

DIOCESAN NEWS

Schools plan changes parishes' payment rates

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

By the 2000/01 school year, tuition revenue and other income must cover 70 percent of the total cost of operating each diocesan school in Monroe County.

That goal is set in a plan released Jan. 29 by the diocesan Department of Catholic Schools.

Titled "Lighting New Fires: A Monroe County Catholic School Response to the Synod," the strategy updates the 1989 System Framework Plan. That earlier plan reorganized Catholic schools, formerly operated and financed by individual parishes, under a unified school system in which parishes with and without schools provide financial support for diocesan schools located at various parishes.

Under the new system, roughly half of Monroe County's parishes will have to increase their contributions to support of Catholic schools, whereas the other half of the county's parishes will experience a decrease in school support obligations, according to Fred W. Seiler, assistant superintendent for business and finance in the diocesan schools office.

The new plan also calls for the diocese to create a common tuition rate for Catholic schools in Monroe County by the end of the century.

Timothy Dwyer, diocesan superintendent of schools, noted that the diocese will soon move in that direction. Next year it will reduce the number of tuition rates at schools from the current 13 to three.

He added, however, that school parents will continue to be able to apply for financial aid, and that, in fact, even parents paying full tuition now are getting some indirect financial support from parish subsidies and donors.

"We're never going to go to the full cost for the child," he said of tuition rates versus per-pupil costs.

According to diocesan figures, depending upon the school attended, full cost per student currently ranges from \$2,050 to 2,850, whereas tuition for one student ranges from \$1,500 to \$2,750.

"New Fires" also changes the way parish school support subsidies are determined. Currently, along with other factors, the size of a school's budget determines how much parishes are asked to contribute to the support of a particular school. Under the new plan, beginning in July 1996, all parishes with revenues of \$60,000 or more will be asked to support the school system according to the following formula.

- Parishes with schools on site will contribute 35 percent of the average of their ordinary parish income for the previous three years.

- Parishes that formerly had a school will contribute 25 percent of that same average.

- Parishes that never had a school will contribute 15 percent of their income.

Seiler pointed out that parishes with schools on site have generally paid the most to support the system. They will experience a decrease or leveling out of their contribution to the system, as parishes without schools increase their contributions to exceed the levels at which most of them are currently giving, he noted.

In addition to the changes made in the schools' revenue systems, Dwyer and other officials pointed out that the new plan calls for more parental involvement in the schools, an increased lay role in their governance, and a five-year financial plan for Monroe County's 31 Catholic elementary and junior high schools, which currently enroll 9,367 students.

David S. Peartree, chairman of the 15-

member Catholic School Board of Monroe County, pointed out that his group will examine ways in which the county's schools can create a more secure financial base. Among initiatives the board will explore are the creation of an endowment fund, and an effort to increase overall school enrollment by 20 percent.

This year, the schools enjoyed a one percent increase in enrollment, according to Dwyer, who added that Catholic schools across the state saw their enrollments increase for the first time in 30 years this year.

Peartree added that several schools have already cooperated in joint-purchasing efforts of equipment in order to cut costs, and that the system as a whole will move toward joint purchasing under the new plan. He predicted that the schools would cooperate on purchasing energy and on contracting for roofing repairs.

"These economies of scale are now an opportunity that we want to take advantage of," Peartree said.

The plan also points out that the diocese will continue to pay special attention to six Rochester inner-city schools that made the headlines last fall when they received a \$25 million grant from Robert B. and Peggy Wegman.

The schools are Holy Family, Holy Rosary, Corpus Christi at Blessed Sacrament, St. Andrew, St. Boniface and St. Monica. At least one-half to three-fifths of the students at all six schools are impoverished, non-Catholic and members of minority groups, the plan notes.

"A ten-year financial projection indicates tuition revenue in these schools will account for only 26 percent of total

costs," the plan said. "The remaining 74 percent must come from donors, parish support and fundraising."

Dwyer noted that he regularly meets with all the schools' principals to monitor programming and services provided by each of the institutions. He added that the Wegmans' gift not only benefits the six schools, but indirectly benefits Monroe County's other Catholic schools because it allows the diocese to shift its financial aid resources around more freely.

According to diocesan officials, "New Fires" was formulated in response to the 1993 Diocesan Synod, which proclaimed lifelong faith formation as the diocese's top priority.

"The collective voice of thousands of Catholics across our diocese called our parishes to reprioritize and direct resources to support not only child-centered education in schools but life-long faith formation for the entire faith community," wrote Bishop Matthew H. Clark in a letter that introduced the new plan. "Our pastors welcome this shift in direction and are anxious to implement it fully."

The new plan recognizes that schools are no longer the main ministerial priority of most parishes, but are, in fact, one of many competing for the church's resources, school officials said.

"The national trend is moving toward parents covering costs," said Sister Mary Ann Binsack, RSM, diocesan director of Faith Development Ministry, which oversees the Catholic schools department. "We're moving toward the day when schools are going to be supported by the people using them and the donors."

Bishop Clark's column will not run this week as he is on the road. It will return next week.

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