

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Elmira school system marks 25 years of success

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ELMIRA — On a recent Friday morning, Nancy Trumble was teaching her seventh-grade class drills for remembering scientific terms. Of one memorization technique, Trumble told the students, "That's what I did when I was learning this 100 years ago."

Snickers ensued, to which Trumble replied good-naturedly, "You think it's funny? It's not funny!"

Although Trumble doesn't go back an entire century, she does own a 30-year teaching tenure at Catholic schools in Elmira. During that time, Trumble has taught continuously amid major structural changes in the schools she has served.

Beginning 25 years ago, the present Holy Family Catholic School system became a trend-setter for the Diocese of Rochester in its approach to dealing with declining enrollments. Two waves of consolidation transformed Catholic education in the Elmira area from seven separate parish-based schools into a three-building system for which parishes share expenses.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark celebrated a 25th-anniversary Mass at St. Mary's Church Oct. 4 to mark the successful creation of the system.

The transformation process began with the closings of St. Anthony's and St. Cecilia's schools in 1971, and St. Peter and Paul School in 1975. The system was then known as the Consolidated Catholic Schools of Chemung County.

The second consolidation occurred in 1985 with the closing of St. Patrick's School and the establishment of Holy Family Catholic Schools. The current system in-



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Sister Nancy Trumble guides seventh-grader Emily Lambert's search for parametria during class at Holy Family Junior High, Elmira.

cludes Holy Family Primary School (grades pre-K through three), located at St. Mary's; Holy Family Intermediate School (grades four through six), located at Our Lady of Lourdes; and Holy Family Junior High (grades seven and eight), located at St. Casimir's.

Decisions leading to the system's current configuration were made by planning committees comprising pastors, school officials and community members.

Brenda Lisi, principal of Holy Family Intermediate, applauded the decision to condense each grade level into one build-

ing rather than retain a K-8 model in several buildings.

"No longer did we have staff and materials in four or five different locations. It helped with efficiency," said Lisi, who has served Elmira Catholic schools since 1978. She is also a St. Mary's School graduate.

"I could see we couldn't have all the parish schools spread out. If we hadn't done it, then we certainly would have been struggling now," said Ann O'Connor, a Holy Family Primary kindergarten instructor who has taught in Elmira Catholic schools since 1968.

Liz Berliner, principal of Holy Family Junior High, acknowledged that emotional adjustment to the consolidations came slowly.

"There was a lot of pain associated with the changes. There always is with any changes," said Berliner, a teacher and administrator in Elmira Catholic schools since 1980.

"Parents didn't want their children going to school in different neighborhoods," Trumble added.

Berliner recalled that several meetings were offered for concerned parents during the second consolidation, when the grade K-8 model was dropped.

"Families were split up, and parents had always felt more secure if their children were in the same building," Berliner said.

Yet Connie Brady, principal of Holy Family Primary, said that students seemed to thrive on diversity.

"To be with children of various backgrounds was really a plus," said Brady, a teacher and principal in area Catholic schools since 1971.

Sharon Tuschner, a fourth-grade teacher at Holy Family Intermediate, added that students adapted to the changes more quickly than their parents.

"When you put the kids together, there was no problem," said Tuschner, a teacher in Elmira Catholic schools since 1964.

Lisi recalled that a cooperative effort was fostered by Elmira pastors "from the pulpit and the bulletin. You needed that support."

Yet Berliner noted that enrollment dropped from 701 in the 1985-86 — the first year of reconsolidation — to 609 in 1986-87. It dipped as low as 488 in 1991-92.

"People lost faith, because in the re-configuration we were closing a building. That is the truth," said Berliner. "We needed time to prove this would be a good move."

In the last five years, enrollment statistics show a solid increase. Comparing figures from 1991-92, junior high attendance has gone from 110 to 135; middle school, 151 to 165; and primary school (kindergarten through third grade), 227 to 250.

"There is a core of people in Elmira who feel very strongly about Catholic education," Berliner said. "These people had faith it would come back. They knew, it would come back."

### Obituaries

## Sister Clement Marie Handy, 88; principal

Sister Clement Marie Handy, SSND, former principal of Ss. Peter and Paul School in Rochester, died Dec. 18, 1996, in Wilton, Conn. She was 88.

Born in Malden, Mass., Sister Clement Marie entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in July 1930, and spent most of her life working in Catholic education.

She began teaching at St. Boniface School in Rochester in 1929 and left in 1937 for St. Lawrence School in Sayville,

N.Y. She also taught and/or served as principal at Catholic schools in Baltimore, Md., Roxbury, Mass., Providence, R.I., and Malden. From 1959 to 1963, she served as principal of Ss. Peter and Paul School in Rochester.

She finished out her career by working as a librarian at Immaculate Conception School in Malden. She retired in 1991, lived in the SSND Motherhouse in Wilton from 1991 to 1995 and spent her last year

in the order's health-care center in Wilton.

A funeral Mass was celebrated Dec. 21 at the SSND Motherhouse. Interment took place at St. Mary Cemetery, Bethel, Conn.

Memorial donations may be sent to the SSND Development Fund, 345 Belden Hill Road, Wilton, Conn., 06897.

## Sister Winifred Hannaford, SSND

Sister Winifred Hannaford, SSND, who served at two schools in the Diocese of Rochester during a 60-year teaching career, died Jan. 19, 1997. She was 86.

Sister Winifred, a Boston native, was professed as a School Sister of Notre Dame in 1932. Her first teaching assignment was at Holy Redeemer School in Rochester, where she served from 1931 to 1941. She briefly returned to Rochester, for the 1969-70 school year, to teach at St.

Joseph's Business High School.

A funeral Mass for Sister Winifred was celebrated Jan. 22 in Wilton, Conn. Interment was in Bethel, Conn.

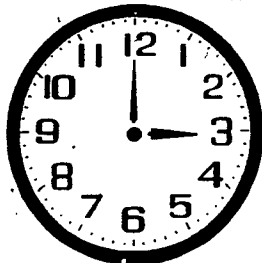
Donations in honor of Sister Winifred can be made to the SSND Development Fund, 345 Belden Hill Road, Wilton, Conn., 06897.

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Liturgy of the Hours