

DIOCESAN NEWS

Congregation weighs new ownership for BK

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

IRONDEQUOIT — Citing decreasing vocations, the Eastern American Province of the Congregation of Christian Brothers and the Bishop Kearney High School board of directors have begun negotiations that may transfer control of the 35-year-old school from the congregation to a new local board.

Under the proposal, the congregation would also shift ownership of the school building and property from the congregation to a not-for-profit corporation yet to be created.

According to Kerri Bishop, Kearney's vice president for advancement, the hope is to have a plan ready to unveil by the 1998-99 school year, with actual implementation to take several more years.

School officials notified parents of the discussions through a Nov. 18 letter. School and board officials held an information session with parents Nov. 24 at the school at 125 Kings Highway South.

"I think the main thrust right now is to try to have a deal where this lay board of trustees ... will take over the school," Raymond D'Agostino, chairman of the board of directors, explained to the approximate 25 parents attending. "We will form a corporation called Bishop Kearney, Inc."

That corporation will acquire the school from the congregation, he noted. But he and other school officials pointed out that the exact details of the nature of the new board and of the ownership transfer, including cost, have yet to be worked out.

During a preliminary presentation and in response to questions from the parents, Brother Raymond J. Vercruyse, CFC,



Greg Francis/Staff Photographer

Control of Bishop Kearney High School may be transferred from the Christian Brothers to a new local board, and ownership shifted to a new not-for-profit corporation.

Kearney's president, explained that the change will be in terms of administrative structure, and noted that similar transfers to lay control had taken place at Aquinas Institute and McQuaid Jesuit High School.

"It shouldn't affect the day-to-day running of the school," he said. "It shouldn't affect the kids."

Approximately 500 students attend the school, Bishop noted, adding that enrollment figures had been stable for the last couple of years.

The decision to proceed with the ownership-transfer discussions was made Nov. 10 at the annual meeting between the Christian Brothers leadership team and

Kearney's board of directors. The decision follows nearly 1½ years' study by the congregation of its current ministries, Brother Vercruyse reported Nov. 24.

"What led us to this point is primarily the level of vocations," Brother Vercruyse said. He cited a congregational estimate that by the year 2005, the congregation will have only 94 active brothers below the age of 65. Meanwhile, the congregation is serving at 21 ministry sites.

Brother Vercruyse reported that five brothers serve at Bishop Kearney. He said that they will remain there for the time being, and that under the proposed agreement, Christian Brothers and the

School Sisters of Notre Dame will still be able to serve at the school. He noted that his own contract runs for three years, and that the congregation indicated it would be open to his renewing it for another three years.

One key issue is how to resolve the school's approximately \$1.2 million debt owed the congregation, D'Agostino noted. That debt was accrued through loans and accumulated interest.

Once that debt is retired — possibly even forgiven by the congregation — the school will be able to direct more of its annual budget toward actual operations, D'Agostino observed. He added that the school had operated in the black for the last two years.

Being free from debt will also help with fundraising efforts, D'Agostino predicted, as school officials will be able to tell potential donors that the money will be going toward operations or the endowment, and not toward debt reduction.

In addition, school officials noted that the possible removal or reduction of debt payments will help to keep down future tuition increases.

The Diocese of Rochester was notified of the initial discussions of the potential ownership transfer approximately a year ago, according to Tim Dwyer, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Rochester.

Dwyer noted that while congregations must obtain the local bishop's permission to operate schools in a diocese, the diocese has no direct control over their operations.

The diocese did provide some input into the earlier discussions, Dwyer noted, in part because the diocese leases space in the Bishop Kearney building to house Northeastern Catholic Junior High.

Diocese, two priests face civil suits after abuse convictions

Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

The Diocese of Rochester is denying allegations against it in two lawsuits involving diocesan priests convicted of sexual abuse.

One suit names the diocese and Father Eugene G. Emo, convicted of first-degree sexual abuse this year. A Steuben County resident is suing Father Emo for \$2 million and the diocese for \$750,000.

The other suit names the diocese and Father William D. Lum, given a condi-

tional discharge in August after pleading guilty to third-degree sexual abuse.

Father Emo, 62, had pleaded guilty to first-degree sexual abuse involving the Steuben resident, who is in his 30s and is developmentally disabled. Father Emo was sentenced May 5 to six months in Steuben County Jail and was released Sept. 4.

In the suit, filed in the State Supreme Court, the developmentally disabled man alleges that while he was a resident of the Steuben County Association for Retarded Citizens (also named in the

suit), he'd been harmed emotionally and physically by Father Emo. The suit states the man came under Father Emo's care from about 1981 to early 1996, and that the priest "on more than one occasion was involved in sexual relations and sodomy" with the resident.

The suit cites the diocese as negligent and careless in "failing to properly supervise; in negligently hiring and training Emo; in failing to give proper instruction and maintain control over personnel within its employee, specifically defendant Emo," when the diocese "knew or should have known of their employee's propensity to conduct himself in a manner harmful to the plaintiff."

Also named in the suit, filed Aug. 15 with the Monroe County clerk and amended Nov. 12, were the New York State Association for Retarded Citizens, and Robert and Mary Lou McCollum of Canestee, who'd cared for the man in their residential home for adults. The plaintiff is asking a total of \$4.25 million.

The suit against Father Lum, 54, filed in New York County Court, also names the Archdiocese of New York, Our Lady of Mercy Church, Greece, and St. Joseph's Church, Penfield. The complainant is the youth upon whose behalf the Monroe County District Attorney brought charges last April. The youth

had met Father Lum while the priest was temporary administrator of St. Joseph's, and the two kept in contact after the priest became pastor of Our Lady of Mercy. The youth was a minor at the time of the incidents.

Paul Yesawich, attorney for the diocese, said the defense is contemplating moving for dismissal of both suits at the appropriate time. It also has moved for a change of venue of the second suit from New York County.

"None of the allegations seem related to the Archdiocese of New York," he said, adding that naming the archdiocese implies the desire for a "more favorable forum."

Diocesan releases dated Nov. 24 and Nov. 19 stated both Fathers Lum and Emo remain on administrative leave, and that there are "no plans currently" for Father Lum to return to active ministry and "no plans" for Father Emo's return to active ministry. They also encourage anyone with concerns about issues related to sexual misconduct to call diocesan officials.

Obituary

Fr. LeFrois; served in Philippines

Father Bernard LeFrois, a Rochester native who served as a priest in the Society of the Divine Word for 63 years, died Oct. 29, 1997, in the Philippines. He was 89.

Father LeFrois attended Rochester's St. Boniface School. He entered the Society of the Divine Word at Girard, Pa., in 1921 and was ordained in 1934.

He taught for 15 years at St. Mary's Seminary in Techny. He then spent 41 years in the Philippines, where he

served as professor of sacred Scripture, as well as chaplain and retreat director, at Divine Word seminary colleges and the archdiocesan seminary in Vigan. Father LeFrois was also a noted author, having written more than 20 books of Biblical and devotional reflections and homilies.

Father LeFrois was the last surviving sibling of a family of six children, four of whom became members of religious orders.



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