

DIOCESAN NEWS

Dobson to leave black ministries directorship

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Jacquelyn Dobson, director of the Diocesan Office of Black Ministries, has resigned her position effective Sept. 24, the same date she was hired in 1984.

Dobson will also leave her position as diocesan liaison to the Women's Commission, a position she took on in May. Dobson also served as interim director of Diocesan Urban Services from January 1995 to June 1996.

Dobson's last major act as director of the black ministries office will be organizing a conference beginning Wednesday, Sept. 15, at the Hyatt Regency for the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators. She said 70 people are expected to attend.

The first woman to head a diocesan black ministries office in the United States, Dobson said she is leaving her job to become a social worker with the Rochester City School District.

"I've done all that I can do, and I'm ready to kind of spread my creative wings and meet some new challenges," Dobson said in an interview in her home.

Kathleen Cannon, director of Diocesan Parish Support Ministries, which oversees Dobson's office, said Dobson will be missed.

"Jackie has shared her gifts with church of Rochester in so many areas," Cannon said. "She always accepted new challenges with great openness."

Cannon said that the diocese has not posted a job listing for Dobson's position, and will explore what form the position will take after gathering input from various diocesan and parish leaders.

Dobson has organized an annual tour of traditionally black colleges in the United



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Jacquelyn Dobson, left, director of the Diocesan Office of Black Ministries, participates in a Kwanzaa celebration with Tammy Holloway at St. Anthony's Church, Rochester, in January.

States for 40 to 50 area black high school students; run numerous multicultural programs for diocesan institutions; hosted liturgical events for African-American and Caribbean Catholics; and provided liturgical assistance to diocesan migrant workers.

A Rochester native, Dobson attended Nazareth Academy and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University before working for the diocese as a youth minister in the black ministries office from

1981 to 1984. A parishioner at Immaculate Conception Church, she came on board with her office only five years after it had been established as the second black Catholic diocesan office in the country.

Robert L. Laird, deputy director of community services for Action for a Better Community in Rochester, helped organize the black ministries office in the mid-1970s. Currently a board member of Diocesan Catholic Charities, Laird said he remembered Dobson's enthusiasm when she took over the reins of the black ministries office.

"She was quite young, but she was quite strong in a lot of her abilities," he recalled.

He said that Dobson has played a crucial role in highlighting how African-American Catholics have contributed to the church.

"I think she really accomplished something by making the community aware of these things," he said.

Mary Wingo, a parishioner at Immaculate Conception, also spoke highly of Dobson.

Wingo's daughter, Sherrienne, went on the black colleges tour in spring, 1998. Wingo said her daughter, who graduated from Gates-Chili High School, was positively influenced by Dobson.

"Jackie has been sort of a big sister, counselor and a friend," Wingo said. "She's been all of these things to Sherri. She had Sherri's trust and confidence. I think she's been

a blessing from God."

Wingo added that Sherrienne is a freshman at Morris Brown College in Atlanta.

Dobson said she organized the annual tours because many African-American high school students are unaware of the fact that there are several esteemed black colleges in the United States. Ninety-five percent of the tours' participants have gone on to college, she said, adding that 87 percent go to traditionally black colleges.

She noted that the tours help destroy the myth that black colleges can't provide as good — if not better — an education than mainly white colleges. She also pointed out that many of the kids who go on the tours attend suburban Catholic and public high schools and are often some of the few people of color in their institutions. Meeting students, professors and other African-American professionals helps the high schoolers realize that academic achievement is highly prized by many in the black community, she said.

"It's the first time for many of (the teenagers) to really feel good about being a black student that has achieved and plans to achieve," she said.

Dobson said she has worked hard to make diocesan African-American Catholics aware that they are valued by the church. Too often, Catholic outreach to blacks means providing social services to impoverished African-Americans of all denominations, she said, while black Catholics are often overlooked as potential leaders of the church. Dobson said she hoped that the diocese will continue to use the talents of African-American Catholics, and continue to maintain her office as a separate entity.

"I hope that the diocese will commit themselves to continue what I believe to be a very valuable and needed ministry," she said.

Rochester school district revises busing plan for special ed

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Catholic and other nonpublic school parents from Rochester reacted positively to news that the Rochester City School District had rescinded its decision to bus their children to public schools for special education services.

Clifford B. Janey, the city's superintendent of schools, announced the decision in an Aug. 27 letter to parents. The letter stated that city-resident students attending nonpublic schools outside the city would continue to receive special education services on-site at their home schools.

The letter reversed an earlier decision this summer to bus more than 60 children needing special education from their home schools to public schools in the city

this fall. A cost-cutting measure designed to save the city money it had spent on special education staff in Catholic and other nonpublic schools, the busing plan was vigorously protested by nonpublic school parents. Primary among them were those from Hope Hall, an alternative, non-denominational school in Gates. The parents complained to the district that the busing plan would severely disrupt their children's learning.

Terry Lewandowski, a leader of the Hope Hall parents, said she was happy the city school district changed its mind.

"I think it's a positive thing that (Janey)'s hopefully recognized that our kids are a little different than the kids in a public school, and we didn't just put them in (Hope Hall) because we have the money," she said.

Hope Hall educates children with

learning difficulties who are unable to learn in a traditional school environment.

Janey stated in the letter that he would meet with a committee of nonpublic school parents, nonpublic school staff and district officials on Thursday, Sept. 9, from 5-7 p.m. at the district's central office. Janey wrote that the committee will review recommendations parents have made to the district about delivery of special education services to their children.

Janey promised in the letter that the district would review each affected child's situation individually before making any more decisions as to how the nonpublic students receiving special education outside the city would get services.

"The District will remain in constant communication with parents and families as we move forward in making appropriate decisions on how to best provide services for our children," Janey wrote.

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