



Reuters/CNS

A Sudanese soldier guards a U.N. food drop in Kaouda, Sudan, Feb. 10.

## School bombings shock Sudanese

WASHINGTON (CNS) - A Sudanese bishop decried his government's bombing of a Catholic school he founded as evidence that the conflict is aimed at destroying the Christian population.

"This terrible, heart-breaking incident is yet another piece of evidence, if more were still needed, that the war in Sudan is a religious and ethnic war launched by Khartoum and aimed at the destruction of my people," Bishop Macram Gassis of El Obeid told the first hearing of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in Washington Feb. 15.

In the Feb. 7-8 National Islamic Front bombing at Holy Cross School in Kauda, 14 children and a teacher were killed and "the number of injured is yet to be fully determined," the bishop said. He said the

school has 360 students and is the "only well-established school in the area."

He denounced the targeting of the school as an attack on the "the most vulnerable and most precious of our resources: our children. They are the future of the church, the future of the country."

Dirdiery Ahmed, of the Sudanese Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, told Reuters, the British news agency, "The bombs landed where they were supposed to land."

The Commission on International Religious Freedom commission was mandated under the International Religious Freedom Act, which President Clinton signed into law in October 1998. Its first report was issued in September, and the commission singled out Sudan, China and Russia as three countries on which the United

States should concentrate its efforts in promoting religious rights.

Before the bishop's testimony, Rabbi David Saperstein, chairman of the commission, read President Clinton's Feb. 14 statement condemning the bombing as an "outrage." Clinton called on the Sudanese government to halt bombings, "to refrain from any attacks on civilian targets" and to provide "full and immediate access" by humanitarian agencies to deliver relief to war victims.

Bishop Gassis welcomed the president's statement: "Finally the leadership of the United States is speaking in our favor."

He urged the international community "to refuse to stand idly by while the African and Christian peoples of Sudan are exterminated."

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## New York schools reach milestone

**T**he early history of Catholic schools in New York is marked by tensions between Catholics and Protestants, the church and the state, immigrants and New York natives, bishops and Rome, and even parents and clergy — who argued over their control. The first classrooms were so crowded the schools could not meet demand; but by the late 1800s parents who sent their children to public schools were to be denied sacraments.



First-grader Neil McGlynn, far left, and kindergartner Marshall Staff, center, raise their hands with other children and Father Walter Wainwright while saying the "Our Father" during Mass Feb. 13 at St. Mary's Church in Canandaigua. The parish and its 150-year-old school kicked off the diocesan Catholic Schools Week, Feb. 13-19, with the Mass, which included schoolchildren's participation.

For all their ups and downs, New York's Catholic schools have achieved 200 remarkable years of history, school officials note.

"I think (the milestone) is awesome," said Timothy W. Dwyer, diocesan superintendent of schools. "It speaks to the tradition and hopefully timelessness of the importance and value of Catholic schools."

The state's first Catholic school, St. Peter's, opened on Barclay Street in New York City in 1800, pre-dating public schools in New York by six years.

"All of us, whether Rochester or Albany or Ogdensburg trace our school history to the old St. Peter's," said Nora Murphy, assistant superintendent of schools for communications and marketing in the Archdiocese of New York.

Although that school no longer exists, the old St. Patrick's cathedral school, which opened in 1817 as an annex to St. Peter's, does. It soon became part of the New York Diocese, split off in 1808 from the Baltimore Diocese, which originally encompassed all of the United States.

### Dearth of records

Historical documents are few, unfortunately, about early Catholic school days. However, insights can be gathered from such resources as Father Robert F. McNamara's book, *The Diocese of Rochester in America 1868-1993*, Father Frederick J. Zwierlein's *The Life and Letters of Bishop McQuaid*, parish histories, the Sisters of St. Joseph archives and a few academic texts.

Timothy Walch described the parochial-school system was de-

scribed as a social movement in his 1996 book, *Parish School: American Catholic Parochial Education from Colonial Times to the Present*.

"At the heart of the Catholic parochial school movement is the unwavering belief that the education of children is a primary responsibility of the family and the church, not the government," he wrote.

The arrival of tens of millions of immigrant Catholics from 1820-1920 secured the future of Catholic education, Walch observed. Their concern for the preservation of their religion and culture caused them to embrace parish schools.

Some historians trace Catholic schools in this country as far back as 1629, when Franciscan missionaries started classes in Florida and New Mexico. Or to decades earlier in New Spain, where the sacristan of the village church also served as schoolmaster and the parish priest instructed children in the faith, according to the 1912 book *The Principles, Origin and Establishment of the Catholic School System in the United States* by Father J.A. Burns, CSC. The methods of these early schools were crude, relying on memorization and pageantry, Walch reported.

In Colonial America, where anti-Catholic laws were established, many Catholic families home-schooled their children. Yet about 15 Catholic schools were formed in Maryland, Pennsylvania and territory to the west by the close of the Revolutionary War, according to Father Burns. But little knowledge of those schools remains, he wrote: "The persecution to which Catholics were subjected rendered it advisable to carry on the work of the schools as secretly as possible."

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