

DIOCESAN NEWS

Diocesan schools seek public school veterans

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

Faced with an ongoing shortage of educators, the Diocese of Rochester's Catholic Schools are attempting to recruit retired public school teachers and administrators, according to Sister Virginia Steinwachs, SSJ, assistant superintendent for human resources.

About a month ago she e-mailed diocesan school administrators asking them to use bulletin inserts, newsletters and other media to spread the word that retired public school personnel are encouraged to consider a post-retirement career with Catholic schools. Currently, about 5 percent of all Catholic school personnel in the diocese have previously worked in a public school district, she said.

Sister Steinwachs said the call for retired public school personnel is rooted in Catholic schools' need to deal with the high turnover rate they are currently facing. Last fall, for example, she said, the diocese had to hire 150 new teachers — about double the number the schools normally have to hire each year. Currently 1,000 teachers are working in the diocese's schools, which offer pre-kindergarten through eighth grades.

Sister Steinwachs also said that about 30 to 40 percent of the diocese's teachers will reach retirement age in the next few years, creating the need for the diocese to encourage younger teachers to consider a career in Catholic schools.

"The last couple of years have been as dramatic as ever in terms of the (teacher) crunch," she said.

Catholic schools often have difficulty retaining young teachers because they can generally make more money working for public schools. But even public schools are facing a teacher shortage, noted Timothy W. Dwyer, diocesan superintendent of schools. He said that he recently attended a conference with public school administrators who also bemoaned the difficulty of finding new teachers. Many teachers were induced to retire by generous retirement packages that school districts around the state offered early in the past decade.

The public schoolteacher shortage com-

pounds the problem for Catholic schools because public school districts often actively recruit Catholic schoolteachers, Sister Steinwachs said. Public schoolteachers can often make twice as much as they make in a Catholic school, she said.

However, despite the pay differences, Sister Steinwachs pointed out that Catholic schools offer such intangibles as a faith-based mission, which public schools can't. She added that Catholic schools are known for their disciplined classrooms. Such features can be attractive to public schoolteachers, she said.

"They don't want to discipline all the time," she said. "They want to teach."

That point was echoed by Kathleen Peters, principal of St. Michael's School, Newark, pre-kindergarten-eighth grades.

"Our kids are naughty once in a while ... (but) if you love teaching, you certainly get a lot more teaching done here than in a public school," she said.

Peters recently distributed a flier asking retired public schoolteachers to consider working at her school. The flier has also appeared as an advertisement in area newspapers, she said. She did get one response, but as of yet, had hired no one, she said. However, she pointed out that the school already employs a former public school principal, Larry Owens, as its science teacher for grades five through eight.

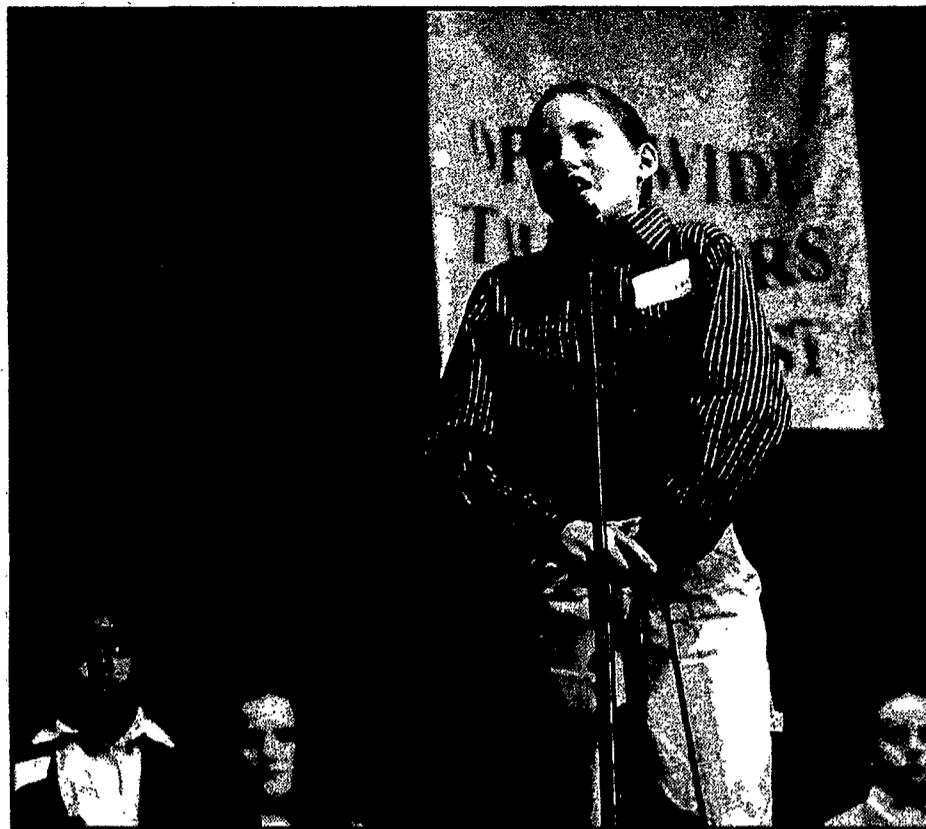
Owens, who worked in various public schools for 34 years, last worked in a public school when he was principal of Marion Junior-Senior High School from 1982-92. After retiring, he worked a few part-time jobs before realizing he wanted to go back into education, he said, and took up his position at St. Michael's in the mid-1990s.

"The students keep me young, and they supply me with energy," said the 63-year-old teacher. "It gives me a reason to get up in the morning."

Owens said he left the public school system because the burdens of being an administrator began to outweigh the joys.

"I've always enjoyed the students, but as principal, I got a little tired of the politics and the paperwork and the state regulations," he said.

He added that teaching in a Catholic school has been a freeing experience.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Spelling bee stress

Caitlin Bowers of Rochester's All Saints Catholic Junior High takes her turn at a word during the 17th Annual Catholic Middle School Spelling Bee on Feb. 7 at Our Lady of Mercy High School, Brighton. Twelve schools competed. Ted Pak of McQuaid Jesuit Middle School won first place, after the runner-up became stuck on the word "molasses." Ted will advance to the next round of spelling bees.

"I see a great deal of support from the parents," he said. "(The students) really try and work for us. We have a dress code. We can teach moral values without anyone coming down on us. The whole thing is just great."

However, he added that he can afford to teach in a Catholic school because he receives a pension from his public school days. He said he can understand why a young person looking to build a future financially might opt for a public school position rather than a Catholic one.

"They are almost forced into public schools ...," he said of young teachers. "You have to be extremely devoted to hang in there."

Sister Steinwachs said the diocese is trying to deal with the salary difference between the two systems, and will give an

across-the-board pay increase to its teachers next year of 5.5 percent, higher than the usual cost-of-living increase.

She added that school parents are realizing they must shoulder tuition increases if they want to retain teachers. Gone are the days when Catholic schools could hire mostly married women who could afford low salaries because their husbands financially supported them, she said. Today's young teachers are often single and carrying loads of debts incurred from financing their educations, she said.

Peters, however, noted that at the end of the day, Catholic schools' strongest selling point to new hires will have little to do with money, a fact she said she stresses with anyone she interviews.

"I tell them the pay isn't that great, but the atmosphere is wonderful," she said.

Obituaries

Father O'Meara, CSB, was first dean at St. John Fisher

Father John P. O'Meara, CSB, died Feb. 11, 2000, in Windsor, Ontario.

Born in Rochester to parents who immigrated from Ireland, he was ordained in August 1942. He taught at Aquinas Institute before becoming the first dean of St. John Fisher College in 1950. Father O'Meara served at Fisher until leaving for Assumption University, Windsor, where

he taught from 1959-79.

"He was a highly skilled administrator," said Father John R. Cavanaugh, CSB, special assistant to the president at Fisher. "Through the curriculum and work he did to organize the college, it received accreditation in 1958, which was very quick. ... They were so impressed by the way he put it all together, the ac-

creditation went right through on the first bat."

Father Cavanaugh recalled that he served at Father O'Meara's first Mass, at the priest's home parish of Corpus Christi in Rochester, following his ordination in Toronto.

Father O'Meara was predeceased by his brothers, Arthur and Francis, and his sister, Elizabeth Rowan. He is survived by his sister-in-law, Helen O'Meara; nieces, Joan (Richard) Rowan Hugoboom, Patricia Partyka and Sharon (James) Van Meeenen, all of Rochester; and a nephew, Brian (Joyce) O'Meara of California; grandnieces and nephews; and his fellow priests in the congregation of St. Basil.

A funeral Mass was celebrated Feb. 14 at Assumption Church, Windsor.

— Kathleen Schwarz

Fr. Malone, former McQuaid counselor, 85

Father James P. Malone, SJ, 85, died in Buffalo Feb. 9, 2000, of heart failure.

Father Malone had served at McQuaid Jesuit High School from 1955-1990. He taught Latin and English, and in his latter years primarily was a guidance counselor.

Born in Buffalo, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1932 at Wernersville, Pa. He studied philosophy and theology at Woodstock College in Maryland and was ordained in 1945.

Father Malone also had taught at St. Peter's Preparatory in Jersey City, N.J., and for three years at Canisius High School in Buffalo. After retiring from McQuaid, he performed priestly ministry, primarily as a spiritual director and doing retreat work out of Rochester.

"He was a good, genuine and gentle person," said Father Frank McNamara,

SJ, alumni director at McQuaid and longtime friend of Father Malone's. "Everyone says that about him — he was very gentle and sensitive, with many friends."

Father McNamara preached the homily at Father Malone's funeral Mass Feb. 14 at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Brighton. Father William McCurdy, SJ, superior of the Jesuit community at McQuaid, presided. Interment was to be in the Jesuit Cemetery in Auriesville, N.Y.

Father Malone is survived by a niece, Kathleen Fallon, and by Jesuit associates and many friends.

Contributions may be made in his memory to the Malone Scholarship Fund, c/o McQuaid Jesuit High School, 1800 Clinton Ave. S., Rochester, NY 14618.

— Kathleen Schwarz

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