

DIOCESAN NEWS

Catholic students play in public school arena

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

How can a student attend a Catholic school with no athletic program, and still play scholastic sports? After two years of discussion, parents and administrators in Auburn may have solved this riddle.

Since September, seventh- and eighth-grade students at the city's two Catholic schools, St. Joseph's and Ss. Peter and Paul, have been eligible to play on all modified level public school teams, provided they reside within district boundaries. St. Joseph's and Ss. Peter and Paul are the only Catholic schools in the Rochester Diocese to have such an agreement with a public school district.

Mary Caffrey, principal of St. Joseph's, said that 10 to 12 of her school's 55 seventh- and eighth-graders have played public school sports in 2000-01. And Bill Locastro, who teaches the combined seventh- and eighth-grade class at Ss. Peter and Paul, said that nearly half of his 23 students have competed on public school teams.

According to Tamela Ray, athletic director for the Auburn School District, Catholic school students are free to try out for all modified, or junior-high level, programs. These sports include football, soccer, cross-country, basketball, wrestling, gymnastics, lacrosse, track, field hockey, volleyball and softball. No state law prohibits this arrangement; policies regarding private school students on public school teams are made from district to district.

The Auburn School Board struck down an initial proposal for the policy last spring, but passed a second proposal just as the 2000-2001 school year was beginning. This was welcome news for Caffrey, who said that at St. Joseph's "we really don't have enough kids to form a team of anything." She acknowledged that the absence of a sports program may have hurt

past recruitment efforts.

"It was perceived by parents, and rightfully so, that we were losing enrollment," Caffrey said.

Diane LaRue, who actively petitioned the school district to adopt the policy, has sons who are in fifth and sixth grades at St. Joseph's School. LaRue said she wouldn't have let the sports situation affect her decision to enroll her kids at St. Joseph's. Yet she's glad they can look forward to playing organized sports when they're older.

"It was a chance to do something positive," LaRue, a parishioner at St. Alphonse Parish, said of the new policy.

Officials interviewed said the arrangement is suitable for a city such as Auburn, where most Catholic elementary school students eventually attend the public high school. For example, Andrew Hoercher, an eighth-grader at St. Joseph's School, plans to attend Auburn High in 2001-02. He played basketball for Auburn East Middle School this year after being limited to CYO competition as a seventh-grader.

"I just really wanted to get in and play basketball, and meet new friends," Andrew said.

Andrew tried football last fall and scored four touchdowns, and he also might go out for lacrosse this spring. In addition, he has continued playing CYO basketball through his parish, Holy Family. Andrew's mother, Teresa, said playing such sports will ease his transition next fall from a small school to a large public school. "To go from St. Joseph's, it's a big jump," she said.

On the other hand, Andrew is one of three St. Joseph's students who started for Auburn East this year. This underlines a concern that had arisen before the policy went into effect: the potential for Catholic school students to bump public school students from roster positions. Ray, from the Auburn School District, pointed out that



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer
Matt Collier, 14, (left) and Andrew Hoercher, 13, play in a pickup basketball game at the YMCA in Auburn. The two students from St. Joseph's School in Auburn now play sports for a public school.

such sports as football, track and cross-country have no-cut policies, but basketball rosters are smaller and must make cuts.

Otherwise, Ray said, the new policy has gone smoothly this year. However, Ray also noted that the arrangement must be renewed annually by the school district.

Whereas the Auburn School District offers full integration by Catholic schools into its modified sports program, two Catholic high schools in the diocese join

with public schools in just one sport, ice hockey. Bishop Kearney merges with its neighboring public school, Eastridge Senior High School; and Geneva DeSales combines with Geneva High.

Rich Parrinello, Bishop Kearney athletic director, said the distribution of players from BK and Eastridge is "pretty close to 50-50." But only two DeSales students are playing hockey this year in Geneva, said Paul Cataline, DeSales athletic director.

Interfaith Action: Rochester houses improved since survey

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

In its ongoing efforts to encourage better housing in Rochester's neighborhoods, Interfaith Action has reported improvements in more than four dozen properties on the city's west side. Interfaith Action is a federation of businesses and churches, many Catholic.

Federation members first met with city officials about the houses last March. Then, 110 people attended and heard how Interfaith Action Local Organizing Committee members at Good Counsel had sur-

veyed a 14-block area around the church and found 95 homes in need of repair and 30 homes vacant. The survey was conducted in autumn of 1999.

On Jan. 29, city officials and federation members met at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, 640 Brooks Ave., to report on the progress made. The 105 people attending heard federation members report the following improvements:

- Of 35 owner-occupied homes once in need of repair, 21 are currently in good condition, while 14 still need repair.

- Of 60 landlord-owned properties once in need of repair, 33 are currently in good condition, 21 are being improved, and six have not been improved.

- Of the 30 then-vacant properties, 10 have new owners, although an additional seven properties have become vacant since federation members first surveyed the area. Hence, a total of 27 properties remain vacant in the neighborhood around the church.

The overall improvements were welcomed by David More, a part-time pastoral minister for the Roman Catholic

Community of the 19th Ward, a cluster of Good Counsel, St. Monica's and St. Augustine's parishes. More serves on the Interfaith Action's local organizing committee at Good Counsel.

"We are pleased that we are seeing progress," he said. "I guess our hope would be that everything would improve."

More said that owners improved their properties for various reasons. Some were cited by the city whereas others fixed them up in order to sell them. Apparently, a number of owner-occupants also painted their homes over the past year as part of

regular upkeep, he said.

He also pointed out that federation members distributed fliers throughout the neighborhood that included information on housing improvement services available through the city and Neighborhood Housing Services Inc., a private, not-for-profit organization. Helping people keep their houses up or encouraging landlords to do so is vital to city residents, More said.

"For the people who do keep up their homes, if they see deteriorating housing around them, they might want to leave."

Recognizing

Students at Siena Catholic Academy, a grade seven-eight school on St. Thomas More Parish Campus, Brighton, participated in the "Do Something Kindness & Justice Program" Jan. 22-Feb. 2, that taught the values of civil rights activists Rosa Parks and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in various classes. Students recorded acts of kindness and justice and presented them during the offertory at a Feb. 2 Mass.

During Advent, students at St. Francis DeSales/St. Stephen's School, Geneva, numbering 221 in grades pre-kindergarten-eighth, collected \$556.70 for the Holy Childhood Association, which supports the church's mission around the world.

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580)
Vol. 112 No. 18, Feb. 8, 2001
Published weekly except the last Thursday in December.
Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

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