

# CONTINUED...

## High schools

Continued from page 1

resents a different religious tradition? Sister Guerin said it's a combination of "the history we have of quality education and the perception of safety. And certainly, the values we teach — that's what parents want for their children. More and more, these things are not available in public schools."

Families of non-Catholic students at Aquinas Institute "just like the structure and safeness," added Joseph B. Knapp, Aquinas' director of admissions and public relations.

Sister Collins said that Nazareth Academy is an appealing draw because of its "values-based education" as well as its strong fine-arts program. And Jesuit Father Philip Judge, principal of McQuaid, said his school is noted for its college preparatory curriculum and athletics. Father Judge added that in spite of Rochester's well-known diversity of colleges, there's a comparatively low choice of private high schools other than Catholic institutions.

At Elmira Notre Dame, the meshing of faiths provides some natural educational opportunities. During the time of year when Catholic sophomores take a theology course on the sacraments, non-Catholics at Notre Dame take a class that examines religious diversity.

"We deal with what healthy religions look like, and what's unhealthy (such as cults)," said Nancy Roy, ND's campus minister who teaches the class. "Then we give students an opportunity to share their own faiths." Roy added that this class is also beneficial for students who have a limited belief in their faith, or who have no religious affiliation.

Evelyn Kirst, principal at Our Lady of Mercy High School, encourages religious diversity from an adult as well as a student perspective.

"We've done world religion for a number of years and have had church leaders speak at classes. We've had rabbis, heads of Islamic communities, and several Protestant leaders," she said.

Quite often the religious differences between Catholic and non-Catholic students are not drastic, Father Judge noted.

"The vast majority (of non-Catholics) here are Protestant. They share everything with us in terms of Scripture," he said.

Such was the case for Funderburk, who said that he ultimately found many similarities at McQuaid between Catholicism and his own Congregationalist faith. As for the differences, Funderburk said that he welcomed the exposure to another faith.

"At my age, you're questioning. Some people believe they make the best decisions with the most information available, and some people don't believe that," said

School	Enrollment (grades 9-12)	% Of Non-Catholic Students
Our Lady of Mercy (all girls)	447	20
Nazareth Academy (all girls)	300	36
Bishop Kearney (coed)	400	15
Aquinas Institute (coed)	880	12
McQuaid Jesuit (all boys)	850	22
Geneva DeSales (coed)	147	16
Elmira Notre Dame (coed)	410	20

**NOTE: These approximate figures were provided by school officials.**

Funderburk, who graduated from McQuaid as a National Merit Scholarship recipient and now attends Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y.

"I was looking for very strong academics and a good learning environment. I wasn't concerned so much with the Catholic piece," added Funderburk's mother, Nancy. "I thought it might broaden his perspective; it broadened him for the real world."

Dan Hennessey and Tammy LeClair, theology teachers at Geneva DeSales, said they don't see any discernible differences between Catholics and Protestants when they teach.

"The Scriptures establish a common language," Hennessey said.

"Ecumenism is so much an issue in the Catholic Church anyway. We can develop a dialogue," LeClair said.

This type of inclusiveness is also important to Pope John Paul II. According to Catholic News Service, the pontiff said in late April that the welcoming of non-Catholic students by Catholic schools helps students recognize their differences "and envision the future together."

"This concrete means of overcoming fear of the other certainly is a decisive step toward peace in society," the pope stated during an international meeting sponsored by the European Committee for Catholic Education.

### Maintaining Catholicity

But Pope John Paul also emphasized that Catholic schools can't become so homogenized that their Catholic identity is overshadowed. A truly Catholic education, he said, offers "a Christian vision of the person and the world, which offers youths the possibility of a fruitful dialogue between faith and reason."

Although Catholic schools in this diocese are independently owned and operated, Sister Guerin said that Bishop Matthew H. Clark "has a responsibility for their Catholicity." This responsibility is willingly shared at Geneva DeSales by Daniel Skinner, principal.

"Essentially, what we need to do is keep in mind that it is a Catholic school. I'm not going to compromise it in the sense that I would just call us a Christian school — we call ourselves a Catholic school," Skinner said. "We make it quite clear in advance that anyone who goes here will go to Mass. Obviously, if they're not Catholic, they can't participate in the reception of sacraments."

Officials at other Catholic high schools, also, said that attendance at liturgies and religion classes is mandatory for all students.

"They know, coming in, they have to take theology and do the community service that goes along with that," said Aquinas' Knapp. At liturgies, he added, "They're not required to receive the Eucharist, but they are required to attend Masses and be respectful."

"All of our students are required to take the same educational program. Holy days, retreats, we make no distinction," Father Judge said.

Ball, at Bishop Kearney, said he feels his school will maintain its strong Catholic focus even if the number of non-Catholics goes up in the future.

"I don't feel that bringing in non-Catholics, in any way, waters down the Catholicity of the school. Students are still taught with a curriculum based on Catholic values," he said.

However, Ball said, the school is not in the business of proselytizing. "If they should decide to convert, that's terrific.

(But) we do not attempt to convert students," he said.

Kirst, at Our Lady of Mercy, said this is a different approach than in previous generations.

"In the late 1960s, if you were going to a Catholic school, well, today or tomorrow you're going to become a Roman Catholic," she remarked. However, she doesn't feel that Catholic schools should force this issue, saying, "If you're called to a certain religion, you're going to receive the call with or without us."

### Changing times

Another major shift, Kirst said, is the increasing cost of Catholic education. When she attended Buffalo's Mount St. Mary Academy in the late 1960s, she said, tuition was \$100 to \$150 per year. On the other hand, the current tuition rate at Our Lady of Mercy is \$5,800 per year for grades 9-12. (Mercy also has seventh and eighth grades.)

"The days of recruiting from the pulpit are probably gone," Kirst said, explaining that Catholic parishes may be reluctant to heavily promote Catholic high schools when it may be difficult to afford them.

"It's a great burden on families," she said. Unless some sort of financial assistance is available, Kirst said it's "not realistic" to expect Catholic families to automatically send their children to Catholic high schools.

While tuition costs continue to climb, overall attendance at Catholic high schools in the diocese has declined in recent decades. For the 2001-02 school year, there are only about half as many students in grades nine-12 as in 1979-80. St. Agnes, an all-girls' school, closed in 1982 and Aquinas Institute, formerly an all-boys' school, went coeducational that fall. Cardinal Mooney, a coed institution, closed in 1989.

It was also in the late 1980s, Father Judge said, that McQuaid Jesuit's non-Catholic student population first surpassed the 20-percent mark. He attributes the increase, in part, to the closing of numerous Catholic elementary schools, thus crippling the pipeline of Catholic students to McQuaid.

With such realities factored in, non-Catholic students appear to be more sought than ever. At Bishop Kearney, Ball said, "We market ourselves as aggressively as we can to Catholics" by visiting Catholic schools and parishes. However, he said the school also invests in television and billboard advertising in hopes of drawing more heavily from the general public.

"If we could sustain ourselves with just Catholic students, we would," Ball said. But he acknowledged that the non-Catholic population is needed "in order to remain a vibrant institution."

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