

DIOCESAN NEWS

Auburn school will vacate one of two buildings

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

St. Joseph's School in Auburn, which had operated on two campuses since the 1997-98 school year, will consolidate into one building beginning in the fall of 2002. In so doing, St. Joseph's will cease operation of its primary-school facility located at 17 Clymer St.

St. Joseph's Primary School, which currently houses pre-kindergarten and kindergarten only, will relocate to St. Joseph's Elementary School, 89 E. Genesee St., where grades one through eight already are located. This process will involve the elimination of five classes and the teaching positions that go with them, said Mary Caffrey, principal of both St. Joseph's Primary and St. Joseph's Elementary.

School officials announced the restructuring at an annual parents' meeting held Feb. 12.

Caffrey said the decision was fueled by "diocesan and state standards for learning, rising costs, fair wages for our teachers, under-enrolled classrooms and retention of our children."

Caffrey said that it's no longer affordable to have tiny class sizes. As an example, she cited the fifth grade at St. Joseph's Elementary. The grade's two teachers have salaries and benefits that, combined, exceed \$50,000. But with only 28 students divided between two classrooms, tuition income can't support those financial obligations "and we haven't turned on the lights, bought a book or made a single copy," Caffrey remarked.

Therefore, grades two, three, six and seven will each drop from two classrooms to one beginning in the fall of 2002. In addi-



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

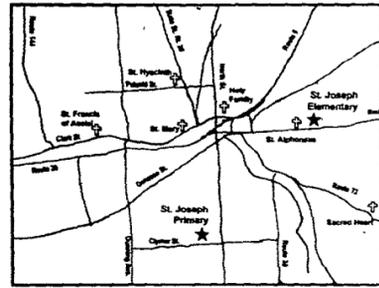
Eliza McQueeney (left) and Duanna Johnson work on a project in Mary Jo Keba's kindergarten class at St. Joseph's Primary School in Auburn. The kindergarten and pre-K classes have been housed in the former St. Mary's School building on Clymer Street, but soon will be moving to St. Joseph's Elementary School on East Genesee Street.

tion, pre-kindergarten will decrease from four rooms to three. Caffrey said she hopes that the necessary staff cuts will come about through attrition rather than layoffs.

The property at St. Joseph's Primary School is owned by St. Mary's Parish. Eliminating use of that building, along with the staffing reductions, will decrease St. Joseph's annual budget by approximately \$155,000, Caffrey said. In addition, tuition for the 2002-03 school year will rise by 6.78 percent for a one-student family; 10.53 percent for a two-student family; and 13.27 percent for a three-student family.

Caffrey noted that some of the funds generated through these moves will help establish a capital reserve fund for St. Joseph's Elementary School. The Genesee Street building is more than 50 years old, and Caffrey said that financial resources need to be in place for repairs and replacement of furniture.

According to figures provided by the diocesan Department of Catholic Schools, St. Joseph's Primary had 94 children enrolled in pre-kindergarten and 38 in kindergarten at the start of the 2001-02 school year. Meanwhile, St. Joseph's Elementary had 258 students in its eight grades. These



figures represent noticeable declines from 1997-98, the first year of the two-campus system, when there were 67 kindergarten students and 330 children in grades one through eight.

The consolidation is the latest in a series of Auburn-area school-restructuring efforts that extends back some 30 years, according to Caffrey. During that period, several parish schools have closed.

"This is just one little small piece in a story of changes in Auburn," said Sister Elizabeth Meegan, OP, diocesan superintendent of schools. Sister Meegan said she hopes the reconfigured St. Joseph's School will "lead to a new beginning."

Caffrey is optimistic that housing all grades in one building will create some needed stability. "We can only get better," she said.

St. Joseph's is the only diocesan-affiliated Catholic school in Auburn. The city also is home to a Ukrainian Catholic school, Ss. Peter and Paul, which is affiliated with the Ukrainian Diocese of Stamford, Conn.

Caffrey said children from all of the city's Roman Catholic parishes — St. Alphonsus, Holy Family, St. Francis of Assisi, Sacred Heart, St. Mary's and St. Hyacinth — attend St. Joseph's.

Spitzer ends investigation of center, is denied court petition

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Abortion foes in the Diocese of Rochester have found two reasons to celebrate in recent weeks: The end of New York state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer's investigation of a crisis-pregnancy center, and a court victory by pro-life protesters over Spitzer and pro-choice organizations.

Spitzer's office, however, viewed both events as examples of its impartial approach to law enforcement, and denied that it had any desire to cater to the whims of pro-choice groups.

On March 5, Birthright of Victor, a private, interdenominational center that helps women in crisis pregnancies, reopened its doors after closing temporarily when Spitzer's office subpoenaed it Jan. 4. Birthright was one of several crisis-pregnancy centers across the state whose advertising and services were investigated. The attorney general's office decided to "survey" the centers' advertising in response to a complaint of misleading advertising made against a Long Island crisis pregnancy center, a state official said.

On Feb. 28, the attorney general's office announced that Birthright had made an agreement with the office regarding its advertising. Under the agreement, which will serve as a model for agreements with other pregnancy centers throughout the state, Birthright agreed to:

- Clearly inform people who inquire about abortion or birth control that Birthright does not provide those services or make referrals for them.

- Disclose verbally or in writing, before providing a pregnancy test or counseling about pregnancy, that the center is not a licensed medical provider qualified to diagnose or accurately date pregnancy. The center also agreed to inform women that only licensed medical providers can confirm pregnancy or provide medical ad-

vice about pregnancy.

- Clarify in advertising and consumer contacts that the pregnancy tests it provides are self-administered.

- Tell callers or visitors that Birthright is not a medical facility.

Victor Birthright has never claimed it was a medical facility, but nonetheless agreed to change the sign outside the center's office to specifically indicate that it is not a medical facility, according to Joan Rohr, executive director of Birthright of Rochester, which has worked with the separately incorporated Victor center. Furthermore, she said, Birthright of Victor also agreed to indicate in all its advertising — including telephone-book ads, for example — that its pregnancy tests are self-administered.

A Eucharistic minister at St. John the Evangelist Parish, Greece, Rohr said Birthright officials were still at a loss about what had prompted the investigation by Spitzer's office, and were never told by state officials why the Victor center had been targeted. She added that the center was originally asked to provide the state with the names of donors and volunteers, but that the request was dropped in the course of the investigation.

"I don't know what (Spitzer's) motivations were, but we didn't feel that Birthright was wrong or misleading," she said.

In a statement, Spitzer's office commended Birthright of Victor for cooperating with the attorney general's investigation.

"This agreement shows that our goals — to combat deceptive practices and to prevent unlicensed practice of medicine — are fully consistent with a (pregnancy) center's exercise of its free speech right to try to persuade women not to seek abortion," Spitzer said in the statement.

Darren Dopp, spokesman for Spitzer's office, said the investigation into the crisis pregnancy centers was prompted by a complaint made last summer against a

center in Long Island. The attorney general's office decided it was time to survey centers throughout the state to review their advertising practices, he said. Dopp added that previous New York attorneys general had similarly monitored pregnancy centers to ensure that they complied with medical advertising laws, and that Spitzer had no desire to shut down any such centers.

Dopp said he could understand why pro-life supporters might think Spitzer, who is pro-choice, was actively working against them, but that the attorney general's only desire is to ensure equal application of the law.

"We don't do anyone's bidding," Dopp said. "We don't want to shut down anyone or abridge their free speech rights."

Meanwhile, Spitzer and such pro-choice organizations as Planned Parenthood of the Rochester/Syracuse Region Inc. have lost another round in a judicial battle against pro-life protesters in the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based in New York City.

On Jan. 24, the court denied the attorney general's petition for a rehearing of the court's November decision to modify a lower court's 1999 ruling that had expanded "buffer zones" around abortion clinics in Rochester and Buffalo.

The lower court had expanded the zones from 15 feet to 60 feet and banned the use of such amplification devices as bullhorns by pro-life protesters. U.S. District Judge Richard J. Arcara issued the ruling in April 1999 at the request of Spitzer, Planned Parenthood and other pro-choice plaintiffs.

The decision was made prior to "Operation Save America," a series of April 20-25, 1999, protests by about 100 pro-life activists at various sites in Rochester and Buffalo. In calling for the decision, the plaintiffs cited concerns for the safety of abortion clinic employees and patients. The protests were marked by heavy police presence, but there was no violence by or

arrests of pro-life activists during Operation Save America.

Arcara's decision was directed at several pro-life protest groups and individuals, and was appealed by two Rochester activists, the Rev. Michael Warren of Brighton Presbyterian Church and Mary Melfi, a parishioner at St. Cecilia's Parish, Irondequoit.

The Court of Appeals found that the buffer zone enlargements "are more extensive than necessary" to protect the state's interests, and therefore violated the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The appeals court also ruled that banning the use of amplification devices by protesters "burdens more speech than necessary" for the goals of the injunction to be achieved.

The Court of Appeals did make one ruling against the interests of pro-life activists in throwing out an exception in the original ruling that had allowed two "sidewalk counselors" to enter the buffer zone. Such counselors generally speak to people going in and out of abortion clinics in an effort to persuade them against abortion.

Dopp said the attorney general had sought the rehearing on the Court of Appeals' decision in order to clarify the limits of buffer zones. He noted that the size of buffer zones is "still up in the air," and that his office wants local law enforcement authorities to have some say in the size of such zones. He also said that his office supports the rights of protesters, but that the zones have helped to "keep the peace" at clinics.

Melfi regularly prays and protests outside Planned Parenthood in Rochester, as well as at the Brighton office of Dr. Morris Wortman, an abortion provider. The Jan. 24 ruling means she can stand closer to such offices than she has done in the past few years, she noted.

"I was definitely thrilled that justice has been served again, and that we're standing where we should have been standing all this time," she said.