

DIOCESAN NEWS

McQuaid leader retiring in 2003

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Jesuit Father James J. Fischer, president of McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester since 1992, will retire in June 2003.

In an interview in his office at the school, Father Fischer said his superiors in the New York Province of the Society of Jesus decided that they had asked him to serve in the position long enough, given that he will turn 80 next year.

"I have enjoyed this very much, and I really liked Rochester," the Jersey City, N.J., native said. However, he said, age has made the job more challenging, and a younger president could bring new energy to his position.

"It's time to pass on the baton," he said.

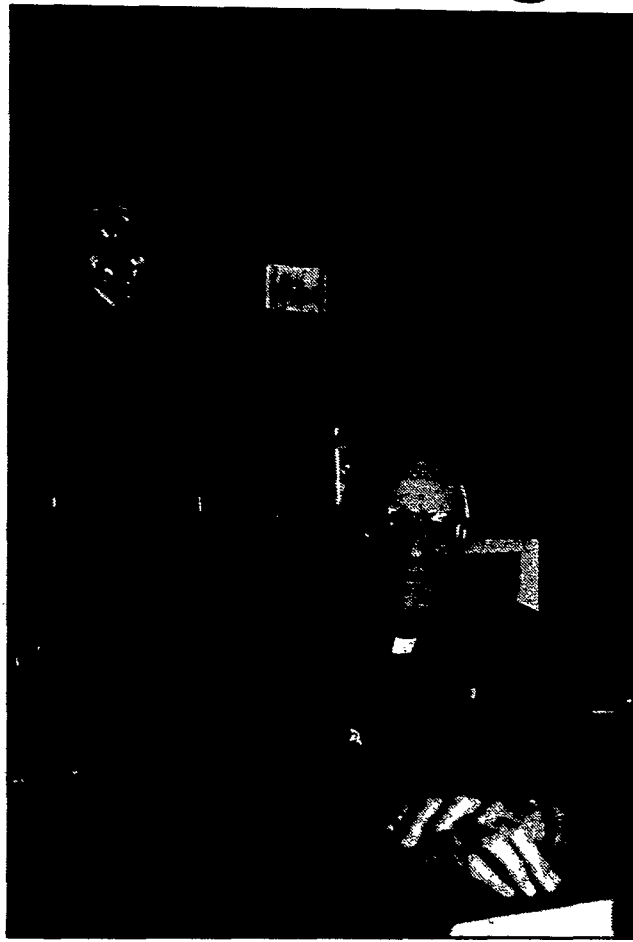
He added that he has yet to make plans for his retirement, but wouldn't mind becoming a retreat director at one of his order's retreat houses throughout the country.

A committee chaired by Thomas I. Nientimp, a 1959 McQuaid graduate and former chairman of the school's board of trustees, will conduct the search for Father Fischer's replacement.

Thomas N. Trevett, a 1960 McQuaid graduate who chairs the school's board of trustees, praised Father Fischer for his leadership, which, he said, had enabled McQuaid "to reach new heights during the past 10 years."

"It was his guidance that helped propel McQuaid Jesuit into the 21st century," Trevett said.

As president, Father Fischer has been responsible for the school's budgeting, development and strategic planning. During his tenure at McQuaid, Father Fischer oversaw an enrollment increase from 692 students in 1992 to 850 currently, and made particular efforts to recruit inner-city students. The school budget has been in the black "year after year," Father Fischer said, and its endowment, scholarship programs, and technological education have all been enhanced. He has also overseen the building of a 27,000-square-foot school annex, which includes a 400-seat



Karin von Voigtlander/Staff photographer
Jesuit Father James Fischer will retire after more than a decade as president of McQuaid Jesuit High School.

auditorium. The school's two orchestras and two bands practice there, he said.

Other physical improvements include construction of an elevator that has made the school accessible to people with handicaps, he said. Father Fischer added that the elevator has had an unforeseen benefit for McQuaid's athletes: Whenever they injure a leg and are on crutches, they no longer have to use the school's staircases, he said.

He also said that the last two major renovations to be completed under his watch will be that of the school's gymnasium and library.

Part of the reason the school has

thrived in an era when so many Catholic schools have closed, he said, was the fact that the earliest alumni of McQuaid — which opened in 1954 — are now reaching an age at which they can vigorously support the school. These alumni have raised their children and are free to make generous donations to McQuaid, he said, adding that the school has also made a concerted effort to create a strong and supportive alumni network.

Father Fischer entered the Jesuit order 60 years ago, and has been a priest for 47 years. He taught mathematics at St. Peter's College in Jersey City and at Fordham College in Shrub Oak, N.Y. He then spent 36 years in administration, including stints as president of St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City and Regis High School in New York City.

Father Fischer said he was inspired to become a Jesuit by the stories he heard as a boy from Catholic nuns about the

Jesuit missionaries martyred in Auriesville, N.Y., in the 1640s.

He added that he always wanted to be a teacher, so the educationally oriented order seemed to be the perfect match for his desires.

"Before I ever met a Jesuit, I made up my mind that I wanted to be a Jesuit," he said.

He said that he is willing to lend a hand to help his successor make a smooth entrance into the office of president, and offered this advice to whoever succeeds him.

"Open your heart — it's a loving community."

Five men join abuse lawsuit

An amended lawsuit was filed Aug. 8 in Monroe County Court against the Diocese of Rochester and Father Robert O'Neill, a retired diocesan priest.

The suit details incidents of sexual abuse allegedly committed by Father O'Neill against teenage boys, as well as alleged negligence by the diocese to take proper action against the priest. Michael Tedesco, diocesan director of communications, confirmed that there are now eight adult male plaintiffs, up from three who filed the original lawsuit June 17.

The amended lawsuit asserts that one of the five recently added plaintiffs — referred to as "John Doe 58" — met with Bishop Matthew H. Clark a few months after he allegedly was abused by Father O'Neill in the early 1980s. The suit further charges that Bishop Clark told John Doe 58 he would "take care of it," but that the only action was Father O'Neill's transfer to another parish.

Tedesco said Bishop Clark and the diocese have no comment on any of the suit's allegations.

Father O'Neill, 65, was one of six priests removed by Bishop Clark on May 2 due to allegations that they had committed sexual abuse in the past. Father O'Neill cannot continue in any form of ministry, cannot wear clerical clothing and is barred from living in any parish or diocesan residence. He had retired from the pastorate of St. Christopher in North Chili in 2001 for health reasons.

Ordained in 1962, he served as assisting priest at Brockport's Church of the Nativity (1962-67) and Rochester's Holy Cross Parish (1967-73). Beginning in 1974 he worked for several years in the diocesan Tribunal, residing at Rochester's St. Boniface Church and later at Greece's St. John the Evangelist Church.

Father O'Neill became pastor at Rochester's Church of the Annunciation in 1987. He moved to St. Christopher in 1998 and was named pastor there in 1999.

— Mike Latona

Woman claims parish ignored harassment

A woman formerly employed by Holy Trinity Parish in Webster has filed a lawsuit against the parish and the Diocese of Rochester, claiming her complaints of being sexually harassed by a fellow employee were ignored both before and after he allegedly raped her.

The complaint, filed in Monroe County Court July 26, charges the parish and the diocese with negligence. The suit claims that the diocese and the parish knew of, tolerated and failed to investigate alleged sexual harassment by the woman's coworker before he allegedly raped her. The suit also charges that the diocese and the parish failed to correct the alleged hostile work environment to prevent the plaintiff's 1999 rape. Accord-

ing to a reliable source, no charges were filed against the woman's coworker, nor has he ever been convicted of any crime against her.

The suit also charges that Holy Trinity "may have changed the terms and conditions" of the woman's employment "in retaliation" for her sexual-harassment complaint. The suit also alleges that the woman "suffered degradation, humiliation, mental anguish, substantial emotional and psychological harm and distress, diminished enjoyment of life, medical expenses, and loss of earnings (above those paid and to be paid by worker's compensation) and benefits."

The suit asks that the defendants be made to give the woman back pay, minus

any compensation already paid, as well as "compensatory damages," and to cover court costs.

The woman's attorney, Bradley P. Kammholz of Rochester, declined to comment on the case. Michael Tedesco, diocesan director of communications, said the diocese does not comment on lawsuits while they are in litigation. Father Thomas F. Nellis, pastor of Holy Trinity, also declined comment, but did say that the man named in the lawsuit is no longer employed by the parish.

— Rob Cullivan

Recognizing

Several June graduates of Rochester's All Saints Academy have received scholarships to area Catholic high schools for the 2002-03 school year. They are: Bishop Kearney High School: Kristal Gallett, Joe Cocca and Eric McKinley. Aquinas Institute: Anthony Danbara, Christopher Kokkias, Matthew Byrne, Christopher Montano, John Danbara, Maria Danbarova, Michael Haller, Jason Brown and Anthony Mirabella. Nazareth Academy: Karalyn Levine and Sara Young.

North Deane High School in Elmore recently inducted 24 students into the Lourdes Chapter of the National Honor Society. They are: T. William Arnold, Nicole Barlow, Daniel Canfield, Olivia Egan, Camie Freeman, Kelly Galvin, Mary Giancoli, Anthony Grogan, Hana Harshbarger, Lindsey Huddle, Kasia Keeley, Kristen Kowalski, Shana Lee, Rebecca McQuinn, Jennifer Palmer, Jill Panoman, Renee Pappalardo, Elizabeth Pappalardo, Chelsea Warkner, Heidi Webb, Kevin Weber.

St. Joseph's Academy in Elmore June graduate and student of Pamela Schick was named to the National Honor Society program for Cirque du Soleil, an international circus troupe from Quebec, Canada.

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