

House OKs D.C. school vouchers

Carol Zimmermann/CNS

WASHINGTON — A Catholic schools official described as “good news” the recent approval of a school voucher initiative for the District of Columbia by a U.S. Senate committee and the full House of Representatives.

Oblate Father William Davis, assistant secretary for Catholic schools and public policy for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Department of Education, has been monitoring the voucher legislation closely. He said the narrow victory in the House (205-203) Sept. 5 does not open the door for federal approval of other voucher plans.

The priest said the legislation for D.C. vouchers was separate from other voucher initiatives and noted, “We won’t get the votes for other scholarship programs.”

But he was quick to acknowledge that a victory for D.C. vouchers is certainly a step in the right direction. “It’s progress,” he told Catholic News Service Sept. 5.

The \$10 million voucher program plan approved by the House will provide \$7,500 to at least 1,300 low-income District of Columbia students to attend the school of their choice.

The five-year pilot program aims to give hope to students who attend “the worst schools in America,” according to Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio, chairman of the Education and Workplace Committee.

Critics of the House proposal, which is an amendment to the District of Columbia appropriations bill, said it signified the abandonment of D.C. public schools and suggested that money should instead be spent on fixing buildings and helping

teachers.

Eleanor Holmes-Norton, the district’s nonvoting delegate in Congress, told House members that by voting for vouchers they would “send a signal to every private school in the country (and) to every organization of private schools, that this is the time to bring pressure to get the same private-school deal that the District of Columbia got.”

Her amendment to eliminate the \$10 million funding for the voucher program failed on a tie vote of 203-203.

The full Senate is expected to vote on a similar five-year voucher amendment the week of Sept. 8, as part of the District’s \$5.6 billion 2004 budget, although Democrats are pledging to collect enough votes to form a filibuster.

On Sept. 4, the Senate Appropriations Committee, in a 16-12 vote, approved a \$40 million plan that would provide vouchers of up to \$7,500 for about 2,000 low-income D.C. students to attend private, charter or public schools.

In a session of heated debate, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., described the public-school system of the District of Columbia, which teaches nearly 67,000 students, as a “broken-down, useless system.”

Opponents of the voucher plan said educational reform would not come about by helping a small portion of students and called the plan an irresponsible use of tax dollars.

Washington Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick has endorsed the bill for its three-pronged approach — offering \$13 million for the scholarship program, \$13 million for the charter schools and \$13 million for public schools in the District of Columbia.

Sr. Marie Joseph Helfrich, SSJ

Sister of St. Joseph Marie Joseph Helfrich, 91, died Aug. 4, 2003.

Sister Helfrich entered the congregation from her home parish, St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport, in 1929. She earned her bachelor’s degree from Nazareth College and taught in diocesan schools until 1962. Her assignments included St. Ambrose, Corpus Christi, St. Anne, Sacred Heart and Blessed Sacrament, all in Rochester; Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Brockport; St. John, Spencerport; St. Anthony, Elmira; and St. Patrick, Corning.

She then served as a classroom assistant at Our Lady of Perpetual

Obituary

Help and Holy Rosary schools. She was a parish volunteer at Holy Rosary after her retirement in 1993 and served in prayer ministry at the Convent Infirmary since 2000.

Her funeral liturgy was celebrated on Aug. 7 at the motherhouse chapel by her cousins, Fathers Frederick and Peter Helfrich, with burial in St. John’s Cemetery, Spencerport. Memorial contributions may be made to the Sisters of St. Joseph, 150 French Road, Rochester, NY 14618.

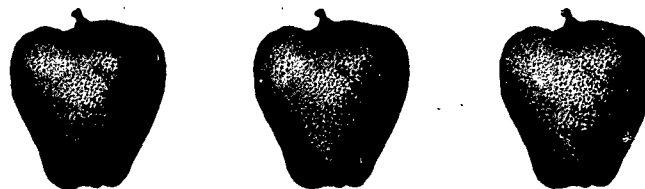


Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Day of blessings

Parishioners of Rochester’s St. Augustine Church celebrated the parish’s 105th anniversary Sept. 7, the Feast of St. Augustine. Also that day, Father Robert Werth, pastor, blessed the church’s new sign and new bells. The bells and their tower had been in disrepair for many years, and recently underwent a \$25,000 restoration. Above, Father Werth addresses parishioners as he blesses the sign.

St. Ann’s Community and Rochester General Hospital Present the 17th Annual Community Care Health Fair



Thursday, September 18, 9:30 am – 2:30 pm

St. Ann’s Home

1500 Portland Avenue, Rochester, NY 14621

Free Admission, Refreshments and Door Prizes

With over 30 booths offering information and health screenings. The Fair is designed to create awareness of community resources for senior citizens and those who care for the elderly.

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