

**Catholic Schools at the Crossroads**

# At St. Adalbert's, no frills, just achievements

## E. Side school is 'island of sanity' amid the blight

By RONALD RUTTI  
STAFF WRITER

On the last Sunday in May, kindergartners from St. Adalbert School go through a ritual that allows them passage into first grade.

The children read aloud from the Bible during a Mass that doubles as their graduation ceremony. They handle verses that on ordinary Sundays are read by adults.

"I was overwhelmed with my daughter, who was reading at first-grade level in kindergarten," said Bobby Tinnon, who has two children in the Catholic school, on E. 83rd St. across from Fairfax Recreation Center.

Tinnon calls the 66-year-old school an "island of sanity" in a neighborhood riddled with blight, drug trafficking and crime.

While other Catholic schools have closed in the inner city, St. Adalbert endures.

"We built a better mousetrap," said Principal Lydia Harris. "We have satisfied our customers."

St. Adalbert graduate Leslye McGhee said paying the tuition "is a struggle for me, but it's worth every penny." One son has graduated from the school. She has another in its kindergarten.

The school's value is "what the school embodies," said Gregg Wadley, who has four children in the school. "It embodies the family. The kids get homework every night. Even kindergarten gets homework. They're bored during the summer. The only thing that would make school better is for there to be a summer session.

"At night I know where my kids are. They are home doing homework."

Wadley said paying the tuition was "like investing in a very good stock."

The investment is \$550 a year. Families with more than one child in the school get discounts.

Many of the 306 pupils, all of whom are black and 80% of whom are non-Catholic, come from one-parent homes, and 70% of the families are poor enough that the children qualify for the federal free-lunch program at the school.



PD/CHRIS STEPHENS

Corporal punishment is now discouraged in Cleveland-area Catholic schools, but discipline is still strict and valued by parents. This second-grader standing in a hall at St. Adalbert Elementary School is getting a dose of it.



PD/CHRIS STEPHENS

Children learn to read early at St. Adalbert Elementary School. From left, first-graders Danita Davis, Rayvon Brown and Roberto Lathan are congratulated by Principal Lydia Harris after reading from the Book of Deuteronomy in the Bible.

*'We are a small parish. In no way can we put the bucks in the school we need.'*

— the Rev. Jerome Steinbrunner, church pastor

Sunday.

The school has no frills, unless you count a cross-country team. It has two kindergartens, one class each for grades one through eight, a handful of computers and no gym. Concentration is placed on the basics.

Despite the bare-bones approach, St. Adalbert has a list of 70 children waiting to get in.

The school has no religious on its staff, but parents say that has not been an obstacle to providing a religious education.

"There is a certain amount of respect that came with the habit (the clothing worn by the religious)," said Linda Gamble, who has had four children at the school. "I had anxiety that possibly we would lose some of the respect the habit brought. It didn't happen."

St. Adalbert used to be served by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, but the nuns left four years ago when the order's dwindling membership forced it to quit some schools.

"All the people in this community were trained by the sisters," said Harris, the fourth-year principal, who previously taught kindergarten at the school for 23 years. "They did an exceptional job. I would like to have the nuns here for their presence, but that is not possible."

Despite such feelings, Harris and parents said the lay teachers presented more realistic role models to the pupils than the nuns did.

The school's faculty is divided almost evenly between blacks and whites. "I like it like that," Harris said. "Having an all-black staff is not realistic."

operating budget is \$285,000, of which \$54,000 is subsidy money.

"We are a small parish. In no way can we put the bucks in the school we need," said

the Rev. Jerome Steinbrunner, the church pastor.

The parish has 350 families and draws about 200 people for its one Mass each

## Promise

FROM/1-A

ply 58% of the average elementary school's operating budget. They must make up the rest through tuition, which hits poor people the hardest.

Membership in inner-city parishes has dropped as Catholics moved to the suburbs, leaving fewer tuition-paying children and fewer parents putting money in the church collection basket.

Those factors have contributed to the closing of 17 elementary schools in poor Cleveland areas since 1968 and to four mergers that affected 10 schools.

One elementary school, St. Joseph Franciscan on Community College Ave., outlived its parish by two years. The school was closed last summer.

To keep schools in poorer areas going, the diocese is intensifying its fund-raising efforts with businesses and foundations.

One drive, called the Catholic Education Endowment Trust, is 12 years old. It builds an endowment whose annual interest is used to help needy families pay tuition.

The diocese said that in the last school year, 3,303 children received \$521,000 from the endowment, with 58% of the money going to inner-city students. About 7,000 families apply each year. Elementary pupils get \$100 a year; high school students get \$300.

Another drive, the 1-year-old Inner-City School Fund, seeks money expressly for the subsidized inner-city schools. Similar drives have been started in Boston, New York and Chicago.

Robert M. Ginn, chairman emeritus of Centenor Energy Corp. and chairman of the inner-city fund, said the Catholic schools anchored Cleveland neighborhoods.

Mayor George V. Voinovich, a consistent booster of the Catholic schools, has made similar assessments. "If we lost the parochial school system, it would be like an atomic bomb hitting the city," he said in 1985.

The Rev. Jerome Steinbrunner, pastor of St. Adalbert Church on E. 83rd St., said maintenance of Catholic schools in the poorer neighborhoods was a sign of commitment and stability from the church.

"I would think if our school went, there would be some wonderings: 'Has the church changed its commitment?'" said Steinbrunner, whose parish school is subsidized.

Gregg Wadley, who has four children in St. Adalbert School, said that besides stabilizing the neighborhood, the school provided moral guidance to children who constantly face hard choices.

*'The disadvantaged need us, whether they be disadvantaged by poverty or low levels of parental education. We are the hopes for a lot of those young people.'*

— Bishop Anthony M. Pilla

"Every summer you see girls 12, 13 and 14 (years old) hanging around E. 75th St. and Kinsman Rd. Then all winter they're pregnant," Wadley said. "Kids in the neighborhoods are out buying drugs. They are having to make moral choices every day. There are gangs for 9- and 10-year-olds. Kids see a 10-speed bike. They have to decide if they want to steal it."

Wadley said St. Adalbert instilled the same kind of values he instilled at his house. "This school has traditional, upper-middle-class values," he said. "This little school promotes a work ethic. They instill responsibility."

Ginn said the business community was happy to support Pilla's request for help in subsidizing the inner-city schools, in part because the Catholic schools have a better graduation rate than the Cleveland public schools.

"In the business community, overall education is our No. 1 priority," Ginn said. "The future of companies depends on it. It's worrisome that so many kids do not finish school."

Others also worry about the graduation rates. A 14-year-old Cleveland girl said she left the public schools last fall to attend Erieview.

"Most of the people I know don't finish school. I just want to get good grades and make it through school," said the girl, who helps pay her tuition by cleaning houses.

Subsidies or not, closings and mergers have continued. Two mergers took effect this fall, yielding the 350-pupil St. Philip Neri-St. Thomas Aquinas School on the East Side and the 773-pupil Metro Catholic Parish School on the West Side. The latter brought together St. Michael, St. Boniface and St. Stephen elementary schools.

"Both of us could have kept going, but we merged to save money," said the Rev. Thomas J. Gallagher, pastor of St. Philip Neri Church. "The building at St. Thomas Aquinas is bigger and more adequate for education. Our building is suitable for other kinds of services."

Gallagher said the new school provided a stronger science and computer program. The St. Philip Neri building now houses a literacy program, hunger center with a

### The series

**SUNDAY:** A quarter-century of falling enrollments and rising costs have left Catholic education at a crossroads in the Cleveland diocese, and one of the major questions facing administrators and parishioners is how to pay a decent wage to the teachers of their children.

**YESTERDAY:** Studies and test scores indicate Catholic schools do a better job of educating students than most public schools, especially in the inner city, although public educators say such comparisons are unfair. In any case, the religious aspect of Catholic education has changed greatly.

**TOMORROW:** Officials say greater financial sacrifice and a reduction in the number of schools will be needed to preserve widespread availability of Catholic education in the Cleveland diocese.

hot-lunch program and economic development offices.

This was the second merger for Gallagher. He was pastor of St. Agatha Church when its school was merged with St. Aloysius School in 1974. The parishes merged a year later.

Gallagher said the latest merger went a lot more smoothly than the previous one, which involved primarily Catholic students, because 85% of St. Philip Neri's pupils were non-Catholic. "A lot of St. Agatha people were angry," he said.

Time has wiped away the anger. The St. Aloysius-St. Agatha merger in Glenville is looked at by many in the diocese as the most successful inner-city merger.

Erieview is a merger product, as is the other subsidized inner-city high school, Cleveland Central Catholic.

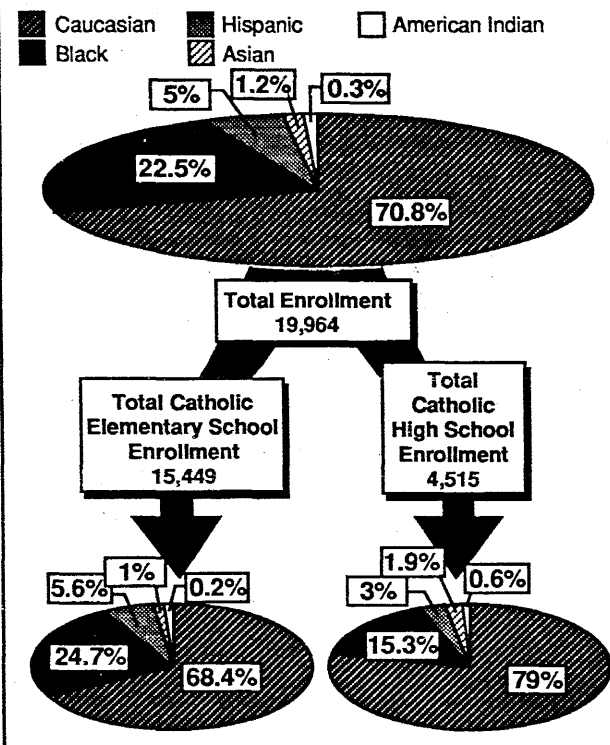
St. John Cantius, St. Stanislaus, Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Michael high schools were joined in September 1969 to create Central Catholic. The merger was billed as an experiment in Catholic education, but diocesan officials said it never quite caught on, largely because the Catholic base around the four schools eroded as the neighborhoods changed. And the tuition, now \$1,650 a year, is a lot to pay in an area in which the families of some students list monthly incomes of about \$200.

The school offered classes in all four buildings at first. In 1975, the campuses were cut to three and this year to two: the St. Stanislaus building on Foreman Ave. and the St. Michael building on Scranton Ave.

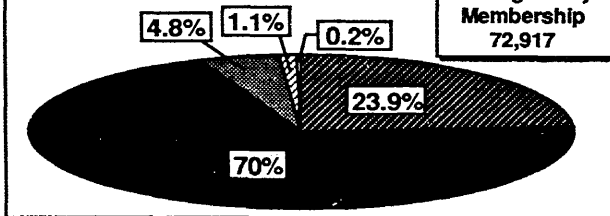
In the last three years, enroll-

## Students in Cleveland

**Catholic Schools**  
Students attending Catholic schools during the 1987-1988 school year.



**Public Schools**  
Students attending public schools during the 1987-1988 school year.



PD Graphic/TINKER

ment has dropped from 926 to 730 at Central Catholic, said the Rev. Neil O'Connor, the principal.

"Central Catholic has all the trappings of the Catholic schools, but not the usual type of kids you find in Catholic schools," said James Riley, who until this year taught in the Lakewood public schools. "There are more broken homes and home problems. However, we do have the discipline structure of the usual Catholic schools."

"Even though it is an inner-city school, it is far different from a public school. The fact that parents pay tuition, you have that leverage. Parents will back you up. When I

would call parents in Lakewood, there was often little interest and support."

About 90% of the Central Catholic students come from Cleveland. "We don't have any wealthy kids, mostly blue-collar families," O'Connor said. The school tries to make financial arrangements for those struggling to pay tuition, he added.

A few of the students receive neighborhood scholarships. Some parishes sponsor students, and groups such as the Polish Women's Club will sponsor a girl, O'Connor said.

The school tries to keep the tuition down by all forms of fund rais-

ing. "Bingos, raffles, all that stuff is the bane of our existence," O'Connor said.

All that stuff may be a bother, but it is necessary, especially at St. Francis School, an inner-city elementary school not subsidized by the diocese. The school, which has a largely non-Catholic enrollment, doesn't need the diocesan funding because of its bingo games, promoted on a large sign in a mini-park at E. 71st St. and Superior Ave.

Bingo and other lotteries are a sore point for Pilla, who wants to rid schools of their dependence on them.

"It isn't a moral evil, and it is a legal way of doing it (raising money). I wish we had a more appropriate way of doing it," Pilla said.

The Rev. Thomas F. Martin, the St. Francis pastor, said that until something better comes along, bingo, casino nights and candy drives must stay. They supply 55% of the school's operating money, he said.

Almost \$3 million of the Inner-City School Fund's \$5 million goal has been pledged, said Alex S. Petrus, director of development for diocesan schools.

Money will be raised for three years, at which time the project will be assessed, Ginn said. Much of the money collected has gone for equipment and repairs, he said.

While fund volunteers have raised money strictly from businesses and foundations, parishioners in the diocese are annually invited to donate to the tuition endowment fund.

"This gives more folks an opportunity to share in something," said Charles W. Zawadzki, an Ameritrust Co. vice president who chairs the endowment board.

"We were put on the board, not to make it grow, but to see it got dispersed properly," Zawadzki said of the endowment. But the mission has changed.

"We came to a mindset that we didn't want to look back 10 years from now and say, 'Why didn't we make it grow?'" Zawadzki said.

Petrus said the endowment stood at \$5.2 million. The goal is to reach \$12 million by 1994.

Disbursements are made based on factors that include family income and number of children, Zawadzki said, and the religion of an applicant is not considered.

Lydia Harris, St. Adalbert School principal, said endowment money kept children in her school.

"For some families, it is a \$50-a-month difference. That really helps," she said. "It is a real sacrifice (to pay tuition). We have aunts and grandparents helping out."