

More Schools Closed



By Dr. R. Pletsch

Some people of our area are suffering through an unstable period that sadly many of us in the area have gone through before -- the closing of a school that was part and partial to their community. The schools closing this year affecting our community are St. Richard/St. Bruno, which had combined at 5025 S. Kenneth and St. Jerome, 2801 S. Princeton. Both of these schools gave parents in our area a choice for their children's education.

These Catholic schools had an impact on parish life for many years. Many of them especially helped the immigrant communities adjusting to the USA and to many especially before TV was an effective way to learn English. When thinking about the baby boom era, the Archdiocese saved the city millions of dollars by running their schools and paying for their teachers.

The Archdiocese released figures that they had enrolled at one time about 366,000 and there was no Pre-K at that time. By 2024 with many of the schools having a Pre-K the enrollment was down to about 67,000. The Superintendent of Archdiocesan schools, Greg Richmond, in a letter to the families wrote that the big need was students and funds. He stated that over the years, some parishes tried heroic measures. Some parishes simply could not. He mentioned as contributing factors were the growth of the charter schools in the 1990s and the clergy sex abuse scandals of the 2000s.

Recently St. Richard / St. Bruno has about 190 students. St. Jerome has about 100 students. These figures may vary a little according to the newspapers. Neither would have the tuition income high enough to pay the bills. I have heard several people talk about the "wealth of the Catholic Church" and "it's so rich the schools should not have tuition". I worked as both a teacher, administrator and principal as an employee of the Archdiocese. I was a parent of students and a principal having the responsibility of a school closing. It was hard. But I quickly learned that a huge amount of "the wealth" is in property and artwork. Have you tried to sell a church at its valued price? It's impossible. I was active in selling a large parish school with a church, rectory, and convent. The value was an estimated \$17 million. After three years on the market, the Bishop in charge accepted \$600,000.

I believe, in general, that the labor cost became too much. Vocations to the Sisters of teaching orders had dropped dramatically. You can pick your own reason why this occurred. But the fact is with very few exceptions, the orders, many of which came from Europe to serve their immigrant communities, dwindled. Despite their attempts we are no longer supplied with a large workforce, who have taken the vow of poverty.

I owe a lot to the great teachers and administrators my family was blessed to have. I also have had the privilege to have worked with and supervised many Sisters in the Archdiocese. You may be a great help to those worried about the schools that their children will attend next year. Be very truthful. Hopefully, the parents will find the best fit for their children.