

Catholic school plan angers some parents

Written by

Sheboygan Press staff

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The schools at both St Dominic and Holy Name Catholic parishes in Sheboygan will close at the end of the next school year, and a new school to replace them both will open in time for the 2012-2013 school year in the building that currently houses Holy Family School.

At least, that's the way the pastors who run both parishes and the Archdiocese of see the future.

If you ask some of the parents at St. Dominic's, however, the outcome is far from a sure thing.

In keeping with the way the archdioceses is planning for the long-term future of its parishes, the creation of one school for all the north-side Catholic students is a natural next step, said Carol Ward, assistant superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

"It is very much within the vision of Archbishop ListECKI (to) share and work together, which is what we should be about anyway," Ward said. "We have to be mindful of how we use our resources to

provide the highest quality. It's not just about the people there today, it's about the people who are going to be there five, 10, 20 years from now."

In contrast, many St. Dominic parents are angry about the decision, and feel the Rev. John Radetski, pastor of St. Dominic, is to blame.

"He made the decision, and I think the decision was poorly thought out," said Rick Leonhard, 47, whose daughter is a first-grader at St. Dominic. "There are a lot of reasons why this school has to stay and why this school should still stay. For one man to make an autocratic decision like this when he has no passionate connection to the school is just wrong."

That's the feeling of many St. Dominic families, despite the fact that the decision came from a four-month study by the archdiocese looking at the long-term health of both parishes and the decision was made by both Radetski and the Rev. Jim Connell of Holy Name of Jesus Parish, with

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the inclusion of both parish councils.

Part of the problem, according to Radetski, is financial.

"There are limited financial resources to continue the high quality of education that we have here," said Radetski, who has been at St. Dominic almost five years. "Let's just say some people not convinced this is not necessary either at this time or any time in the future."

In fact, St. Dominic has been using its reserves to pay bill for the last three years, Radetski said, and at the parish's January finance committee meeting, predictions were the parish would finish the year with a deficit of \$68,000. In addition, the parish's annual subsidy to keep the school afloat is north of \$300,000 per year.

In response to the news, Leonhard agreed to spearhead an emergency fundraising campaign for St. Dominic and as of Tuesday afternoon the effort had brought in pledges of \$90,000. In addition, he has contacted a company in Illinois about doing a strategic plan for the school.

"I think both schools can co-exist and both schools should and can succeed," Leonhard said. "These schools are being treated more as a drain on the parishes instead of looking at them as producing really good people."

Connell said the reaction from many at St. Dominic, including apparent harassment of Radetski and the refusal of many families

to send their children to the new school, have been hurtful.

"Why would they say they would not send their children?" Connell said. "They might not like it that their building is not being used but why would they say Catholic education was important to them but now it's not anymore? That's an unanswered question."

All the staff members of both schools will be invited to apply for positions at the new school, Ward said, and she expects some attrition in the staff when the time comes. St. Dominic currently has 120 students, down from 172 in 2001, and Holy Family has 180, which is down from 192 students in 2001.

Radetski, who has been receiving middle-of-the-night prank phonecalls for several months and has clashed with his parish over personnel decisions he's made about the staff, will begin a medical leave next Monday and doesn't expect to return to St. Dominic.

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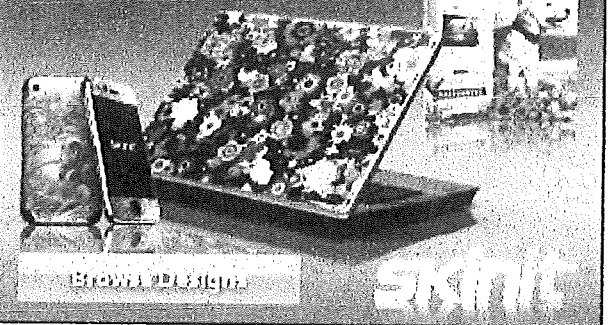
"There is some anger, some hurt," Radetski said. "I'm still perplexed, I cannot fully understand this hesitancy of working together to promote a strong Catholic school on the north side. I hope and pray somehow maybe someone who come after me, let's pray that person ... will be the right person to communicate with (parish members) and understand them a little bit better."

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