

Survey provides clear picture of growth for Catholic education

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What's the number-one reason people send their children to Catholic schools in the Diocese of Covington?

The results of a survey conducted by Meitler Consultants Inc. for the Diocese of Covington discovered the answer overwhelmingly to be for "Catholic values and instruction." Academic excellence was a close second. Survey results along with demographic information, trends and study group results make up a 64-page document of collected data on the long-range educational needs of the diocese. The data was presented to Bishop Roger Foys Feb. 6.

"It was very well done. The information will prove invaluable for long-range planning in the diocese," said Bishop Foys.

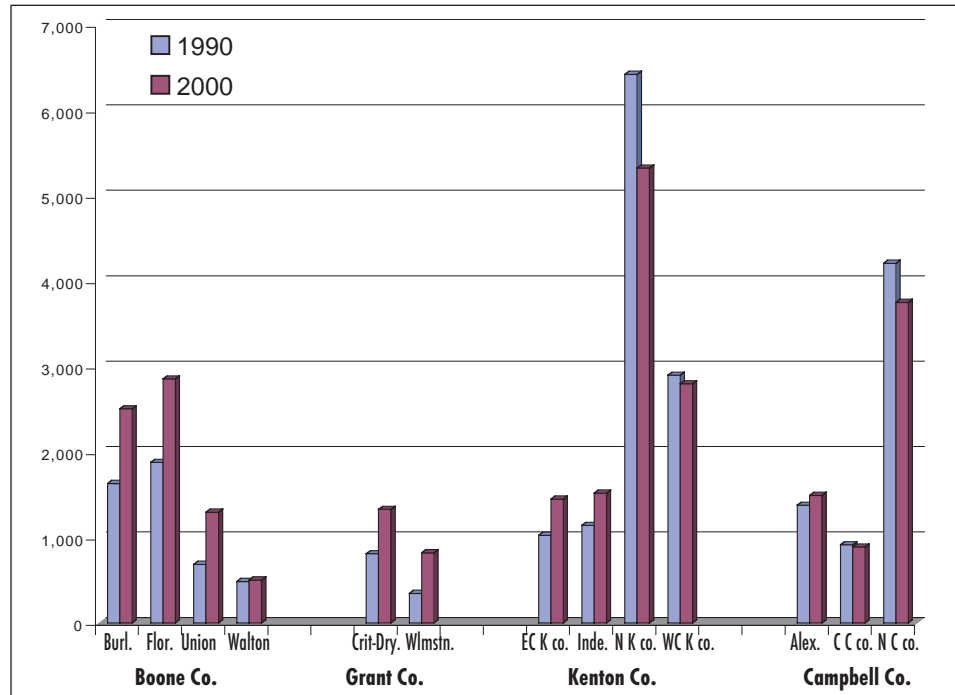
Alan Meitler, senior consultant, Jan VonHandorf, diocesan director for planning and research, and Dr. Lawrence Bowman, diocesan director for Catholic education, presented the data. Response rates for the survey was very good, according to Mr. Meitler. Mr. Meitler also said that the focus groups provided good information and were instrumental in the completion of the study.

"This is a report the Diocese of Covington can be proud of. We are serving the educational needs of children in the diocese now, but we need to keep pace," said Ms. VonHandorf.

Currently an executive summary of the data is being created. The executive summary will be mailed to pastors in the next couple of weeks. Anyone interested in viewing the complete collection of data is welcome to contact the planning office.

"We don't want to overwhelm people with data but they're welcome to come look at it," said Ms. VonHandorf.

Dr. Bowman and Ms. VonHandorf agree that the study conducted by Meitler Inc. was extremely thorough and prudent. They both felt the consultants had a clear understanding of the growth of communities and the mission of



The above graph created by the Messenger compares the number of children under age five for the years 1990 and 2000 in specific geographical areas of the diocese. The graph is based on U.S. Census data obtained from the 64-page diocesan Strategic Planning Initiative for Catholic Schools. Meitler Inc. conducted the study for the diocese in cooperation with the offices of Pastoral Planning and Research and Catholic Education.

Catholic education in the diocese.

"The data collected provides a very clear picture of the growth of the diocese," said Dr. Lawrence Bowman.

What the diocese is planning to do based on the data has yet to be determined.

Three areas of immediate growth are clear. The Union area around St. Timothy Parish has strong support, projected growth and the numbers for a future elementary school. The Burlington area around Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish has overwhelming growth that could possibly justify the establishment of another parish. Because southern Campbell County will likely see explosive growth soon, the diocese might consider purchasing property in the Claryville

area, just south of Alexandria.

Dr. Bowman said that Campbell County is expected to lift a development moratorium in the southern area later this year. This will allow developers to begin deferred projects.

"St. Mary's in Alexandria is geographically the Catholic school but they are at capacity. The diocese doesn't even have land there (southern Campbell County). What's going to happen?" said Dr. Bowman.

Independence in Kenton County is another area where growth is expected. The Catholic elementary school serving the needs of southern Kenton is St. Cecilia. St. Cecilia is operating near capacity.

Options for all these booming areas,

and other areas in the study, may include adding additional classes per grade, expand existing structures or building new schools. But "we don't want to build a new school at the expense of existing schools," said Ms. VonHandorf.

Dr. Bowman and Ms. VonHandorf both expressed concern over creating "mega" school complexes.

"The benefits of Catholic education is our ability to meet individual needs, take a personal interest in the kids and build community. When schools get too large we defeat our primary purposes," said Dr. Bowman.

Grant County and Carrollton are areas where there is no immediate need but it is recommended that growth be carefully monitored.

The goal of the study was to gather demographic information, and growth and attitudinal trends for long range planning for Catholic education. We have the data; the next question is how do we proceed, said Ms. VonHandorf.

The survey was based on a parish/elementary school model because that is what currently exists in the diocese, said Dr. Bowman. But that doesn't mean that the future is limited to this model or excludes a district model. Several diocesan high schools currently operate under a district model, meaning the schools serve students from several parishes. Holy Trinity elementary and middle schools serving Bellevue, Dayton and Newport are another example of a district model.

Since fall of 2001 the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force has been gathering similar information on the diocese. They are expected to present a report to Bishop Foys in late spring. Their report coupled with the Meitler report will be the basis for future planning.

"We have to find the best way to provide Catholic education and we have to be open to looking at every conceivable and realistic model," said Dr. Bowman.