

EDITOR'S NOTE:

In recognition of the upcoming 50th Anniversary of the Diocese of New Ulm (November 18, 2007), *The Prairie Catholic* will be taking "a look back" each month through November on the important history since the conception of the diocese. This month we "look back" at the history of the Catholic schools in our diocese.

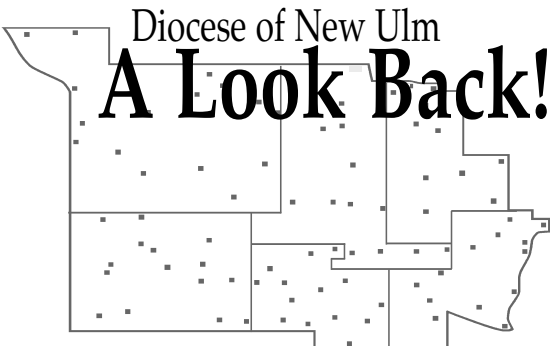
When the Diocese of New Ulm was formed in 1957, its Catholic population was 68,094. In 2006, the population of 68,087 nearly mirrored that of the diocese's first year. Although the populations were so similar, significant changes have occurred in the 50 years that have impacted the Catholic schools of the diocese.

Probably the most significant change is the difference in the number of school age children. In 1958, there were 23,531 Catholic school age children in the diocese. By 2006, that number had declined to 47 percent to 12,680.

In 1957, the diocese was home to 38 Catholic elementary schools and seven Catholic high schools. The 45 schools educated 10,081 children. Due to a multitude of factors, but certainly including a dramatic decline in the number of school age children, only 16 Catholic elementary schools and three high schools remain. In 2006/07, the 19 schools educated 2,631 students (K-12).

The number of baptisms the first year of the diocese compared to today also illustrates this significant population change. In 1958, there were 2,510 baptisms. In 2006 there were 1,020, a 60 percent decline.

Recognizing the importance of a Catholic education, in a letter to the faithful of the diocese that was published in the June 30, 1972 issue of the *Newsletter*, the official diocesan newspaper, the Most Rev. Alphonse J. Schladweiler, bishop of New Ulm, writes: "The schools of the Diocese of New Ulm are still a large operation. When school opens



this fall, we will have 28 parochial grade schools operated by 35 parishes in 33 buildings. Three high schools will be in operation. We are grateful to our people who make the sacrifices to maintain the school system of the diocese. Our schools are dear to us.The basic reason for them to be founded are still present today and some new reasons can be added. A Christian environment in which the mind of the child can unfold and curriculum that includes God are even more important than in the past. Religious truths and moral values taught as part of the total educational process are more readily assimilated and made meaningful.

"Our schools are costing us more money than in the past. But so does everything else we hold dear. If we can find the means to pay more for necessities of life, and for its luxuries, then religious education of the soul and mind is also worth the increased price since it is priceless."