

Valley Catholic schools facing financial woes

By CONNIE MIDEY

The Valley's four Catholic high schools are in financial trouble and need help of some kind, a meeting of clergymen and laymen was told last night.

The meeting of about 40 priests, educators and parents at Gerard High School, 40th Street and Oak, was called by the board of regents of the four high schools.

"PERSONALLY, the only solution I can see for supporting our Catholic schools is tax relief," they were told by the Most Rev. Francis J. Green, bishop of the Diocese of Tucson.

"But the problem is that there's not even enough money in the state to support public schools," Bishop Green said.

However, the group heard suggestions that the Catholic schools receive financial aid through appropriations made by the Arizona Legislature and that parents with children attending parochial schools receive tax rebates.

John Simmons, business manager for the high schools, pointed out that it costs less per student in parochial schools than in public schools.

Simmons said it cost an average of \$442 in the four Catholic high schools while the average cost per student in Arizona public schools was \$742.

FIGURES WERE not available, Simmons added, but he said the cost per student in the Phoenix Union High School District is about double the cost of the parochial schools.

Sister Mary Faith, principal of Xavier High School, said a committee of educators, priests and church members in her area has been formed to study a program on how to introduce specific legislation for tax relief for the parochial schools.

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ONE PARENT in the audience suggested they consider the possibility of abandoning parochial schools and strengthening the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, a program of religious instruction.

"To say that CCD classes are the equivalent of a parochial school education is whistling in the dark," Bishop Green replied. "Students won't always attend the extra CCD classes after school and when they do they don't feel they need to pay attention.

"I DON'T SEE how parishioners will continue to support Catholic high schools when they have to borrow money to do it," Bishop Green added.

Another parent suggested cutting enrollment and one said they might have to raise tuition.

The two other Valley Catholic High Schools are St. Mary's and Bourgade.

Total enrollment in the four schools is 2,397. The cost to operate the schools this year is \$1,590,362. It also was noted that priests and nuns are paid minimal salaries, thus accounting for a large part of the reason why the cost of education in the Catholic schools is far below the cost in public schools.