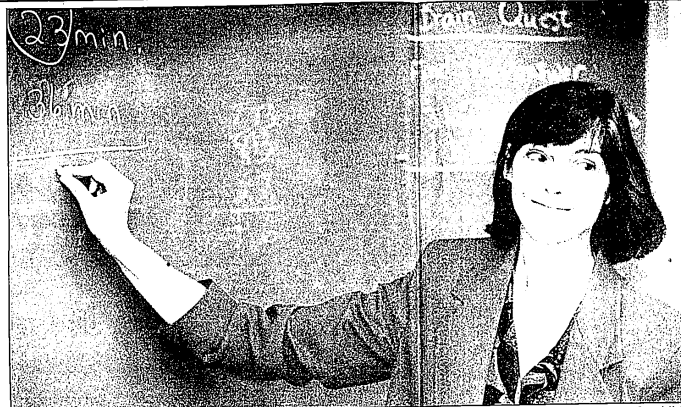


St. Paul's pastor: "We don't want to become a club," says the Rev. Ralph Unger.

"We are teaching people how to live, not just telling them what to do. Our congregation still gives a lot of support to the school even though it has not grown that much. The congregation and school are married to each other."

The Rev. Ralph Unger



St. Paul's from page 1A



By the numbers: At left, fourth-grade teacher Karen Fischer encourages answers to math questions about time. Above, students, including Kristin Loudermilk (left), Jani Martin and Katrina Karrett, wait for the rest of their class to finish a lesson.

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In addition to high academic standards, the school is proud of some of its differences.

Every Wednesday morning, students have chapel, where they worship and sing hymns.

Although many students go on to Lutheran High Westland or other parochial schools, many do not, Fisher said.

"We teach the theory of evolution, so they'll be prepared for the outside world," Fisher said. "We

want them to have a moral base so they can handle problems."

Students take field trips and study the subjects that public school students do, but the response by parents, who must pay tuition, is different, said Fisher. She taught public school in Missouri before moving to Michigan and teaching at St. Paul's for the past 22 years.

"I think there's more parent support," she said. "They're very concerned about giving their children a

religious education."

St. Paul's PTA president Cheryl Decker of Farmington Hills can testify to the parent support of the school. During one three-year stretch, Decker drove her kids to school from the family's home in Dexter, then drove to her job in Ypsilanti, back to St. Paul's to pick up her children, and then home.

"It was about a 200-mile trip," she said. "But their staff is superb. I can't find anything bad to say about the school."

A complete sports program for both boys and girls, visits to nursing homes, and other Christian activities have helped build the school, church and families, Unger said. But it hasn't always been smooth sailing.

In the mid-70s, the church congregation — which is affiliated with the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church — split apart, with one

section relocating to Novi, he said. "We had a lot of members," he said. "And we have a lot of people that are here for three or four years and then move further out (from Detroit)."

For that reason, Unger said the congregation and school have reached out into Farmington Hills and surrounding communities, not only to continue operating the school, but to bolster numbers of church members. Only 25 percent of the students are from families of church members.

"We don't want to become a club," he said. "We have to go out to them." The school charges \$2,000 a year for students, but that is much lower than comparable schools, he said. And the benefits, to Unger's way of thinking, are lifelong.

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