

Clashes Came Over Changes

Soutiere Resigns as Principal of Rice Memorial

By CANDACE PAGE

Free Press Staff Writer

The Rev. Ronald Soutiere has resigned as principal of Rice Memorial High School in South Burlington after less than a year on the job and following a period of tension with faculty members.

Soutiere's letter of resignation was submitted to the School Board Thursday night and his decision



SOUTIERE

was announced at the school Friday.

Neither Soutiere nor members of the School Board could be reached for comment Saturday.

Soutiere, a religion teacher and former Marine, was named to head Vermont's largest Catholic High School last spring.

According to teachers and students, Soutiere had clashed with some faculty members over changes he wanted to make in educational emphasis and administrative procedure.

A week ago, several faculty members met with School Board members to discuss their feelings about Soutiere.

According to one source,

Soutiere's resignation followed a School Board decision not to accept his recommendation that several Rice teachers not be rehired next year.

"It amounted to a vote of no confidence. He felt his efforts to go on were futile," said the source, who, like everyone contacted, agreed to be interviewed only if he were not identified.

Everyone willing to speak about the subject said there has been considerable tension between Soutiere and some members of his staff this year.

"His philosophy was a radical departure for Rice. It created tensions," one teacher said. "I don't want to say more than that."

A student, who said she was not familiar with the issues dividing Soutiere and some faculty members, said students were aware of the friction. "There's been a lot of tension around school," she said. "The teachers said they thought Father Soutiere wasn't willing to compromise with them."

The sources said Soutiere wanted to make administrative changes. For example, he wanted to delegate some administrative responsibilities to department heads in such areas as finding substitute teachers.

Beyond that, the sources said,

Soutiere wanted to put more emphasis on educating students who did not plan to attend college. About 75 percent of Rice students go on to higher education.

"He saw a group of kids in the

diocese who he felt weren't being adequately served," said one person sympathetic to Soutiere. "He wanted teachers to do more to help students having trouble learning."