

'Freedom' Issue Fails to Sway Committee

By MARTIN TOOMBS

Canandaigua — Freedom of choice, quality of care, freedom of religion, cost savings, abortion and democracy were some of the issues raised during the discussion of St. Joseph's obstetrical service at the FLHSA Executive Committee meeting here June 28. Three hours of public discussion and two hours of committee deliberations preceded the decision by the committee to recommend closure of St. Joseph's obstetrics unit.

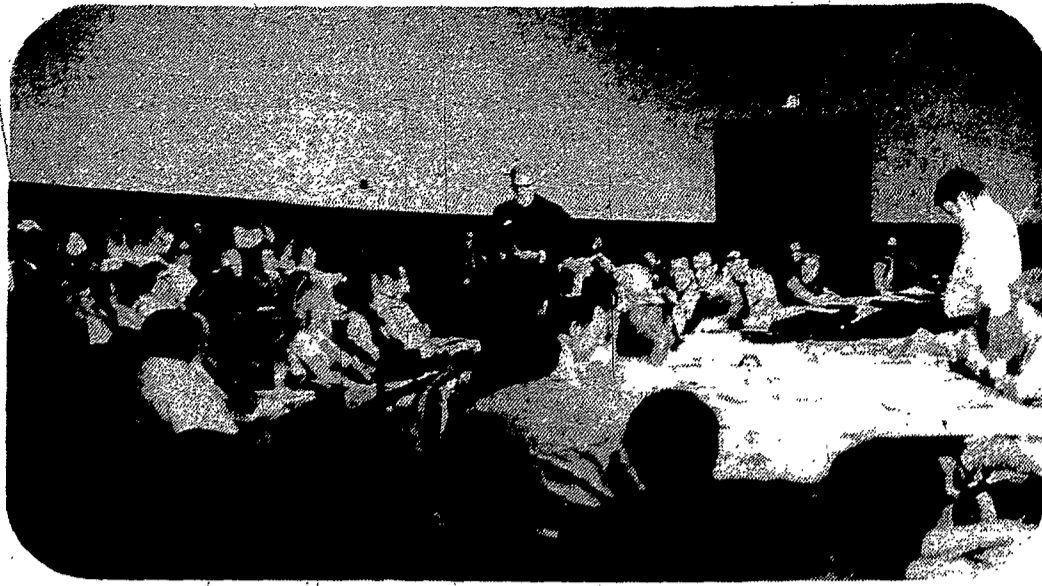
The vote was 11 to 7. More than 70 persons signed up to speak; of those, four recommended that St. Joseph's obstetrical service be ended.

Sister Martha Gersbach, St. Joseph's administrator, opened the discussion, noting that "the Board of Directors of St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira, New York, remains firmly committed to the continuance of its obstetrical service as a Catholic health facility operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph. St. Joseph's Hospital stands as a witness to the sacredness of life at every stage of its existence, from conception until death."

She described the quality of care St. Joseph's offers, and noted several innovations, begun at St. Joseph's, which are now available in other area hospitals. "We do not agree that volume is necessarily synonymous with quality care," she emphasized, "we believe that the closure of OB services at St. Joseph's will have a long range negative effect on the quality of care rendered to the people of the Elmira community."

She also noted that it will "be necessary to expand" the facilities at Arnot Ogden in order to take all of St. Joseph's load.

"We are all aware too, that on several occasions,



Father Joseph Egan, a native Elmiran, addressing the public forum.

women have expressed to us that they would prefer to have their babies at St. Joseph's Hospital, but were encouraged to go to Arnot Ogden because of the established patterns of practice of the physicians who concentrate the major part of their OB-Gyn practice in that hospital," she explained. "Would it be appropriate for the planners to address the concern for improved utilization of existing OB facilities by physicians in the Elmira community rather than the closure of one unit and the expansion of the other?" she asked.

Mrs. Joanne Beecher presented the minority opinion of the Southern Tier Subarea Council, calling for the end of St. Joseph's unit. She stated that it is "neither appropriate, nor proper, for the Health Systems Agency to become involved in questions or issues relating to freedom of choice, questions of a spiritual, religious or moral nature, questions relating to socialism, communism or democracy, in regard to 'state dictating' versus the individual's desires. Our primary function is to consider the health system in regard to quality of care,

(and) utilization of service." "We are not meant to be, nor should we try to be, omnipotent," she stated.

Dr. Donald Brooks Jr., head of the obstetrics unit at Arnot Ogden, spoke in favor of retention of service at St. Joseph's, noting that that has been his hospital's stand on the issue. He also assured the committee that if St. Joseph's unit were to close, Arnot Ogden would be able to handle the increased patient load.

Dr. Thomas Curran, an Elmira dentist, noted that the neo-natology unit at Arnot Ogden was established with the assistance of two employees of St. Joseph's, and "supposedly this was a joint unit, and now it is being used against St. Joseph's, as a weapon to close its OB unit. Even an editorial in the local press used this, and the paper should know better."

Referring to the problem of lack of experience among staff at St. Joseph's due to the low number of births, Dr. Curran noted that problems can be caused by being too busy; "the only thing that is worse than seeing a crisis situation

infrequently is seeing two of them at the same time," he emphasized.

Dr. Curran also pointed out that a majority of the obstetricians in Elmira tell their patients to go to Arnot Ogden, regardless of the patient's wish.

Richard Evans, a member of St. Joseph's Board of Directors, addressed the problem from a business perspective, noting that a hospital "has to survive as a business" and taking away one of its services can damage the long term fiscal standing of the facility. "Let's not make the cure the malignancy that becomes the death of the institution," he observed.

Father Joseph Egan noted that 360 parishioners of St. Patrick's, Elmira, signed a petition for the continuation of service at St. Joseph's Hospital. He asked the committee "how many of you have personally inspected the obstetrical facilities at St. Joseph's Hospital." Two members raised their hands. "This is the group that is going to decide the life or death of that department, and possibly of the entire hospital," he commented.



Dr. Thomas Curran, when told his time was up, noted, "I was told that if I didn't mention abortion I could have two more minutes or a beer. I'll take the two minutes."

OB Unit

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the nine-point recommendation of the Subarea Council be approved by the committee. The first six points dealt with Southern Tier hospitals, and had not been questioned. Point seven asked the state to recertify closed obstetric beds for other uses, and points eight and nine called for the retention of service at St. Joseph's, and waiver of any penalties against St. Joseph's and Arnot Ogden until the religious issue is resolved.

Dr. Berg made an amendment to remove the final three points. Blostein and Jerome fought the amendment, stating that it failed to deal with the entire recommendation of the Subarea Council. The amendment was approved, however, 12 to 6.

The first six points were then approved, 17 to 1. Point seven was then defeated; questions were raised concerning the state's acceptance of recertification.

Discussion then turned to points eight and nine,

dealing specifically with St. Joseph's. Some members of the committee stated that the religious issue should not be considered on the local level, but should be left to the state Health Department. Jerome pointed out that the special status of religious hospitals was specified in state law, and that "we don't have the right not to discuss the religious issue." The law states that "religious need is public need," he explained.

After further discussion, the committee defeated approval for St. Joseph's unit, 11 to 7.

The crowd remained silent until it applauded a statement by Jerome that the many supporters of St. Joseph's in attendance "can only leave with the feeling that this organization is giving lip service to consumer input and to all the things that we have talked about, listening to the local level, (and) planning at the lowest possible level...I am extremely disappointed in your action."

St. Ann's School Honors Graduates

Hornell — Members of the 106th St. Ann's graduating class received diplomas at a concelebrated Mass in St. Ann's Church marking the end of the school year.

The 27 eighth grade

graduates participated in the offertory procession of the Mass, concelebrated by Father Robert M. MacNamara, pastor, Father Lewis Brown, associate pastor, Father Leo Mans, pastor of St. Ignatius

Loyola, and Father William Spilly, a former St. Ann's associate.

Father Brown, in his address to the graduates, reminded them of the gifts God bestowed on them. One of these, that of friendship, can be a source of enduring joy, he said. He added that loyalty, understanding and unselfishness are essential qualities for the formation of lasting friendships.

Awards were presented by Father MacNamara.

Mary Koehler received the award for general academic excellence, presented by Court St. Ann, Catholic Daughters of America, and Michael Mazzella the corresponding award for academic excellence presented by the Hornell Council, Knights of Columbus.

The same two graduates were chosen by their classmates as most deserving of the good citizenship medal donated by the Kanestio Valley, Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Michael FitzGerald and Diane Roof were presented with certificates from the DAR for achieving the highest average in American history. They also received the Knights of Columbus award for excellence in history.

Priest Criticizes 'Protestantizing'

Huntington, Ind. (RNS) — A columnist for Our Sunday Visitor, says there is a "deliberate — a calculated attempt" on the part of some Catholics to Protestantize the Church by "undermining the central (papal) authority and intentionally creating chaos."

In his "Odds and Ends" column in the June 19 issue of OSV, Father Albert Nevins, M.M., said the "number" of these active anarchists is not large but the membership of the club is closeknit, influential and very vocal. And he said they are "tuned in" to the press and public relations, making large segments of the media "an ally and promoter of discord."

In stating that "there is great insensitivity today to the role that the papacy holds in the Catholic Church," he said there is also a "strange quirk in

some editors" who believe they must oppose authority, especially in the form of the papacy.

Father Nevins pointed to the controversial reconciliation rites held in Memphis last year as an example of disregard for papal authority.

Stating that there is "no evidence" that the people involved knew what was fundamentally at stake, the priest-columnist said "it was not a question of pastoral practice (as Bishop Carroll Dozier of Memphis contended), but basically the authority of the Holy See to regulate how its approved rites are to be used."

Acknowledging that authority can make mistakes, he said Catholics are "still duty-bound in obedience" to the authority of God in the leadership of the Church.

Anna Brady

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been a good many changes — changes in philosophy, in business practices; reorganizations, eliminations, consolidations; an ebb and flow in office personnel, and a wholesale move of the Pastoral Office to Gates. And Anna Brady has kept right on typing, for Bishop Kearney and Bishop Casey, for Bishop Sheen and Bishop Hogan.

"I knew another bishop, too," she suddenly noted. "I worked for a short time at Corpus Christi, when Bishop O'Hern was around."

What are her plans? Well, Rome was mentioned, and County Tyrone, but that might be rather perilous.

"I know this," she said. "I'm going back to St. Anne de Beupre. I couldn't go last summer."



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