

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

### The Time Seems Right

The Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court must be getting early warning signals on two abortion-related issues which have surfaced recently.

A jury in the District of Columbia Superior Court granted medical malpractice damages of \$75,000 to the estate of an unborn baby. As far as I can discover, it's the first time that such a judgment has been made in a federal court.

If the stillborn baby could have an estate, the jury obviously saw it as a legal person. If, legally, an unborn baby can have personal property rights, does it not also enjoy the constitutional rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

The judgment might be appealed; it might be overturned. There is a good chance that it might end up before the Supreme Court.

There is also a move to seek a legislative definition of personhood.

Justice Blackmun, in the majority opinion, wrote that it was beyond the competence of the court to decide when human life begins.

The current effort speaks directly to that point: Its proponents claim that it is within the competence of the legislature to determine when the legal rights of personhood begin. They would have Congress declare that these rights begin with conception.

The major tactical advantage of this move is that it avoids the cumbersome process of passing a constitutional amendment.

Estimates have it that there is a fair chance of getting the necessary majority of the present membership of both houses to support such a law; there seems far less likelihood of obtaining the two-thirds of each house needed to support an amendment. And such a law would need only the signature of the President (who, in his campaign, indicated strong

pro-life views) not ratification by three-fourths of the states.

Almost certainly such a law would also be appealed to the Supreme Court, but this is not the same court which gave a majority to the Blackmun decision. (Douglas is gone; by the time such a case would be heard, it is likely that one or more of the present Justices will be replaced by President Reagan.)

Though the Woodward-Armstrong book, "The Brethren," has been criticized for its methodology, it reported that there was considerable unhappiness on the court with the Blackmun decision, that White and Rehnquist maintained their opposition, that Burger had returned to his anti-abortion position, that Powell's support for Blackmun was shaky. Stevens came after that decision.

Aside from popular opposition from the pro-life movement, the Blackmun opinion has been subjected to heavy legal criticism as sloppy jurisprudence — most effectively by John Noonan.

In view of all these developments, it seems doubtful that the Court would overturn the right of Congress to determine when legal rights begin in human life.

Though some in the pro-life movement oppose this effort, holding out for the constitutional amendment, I see it as a very realistic approach.

There does seem to be a growing sensitivity in the nation to the pro-life position. But there is also a very determined, very large opposition to it.

When you consider the initial momentum of the Equal Rights Amendment and the effectiveness of a relatively small, but very determined opposition, the odds still seem very much against any early passage of a pro-life amendment.

The time and the circumstances seem right for a try at the legislative approach:

## Charities and OHD Explore New Northern Tier Office

Catholic Charities and the rural staff of the Office of Human Development are working on the development of a new human care and social justice organization in the northeast section of the diocese.

The area to be served will cover Wayne, Yates, Seneca, Ontario and Cayuga counties.

It is envisioned that the new organization will follow the lines of the recently established Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry.

### NFP Schedule

Natural Family Planning information sessions for April have been released. NFP will hold sessions at 7:30 p.m., Monday, April 6 at St. Mary's Hospital in the Bishop Kearney Building; and at 7:30 p.m., April 10 at Rochester General Hospital in the Main Conference Room.

Family Planning sessions will also be held at 7:30 p.m., April 25 at St. Mary's Church, Dansville, and from 11 a.m. to noon, and from noon to 1 p.m. at Monroe Community College in the Health Services area.

According to William Privett of Charities, the two agencies are now in discussion with Catholics in the region to develop a proposal which will then be the subject of open hearings in the five-county area.

He said that the development of such an office will further a goal stated in 1978 by the Catholic Charities Board of Trustees to decentralize the human care role of the diocesan organization.

The planners envision a local board of directors who would be enabled to assess needs for themselves, set priorities, and attract

### A Caper On Skates

Mrs. Robert Legault's sixth grade at St. Michael's in Penn Yan is sponsoring a rollerskating party. It will be held 6:30-8:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 18 at the Penn Yan Academy. The public is welcome.

Admission is \$2 for adults and \$1.50 for students. Proceeds will be used for the class graduation in June.

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## St. James Offers Lenten Programs

Hornell — A series of programs to be presented each Wednesday during Lent got under way at St. James Mercy Hospital on Ash Wednesday.

Slide presentations, "Understanding Scriptures," will be presented at three showings each Wednesday at 11:30 a.m., noon, and 12:30 p.m. Employees are invited to bring their lunch to the conference dining room and enjoy the non-sectarian programs. A discussion period moderated by Sister Mary Augustine and Father Eugene Emo will follow.

Programs upcoming are: "Prophets, Their Words and

Deeds," March 18; "People of Hope," March 25; "The Histories of People," April 1; "Letters: A Tradition," April 8; and "Gospels: Portraits of Jesus," April 15.

On the hospital's main lobby wall, a tree painted by Joanne Ball of the radiology department will "blossom." On each of the 40 days of Lent, a paper blossom containing a scripture reading will be added to the tree's branches which by April 18 will be in "full bloom."

The Lenten programs are being sponsored by the hospital's Activities Committee.

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