

Diocese offers guidelines on school-based health clinics

By Teresa A. Parsons

A diocesan task force on school-based health clinics this week released a position paper that calls for recognition of parents as the primary educators of their children, as well as for sensitivity to the values of various religious and ethnic groups.

The task force was formed last November, after the Rochester City School District applied for \$900,000 in grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to establish a clinic and day care center at Jefferson Junior-Senior High School on the north side of the city. By June, 1987, the Washington-based foundation expects to award 20 grants that will extend over the next six years.

Meanwhile, a committee is studying the possibility of establishing a similar facility at an Elmira high school, although no formal proposal is currently being considered.

"We know that school-based health clinics are springing up throughout the country," said Lourdes Perez-Albuerne, associate director of the diocesan Office of Social Ministry and convener of the task force. "Our purpose was to look at the reality of school-based health clinics and to see what was the responsibility of the diocese."

The task force wrote a position paper that offers six guidelines for addressing the needs and responsibilities of parents regarding such

clinics. The paper has been sent to pastors for distribution among families, and to members of the Rochester City School Board and its community advisory committee, formed to consider the clinic proposal.

The following are summaries of the task force's guidelines:

- The diocese respects parents' rights to fulfill their God-given responsibility toward facilitating their children's growth.

- The diocese endorses ongoing parent advisory groups at such clinics so that they can exercise their responsibilities and ensure that quality health care is provided.

- The diocese urges that parents be individually interviewed to obtain their consent for treatment of their children, and that they are offered a clear explanation of what doctor/client confidentiality entails under the law.

- The diocese endorses communication and cultural sensitivity, especially toward those parents and youths whose first language is not English.

- The diocese endorses the efforts of parishes and other churches to facilitate communication within families, especially in the areas of health and sexuality.

- The diocese reminds parents of the need to help adolescents discover and understand religious values — and especially to help them place sexual intercourse in the context of

'We're saying that the persons who have to decide whether they want their children to receive services or not are the parents, and that parents also have to clearly understand the teachings of the Church.'

Lourdes Perez-Albuerne
diocesan task force member

marriage.

Task force members stressed that the guidelines are not intended as a judgment on the merits of school-based clinics, but rather as an aid to continued discussion.

"The reality is that parents in that area feel they need health services for their children," said Perez-Albuerne. "We're saying that the persons who have to decide whether they want their children to receive services or not are the parents, and that parents also have to clearly understand the teachings of the Church."

If funded, the clinic at Jefferson High School would offer all students free, comprehensive health services, including routine physicals, drug- and alcohol-abuse counseling,

pregnancy tests and contraceptive counseling, dental care and both routine and emergency medical services and referrals.

In particular, those proposed services related to sexual health have generated controversy among some parents and community groups on religious and moral grounds.

Sister Carol Cimino, SSJ, a member of both the diocesan task force and the city school board's advisory committee, believes that those services have been emphasized at the expense of others.

"People have to remember that school-based health clinics are a comprehensive idea. There's been much too much emphasis on the so-called 'sex clinic' aspect," Sister Carol said. "We have been told by parents and neighborhood people that the major problems kids are walking in with are drugs and alcohol. There is also a substantial proportion of people in the neighborhood who are without health insurance."

A subcommittee of the school board's community advisory group is currently designed the parental consent form, according to Sister Carol. As the group now envisions it, the form will allow parents to designate that their child may receive all of the clinic's services, none of the clinic's services, or all services except those designated.

"Parents are empowered in this whole thing," she said. "If you do not want your children to go near that clinic, you have the power to do that."

Members of the task force include diocesan administrators from the areas of education and social ministry, as well as urban and youth ministry; pastors; and neighborhood representatives. While only one member has children who attend Jefferson High School, several others are parents.

The task force plans no immediate follow-up to its position paper, but will continue to follow the progress of the community advisory group.

"We will monitor this clinic as well as related activities, and will respond where and when we believe necessary," Perez-Albuerne said.

The task force has thus far not considered an existing health clinic at Benjamin Franklin Junior/Senior High School and at present, has no plans to do so, she added.

Pro-lifers, educators differ over Reagan's omissions

By Liz Schevtchuk

Washington (NC) — Two staples of the Reagan agenda — tuition tax credits and opposition to abortion — were missing from the president's annual State of the Union address for the first time in years.

Some pro-lifers and Catholic education officials aren't certain if those omissions mean anything, while others expressed disappointment or skepticism about the president's plans.

Reagan, in the Jan. 27 address to a joint session of Congress, did reiterate support for other favorite administration issues, including aid to rebels fighting Nicaragua's government, prayer in public schools, welfare reform and the Strategic Defense Initiative, Reagan's space-based weapons proposal.

Reagan had mentioned tuition tax credits in each of his 1983, 1984 and 1985 State of the Union speeches and an alternative proposal, educational vouchers for non-public school students, in his 1986 address.

And in his 1984, 1985 and 1986 speeches, he specifically called for efforts to end legal abortion in the United States. Last year, for example, he termed abortion "a wound in our national conscience" and pledged to "do what I can to see that this wound is one day healed."

In a separate statement sent to Congress to outline administrative views on pending legislative questions, Reagan did indicate

further support for measures denying government funding of abortion and for other pro-life bills.

Richard Duffy, U.S. Catholic Conference representative for federal assistance, suggested the lack of a reference by Reagan in the State of the Union address to the tuition tax credit or voucher proposal won't greatly affect the issue.

"It doesn't mean anything when he mentions them, and it doesn't mean anything when he doesn't. He doesn't do anything," said Duffy.

Ernest L. Ohlhoff, executive director of the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, said he did not see "any real significance" to the fact Reagan did not include the right-to-life cause in his State of the Union agenda. "I think the actions of the individual are much more important."

Ohlhoff said Reagan has a good "track record" on appointing pro-life judges and executive branch officials and "has demonstrated concern for the (pro-life) issue on many occasions."

Ursuline Sister Renee Oliver, executive director of Citizens for Educational Freedom, said she was "very disappointed" by the lack of reference to tuition tax credits or vouchers.

"He has been a staunch supporter and has gotten trashed by the Democrats, by the media, the education establishment" over

the tuition tax credit and voucher issues, she said.

Her organization had even written Reagan asking that the issues be included in the address, Sister Oliver noted. She added that she "had hoped (Reagan) would be the one to stand up firmly — but why he didn't mention it I do not know."

Joseph Scheidler, director of the Chicago-based Pro-Life Action League, said anti-abortion activists were not surprised that Reagan "made no reference at all to the abomination of abortion" this year. "We suspected he would leave it out this year."

"Reagan, we believe, missed a magnificent opportunity to be the defender of the truly oppressed and persecuted," Scheidler said. "For the most part, he fumbled the ball on the abortion issue. As with the Catholic bishops, he could have been a great leader but he turned out to be merely a nice guy."

The Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, in its January newsletter, had said Reagan's State of the Union speech and action on a proposed new anti-abortion measure would be significant.

"If he fails to back (the bill) — and-or 'neglects' to damn abortion yet again in his State of the Union address — it will send a message to the opposition that the next two years will indeed be a wind-down rather than a build-up for the '88 (presidential) race," the newsletter declared.

Pro-life activism

Continued from Page 3

Cruthis acknowledged that the actions of the Rochester clinics are far less blatant than those under investigation in New York City, but he said that both local clinics misrepresent their services in advertisements and use free pregnancy tests to entice clients, then exaggerate the dangers of abortion.

"Essentially, they (the clinic staffers) are saying that if one has an abortion, the risks of serious lifelong health problems or sterility are much greater than they are," he said. "We have an obligation to let the public know where they can get good service and where they can't."

Counselors at Planned Parenthood hear an

average of one complaint each week from clients who have previously visited one of those two clinics, he said.

In one instance, Cruthis claimed, a counselor from the Problem Pregnancy Center telephoned a woman at home after she visited the center. When the woman, who Cruthis said was pregnant as a result of being raped, informed the caller that she had decided to have an abortion, the counselor called her "completely irrational."

"To tell someone under that kind of strain that they're being irrational is really just unconscionable," Cruthis said.

Although Long had no personal knowledge of the incident, he said it would not be inconsistent with the Problem Pregnancy Center's policy.

"It is not uncommon for our counselors to do a follow-up call," he said. "And we would still not counsel for an abortion in the case of a rape."

While Planned Parenthood officials charge them with coercion and intimidation, directors of both clinics in turn charge Planned Parenthood with neglecting to inform its clients of the real dangers of abortion and with conducting "a disinformation campaign" against clinics that do.

"They are taking women who are upset about finding out the truth and using such euphemisms as 'disturbed' and 'traumatized,'" Long said. "At this point, it's just hearsay, whereas we have case studies on file at the Problem Pregnancy Center of women they (Planned Parenthood) have counseled for

abortion, who were never offered any other options, who went through with an abortion and who came back to us feeling totally deceived. I'd say we end up picking up the pieces more often than not."

Likewise, Kathy Hildebrand, the director of the Crisis Pregnancy Center, is not worried about the lawsuit's impact.

"In those other centers, I have heard that they really make it look like they do abortions," she said. "We don't have anything to do with those kinds of manipulative tactics — we totally disagree with them."

"We don't have any fear because we don't feel we advertise falsely," she added. "We don't say we do abortions. We say we offer abortion information, and in fact, we give more information than the abortion clinics."

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