

Features

Thanks Giving Appeal '88

Diocesan program encompasses varied life issues

By Rob Cullivan

Jean Luzzi is giving a baby shower on Thursday, Nov. 3. Like any good hostess, Luzzi, chairwoman of the human development committee at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Ithaca, will serve cake and refreshments to her guests. But if they ask her when the baby's due, her reply may surprise them.

The shower is for more than one expected infant, and Luzzi won't be able to tell her guests when the babies will be born. If the guests are having problems choosing gifts for the infants, Luzzi will suggest that they bring something for a senior citizen — just to be consistent, she'll say.

Luzzi is one of several parish leaders throughout the diocese who have been trained to conduct reflection sessions concerning the respect life movement in the Church. Luzzi's baby shower actually will be a reflection session focusing on abortion, which is among several issues that interest Catholics seeking to discern a consistent ethic of life.

The baby gifts will go to the local chapter of Birthright, an agency that offers financial and emotional support for pregnant women, in an effort to encourage them to choose alternatives to abortion. Gifts for senior citizens will be donated to local nursing homes. In this way, session participants will help weave the "seamless garment" of life that is endangered not only by abortion, but also by euthanasia, the death penalty and the threat of nuclear war.

To prompt a lively exchange of views, participants will ask questions of Father Dave Mura, who works with the diocese's Puzzle Project/Project Rachel, a reconciliation program for women who have had abortions.

Other parishes, including Ss. Peter and Paul in Elmira, are basing their reflection sessions on a diocesan model that uses fictional case studies of families confronted with abortion.

In one case, a college student named Bob learns that his girlfriend, Elizabeth, is pregnant. She calls on her brother, John, for help because she is embarrassed to tell her family and hesitant to marry Bob. At this point, session participants are asked to break into small groups to discuss what John could tell his sister.

In the next scene, an anguished Elizabeth tells John that she has had an abortion. She is worried that God will punish her and that she'll never be able to have children. She wants to run away, but she asks John for advice. Once again, parishioners are asked to consider John's options in advising his sister.

In the final part of the case study, participants are asked whether or not they think parish ministers fully address such moral issues as the one presented in this case. Parish ministers can then use the responses to assess the parish's need for possible follow-up programs, including inviting relevant speakers to talk about parishioners' concerns.

Karen Keenan, chairwoman of Ss. Peter and Paul's evangelization committee, moderated her parish's reflection session on Wednesday, Oct. 19. Keenan's interest in life issues was piqued by her experiences in nursing school. "When I was in nursing school, we were taught a whole life concept. The fetus was a human being," she said.

Advances in medical technology have changed this concept of life, Keenan said. Euthanasia, for example, concerns many of the parish's elderly, but many find it difficult to discuss, she said.

Then there are the younger relatives of the elderly, like Luzzi, who must confront euthanasia's moral complexity firsthand. Luzzi's 92-year-old aunt nearly died last spring. Attending physicians told Luzzi her aunt would need "unusual methods" to stay alive.

"They told me she was near death's door," Luzzi said. In spite of doctors' counseling, the niece approved the extraordinary treatment, and her aunt is now recovering. "It really makes you think," Luzzi said.

Such scenarios, whether real or fictional, often provoke the kind of thoughtful reactions that gratify the diocesan education consultant for social ministries, Sister Dawn Nothwehr, who helped design the case study now being used in parishes. In an effort to simplify an academic model proposed by the New York State Catholic Conference last spring, Sister Nothwehr created the case studies for parishioners who might not have the theological and medical background assumed by the writers of the original model.

Sister Nothwehr said that parishes could create "safe and prayerful atmospheres" in which to discuss abortion. "The purpose is to surface what people out there are thinking," she said. "I don't know anyone who has the perfect insight."

Insight is something that is not easy to come by in addressing the implications of life issues. Melissa Marquez, coordinator of the diocesan Respect Life Program, monitors legislation concerning abortion, euthanasia and other pro-life matters. She said that her office is trying to get people at the parish level to make judgments and take action.

"We need to be more pro-active," Marquez said, noting that the Respect Life Program used speakers and parish bulletins to encourage parish members to write their state legislators on a bill last session that would have allowed minors to have abortions without parental consent. The bill stalled in the assembly's health committee after Southern Tier assemblyman George Winter voted against bringing it to the floor, and Marquez credited grass-roots organization with the bill's failure.

"Several people were able to call (Winter's office) the day of the vote," Marquez said. "We let him know he would be held accountable for his actions." Future efforts will include monitoring the legislature's reported desire to override Governor Cuomo's veto of the death penalty, she said.

This year's presidential election is an opportune time for Catholics to think about respect

life issues, Luzzi observed. "Neither candidate is completely pro-life. Bush is pro-death penalty and pro-nuclear weapons, and Dukakis is pro-abortion," she said, noting that pro-life voters need to know the whole range of political choices before making their decisions.

One of those decisions concerns nuclear weapons. The U.S. Catholic bishops have openly opposed the arms race openly, and this year, diocesan parishes have expressed their concern to both political parties through petitions opposing the development of nuclear weapons.

But discussing, lobbying and voting are only the political side of the respect life movement. The personal side is often obscured by such public actions as abortion clinic sit-ins and anti-nuclear protests. Much of the work that gives someone the "right to life" is hands-on service, most notably giving pregnant women the means to choose an alternative to abortion.

This month, the diocesan Respect Life Fund, which is supported by funds from the Thanks Giving Appeal and the diocesan Catholic Foundation, awarded grants to 12 not-for-profit agencies that provide care to pregnant women. To qualify for the grants, agencies must not provide abortions or abortion referrals, but should be involved in anti-abortion education efforts or provide pastoral care for women who have had abortions. Melita House of Rochester, a residence for pregnant women, was this year's top recipient, garnering \$6,000 from the fund.

Sister Jane Schur, Melita House's director, said the grant will be used to hire more staff and to help pay for maintenance of the program's building, in which as many as 10 women — ranging in age from 13 to 35, the bulk being between 16 and 22 — may reside at any one time. "We feel very strongly that if we want women to carry pregnancies to term, we want to offer them (residence)," she said.

Sister Schur commented that the women who reside at the house suffer from more than an unplanned pregnancy. "Pregnancy is usually just the tip of the iceberg. They all have to have counseling while they're here," she said, noting that many Melita clients were foster children who lack the financial means to support a pregnancy.

Budget

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grams to offer recreational programs for adults with all types of disabilities, regularly faces fiscal disaster.

Most recently, the center has relied on funding from the Easter Seal Society of Monroe County, the City of Rochester Department of Recreation, and an annual grant from the New York State Office of Mental Health, in addition to the county's contribution. However, this year's Easter Seals' contribution, which depends on the society's success in fundraising, will be \$3,700 less than expected, according to Dechaine. The state grant, meanwhile, remains in suspense from year to year. "We are spending an inordinate percentage of our time on just remaining solvent," she said.

Two years ago, when the Monroe County Legislature first allocated funds to the Action Center, staff members hoped it would mark the beginning of a more stable future. "We thought the county was going to be our salvation," Dechaine explained. "It was good, steady ongoing funding."

In fact, Dechaine had this year requested an increase of 10 percent in the county contract, along with an additional \$35,000 to hire a social worker for the Action Center staff.

Advocates of the Action Center hope their county funding may still be reinstated. In addition to meeting with Osborne this week, Dechaine plans to alert several county legislators to the Action Center's plight.

The proposed county budget, meanwhile, will be submitted to the legislature's Ways and Means Committee November 2, and faces a public hearing November 19 before a final vote is taken November 29.

Diocese announces policy for school meals

The Catholic School Office of the Diocese of Rochester has announced a free- and reduced-price meal policy for schoolchildren in diocesan schools.

Applications and a chart listing eligibility guidelines for applicants of various family sizes and income levels can be obtained from the schools office, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624, or at the local Catholic school.

Dean of New York seminary to speak at Interfaith Chapel

As part of the worldwide celebrations commemorating the millennium of Russian Christianity, the dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York, Father John Meyendorff, will deliver two talks at the University of Rochester's Interfaith Chapel on Wednesday, Oct. 26.

Father Meyendorff will discuss "The Historical Significance of the Conversion of Russia" at 3:30 p.m. on the chapel's lower level. His second lecture, "The Orthodox Church in Russia Today," will take place on the chapel's upper level at 7:30 p.m. Vespers sung in the Orthodox tradition will precede the second lecture.

Both events, which are being sponsored by the Interfaith Chapel, are free and open to the public. The chapel is on Wilson Boulevard on the University of Rochester's River Campus.

A reception hosted by Linkages, a group which encourages understanding between Rochester and its sister city of Novgorod, Russia, will follow the lecture.

Income information provided on the application forms is held confidential and will be used only to determine eligibility. The school district reserves the right to verify at any time within the school year any information provided on the applications.

The applications will be reviewed by a designated official, who will determine eligibility. If a parent is dissatisfied with an eligibility ruling, he or she may make an oral or written request for appeal. Hearing procedures are outlined in the full policy, which is also available from the diocesan schools office.

In the operation of Child Nutrition Programs, no child shall be discriminated against because of his/her race, sex, color, national origin, age or handicap. If any member of a household believes he or she has been discriminated against, he or she should write to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250.

Diocesan Appointments



Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following diocesan appointment:

Deacon Albert P. Bergeron from chaplain at Strong Memorial Hospital to deacon at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Rochester, effective September 14, 1988.

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