

Local News

Pastor denies the pulpit to pro-choice physician

By Richard A. Kiley

GATES — A Greece doctor's request to speak out for abortion from the pulpit of a suburban Rochester church has been denied by the pastor, and the move may bring pro-choice demonstrators out to picket the church.

Dr. Ralph P. Caschetta, whose office was recently picketed by anti-abortion activists, had written a letter seeking permission to speak at the Sunday Masses of St. Theodore's Church, where Father Anthony P. Mugavero is parochial vicar. Father Mugavero and about 40 other Catholic activists participated in a Dec. 28 demonstration in front of Dr. Caschetta's office at the Park Ridge Health Campus in Greece.

But Father Gerald E. Dunn, pastor of St. Theodore's Church, turned down Dr. Caschetta's request in a letter the priest sent to the Greece doctor last week.

"The pulpit of the church is not the proper forum for such a debate," Father Dunn wrote in a letter dated January 11. "I might envision a debate held between the two of you (Father Mugavero and Dr. Caschetta) for those who might wish to attend. But since there will be a little children and other impressionable people in attendance at church, I would not like them to be subjected to a graphic description of abortion, nor would I want them to believe that abortion is a matter of choice."

"Are you willing to let Father Mugavero

speak to your abortion patients in the confines of your office?" the priest wrote. "Your office is where the problem begins and it should be the locale of the debate even more than my pulpit."

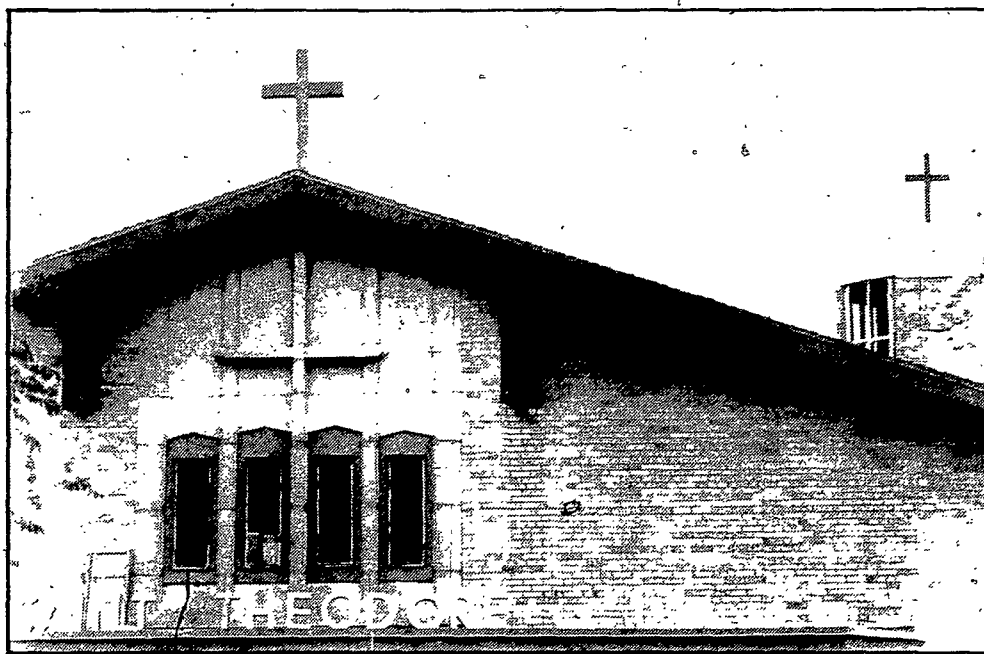
In his letter to Father Dunn, Dr. Caschetta said he wanted "to present my views in five to 10 minutes, and would be willing to speak at all four Masses on any Sunday of your choice."

"I feel the community should know both sides of the issue, for this is where the problem lies ... not in my office," Caschetta stated in his Jan. 9 letter.

Dr. Caschetta said that in late December he had received an unsigned note from Father Mugavero, which said if the doctor refused to speak with anti-abortion activists, his name would be given to the media. In comments made in early January to the *Democrat and Chronicle*, one of Rochester's two daily newspapers, the obstetrician said he considers the note "a thinly veiled threat of blackmail."

"Father Mugavero stated publicly he has some concern over the community finding out that abortions are being done in the Greece-Gates area," Dr. Caschetta wrote in his Jan. 9 letter to Father Dunn. "I do not share his concern."

"Unlike the Catholic Church, I am opposed to civil disobedience, violent or otherwise," the



C-J file photo

St. Theodore's Church in Gates could be the site for a pro-choice demonstration.

letter stated. "I am also opposed to threats and blackmail."

In his response to the Greece doctor, Father Dunn stated a resounding approval for Father Mugavero's pro-life activity.

"I am aware of the activities of Father Mugavero. I am also in support of his feeling that abortion is the taking of innocent life," the priest wrote. "I also support non-violent demonstrations."

"I am not ashamed to be associated with Father Mugavero," Father Dunn continues. "In fact, I find him a most charitable, prayerful

and caring priest. In spite of the fact that I am his immediate superior, I cannot nor will I tell him what he must do in his free time. He does not represent St. Theodore's Parish in these demonstrations. If you want to dialogue with Father Mugavero, I am sure he would welcome the opportunity."

Last week, the Office of Bishop Matthew H. Clark received an anonymous telephone call, saying that if Dr. Caschetta's request was denied, pro-choice demonstrators would picket the Gates church. When these protests might occur is unknown.

Parishes prepare response to proposed school-closing plan

By Rob Cullivan

ROCHESTER — Parishes affected by the northeast quadrant planning board's proposal to close six elementary schools are gearing up to respond to the diocese by the Jan. 20 deadline.

The planning board — one of nine groups charged with reorganizing Monroe County's Catholic school system — made its recommendations in a report issued Jan. 5. The report recommended the June, 1989, closings of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and St. Philip Neri in Rochester, and St. Salome in Irondequoit. Christ the King and St. James in Irondequoit, and Annunciation in Rochester were slated to close in June, 1990.

The report also calls for the establishment by September of 1990 of a junior high school for the quadrant on the premises of Bishop Kearney High School.

Each affected parish was given until Jan. 20 to form a response to the proposals. School officials and parents are planning a variety of responses, ranging from rejection of the plan to acceptance.

The parish council at Christ the King last week voted unanimously to reject the proposal as it stands until further consultation with the diocese, according to Father Donald McCarthy, pastor.

Instead of closing Christ the King and its Irondequoit neighbor, St. Salome, the diocese should consider closing St. Cecilia's School, according to Richard Moll, chairman of St. Salome's Catholic School Committee. The parish's school parents attended a meeting on Monday night, Jan. 16, and voiced concerns that the planning board's proposal leaves only St. Cecilia's School to serve the northeastern corner of the quadrant.

St. Salome's parishioners object to St. Cecilia's as the area's centralized school because it is located in an area with a heavy amount of traffic congestion, Moll said.

"When we think about a site for a grammar school, we don't think about a site with a busy intersection," he said. St. Cecilia's, which lies southeast of Christ the King and southwest of St. Salome's, is in a centralized location, Moll acknowledged, but St. Salome's and Christ the King are located in "safer locations."

"None of the sites are the perfect facility for a centralized school," Moll said, but noted that Christ the King and St. Salome have "more amenities" than St. Cecilia, such as playgrounds and Christ the King's parish center.

St. Salome Parish does support the planning board's call for an annual education subsidy. All diocesan parishes would contribute to the subsidy, which would, in turn, support all the schools in the diocese, Moll said. He also welcomed the proposal's ideas on governance of the quadrant's schools. According to the planning board's report, each quadrant board would eventually take on such functions as giving first approval to budgets, hiring principals, contract-

ing teachers and determining the general educational direction for quadrant. The board, made up of pastor, principal and parish representatives, would relate directly to the Diocesan Board of Education, the report said.

The principal at Annunciation School, on the other hand, wholeheartedly supports the proposed closings, viewing the proposal as a positive step for the diocese. "I have a problem with the people who are saying it is such a big surprise," said Sister Diane Marie Erskine.

The Annunciation principal noted that the plan suggests that the buildings now occupied by closing schools should be reused for other educational purposes. Sister Erskine proposed that Annunciation's be used for pre-kindergarten classes and day care.

Eddie Spencer, a member of Annunciation's school board, said that although the proposal was heartbreaking, it was nonetheless necessary for the sake of Catholic education in the diocese. The Annunciation parish council will meet this week to discuss the proposal, and Sister Erskine predicted a positive response.

St. Philip Neri will base its response to the proposal on the written comments it has collected from school parents through Jan. 18, according to Teresa Hinchliffe, school secretary. One parent, however, isn't sure whether efforts to respond to the proposal will do any good.

Dennis Polito, whose two daughters attend the parish school, believes the diocese will close the school regardless of what the parish wants. Referring to diocesan officials, he said, "I think they've got their mind set." Polito criticized the diocese for failing to promote Catholic elementary schools as well as it has promoted Catholic high schools. Nevertheless, Polito's wife, Marilyn, has written two letters in response to the plan.

The vast majority of people attending Masses at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish last weekend want to keep the parish school open, according to Father Neil Miller, pastor. The parish distributed a survey at each Mass, and 252 of the 322 people who responded said they wanted the school to remain open. When asked whether they would increase their financial contribution to the school to keep it open, 193 said "yes," and 88 said "no."

Father Miller noted that 301 of the respondents didn't even have children enrolled in the

Women's guild plans dinner

Cardinal Mooney High School's Women's Guild will hold its next meeting Tuesday, Jan. 24, in the school cafeteria, 800 Maiden Lane, Rochester. The evening will begin at 6:30 p.m. with a happy hour, followed by a stuffed pork chop dinner at 7.

Dinner will cost \$8. Reservations must be made by Thursday, Jan. 19. Call the school office, 716/865-1000.

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