

Jailed activist vows to continue fight for the unborn

By Richard A. Kiley
Staff writer

PENFIELD — Before standing trial in July on charges stemming from a rescue mission at Genesee Hospital April 26, Amy Dorscheid — a parishioner at St. Joseph's in Penfield — and three other women activists were offered a deal by the Monroe County District Attorney's Office.

Pending approval from City Court Judge Ann Pfeiffer, the deal would have allowed the four women to avoid spending any time in the county lockup by pleading guilty to trespassing charges, paying a \$200 fine and agreeing to perform 40 hours of community-service work.

The women turned down the deal and instead pleaded not guilty to misdemeanor charges ranging from resisting arrest and third-degree criminal trespass to obstructing government administration.

"We decided at that time that we weren't going to do community service," Dorscheid said. "We had already done our community service by saving babies."

Michael DiPrima, the attorney for the women, told Pfeiffer that his clients could not accept fines or community service because they would view that as acquiescing to a judgment they could not accept.

The Rochester City Court judge tried each woman separately, and in each case the verdict was guilty. Pfeiffer sentenced the four pro-life activists to 30-day jail terms on July 27.

Although the judge said she regretted sentencing the women to jail, she sharply criticized each for burdening the police, the court system and the hospital with their tactics.

In addition to Dorscheid, 33, the women were Wendy Hayes, 36, and Judith Begandy, 32, both of Rochester, and Ruth Bantelman, 36, of Hamlin.

In refusing the district attorney's offer, Dorscheid said, she did not defy Bishop Matthew H. Clark's statement on civil disobedience released last December. The statement supported the right of diocesan members to engage in non-violent civil disobedience, but noted that those who do so "must also be willing to accept the legal consequences of such action."

"I did go to jail ... that was a consequence of my actions," Dorscheid said. "I felt the Lord was calling me to do this. The Lord has put in my heart the plight of the unborn babies."

Dorscheid said jail was an eye-opening experience, but not for the reasons most people would think. She was genuinely moved by the inmates she met, many of whom opposed abortion, Dorscheid said.

"Of the prisoners who came up to us, almost all were pro-life," said Dorscheid, who spent much of her time in jail reading the Bible and many books brought to her by parishioners at St. Joseph's in Penfield. "One of the first things anybody said to me



Pro-life activist Amy Dorscheid (left) talks with co-protestor Helen Ann Wagner during an abortion demonstration outside Genesee Hospital Saturday, Aug. 26. Wagner's 7-month-old son, Peter, looks on.

Linda Dow Hayes/Catholic Courier

was, 'Don't worry, we're all nice people here.' I'm convinced that if it wasn't for drugs, none of them would be there."

Because the county jail is so overcrowded, Dorscheid was put in a day room with five other women. She was befriended by a prostitute, whom Dorscheid said was trying to get help.

"She made shampoo out of crushed-up Ivory soap and hot water, and she let me use it," Dorscheid said. "She was very nice to me in so many ways."

Dorscheid referred the prostitute — who was released from jail a week before Dorscheid was — to The Women's Place at St. Augustine's Parish, a home for women in transition. After Dorscheid was released from jail Aug. 12, she found out her friend had never made it to the home and that she was arrested for alleged cocaine possession.

"I know when her trial date is, so I'll try to talk to her then," Dorscheid said. "She was very sincere ... she's just powerless against her addiction."

The prostitute's case is much like the babies who are powerless against abortion, Dorscheid believes.

Since her release from jail earlier this month, the Penfield woman has continued

her pro-life activities. As she has done most Saturdays since last January, Dorscheid said she will continue to march in front of Genesee Hospital and perform sidewalk counseling outside Dr. Morris Wortman's office in Brighton.

"That's harder than going to jail," Dorscheid said of her efforts in front of Dr. Wortman's offices. The Brighton doctor has twice been the target of rescue missions by Rochester-area pro-life activists. "When you try and counsel someone ... you just can't always talk them out of it," Dorscheid said. "Babies are being killed there every Saturday."

Dorscheid said she is "certainly open to the idea" of participating in more rescue

missions in and around Rochester.

"It's a very spiritual experience. You can really feel the presence of the Lord, but you also feel like you're at the gates of hell," she said.

Along with her husband, Robert, Dorscheid hopes to start up a pro-life group at St. Joseph's. The parish was well represented at a prayerful demonstration last Good Friday in front of the Park Ridge Doctor's Office Building in Rochester.

Robert Dorscheid said the group at the Penfield parish will work to educate people about the adverse effects of abortion and to disseminate information on political candidates now that the Supreme Court has gi-

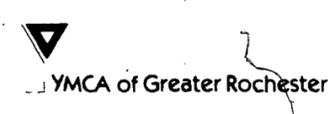
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