

Constitutional conflict

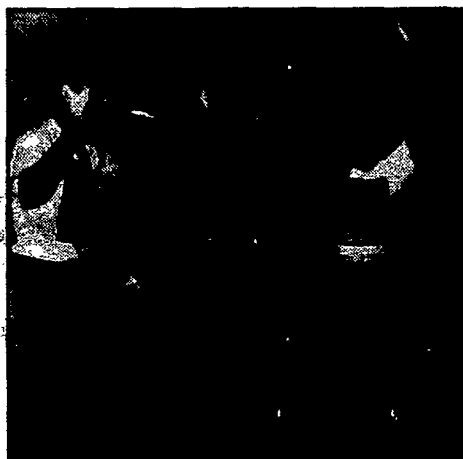


The announcement of a papal visit to Mexico next spring threatens to expose anti-clerical groups' failure to eliminate the church, says the bishop of Rochester's sister diocese. Page 7.

Federation formation

Diocesan school parents have met to form a new chapter of the New York State Federation of Catholic School Parents, which will serve as a lobbying organization for Catholic school parents throughout the state. Page 3.

Salvadoran stories



Romero opened at Rochester's Little Theatre last week, followed by a benefit performance of Salvadoran band Yolocamba I-Ta. The group's music is featured in the movie, which illustrates the late Archbishop Oscar Romero's heroic struggle to speak for justice in oppressed El Salvador. Pages 8 and 9.

Life's web

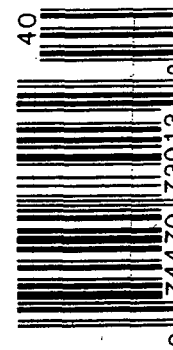
This week's Insight package and Respect Life supplement offer various points of view on the complexity of such life issues as abortion, euthanasia and ever-changing family lifestyles.

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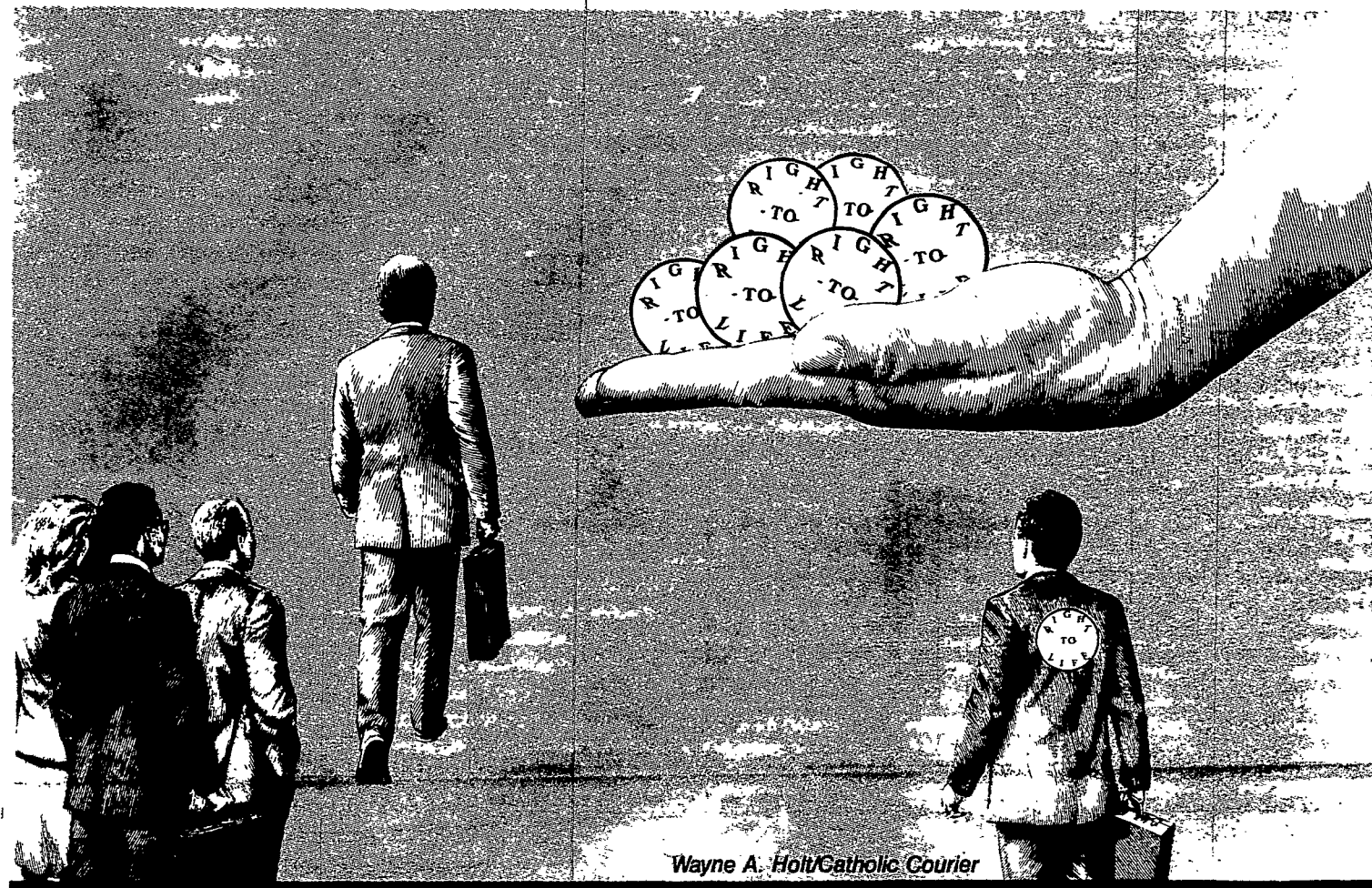
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# CATHOLIC COURIER

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## Right to Life endorsements play symbolic political role



Wayne A. Holt/Catholic Courier

### Candidates vie for pro-life line

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

For Greece resident Kathleen Nichols, the debate over abortion is black and white. "If people don't respect life before birth ... I don't think much of their other ideals," she said.

Nichols, a registered member of the Right to Life Party, has no time for politicians who waffle on the question of abortion. An unborn child's right to life is of paramount concern for this voter, who joined the party when it first appeared on New York State ballots in 1978.

The Right to Life Party currently claims the membership of nearly 24,000 registered voters throughout the state. Yet that figure is deceptive since almost six times that number voted for candidates endorsed by the party in the New York's last gubernatorial election in 1986. The anti-abortion constituency has become a force to be reckoned with — one that politicians at the state and national levels can no longer ignore.

Politicians seeking city and county offices throughout the diocese may never have to confront the abortion issue directly in the legislative process; yet some have chosen to take a stand on it nonetheless. Other politicians — even some who oppose abortion — have criticized the Right to Life Party as a narrow-minded, single-issue organization that brings a national and state debate into an arena where it does not belong — local politics.

Irondequoit's Democratic candidate for town supervisor, Donald Deming, has been on both sides of the abortion fence. Deming accepted a Right to Life endorsement in 1979 when he last ran for the supervisorship, but he has since refused

any more endorsements. He said that he regretted his decision to accept the Right to Life endorsement in the first place.

"I'm a practicing Catholic," Deming said. "I don't believe in abortion personally. But (the abortion issue) has no place in local politics. It's either a national or a state issue."

Deming noted that he's never been in a position to affect abortion legislation, and criticized the Right to Life Party for urging people to vote on its line in local elections.

"I don't think that any candidate should be judged on one issue and one alone," he said, noting that he fears the Right to Life Party will eventually spawn other single-issue factions. "The next thing we're going to have is a death penalty (party)," he added.

Don Peters, one of 10 state Right to Life Party vice-chairmen, acknowledged that his is a single-issue party by design. "Basically, our purpose is to influence the major parties," the Waterloo resident explained.

The day abortion is outlawed, he added, the Right to Life Party will disband. "If we achieve that, we put ourselves out of existence," Peters said.

The party struggled in its early days to find candidates at any level willing to accept its endorsements. "In the very beginning it was hard to find anybody," Peters said. "In the last six years of elections, they're coming to us."

Local candidates running on the Right to Life line send a message to politicians at the state and national levels, Peters observed. "It shows politicians just how many people out there care about these babies," he said.

Peters commented that some pro-life politicians may shun his group's endorsement for fear of repercussions at the polls, but he didn't begrudge that fact. "If they are iffy about the endorsement, I find someone to take the endorsement. I just

don't go begging for candidates," he said.

In the Rochester diocese, 24 candidates in various elections are running on the Right to Life line. Most were picked by the party itself, but at least two — including Deming's opponent, Fred Lapple — garnered the endorsement through a write-in primary on Sept. 12.

Republican Lapple said he sought the Right to Life endorsement because he felt pro-lifers needed a voice in the Irondequoit election. Lapple criticized his opponent for declining the Right to Life line after having previously run on it, and speculated that Deming was pressured by Democratic Party advisers to lay low on abortion.

"No one talked to me on that," Deming responded. "It was my own decision." The candidate also replied that he thought Lapple went for the pro-life vote for political, and not moral reasons.

"I'm sure (Deming) would say that," Lapple said. "What would you expect from a guy who ran on it before, accepted (the Right to Life endorsement) and then denied it?"

Lapple also said that Deming's shunning of the Right to Life endorsement was "shocking," given that Deming is a Catholic.

Providing impetus for politicians' decision to seek or avoid the anti-abortion vote was this summer's Supreme Court ruling in *Webster Reproductive Services vs. Missouri*, which upheld a Missouri statute restricting abortions.

The *Webster* decision sent a message that restricting abortion could once again become a question for states to weigh, just as they did prior to the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe vs. Wade*. That ruling superseded all state restrictions on abortion, making the procedure legally available throughout the nation.

Politicians will now have to stand up and be counted on abortion, noted Robert Nei-

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