

Group to instruct churches in political action

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Gerald Crawford opened the Christians In Action resource manual to a blank page.

The assistant director of Project Life of Rochester then turned to the next page, on which the following was written: "The preceding page contains everything we found in our files of newspaper clips on abortion written by pro-life pastors over the last two years."

Crawford would like to render that sarcastic assessment obsolete by teaching Christian congregations to become more active in the political and cultural spheres of society. For too long, Crawford asserted, Christian churches in the United States have taken the constitutional separation of church and state to mean that pastors, priests, parishes and congregations should stay out of politics.

To rectify the situation, he said, Project Life formed Christians In Action to teach churches such political strategies as making political pronouncements without endangering their tax-exempt status; organizing boycotts of advertisers who sponsor "objectionable" television shows; promoting abstinence-based sex education in the

CHRISTIANS IN ACTION



public schools; and opening church-run crisis pregnancy centers.

CIA has its roots in Project Life, long noted in Rochester for its organization of "rescue missions," in which pro-life activists attempt to prevent abortion procedures by occupying and refusing to leave health clinics and physicians' offices.

The desire to establish this spirit of

Christian activism in Rochester-area congregations fueled Project Life's desire to start CIA, Crawford noted.

He said that such activism is not a new idea, having its origins in such Christian-influenced endeavors as the Abolition movement that preceded the American Civil War. "When the church has responded to biblical principles and influenced the culture ... things have changed," he said.

CIA will differ from Project Life because it will focus solely on church-based activity, Crawford said, noting that Project Life is a collective effort of individuals from various congregations.

Thus far, four churches have signed up for CIA seminars that will take place during the next few months, Crawford said. The eight-hour seminars will be free, although an offering will be taken.

Pastor Ron Domina of Bethel Full Gospel Church said he hopes to find a political "labor force" when CIA runs a seminar at his church in January. He said members of his congregation need to become more aware of their ability to influence the political process.

"The separation of church and state, I think, has gone too far," Pastor Domina said. "We have to educate people in how they can become involved in the community, to be aware of legislation that affects Christians."

Thus far, no Catholic parishes have signed up for CIA seminars. And, although CIA is ecumenical, Crawford acknowledged the organization's fundamentalist approach may appeal more to Protestant churches.

"Our focus is for churches that teach that the Bible is the Word of God," he said, noting that denominations that don't have "absolutes as a standard" run into ambiguity when trying to clarify where they should stand on issues.

Crawford added that 30-35 percent of all Project Life activists are Catholics, pointing to their presence as a sign that CIA may eventually make inroads with the Catholic Church.

Father Anthony Mugavero, parochial vicar at St. Theodore's Church in Rochester and one of two Catholics on CIA's board of directors, agreed that the new group might have some initial trouble attracting the interest of Catholics. "There might be a natural affinity for Protestants to go to this group," he commented.

Nonetheless, the priest observed that CIA has much to offer Catholics, especially in the area of political action. Catholic Family Center's Peace and Justice Commission is considering such efforts as encouraging parishes to establish pro-life committees in the next few months, Father Mugavero said.

The priest views himself as a bridge between the fundamentalist slant of CIA's directors and the broader religious tradition of Catholic parishes.

"There are certain ways of saying things that will attract or draw (Catholics)," Father Mugavero said, adding that he hoped CIA's leaders would not use language that might turn off Catholics. "If it's too narrowly defined, it could scare people away," he said.

Despite their diversity, Father Mugavero predicted that Christian activists of all denominations will be working more closely in the next year.

"Eventually there's going to be an overlapping of Catholics involved with Protestants," he said. "At this stage, it isn't quite in place yet."

Chemung Right to Life presents pro-life advocate

Dr. Mildred F. Jefferson, a renowned pro-life advocate, will be the keynote speaker for the first Respect Life dinner to be sponsored by the Chemung County Right to Life Committee.

The dinner is scheduled for Friday, Oct. 20, at 6 p.m. at the Horseheads Holiday Inn.

Jefferson was the first black female graduate of Harvard Medical School and is a founding member of the state and national Right to Life movements. She is currently a general surgeon and an assistant clinical professor at the Boston University Medical Center.

Jefferson is also president of Right to Life Crusade, Inc.

Tickets, which must be purchased by October 15, cost \$12. Call 716/732-1080 for information.

Fund to aid ravaged church started by K of C council

Knights of Columbus Elmira Council 229 has established a fund to help repair a South Carolina church damaged by Hurricane Hugo.

Individuals or organizations that would like to contribute to a fund for Stella Maris Church, Sullivan's Island, S.C., may send their donations payable to Knights of Columbus, 701 Kinyon St., Elmira, N.Y., 14904.

Call 607/733-3684 for information.



Doug Meszler

Project Life of Rochester, which has been responsible for organizing several rescue missions in the Rochester area, is behind the Christians In Action effort. In the above photograph, policemen carry off an unidentified pro-life activist during a demonstration in Brighton last spring.



FALL & WINTER CRAFT CLASSES

- Oct. 19-Cornhusk Doll
- Oct. 21-Basic Basket Weaving
- Oct. 24-Country Folk-Art Painting
- Nov. 7-Sweatshirt Painting
- Nov. 11-Pysanka Xmas Egg Ornaments
- Nov. 21-Country Folk-Art Painting
- Nov. 30-Paper Twist Angel
- Dec. 5-Evergreen Wreath
- Dec. 9-Basic Basket Weaving
- Dec. 14-Stenciled Gameboard
- Dec. 19-Country Folk-Art Painting

Each class is held from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (with the exception of Country Folk Art Painting and Saturday classes.)

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