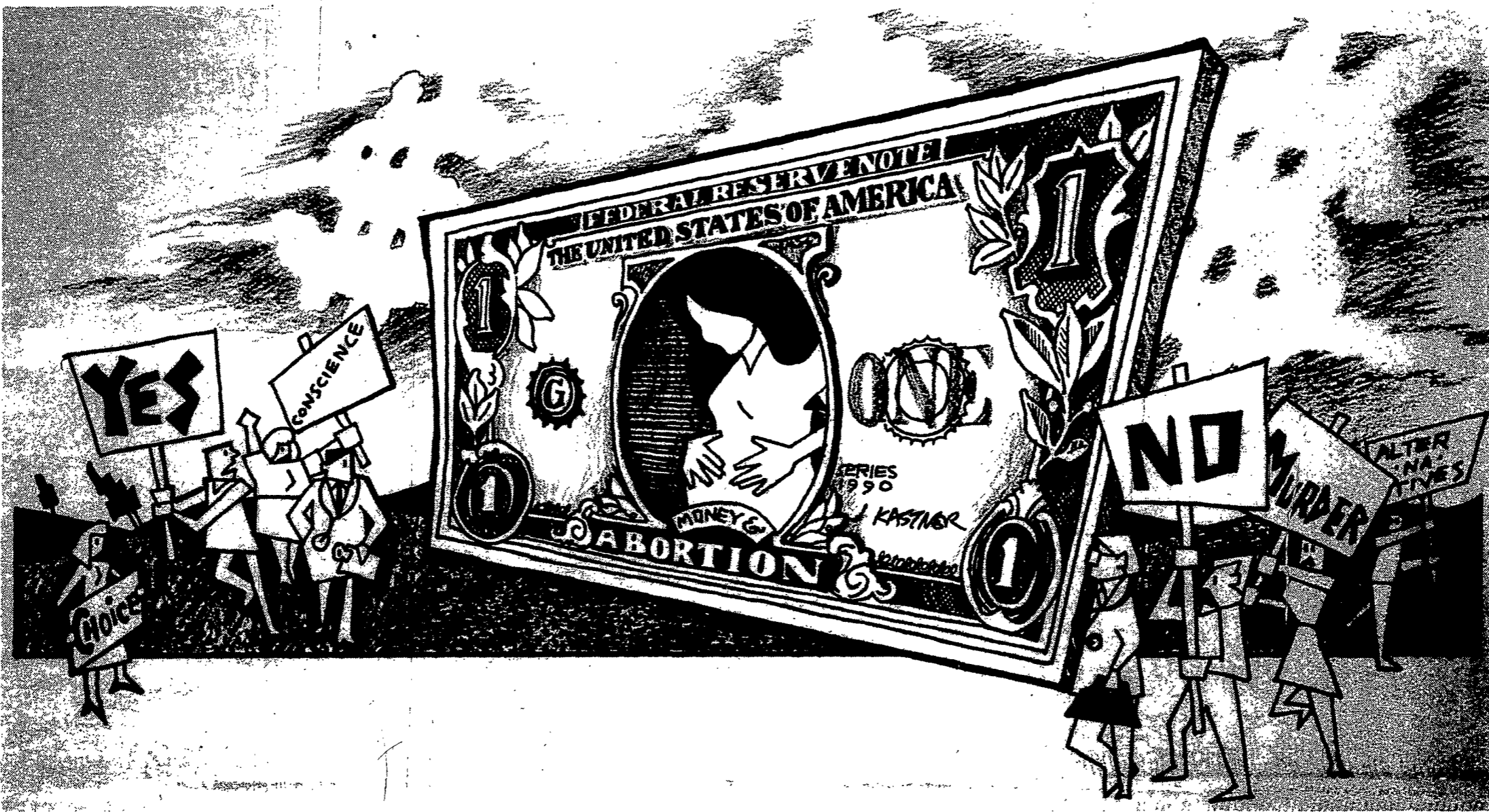


**Teaching trip**  
As part of a St. John Fisher College course on the Dominican Republic, 27 people recently traveled to the Caribbean nation to observe this year's presidential campaign. Page 10



# CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester Thursday, April 4, 1990 50¢ 24 pages



## Almighty dollar influences abortion

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Last August, "Jane," a 28-year-old unmarried Catholic, faced a question that confronts millions of American women each year — whether to carry her unborn child to term or to abort her pregnancy.

Jane (who asked that her real name not be used in this article) was dead-set against abortion at first, but eventually she was persuaded to have one by her sister, who convinced Jane that she would be unable to afford the unplanned child.

Yet nine months later, Jane believes that she could have afforded a baby. "I probably would have had my baby if I knew I could get day care at a good cost," she said. But at the time, Jane recalled, she was so frightened by the consequences of her pregnancy that she didn't explore the economic options available to her.

Jane's story gives a human face to statistics showing that economic worries are the main reason that more than one million American women each year have abortions. Her sad tale also points to the fact that abortion is not just an issue of fetal rights vs. women's rights — it's an issue of women's economic rights and society's responsibility to ensure them.

Two out of every three women seeking abortions say they can't afford to have a child, according to New York City's Alan Guttmacher Institute, an independent, not-for-profit research, policy-analysis and education corporation that monitors abortion and contraceptive issues.

"Young, unmarried and poor women in particular experience circumstances that lead to unintended pregnancies and therefore to abortion," states one of the institute's 1988 studies on reasons for abortion. "(P)oor women are about three times more likely than are women who are financially better off to have abortions."

Indeed, the pro-choice camp has sometimes charged pro-lifers with being insensitive to the needs of poor women who are often bereft of contraceptive means to prevent unplanned pregnancies and of economic means to give birth to and raise unplanned children.

But, according to some pro-lifers, focusing on economics in abortion begs the issue. "I think that the bottom line is

child-killing," commented Jonathan Thoburn, an assistant to the director of Operation Rescue, located in Marietta, Ga.

Thoburn contended that the human rights of the fetus outweigh the rights of the woman bearing it. "When (pro-choicers) talk about a woman's rights, they neglect the fact that there's another body involved," he said.

Thoburn's view is shared by George Green, executive director of Rochester Right to Life, an education and advocacy organization. "(Abortion) is not essentially a question of economics — it's a question of human rights," Green said.

The vice chairman of New York State's Right to Life Party — which is distinct from the Right to Life organization — was skeptical of the charge that outlawing abortion would hurt poor women. "When I go down to Washington and Albany ... I hear rich people lobby for abortion rights," said Don Peters. "They talk about the poor, but they don't want to help them by helping their babies."

Nonetheless, economics is a relevant issue in the abortion debate, according to Donna Kearney, coordinator of the Western New York Chapter of Feminists for Life, a pro-life group.

"People who say that they are against abortion are not consistent unless they are also willing to support this option for women who bring these children into the world," noted Kearney, who maintained that such early feminists as Susan B. Anthony saw abortion as child murder and as another example of male sexual and economic exploitation of women.

Keeping abortion legal is just another way of keeping women in their place, Kearney asserted. "We will never attain equal rights with men by having abortion as something that is legal," she said, explaining that by focusing on abortion, the women's movement has ignored such issues as employer-sponsored day care, socialized medicine, paid maternal leaves and equal pay.

By continuing to force women to consider abortion a viable economic choice, society avoids confronting the fact that the ability to bear children is a woman's right that should be protected and encouraged, Kearney maintained. "We should not be ashamed of who we are," she said.

"We should not have to neuter ourselves to be successful."

Noting that he is pro-life, Bill Privett, the Catholic Family Center's associate director, agreed that a woman's economic plight should be the concern of a true pro-life activist. "I think the pro-life stance should be based on rights, but should have the face of compassion also," he said.

The center has established a \$25,000 birth fund for poor, uninsured mothers and their children, Privett said, noting that a portion of the fund will go toward promoting adoption to teenage mothers, who too often rule out giving up their babies as a viable option to aborting them.

Indeed, unlike some pro-life factions, the Catholic Church — through its seamless-garment approach — concerns itself with a variety of life issues, rather than focusing exclusively on the single issue of abortion, according to Kathleen Gallagher, legislative assistant to the New York State Catholic Conference.

"We have a much broader agenda than Operation Rescue," Gallagher said, listing housing, employment and day care issues as concerns of the conference. "We think it's pretty unjust of the government to say, 'We support abortion, but not all needs.'"

Yet Dr. Ruth Schwartz blames the pro-life movement for the nation's failure to create a just economic environment for women. Schwartz, former vice chairman of the Health Commission of the American Colleges of Obstetrics and Gynecology, said that the need to defend legalized abortion against pro-life tactics has drained the energy of women's activists who otherwise would be concentrating their energies on attaining economic rights for women.

"It would be well that we spend other time on women's issues," the doctor said. "A number of people who would be doing more work on (economic justice) are really working for choice."

Schwartz's beliefs would find a home with the executive director of Planned Parenthood of Rochester, who argued that a true "feminist" would necessarily be pro-choice. "Feminism ... means giving women more options," Greg Soehner said.

Another local pro-choice activist agreed with Soehner's

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