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Path to priesthood

On the way to his June 22 ordination, Deacon Paul Bonacci has taken career detours as a sheriff's deputy, baseball umpire and teacher. Page 8.



CATHOLIC FAMILY CENTER

Firing reveals divisions at agency

EDITORS' NOTE: The recent firing of a Catholic Family Center employee has led to protest marches, media statements and public debate about the center's policies on pro-life activity. The following article — the product of numerous interviews conducted over a three-week period — takes a look at allegations being levied against CFC and at the agency's response to these charges.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Critics of the Catholic Family Center have lately voiced a view that the center may be many things — but isn't Catholic.

CFC's defenders, meanwhile, adamantly aver that the agency embodies Catholicism in its most universal form.

Those disenchanted with the agency contend that CFC has suppressed and sidestepped actions — particularly in the pro-life arena — that might distinguish it as a Catholic agency for fear of offending its financial backers.

The agency's defenders, on the other

hand, contend that critics are misinforming, misleading and mistaken. They argue that Catholic Family Center — through departments serving such populations as the elderly, disabled, aging and young — truly carries out the church's consistent-life ethic, which encompasses a broad range of life issues in addition to abortion.

The catalyst for this public debate was Catholic Family Center's firing last month of Ken Maher, an employee of CFC's Justice and Peace Department.

Carol Crossed, a member of CFC's board of directors, resigned in the wake of Maher's firing, charging that his dismissal was merely an example of the center's alleged lack of commitment to Catholic social-justice teachings, particularly with respect to abortion.

"Money and the United Way are CFC's god, not Jesus Christ," she wrote in her letter of resignation. "CFC makes me ashamed to be a Catholic," her letter also stated.

Those strong words summarize the feelings of a number of the agency's critics — including former employees, ex-members of the board of directors,

and recently resigned members of the Justice and Peace Department's advisory committee.

But a number of the agency's defenders consider Crossed, in particular, as an unfair critic who pushes a narrow anti-abortion agenda and who never used the proper channels to raise many of the issues she since has raised with the press.

Carolyn Portanova, CFC's executive director, pointed out that the center has sponsored a number of activities specifically related to abortion, including the purchase of newspaper advertisements encouraging pregnant women to carry unplanned children to term.

Portanova and CFC supporters assert that the agency has on numerous occasions taken public action that promotes the church position on abortion. One such action is CFC's annual sponsorship of an abortion healing service at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

The center also helped establish a 40-parish pro-life network last year, noted Brian Kane, director of CFC's Department of Justice and Peace. The network operates through the parishes'

social-justice ministry committees and receives support from Kane's department.

"I think, quite frankly, that the department's work speaks for itself," Kane said in response to critics' challenges about the center's commitment to pro-life action.

Kane himself has been criticized by Judy Curtin, one of 10 members of the justice and peace department's committee who resigned in protest after Maher's firing. Curtin maintained that Kane didn't take seriously the advisory committee's opinions on social-justice issues.

"It appeared to me that our opinions didn't mean much ... and it appeared that (Kane's department) wanted to get rid of us all," Curtin said.

Kane responded that Curtin usually was not "accessible" during her tenure on the advisory committee, and that she declined to work on the goals set forth in the justice and peace department's mission statement. The statement was issued in January of this year.

Despite the arguments of CFC's di-

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