

# Amendment comes up vote shy in legislature

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Despite coming up one vote short for the second consecutive year, supporters of an amendment requiring parental notification for teens seeking abortions or abortion referrals vow to continue their fight in the Monroe County Legislature.

At its June 25 session, the legislature failed to approve the amendment — which had the support of the Rochester diocese — by a 14-13 vote, one shy of the 15 necessary to pass the legislation. But supporters of the amendment may seek its approval again at the legislature's session on July 30.

"If we could get one more of the legislators to support us — and we would ask people to lobby their legislators — then we would bring it up again," said William Polito (Rep.-8th District), who sponsored the amendment.

The amendment called for the county government to recognize the family as "the most basic unit of social organization, and the parents as having the primary right, duty and responsibility for the rearing and upbringing of their children including their sexual, medical and moral decisions."

The amendment also called for parental notification in cases where a program or agency provides an abortion for a teenager or refers that teenager to an agency which will provide abortions.

The proposed amendment was attached to legislation involving contracts for the Monroe County Youth Bureau.

Originally, Polito intended to attach the amendment to a bill authorizing funding for teen-pregnancy prevention programs. But vote on that \$335,000 proposal was delayed until the July 30 session. Consequently, Polito opted to attach the amendment to the youth bureau bill.

Approximately 30 people spoke out in favor of the amendment at the June 25 session, including Father John Firpo, director of diocesan Social Ministries, as well as representatives from St. Pius the Tenth Church in Gates and St. Joseph's Church in Penfield.

Other supporters who spoke at the session included representatives of such groups as the Knights of Columbus, the Problem Pregnancy Center, St. Thomas More Lawyer's Guild, and Feminists for Life, Polito noted.

The diocese, which chose not to support the amendment last year, changed its position this year after several passages were rewritten, Father Firpo explained.

The sections included a provision involving a notification waiver in cases where physical or emotional abuse might result. Diocesan officials had also requested the elimination of a passage concerning the dispensation of birth control to minors.

The diocese chose to endorse the amendment this year, Father Firpo said, because "the amendment supports the



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

## Safe passage

Frank DiSalvo puts the finishing touches on Camp Stella Maris' new cedar-covered bridge across East Lake Road. The bridge allows campers to safely cross the busy highway to reach lake-front activities. Construction of the bridge is now complete, but the camp is still working to raise the last \$15,000 in funding for the project.

right and duty of parents to be the primary care takers of their children."

But the diocese's decision to support the amendment became a source of controversy for Catholic legislators opposed to the legislation. Several Catholic legislators feared that disagreeing with the diocese's position could get them labeled as "bad" Catholics.

The situation intensified after the Monroe County Legislators for Pro Family Coalition sent a package to all parishes in the Rochester diocese. The package included a letter to pastors, a fact sheet about the amendment, information about the U.S. Catholic bishops' support for parental notification and a reprint of a July, 1990, article from the Rochester Area Right to Life Committee that labeled Catholic legislators who failed to support parental notification as "cafeteria Catholics."

"What I'm terribly afraid of is that someone, just before an election, will write a letter to everyone in my parish that Rick Dollinger is not a good Catholic," noted Richard Dollinger (Dem.-14th District), a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Brighton.

Dollinger, who voted against the amendment, acknowledged that he had not seen the information sent out by his fellow legislators, but said he was upset about what he perceived as attempts to question his faith. He added, however, that he did not believe the diocese had tried to force legislators to vote one particular way.

In his statement to the legislature supporting the amendment on June 25, Father Firpo said, "It is not the proper role of the church to directly intervene in the political process by telling people how to vote. It is the proper role of the church to express its point of view so that Catholics and people of good will give serious consideration to

its position before votes are cast."

George Wiedemer (Rep.-9th District), who wrote the letter to diocesan pastors, said his intention had been to encourage representatives from parishes and pro-life committees to attend the June 25 session to speak in support of the amendment. Wiedemer denied Dollinger's claims that he was using the amendment as a political weapon against Catholic legislators opposing the legislation.

"Who's going to use it against him?" Wiedemer said in response to Dollinger's concerns.

Joanne VanZandt (Rep.-10th District), who had voted in favor of the amendment last year, was among the Catholic legislators to vote against the amendment June 25.

VanZandt, a parishioner of Transfiguration Church in Fairport, noted that she had changed her vote after consulting with people who worked in teen-counseling programs.

The concern among counselors, VanZandt explained, was that — if parental notification had passed — teenagers would misunderstand the intent of the amendment and think their parents would be notified every time they went to the clinics.

"Their fear would be so great that they would likely not go to the clinic at all," VanZandt explained. Thus, she added, the youths might fail to get necessary medical care and counseling.

Polito added that supporters will continue efforts to have the amendment and its pro-family stance approved. Unless a legislator switches his or her position, however, those efforts might have to wait until after the election this November, he said.

"I think the public wants it," Polito said. "It could have a major impact on county policies if it gets passed."

# Sisters of St. Joseph elect Sr. St. Peter new superior

ROCHESTER — By unanimous vote June 27, the Sisters of St. Joseph elected Sister Rosemary St. Peter to serve as the congregation's superior general for the next four years.

Sister St. Peter will replace Sister Elizabeth Anne LeValley, who served two terms as the order's superior general, from 1983-91. Sister LeValley worked in central administration for eight years prior to being named superior general.

Sister St. Peter has been the SJS's assistant superior general since 1987. Her term as superior general will begin officially with a July 14 installation ceremony.

A native of Rochester, Sister St. Peter has worked in the order's central administration since 1983. Prior to joining that office, Sister St. Peter served as a principal at St. Patrick's School, Seneca Falls; St. Ambrose, Rochester; and Holy Trinity, Webster.

She also has taught at Catholic schools in Wayland, Canandaigua, Greece and Rochester, and she holds a B.S. in education and a B.A. in history from Nazareth College.

In a statement released by the order, Sister St. Peter discussed her upcoming term with reference to a vision statement the congregation adopted during its chapter meeting in May of this year. That statement called the sisters to participate "in the transformation of unjust structures and alleviation of injustice in our world."

"I envision the next four years as a time of continued collaboration," Sister St. Peter said. "Together in prayer, reflection and dialogue, in light of our Gospel beliefs and charism, we can determine the actions we need to effect the Value Statement adopted by the 1991 chapter. Together with you, I trust that the same spirit who gave being to a congregation of women who dared to undertake all things for the glory of God will continue to be with us and urge us to serve with courage and fide-

lity."

In addition to electing Sister St. Peter, the Sisters of St. Joseph unanimously chose four other members of their administrative team:

- Sister Janice Morgan, director of religious education at Assumption of Our Lady Parish in Fairport since 1985, was elected assistant superior general. The Elmira native served as assistant superintendent for curriculum in the diocesan Education Office from 1981-85. Previously she was principal of St. Francis Xavier in Rochester and St. Theodore's in Gates. She also taught at a number of diocesan schools.

- Sister Sharon Bailey, a native Rochesterian and co-director of the Corpus Christi Neighborhood Center, 142 Webster Ave., was elected one of three councilors. A registered nurse, she has worked at the center since 1981 and has also served as pediatric nurse practitioner and pediatric health-care service coordinator at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira.

- Sister Rita Jongen, born in the Netherlands, was elected a councilor. Sister Jongen has worked in the order's central administration since 1987. From 1980-87, she taught English at Nazareth Academy, 1001 Lake Ave., and she has also taught at Corpus Christi in Rochester, and Our Lady of Lourdes in Brighton.

- Sister Mary John Van Atta, a native of Rochester, was also elected a councilor. A nationally known process consultant for congregations of women religious, she served on the board of directors of the former *Courier-Journal* from 1985-88. Sister Van Atta has taught at St. Joseph's in Wayland and at St. Mary's in Elmira. She was director of public relations for her order from 1975-1986, and director of communications from 1970-75. She also served as pastoral assistant at Immaculate Conception in Rochester.

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