

# Pro-life group may opt out of feminist event

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Feminists for Life may wind up on the sidelines of an October campaign protesting violence against women.

The campaign is being organized by Women Acting Against Violence, a coalition of local women's groups. The WAAV steering committee voted Aug. 22 to reinstate a pro-choice statement as one of its positions. The committee previously had decided to drop the pro-choice statement and remain abortion-neutral.

Due to the Aug. 22 vote, Feminists for Life won't be allowed to sponsor an event during the month-long campaign, according to Carol O'Connor, executive director of the the YWCA and one of the organizers of the campaign. The pro-life organization now is reconsidering its participation in the Take Back the Night march scheduled for Oct. 1.

Feminists for Life was a sponsor of the original Take Back the Night march, held in February, 1990. The 1990 march was abortion neutral.

Suzanne Schnittman, a member of Feminists for Life and of the WAAV steering committee, said the coalition reversed its abortion position because representatives of MetroAct and the National Organization for Women said they would withdraw from



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Suzanne Schnittman, a member of Feminists for Life and of the Women Acting Against Violence steering committee, laments the WAAV's vote to reinstate a pro-choice position its October campaign.

the campaign unless it was pro-choice.

"The irony here," Schnittman continued, "is that women who proclaim themselves against violence have in this decision to exclude other women demonstra-

ted a certain kind of violence themselves."

But O'Connor countered that the decision was not intended to exclude Feminists for Life from the campaign.

"They can participate," O'Connor said.

She noted that representatives of Feminists for Life were informed at the steering committee's Sept. 5 meeting that they could participate as a group in the in the march and as individuals at other events.

"If it was a question of whether their participation was welcome, it certainly is," O'Connor said.

But she acknowledged that the pro-life group will not be allowed to sponsor an event as part of the campaign and that the month-long effort will be pro-choice.

"Support of a pro-choice position is an issue, but not the primary position for the month," O'Connor explained. "Our position is that a woman should have a choice, and where women do not have a choice, it creates an environment in which there can be violence against women."

She said the event Feminists for Life hoped to sponsor during the campaign would have been a forum on abortion.

Schnittman added that the steering committee of Feminists for Life will meet Sept. 14, when it will discuss participation in the march.

The key to that decision, Schnittman noted, is whether any speech scheduled before the march will address the pro-choice agenda.

O'Connor said an address will be given before the march and that she could not guarantee speakers "might not make reference to the choice issue."

# Priest will appeal removal from Mt. Morris pastorate

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

MT. MORRIS — Father Norbert Nolan, pastor of St. Patrick's Parish, has initiated a Vatican appeal of his removal as pastor of the parish.

On Aug. 28, Bishop Matthew H. Clark issued the decree removing Father Nolan from the pastorate, effective Sept. 13.

In a statement issued Wednesday, Sept. 4, the diocese said Bishop Clark had asked Father Nolan to resign on March 5, 1991. The action stemmed from the pastor's failure to cooperate in addressing a number of concerns about his actions, the diocese said.

Among those concerns — which surfaced at a Sept. 3 parish meeting — were allegations of alcohol abuse, inappropriate behavior and comments, and ongoing dissension in the parish.

Father Nolan did not resign and, according to the diocesan statement, subsequent efforts failed to resolve the situation.

"The bishop deeply regrets the necessity of this action, but feels that he had exhausted all other alternatives before acting to remove Father Nolan for the good of the parish community," the release stated.

The diocese declined to comment on the specific nature of the allegations against Father Nolan, describing them as personnel issues.

Father Nolan said he has hired Father John P. Beal, judicial vicar for the Diocese of Erie, Pa., as his canonical adviser for the appeal, which will go to the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome.

"It's a matter of justice with me, and I have to fight it," Father Nolan said in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "I'm being treated very unfairly by a small group of people and by the diocese."

At the advice of his canon lawyer, Father Nolan said he could not make any further comment on the case.

Meanwhile, on Sept. 3, St. Patrick's parish council sent letters to all diocesan priests, claiming that "Bishop Clark has violated both canon law and civil law, but most importantly, Christian principles of fairness and human decency."

The council later invited the priests to attend Father Nolan's final Mass at the parish, scheduled for 5 p.m. on Sept. 13.

The council further organized a poll at the parish's Masses the weekend of Aug. 24-25. According to council member Ed Palermo, 82 percent of approximately 400 people attending Mass that weekend voted in support of Father Nolan.

Approximately 200 people attended the Sept. 3 parish meeting to discuss Father Nolan's removal, according to organizers.

Palermo told the *Courier* that some of the allegations leading to Bishop Clark's action were presented to Father Nolan at a Feb. 12, 1991, meeting at Sacred Heart Cathedral. At that meeting, he said, Father Nolan was confronted by eight people — including the then president and secretary of the parish council, and several current and former members of the parish.

The president, vice president and secretary of the council were subsequently impeached by the rest of the council at the council's March meeting, Palermo said.

According to Palermo, among the charges discussed at the meeting were an incident about eight years ago in which Father Nolan allegedly almost struck several children while driving in the church's parking lot, then verbally abused the children; repeated reports of alcohol on his breath; and a report that Father Nolan allegedly called a parishioner one evening and slurred his words as he spoke, suggesting that he had been drinking.

In a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Dorothy Maggio, a former parishioner of St. Patrick's, former member of the parish council and one of the participants at the Feb. 12 meeting, identified herself as the recipient of that phone call.

Maggio said Father Nolan called her at 7:30 p.m. — not "late night," as some media had reported — and accused her of trying to start a petition against him. Maggio said she denied the accusations, but that Father Nolan repeated them.

"He was slurring his words," Maggio said.

Palermo, who attended the Feb. 12 meeting with Father Nolan, said none of the charges leveled against the priest at that meeting were substantiated.

"None of the complaints to the bishop ... were corroborated (by evidence),"

Palermo said. "If he was under the influence of alcohol at any time, I say prove it."

Palermo said Father Nolan has cataracts and other eye problems that impair his depth perception, at times causing him to stumble in a way observers might attribute to intoxication. Further, he noted that the priest was taking medication for high blood pressure, and suggested that the medication occasionally may have caused slurred speech.

Palermo said Father Nolan did drink on a daily basis, but that he had never seen the priest intoxicated. Palermo said he has had regular contact with Father Nolan, both socially and at parish activities.

The diocese failed to adequately investigate the charges, Palermo charged, saying officials based their decision solely on what the eight people said at the Feb. 12 meeting.

But Maggio reported that Feb. 12, 1991, was not the first time current and former parishioners had met with Bishop Clark about Father Nolan. She said she had participated in one meeting in May, 1989, at which six people raised concerns about the priest.

In response to that meeting, supporters of Father Nolan led a petition campaign in the parish, Maggio said. She pointed out that three of the eight people who raised

concerns about Father Nolan at the Feb. 12, 1991, meeting were among those who had helped organize the 1989 petition campaign supporting the priest.

Further, Maggio said, the diocese had been receiving letters of complaint about Father Nolan since his appointment to the parish in 1982.

Based on ongoing allegations about Father Nolan's drinking, Palermo said, Bishop Clark asked Father Nolan at the Feb. 12 meeting to undergo evaluation for alcoholism.

Father Nolan did meet once with Dr. Robert Klein of Strong Memorial Hospital's Alcoholism and Drug Dependency Program on March 26, according to the report Dr. Klein submitted to the diocese. Palermo provided a copy of that report to the *Catholic Courier*.

In the report, Klein said he found no signs of alcohol dependency symptoms, and that Father Nolan's family history is without evidence of alcohol or drug dependency. Klein also reported that Father Nolan acknowledged "drinking daily before dinner and drinking alone due to his living situation."

Klein noted, however, that he could not make a diagnosis based on one visit and would need more information from the diocese to make an evaluation.

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