

Churches join coalition targeting United Way

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A growing coalition of church, pro-life, business and community groups, opposed to United Way funding for Planned Parenthood because of its plans to open an abortion clinic in Rochester, is escalating its efforts.

In addition to circulating "fact sheets" about the agreement between United Way of Greater Rochester, Inc. and Planned Parenthood of Rochester and the Genesee Valley, Inc., the coalition took out a full-page ad in last Sunday's Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Meanwhile, United Way President Joseph Calabrese and other agency representatives, concerned that the coalition's actions will hurt the 1992 campaign, spent the weekend of March 27-28 contacting pastors of Catholic and Protestant churches to refute its claims.

Despite those efforts, coalition representatives and a number of Catholic parishes April 1 submitted nearly 1,000 forms to United Way signed by individuals who said they would redirect their funds to other charitable organizations.

Collected at 33 Catholic and 23 inner-city churches the weekend of March 27-28, the forms were presented at the Riverside Convention Center during the kickoff luncheon for United Way's \$38.5 million 1992 campaign.

United Way officials acknowledge that groups and individuals are continuing to submit the forms directly to United Way.

Citizens for United Way Responsibility — with the support of other coalition groups — took out the full-page ad in the Sunday, April 5 Democrat and Chronicle.

The ad discusses abortion, alleging that the agreement between United Way and Planned Parenthood would "facilitate" plans to open the clinic. The ad suggests that "before you open your wallet, you deserve a few straight facts — and a lot more openness. Ask. Think. Then decide."

Calabrese, a parishioner of Pittsford's St. Louis Church, called the ad and the fact sheet "false" and "misleading."

Further, Calabrese said, if efforts to discourage people from giving to the United Way this year succeed, "a lot of agencies — small ones especially — are going to be hurt."

But Siobahn Hanna, a coalition spokesperson, defended the informa-



Nellie Blake (right), wife of the Rev. Gladstone Blake (center) of Rochester's First Born Church of the Living God, hands over envelopes containing 'non-pledge' forms to Diane Ryan, vice president of communications for the United Way of Greater Rochester, Inc. The demonstration was held while the agency kicked off its annual campaign at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center April 1.

Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

tion in the fact sheet and the ad, saying, "We've done our research. We did an in-depth analysis of the agreement."

At issue is the agreement between Planned Parenthood and the United Way that would keep Planned Parenthood a member agency — rather than donor option — with the understanding that no United Way monies would be used for the proposed abortion clinic, scheduled to open at Planned Parenthood's headquarters at 114 University Ave.

Planned Parenthood has already received approval for the clinic from the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency, which considers local applications for health-care services. Since approving the application March 11, agency officials have already forwarded it to the New York State Department of Health, where it is now under consideration.

When Planned Parenthood first announced plans in the fall of 1991 to open the clinic, United Way decided to switch Planned Parenthood from member-agency status to donor-option status. That decision was overruled by the executive committee of United Way's board of directors Jan. 31, 1992, in light of Planned Parenthood's guarantee of fiscal separation for the clinic.

A number of groups opposed the agreement, circulated the fact sheet and claimed that United Way money given to Planned Parenthood would be

used for abortions.

Hanna noted that she and other members of the business community who are opposed to the clinic had studied the agreement between the United Way and Planned Parenthood, determining that it provides "no adequate provision to maintain financial separation."

Calabrese, however, said that assessment was wrong.

"Absolutely, categorically," he said, no money given to United Way would go toward abortions.

After United Way officials saw the fact sheet, Calabrese said, he spoke March 27 with Mary Burke — a member of the Parish ProLife Network and one of the document's authors — to point out what he claimed were inaccuracies.

Burke acknowledged that she spoke with Calabrese, telling him that if he prepared a list of objections to the fact sheet, she would discuss them with coalition members. If they determined that facts were inaccurate, she said, the fact sheet would be rewritten.

After considering Calabrese's objections, Burke reported, coalition members decided not to rewrite it.

"We stand behind the fact sheet," she declared.

However, some United Way supporters who called the parishes implied that Burke had admitted the sheet contained errors.

Father L. James Callan, pastor of Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle Church, said he had been called by a woman representing United Way who,

he claimed, "gave the impression that Mary (Burke) had acknowledged there were errors and had agreed to rewrite it."

Some parishioners studied the fact sheet, Father Callan said, and found it accurate. Consequently, the sheets were made available at the parish's Sunday Masses, and more than 350 parishioners signed forms agreeing not to contribute to the United Way.

Coalition members are asking for a community forum to discuss the fact sheet, Hanna said. But, she said, United Way officials would agree only to meeting with representatives of the various groups in the coalition.

Calabrese acknowledged that he would be willing to meet with representatives, but not to take part in a public discussion.

"I'm not interested in giving the group or any other group a public forum," Calabrese said. He added that the United Way should not be used as the "instrument of punishing Planned Parenthood" or as the battle ground over abortion. Rather, he suggested, opponents of the abortion clinic should make their objections known through "the public process that's available to them."

Hanna said that the coalition would indeed take part in any state hearings concerning the clinic.

She added that she "and other members of the coalition would like to support the United Way," but that until its support for Planned Parenthood changes, "We're going to continue to put pressure on United Way."

Judge denies defense's motion in former choir director's case

WAVERLY — A Tioga County court judge has denied an attorney's request for a special prosecutor in the case involving Leo McDermott II, according to the county court clerk's office.

Judge Andrew F. Sidlecki also remanded the case back to the Village Court of Waverly, according to Lisa Roe of the county court clerk's office. Roe noted that the judge's decision, dated April 2, was filed with the court clerk's office on April 3.

McDermott, former director of the Praise and Power Youth Choir and ex-director of music at St. Mary's of the Lake Parish in Watkins Glen, has pleaded not guilty to sexual abuse charges stemming from an alleged incident involving a minor in January.

After seeing statements regarding McDermott's case made in the press by

Tioga County Assistant District Attorney Gerald A. Keene, defense attorney James A. Baker last month asked Judge Sidlecki to disqualify the district attorney's office from prosecuting the case.

"This case has been plagued with a lot of prejudiced publicity," Baker recently told the *Catholic Courier*.

Following the motion's filing, an employee with the Tioga County District Attorney's Office told the *Catholic Courier* that officials had been instructed not to comment publicly on the McDermott case.

When contacted on Monday, April 6, Baker said he had not yet received a copy of Judge Sidlecki's decision denying his motion so he would not comment on the development.

— Rob Cullivan

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