

# Geneseo couple offers alternatives for women

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

GENESEO — If asked to picket for or against an abortion clinic, David Desmond would probably excuse himself and stand on the sidelines.

Not that the youth minister at St. Margaret Mary's Church in Irondequoit questions the church's stance against abortion. It's just that he doubts "rescues," such as the ones held during the recently concluded "Spring of Life" in Buffalo, attack the root of abortion.

"We've got to look into providing more assistance for women and children rather than keeping this fighting going on," Desmond said in an interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

Putting this conviction into practice in November, 1988, Desmond and his wife Carol started Life's Refuge, Inc. — a referral and assistance center for women facing problem pregnancies. The Desmonds run the center out of their Geneseo home.

Primarily operating in the Geneseo area, Life's Refuge has a seven-member board of directors, and a mailing list of about 70 people, he noted.

Incorporated in May, 1991, Life's Refuge was founded on a simple notion, Desmond said: the belief that women should know where to turn for alternatives to abortion as easily as they know where to turn for abortion information.

In the most recent Life's Refuge newsletter, Desmond wrote:

"When I asked people to give me information on programs assisting women with their pregnancies, most (over 80 percent) could not do so," he wrote. "When I asked the same people for information on programs providing abortions, over 75 percent of them answered 'Planned Parenthood.'"

"It is absolutely unacceptable that there is not an answer more readily available for the first question, than for that of the second question," Desmond added.

Help is often available for pregnant women, Desmond stressed in his interview with the *Courier*, but a lot of women don't know how to go about finding such assistance. By gathering information into one regional clearinghouse, women can have a readily accessible source of help whenever



David Desmond (center) met with Antoinette M. Thompson (left), the network referral specialist at Catholic Family Center's CYO Department, and Deborah Cummings-Brown, CYO's program director, during an April 30 visit.

they or their peers face a crisis, he observed.

He added that even some of the pro-life activists he's met don't know where to find such information.

To help women facing crisis pregnancies find abortion alternatives more readily, Life's Refuge has compiled a list of agencies to which it can refer its clients. Some are pregnancy crisis centers, while others deal with such issues as housing, adoption, pre- and post-natal care, and financial aid.

If Life's Refuge can garner more donations, Desmond also hopes to install a toll-free hotline. He would also like to advertise the center's services.

Future plans also include political advocacy on behalf of mothers and their children; a residential and day care program; counseling service; and surveys to assess regional needs of women in pre- and post-natal stages.

Desmond hopes that Life's Refuge will eventually become known

throughout the diocese. He and his wife have already dealt with inquiries from out-of-state couples seeking to adopt children, and from an unemployed single mother seeking help.

To illustrate the couple's commitment to the mission of Life's Refuge, Desmond noted that he and his wife have scaled back their lifestyle, taking one of their two cars off the road.

Dave Burns, a member of Life's Refuge board of directors, commented on David Desmond's strong belief in the project.

"He's very focused on his vision to improve the world, and he's very willing to make sacrifices," Burns said.

After meeting the couple through St. Margaret Mary's Church, Burns noted that it was the compassionate philosophy behind the Desmonds' plan that

attracted him to Life's Refuge.

Although he opposes abortion, like the Desmonds, Burns was uncomfortable with aggressive protests against it. Life's Refuge "was something I could grab onto rather than getting out into the streets and screaming at someone," he said.

Burns now offers the board of directors financial advice, having honed his skills as the general manager of a business unit at Gleason Works in Rochester, and as current director of the West Irondequoit Foundation.

Burns added that he wants to institute an annual fundraising campaign for Life's Refuge this fall.

**EDITORS' NOTE:** For information on the organization, call the Desmonds at 716/243-4414, or write: Life's Refuge, 12 E. South St., Geneseo, N.Y. 14454.

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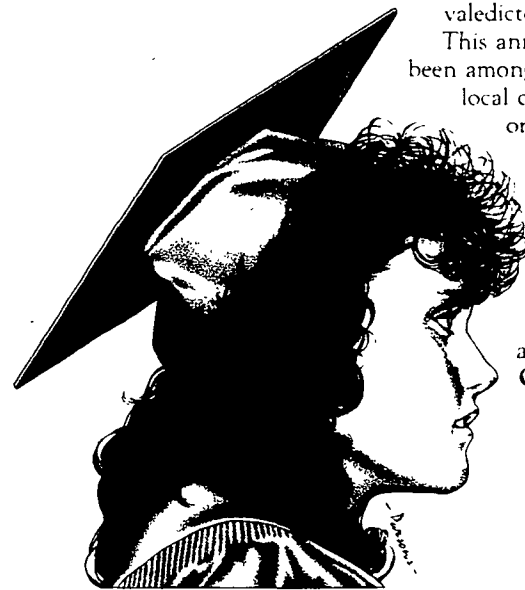
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