

# Age doesn't keep activist from fighting injustices

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

FAIRPORT — Clare Regan remembers contemplating the prospect of her imminent baptism into the Catholic Church when she was 16 years old.

The thought of receiving the sacrament made her leave the church to go outside and become sick.

"I questioned everything," said the 65-year-old Fairport woman, whose parents had compelled Regan and her siblings to convert to Catholicism when they were growing up outside of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Her late father was raised a Presbyterian, but he loved the Catholic Church for its compassion toward sinners and because various Catholic publications had published articles he wrote on economic social justice.

The adolescent Regan, however, found herself debating many of the church's teachings, including its call to pray for the dead.

Regan finds the teaching illogical because she believes it implies that the more famous people are when they die, the better their chances of getting into heaven since multitudes of people would be praying for them.

Hence, evil figures might get into heaven through the perseverance of his or her prayerful supporters on this earth, she concluded, whereas the fate of some moral, obscure person was in question.

"I don't have Masses said for dead people," she concluded.

Despite these and other objections to Catholic theology, Regan had become a member of the church willingly by the time she decided to study chemistry at Duquesne University.

The combination of pragmatism and idealism that seems to mark Regan's character helped not only to settle her stomach before coming back to church, but her conscience as well.

"I think basically either you go outside the church or you stay inside and reform it," said Regan, a parishioner at Church of the Resurrection, 63 Mason Road.

Her attitude toward the church parallels Regan's sentiment toward society as a whole. A self-described "liberal," pacifist and activist, Regan has done everything from teach Catholic high school students the church's economic and labor encyclicals to overlooking the treasury for the 1978 upstate New York campaign of then-lieutenant governor candidate Mario



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Clare Regan, a parishioner of Fairport's Resurrection Church, publishes her views against the death penalty alongside her calls for prison reform in *Justicia* — a monthly newsletter she edits for the Judicial Process Commission.

Cuomo.

Her career as an activist, a vocation that has spurred her to protest against the Vietnam War and the arms race, is far from over, she added. Indeed, such commitment should mark the career of any committed Christian, young or old, she contended.

"You're not absolved of your responsibility about the kingdom when you're 65 or 70," she asserted.

Indeed, as a member of the Judicial Process Commission — a program sponsored by the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, which includes the Rochester diocese — Regan finds herself taking what she considers the compassionate side in three major debates currently raging across the nation.

She regularly publishes her views against the death penalty and the drug war alongside her calls for prison reform in *Justicia*, the monthly newsletter she edits for the commission. And she spoke about all three issues with the same kind of passion that marks her pieces in *Justicia*.

• On the death penalty: "I've al-

ways been against it. I don't feel that we have a right to kill people ... 'Revenge is mine,' says the Lord."

In addition to her own feelings, she cited statistics indicating that the costly appeals process inherent in death-penalty cases makes it a far more expensive punishment than life imprisonment. Furthermore, Regan notes that murder rates consistently go up in states whenever someone is executed.

Finally, she has written, the death penalty generally applies to poor blacks, rather than wealthy whites, and "of 455 men executed for rape in the U.S. since 1930, 405 were black. No white man has ever been executed for raping a black woman."

• Concerning the "war on drugs:" "Anybody who wants drugs today can get them," she said. "They're not using them not because it's illegal, but be-

cause they know they're bad."

To prove her assertions, Regan pointed out that smoking tobacco is legal, yet its use among the general public has declined considerably since people began learning of its harmful effects.

Regan also believes such illegal drugs as marijuana and cocaine should be legalized and sold or distributed through public outlets that control the substances' quality and purity. Such a practice would eliminate the dangers associated with illegal drug concoctions, and would also allegedly eliminate the huge untaxed, illegal profits associated with the drug trade, she argued.

• On prison reform: "If you're in the peace movement, it behooves you to clean up the prisons," she said, adding that many peace protesters are imprisoned for their activism.

Prisons are overcrowded across the nation due to the incarceration of millions of drug offenders, she noted, adding that many prisoners could be free if they had the money to get out on bail. Additionally, prisons often make inmates only more violent since a large minority are raped and intimidated by other inmates throughout their sentence, she commented.

As an alternative to incarceration, Regan advocates "restorative justice" for all convicted criminals — for example, compelling non-violent offenders to work at a job to pay back their victims, and making such violent offenders as rapists and murderers work in prison with part of their salary going to their victims and their victims' families.

The bottom line for Regan is that Catholics are duty-bound to help the imprisoned.

"As Christians, we have an obligation to develop them as fully as possible while they're here," she said, adding: "Nobody is beyond redemption."

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