

Father Curran draws line at assisted suicide

Priest addresses issue during talk at St. John Fisher

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

DALLAS — Catholic teachings permit the withdrawal or withholding of life-support treatment for acutely ill patients under some circumstances, according to Father Charles E. Curran.

However, the Rochester native and former Catholic University of America professor does not favor physician-assisted suicide as practiced by Dr. Jack Kevorkian in Michigan or the recently defeated initiatives that would have permitted euthanasia in California or the state of Washington.

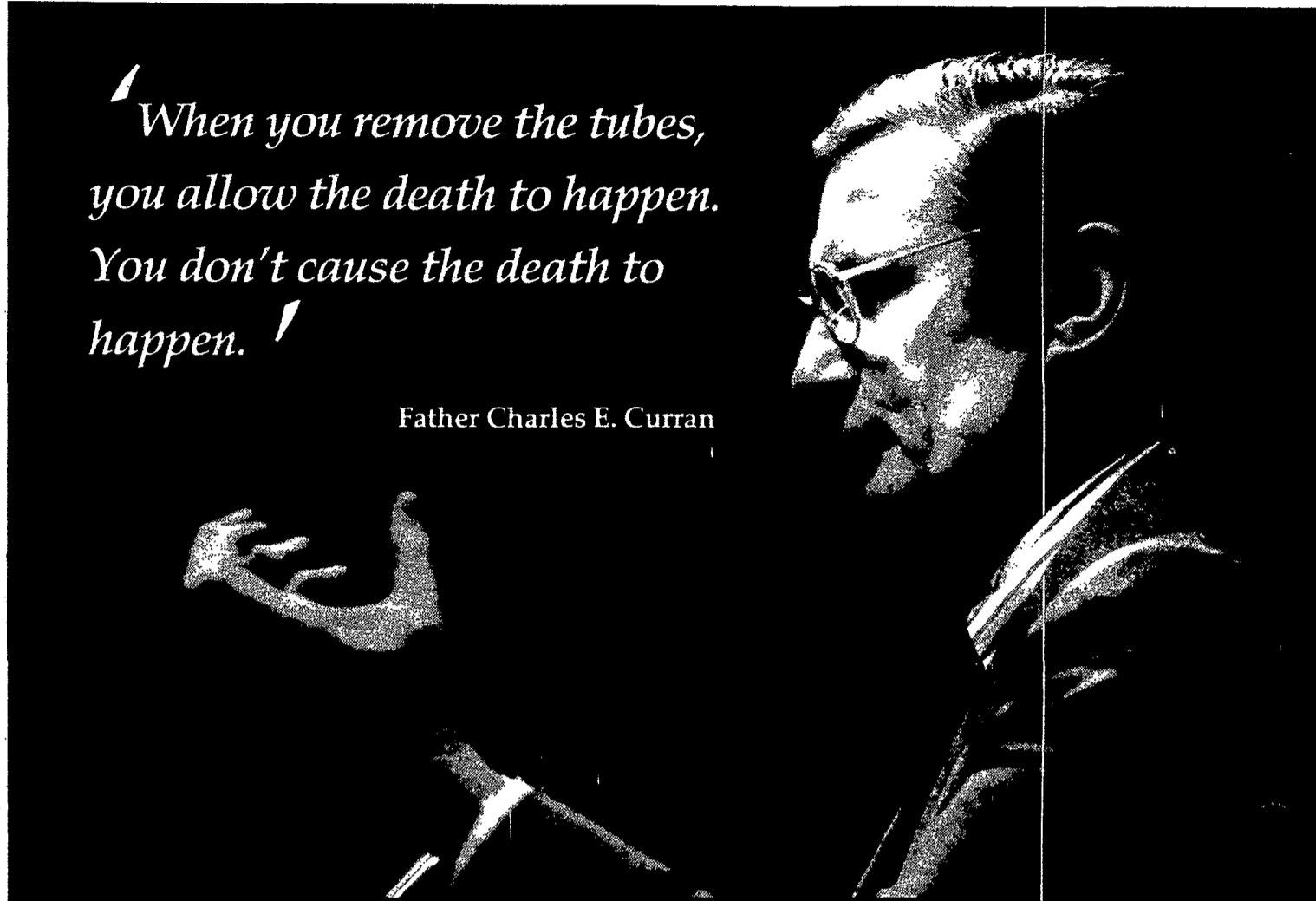
"I think the argument could be made (for euthanasia) in a theoretical case, but my problem is the long-term consequences for society," Father Curran said during a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from his Southern Methodist University office. "If you begin to have exceptions, then you have a much more dangerous situation."

Father Curran spoke about withholding or withdrawing treatment for acutely ill patients during a lecture at St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave. in Pittsford on Feb. 5.

The diocesan priest is now a professor of human values at Southern Methodist University. The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith notified the moral theologian in 1986 that he was no longer deemed suitable or eligible to teach Catholic theology because of his dissenting views in the area of sexual ethics.

As a result of that decision, Father Curran was suspended from his tenured teaching position at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He took brief teaching posts at several other institutions, lost a lawsuit to CUA, then was granted immediate tenure as a human values professor at SMU.

Father Curran spoke with the *Courier* prior to his address at Fisher. Al-



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Father Charles E. Curran

Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Father Charles E. Curran, professor of human values at Southern Methodist University in Texas, addresses more than 100 people at St. John Fisher College in Pittsford Feb. 5.

though the priest sees a clear difference between withdrawing treatment and actively causing death, he noted that his talk at Fisher would have to include euthanasia.

"When you remove the tubes, you allow the death to happen," he said. "You don't cause the death to happen."

"It's like the difference between being on the bank of a river and seeing someone in the river," he continued, "but because you can't swim you can do nothing, so the person drowns, or your going into the river and holding the person's head under water until they drown."

Traditional Catholic teaching permits the withholding of extraordinary means to keep people alive, Father Curran noted.

"You don't have to do everything

that's possible to keep human life in existence," he said, noting that such factors as hope for improvement and the pain involved in the ongoing treatment must be considered in such decisions.

Thus, Father Curran stressed, even withholding food may be permitted for individuals in permanent vegetative states. In such cases, he explained, food is no longer a moral obligation, but a medical treatment.

On the other hand, the priest said he could not see a practical instance when euthanasia was permissible.

"It seems to me that I am opposed to euthanasia for a number of reasons," Father Curran remarked. Among those reasons, the priest noted, is the fact that due to medical advances, euthanasia is not needed to prevent undue

suffering — one of the arguments sometimes cited in its favor.

Euthanasia would also undermine the doctor-patient relationship, Father Curran suggested. The doctor's role would shift from one of trying to save life to one of inducing death.

Further, Father Curran said, in situations where doctors and patients decide whether or not to end life, it would be difficult to draw the line between when it is and is not permissible to induce death. He noted that while many euthanasia advocates say the practice should be permitted for terminally ill patients, a number of the people who died with Dr. Kevorkian's help were not terminally ill.

"When are you going to stop it?" Father Curran asked. "The terminally ill"

Continued on page 18

Parishes take in almost 50 guns during buy back

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The City of Rochester is slated to conclude its gun buy-back program on Friday, Feb. 12, according to Lt. Scott Hill of the Rochester Police Department.

As of midnight, Sunday, Feb. 7, 220 handguns and 68 long guns had been turned in at gun buy-back sites around the city, Hill said.

Three Catholic churches, two Protestant churches, three fire stations and police headquarters are serving as sites for police to buy back guns.

The plan was originally slated to run from Jan. 13-29, but its success over the first two weeks led to the City Council's decision to extend the program two more weeks, Hill said.

More than 80 percent of the guns have been collected at three city fire stations — Engine 5, 450 Lyell Ave.; Engine 7, 873 Genesee St.; and Engine 16, 704 Hudson Ave.; and at police headquarters on Exchange Street, Hill reported.

The police lieutenant gave the following figures for the three Catholic churches participating in the program:

- Corpus Christi, 880 E. Main St., collected 25 handguns and seven long guns.

- St. Michael Church, 869 N. Clinton Ave., collected six handguns and one long gun.

- St. Francis Xavier Church, 316 Bay St., collected four handguns and four long guns.

In addition to these Catholic churches, New Bethel CME Church, 270 Scio St., and Pentecostal Miracle Deliverance, 580 St. Paul St., have also served as buy-back sites.

Hill observed that even though the buy-back program may not eliminate street violence altogether, it may help decrease the number of accidental or domestic shootings, he said.

"It limits the use of a gun in a moment of passion," he explained.

In addition, the chance of guns being stolen and used elsewhere is lessened with fewer firearms lying around, he added.

Residents receive negotiable checks of \$30 for each handgun, and \$15 for each rifle or shotgun received at a buy-back site. The checks can be cashed at designated Rochester-area banks.

Names and addresses of those who

drop off guns are not being recorded. Neither does ownership of weapons have to be proven.

Taking advantage of the publicity surrounding the buy-back plan, Corpus Christi Parish's Peace and Justice Committee is collecting donations on behalf of Families and Friends of Murdered Children and Victims of Violence. The organization counsels relatives of murder victims and sponsors non-violence programs in schools, according to Kathy McCrone, co-chairwoman of the Peace and Justice Committee.

The committee is encouraging parishioners to "match" a buy-back check and write a check of up to \$30 for donation to the organization. As of early February, the committee had collected \$200 for the group, McCrone said.

EDITORS' NOTE: For information on the buy-back effort, call the 24-hour "buy-back" line at 716/428-6140.

To donate to the Corpus Peace and Justice Committee fund, write out a check payable to the "Gun Amnesty Program" and send it to 84 Prince St., Rochester, N.Y. 14605.

Funding available for 30-day retreats

ROCHESTER — An anonymous individual has offered to provide funding this year for two people in ministry — clergy, religious or lay — in the Rochester diocese to experience a Cushman sponsored 30-day retreat.

It is recommended that individuals undertaking this retreat have had prior experience of a directed retreat or a spiritual director. The individuals will have to provide for coverage of their ministerial positions while they are on retreat.

Consideration will be given to individuals based on financial need. The retreatants will have to pay their own transportation costs.

The cost of the retreat — approximately \$1,000 per person — will be covered by the donor.

The deadline to apply is Feb. 28, 1993.

For information or an application, contact: Mary Consler, Diocese of Rochester, Cushman Sponsored Retreat, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.