

Spring of Life's effects still unclear after a year

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Instead of large protests, Buckham charged, pro-life activists are turning to increased violence. In addition to several incidents of arson at clinics, she pointed to the March 11, 1993 shooting of Dr. David Gunn at an abortion clinic in Florida.

But such incidents of violence are infrequent and are often unduly emphasized by the media and pro-choice activists, noted Helen Alvaré, spokeswoman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishop's Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

"If I go to 20 states and in 19 of them there are peaceful protests, the newspapers in those 19 states will carry only the story of the violent incident," Alvaré told the *Courier*. "The most violent incidents are blown way out of proportion."

As for the Dr. Gunn shooting, Alvaré said such actions are to be condemned.

"Every movement has its zealots," Alvaré said. "We need to do everything we can to engender a peaceful spirit, a true pro-life spirit."

Meanwhile, the perception that the pro-life movement "lost" ground during the Buffalo protests was engendered, in part, because the pro-choice camp was successful in taking pro-life activists off guard by their tactics and cohesiveness at rescue sites, Prior said.

"We were more surprised by the organization than the numbers" of pro-choice counter-protesters, Prior said. "The fact that they were so organized and that they were able to put aside some of their differences and work together was a lesson to us as pro-lifers. We need to put aside our differences and work together to save the lives of the unborn."

Prior added, "One of the things that we all underestimated was the depth of hostility and hatred emanating from some of the pro-choice people. As Christians, that was something that, in some ways, is foreign to us, and is difficult to deal with."

The behavior of pro-choice activists — some of whom yelled, jeered, swore, and even physically attacked some of the pro-life protesters — may actually help the pro-life cause in the long run, suggested Philip Lawler, author of the 1992 book, *Operation Rescue: A Challenge to the Nation's Conscience*.

"It was the first time the media no-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Marlene Beghini, assistant director of Problem Pregnancy Help Center on Lake Avenue in Rochester, sits in front of a wall adorned with birth announcements and photos of clients' children.

ticed the character of the opposition to Operation Rescue," Lawler said in an interview with the *Courier*. "It was the first time their behavior was portrayed as particularly threatening."

Although Lawler said he would not describe the Spring of Life protest as a "watershed" for the pro-life movement, he acknowledged that the rescues coincided with a decrease of large-scale protest activities.

"Historically, it's not at all uncommon to see a movement like this rise up, seem to be defeated, then rise up again five, 10 years later," Lawler said. "I think that people are recognizing that this cannot be viewed as just as a political battle, because it's clear now with the election of (President) Bill Clinton that we're going to lose the political battle for the near future."

Lawler, however, attributed that decrease to the increased pressure being placed on pro-life forces by law enforcement officials, and the rising legal costs arising from court cases.

Thus pro-life groups are pouring more of their energies at this time into sidewalk counseling and pregnancy centers that are getting increased business, Lawler observed.

Such is the case with Rochester's Problem Pregnancy Help Center, Inc.,

3252 Lake Ave.

The center provided counseling, support and material aid to 629 clients — an average of 52 per month — during 1992, according to Director Patricia Amato. From October 1990 to December 1991 the agency saw an average of 30 women. And Amato said the center is averaging three to five more clients a month during the first few months of 1993 compared to last year.

In addition, the election of President Clinton, who is pro-choice, has also led to an increase in the number of volunteers at the center, Amato said.

"It's moved people to do something, because they've realized the movement needs more help now," Amato said.

Prior noted that Buffalo-area centers have witnessed a similar increase in the number of people seeking help and volunteering to work.

Further, the Buffalo-area pro-life community has staged weekly Spring of Life rallies, which draw an average of 100 to 150 people, Prior claimed. In addition to peaceful protests continuing outside abortion clinics on a regular basis, the number of people trained as sidewalk counselors has doubled since

last year's protests ended, she said.

Even the Buffalo diocese has become more involved in pro-life activities.

According to Monsignor David Lee, diocesan director of communications, the diocese has held regular rosary novenas for life, during which participants pray at churches before they proceed to area abortion sites. He estimated that since last spring's protests, the number of participants in these novenas had increased 50 percent.

Many parishes have also increased the number of pro-life events, including holy hours and education sessions, the priest continued. A number of parishes have also begun programs to support new mothers.

"In my opinion, Operation Rescue hurt the pro-life movement," Monsignor Lee said. However, "I would also have to say because of it, there are a lot of discussions going on. There's an increased awareness of the need for discussions because of (the protests)."

One manifestation of the increased awareness of the need for such discussions is the Buffalo Coalition for Common Ground.

Formed in the Spring of Life's wake by officials associated with the Buffalo Council of Churches, the group seeks to diffuse some of the anger and to foster dialogue between pro-life and pro-choice activists, noted coalition member Betty Hutcheson.

The coalition already sponsored one workshop on Feb. 13, which 16 activists from each side attended, Hutcheson reported. Workshop participants identified issues on which they can agree — such as the need for sex education and more support for women and children. Now the group is trying to develop practical means to jointly address problems, she said.

Prior, a participant in the Buffalo coalition, noted that the changed political climate and the increasing organization displayed by pro-choice activists has indeed led pro-life leaders to reconsider tactics — including rescues on the Spring of Life's scale.

"It's time, certainly, to sit back, re-evaluate the situation, shed the old wine skins and take on the new," Prior concluded.

Anti-Catholic

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Koresh, and so they don't seek out faith expressions that could be meaningful to their lives."

The comic book depicts the conversion of a Jewish Holocaust survivor to fundamentalist Christianity after the survivor, his granddaughter and the man who converts him witness a neo-Nazi rally in the United States.

The Christian man first informs the Holocaust survivor that by killing Jews en masse, Adolph Hitler was merely carrying out the policies of the Catholic Church's medieval Inquisition. The comic book concludes by contending that the Vatican plans to turn the United States into a Catholic nation, complete with a new Inquisition aimed at non-Catholics.

Several speakers and students at the May 6 forum condemned the book's contents, but some upheld the right of Brockport Bible Study to distribute the information. The group's right to free speech became an issue when Steve Wions, a member of the student government board of directors, pro-

posed in late April that the Brockport Student Court — which hasn't met in a decade — dissolve the study group.

Wions, former co-president of Hillel, a Jewish student organization, later withdrew that proposal when he acknowledged that it could become a First Amendment issue. He also cited the student court's dormancy as a factor in his decision.

At the forum, Wions maintained that he was not interested in squelching the Bible study group's freedom of speech. Instead, he claimed that he believed the study group, sponsored by the student government, may have violated the student government constitution by implying that its views were representative of the student government. That implication was made because the comic book was marked by a Brockport Bible Study stamp, he noted.

"I wouldn't have put any BSG stamp on it," Wions said. "That was the whole issue."

In the fall, Wions said that he would propose an amendment to the student constitution noting that the views of any student group on campus do not necessarily represent the views of student government.

Obituary

Father Thomas Florack, chaplain

Father Thomas J. Florack, who served for 38 years as chaplain at Willard Psychiatric Center in Willard, Seneca County, died on May 4, 1993, in Rock Hill, S.C. He was 70.



Born in Rochester on Nov. 12, 1922, Father Florack was a parishioner at Blessed Sacrament Church, 534 Oxford St. He graduated from St. Andrew's Seminary and St. Bernard's Seminary, and also studied clinical pastoral psychology at Brooklyn State Hospital. He was ordained at Blessed Sacrament Church in 1947.

Father Florack's first assignment was at Ss. Peter and Paul Church, 161 High St., Elmira, from 1947-51. He then served at Holy Cross Church, 7231 S. Main St., Ovid, from 1951-54.

During his time at Holy Cross, Father Florack also began his affiliation with Willard Psychiatric Center. His role as resident chaplain at the mental facility began in April of 1954.

Father Florack remained at Willard until 1989. He also served as auxiliary chaplain at Seneca Army Depot in nearby Romulus beginning in 1976.

"(Willard) was his life. Essentially, he was married to it," the priest's sister, Dorothy, a Rochester resident, told the *Catholic Courier*. "It was a two-way street. He loved the patients, and they loved him equally."

In addition to his sister, Father Florack is survived by his mother, Anne, of Rochester; another sister, Rita Tolliver, of California; brother and sister-in-law, Dr. Arthur J. and Ellie Florack, of South Carolina; and several nieces and nephews.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held on Monday, May 10, at Blessed Sacrament Church. Interment was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Memorial contributions may be made in Father Florack's memory to Alzheimer's Disease Research, 15825 Shady Grove Road, Rockville, Md., 20850; or Covenant House, P.O. Box 731, Times Square Station, N.Y., 10108.