

Respect Life

CATHOLIC COURIER SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT
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File photo
Bernice Kleinhammer, a parishioner at Irondequoit's St. James Church, Oct. 1 stands outside the Riverside Convention Center in Rochester, holding a banner quoting Pope John Paul II. Kleinhammer was showing her support of issues related to the 'consistent-life ethic' during the Synod.

Consistent-life ethic calls for charity and action

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

Carol Crossed has put herself on the line for life many times.

By her own estimate, Crossed has been arrested 16 times for protesting nuclear weapons, U.S. policies in Latin America and abortion.

Oct. 1-3, 1993, Crossed camped for the better part of two days and nights outside the Riverside Convention Center in Rochester during the general sessions of the Diocese of Rochester's Seventh Synod. Crossed was there as a witness to the consistent-life ethic or "seamless garment" — a belief that such life issues as the death penalty, abortion, war, poverty, sexism, euthanasia, crime and civil rights are linked, and that people are called to support life across this range of issues.

Her hope and that of others who camped out with her was that these issues would not be forgotten as synod delegates considered recommendations from which would emerge a pastoral plan to guide the diocese into the next century.

"Those of us on the outside wanted it to be clear that we support (the delegates advocating the consistent-life ethic) and support the process of the synod," Crossed said. "Our presence was a witness of support."

On the afternoon of Oct. 3, Crossed learned that the consistent-life ethic had been chosen as one of the five recommendations to which the diocese was committing itself. Indeed, the consistent-life ethic had not even been on the list of 18 recommendations originally selected for balloting to select five goals for the diocese. It had emerged from discussions of "missing" recommendations, and ultimately became the second-leading vote getter, trailing only lifelong religious education.



File photo
As a witness of the 'consistent-life ethic' during last October's Synod, Carol Crossed (second from right) participated in a demonstration at Rochester's Riverside Convention Center.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark acknowledged he was pleased that the recommendation became one of the diocesan goals.

"I was delighted when this got raised up as an explicit recommendation," Bishop Clark said. "To be pro-life flows out of our Roman Catholic Christian heritage. But I think to be genuinely pro-life in the full Roman Catholic Christian heritage is to be mindful of life in all its stages."

A year later, Crossed is still happy that the diocese is committing itself to promoting the consistent-life ethic. But she is also concerned that the ethic be clearly explained and promoted so that people will realize it is not an easy belief. The consistent-life ethic, she argued, involves both providing support and assistance to people, and taking sometimes uncomfortable and unpopular stands on life issues through such means as advocating public policy and political changes, and perhaps even protesting

and facing arrest.

"I don't see the consistent-life ethic as charity — and I think that is a possible pitfall," Crossed said. "We always have to do the charity, but the justice of what I see the consistent-life ethic is always asking, 'Why?' Asking 'Why?' is the justice component of the consistent-life ethic. Without it, the nurturing, the charity, is a Band-Aid."

Thus Crossed called for more direct challenges to situations and activities that threaten life — including the political realm and through support for those who are called to civil disobedience.

Father Anthony Mugavero, pastor of Rochester's St. Bridget's Parish and a member of the analysis team that developed action steps to implement the synod goal, agreed with Crossed that the ethic involves more than charity.

"My fear is that it will be easier to do the service sense of it and not continue on into the area of public policy," Father Mugavero observed.

Before moving consistent-life-ethic activity into the arena of public policy, however, advocates must educate more Catholics about the ethic itself, the priest acknowledged.

"On the analysis team, we found there was very little understanding of the consistent-life ethic," Father Mugavero said. "Many people are single issue."

People often fail to see a connection among such issues as abortion, capital punishment and reforming the criminal-justice system, Father Mugavero explained. Helping people to see why those who oppose abortion need to be equally strong in opposing the death penalty is a process that may take the full five years covered by the pastoral plan, he said.

"The reality is that it takes an awful long time to come to the point of charity, of justice, of prophet-

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