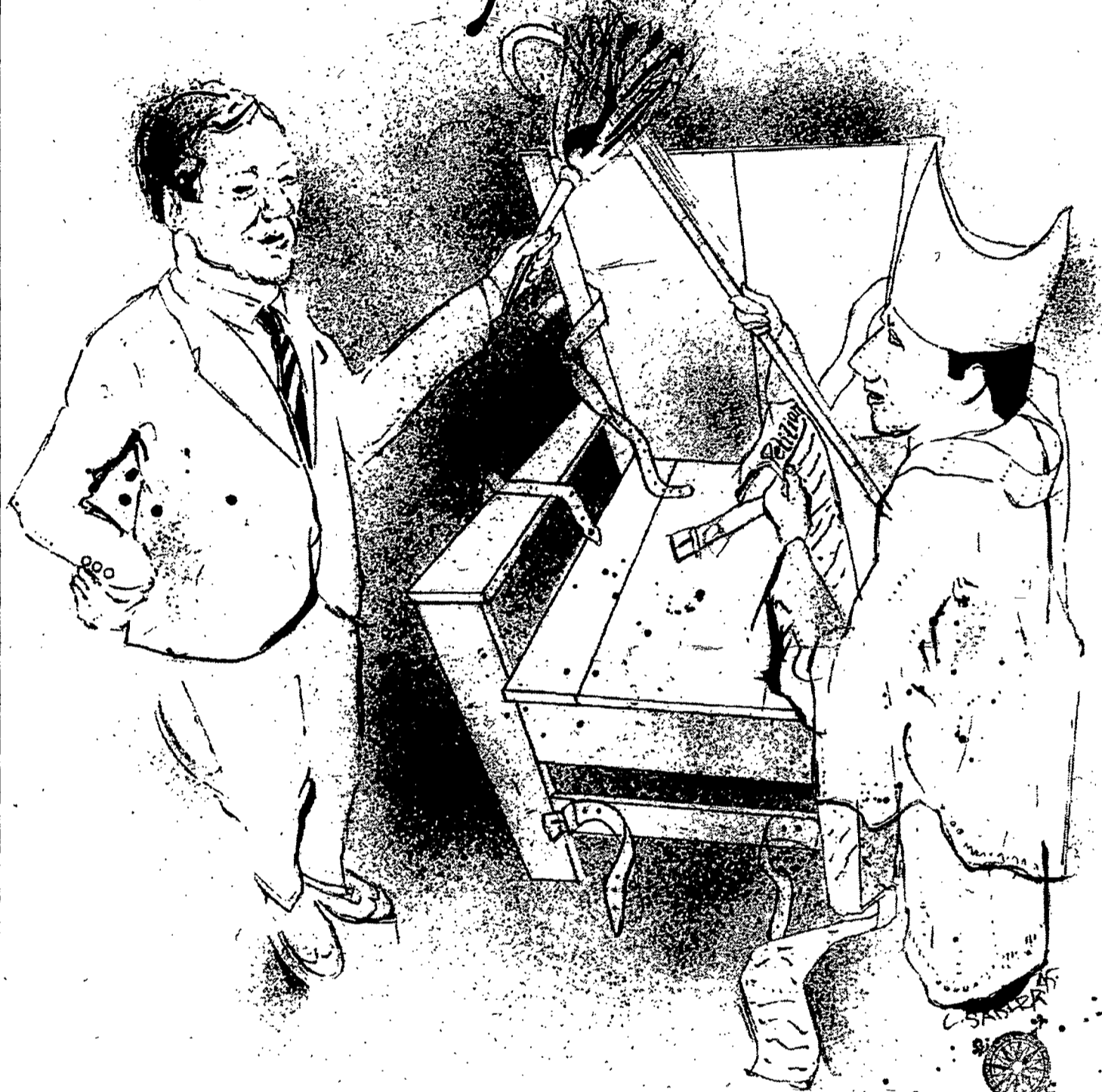


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Deadly Revival



Politicians dust off death penalty as means to control crime in N.Y.

By LEE STRONG, SENIOR STAFF WRITER

George Pataki, New York's newly elected governor, has made a point of declaring that he wants to restore the death penalty in New York state — a point he reiterated throughout his campaign and declared again in his State of the State address last week.

New York's Catholic bishops — as well as a broad coalition of religious, legal and civil rights groups — are making a point of opposing the return of capital punishment to the state after 20 years of vetoes of such legislation by Governors Mario Cuomo and Hugh Carey.

In the Rochester diocese, that opposition will be being expressed most clearly this weekend (Jan. 14-15) with a diocesan-wide petition campaign.

Parishes throughout the diocese have been sent packets containing statements by Bishop Matthew H. Clark; the bishops of New York state and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops opposing the death penalty; bulletin materials; sample homilies; and petitions, which are to be collected by the regional offices of Catholic Charities and sent on to the state capitol.

At the same time, a petition drive sponsored by the Catholic Family Center, the Rochester Area Coalition

Against the Death Penalty, the Greater Rochester Community of Churches and a number of other groups is taking place. Those petitions are to be collected at an interfaith church service scheduled for noon on Jan. 17 at the West Avenue United Methodist Church, 56 Chili Ave., Rochester.

Meanwhile, this same coalition sponsored a Jan. 8 forum at the First Unitarian Church in Rochester featuring an address by Ronald Tabak, a member of New York Lawyers Against the Death Penalty, and a panel consisting of death-penalty supporters and opponents.

On the state level, the New York State Catholic Conference is preparing packets of materials to be sent to the state's bishops for distribution in parishes; is reissuing the state bishops' Feb. 15, 1994, statement opposing the death penalty; and is sponsoring an interreligious prayer service on Jan. 24 at 6 p.m. at Albany's Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

In a Dec. 13, 1994, letter announcing the diocese's petition effort, Bishop Clark noted that, while the majority of people in New York state support reimposition of the death penalty, and the legislature appears ready to pass it, he wished "to call the people of our Diocese to a serious reflection on our Consistent Life Ethic priority and the many

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Church officials await particulars of Pataki's plans

In addition to the death penalty, the Diocese of Rochester and the New York State Catholic Conference are watching a number of other issues and initiatives raised by newly elected Gov. George Pataki during his campaign to unseat Mario Cuomo.

Father Michael Bausch, chairman of the diocesan Public Policy Committee, noted that Pataki appears to be open to discussion regarding a voucher system to help parents who send their children to private schools. "We will be taking a position on that," Father Bausch said.



Pataki

In addition, the diocese will be studying Pataki's proposals in terms of trimming welfare and other forms of assistance to the poor, Father Bausch reported.

Meanwhile, state Catholic officials are waiting for specific proposals before they begin taking positions, noted Kathleen Gallagher, associate director of the New York State Catholic Conference.

"It's going to affect not only the poor people who we are called to serve, but it's going to affect the hospitals, the day care centers, our institutions," Gallagher noted.

Among the areas on which conference officials will be keeping especially close watch are Pataki's policies regarding welfare, criminal justice, school voucher, and Medicaid, Gallagher indicated.

— Lee Strong

R. Mead Shumway was executed in Nebraska in 1909 for allegedly murdering his employer's wife. In 1910, the employer confessed that he — not Shumway — had committed the brutal act.