

Budget cuts threaten church services

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Lois A. Amendola, volunteer co-director of Bethany House of Hospitality, 169 St. Bridget's Drive, a Catholic Worker home for women and children, was a resident herself for six weeks back in 1991.

An ex-offender, Amendola moved to Rochester in an attempt to start a new life. She found no one willing to hire her because of her prison record, even though she possessed skills as both a legal and executive secretary.

Now, Amendola, who lives on public assistance in her own apartment, attends Monroe Community College and is on her way to a degree in human services. But she fears she may wind up right back at Bethany House due to proposed welfare cuts in the state budget.

Under Gov. George Pataki's proposed budget, employable single adults — such as Amendola — and couples without children would be limited to 90 days of home relief in any 12-month period.

Amendola, who receives \$394 of home relief monthly, also gets food stamps, and receives tuition assistance from the state.

Pataki and the Republican-controlled state Senate have already agreed on a budget, but the Democrat-controlled Assembly had not approved a fiscal plan as of April 3. The state is supposed to have a budget by the start of the fiscal year, April 1.

If the proposed cuts go through as they stand now — and many observers say they will — Amendola fears she won't be able to get a job and will have to go back to square one in her attempt to change her life. She claimed that she knew of many people who, like herself, long to get off welfare, contrary to public perceptions of welfare clients as free-loaders and layabouts.

"I can tell you there are a lot of people who are trying not to make (welfare) a generational thing," she asserted.

She added that a number of able-bodied people who use church-supported social services don't look to just live off the contributions of Catholics.

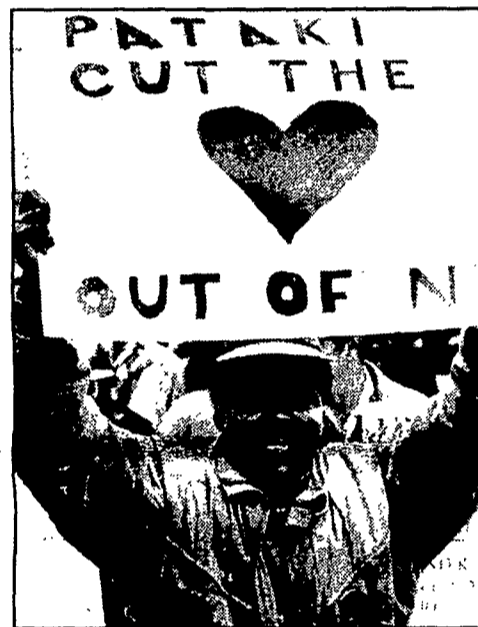
"I have many people that I'm in touch with who come through Bethany House," she said. "We used and took (the house) as a temporary measure."

Yet, Catholic social service workers fear that the church's shelters, food



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

About 200 demonstrators protested Gov. George Pataki's proposed budget cuts outside the Hyatt Regency Rochester when the governor spoke to the Rotary Club inside the downtown hotel on March 22.



Gov. George Pataki's proposed budget cuts for welfare spending include a time limit on how long able-bodied adults can receive public assistance.

banks, and emergency programs will become the first — rather than the last — source of refuge for people ineligible for state benefits at a time when the church is already stretched to its limits.

Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities, has been working with other diocesan employees on last-

minute political action to stem the proposed cuts, but is frustrated that politicians and the public seem to perceive social service clients in a negative light.

"The myth is that people are on welfare forever," Balinsky said. "The truth is less than one-half of the people are on welfare more than two years."

Along with Balinsky, Joseph L. Buttigieg, executive secretary of the New York State Catholic Conference, also expressed concern over the proposed cuts.

He noted, for example, that St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira and St. James Mercy Hospital in Hornell are looking at a combined loss of \$9 million in state Medicaid funding. The state's 40 Catholic hospitals will suffer a combined loss of \$148 million under the proposed budget, he added, noting that Catholic hospitals suffer worse than secular institutions because church facilities cater to the poor.

"There's no way our facilities can sustain that kind of hit," he said.

Both Balinsky and Buttigieg urged Catholics throughout the state to write letters or make phone calls to their state representatives in an effort to restore at least some of the proposed cuts (please see add on page 7 for one effort).

"We really do need the support of the people in the parishes," Buttigieg concluded.

Chrism Mass scheduled for April 11 at cathedral

ROCHESTER — The annual Chrism Mass has been scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 11, at Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park.

The liturgy will feature Bishop Matthew H. Clark blessing the oils that are used throughout the year in the church's sacramental rites. Those oils are the Oil of Catechumens, the Oil of the Sick and the Sacred Chrism. Following the Mass, the oils will be distributed to parishes throughout the diocese.

All diocesan Catholics are invited to attend this Mass. A reception will follow.

Schlafly, 'Roe' attorney to debate sex and politics

Phyllis Schlafly, an outspoken abortion foe, and attorney Sarah Weddington, winner of the *Roe vs. Wade* case — which effectively legalized abortion in the United States — are slated to debate "Sex and Politics in the 1990s" on Wednesday, April 12, at 7 p.m. in the Rochester Institute of Technology's Clark Gymnasium, 51 Lomb Memorial Drive.

The debate, presented by RIT's student government and sponsored by the Frank Horton Distinguished Speaker Series, will cover such topics as abortion, the "glass ceiling" in the workplace, sexual harassment and welfare reform.

Tickets, for \$6, are on sale at the Candy Counter in the Student Alumni Union. For information, call 716/475-6991.

Diocese offers tuition aid for summer courses

The Diocese of Rochester is offering tuition assistance for individuals who are preparing for ministry in the diocese and have financial need, or for individuals wishing to take individual courses to enhance their ministries.

The deadline to apply for assistance for summer courses April 15.

For information, call 716/328-3228, ext. 255, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 255.

Coalition begins domestic partnership petition drive

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

A coalition of more than 30 churches and groups — including the St. Thomas More Lawyers Guild and Rochester chapter of Catholics United for the Faith — have launched a petition drive aimed at overturning Rochester's controversial domestic-partnership laws.

The goal is to obtain 5,400 signatures from registered city voters asking that the Rochester City Council amend the City Charter to rescind two laws the council passed last year. One law allows unmarried heterosexual and homosexual couples who live together to register with the city as domestic partners. The second law extends health and employment benefits to the registered domestic partners of city employees.

If the City Council fails to rescind the laws, the group then plans to collect an additional 2,700 signatures to put the issue on the ballot for the voters to decide next November.

At a March 25 press conference and rally at Bethel Full Gospel Church, 321 East Ave., organizers of the group —

called the Coalition for Families — said their chief concern is the family.

"This is not about sexual preference," noted coalition member William P. Polito, a former county legislator from Webster. "This is about families, about community, about children."

Moreover, taxpayers should not be asked to pay for lifestyles they may not support, observed County Legislator George Wiedemer, (R-Penfield).

"It not only is a moral issue, it's a financial issue," Wiedemer declared.

Currently, about 40 city employees have signed the registry to declare their domestic partnerships, Wiedemer reported. The city pays approximately \$5,500 in benefits per month for those employees' partners — at a time when the city faces financial problems, he said.

The coalition is using a section of the state's Municipal Home Rule Law in its efforts to amend the Charter of the City of Rochester. In order to get the council to consider the change, organizers need to get at least 10 percent of the total number of valid votes cast in the City of Rochester for governor in the 1994 election. Individuals signing the petitions

must be city residents who were registered to vote at the time of the November election.

The coalition plans to submit the petitions to City Council July 1, Wiedemer explained. Under the law, the council will have 60 days to act. If it fails to act by Sept. 1, then the group will move to secure 2,700 more signatures and have the issue put on the November ballot.

"We are following a form that other cities have tried and have been successful at in overturning domestic-partner ordinances," Wiedemer noted.

The coalition is targeting churches during the month of April. They plan to go door to door in May.

Polito said he is hoping to get some Catholic churches involved in the petition drive. In addition, the Finger Lakes Regional Council of the Knights of Columbus — of which he is a member — is scheduled to discuss the effort at its April 22, he reported.

Meanwhile, Polito contacted Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities, who gave the group permission to contact Catholic parishes.

In a written statement to the *Catholic*

Courier on March 31, Balinsky pointed out that the diocese had opposed the domestic-partnership laws when they were approved by City Council April 12, 1994. At the time, the diocese felt there was a need for more information about fiscal implications of the laws, and more time for public debate.

As to the city's laws, Balinsky observed, "We continue to uphold the ideal of marriage as the best institution for providing a supportive, nurturing environment for the growth and happiness of both children and adults."

At the same time, Balinsky continued, the diocese is keeping in mind "respect for the rights of individuals (for example, the right to health care) who choose of find themselves living in other forms of 'families' which can also enhance human life."

As for the coalition, Balinsky said, "We are not a member of the coalition, but do think this is a positive opportunity for community discussion."

EDITORS' NOTE: For information about the Coalition for Families and the petition drive, call 716/234-1960.

