

DIOCESAN NEWS

Alliance draws diocesan attention

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Father John Mulligan, vicar general of the Diocese of Rochester, has issued a letter to diocesan parishes and parish administrators about the Catholic Alliance, a new division of the Christian Coalition intended to appeal to Catholics.

The letter, dated Jan. 18, notes that "some parish leaders have received communications from the Catholic Alliance which claims to represent the Catholic Community before both federal and state legislative and other government bodies. Please be aware that they represent Catholics very selectively."

Along with the letter, Father Mulligan sent a copy of remarks about the alliance made by Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany during an executive session of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops at its November meeting.

Among the concerns voiced by Bishop Hubbard are the use of the title "Catholic" by an organization with no ties to the Catholic Church; possible confusion among legislators and lay people that may be caused by the use of that title; and that while the church and the Catholic Alliance agree on some issues, such as abortion, alliance positions on such issues as welfare reform and the death penalty oppose stated Catholic positions.

According to Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities, Father Mulligan's letter and the copy of Bishop Hubbard's remarks were issued after diocesan officials discussed how best to respond to the Catholic Alliance.

Although the alliance did not appear to be very active in the diocese at this point, Balinsky said, diocesan officials felt it was important to alert parishes about the new organization, especially in light of the 1996 elections.

"We will over the next several months be trying to encourage Catholics to take political responsibility," Balinsky said.

As for differences with the alliance, Balinsky noted, for example, that the diocesan Public Policy Committee had been working hard "to encourage a consistent life ethic," but the Christian Coalition and the Catholic Alliance "are not in tune with the consistent life ethic."

Father Mulligan's letter follows a Jan. 9 joint statement by Colorado's bishops about the alliance, and similar concerns raised at that time by Bishop Thomas J. O'Brien of the Diocese of Phoenix.

At the same time, however, Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., criticized the public release of Bishop Hubbard's statement. Bishop McHugh, who has met with alliance officials, described the organization as presenting an opportunity for Catholic/evangelical dialogue on public policy issues.

And Father Richard Neuhaus, in February's "First Things" magazine, wrote an editorial that critiques Bishop Hubbard's comments and praises Bishop McHugh's call for dialogue.

In the midst of these disagreements, Bishop Anthony M. Pilla of Cleveland,

president of the NCCB, met with Ralph Reed Jr., executive director of the Christian Coalition, and Maureen Roselli, director of the Catholic Alliance, Jan. 17 at NCCB's Washington headquarters.

A call to the NCCB about the meeting was referred to Catholic News Service. Jim Lackey, general news editor of CNS, told the *Courier* that details of what was discussed have not been released, noting that according to his knowledge, "Both sides agreed not to talk about it."

Roselli, meanwhile, told the *Courier*, "We don't have any comment about the meeting. It was a private meeting."

But she did say that there have been misunderstandings about the alliance.

Roselli noted, for example, that Bishop Hubbard specifically cited the death penalty as an area of disagreement. But, she stated, the organization has "no official position on the death penalty."

The alliance, Roselli said, is simply an public policy organization of lay Catholic Americans coming together around a "pro-life, pro-family agenda." The title "Catholic" is intended to reflect the organization's Catholic makeup, not to mislead people.

"We do not pretend to speak for the

church," Roselli cautioned. "There are 60 million Catholics. We don't pretend the Catholic Alliance will appeal to all Catholics."

Still, the organization is seeking to draw more Catholics to the Christian Coalition, Roselli said, estimating that the coalition currently has some 250,000 Catholic members.

Despite such assurances, John Kerry, executive director of the New York State Catholic Conference, said he attended the alliance's inaugural meeting Dec. 9 in Boston and came away with concerns.

He described the meeting as "very much like a political rally. It had the trappings of a highly politicized event."

The bishops prefer to address public policy issues, not specific candidates, Kerry explained, and "not so much in the partisan political approach as the gathering in Boston."

Moreover, Kerry said, "My concern regarding the Catholic Alliance is that they are creating the perception that they are speaking for the Catholic community," and, he said, that legitimate state and national Catholic conferences' activities "will be obscured by the activity of the Catholic Alliance."

St. Mary Leon, SSJ, 78; 51 years teaching career

ROCHESTER — Sister Mary Leon, SSJ, who taught in diocesan Catholic schools for 51 years, died Dec. 13, 1995, at the Our Mother of Mercy convent. She was 78.

Sister Mary Leon entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1944, and was assigned to St. Mary's School in Rochester, N.Y., in 1950, and served a number of years from Nazareth School in Rochester, N.Y., and St. Mary's School in Rochester, N.Y.

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Bishop Clark selected for NCCB committee

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has been elected by the New York state bishops to a three-year term representing them on the administrative committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The committee carries on the work of the conference between plenary assemblies. It meets three times a year, and prepares the agendas for conference assemblies. Committee members are also responsible for reviewing actions taken by the NCCB executive committee and moderating the work of the conference's general secretariat.

St. Bernard's kicks off fund-raising campaign

ROCHESTER — St. Bernard's Institute kicked off its annual fund-raising campaign Jan. 20, hoping to raise \$100,000 to help the school offer its Catholic theology and ministry training programs.

The institute currently enrolls 125 students in its graduate programs and 150 students in its ministry certification programs. St. Bernard's also offers continuing education sessions and provides lectures for the general public.

The St. Bernard's "On the Road" program takes faculty members to parishes throughout the diocese to speak on current church issues.

For more information about SBI, call 716/271-3657.

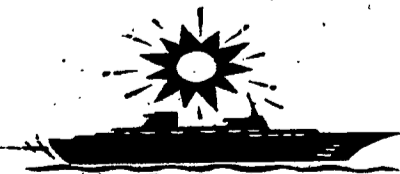


S. John Wilkin/Staff Photographer

Celebrating care

Sister Kathryn Sullivan (right), a resident at the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Infirmary, greets a friend at the 35th anniversary celebration at the infirmary Jan. 21. Festivities included an open house, walking tours, and a liturgy in the Chapel. The 80-bed residence has been home to more than 300 Sisters of St. Joseph since it opened in 1961.

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