

DIOCESAN NEWS

Planned execution site draws ire of protesters

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Death-penalty opponents in the Diocese of Rochester have intensified their efforts following last month's announcement of a planned execution facility in Chemung County near Elmira.

The building would be constructed at the Southport Correctional Facility, which currently serves as a maximum-security prison. The state Department of Correctional Services plans to complete construction of the new unit by September.

"Violence just seems to be so rampant; it seems to be a solution for everything. This is an example of institutionalized violence," said Kathleen Dubel, justice-and-peace coordinator for Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

The most recent legal execution in New York state took place in 1963. However, a new death-penalty law was passed last year under first-year Gov. George Pataki. Southport would serve as the first execution site in the state under that law.

St. Mary's Church in Elmira is located less than a mile from the Southport prison. Father William Donnelly, parish pastor, said he "feels very badly that the executions will take place in this parish."

Father Donnelly said he's attempting to have the movie "Dead Man Walking" brought to the Elmira area. The film, starring Sean Penn and Susan Sarandon, features a man awaiting execution by lethal injection — the same method

planned for the Southport prison.

"We're hoping, as a parish, to sponsor forums and discussions," Father Donnelly said.

Meanwhile, Dubel is part of a 12-member group, known as Twin Tiers Community Against the Death Penalty, which held its first meeting this month.

Dubel said the current outcry is the latest development in a movement that began when Pataki — who promised in his 1994 campaign to reinstate the death penalty — took office. Several Southern Tier activists, Dubel noted, now wear buttons asking, "Why do we kill people who kill people to say killing is wrong?"

"It's kind of pitiful that people look at this from an economic viewpoint, saying this will create more jobs. Or they say, 'Well, they have to build it somewhere,'" Dubel commented. "It's depressing."

Opposition to the Southport facility extends beyond the Southern Tier. In Monroe County, a newly formed activist group, Reconciliation Network — Don't Kill In Our Names, is also planning protests. The group is coordinated by Clare Regan, a parishioner at Rochester's Corpus Christi Church, and Suzanne Schnittman, diocesan Consistent Life Ethic coordinator.

Regan said the public is invited to participate in an anti-death penalty demonstration March 1 at the Liberty Pole in downtown Rochester. The group plans to demonstrate monthly at the Liberty Pole.

In addition, Regan said she will continue denouncing the death penalty through



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
N-E-R-V-O-U-S — Caroline Whelan (right) from St. Louis School in Pittsford anxiously awaits as Kelly Garvin from Seton School in Brighton spells her word during the Invitational Spelling Bee Feb. 5. The annual Catholic Schools Week event involved 26 schools and was sponsored by Rochester's St. Boniface School. Sarah Providence of Fairport's St. John of Rochester School was the overall winner.

seminars and the social-justice newsletter she publishes, "Justicia."

Regan emphasized that it's not too late for protest groups to make a difference. Even though the state law is already in effect, she explained, the first legal execution would still be several years away because of the lengthy process involved in execution cases.

Dubel expressed similar hope that the executions will never take place in Southport — or anywhere else in the state, for that matter.

"This is horrible to have this facility in Chemung County. But we also look at how we can work to repeal the death

penalty," Dubel said.

However, Father Donnelly pointed out that not all state residents — even Catholics from Chemung County — are fighting the state's plans for the Southport unit.

"I wouldn't be so rash as to say everybody is in opposition to the death penalty," Father Donnelly remarked. "We had several people in our parish sign a petition against the death penalty, but not everybody signed it."

EDITORS' NOTE: Anyone interested in joining Twin Tiers Community Against the Death Penalty should contact Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier at 607/734-9784.

Plan draws wide range of reactions from parishes, pastors

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Brockport's Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish welcomes the diocese's plan for financing Monroe County Catholic schools. It means the parish will have more funds, which could be used to hire a part-time youth minister.

But for St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Mendon, the new parish school subsidy rates outlined in the plan mean a decrease in overall funding for other parish ministries — and the shelving of any plans to hire a youth minister.

Such is the mixed effect of "Lighting New Fires: A Monroe County Catholic School Response to the Synod," released Jan. 29 by the diocesan Department of Schools.

The plan called for tuition revenue and other income to cover 70 percent of the total cost of operating each diocesan school in Monroe County by 2000.

Pastors, principals and parents heartily welcomed the plan's call for more parental involvement and governance of schools, but all expressed concern over tuition rate increases slated for next year.

Indeed, school officials noted that Catholic school systems throughout the nation are moving toward a financial system buoyed less and less by parishes and more and more by parents and school supporters.

In practical terms, according to school officials, the call for more money from parents and school supporters means tuition increases of 3 percent and higher, even into double digits, for the county's Catholic schools next year.

At St. Helen's in Gates, for example, tuition will increase for one child from a parish-sponsored Catholic family from \$1,660 to \$1,800 next year, according to Carol Robinson, principal.

Josephina Levine, whose four children attend St. Helen's, wondered if the plan's

call for increased parental support of Catholic education meant the church was abandoning Catholic education as a priority.

"I feel (Catholic education) is just a commodity," she said. "I feel like we're paying for the services, rather than being part of the outreach of the church."

One pastor shared Levine's concerns about the rising cost of tuition.

"We're very concerned that we're going to be priced out of existence," said Father Michael F. Conboy, pastor of St. Joseph Church in Penfield, which is home to a school for pre-kindergarten to sixth-grade classes.

But school officials stressed that financial aid would continue to be available to parents who struggle to send their children to Catholic schools.

"While tuition increases are inevitable, increasing amounts of financial aid are available for a greater number of families," said Sister Carolyn Knipper, RSM, principal of Holy Cross School in Rochester.

The plan also called for Monroe County parishes with revenues of \$60,000 or more to support the school system, beginning in July 1996, according to the following formula:

- Parishes with schools on site will contribute 35 percent of the average of their ordinary parish income for the previous three years.

- Parishes that formerly had a school will contribute 25 percent of that same average.

- Parishes that never had a school will contribute 15 percent of their income.

A parish payment to the school system may increase by no more than 10 percent of the previous year's payment, and decrease by no less than 5 percent, according to Fred W. Seiler, assistant superintendent for business and finance in the diocesan schools office.

Seiler added that roughly half the

parishes in Monroe County will experience an increase in their school subsidy, whereas the other half would experience a decrease.

For example, Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Rochester, which formerly had a school, will watch its subsidy rate increase from \$12,000 to a little more than \$13,000 next year, according to Father Neil Miller, pastor.

Meanwhile, Christ the King Parish in Irondequoit, which is home to a school for pre-kindergarten to sixth grade, will enjoy a \$4,000-5,000 decrease in its school support payment next year, according to Father Robert B. Hale, CSB, pastor.

For parishes like Christ the King with schools on site that have footed the bulk of the Catholic school system's bills, the new payment set-up came as welcome relief from the high cost of the schools.

Father Roy Kiggins, pastor of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Brockport, estimated his parish has shelled out between 41 and 42 percent of its Sunday collections to help pay for its Catholic school. He said BVM would pay about \$6,000 less next year than it paid this year.

Now, in addition to being able to hire a part-time youth minister, BVM may also be able to consider hiring a pastoral associate and to expand its ministry to the region's Spanish-speaking population, he explained.

"That, of course, is contingent on the fact that the collections stay the same," he said with a laugh.

On the other hand, Father Charles Latus, pastor of St. Catherine of Siena in Mendon — which has never had a school — noted his parish's school support payments will increase from \$27,534 to \$30,287.

"It's an increase we will handle, though obviously it's of significant concern to us," he said.

He added that 550 children at St. Catherine's attend religious education classes whereas only 14 attend Catholic schools. Yet, he noted that the school subsidy increase will preclude the parish's hiring of any more religious education staff.

Father Latus did welcome the fact that the new school subsidy set-up is based on what parishes bring in rather than on what the schools request from parishes.

"It makes the schools have to live within the parish budgets rather than the other way around," Father Latus said.

Parishes in southeastern Monroe County have been moving toward a formalized revenue-sharing system for several years now, according to Father Frank E. Lioi, pastor of St. Anne's in Rochester, which used to have a school.

Father Lioi said that southeastern parishes with schools have been paying a school subsidy rate of 35 percent; parishes that formerly had schools, a 19 percent rate; and parishes that have never had schools, a 9 percent rate to support the region's schools. Hence, he noted that southeastern parishes are better prepared to handle the new rate set-up enclosed in the schools plan.

"We kind of faced the facts a few years ago," he said.

One pastor of a parish without a school will, ironically, enjoy a decrease in his school subsidy payment to the Monroe County system.

Father William J. Amann, pastor of Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hamlin, noted that up to 19 percent of the parish's revenue has gone to support parish children attending Catholic schools in the northwestern region of the county, which includes Hamlin. He welcomed the new revenue-sharing system contained in "Lighting New Fires."

"I think expenses should be borne equitably, and this is the way to do it," Father Amann said.