

DIOCESAN NEWS

Catholic leaders, doctors bemoan court ruling

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Catholic opponents of physician-assisted suicide reacted with outrage and concern at the April 1 decision of a federal appeals court in New York City that effectively legalized the practice.

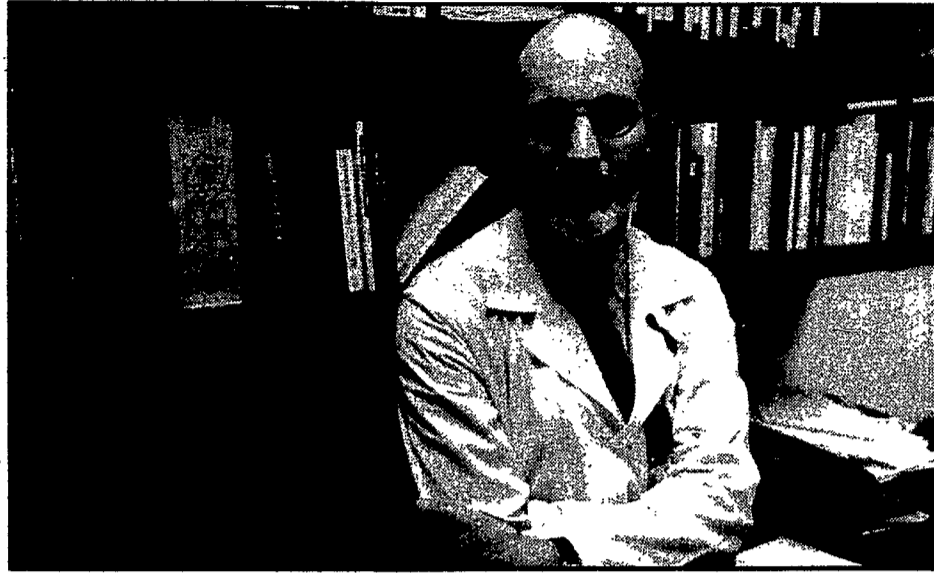
In an April 2 statement, Bishop Matthew H. Clark called the decision "sobering" and "tragic," and saw it as part of a broader attack on life permitted by a nation that has also legalized abortion and the death penalty.

"Our Catholic faith teaches us there is dignity in all life," the bishop wrote. "We are not in a position to determine which life should be continued and which should be ended. The Consistent Life Ethic that undergirds our faith upholds the sacredness of all life and sees euthanasia and assisted suicide as serious threats to that life."

Gail Quinn, director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' secretariat, said the ruling by the court shows that "the courts are developing a bias against life," according to *Catholic News Service*.

In its opinion, the New York City-based 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said New York state laws prohibiting assisted suicide violated the Constitution by failing to treat people equally, CNS said. The decision came one month after a ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based in San Francisco, which said there was a constitutionally protected "right to die."

To refuse to let dying patients end their lives with medication, while permitting patients on life-support systems to be disconnected at their request, would be discriminatory, the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Dr. Timothy Quill of Rochester led a group of physicians and patients who successfully sued to have New York state's ban on assisted suicide overturned.

said.

But Bishop Clark pointed out that the court's decision "places doctors in an untenable position. Pledged to preserve life, doctors will now be faced with demands to end life.

"Once again," the bishop concluded, "the community allows others, this time in the role of doctor, to kill in our name."

The decision came in response to a suit to overturn New York's ban on physician-assisted suicide brought by a Rochester physician, Dr. Timothy Quill, on behalf of a group of doctors and patients. Quill became nationally known in 1991 when he publicly admitted that he had given a patient with leukemia the drugs she later used to kill herself. A Monroe County grand jury later refused to indict him on

any charges related to the incident.

Quill — along with other physician-assisted suicide advocates — has been criticized in the past by members of the Catholic Physicians Guild, an organization of Catholic doctors in the diocese dedicated to promoting and living out the church's teachings on health care.

The guild issued a statement April 5 that, like Bishop Clark's, criticized the recent court decision, adding that the poor, the homeless and the elderly could be placed in grave danger since they have the least power to resist health-care professionals empowered to kill them.

"In an environment of managed care with increasing pressure to decrease the amount of money allocated to health care, it is not hard to think that (physician-as-

sisted suicide) would be encouraged in order to save money or to transfer funds to treat those who are not in danger of death," the statement read. "This is a situation where the most vulnerable would be at greatest risk."

The guild's statement also called for physicians, health-care professionals and the public to review advances made in caring for the terminally ill.

"Leading cancer treatment centers are utilizing many different and successful approaches to control the pain associated with advanced cancer and other diseases," the statement read. "This approach has enabled terminally ill patients to be comfortable and at peace so that they die with dignity and self-respect.

"We recognize that some types of treatment done (for terminally ill patients), especially when related to relieving pain, shortens the lives of some patients," the guild statement also said. "There is, however, a great difference between administering medicines for pain relief and purposefully giving a lethal dose of a drug to someone who is dying. Intentionally ending the life of a patient is crossing a line that physicians and all others involved in health care should never attempt to do."

On the state and national level, Catholics opposed to physician-assisted suicide also severely criticized the circuit court's momentous decision.

John E. Curley, Jr., president of the St. Louis-based Catholic Health Association of the United States, said the decision placed the wrong kind of power in the hands of physicians.

"Legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia will only undermine the way dying persons are cared for by weakening the bonds of community with them," Curley wrote in a statement issued last week. "Moreover, such proposals put at risk everyone whose age, medical condition and social and financial status makes them vulnerable."

Yet, like the diocesan physicians guild, Curley acknowledged that physician-assisted suicide advocates play to an audience whose concern about end-of-life issues is legitimate.

"(W)hile we abhor proposals to kill the dying, we realize that we must listen more attentively to those who raise their voices in fear at the prospect of facing death," Curley wrote. "In doing so, we reflect on the recent (*Journal of the American Medical Association*) report on the 'Study to Understand Prognoses and Preferences for Outcomes and Risks of Treatment,' which found that persons experiencing life-threatening illness are often over-treated and experience unrelieved pain while physicians persist in ignoring stated patient references about medical interventions."

In a statement issued on behalf of New York state's bishops, Cardinal John O'Connor, archbishop of the Archdiocese of New York, applauded New York State Attorney General Dennis C. Vacco's stated commitment to appeal the decision in the U.S. Supreme Court.

"We pray for a reversal of this decision at the earliest possible instance," the cardinal wrote.

Obituaries

Fr. Brice T. Ryan, OSB, 64; monk, professor

Father Brice T. Ryan, OSB, a priest-monk of St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pa., and a Dansville native, died of cancer March 19, 1996. He was 64.

Father Brice attended St. Mary's Grade School in Dansville and Dansville Central High School. He was a graduate of Wilcox High School in Elk County, Pa.

He earned several degrees from various colleges: a bachelor of arts in philosophy, a diploma in French studies and a bachelor of arts degree and licentiate in canon law. He studied in Canada and in France, earning a master of arts degree in French language and literature from Laval University in Quebec.

Father Brice entered the Benedictine monastery of St. Vincent's in 1951, and was ordained a priest in May 1958. His early monastic career was spent as a master of ceremonies for St. Vincent's and as a prefect and teacher at St. Vincent Preparatory School where he taught reli-

gion, Latin, English and forensics.

He later served as chaplain to the students, and was a professor of French, Latin and religious studies. He also served as chairman of the foreign languages department for 20 years.

Most recently Father Brice was a professor of canon law at St. Vincent Seminary; director of liturgy at the archabbey; weekend assistant at St. Victor Parish in Bairdford; and diocesan judge and defender of the bond for the Diocese of Greensburg Marriage Tribunal.

Father Brice belonged to the Canon Law Society of America, Modern Language Association, American Association of Teachers of French, and the American Benedictine Academy.

He is survived by his sister, Alice (John) Stout of Rochester, and four nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his parents, William and Bertha Ryan.

A funeral Mass took place March 22 in

the archabbey basilica. Interment was in the Benedictine Community Cemetery, Unity Township, Westmoreland County, Pa.

A memorial service for Father Brice is scheduled at Our Mother of Sorrows Church, 5000 Mt. Read Blvd., for 11 a.m. April 20.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Health and Welfare Fund of St. Vincent Archabbey, Latrobe, Pa. 15650.

Fr. John Mayer, 74; served in missions; April 13 service set

A memorial service for Father John Fisher Mayer, OFM, has been scheduled for 10 a.m. April 13 at St. Andrew's Church, 923 Portland Ave.

A Rochester native, Father Mayer died March 28, 1996, at age 74 in Quirinopolis, Brazil.

Father Mayer was born Dec. 21, 1921, to Lawrence V. and Anna C. Mayer. He attended Corpus Christi School, then St. Andrew's Seminary. In 1951 he entered the Franciscan order, and was ordained a priest June 12, 1948, in Washington, D.C. He celebrated his first solemn high Mass June 20, 1948, in Corpus Christi Church. In the fall of that year, he began working in the Brazil missions, remaining there until his death.

Father Mayer was predeceased by his parents, his sister, Antoinette, and three brothers, Lawrence, Robert and Edward. He is survived by three sisters, Marie Mayer, Anna C. Ritz and Sr. Marie Lawrence, SSJ; one brother, Robert, and his wife, Lois; and two other sisters-in-law, Betty and Lottie.

Sister Marie Celine Doherty, SSJ, 88

Sister Marie Celine Doherty, SSJ, a supervisor at St. Joseph's Villa of Rochester, an agency serving children, adolescents and their families, died at St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary on March 17, 1996. She was 88.

Born in Rochester, Sister Marie Celine entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1927 from St. Patrick's Girls' Home, an orphanage, and continued to serve the orphanage as a child supervisor from 1933 to 1942. When that institution became part of St. Joseph's Villa in 1942, Sister Marie Celine continued to work with the girls at St. Joseph's Villa until January of this year, when she moved to St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary because of illness.

In a statement from her order, Sister Marie Celine's life was described as one of service.

"Her girls knew they were loved and they recognized her goodness and the valuable lessons she taught them," the statement said. "Women have called and written to her as she was a confidant, friend and mother to hundreds of young women."

Sister Marie Celine is survived by a niece, two nephews, and grandnieces and grandnephews, as well as her fellow Sisters of St. Joseph.

A funeral Mass was celebrated March 21 in the Motherhouse Chapel, 4095 East Ave. Interment took place at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

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