

CONTINUED...

Lambs

Continued from page 1

do is what Jesus Christ did," he said, asserting that Jesus would continue to break the law today. "There is no question. He would not compromise."

The priest said arrests do not occur at all Lambs' protests and that even when the risk of arrest is present, individual protesters can opt to avoid it.

"Those of us who are at the killing center can choose to remain on the sidewalk and not risk arrest," he said. Or they can sit in front of the door, as some do while singing Christian songs, and risk arrest, he said.

If police make arrests, he said, "They'll take us in a limp condition because we go into the fetal position, because we're becoming unborn children in order to raise the social consciousness of the people across the country as to the utter helplessness of the baby."

"Our consciences are very clear," he explained. "We have no problem at all with trying to stop the killing of the baby — Jesus Christ's baby. It's not the mother's or the father's baby. It's Jesus Christ's baby. Jesus Christ has created every human baby in existence that ever was or ever will be."

Father Weslin joined Bishop Moynihan — along with Auburn's Father Albert Shamon — in leading the procession at the bishop's first Syracuse march Dec. 8. He joined some 40 priests and about 1,200 others for the bishop's second peaceful march May 10.

Yet when asked about his association with Father Weslin, Bishop Moynihan remarked: "I welcome anybody's participation, but they participate with us. It's our march."

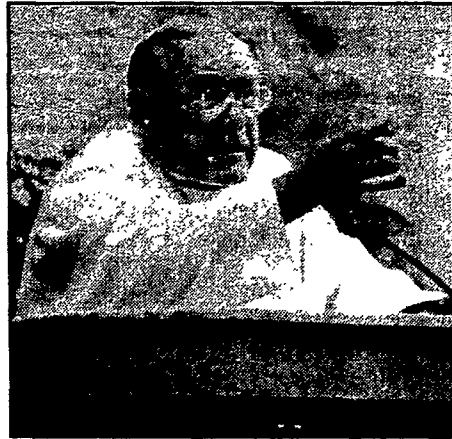
The bishop also expressed some reservations about Father Weslin's methods.

"I don't agree with his tactics, with any kind of civil disobedience," observed Bishop Moynihan, who was pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Penfield from 1976 to 1991.

Father Shamon, who first invited Father Weslin into the Rochester diocese to speak last spring, described the priest's talk to parishioners at St. Isaac Jogues Chapel in Fleming as "wonderful." But since reading some articles about the Lambs' activity, Father Shamon does not plan on any further contact with the organization's founder.

"I don't know how to say this," Father Shamon said. "I always just believe in prayer and keeping the law. I think he likes to get arrested."

Although he's been arrested elsewhere in New York, such as Dobbs Ferry in 1994, Father Weslin has not been arrested for



Matthew Scott/Staff Photographer
Father Weslin speaks at St. Jude's Church Sept. 12.

almost weekly protests outside Planned Parenthood Center of Syracuse. But the center's executive director, Jeff Gilbert, said the priest employs a "very confrontational style, a very inflamed rhetoric, much of which is untrue."

"He walks up and down often chanting very loud, 'Babies killed here, cheap,'" Gilbert said.

Despite their sharp rhetoric and other high-profile tactics, the Lambs are unfamiliar to many people.

In Rochester, for example, diocesan Consistent Life Ethic Coordinator Suzanne Schnittman acknowledged she did not know much about Father Weslin or the Lambs.

"My limited experience leads me to believe it is a group that feels so passionately about abortion, they feel they must do civil disobedience," Schnittman said. "We all feel called to respond to what we feel are extreme crises. Everyone acts according to their own conscience."

Meanwhile, Helen Alvare of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities said she didn't know anything about the Lambs. She suggested that anyone considering affiliating with any such group interview its leader directly, review its position papers and "look to see whether the bishops evaluated them or if they'd interacted with any bishop or chancery."

Since most average Catholics cannot readily poll bishops about their experiences with Father Weslin and the Lambs of Christ, the *Catholic Courier* surveyed other dioceses. Bishops' evaluations varied significantly.

Bishop James S. Sullivan of the Diocese of Fargo, N.D., wrote a full-page message in support of the group in the August 1991 edition of his diocesan newspaper *The New Earth*.

"The Lambs of Christ imprisoned for attempting to rescue our unborn brothers and sisters from the Fargo Women's Health Organization are showing all of us

that we must have the courage of our convictions," Bishop Sullivan stated. He added that the Lambs demonstrate zeal and "contemporary apostolic witness."

The episcopal reaction to the Lambs' January 1991 protest outside the Mahoning Women's Center in Youngstown, Ohio, was much cooler, however.

An article in the Jan. 4, 1991, issue of the *Catholic Exponent*, quoted then-Bishop James W. Malone as saying "the alleged physical and verbal abuse from both sides in confrontation at the clinic is unacceptable."

And in Colorado Springs, where Father Weslin transformed his house into a home he claims has served 224 unwed mothers, a spokeswoman for Bishop Richard C. Hanifen told the *Catholic Courier* that the priest was "not in good standing" and does not have faculties — permission to perform priestly ministries — in the diocese. The spokeswoman declined to offer any explanation for the bishop's position.

Meanwhile, Catholic Community Services of the Colorado Springs Diocese declines to refer pregnant women to the home, according to the office's executive director, Gail Dusing. When asked why, Dusing would only state for the record, "We have concerns about the home."

On the other hand, Bishop Austin B. Vaughan, auxiliary bishop of the New York archdiocese and a well-known pro-life activist, has given Father Weslin his blessings. And as his spiritual director, the bishop has, as Father Weslin has stated, advised the priest to "revivify the Lambs" with rallies around the country.

"He's a good man, completely dedicated to the pro-life cause," Bishop Vaughan said in a telephone interview from New York. The bishop noted, however, that he had urged the priest to continue his work in general, not specifically in Rochester.

"I'm not looking for him to pick fights with the locals' ordinary," Bishop Vaughan said. Asserting that Bishop Matthew H. Clark "isn't regarded as a leader in the pro-life movement," the auxiliary bishop said he thought it might be unwise for Father Weslin to focus his efforts here.

"But I really don't know the situation," Bishop Vaughan added.

Father Weslin did not seek Bishop Clark's blessings on his undertakings in this diocese. But the priest said he rarely asks any bishop for faculties, as would be typical for a priest planning to visit another diocese for an extended period.

"I never implicate a bishop," he explained. "Regardless of what the bishop's inclinations or leanings or teachings are, I never implicate him in any way. The bishops never tell me what to do, and I ask them not to."

Father Weslin also stressed that his local processions will be nonviolent and will not involve the risk of arrest.

"If they follow me," he said of pro-lifers in general, "they won't become violent because I ask everyone who comes with us, if there's anyone here inclined toward violence, please do not come with us ... I don't even believe in capital punishment."

In an effort to avoid any connection to violent acts, Father Weslin said the Lambs even went into a "dormant state" for two years following the killings of five people with connections to abortion clinics in 1993 and late 1994.

"I don't associate with murderers. I try to stop the killing," he said.

Even his detractors admit that fact.

"In no public way has (Father Weslin) ever been identified with people who advocate murder," acknowledged Ann Baker, a Catholic who runs the National Center for the Pro-Choice Majority in Hightstown, N.J.

Yet Baker challenged the priest's claim of nonviolence. "His harm is not lethal," she said. "It's a form of harassment and intimidation. ... Harassment and intimidation are not nonviolent."

Baker referred specifically to the case of Dr. Susan Wicklund, which was presented in a February 1992 "60 Minutes" broadcast and in other media. During the broadcast, Wicklund said she had come to fear the Lambs in late 1991 when they began gathering outside her home in Cambridge, Minn., and following her to work at an abortion clinic in Fargo.

Father Weslin acknowledged to the *Courier* that Lambs did follow Wicklund. But despite accusations to the contrary, he said, they did not block her driveway. "Our intention was to let her neighborhood know there was a killer living in their midst," he explained.

"They call it intimidation," the priest said of critics' views on his tactics. "We call it just stating the reality. There is no physical intimidation ever."

Father Weslin also charged that the Lambs have been victims of violent acts. He cited tire slashings, beatings, a shooting at a home where he stayed, and threats made to his daughter.

Noting that he spent nine months after his ordination working with members of Mother Teresa's order in the Bronx, Father Weslin remarked that "Mother Teresa prays for martyrdom every day. I don't have that courage to do that."

Yet, he remarked, "I pray for the courage to say 'Yes' to Jesus if he asks me to lay down my life for the unborn child. That's the highest form of love. He says no greater form of love has man than to lay down his life for a friend, and our friend is the baby."

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