

Pro-lifers set to form peaceful 'chains' Oct. 6

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

The Rev. Mike Warren admits he's disappointed — but not discouraged — that the U.S. Senate failed Sept. 26 to override President Clinton's veto of a law banning partial-birth abortions.

"I believe the key is God's people," declared Rev. Warren, a pastor of Brockport's Christ Community Church, and the Western Monroe County life chain coordinator. "We're not going to see a political solution."

The pastor claimed that despite the Clinton administration's abortion policies, the number of abortions in the United States is at its lowest level since 1986 and that the number of abortion clinics is decreasing.

"I think what's happening is

God's people are beginning to pray," Rev. Warren said.

As life chain coordinator, the minister is helping to provide a public opportunity for people to pray about abortion. He is organizing a life chain that will form along Main Street in Brockport from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Oct. 6, passing in front of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church.

The Brockport life chain is one of several scheduled in the Diocese of Rochester. Other chains will form that day in downtown Owego, in Tioga County, from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m., and along East Avenue in Rochester from 2 to 3 p.m.

For the last six years, people across the diocese have been staging peaceful life chains on Respect Life Sunday. Participants line streets, pray and bear signs proclaiming that abortion

kills children — and that Jesus is waiting to heal and forgive those who have had abortions.

"I think it's valuable just for people to see all those people standing out there and being counted," observed Cleo Sopka, who is helping to promote the Owego life chain among her fellow parishioners at Owego's St. Patrick Church.

That sentiment was echoed by Ken Hatlee, who is coordinating the Owego chain.

"It's just to get the message out and let people know that there are people who think the taking of the life of an infant is murder, and that there are other options, and that Jesus forgives and heals," Hatlee said.

Jim Cox, who is helping to coordinate the Rochester chain, noted that the attempted — and failed — effort to override the partial-birth ban veto may help

reverse a trend in recent years in which the number of chain participants has gone down.

"I think there's more of an interest with the veto of the partial-birth bill," Cox said.

Rev. Warren pointed out that the pastors' breakfast Sept. 17 to prepare for the life chain was the best attended in his three years of coordinating chains in Brockport. He attributes that in part to the current furor over the partial-birth ban veto.

National life chain coordinator Royce Dunn acknowledged that originally, organizers thought that the number of chains nationally would be down this year, but said that there has indeed been an upsurge in activity. He attributed that interest in part to the partial-birth abortion debate — as well as Clinton administration policies and a resurgence of ac-

tivism among pro-lifers.

In a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from his Santa Barbara, Calif., home, Dunn estimated that approximately 800 chains are scheduled for this year — the same number as last year.

But Dunn is looking for people to go beyond the chains.

"The essential first step for people across the nation to take is the life chain," Dunn said. The next steps, he said, should include lobbying, taking part in rallies, going to abortion sites to pray and offer sidewalk counseling, and encouraging churches to be more involved in pro-life efforts.

"The essential steps for all pro-life people is massive numbers of Christians at the death centers to make (abortion) as socially unacceptable as slave ownership," Dunn declared.

Rachel

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"Project Rachel has already pulled together dozens of kinds of people who work on Consistent Life Ethic concerns," Suzanne Schnittman, diocesan consistent life ethic coordinator, was quoted as saying in Father Hewes' letter. "It is a wonderful way to put a refreshing Catholic face on the abortion issue."

Project Rachel was founded when Thorn was Respect Life director for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Thorn wrote in a

chapter of the 1994 book, *Post-Abortion Aftermath*, that she began it in response to a call first issued by U.S. bishops in their 1975 "Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities." The document included a call for a ministry of post-abortion reconciliation and healing. The bishops updated the letter in 1985.

"Granting that the grave sin of abortion is symptomatic of many human problems, which often remain unsolved for the individual woman," the 1975 document read, "it is important that we realize that God's mercy is always available and without limit, that the Christian life



can be restored and renewed through the sacraments and that union with God can be accomplished despite the problems of human existence."

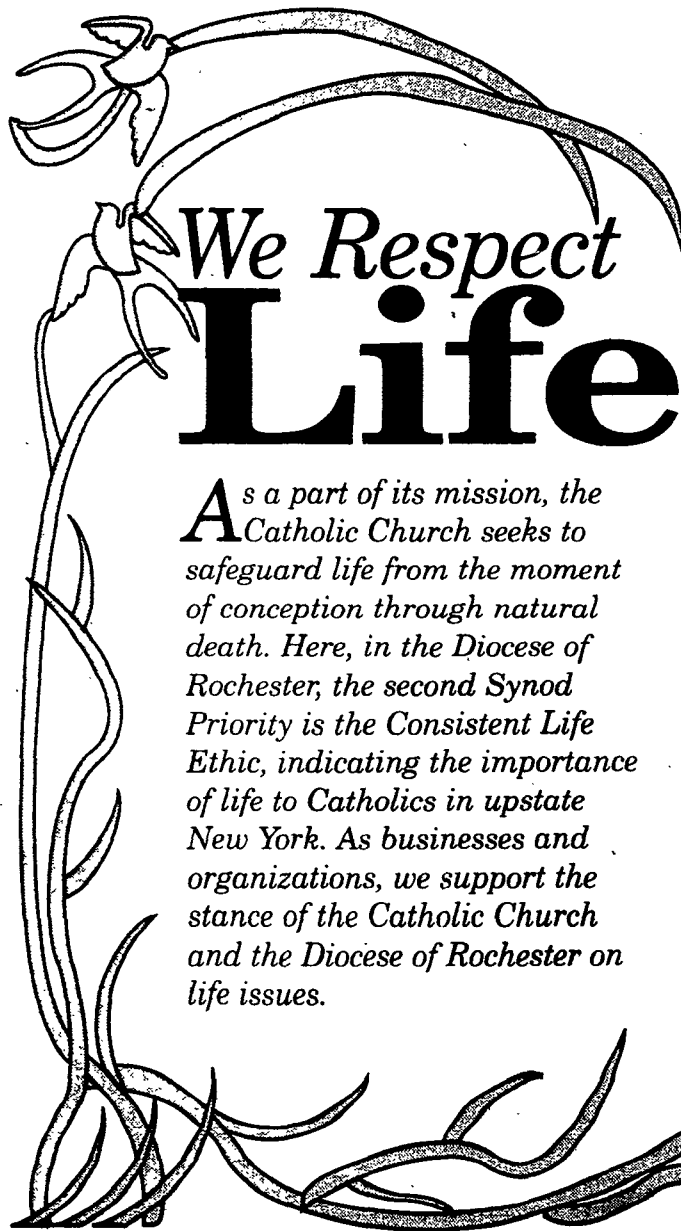
Project Rachel gets its name from Rachel, mother of Joseph and a mother symbol for Israel. In the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah, a poem describes Rachel crying unconsolably for her children, the kingdom of Israel that was destroyed by the Assyrians in the eighth century.

In modern times, women who have called Schickert's office for help in healing from an abortion have been as old as their 80s and near death. Some

have not received the Eucharist since they were 18.

"It is heart-wrenching to me," Schickert said. "Women are so ready to have God embrace them. They have agonized for years and years and years."

God's message to them, she said, is virtually the same as the message relayed in the Book of Jeremiah to Rachel: "Cease your cries of mourning, wipe the tears from your eyes. The sorrow you have shown shall have its reward, says the Lord, they shall return from the enemy's land. There is hope for your future"



We Respect Life

As a part of its mission, the Catholic Church seeks to safeguard life from the moment of conception through natural death. Here, in the Diocese of Rochester, the second Synod Priority is the Consistent Life Ethic, indicating the importance of life to Catholics in upstate New York. As businesses and organizations, we support the stance of the Catholic Church and the Diocese of Rochester on life issues.

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