

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Birthright celebrates 25 years in Rochester

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — With the help of Birthright of Rochester, Jill LeVesque was able to turn her situation from no-win to win-win.

The two big winners: her baby — and herself.

Nearly four years ago, at the age of 22, LeVesque discovered she had become pregnant by her boyfriend of six months. He, along with his family, opposed her desire to have the baby.

"They encouraged me to get an abortion, which I don't believe in at all," LeVesque said.

Being new to the Rochester area, LeVesque had no nearby family or close friends to turn to. Seemingly alone in the biggest struggle of her life, LeVesque began thumbing through the yellow pages in search of help. She found the number for Birthright, and called to arrange a meeting with a counselor.

LeVesque recalled that her anxiety was at a peak by the time she arrived for her first appointment.

"I was devastated when I walked through those doors. I was embarrassed, scared —

terrified, in fact," LeVesque said. "I may have done a number of things. I was almost feeling suicidal at that point."

By expressing her feelings to the counselor, LeVesque reached a turning point in her decision-making process.

"She made me feel real comfortable," LeVesque said. "She said all my thoughts were valid, instead of 'I have no right to feel that way or think that way.'"

With Birthright's help, LeVesque enrolled in childbirth classes and received maternity clothes with further counseling. After she gave birth to her son, Tyler, Birthright continued its support by equipping her with baby clothes and formula.

LeVesque's story is similar to those of many pregnant women who have sought out Birthright since its Rochester chapter opened in 1971. According to Birthright of Rochester's executive director, Joan Rohr, her office has assisted approximately 35,000 women and their children since its inception. This achievement was noted on Nov. 10, when Birthright held a 25th-anniversary ecumenical prayer service at St. Thomas More Church in Brighton.

Rohr noted that Birthright counselors do not lecture women extensively about their decision to give birth or have an abor-



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Jill LeVesque gets some "sugar" from her son Tyler as they spend time together in their new home. The mother and son received substantial help from Birthright.

tion. However, she said, Birthright does believe strongly in childbirth.

"We support life as a precious gift," Rohr said. "(But) we don't use scare tactics. I often refer to Birthright as the gentle arm of the pro-life movement."

Rohr noted that the Birthright International slogan states: "It is the right of every woman to give birth and the right of every child to be born."

Birthright International, founded in Toronto in 1968, operates more than 600 branches worldwide. Its Rochester chapter still works out of its original location at St. Mary's Hospital, 89 Genesee St. A second office was added in 1980 and is currently located at 3380 Monroe Ave., Pittsford.

Birthright does not charge for any of its services. Rohr said that the Rochester agency is mostly supported through private donations and the United Way.

Birthright also receives funding through the diocesan Consistent Life Ethic office. According to that office's coordinator, Suzanne Schnittman, a total of \$2,835 was allocated in 1996 to Birthright branches in

Rochester, Genesee, Owego, Victor and Auburn through the Consistent Life Ethic Fund, which received part of its money from the diocesan Thanks Giving Appeal.

Rohr said that of the many services offered by Birthright, its most valuable role may be in the area of emotional support.

"Many times, girls only need someone cheering them on, saying 'It's okay,'" Rohr remarked.

This form of encouragement has enabled such young mothers as LeVesque to move on happily with their lives. Now employed full-time as a secretary, LeVesque and her son moved into a newly purchased home in late October — just in time to celebrate Tyler's third birthday on Nov. 16.

LeVesque said she will never forget the guidance she received from Birthright staff members, whom she considers to be true friends.

"They really went above and beyond. They made me focus a lot," LeVesque said. "They kind of drill it into your head that your child is the most important thing in the whole world."

## Fisher professor researches diocesan changes since '50s

Helping retired Bishop Joseph L. Hogan write his memoirs, Nathan Kollar did some of his own reminiscing as well. And he began to wish for the chance to study certain recollections.

He got his wish for one full-time project. The professor of religious studies is on leave from St. John Fisher College, thanks to a grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc., covering his college salary for one year. It is allowing him to study change in the Diocese of Rochester since the Second Vatican Council.

The award comes at a time when Kollar and a Bishop Hogan are about ready to seek a publisher for the bishop's memoirs, Kollar said.

Kollar said he plans to study changes in the diocese from the time of its sixth Synod (1954) to its seventh Synod (1993), a period covering the years of the Vatican Council (1962-65) and the period after the council when the changes proposed as a result of it were implemented. He noted there has never been a detailed examination of how one diocese changed as a result of Vatican II.

Kollar said he realizes "every person sees change from their own perspective,

their own generation."

"I really am open to talking to anybody about what they understand is the change in the diocese," he said, even people who have been troubled by some of the changes.

He is just finishing the first part of his work, which includes surveying diocesan newspapers, diocesan directories and minutes from such meetings as the priests' and women religious' councils. Next, he plans to study how diocesan departments responded to changes since Vatican II. The individual discussions will come later.

Kollar is particularly interested in effects of the Vatican II culture combined with U.S. culture of the 1960s.

"Both events created changes in Roman Catholic worship, doctrine, moral imperatives and institutional forms," he stated. He said his study will center on the church as an organization, and how it implemented bishops' mandates for change.

"Bishop Clark and the other officials have been fantastic. I am overwhelmed by their openness," he said, appreciative of his access to information.

— Kathleen Schwarz

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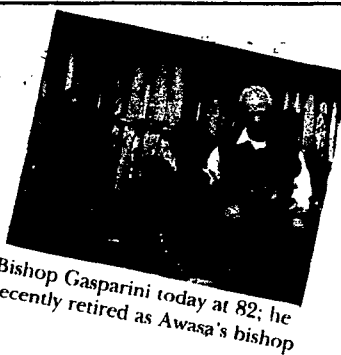
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Bishop Gasparini today at 82; he recently retired as Awasa's bishop

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