

DIOCESAN NEWS

Pro-life activists protest on air, streets

'Catholic Radio' presents traditionalist views

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

A new Rochester Catholic radio program with a decided pro-life and traditional slant got its start thanks in part to the fact that a Syracuse man got angry back in 1993.

Richard Bucci had returned to the Catholic Church in 1989 after being away more than 20 years. He said he discovered that much of what he'd been told by non-Catholics about the Catholic Church during those years was not true.

"I started studying what the church taught, and I got hooked," Bucci recalled.

Subsequently, he began to deliver lectures about his faith — and by 1993, began looking into developing a Catholic-based radio show to present what he was learning. But his first contact with a religious radio station in Syracuse reconfirmed the anti-Catholic feelings he had found among some groups with which he had been involved: The station manager refused to carry the show because it was Catholic.

Angry but determined, he then visited the station manager of the only other station in Syracuse at that time, WVOA-FM, ready for a confrontation.

"I asked him, 'Do you have a problem with a Catholic program?'" Bucci recalled. "He leaned back in the chair, pointed to a picture of a young priest. He said, 'See that picture? That's my son.'"

The manager decided to give Bucci a chance, and "Catholic Radio" went on the air March 8, 1993.

Continuing his daytime broadcasts on the Syracuse station, Bucci also began broadcasting a separate half-hour edition of "Catholic Radio" at 6 p.m. Monday-Friday on Rochester station WWVG 1460 AM on Nov. 4.



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer
Richard Bucci (right) interviews Rob Pokalsky for "Catholic Radio" at Planned Parenthood Dec. 3.

The program is a mix of taped talks, discussions by Bucci and guests, and listener call-ins. The show unashamedly defends the doctrines of the Catholic Church.

"I really exhort Catholics to be loyal to the Holy Father and the teaching magisterium of the Catholic Church," Bucci said.

Bucci said that the program also has a strong pro-life orientation. He noted that he relies on Father Norman Weslin, OS, founder of the pro-life group the Lambs of Christ, "for spiritual guidance," and has had the priest as a regular guest on both his Syracuse and Rochester shows.

"Catholic Radio" has also broadcast live from outside Syracuse's Planned Parenthood office, and began doing so at Rochester's Planned Parenthood affiliate Dec. 3. Bucci was also present at the Dec. 7 protest at Rochester's Planned Parenthood that led to the arrest of Father Weslin and 10 other individuals. (See accompanying story.)

"It amazes me that a Christian country allowed abortion to become legal," Bucci remarked.

Bucci said he will continue to broadcast live from outside the Rochester Planned Parenthood office.

"I'll be there at least once a month, maybe twice," he said.

In the coming months, Bucci also intends to have Rochester guests on the WWVG edition of the program.

"One of the things we'd like to do is focus on strong Catholics, let people know there are people doing good things," Bucci explained.

He also acknowledged that some people will not be entirely comfortable with what he presents on the program, but that that will not stop him from saying what he believes.

"I'm not doing the show to be popular," Bucci explained.

Lambs of Christ plead not guilty to protest-related charges

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Eleven pro-life activists, including Father Norman Weslin, OS, spiritual leader of the national pro-life group Lambs of Christ, pleaded not guilty to charges of resisting arrest and criminal trespass in the third degree in Rochester City Court on Dec. 9.

The charges stemmed from the protesters' alleged attempt to blockade the offices of Planned Parenthood of Rochester and the Genesee Valley, 114 University Ave., the morning of Dec. 7.

The protest was from as far away as California. Only one, Randolph Smith, is a local resident. Father Weslin is also currently living in the Rochester area.

The protest is part of an apparent escalation of pro-life activities at the Rochester Planned Parenthood site.

On Oct. 19, more than 300 people marched peacefully to the site; a similar rosary march is planned for Dec. 28.

Meanwhile, on Dec. 3 a Catholic radio program on Rochester station WWVG 1460 AM, held the first of what the host said will be regular live broadcasts during pro-life vigils outside Planned Parenthood. (See accompanying article.)

According to various sources, including the defendants themselves, several of the Dec. 7 protesters performed a number of dramatic acts at the clinic. One protester locked himself to the engine of a car that had been placed in front of the clinic's main entrance. The car's tires were deflated and the vehicle had no license plates. When asked, one of the protesters declined to identify who owned the car.

Another protester glued his forehead and hands to the back door of the clinic. Other protesters either chained themselves to the building, or locked their limbs inside a box-like contraption in front of the clinic's staff entrance. Two protesters locked their necks together with bicycle locks and blocked a door.

All the protesters, except for Father Weslin and one other defendant, Arnold Matheson, were released from custody on Dec. 9 by City Court Judge Teresa D. Johnson, who ordered the nine released defendants to return to court on Jan. 10.

The judge wanted \$250 bail from both Father Weslin and Matheson because both men had bench warrants on them from prior arrests. Father Weslin and Matheson will return to court on Friday afternoon, Dec. 13, according to Thomas R. Morris, assistant Monroe County district attorney. If

they post bail, they may be released and their cases will be adjourned to Jan. 10, he said.

In addition to Father Weslin, Smith and Matheson, the following protesters were arrested: John Blanchard, Martin Chamberlain, Michael Illuzi, Karen Jackson, Daniel Lamantain-Leatherman, Dwight Monaghan, Robert Raco and Rene Riddle.

If convicted, the protesters could face up to 90 days in jail on the trespassing charges, and up to one year in jail on the charges of resisting arrest.

Judge Johnson also issued orders of protection on behalf of Planned Parenthood against all 11 protesters. They are not allowed to go within an area of the clinic bounded by several streets.

But Father Weslin was defiant when Judge Johnson issued the order.

"If God tells me to go back tomorrow, I'd go back tomorrow," Father Weslin said.

Richard Bucci, the host of "Catholic Radio," who accompanied the group to the protest, said any decision to carry out more protests will be made after Father Weslin is released from jail.

"We won't know until we get together,"

Bucci said.

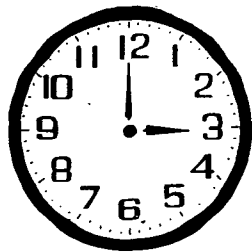
During the protests, Bucci contacted area media and some local supporters after the group arrived at Planned Parenthood. Approximately 25 supporters came.

The radio host said that he was not worried about the small number of people who came, or the potential impact on a rosary march planned for Dec. 28.

"The thing is, numbers don't count," he said. "You've got to understand, the Blessed Mother is orchestrating the whole thing."

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This story includes reporting by Lee Strong.

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