

DIOCESAN NEWS

Lambs of Christ plan to fight federal charges

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

Eleven Lambs of Christ facing federal charges for blocking a Rochester clinic will plead not guilty Jan. 10 in federal district court, according to their attorney, John J. Broderick of Long Island.

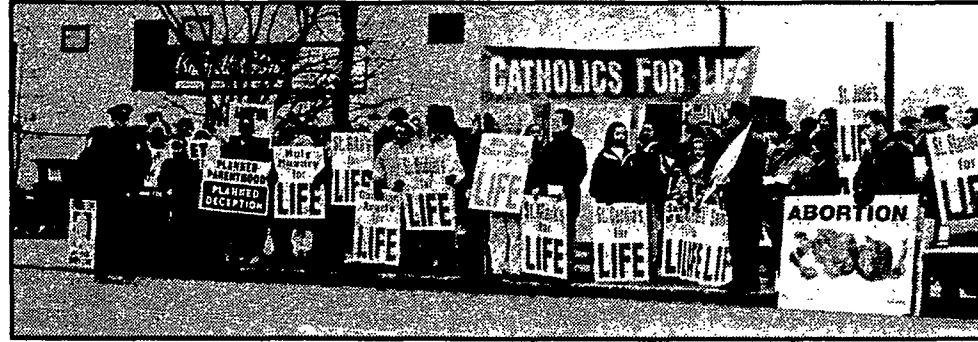
Broderick, who has defended similar cases involving abortion activists elsewhere, said he knew of only one other instance when such charges, under the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, were filed against a group of protesters. He said the 11 are being made examples.

"There's been a sudden about-face by the (Clinton) administration," he said. In most cases, he said, the administration has deferred to local officials' charges or civil suits.

Rochester police arrested the activists for resisting arrest and criminal trespass outside of Planned Parenthood of Rochester and the Genesee Valley, 114 University Ave., on Dec. 7. The building houses an abortion clinic operated by Planned Parenthood.

During the protest, the activists blocked the front entrance with a disabled car and a protester locked to it, another protester glued himself to the back entrance, and others locked themselves together and to the building, or locked their limbs into a box.

The local charges are to be dropped after the 11 appear for arraignment in federal district court of the Western District of



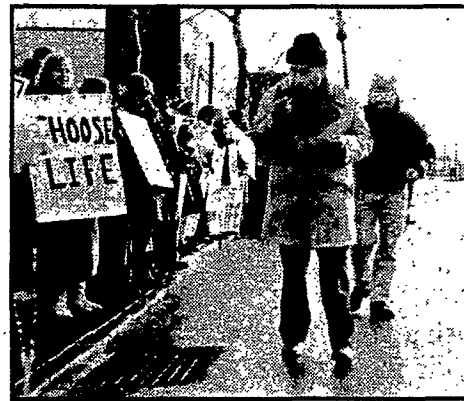
Mark Lund

Pro-life marchers in a Dec. 28 procession through downtown Rochester gather in front of Planned Parenthood of Rochester and the Genesee Valley, 114 University Ave. Below, Father Albert Shamon, administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel in Fleming, leads protesters in the recitation of the rosary.

New York, said U.S. Assistant Attorney Brian McCarthy of Rochester. The federal prosecution is believed the first in the state under the law. It was initiated, with charges filed Dec. 19, he said, because the protesters had blocked entrance to the clinic and because they "came from all over the country."

Of the defendants, seven, including Randolph Smith, 43, of Rochester, are from New York state. The other four are from California and Ohio. Father Norman Weslin, OS, 66, founder of the Lambs, organizer of the protest and one of the arrested, is from Colorado, but has lived with residents in the Rochester area.

Nine of the 11 were released on their own recognizance Dec. 9; Father Weslin and Arnold Matheson, 69, of Poughkeepsie, N.Y., were released after a supporter posted bail, Broderick noted.



Meanwhile, a peaceful procession to Planned Parenthood, with a police escort, took place Dec. 28, on the feast of the Holy Innocents. As many as 300 people were es-

timated to have taken part in the event, which was sponsored by the Knights of Columbus Finger Lake Chapter, New York Lambs of Christ (a loosely knit, grassroots organization from Rochester and other parts of New York) and the Pro-Life Planning Committee (also a loosely knit group of lay Catholics, in the Rochester diocese).

According to Mary Quinn of Webster's Holy Trinity Church and Jacquelyn Morency of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, the New York Lambs of Christ do not risk civil disobedience in "rescue efforts," as the Lambs are known to do.

The Lambs appearing in court Jan. 10 face six months in jail, if convicted. Broderick said he expected the case to go to trial.

"The word going around up there is they want to make an example of these rescuers," he said in a telephone interview.

"The law itself is insane and grossly unconstitutional," he insisted. "If you were a civil rights activist, a human rights activist or an animal rights activist, you could do precisely the same as the rescuers do and be charged with disorderly conduct and be given a fine."

Others charged in connection with the Dec. 7 incident are John Blanchard, 72, and Karen Jackson, 54, both of Watertown, N.Y.; Barton Chamberlain, 73, of Moravia, N.Y.; Michael Illuzi, 25, of Franklin Square, N.Y.; Robert Raco, 72, of Campbell, Ohio; Rene Riddle, 37, of Toledo, Ohio; Daniel Lamantain-Leatherman, 59, of Perris, Cal.; and Dwight Monaghan, 45, of Los Angeles.

House of Mercy's role as unofficial shelter will end Jan. 24

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The House of Mercy, 725 Hudson Ave., an outreach center owned and operated by the Sisters of Mercy, has taken in as many as 60 homeless people a night looking for a place to sleep, said Sister Grace Miller, RSM, director.

"They're better off here in a warm place than they are on the streets," said Sister Miller.

Yet the House of Mercy is slated to end its role as an unofficial — and illegal — shelter for the homeless by Jan. 24, according to city and county officials and the Sisters of Mercy.

In a Jan. 3 interview at the House of Mercy — which is zoned for office space — Sister Miller said her Christian faith compels her to take in homeless people other licensed shelters can't take or won't take due to the regulations under which they operate. No one is turned away, no matter what time of night he or she knocks at the door, she said, and no one is charged for staying there.

But the House of Mercy's unofficial role as a homeless shelter came under scrutiny last fall, according to Thomas Argust, Rochester's commissioner of the Department of Community Development. Argust said a local newspaper report about homelessness quoted Sister Miller saying she was sheltering homeless people.

"I think that raised a few eyebrows," Argust said.

Additionally, Argust said that the House of Mercy has been the subject of several complaints since it opened on Hudson Avenue. However, he added that most of the complaints had to deal with issues the police usually handle, such as loitering or

noise. But the fact that Sister Miller had publicly declared she was sheltering homeless people indicated that the House of Mercy was violating its certificate of occupancy, he said.

On Nov. 22, Argust's department issued a "notice and order" to the house that cited several violations of the city's building code, along with the fact that an inspector saw people sleeping in the center when she visited on Nov. 8.

Then, in a follow-up visit on Dec. 9 to see if the center had complied with the notice and order, officials from Argust's department, the police department, the health department, and the Monroe County Department of Social Services, came to the House of Mercy just before midnight. Photographs were taken of guests sleeping in the center, a fact that caused Sister Miller to liken the visit to a raid by "the Gestapo." But Argust noted that it is standard procedure for his department to document code violation inspections photographically.

"This is very clearly a violation of the certificate of occupancy held by the sisters and acknowledged by the sisters," he said.

Sister Miller said the house is being targeted by Monroe County government offi-

cial because of her outspoken advocacy on behalf of the poor; and her vehement opposition to such practices as the electronic finger imaging of welfare recipients.

"I think they want me out of the city, and they want the House of Mercy closed down because our people don't wear ties and don't carry attache cases," she said.

But Richard Schauseil, director of the Monroe County Department of Social Services, denied that government officials had any political motives in investigating the House of Mercy.

"I'm sick of her saying that," he said.

Despite the public controversy over the House of Mercy's relationship with government officials, Sister Ann Miller, RSM, president of the Rochester Regional Community of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, said her order has no dispute with county and city officials over the House of Mercy's proper use.

"The first thing we're going to do is to cease using it as a shelter," said Sister Ann Miller (not related to Sister Grace Miller).

The Monroe County Department of Social Services is working with 13 clients of

the House of Mercy who asked for information on alternative housing when DSS officials visited the House of Mercy on Dec. 30, according to Schauseil.

Meanwhile, a meeting was slated for Jan. 7, between Rochester Mayor William Johnson and Sister Ann Miller. Another meeting is slated between local government officials and the two Mercy sisters on Jan. 23 to further discuss moving the homeless at the House of Mercy.

Sister Grace Miller added that she would like to obtain a variance from the city to operate as a shelter until housing is found for all the House of Mercy clients, but Sister Ann Miller said her order was not planning to seek such a variance. The Mercy president did say, however, that her order would investigate the possibility of taking the steps necessary to make the House of Mercy a licensed shelter for the homeless.

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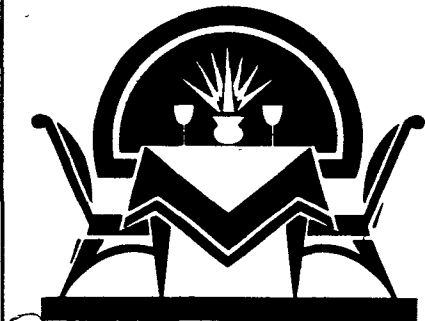
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