

DIOCESAN NEWS

'Pledge for Life' garners parish endorsements

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Diocesan officials report that as of April 6, eight parishes had notified them that they had endorsed the "Faith Community Pledge for Life," agreeing to support women in troubled pregnancies.

The pledge commits a parish or faith community to help women find the material and emotional support to carry their babies to term.

"I've been involved in pro-life activities for almost 30 years, and this is one of the most exciting things I've seen," remarked Father James Hewes.

Father Hewes, chaplain of the Newman Community at SUNY Geneseo, developed the pledge idea after learning about a similar effort promoted by Bishop Kenneth E. Untener in the Diocese of Saginaw, Mich., in the early 1990s.

In January, the diocese invited parishes to endorse the pledge — setting Mother's Day (May 10) as an unofficial deadline.

To help answer questions parishes might have about the pledge, the diocese, in conjunction with Henrietta's Guardian Angels Parish, has scheduled an April 18 workshop at the parish, 2061 E. Henrietta

ta Road.

The 9 a.m.-noon workshop will cover such issues as medical care, legal implications, counseling and adoption.

Parishes already on record as endorsing the pledge are: St. Mark's, St. Philip Neri and St. Salome's in Rochester; Church of the Resurrection, Fairport; St. Mary's of the Lake, Ontario; St. Patrick's, Macedon; Church of the Epiphany, Sodus; and St. Isaac Jogues, Fleming.

The pledge for life is a way for the diocese and parishes to show that the Catholic commitment to life is more than just talk, acknowledged Suzanne Schnitman, the diocese's consistent life ethic coordinator.

"I think this is another way we can not only advocate for life, but we can provide the support system to sustain life," she said. "This is really saving the woman's life as well as saving the life of the child."

Father Hewes said that in consulting with Bishop Untener, he realized that such a faith pledge would address some concerns raised by women with whom he's spoken through Project Rachel, the diocese's post-abortion support program.

"Women faced with (a problem pregnancy) feel pressure, and they feel alone,"

Father Hewes said. "What we are trying to say is we will walk with you in solidarity so you will not be alone, and we will walk with you in a practical way."

He acknowledged that many services envisioned in the pledge are already being provided through such agencies as the Problem Pregnancy Help Center, Crisis Pregnancy Center and Birthright.

"What we are trying to do is connect it more with the faith community," he said.

Parish responses may go beyond simply referring women to these agencies, Father Hewes added.

Parishes could request from parishioners such donations as cribs and baby clothes, provide women with a list of parishioners to call when they need to talk, or even link women with mentors. The support would last as long as the women need it.

St. Philip Neri Parish is already doing much of what the pledge calls for, according to Diane Knittle, parish life coordinator.

"Just recently, we had a woman who came to us saying she needed a crib," she noted. "We put the word out and got one."

Knittle said that she announced the pledge idea in early February in the parish bulletin, and then put up a poster board in church for people to sign. The support was overwhelming, she said.

"This parish is very interested in the consistent life ethic," she observed. She added that the parish operates a food cupboard, and has previously collected items for the Problem Pregnancy Help Center and Birthright.

At St. Mary's of the Lake Parish, On-

tario, the pledge is also a continuation of current activities, acknowledged Deacon Jerry Skerritt, who serves with his wife Lee as the parish's pastoral associates.

The parish works regularly with Birthright, he explained, noting, "How blessed we were to have already had that kind of thing in place all of those years."

The parish promoted the pledge in the bulletin a few weeks ago, he reported, and 30 to 35 parishioners signed on as volunteers. Those volunteers may be called upon to help, should a situation arise that Birthright can't address.

The value of the pledge is more than just getting a parish to commit to helping women, Knittle noted.

"I see it more as a collaborative effort," Knittle said. "It extends us beyond our neighborhoods by collaborating with other parishes."

Schnitman pointed out that as neighboring parishes discover they have pledged, they may find opportunities to work together.

"It allows the possibility to network, just like we are being challenged to network through all the collaborative parish planning," she observed.

Her office will keep parishes informed as to which parishes have signed the pledge, Schnitman said. She will also strive to keep them updated on resources available in the community.

But beyond providing immediate support for women, the pledge effort helps to advance the pro-life cause, Schnitman added.

"If you don't touch people's lives," she said, "then you don't change their hearts."



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Supermarket sub

Sister Beth LeValley, SSJ, enjoys a submarine sandwich from the new Upper Falls Tops Supermarket in Rochester April 3. Sister LeValley, a director with the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, was instrumental in bringing the supermarket to the area along with Partners Through Food, Inc., chaired by Lovie Smith and co-chaired by Delaine Cook-Greene, both parishioners at St. Bridget's Church, Rochester. Opening day was April 1.

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Recognizing

◆ St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira, presented its annual OPFY Award to John Goble, who has worked at the hospital for 20 years and is now the ultrasound coordinator. The OPFY Award honors a St. Joseph's employee or volunteer for friendly service, courtesy and creating goodwill among fellow employees, visitors and the general public.

◆ The Catholic Family Center presented the CFC Award to Roger Kober, former president and CEO of Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation, for his efforts on behalf of Eldersource, a program that helps to link seniors and their families with the eldercare needed to maintain independence. The award was given to him March 13 at the sixth annual Catholic Family Center St. Patrick's Day Charity Gala — a fundraising event that netted \$73,000 for CFC.

◆ Father Kevin McKenna, chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester, wrote an article, "Confessions of a Canonist," published in the Feb. 28, 1998, edition of *America*.



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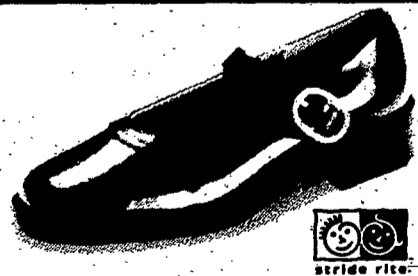
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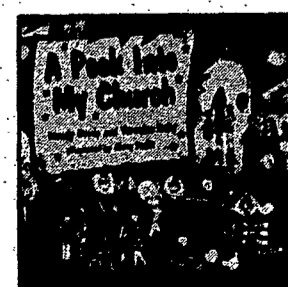
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