

Bishop repudiates charges found in CDC flier

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark June 23 repudiated charges outlined in fliers distributed over the last month at area parishes.

The fliers are being distributed by a group protesting a planned national conference on Catholic gay and lesbian ministries set to take place here in September.

The fliers are inaccurate, both the bishop and another diocesan spokesman said, in part because they misrepresent how the bishop has addressed the question of same-sex unions.

The flier was put out by the group Citizens for a Decent Community. The flier calls on diocesan Catholics to write Pope John Paul II and ask him to remove Bishop Clark from his post as Rochester's bishop. The group's rationale for such a move is based, in part, on the bishop's support for the upcoming conference.

The conference — the fifth-annual gathering of the National Association of Catholic Diocesan Lesbian & Gay Ministries (NACDGLM) — is titled "Imaging Justice." It will run from Thursday afternoon, Sept. 17, to Sunday afternoon, Sept. 20, at the Sheraton Four Points Hotel, 120 E. Main St.

Bishop Clark will give the welcoming speech at the conference, and celebrate Saturday Mass. Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry, an independent pastoral ministry that collaborates with the Dio-

cese of Rochester, is hosting the conference.

The Citizens for a Decent Community flier is titled "Bishop Clark Promotes Same Sex Marriage & Gay Adoption." The flier charges that NACDGLM wants homosexuals to have "the right to get married, adopt children and make the church sanction their sexual conduct."

The flier contains a reprint of a May 14 article and editorial from *The Wanderer*, a national, weekly newspaper published independently by lay Catholics. The article is critical of the conference and the editorial calls for Bishop Clark's removal.

The article also claims that Bishop Clark publicly endorsed the concept that the church might someday bless same-sex unions. *The Wanderer* has reported repeatedly that Bishop Clark made the comments during a talk he gave at a March 1997 New Ways Ministry conference in Pittsburgh.

In comments to the *Courier*, however, Bishop Clark refuted that charge.

Bishop Clark said, *The Wanderer* article distorted what he said at the Pittsburgh conference and that he had never referred to same-sex unions in the manner described by *The Wanderer*.

Rather, the bishop said, he was referring to *chaste* spiritual friendships that the church could possibly recognize in some manner. He said that he had asked his staff to explore whether recognition of such friendships had ever taken place in church history and that, as of yet, staff

members had found no historical references to such recognitions.

He added that a few people at the conference booed him when he noted that he did not support same-sex marriages.

"I do not support and cannot support (same-sex) marriages because marriages are a sacrament between men and women," the bishop said.

In addition to Bishop Clark's comments, Father Gary Tyman, who was appointed by the diocese as a conference spokesman, also said the flier was filled with inaccuracies. He maintained that the conference's speakers and purpose were in keeping with church teaching on homosexuality.

NACDGLM has been officially recognized by the U.S. bishops, according to Father Tyman, who is chaplain of the Newman Community at the University of Rochester. Father Tyman also works with Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry and serves on the conference organizing committee. He said about 200 pastoral ministry workers from 30 dioceses are expected to attend the conference.

Contrary to the flier's contentions, the conference will not promote same-sex marriages, gay couples adopting children or the church's sanctioning of homosexual sex, Father Tyman said.

"A gay Catholic who wants to find support in living a celibate life would be able to find resources and support at this conference," he said.

Father Tyman added that all of the con-

ference's speakers are in good standing with the church, and that the conference is designed to help pastoral ministers deal with the needs of gay and lesbian Catholics and their families.

Although most people know the church considers homosexual sex immoral, few people realize that the church does not consider a homosexual *orientation* immoral, he said. Nor do most people realize that the church considers gays and lesbians as worthy of pastoral care, Father Tyman added.

"Too many people when they realize they are homosexual think that they have to leave the church ...," Father Tyman said. "We have to make real and concrete that they're part of the church and that we care for them."

Also contrary to allegations contained in the flier, the conference will not receive Thanks Giving Appeal funds, he said. He added, however, that diocesan staff members are working on the conference, and that their work could be seen as a form of diocesan financial support for the conference.

Meanwhile, Michael Macaluso Jr. of East Rochester, chairman of Citizens for a Decent Community, refused to confirm whether CDC had distributed the flier at diocesan parishes. Nor would he comment on the flier's contents. Macaluso, did say, however, that CDC has 1,500 names on its mailing list. He described the group as "Christian," "anti-pornography" and "anti-homosexuality."

Coalition calls for national moratorium on death penalty

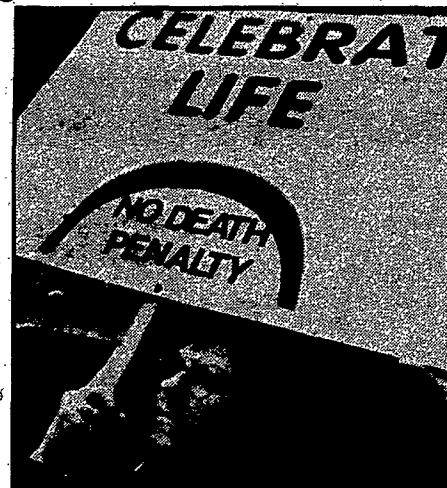
By Mike Latona
Staff writer

A coalition from the Rochester area — one that includes many Catholic organizations — has joined the call for a national moratorium against the death penalty.

The effort by the Reconciliation Network, an interfaith group of activists against the death penalty, was announced June 12 at its monthly prayer vigil at the Liberty Pole in downtown Rochester.

According to Suzanne Schnittman, diocesan consistent life ethic coordinator, the move unites the coalition with nearly 200 groups nationwide in an effort to have the death penalty abolished. The push, *Moratorium Now!*, was begun last fall by Equal Justice USA, a national organization based in Maryland.

Its moratorium resolution is part of a three-year national campaign "to muster widespread grassroots political pressure for a halt on executions," according to an Equal Justice statement.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Martha Brown holds a sign protesting the death penalty in New York state during a silent vigil at the Liberty Pole, downtown Rochester, June 12. The vigil was organized in part by the Reconciliation Network: Don't Kill in My Name.

Signers of the petition stating the resolution are the Diocese of Rochester; the Sisters of Mercy; the Sisters of St. Joseph; Catholic Family Center; St. Salome's Parish, Irondequoit; and St. Joseph's House of Hospitality and Corpus Christi Parish, both of Rochester.

Schnittman noted that the death penalty has received added attention in New York state following the death sentence given Darrell K. Harris June 6 in Brooklyn.

Harris, who was convicted of murdering three people, is the first person condemned to death in the state since capital punishment was reinstated here in 1995.

"There's been this nagging feeling, 'When is this going to happen?'" Schnittman commented.

Gov. George Pataki had promised to resurrect the death penalty in his 1994 campaign against incumbent Mario Cuomo.

"The death penalty is a very serious issue in general, but it's become even more serious," added Sister Anne Curtis, RSM, justice coordinator for the Rochester Sis-

ters of Mercy. "There's still a lot of work that has to be done."

Schnittman estimated that 75 people turned out for the June 12 prayer vigil in Rochester. She said she is concerned that a similar protest rally in New York City, one day after Harris' sentencing, also drew only 75 people — but in a larger city and the one where Harris' sentencing took place.

"I think it has to do with being organized," she said. "Locally, we're trying to get as many groups together as we can."

Schnittman said that the local petition will be taken to Rochester City Council this fall. From there, she hopes that the anti-death penalty cry will reach Albany and spare Harris. She asserted that the death penalty, though legal in many other states, often goes unused due to public pressure.

Noting that she would like to see the capital punishment law done away with altogether in New York state, Sister Curtis said, "The death penalty is racist; it doesn't save us money; it's not a deterrent from crime; and it doesn't really stop violence."

Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following pastoral assignments, effective June 30.

Father Lee Chase, from parochial vicar, St. Joseph Church, Penfield, to administrator, St. Thomas More Church, Brighton.

Sister Mary Wintish, RSM, from pastoral associate to administrator, All Saints Church, Lansing.

Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580) Vol. 109 No. 40 June 25, 1998

Published weekly except the first Thursday in January.

Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.



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