

Experts see little new in letter about dissent

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter, *Ad Tuendam Fidem* ("To Defend the Faith"), issued June 30, wasn't a landmark statement so much as a reaffirmation of church teachings, according to theologians and canonical experts.

"It adds to canon law what was in other documents. It's housekeeping; it's tidying up," said Father Joseph A. Hart, moderator of the diocesan Pastoral Center. "There is nothing new," added the priest, who is on leave from his post as associate professor of theology at St. Bernard's Institute.

The pope's legislation stated that Catholics must firmly accept definitive teachings by the pope or the college of bishops. One who denies them, it states, "opposes the doctrine of the Catholic Church." The required assent includes fully accepting church positions that prohibit such practices as euthanasia, fornication and women's ordination.

In addition, the legislation warned that dissenters will be "justly penalized" if they continue to openly reject such teaching and refuse to recant after being warned by the Holy See, a bishop or religious superior.

Yet Atonement Father Patrick J. Cogan, executive coordinator of the Canon Law Society of America, agreed with Father Hart's assessment that the pope's letter probably doesn't signal major change.

"(It) just enshrines in the Code of Canon Law of the church the requirements (al-

ready spelled out elsewhere) to respect and uphold church teachings," Father Cogan told Catholic News Service. (See related story on Page 4.)

"I think it's significant, but I don't think it's wild," added David Higbee, religious education director at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Irondequoit. "It's the long view that's in mind; it's about core beliefs. It's not going to create a witch hunt. I don't think we're going to see a precipitous change. If we do, it will be a total surprise."

Higbee said that he believes the pope felt compelled to issue a reminder about core beliefs "because we're living in a very fast-moving society, one which has changed so much even in the last 40 or 50 years."

The Vatican press office released the letter in Latin and Italian, but no English version had been released by July 7. It also released commentary in several languages June 30 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

Father Hart noted that many people are reacting more to that commentary than to the pope's three-page statement. For instance, the commentary referred to a 1994 papal statement that reiterated the church's stance on having a male-only priesthood, as a directive that requires "firm and definitive assent."

Yet the pope himself apparently didn't say anything new about ordination in his June 30 letter, Father Hart said.

"He's already said that this is to be definitively held," Father Hart remarked.



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

A blessing for Bethany House

Deacon Tom Ecker presides over a blessing of the Bethany House of Hospitality in Rochester June 24. A Catholic Worker house that serves homeless women and their children, Bethany celebrated its 20th anniversary with an open house, a eucharistic liturgy at St. Bridget's Church, and buffet reception that day.

At the same time, Father Hart stressed that the pontiff could make stronger changes in church law if he so wished.

"The pope is the legislator in the church — which means if he wants to alter the law, he can alter the law," Father Hart said.

Meanwhile, Nancy DeRycke said that the June 30 letter's seemingly strict tone is unfortunate because it does not promote open discussion of church issues.

"Saying that the case is closed just doesn't do justice to the hearts of the faithful," said DeRycke, campus minister at the New-

man Community in Brockport. A woman religious for 24 years, she left the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in April.

DeRycke, an active member of the Women's Ordination Conference, said that it is the pope's responsibility to affirm church law, but said he should do so "in conjunction with the bishops, who are supposed to be in touch with the people."

She asserted that enough people feel strongly about women's ordination that "it's real important we don't close the conversation yet."

Pro-life feminists announce activities for women's rights celebration

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

As the 150th-anniversary celebration of the first Women's Rights Convention gets under way this month in Seneca Falls, Feminists For Life of New York wants visitors to know that early feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony clearly condemned abortion.

From Thursday, July 16, to Sunday, July 19, the village of Seneca Falls will be the sites of activities celebrating women's rights. The event is called Celebrate '98.

"Oftentimes it does seem that the women's movement has been closely tied to advocacy for abortion," said Debbie Rieger, president of the pro-life feminist group. "Basically, what we do is be the other voice... We want to let people know that you can support women's rights without advocating abortion."

Feminists For Life is a nonsectarian organization, said Rieger, a parishioner at Sa-

cred Heart Cathedral in Rochester. Past presidents include Suzanne Schnittman, the diocese's consistent life ethic coordinator, who currently sits on the group's board. The group has worked with the diocese on activities promoting the consistent life ethic, Rieger noted.

To draw attention to its feminist/pro-life stance, FFL of New York has erected a billboard on Route 5 and 20 between Seneca Falls and Waterloo in Seneca County.

The billboard, featuring a picture of Stanton, is titled "Pro-Woman, Pro-Life" and quotes the pioneer feminist as saying: "It is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit."

Stanton, a Seneca Falls native and a Quaker abolitionist, organized the 1848 convention, which passed the famous Declaration of Sentiments declaring "all men and women are created equal."

The billboard already has attracted opposition. Seneca County sheriff's deputies arrested three Syracuse-area women near the billboard early on July 6. The women were armed with paint and brushes, and

allegedly were preparing to deface the sign, according to the Sheriff's Department.

The three are to appear in court Aug. 24 to answer charges of conspiracy and possession of graffiti instruments.

Meanwhile, as part of the anniversary celebrations, FFL of New York has invited Serrin Foster, executive director of Feminists For Life of America, to speak on "Pro-life Feminism: the Legacy Continues" at FFL's annual luncheon on Sunday, July 19, at 1 p.m. The buffet luncheon will take place in The Falls Restaurant and Lounge located in the Gould Hotel, 108 Fall St., Seneca Falls.

In interviews and articles, Foster has linked feminism's concern about the subjugation of women with concerns for their unborn children. One article she wrote for *Commission Quarterly's* fall 1996 edition spelled out such concerns.

"No compassionate person, pro-choice or pro-life, wants a teenage girl to have to drop out of school and face a lifetime of poverty and welfare because she became pregnant," Foster wrote. "Nor do we want

her to suffer the pain and anguish of abortion."

Tickets for the speech and the luncheon are \$20, and reservations may be made by calling 716/458-2842.

The FFL luncheon will be followed by a 3 p.m. rally in Declaration Park on Fall Street. FFL is asking pro-life feminists to wear white or costumes from the 1840s to show solidarity with their movement.

Feminists For Life of New York will also sponsor an exhibit table at the National Women's Expo, which runs from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursday, July 16, to Sunday, July 19, in the village's Academy Square Auditorium.

Includes reporting by Mike Latona.

Appointment

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following appointment, effective May 30, 1998:

Charlotte M. Bruney, former hospital chaplain and collaborative team minister from the Archdiocese of Hartford, Conn., to temporary pastoral administrator at St. Vincent DePaul Church, Churchville.

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