

DIOCESAN NEWS

Bishop Clark issues statements on life issues

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

Citing a torrent of recent "challenges we face in our defense of life" and the upcoming 26th anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade*, Bishop Matthew H. Clark has issued a statement encouraging the people of the diocese "to reaffirm your commitment to defend life wherever it is threatened."

The statement — distributed through diocesan centralized mail to parishes and Catholic institutions in the Diocese of Rochester Dec. 30 — came just one week after Bishop Clark issued a brief statement concerning the U.S.-led bombings of Iraq that began Dec. 16.

"As the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester and as a private person, I must condemn this bombing by our country," he declared in the Dec. 23 statement, which was read at a rally that same day at the Federal Building in Rochester to protest the air attacks.

Suzanne Schnittman, consistent life ethic coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester and the person who read the Dec. 23 statement on Bishop Clark's behalf, said that the two statements are linked, the second growing in part out of the first.

The diocese had been invited to take part in the rally by its various organizers, Schnittman explained. Bishop Clark was not able to attend, but felt that the diocese had to be represented. The brief statement was the result of his concern, she noted.

"I share the sentiments of you gathered and of our wider community that the course chosen, that of violence, solves no problems," he said in the Dec. 23 statement. "War is not the answer. We must seek a more nonviolent alternative."

As part of their discussion, Schnittman continued, Bishop Clark had also noted that the attack on Iraq was just one of a series of recent events concerning life issues. The front page of the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* Dec. 17 not only reported the Iraq bombings, but also the story of the guilty verdict in the Angel Mateo, death penalty case, she observed.

Meanwhile, on Nov. 22 there had been live television coverage of Dr. Jack Kevorkian killing a man who wanted to die, and on Dec. 18 the 500th execution since the restoration of the death penalty in the United States took place.

The convergence of these events, Schnittman said, "really pointed out the counter-cultural aspect of what the consistent life ethic calls us to."

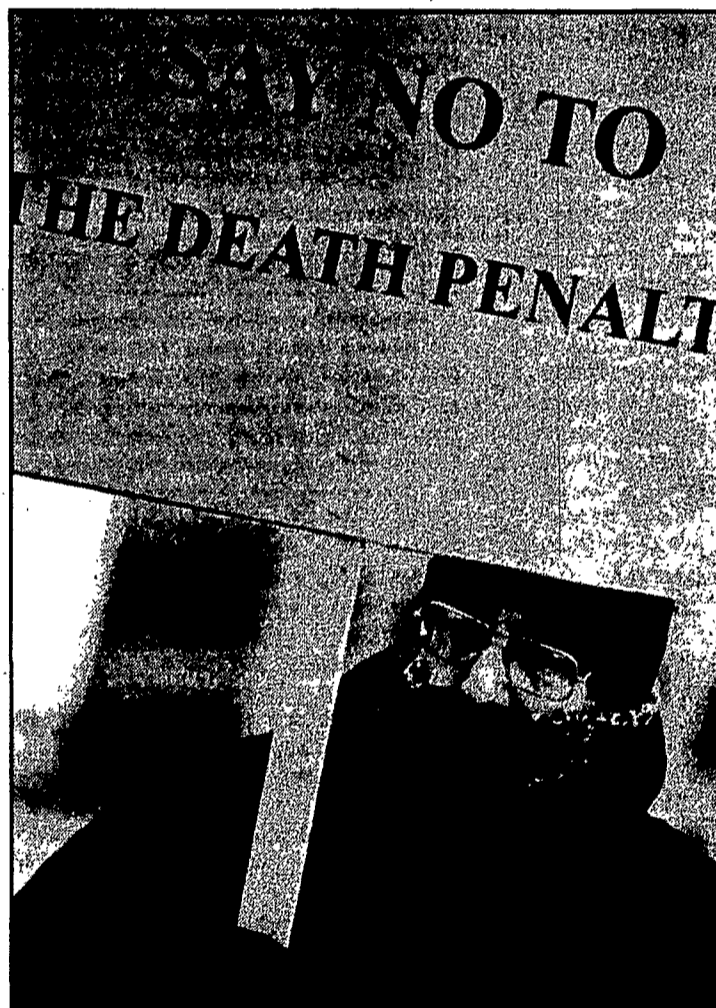
In the Dec. 30 statement, Bishop Clark cited Kevorkian, Mateo, the 500th execution, attempts to legislate physician-assisted suicide, and the upcoming 26th anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that effectively legalized abortion in the United States.

Roe vs. Wade had not been part of their



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Above, Father James Hewes (right) reads from the Bible during a death penalty protest outside the Hall of Justice, Rochester, Jan. 8. Below, Aaron Braveman, who attends Rochester's Temple B'rith Kodesh, participates in the protest.



initial discussion, Schnittman said, but Bishop Clark "insisted that *Roe vs. Wade* be part of this." In the Dec. 30 statement, Bishop Clark used the upcoming anniversary of the abortion decision to lead into the other issues.

"If that grim reality (*Roe*) were not enough, three events of recent weeks attack our belief in the sacredness of life and call us to affirm our commitment to the Consistent Life Ethic," he wrote.


After citing these various "attacks" on the church's beliefs concerning life issues, he noted that "others in

our faith tradition share this concern."

Bishop Clark then quoted Pope John Paul II's Oct. 9, 1995, address in Central Park in which the pontiff declared, "Stand up for the life of the aged and the handicapped, against attempts to promote assisted suicide and euthanasia! ... Resist the pressures and temptation of a world that too often tries to ignore that ... life is a gift from God our Creator."

He also cited a 1994 statement by the New York State Catholic Conference of Bishops opposing the restoration of the death penalty in New York, a November 1998 statement by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops opposing the use of military force against Iraq and a Dec. 20 statement by Pope John Paul II in which the pontiff, reacting to the recent bombings, declared, "I repeat: War has never been and never will be an appropriate way to solve problems between nations."

"Taking from the inspiration of these leaders we as church and as followers of a nonviolent Jesus will continue our efforts, not only against abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, and military attacks, but also against economic injustice," Bishop Clark wrote. "I applaud those in our community who defend life. I also lift up those who participate in the ministries throughout our Diocese that literally sustain the poor in their daily lives."



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