

DIOCESAN NEWS

Planned protest draws critics and supporters

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

A pro-life demonstration planned for Buffalo and Rochester April 18-25 is under attack from New York State's attorney general, who wants to restrict protests outside abortion clinics and other facilities.

The planned protests have also drawn public criticism from several Rochester officials, including Mayor William A. Johnson Jr., who have signed a petition asking the protesters not to come to Rochester.

But Bishop Matthew H. Clark issued a statement March 29 criticizing the petition, writing that the petition unfairly characterizes pro-life activists as violent.

"Operation Save America" is being organized by the pro-life activist group Operation Rescue National, and will draw activists from around the country, organizers said. Operation Save America will consist of a series of protests at abortion clinics, colleges, sexually-oriented businesses and the homes of doctors who perform abortions in Buffalo and Rochester, said the Rev. Mike Warren of Brighton Presbyterian Church. Rev. Warren is organizing the Rochester end of Operation Save America.

Rev. Warren said that while most of Operation Save America's actions will take place in Buffalo, Rochester will be the site of protests on Wednesday, April 21, with possible follow-up actions on Thursday, April 22. The minister estimated that 200 people from outside Western New York may show up to join local Rochester activists, and that Catholics may make up one-third of those who plan to participate.

The Diocese of Rochester will not formally participate in Operation Save America, a diocesan official said.

Rev. Warren mentioned three places as possible sites for pickets — Rochester General Hospital, Planned Parenthood of Rochester & The Genesee Valley, and the office of Dr. Morris Wortman in Brighton.

New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer has filed legal papers against sev-

eral activists in federal court in Buffalo. Activists targeted by the papers include Rev. Warren and Bob and Amy Dorscheid, pro-life activists from the Rochester Diocese. Bob Dorscheid is a member of the Diocesan Consistent Life Ethic Network Awards and Grants Committee.

The papers were filed by Spitzer along with several pro-choice representatives, including Planned Parenthood and Wortman. The papers ask that the federal court widen "buffer zones" — across which protesters cannot pass — around 13 health-care facilities in nine Western New York municipalities. The current buffer zone is 15 feet around facilities that provide abortions; Spitzer's papers ask the court to expand such zones to 60 feet.

Additionally, Spitzer has asked that the court prohibit protesters from using megaphones and loudspeakers to make "excessive noise" within 1,000 feet of any of the facilities. A hearing on Spitzer's request is slated for Thursday, April 8, in federal court in Buffalo.

Meanwhile, Rochester-area opponents of the planned protest have drawn up a petition titled "Save Our Civility." It notes that at least one doctor who provided abortions in the area has been killed, and that doctors and clinics throughout the country have been the targets of violence. The petition claims that Operation Save America will create an "environment for violence" in the community. The petition is signed by numerous church and community leaders and will reportedly appear as an advertisement in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* this month.

Bridgette Burch, director of communications for the City of Rochester, said Mayor Johnson signed the "Save Our Civility" document because he doesn't want the planned protests to foster violence.

"He is not taking a stand on the (abortion) issue," Burch said of Johnson. "He is taking a stand on the violence and the civility."

But Rev. Warren noted those who op-



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Vigils raise concern

Nineteen people took part in this March 25 prayer vigil at Sacred Heart Church in Auburn, and an estimated 100-200 attended a simultaneous service at St. John the Evangelist Church, Rochester. Organizers said the vigils were intended to show support for the two "Prophetic Statements" arising from the 1993 diocesan General Synod. In those statements, Synod delegates voted overwhelmingly to ask that the Catholic Church consider ordaining women to the permanent diaconate and priesthood, and married people to the priesthood. In a letter dated March 29, Bishop Matthew H. Clark expressed concerns about the services. Bishop Clark's letter, which was to be distributed to parishes and diocesan offices March 31, instructed parishes and pastoral ministers in the diocese not to "engage in activity which gives rise to doubt that we are loyal to and supportive of the definitive teaching authority of the church." In 1994, Pope John Paul II declared that the restriction of ordination to men is to be a definitively held teaching.

pose their protest are smearing the vast majority of nonviolent pro-life activists with the violent actions of a few. Echoing that sentiment, Bishop Clark's statement upheld the First Amendment rights of the pro-life protesters and sharply criticized the "Save Our Civility" document.

"Save Our Civility" asks the pro-life community not to speak out for life in any public forum," the bishop wrote. "They assume the expression will lead to violence. This is unfair. We have no evidence of previous violence on the part of pro-life demonstrators among Rochester Catholics, including those served with re-

straining orders or those who plan peaceful demonstrations in April."

However, in the light of recent violence against doctors and clinics, pro-life activists need to be aware that their rhetoric can be seen as violent even if it is not intended to be, said Sister Beth LeValley, SSJ, director of community economics for the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, an ecumenical organization to which the Diocese of Rochester belongs. Sister LeValley signed the "Save Our Civility" document.

"We need to gently engage others," she said. "I don't think coming with signs — one way or the other — helps anyone."

Diocese honors 43 people for commitment to consistent life ethic

The Diocese of Rochester has presented nine people with Vita Awards for their efforts on behalf of the consistent-life ethic.

Anne Batterby, Toi and Kevin Clawson, Deacon Bill Coffey, Tom Malthaner, Patricia and Peter Ladley, and Vivian and Dick Rightmyer will be honored at a Celebration for Life beginning at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, April 10, at the Four Points Sheraton, 120 East Main St., Rochester. The dinner funds diocesan consistent life ethic grants.

The nine received their awards March 15 at St. John of Rochester Church, Perinton. In addition, 34 other people were recognized that night for promoting the consistent life ethic by opposing abortion, the death penalty, economic injustice, euthanasia, violence and war.

According to Suzanne Schnittman, the diocese's consistent life ethic coordinator, the winners stood out because of their commitment to life issues in their daily lives and their willingness to take public action.

"It's not just that you believe in life, but you express your concern so that the public notices," Schnittman said.

Batterby, a member of the Catholic

Community of St. Anne and St. Gregory/Palmyra and Marion, is active with her parish social ministry committee and with pro-life causes. A member of such groups as Pax Christi, Amnesty International, Catholics Against the Death Penalty and the American Life League, she takes part in the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C., and corresponds with prison inmates, including one on death row.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Clawsons set up a foundation to help build a school in Nairobi, Kenya. They are active with Common Ground of Upstate New York and Feminists for Life. Toi has acted as a sponsor for Vietnamese refugees through the Catholic Family Center. Kevin has been active in efforts to oppose the death penalty.

Deacon Coffey oversees the social ministry committee among his many duties at St. Mary's Parish, Rochester. He has begun holding noontime prayer vigils outside the homes of murder victims.

Tom Malthaner, who works at St.

Joseph's House of Hospitality in Rochester, has undertaken missions to El Salvador, Bosnia, Israel, Haiti and Iraq. He teaches classes on nonviolence, and has regularly taken part in local vigils and protests that address such issues as abortion, the death penalty and the bombing of Iraq.

Peter Ladley is a chaplain at Elmira Correctional Facility, and Patricia Ladley is a theology teacher at Elmira Notre Dame High School, where she coordinated an Amnesty International chapter. They attend Mount Savior Monastery in Elmira, and are members of Pax Christi and the an-

ti-death penalty coalition in Elmira. Peter has undergone Project Rachel training.

The Rightmyers are active members of Pax Christi, Feminists for Life, Common Ground, the Reconciliation Network against the Death Penalty and their parish, St. Bridget's, Rochester. Vivian takes part in the anti-death penalty monthly vigil in Rochester, and the couple attends the Masses for peace at the army on Culver Road.

For information about the Celebration for Life, call 716/328-3210, ext. 304.

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