

DIOCESAN NEWS

Support, questions greet state HIV guidelines

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — New state guidelines mandating HIV counseling for pregnant women in labor who are unaware of their HIV status met with support — and some critical questions — from Catholic institutional leaders in the Diocese of Rochester.

On Aug. 1, New York became the first state to mandate such counseling, according to Kristine Smith, spokeswoman for the New York State Department of Health. Women whose HIV status was determined during prenatal care do not have to be counseled, she said during a phone interview from her Albany office.

Under the new guidelines, a hospital's maternity staff must encourage all women in labor who have not been tested for HIV to consent to a test and receive counseling during labor. If a woman refuses, her baby would receive an expedited HIV test immediately after birth.

The test results must be made available to the mother within 48 hours, and mother and child are to be encouraged to stay in the hospital until the results return.

Since February 1997, all infants born in New York have been tested for HIV, and 2,345 out of more than 500,000 have been found to have the virus. However, HIV test results under the old guidelines were not made available for at least one to two weeks, Smith said.

During that time, an HIV-negative baby could have been infected by an HIV-positive mother through her breast milk, she said. The new regulations ask hospital staff to discourage mothers from breast-feeding their children if the mothers don't know their own HIV status.

The new regulations are designed to help mothers realize that they can reduce the chance of transmitting the virus to their babies both during delivery and after birth, Smith said.

But Jane Hallinen, AIDS services director for the Diocese of Rochester's Catholic Charities Community & Residential Ser-

vices, questioned if labor is the best time to talk to a woman about her HIV status.

"I think trying to test someone when they're in the throes of labor is ludicrous," Hallinen said. "I kind of equate it to when someone is dying, trying to decide the guardianship of the children."

Smith agreed that labor is not the ideal time — "maybe even the worst" — to talk to a mother about HIV. However, she said, in New York more than 15,000 pregnant women a year — almost 6 percent of all pregnant women — receive little or no prenatal care, and hence, may enter a delivery room unaware of their HIV status.

"We agree that this is not the best time to do the counseling," Smith said. "But this is the last chance to do something to protect the baby from a deadly and life-threatening disease."

She added that the state urges hospitals to learn as much about a woman's health before suggesting HIV testing. For example, a woman who has not used IV drugs and has not had sex other than with a monogamous, uninfected partner is less likely to need HIV counseling than a woman who has.

But Hallinen said women who know they may be tested for HIV when they deliver may not bother with HIV testing during pregnancy. Smith agreed that that was a slim possibility, but she added that women who don't know their HIV status during pregnancy usually are dealing with a host of other problems — financial, social — that preclude them from seeking prenatal care that includes HIV counseling and testing.

Nancy C. Kull, obstetrician nurse-manager at St. James Mercy Hospital in Hornell, said her facility welcomed and endorsed the new guidelines. Even if only one baby a year is saved from contracting the AIDS virus, that's good enough reason to have the guidelines, she said.

"Obviously, we want our newborns to be as healthy as possible, to give them every chance," she said.

Smith, Hallinen and Kull all agreed that

women should learn their HIV status long before they enter the delivery room. To that end, Marie Voss, nursing director of women's services for Unity Health System, an alliance of St. Mary's and Park Ridge Hospitals in Rochester, said she supported the new regulations insofar as they might inspire obstetricians to encourage pregnant women to be tested for HIV as part of their prenatal care.

"I still would hope that most women would be concerned enough about their newborns that they would want to be tested for HIV," she said.

Infants can be infected with HIV while in the mother's womb, and also from the

mother's blood during birth, Smith said. However, she noted, before, during and after birth, babies can be treated with ZDV — also known as AZT — which can reduce chances of transmission of HIV from mother to infant, as well as cut the risk of infections to an infant who has HIV.

If HIV test results are positive, hospitals should consider delaying the discharge of a new mother and her baby until a second test can confirm the preliminary test results, according to the new guidelines.

Five out of 1,000 results from the first test are generally false-positive. However, the second test has almost no false-positive rate, Smith said.



Mike Mergen/Photo Intern

Seek peace

Tom Malthaner, left, and Gene Clancy lead more than 20 people in a "Walk for Peace" Aug. 8 from St. Joseph's House of Hospitality on South Avenue in Rochester to Ontario Beach Park. The march marked the anniversaries of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and protested violence in the world today in such places as Yugoslavia, Iraq and U.S. schools.

Gay, lesbian ministry works for review of Vatican decision

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

The Catholic Gay & Lesbian Family Ministry is encouraging a review of the Vatican's decision to bar Sister Jeannine Gramick, SSND, and Father Robert Nugent, SDS, from working with gay and lesbian people.

"We are deeply saddened by the action taken by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," the ministry's latest newsletter stated.

The decision, the newsletter continued, is "likely to further alienate more gay and lesbian people and their families from the church of their baptism."

"Our collective experience with them is one of careful and caring ministry that always presented church teaching clearly, a ministry that deeply touched many gay and lesbian people and their families and friends," it stated. It added that it was ironic the action was taken against the two people who probably have educated more U.S. Catholics than anyone else.

Sister Gramick and Father Nugent worked jointly for more than 25 years with homosexual Catholics, and had been under Vatican investigation since 1988. The two founded New Ways Ministry in 1977, which continues today as an unofficial, Catholic-oriented ministry.

The Vatican stated July 13 that the two advanced "doctrinally unacceptable" positions "regarding the intrinsic evil of homosexual acts and the objective disorder of the homosexual inclination."

While maintaining the intrinsic evil of such acts and the disordered nature of the inclination, the church encourages pastoral care for homosexual persons, and

discourages discrimination against them.

The CGLFM, which operates on behalf of the diocese, also has scheduled an Aug. 25 meeting as a forum for parents who want to talk about the Vatican decision.

At least eight or nine parents are interested in meeting, according to Casey Lopata, co-director of the ministry.

He had been following the Vatican's investigation but said the outcome was more severe than he had anticipated.

"The sense I had was they might ask for some corrections or clarifications," he said. "But that was it."

Instead the Vatican congregation stated it had, "with the hope that Father Nugent and Sister Gramick would be willing to express their assent to Catholic teaching on homosexuality and to correct the errors in their writings" invited them "to respond unequivocally to certain questions regarding their position on the morality of homosexual acts and on the homosexual inclination."

However, "Their responses ... were not sufficiently clear to dispel the serious ambiguities of their position."

The ban will limit information about homosexuality, Lopata commented. Gramick and Nugent's books — which the Vatican ruled contained questionable views — have been among those the ministry recommends, and the ban implies no further writings by the two. However, he indicated that their books still contain much that's positive to offer.

"I think the biggest problem is the silence," Lopata said, referring to any discussion of homosexuality in the church. "That's why it's important there be materials available and people can discuss this, especially in the pastoral sense."

He said the ministry team was encouraged by Bishop Joseph Fiorenza's statement July 13 that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does want outreach and ministry, and that the U.S. bishops "have heard the call to offer this Gospel-based pastoral assistance, as demonstrated by the various forms of outreach which exist in individual dioceses." Bishop Fiorenza is president of the National Council of Catholic Bishops/U.S. Catholic Conference.

Bishop Fiorenza also noted that a commission that had reviewed Sister Gramick and Father Nugent's work did not find it to be "without positive aspects."

The ban will not affect the ministry in the Rochester Diocese, Lopata said, adding, "Our mission remains the same."

On Aug. 18, the ministry will hold a workshop at diocesan Leadership Days to explore "Welcoming Gay & Lesbian People and Their Families in Our Faith Communities."

"There's much more emphasis on what is the welcoming that can be done, what it takes for gay and lesbian Catholics to feel wanted and accepted in our parishes

instead of a Mass that's particularly designed for them," said Karen Rinefierd, diocesan liaison to the CGLFM.

Last September Bishop Matthew H. Clark announced that the diocese was looking into scheduling a regular Mass for gay and lesbian Catholics, and that it would ask priests to stop celebrating Mass for Dignity-Integrity Rochester. The organization of Catholics, Episcopalians and other Christians is not approved by the Catholic Church.

Diocesan priests have stopped celebrating the Mass, according to Michael Nicosia, lay chaplain to Dignity-Integrity. Instead, the group hosts Liturgies of the Word, led by lay presiders following the bishop's guidelines on Sunday celebration when priests are unavailable, and is "making the best of it," he said.

There wasn't a strong response last fall that gay and lesbian Catholics actually wanted their own Masses, Rinefierd said.

"We are kind of waiting to see what response there is to the workshop, and other attempts to listen to the needs of gay and lesbian Catholics, to see when and where a Mass might be appropriate."

Bishop Dennis Hickey moves to McAuley Residence

Auxiliary Bishop Dennis W. Hickey has moved from Church of the Holy Family, Rochester, to the McAuley Residence, Brighton.

He has been under treatment for leukemia, for which he had been hospitalized in July. While he is not encouraging visits at this time, he said he does appreciate prayers and cards.

Hickey has been auxiliary bishop since 1967 and auxiliary bishop since 1968. He retired nine years ago but has continued assisting and presiding at parish and special Masses, confirming children throughout the diocese and representing Bishop Matthew H. Clark at church events.

His new address is McAuley Residence, 1457 Blossom Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14611.