

DIOCESAN NEWS

Assemblyman urges youths to keep the peace

By Mike Latona
Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — Most of the hundreds of youths gathered shot their hands up when State Assemblyman David Koon asked if they had ever loved someone.

A great many also raised their hands when Koon asked if they had ever hated anyone.

Koon acknowledged that most everyone carries feelings of love and hate. It's what you do with those feelings that distinguishes between violence and nonviolence, he told students during an April 27 speech.

Koon, a Democrat who represents the state's 135th district covering parts of Monroe and Ontario counties, was a keynote speaker for the Education for Peace Conference, held April 27-28 at Rochester Institute of Technology. The 11th-annual event featured numerous workshops and guest speakers, all carrying a message of ending violence and promoting peace.

According to conference organizer Dina D'Aiuto, the event attracted more than 1,500 high-school, middle-school and elementary-school students from public and private schools in the Monroe County area.

Koon's speech noted the fine line between love and hate. "Adults get married out of love, and many years later they divorce out of hate," he remarked.

He implored the conference participants to adopt a loving attitude to resolve conflicts. "There is not one war in this world that's been settled by killing people," Koon said.

Rather, he asserted, resolutions occur only when negotiators sit down and have peace talks.

Koon also encouraged students to reach



John Powell/Photo Intern

Carolyn Ray, left, and Ryan Ricci drum while children from area schools dance during the Education for Peace Conference April 28 at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Children from St. Boniface School (front row of dancers) joined students from other schools at the event.



Jay'Ana Smith joins the crowd listening to the drum.

out to those who may feel alienated from the mainstream. Noting that it has been about a year since the Columbine High School tragedy, Koon reflected on teen gunmen Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, who killed 13 people and themselves in the April 20, 1999, rampage in Littleton, Colo.

"Most of the stories I've heard and read is, nobody cared about them. They didn't have friends, they were loners. I'm sure every school has some of these loners, who don't feel they belong," Koon said.

The subject of violence is all too familiar for Koon. His daughter Jennifer, a student at St. John Fisher College, was shot to death in 1993, two weeks shy of her 19th birthday. Since then, Koon has worked on behalf of many community anti-violence pro-

jects.

After his April 27 speech, Koon told the *Catholic Courier* that he had considered mentioning his daughter, but decided to present a more uplifting message.

"You can pick up the paper and read about all the garbage on the street. But these kids are doing a lot of good things, too," he said. He noted that several youths had indicated to him that they are serving as peer mediators in their schools.

One young person making an effort toward erasing violence is Courtnee Hill, 12, a seventh-grader at Our Lady of Mercy High School. Courtnee, who serves on the student board of the Rochester-based Education for Peace Inc., presented Koon with a gift on behalf of the organization.

Courtnee also attended conference workshops on April 27, and said she was particularly struck by a session on communication. She said she was reminded how one can make difference in people's lives without even talking to them — "by doing nice things, smiling at them and making them happy."

Nate Olson, 18, a senior at McQuaid Jesuit High School, was among the teen representatives at the April 27 conference. During the closing ceremony, he described how his school is working toward peace. Nate noted that McQuaid's campus ministry programs are designed "so that everyone can become friends."

Courtnee added that she considered the Education for Peace Conference a valuable resource for youths who may encounter potentially violent people and situations.

"There's a lot of violence in the world today. If (participants) did nonviolent acts toward other people, that could help other people learn from them," Courtnee said.

Justice dismisses ex-employees' suit against diocese, leaders

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

New York State Supreme Court Justice Thomas A. Stander has dismissed a wrongful termination lawsuit against Bishop Matthew H. Clark, the Diocese of Rochester and Corpus Christi Parish, Rochester. The suit had been brought by four former employees of the parish.

In his April 24 decision, the judge said it would be improper for the court to intervene in an employee dispute that entailed examining Catholic teachings and canon law.

"This Court will not interject itself into resolving religious disputes as to the rights and authority of an Administrator of the Church to enter into employment contracts; the rights and authority of a

Pastor to terminate employees performing ministry duties of a church; and the enforcement of contract terms directly addressing religious beliefs," the judge wrote. "To decide otherwise would require this Court to resolve underlying controversies over religious doctrine."

The ex-employees had filed the suit in February 1999, saying they had been wrongfully terminated in December 1998 from their positions with the parish and had suffered a breach of their one-year contracts. The suit sought 10 months' pay and benefits for the employees.

Additionally, the suit had sought reinstatement of plaintiff James M. Smith, former director of Rogers House, a parish prison ministry. The other plaintiffs were Mike Boucher, former adult education minister; Myra Humphrey, former hospitality minister; and Denise Donato, former family minister.

According to court documents, the employees were fired for refusing to cooperate with and follow the directives of Fa-

ther Daniel McMullin, Corpus pastor.

Richard N. Chapman, attorney for the diocese, said courts generally don't get involved in church employment disputes because the U.S. Constitution prohibits government interference in religious practice. He added that the courts usually interfere only in church matters when property is an issue, and sometimes when a non-ministerial employee has a dispute with a church, but not when it involves people working in ministerial positions.

"These people were not janitors," Chapman said of the plaintiffs. "They weren't shoveling the parking lot or changing light bulbs. Our position was that the pastor has the right to determine who these people are going to be who carry out the religious function of the church."

However, the plaintiffs' attorney, Matthew J. Fusco, said he believed that the judge gave more weight to the term "minister" in three of the plaintiffs' job titles than necessary, adding that none of

the three were ordained. He added that he had cited precedents in which the courts had intervened in contract disputes involving religious teachers and a rabbi. He also said even though a dispute may have underlying religious principles, there are still contract issues over which courts have jurisdiction, and he believed that this case contained such issues.

Fusco said his clients have yet to decide whether to appeal the decision.

The lawsuit was filed last year on the heels of formation of a new church called Spiritus Christi. Spiritus Christi is made up primarily of former members of Corpus who had supported Father McMullin's predecessor, Father James L. Callan, after he was ousted in September 1998 from his position as parish administrator by Bishop Clark. In removing him, Bishop Clark had cited Father Callan's ongoing and public defiance of church teachings on intercommunion with non-Catholics, women's liturgical roles and ministry to homosexuals.

Correction

Sister Elaine Hollis is a Sister of St. Joseph, not a Sister of Mercy, as reported in the *Catholic Courier's* April 27 cover story, "Chaplaincies take on new look."

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