

DIOCESAN NEWS

Schnittman leaving life issues post

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

GATES — Suzanne G. Schnittman, life issues coordinator for Diocesan Catholic Charities, will leave her position Friday, May 26. The same day she will also leave her position as coordinator of the Diocesan Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, which operates under Parish Support Ministries.

Schnittman has held both positions since last July.

A former history professor, she began working for the diocese five years ago as its first consistent life ethic coordinator. The consistent life ethic office was established in July 1995, after the 1993 Diocesan Synod, during which delegates named promoting the consistent life ethic — which opposes abortion, euthanasia, war, poverty, racism and the death penalty — as a priority.

In a revamping of the Pastoral Center last summer, Schnittman's position was renamed life issues coordinator and placed under the auspices of Catholic Charities.

Schnittman now plans to work part-time from her home on a new program designed to train parish volunteers to do pastoral work in the area of domestic violence. The program will operate under the auspices of Parish Support Ministries.

Diocesan officials said that they are seeking to fill both of Schnittman's current positions.

Schnittman said she had decided to leave her position as life issues coordinator because she felt she had reached a "plateau" in terms of being effective.

"I'll continue to work on life issues from outside the (church) structure...," she said.

Schnittman's legacy of promoting the consistent life ethic earned her praise from Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

"I think her ability and willingness to do the extremely hard work of getting people together is her contribution," he said. He noted that Schnittman has created coalitions of people working separately on such issues as abortion and the death penalty that now fight for each other's causes.

"She's not alone in that, but she certainly showed us the way," the bishop said.

Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities, expressed gratitude for



Schnittman's work.

"Certainly she will be very difficult to replace," he said.

Among Schnittman's legacies is the establishment of Project Rachel, a post-abortion counseling program coordinated by Father James E. Hewes, parochial vicar of the Roman Catholic Community of Geneva. The program has trained more than 130 counselors throughout the diocese.

"I'm not sure we would have had Project Rachel going or continuing without her support," Father Hewes said of Schnittman.

In addition to Project Rachel, Schnittman oversaw the establishment of the "Vita Awards" program, which annually recognizes people who promote the consistent life ethic. This year's Vita Awards ceremony and reception will take place at 7 p.m., Saturday, May 20, in the Elaine P. Wilson Pavilion at St. John Fisher College, Rochester.

Schnittman also oversaw the establishment of a consistent life ethic grant program that has doled out tens of thousands of dollars to homeless shelters, problem pregnancy agencies, food cupboards, welfare-to-work programs and other recipients.

In addition, Schnittman's office helped to create two organizations: The Monroe Coalition For Life, and the anti-death penalty Reconciliation Network: Don't Kill In My Name. Both consist of Catholic and non-Catholic activists.

Schnittman noted that the network would be promoting an anti-death-penalty vigil outside Blue Choice Arena at the War Memorial in downtown Rochester starting May 12 at noon, and then continuing each Friday at noon thereafter throughout the trial of Jose Santiago, a capital defendant being tried across the street at the Monroe County courthouse.

Schnittman's office also aided in forming the diocese's Jubilee Year 2000 Public Policy Committee. The committee is promoting a broad legislative agenda seeking

such goals as the reduction of debt owed by poor countries; support for alternatives to current sentencing practices for offenders; enactment of a ban on late-term "partial-birth" abortions; and the clean-up of abandoned toxic industrial sites. Father Brian C. Cool is chairman of the committee, which includes representatives of parishes, diocesan schools and Catholic social service agencies and ministries.

This wide range of activity designed to protect all human life is being sought by coalitions of Catholic and non-Catholics alike that hardly even existed a decade ago, Schnittman noted. However, the diocese's embrace of the consistent life ethic has lent institutional weight to causes like the protection of the unborn and the elimination of war that were not even linked in most people's minds until recent years, she said. She added that it's the Catholic Church's embrace of the consistent life ethic that has strengthened her own Catholic faith.

"We need the diocese to stand behind what we teach, and this (office) helped that," she said.

She added of the Diocesan Pastoral Center and its staff:

"I really thought working in this building would make or break my faith, and it made it. For that I have to praise everyone. I think there's more commitment to life here than I ever imagined."

Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following parish appointments, effective June 27:

Sister Joan Cawley, SSJ, to pastoral administrator of Corning/Painted Post Roman Catholic Community, from temporary pastoral administrator. She succeeds Father Michael Conboy, who earlier this year became director of Priest Personnel and pastor of St. Jerome's Parish, East Rochester.

Father John Formi, to pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Greece, from pastor of the Catholic Community of the Blessed Trinity in Wolcott, Red Creek and Fair Haven. He succeeds Father Joseph D'Aurizio, who is retiring.

Father Thomas Mull, to pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Canandaigua, from pastor of Sacred Heart Cathedral. He succeeds Father Walter Wainwright, who was named pastor of St. Anthony/St. Patrick Cluster, Elmira.

Father George Okoth, to pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Leicester, and St. Lucy, Retsof, along with the position of sacramental minister at SUNY Geneseo. He currently is chaplain at Monroe Community Hospital.

May devotions

Cousins Nicholas Liberati, 4, and Brooke Record, 4, talk in front of the statue of Mary during the May Crowning at St. Dominic's Church in Shortsville on May 7.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Mercy fires teacher facing count

Alexander Capo, 57, was fired from his position as an eighth-grade Spanish teacher at Our Lady of Mercy High School, Brighton, after being arrested May 3 by Town of Brighton police and charged with one "A" misdemeanor count of endangering the welfare of a child.

Conviction is punishable up to one year in jail.

Capo, of Irondequoit, allegedly had an inappropriate relationship with a 13-year-old Mercy student that went on for two months prior to his arrest.

The girl and her family reported to investigators that Capo and the girl engaged in "kissing and caressing in the school building prior to the beginning of

classes," according to Brighton Police Staff Services Commanding Officer James R. Cavallaro.

Capo also allegedly gave the girl several gifts including designer clothes, jewelry, poetry books and a cellular phone.

Capo was released from Monroe County Jail May 4 on \$10,000 bail. He appeared in Brighton Town Court on May 8 and will appear again in court on June 5 for pre-trial motions.

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