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New York

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mostly non-Catholic Christian churches, employers, schools and individuals. The Rev. Duane Motley, an independent Baptist minister from Rochester and founder of NYCF, said Christian music stores, law firms, car dealers and other employers who operate on "biblical principles" may be victimized by the proposed legislation.

"I don't think that we should be dictating to people that they provide something opposite of their religious beliefs," Rev. Motley said.

Stephen Healey, chairman of the Monroe County chapter of the Libertarian Party, also stressed his party's opposition to the proposed legislation.

"A law that requires a peaceful citizen of faith to choose between respecting God and violating that law will breed only contempt for government," Healey said.

Religious employers

Some of California's Catholic institutions, including Catholic Charities and certain colleges and universities, are currently paying for contraceptive coverage "under duress," according to Carol Hogan, spokeswoman for the California Catholic Conference, which represents the state's bishops.

Meanwhile, according to information provided by the Catholic conferences in California and New York, some Catholic employers such as universities, colleges and hospitals have included contraceptives in their health plans "voluntarily." Balinsky said insofar as he knows, no Catholic institutions in the Diocese of Rochester currently include contraceptive coverage in their health plans.

Where coverage is offered, conference leaders from both states said this may have happened because such institutions merged with secular institutions whose union had already garnered such coverage in prior contract negotiations. In other cases, it may have happened because such institutions simply overlooked or were unaware of the fact that their insurers offered contraceptive coverage.

Only institutions defined as "religious employers" by California's government are allowed to opt out of offering their em-



ployees contraceptive benefits. Hogan said Catholic Charities is not allowed to do so because most of its employees are not Catholic and it serves a mostly non-Catholic population. Furthermore, Catholic Charities does not have as its primary mission teaching the Catholic faith, another standard the state considers essential when determining whether an employer is religious. Similar standards are part of the proposed New York state law.

Hogan said some California Catholics have argued that Catholic Charities should simply stop offering its employees health insurance to protest the coercive legislation. Yet Hogan noted that the Sacramento Archdiocese has argued in court that such a practice violates another church teaching — the duty of employers to provide just employment wages and benefits, including health insurance. Other Catholics have argued that the archdiocese should close down Catholic Charities, but that would give many California politicians what they want, she said.

"(Closing) wouldn't show the legislature anything because there's quite an anti-Catholic bias here, and they'd all be happy if we just folded our tents and went away," Hogan said.

Particular cultural climate

The First Amendment's guarantee of religious liberty is at the heart of the current debate, according to church leaders. When arguing the case in the secular news media, Hogan said her conference doesn't even refer to contraception. Instead, she said, California's Catholic leaders feel the real issue is that the state has usurped the church's right to define which of its institutions are Catholic. Thus, she said, her conference is attempting to frame the debate in religious liberty terms.

A similar position is held by New York's

Catholic leaders, including Bishop Matthew H. Clark, who joined his fellow bishops in issuing a statement condemning the New York State Senate's bill.

"All people of good will, regardless of their views on the morality of contraception, should reject the attempts by our Legislature to trample on the First Amendment," the bishops wrote. "The framers of the Constitution intended for all religious beliefs and practices to be accommodated, not simply those deemed acceptable by the particular cultural climate of the day."

Today's "particular cultural climate" supports ending the church's right to opt out of providing employees contraceptive coverage, according to a recent report from the American Civil Liberties Union, a prime actor in the anti-conscience-clause movement. The ACLU's report on "Religious Refusals and Reproductive Rights" continually trumpets the public's opposition to conscience clauses. According to ACLU research, more than two-thirds of Americans surveyed believe "it is more important to protect the reproductive freedom of women" than to "protect the religious freedom of religious hospitals" and also believe "if a hospital receives government funds, it should be required to provide basic, legal medical services, regardless of the hospital's religious objections."

Meanwhile, in a Feb. 20 paper on health-care providers' rights of conscience submitted to the Kansas House of Represent-

tatives, the U.S. bishops' Pro-Life Secretariat noted that "conscience laws are under increasing attacks by abortion rights activists, who want to require all health care personnel and hospitals to provide the full range of reproductive services," including abortion.

Cathy Cleaver, the secretariat's director of planning and information, said abortion is still considered wrong by many Americans, but if it can eventually become an expected health benefit, it may take away some of the stigma attached to the act.

In a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, she added that pro-choice politicians and groups not only want abortion to become a benefit, they want it to become something all hospitals must provide, something obviously impossible for Catholic hospitals to conceive allowing to happen. However, such hospitals may be forced to choose between closing and performing abortions if government monies begin to come with pro-choice strings attached.

"It's not an empty threat to say that the whole Catholic hospital system would shut down," she said.

To forestall such a day, the nation must begin to realize that certain rights of conscience should not be subject to the whims of public opinion, Hogan said.

"If you based all your public policy on what the people say, we'd still have slavery because it was convenient."

Change

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This prospect, he said, might spur such remarks as "We can't let them do that to us" and "This is the way we've always done it."

Father Ring said these feelings can be eased if people embrace other parishes in their planning group, and encourage those in their own parish to become involved.

Father Baldwin emphasized that parish leaders must forge ahead with necessary changes despite potential backlash. "Pre-tending that nothing is going on ... is beyond belief to me," he said.

Father Baldwin spoke at the first Planning Group Leadership Day in 2000 and also serves as a planning consultant for a number of dioceses. He told the *Catholic*

Courier that the challenges in his archdiocese — including a dwindling number of priests, demographic changes and financial woes — exist all over the United States.

Planning Group Leadership Day was attended by parish leaders and representatives of the Rochester Diocese's 35 planning groups. Along with the keynote talks, the day also featured small-group discussion, as well as a question-and-answer session involving Father Baldwin, Father Ring and Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

Pastoral planning began in the Rochester Diocese in 1997. Designed to be repeated every five years, the process will begin its next round this September. That cycle will focus much more heavily on implementation than the initial round, said William Pickett, director of the diocesan Office of Planning.

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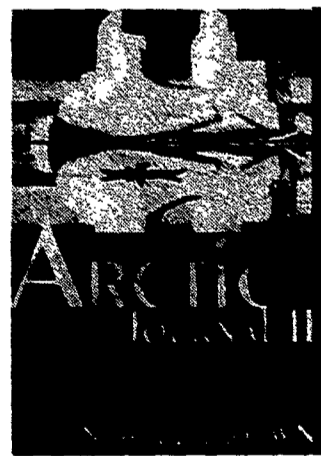
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