

DIOCESAN NEWS

Legislature passes bill deemed 'anti-Catholic'

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Both houses of the New York State Legislature passed a bill June 17 termed "anti-Catholic" by the New York State Catholic Conference.

The bill mandates that employers' group-health insurance plans include coverage for artificial birth control and abortifacients, or abortion-inducing devices. The Senate voted 49 to 10 for the bill; the Assembly voted 138 to 10.

In a press statement, the Catholic conference, which represents all the bishops of New York state, expressed "grave disappointment" over the Legislature's passage of the bill, which would force Catholic hospitals, charitable agencies and schools to provide contraception coverage in their employee health plans. If the bill becomes law, the bishops have said they may have to consider closing many Catholic institutions rather than operate them in violation of church teaching.

"Today, the state Legislature ignored the principles of the First Amendment and passed a bill that can only be described as religiously intolerant," said Richard E. Barnes, executive director of the Catholic conference. "In effect, Catholics in New York State are being told that the practice of one's faith is no longer to be protected by our laws. All New Yorkers who value our Constitution ought to be outraged by the actions of both houses."

The bill contains a religious conscience clause, but the protection offered by the clause is so narrow as to be almost meaningless, conference officials said. It excludes the agencies operated by Catholic Charities, which serves more than 1.3 million New Yorkers every year, as well as the 40 Catholic hospitals and 60 nursing

homes operated by the church. Many of the 850 Catholic schools across the state would be forced to offer contraception coverage as well.

Jann Armantrout, life issues coordinator for Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Rochester, strongly condemned the bill.

"The lack of meaningful conscience protection for Catholic schools, hospitals and charities ... is a direct affront to religious liberty," she said. "The diversity of opinion on core moral issues such as when life begins and abortion is effectively overruled by lawmakers who insist that Catholic institutions operate contrary to the moral tenets upon which they are founded."

"This legislation is not about women's health," said Kathleen Gallagher, the Catholic conference's associate director for pro-life activities. "If the Legislature truly wanted to improve access to women's health it could have easily done so without assaulting religious liberty. The motivation of abortion and contraception advocates with this legislation is to tear away at the concept of religious conscience protection and eventually force the church to provide procedures that violate fundamental teachings."

The state's bishops are calling on Gov. George Pataki to veto this legislation. They also want the Legislature to send a women's health bill to his desk that does not attack religious beliefs in general and the Catholic Church in particular. Failing that, the bishops will consider other remedies, including the possibility of litigation, the Catholic conference said. Catholic Charities of Sacramento, Calif. is pursuing a lawsuit over identical language in that state's contraception mandate. The case is currently before that state's Supreme Court.



Karin von Voigtlander/Staff photographer



Flag Day

St. Charles Borromeo School and Girl Scout Troop 210 honored Father Elmer Heindl, a decorated war veteran, during a Flag Day ceremony June 14, which also was the priest's 92nd birthday. At top, Megan Hollenbaek, 7, flanked by Jesandra Kirby (left), 7, and Mikayla Spindler, 8, joins St. Charles' other students in singing "Happy Birthday" to Father Heindl. At right, Father Heindl salutes during the "Star Spangled Banner." Above, the priest wraps himself in a birthday gift.



Three from Rochester diocese ordained in other areas

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Three men from the Diocese of Rochester have been ordained to the priesthood outside the diocese in recent weeks.

The three men are Father Peter J. Clark, 54, who grew up attending St. Monica's Parish in Rochester; Father Thomas J. O'Brien, SJ, 53, who grew up attending St. James Parish and school in Waverly; and Father Philip Brockmyre, 63, formerly of St. John of Rochester Parish in Fairport, who grew up attending Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Brighton.

Father Clark was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Lansing, Mich., at St. Mary's Cathedral in Lansing on June 8.

Father O'Brien was ordained a priest of the Detroit Province of the Society of Jesus on June 8 at the Madonna della Strada Chapel at Loyola University in Chicago, Ill.

He was ordained along with his nephew, William P. O'Brien, who belongs to the Jesuits' Chicago Province.

Father Brockmyre was ordained of priest of the Diocese of Syracuse on June 1 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in downtown Syracuse. He is believed to be the oldest man ever ordained to the priesthood in Syracuse.

Father Clark returned to St. Monica's last Sunday, June 16, for a Mass of Thanksgiving. A graduate of the former West High School in Rochester, Father Clark attended Wittenburg University in Springfield, Ill., and pursued graduate studies in medicine in Belgium. He settled in Michigan after completing his university studies, eventually working in internal and geriatric medicine in Milan, and teaching part-time at the University of Michigan.

Long active in the Catholic Charismatic movement, Father Clark was also a pro-life

activist, participating in abortion-clinic "rescues," which generally involved blockading clinic entrances and other forms of civil disobedience. It was through his pro-life work that Father Clark said he decided to become a priest. He was being arrested at a demonstration one day when he began pondering how he could change the mind of the doctor running the clinic.

"A thought came to me that I can only convince him to change his career if I change my own career," Father Clark said.

He said he sold his practice in 1994, and spent three years praying, fasting and doing "works of mercy" before he decided to enter Mundelein Seminary in Illinois in 1997. He graduated from the seminary in May, and is currently serving St. John's Parish in Fenton, Mich. Father Clark added that it was unlikely he would continue to practice medicine because the need for priests to do sacramental duties is so great.

Father O'Brien graduated from Notre Dame High School in Elmira in 1965. A 1972 graduate of the University of Detroit, Father O'Brien completed his graduate studies at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., in 1976. He also pursued theological and divinity studies in California and Illinois, and was a member of the Society of Jesus from 1967-81. During that time, he taught high school in Akron and Cleveland, Ohio. He reentered the Jesuits in 1997, and will be an associate pastor at Holy Rosary/St. John's Parish in Columbus, Ohio.

Father Brockmyre was married for 40 years to Patricia Brockmyre, who died in February 1998. The couple had eight children and 17 grandchildren. A graduate of Brighton High School, he pursued studies in social work at Villanova and Michigan State University, and has worked in New

York City, Illinois, Indiana and Mississippi. Among the positions he held in Rochester was coordinator of Child Protective Services for the Monroe County Department of Social Services.

During the 1980s, he and his late wife also were active in Marriage Encounter, a retreat program for married couples and served on the program's national board. After his wife died, he began to consider the priesthood, Father Brockmyre said.

"When one's wife dies, suddenly you have the rest of your life ahead of you," he said. "You want to make the best of whatever time is left ... It was clear to me at that point that the priesthood was calling."

Father Brockmyre said he did explore pursuing the priesthood in the Rochester diocese, but was told that he exceeded the age limit for prospective priests, which is generally 50. Father John DeSocio, diocesan director of pre-theology and seminarians, said the diocese has an age limit for reasons related to such issues as pension, benefits and the length of priestly formation, which can be as long as seven years. Brockmyre said he accepted the fact that the Rochester diocese had its own policy, and was grateful that the Syracuse diocese "took a gamble" on him.

Father Brockmyre attended Blessed John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Mass., and is currently serving Holy Family Parish in Fairmount. He added that people are intrigued that he was once married.

"I'm certain that my whole background will help me in dealing with families and couples," he said.

At an age when some priests are considering retirement, Father Brockmyre said he wants to work for as long as he can.

"My hope is that I will be active until they get out the hook," he said with a chuckle.

Bishop Clark will ordain Deacon Fennessy June 22

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will ordain Deacon James D. Fennessy, 44, to the priesthood during a 10:30 a.m. liturgy on Saturday, June 22, at Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park, Rochester. The Mass is open to the public.

A native of Auburn, Deacon Fennessy is one of four children of Donald and Jean Fennessy. His home parish is St. Alphonsus.

Deacon Fennessy was ordained a transitional deacon in June 2001 at Sacred Heart Cathedral. This past May he completed his master's degree in theology at the Theological College of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Following his ordination, Deacon Fennessy will serve the Roman Catholic Community of Geneva as a priest intern beginning June 25. He will preside at a 9 a.m. Mass of Thanksgiving on Sunday, June 25, at Rochester's St. Ambrose Church, where he served his pastoral year in 1999-2000 and also performed his diaconal summer experience in 2001. The following Sunday, June 30, Deacon Fennessy will return home to celebrate the 10 a.m. liturgy at St. Alphonsus in Auburn.

"The people of the Diocese of Rochester have been instrumental in my formation," Deacon Fennessy stated. "I look forward to serving them and helping them in their spiritual journey, as well as the wonderful moments in their lives."