

# Bishop backs end-of-life campaign

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Bishop Matthew H. Clark joined with other Rochester-area religious leaders Sept. 24 to support an initiative aimed at improving the quality of health care at the end of life.

"I encourage all Catholics, all people, to give thought and reflection to the type of care they wish to receive at the end of life. I encourage them to discuss their wishes with their families and decide whom they might want to act as their spokesperson should the need arise," Bishop Clark said during a press conference at St. Mary's Church in downtown Rochester.

Despite the value Catholics place on the sanctity of life, the bishop said people are not required to use extraordinary measures "when there is no reasonable hope of benefit or which involve excessive hardship." In the case of terminal illness, he added, pain killers that carry the risk of shortening life can be used "so long as the intent is to relieve pain rather than to cause death." Yet he also said "the dignity of human life is inviolable; consequently, physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia are judged to be wrong."

The conference served as a kickoff for a campaign cosponsored by the Rochester Health Commission and BlueCross BlueShield of the



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier  
Bishop Matthew H. Clark speaks about the importance of advanced-care directives during a Sept. 24 press conference at St. Mary Church's Dugan Center in Rochester.

Rochester Area. The campaign urges every adult over age 18 to discuss end-of-life wishes with loved ones and to designate an appropriate spokesperson, or proxy, to make medical decisions in case the individual is too ill or injured to speak for himself/herself. In addition, people are urged to complete New York's advanced-care directive forms to designate preferences for medical care.

To emphasize the importance of this process, Bishop Clark signed his own advanced-care directive

Sept. 24, as did the other religious leaders in attendance: Episcopal Bishop Jack McKelvey; Muhammad Shafiq of the Islamic Center of Rochester; and Rabbi Laurence Kottok of Temple B'rith Kodesh.

Jann Armantrout, life issues coordinator for diocesan Catholic Charities, said she was impressed that the Catholic, Protestant, Muslim and Jewish communities were in agreement on these issues.

"Each religious leader reinforced the idea that life is sacred. They stressed the sanctity of life and the

need for advanced-care planning," said Armantrout, who represents the Rochester Diocese on a subcommittee of the Rochester Health Commission that studies end-of-life issues.

Planning in such a way, Armantrout said, helps remove a major concern for many. "If you ask people what is their greatest fear about dying, the biggest percentage will say dying alone in an institutional setting, hooked up to a machine. Or, that the resources aren't available to them to die with dignity," she remarked.

BlueCross BlueShield has prepared an advanced-care planning packet that explains the procedure and also contains advanced-care directive forms. Packets can be obtained by calling 585/325-3630 or 800/847-1200, or downloading from [www.compassionatecare.net](http://www.compassionatecare.net)

Armantrout said the diocese will continue to promote this cause by educating health-care providers on end-of-life issues, and encouraging parishes to attend the Rochester Health Care Forum-sponsored "Community Conversations on Compassionate Care" series due to begin this fall. Armantrout added that Deacon John Nelson will advocate for advanced-care planning as part of his new position as coordinator of health-care ministry for diocesan Parish Support Ministries.

## Charities leader decries N.Y. law

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

New York state's new law compelling Catholic institutions to provide contraceptive coverage as part of their group health plans is part of a "dangerous" trend in church-state relations, according to Jesuit Father J. Bryan Hehir, president of Catholic Charities USA.

Father Hehir made his remarks during a presentation on Catholic social action on the morning of Sept. 24 at St. Patrick's Parish Center in Victor. The priest visited Rochester, Victor and Geneva Sept. 23-24 to meet with diocesan Catholic Charities officials, and to give the keynote speech at a Sept. 24 dinner in Geneva marking the 20th anniversary of Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes.

In a question-answer session following his speech on "Catholic Social Action and Advocacy: Offering a Direction for Society," the priest fielded a question about the

Women's Health and Wellness Act, signed Sept. 17 by Gov. George Pataki. The bill does include exemptions for churches and other institutions that have primarily a religious mission and serve only people of that religion. The law does not exempt such Catholic organizations as hospitals, nursing homes, universities and social service agencies such as Catholic Charities, since they do not serve only Catholics, and their primary purpose is not religious.

Father Hehir noted that women's groups had supported similar bills in Washington, D.C., and California lacking clauses protecting Catholic organizations because they believe Catholic institutions touch far too many women's lives to be granted exemptions. In the past, the church has been granted broader "conscience clauses" in proposed legislation, he said. But sex-abuse scandals this year hurt the church politically and collapsed support

for its traditional position in favor of conscience clauses, he said.

He added that no politician would want to oppose legislation mandating female contraceptive coverage, especially when insurance companies already offer coverage for male impotence drugs. Nonetheless, Father Hehir said supporters of such bills are attacking religious liberty.

"The difficulty with this is it's not about contraception," he said. "It's about church and state. When you get the state deciding who's Catholic or what's Catholic, you get the state extending into a sphere of life that is really dangerous."

He added that he believed the U.S. Supreme Court would eventually have to decide about the constitutionality of such laws.

The priest, an expert on just-war theory, also said war in Afghanistan was "justified and necessary," after Sept. 11. However, he was more hesitant when speaking about Iraq. Al-



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier  
Father J. Bryan Hehir, president of Catholic Charities USA, speaks at a workshop at Victor's St. Patrick Church Sept. 24.

though he said Iraq constitutes a threat to peace in the Middle East, he said he believes the United States should consider what precedent it would set if it unilaterally attacks the country. Superpowers have unique opportunities, he said, but they also have unique obligations and must consider the example they are setting worldwide when they forego creating an international consensus on the legitimacy of preemptive strikes against nations.

Murray/CNS

ice  
vernment

lved," Ivers  
that people  
or they're  
I think this  
ur-face kind

ow and tell,  
ations)," Sis-

pkins Coun-  
to take a di-  
g observed:  
out here; re-  
re's only one  
Immaculate  
we want to  
the people,  
ally."  
cesan direc-  
ness, com-  
o see an ini-  
at involves  
ioners.  
o the priests  
ners have to  
nerty said,  
an parishes  
e beginning  
ness teams.