

# Ribbon wearers decry porn's ills

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

A few years ago, Mary M. Smith, a parishioner at the Church of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads, went to a public library to use a computer. The computer's last user had apparently been a fan of pornography, because that's the first thing she saw on the computer screen.

Smith complained to a librarian who told her the library did not filter Internet porn from its computer system because of First Amendment concerns over freedom of expression. However, Smith said she felt she had equally important rights as a computer user in a public library.

"I don't want my space invaded by this evil," she said of pornography.

As places designed to educate citizens — including children — libraries should be safe from porn, she added. And with the rapid increase in Internet use, pornography now has the ways and means to infect every child's life, she noted.

"Is this open season on youth?" she asked rhetorically. "I feel that innocent lives may be warped or destroyed because of the evil of porn."

Concerned about porn's effects, Smith looked into the White Ribbon Against Pornography Campaign, or WRAP. Started by a Catholic

woman in Pennsylvania who was inspired by an anti-porn homily, WRAP is now in its 15th year. The campaign takes place the last week of October each year, this year running from Sunday, Oct. 27, to Sunday, Nov. 3. WRAP supporters are asked to wear white ribbons to show that they are opposed to the proliferation of pornography. The campaign is now officially sponsored by Morality In Media, a New York City-based interfaith watchdog group that maintains a Web site at [www.moralityinmedia.org](http://www.moralityinmedia.org).

For the past three years, Smith has promoted the WRAP campaign with the help of fellow members of Corning's Court of St. Joseph No. 139 of the Catholic Daughters of America. This year, the court's members made 1,000 white ribbons that were distributed to 11 parishes in Steuben and Chemung counties, she said. Parishes placed the ribbons in baskets in their foyers, she said, and made pulpit announcements about the campaign.

Smith said she and her fellow Catholic Daughters are supporting WRAP because they believe pornography demeans the dignity of women and children. She added that she wants her fellow citizens to work harder to limit the proliferation of pornography in their communities by working against the opening of such outlets as adult



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

## New office celebration

Participating in an Oct. 23 ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Catholic Family Center's new offices on Rochester's North Clinton Avenue, were (from left) Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities; Larry Glazer of Buckingham Properties; Carolyn Portanova, CFC's president and CEO; Lois Giess, president of the Rochester City Council; and Patty Lovallo, chairwoman of CFC's board of directors.

video stores. Indeed, the Morality In Media Web site offers a host of suggestions to communities that want to fight pornography using such legal tools as little-enforced obscenity laws.

Smith also noted that WRAP is a campaign that resonates with the Catholic Church's teaching about pornography. She cited a 1999 statement Pope John Paul II made in Poland against pornography as one example of such teaching.

"Guard your families against

pornography, which nowadays under various forms affects people's minds, especially those of children and young people," the pope said. "Defend the purity of morals ... in your homes and in society ... The purer families are, the healthier the nation will be."

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** To learn more about WRAP, call Mary Smith at 607/732-1080, or write to her at 3512 Michigan Ave., Elmira, NY 14903-1107.

# Supreme Court eyes death-penalty, abortion-clinic cases

Patricia Zapor/CNS

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court has announced about half the cases it will consider this term and so far only a handful of them merit watching for interests of the Catholic Church.

Nothing on the docket yet, however, seems to have the potential for dramatic impact on issues important to the church, such as last year's ruling that found Ohio's school voucher program constitutional.

Among those cases being followed by state and national Catholic conferences and other church groups are cases on the death penalty, immigrants' rights, abortion clinic protests and whether cross-burning is a constitutionally protected act of free speech.

Last term, the court made two significant rulings that limit the use of the death penalty. One found it

unconstitutional to execute those who are mentally retarded. The other overruled the practice in a handful of states of having judges rather than juries impose capital sentences.

As of the court's first week in session, four death penalty-related appeals were on the calendar, all dealing with how a capital case is carried out, rather than major constitutional questions about the punishment itself.

Robin Maher, director of the American Bar Association's Death Penalty Representation Program, said all four cases are important, but they're unlikely to have the sweeping impact of last term's *Atkins vs. Virginia*, which ended executions of people who are retarded, and *Ring vs. Arizona*, the juries ruling.

The cases this year consider smaller issues such as the legality of time limits on when death-row

appeals may be filed and the rules for defendants who claim their original lawyers did a poor job of representing them.

One issue the court hasn't agreed to consider yet is the constitutionality of executing people for crimes committed when they were juveniles.

On another aspect of capital punishment, U.S. District Court judges in New York and Vermont this year have found the federal death penalty statute unconstitutional, for different reasons. Both rulings are on appeal, and Maher said they eventually could reach the Supreme Court, though not likely this year.

Also on the docket this term is yet another appeal dealing with legal restrictions on protesters outside abortion clinics. Sixteen years ago a federal judge granted an injunction that relied upon the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Orga-

nizations Act, known as RICO, to limit protests at abortion clinics.

The court has already upheld use of the statute against clinic protesters. The latest of a series of cases stemming from the injunction — *Scheidler vs. National Organization for Women* combined with *Operation Rescue vs. National Organization for Women* — deals with the award of monetary damages to the clinics and whether the activities of protesters are unconstitutionally criminalized under the Hobbs Act.

Another free speech case on the docket considers whether a Virginia ban on cross-burning violates the First Amendment. Cole said it replays some of the issues raised in previous cases over flag burning. The Virginia Supreme Court held that the cross-burning statute is unconstitutional because it prohibits otherwise permitted speech solely on the basis of its content.