

DIocese CONSIDERS SUIT AGAINST SNAP

ERIE, Pa. (CNS) — The Erie Diocese is considering legal action against a local branch of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests for posting fliers April 27 on the doors of several Catholic schools in the city of Erie without permission.

The 8 1/2-by-11 inch signs are topped with the bold heading of "Protect Children Now." Printed in all capital letters, the signs read: "If you, or anyone you know, has been sexually molested by a priest, you can get help and help others through our support group. By contacting SNAP you will be helping to protect children. By identifying child molesters, you will be fulfilling a moral responsibility to yourself, your church and your community."

CARITAS AID CONVOY REACHES IRAQ SAFELY

BAGHDAD, Iraq (CNS) — The security situation in Baghdad remains a concern despite recent signs of progress, said a Catholic Relief Services official.

"We have received reports that there are signs of improvement being made and that people here have seen some sort of progress," said Christine Tucker, CRS regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, who arrived in Iraq May 3 as part of a Caritas Internationalis humanitarian aid convoy.

Tucker said the supplies reached the Caritas warehouse in Baghdad by May 4 and were to be distributed to Caritas centers throughout Iraq.

ROME GIVES SHRINE OVERSIGHT TO BISHOP

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican's decision to place a local bishop in charge of an Italian pilgrimage complex founded by St. Padre Pio of Pietralcina has sparked an uproar among the Capuchin friars at the site.

Pope John Paul II named Archbishop Domenico D'Ambrosio as a delegate to oversee the sanctuary of San Giovanni Rotondo and its related institutions. The Franciscan Capuchin order, of which Padre Pio was a member, would still run the sanctuary, but under the supervision of the archbishop, according to the Vatican.

Two peoples, one Creator

Catholics, Muslims pledge cooperation

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

BRIGHTON — Leaders of the Diocese of Rochester and the Council of Masajid (Mosques) of Rochester signed a historic agreement May 5, pledging mutual cooperation and support. The signing took place following a dinner at the Islamic Center of Rochester on Westfall Road.

Titled "An Agreement of Understanding and Cooperation," the five-article, two-page document pledges both communities to respect each others' religious traditions; challenge religious and ethnic bigotry; and undertake efforts to foster mutual respect, including the establishment of joint educational programs for children and adults, and mutual outreach efforts. The document also calls for the establishment of a joint committee of Catholics and Muslims to implement the agreement.

"Affirming our faith in only one God, and recognizing our common history and shared Abrahamic traditions, we pray to the merciful God to inspire in us respect, mutual understanding, and love and to guide us to pursue our common values for the benefit of all in our society and beyond," the agreement reads.

J. Patrick O'Connor, diocesan representative to the Christian-Muslim agreement, said the agreement was inspired in part by discussions he had with Aly Nahas of the Islamic Center about a similar agreement the diocese had forged with leaders of the Rochester-area Jewish communities in 1996. Believed to have been the first of its kind in the country, the 1996 agreement called for cooperation between Jewish groups and the diocese on such matters as combatting prejudice and promoting education about each faith. Similarly, Imam Muhammad Shafiq of the Islamic Center said the Catholic-Muslim agreement is perhaps the first of its kind in the nation, and O'Connor said it represented an effort to change how Catholics and Muslims view each other.

"Either we talk and learn to mutually learn from one another, or we'll fight one another, and that doesn't work — we tried it for centuries," O'Connor said.

O'Connor noted that Catholic-Muslim dialogue had predated the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and that the agreement gives a formal stamp of approval to ongoing efforts by



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Bishop Matthew H. Clark (left) and Imam Muhammad Shafiq sign an agreement of understanding and cooperation between the Catholic and Muslim faith communities May 5 at the Islamic Center in Brighton.

both communities to work together.

"There's a lot of mutual ignorance, and if you have a document like this, it's a wonderful vehicle to open doors," O'Connor said.

Referring to the terrorist attacks, Imam Shafiq observed that "One thing you see from 9/11 is ... the religious communities coming to work together." He noted, for example, that Catholic youth groups had visited the Islamic Center in the wake of the attacks.

He also expressed gratitude to both secular and religious leaders from the area for lending support to his community after the terrorist attacks.

In addition to Imam Shafiq, Nahas and O'Connor, other signatories to the agreement were Bishop Matthew H. Clark; Father Joseph A. Hart, diocesan vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Center; Imam Mehmet Aktas of the Islamic Cultural Center; Bernard Grizard, diocesan director of parish support ministries; Imam Hanif Abdul-Wahid of Rochester Masjid al-Islam; Abu Saeed Islam, president of the Islamic Center; Father Joseph Marcoux, parochial vicar of Sacred Heart Cathedral and diocesan representative to the Christian-Muslim Commission; Utku Kanik, president of the Turkish Society of Rochester; Deacon Thomas Driscoll, director of community education at St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry in Rochester.

Dr. Saluhuddin Malik, a trustee of the Islamic Center, said that the agreement represents what could be the future as opposed to what has been the past.

"It is our differences that make us

Muslims and Christians, and our differences are so small," he said. "The hostile mood (in the world) is not in keeping with the teachings of Jesus and Muhammad. Imagine what the world might have achieved if the Muslims and Christians had worked together over the last 1,400 years. The world would be a different planet."

Both O'Connor and Bishop Clark noted that Pope John Paul II has repeatedly called for Catholics to engage in dialogue with Muslims, and the bishop added that the signing of the agreement was a highlight of his life in service to the church.

"I have no doubt that this is one of the moments that will never leave me," Bishop Clark said during the dinner.

After the signing ceremony, Abu Saeed Islam said he hoped the agreement would set an example for the rest of the world, which takes up such American fashions as fast food and popular music. What if religious mutual understanding in a similar fashion caught on throughout the world, he asked rhetorically.

"We shouldn't know each other through the media," he said. "We should be meeting face to face."

Theresa Fantone, youth minister at St. Margaret Mary's Parish in Irondequoit, said she had accompanied young people from her parish on visits to the Islamic Center, and praised the signing of the agreement.

"I think it's so awesome for people, in this contemporary time of conflict with the media showing only that part of it, to show that people do aspire to the mutuality and commonality they find in God," she said.