

# Church hails unborn bills

## State, federal leaders promoting legislation

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Catholic leaders on the diocesan, state and national levels are supporting legislation that would recognize unborn children as victims when injured during the commission of crime.

On May 14, the New York state Senate passed the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, which treats the killing of an unborn child as a form of homicide. The law, which specifically excludes legal abortions, awaits consideration by the Assembly.

Under current state law, if an unborn child is killed or injured, the offender may not be held responsible for the harm caused to that child unless he or she is born alive. In a statement released following the bill's passage, Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno said the legislation closes a loophole in New York state law.

"It provides unborn children with a measure of protection afforded to everyone by our criminal justice system," his statement said.

In a statement, the New York State Catholic Conference, the state bishops' policy arm in Albany, applauded the bill's passage.

"Studies reveal that women are at a higher risk of domestic violence when they are pregnant," said Kathleen Gallagher, the conference's director of pro-life activities. "By passing this legislation, the Senate is attempting to correct a serious injustice in our criminal justice system."

Jann Armantrout, life issues coordinator for the Diocese of Rochester, noted the bill reinforces the Catholic belief that life is sacred from conception.

"I applaud the action of the state Senate and hope that this leads to a further understanding of and respect for the dignity of life, particularly relative to an unborn child, the most vulnerable among us," Armantrout said in a statement.

At the federal level, legislation reintroduced in both houses of Congress May 7 would recognize an unborn child as a legal victim when he or she is injured during the commission of a violent federal crime. The House has twice passed the bill but it has not come before the Senate. The Unborn Victims of Violence Act must be approved by Congress to provide "new legal protections" for women and their unborn children, the U.S. bishops' chief pro-life



Reuters/CNS

A choir sings during a memorial service for Laci Peterson at the First Baptist Church in Modesto, Calif., May 4. Peterson was eight months pregnant at the time of her death, and her husband, Scott, has been charged with double homicide. The Unborn Victims of Violence Act, proposed legislation to recognize unborn children as legal victims of violence, will be renamed Laci and Conner's Law.

spokeswoman said as the legislation was reintroduced in the House.

Cathleen Cleaver, director of planning and information in the bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, noted in a May 8 statement that the legislation is soon to be renamed Laci and Conner's Law in memory of Californian Laci Peterson and her son, Conner, with whom she was eight months pregnant at the time of her death. Scott Peterson, Laci's husband, has pleaded not guilty to two counts of capital murder.

"The murders of Laci and Conner Peterson have shocked the nation," Cleaver said. "Women and their unborn children deserve the new legal protections this bill offers."

In a letter to the chief sponsors of the legislation, Sen. Michael DeWine, R-Ohio, and Rep. Melissa A. Hart, R-Pa., Laci Peterson's mother, Sharon Rocha, as well as her stepfather, Ron Grantski, and four brothers and sisters urged passage of the bill and asked that it be renamed in honor of Laci and Conner.

"This bill is very close to our hearts," the letter said. "We have not only lost our future with our daughter and sister, but with our grandson and nephew as well. ..."

"Knowing that perpetrators who murder pregnant women will pay the price not only for the loss of the mother, but the baby as well, will help bring justice for these victims and hopefully act as a deterrent to those considering such heinous acts," they added.

Cleaver said Laci Peterson's family, "and the American people, see

clearly that there were two victims of this tragedy."

"It's sad and ridiculous for anyone to suggest that Laci's family has only one loved one to mourn," she added. "It's time that our federal laws against violence embrace reality."

Twenty-six states currently have laws that recognize unborn victims of at least some violent crimes.

"Unborn children can own property, sue for paternity rights and loss of companionship, and receive welfare benefits, and in two dozen states they can be recognized as a victim of violent crime," Cleaver said. "Pro-abortion groups must not be allowed to invoke abortion to deny the chances of protection for women and children in federal crimes of violence."

Gallagher and Armantrout also noted that the murders of Laci and Conner Peterson had highlighted the need for protection of unborn children harmed during crimes.

"The issue of the lawful protection of the unborn is brought into sharper focus because of the tragic death of Laci Peterson," Armantrout said. "The grief of her family in California extends beyond that of grieving their daughter. They are also experiencing the loss of a joyfully awaited grandson. Protecting unborn children is not an issue of choice but an issue of recognition of the reality of an unborn human being, nurtured and cared for by his or her parents."

Contains reporting by Catholic News Service.

## FORTY-EIGHT GRADUATE FROM ST. BERNARD'S

ROCHESTER — On May 16 a capacity crowd attended the 22nd annual commencement ceremonies for St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry at St. Mary's Church.

Forty-eight people received degrees from the school — 29 received master's of arts or divinity degrees; two received graduate certificates; 10 received certification for ministry in the Diocese of Rochester; and seven received certification for ministry in the Hispanic community.

Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Schoelles, St. Bernard's president, noted that the commencement was the final one for the school before it relocates to 120 French Road in Pittsford. St. Bernard's is tentatively slated to begin moving its offices in July.

## DEACON FORMATION DIRECTIVES REVISED

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops will vote on revised national directives for permanent deacons when they meet in St. Louis this June.

The directives treat deacons' human, spiritual, academic and pastoral formation. It also sets out formally for the first time the procedures and the formation and discernment process to be followed before an applicant is accepted into formation as a candidate for the permanent diaconate.

## BISHOP BLAMES DEATHS ON U.S. BORDER POLICY

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A "flawed and inhumane" border policy is at fault in the deaths May 14 of 18 illegal immigrants found in a trailer in Texas, according to the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration.

"It is time for our elected officials to acknowledge that the border blockade strategy our nation has pursued since 1993 is a flawed and inhumane policy," said Miami Auxiliary Bishop Thomas G. Wenski in a statement released May 19.

He renewed the call made by bishops of the United States and Mexico in a joint pastoral letter in January for reform of U.S. immigration laws to create legal ways of accommodating the flow of migrant labor into the United States.