

# State senators decry gay unions

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

ALBANY — About 1,000 representatives of the Catholic Church in New York state — including about 100 from the Diocese of Rochester — traveled to Albany March 9 to lobby state legislators on a wide range of issues.

The annual Public Policy Day is organized by the New York State Catholic Conference, the public-policy arm of the state's bishops.

Concern about the growing movement to legalize same-sex unions in the nation was a dominant theme in politicians' speeches. During a general assembly in Empire State Plaza Convention Center, two state senators decried "same-sex marriage." One of the senators, Serphin Maltese of Queens, noted he had introduced a bill that states: "A marriage or union is absolutely void if contracted by two persons of the same sex, regardless of whether such a marriage or union is recognized in another jurisdiction."

"Same-sex marriage is not a civil-rights issue," Maltese said. "Same-sex marriage is an abomination." Maltese's bill (S.2220) has also been introduced in the state assembly (A.2998).

Dennis Poust, spokesman for the Catholic conference, said that the conference opposes legalizing same-sex unions. Poust added that gays and lesbians seeking same-sex unions can procure many of the same benefits that married couples enjoy — inheritances, insurance policies, etc. — through legal contracts.

When asked for comment on the issue, Michael Tedesco, spokesman for the Diocese of Rochester, said that "a same-sex union contradicts our understanding of marriage and it would be wrong to equate that type of relationship to marriage."

Tedesco added that last November, Bishop Matthew H. Clark joined the other U.S. bishops in stating that giving same-sex unions the legal status of marriage would grant official public approval of homosexual activity and would treat

it as if it were morally neutral when the church teaches otherwise.

"That said, the Diocese of Rochester has long embraced church teaching that it is wrong to show hatred or contempt for those of homosexual orientation," Tedesco said. "In fact, the diocese has, and will continue to welcome and minister to gay and lesbian individuals."

Meanwhile, Catholic representatives of the Rochester diocese brought a varied range of concerns to the capital. Among those visiting their legislators March 9 were representatives of the diocese's Southern Tier, led by Kathy Dubel, justice and peace director for Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier in Elmira (see related story on page 14).

Dubel and her fellow Catholics visited with Assemblyman George Winner, who represents Chemung County and portions of Tioga County. The delegation expressed concerns on such issues as restoration of child-care subsidies to low-income parents; reform of the state's drug laws to allow more discretion in sentencing; and aid to Catholic schools for various services.

Three delegates from Monroe County also came to lobby their home-area legislators on fetal rights, religious property rights and health insurance for the poor.

Amy Dorscheid, youth minister at St. Andrew's Parish in Rochester, said she supported Assembly passage of the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, which the Senate passed last year. The bill would recognize a fetus killed in the course of an attack or murder of its mother as a separate victim, a status the unborn do not currently enjoy.

"They're not even given the dignity of being seen as a victim of a crime," Dorscheid said.

Her husband, Bob Dorscheid, manages a Catholic Charities group



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

## He's got the beat

John Baglin keeps rhythm with a field snare drum as he and bagpipe player Robert Dalton, members of Celtic Crossroads, practice before performing March 13 at the 2004 Celtic Family Fair held at Rochester's Clarion Riverside Hotel.

home for people with developmental disabilities. He noted that he came to Albany to lobby against changing the tax-exempt status of property owned by not-for-profit organizations such as Catholic Charities. According to the Catholic conference, several bills were introduced into the Senate last year to impose property taxes on not-for-profits. However, the conference maintains that, if passed, these bills could destroy the financial health of

thousands of social-service agencies, environmental groups and religious organizations.

Marv Mich, director of social policy and research at Rochester's Catholic Family Center, said he came to Albany armed with petitions signed by 4,400 diocesan Catholics calling on the state to make it easier for people to enroll in the health plans Medicaid, Child Health Plus and Family Health Plus.

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