

CLE guides physicians' philosophies

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Legally, nothing prevents Dr. Stephen A. Spaulding or his wife, Dr. Theresa A. Spaulding, from issuing contraceptives or performing abortions or sterilizations.

But the Spauldings, who practice out of Montour Falls, Schuyler County, answer to different standards — those set by the Catholic Church.

The Spauldings list themselves as "pro-life family physicians" in a bulletin advertisement for Horseheads' St. Mary Our Mother Parish, where they are parishioners. Further evidence of their beliefs can be found in their office, where a crucifix and pro-life literature are in plain view.

Not surprisingly, the Spauldings say they're guided by consistent-life-ethic priorities, which promotes the dignity and preservation of human life in all forms from conception until natural death.

"There's no other way. There's only one stance if you go by the teachings of the church," Stephen Spaulding stated.

Whereas the Spauldings deal primarily with beginning-of-life aspects of the consistent life ethic, Dr. James Maxwell follows his CLE beliefs in many end-of-life situations in his role as Rochester General Hospital's chief of neurosurgery. Maxwell said he has adhered to CLE standards "top to bottom, beginning to end, 365 days a year, full-court press," throughout his three decades as a doctor.

"I believe Christ's message is very simple — do unto others, the Good Samaritan," said Maxwell, a parishioner of St. Louis in Pittsford. "It's amazing — if you spend enough time with people, you get to a sense of what's the right thing to do."

When dealing with serious brain injuries, Maxwell is legally bound to respect advance directives — specific instructions outlining what medical treatment a patient would receive if he or she became incapacitated. He also follows Catholic teaching on dying as stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2278: "Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate."

"Assisted suicide is wrong; actively ending life is wrong. But I think it's quite proper to get out of the way of nature," Maxwell remarked.

Maxwell acknowledged that instances have come up where "I did have to excuse myself" — he declined to elaborate — when placed in



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Michele Compton of Hector smiles as she looks at a sonogram of her unborn child during an ultrasound Aug. 30 at the office of Dr. Stephen Spaulding (left) in Montour Falls.

situations that went against his Catholic beliefs. This has caused occasional criticism from his colleagues — yet Maxwell said he's never had a dispute with patients or their families, noting that he avoids misunderstanding by setting ground rules early on. For instance, he makes clear that he won't hasten death by administering a fatal drug overdose à la Jack Kevorkian.

The Spauldings, also, say they establish communication with patients by making their stances known up front. "A woman shouldn't come into our practice expecting to get birth-control pills," said Theresa Spaulding, who currently works part-time at the Montour Falls prac-

tice where her husband is full time.

Unlike Maxwell, who said he's been guided by CLE priorities throughout his life, the Spauldings underwent a conversion experience early in their careers. As Army doc-

tors in the early 1980s, they rode the bandwagon in regard to birth control. "Oh, these people are so smart, I'll just do what they do" — that's what you learn in residency," Stephen remarked.

But he began looking at things differently in 1991 after meeting a young Catholic intern, F.J. Milligan, who vigorously defended his church views against popular belief. This prompted Stephen to seek out a priest, and from then on he dropped the birth-control aspects of his practice.

"That ruffled some feathers. There were some people who said he wasn't providing good care for the patients," Terry Spaulding said, adding that she soon followed her husband's lead.

Even today, Stephen — who serves as president of Chemung County Right to Life — willingly faces opposition to his beliefs. "People died for the faith. This is not that bad," he said.

On the other hand, the Spauldings have reached many a patient who appreciates knowing there are Catholic physicians who espouse the CLE.

"We've had people come from hours away," Theresa said.



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