

Church calls for prayer after 33rd suicide

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Within hours of Adam Cardinal Maida establishing a hot-line to provide an alternative to assisted suicide and abortion, Dr. Jack Kevorkian delivered the body of a California woman to Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital (POH).

Without much explanation, Kevorkian left the body of Rebecca Badger at the hospital emergency room shortly before midnight Tuesday. She is the 33rd person known to have died after consulting with Kevorkian, a retired pathologist known as "Doctor Death" in part because of his advocacy of assisted suicide.

Hours later, Kevorkian's lead

attorney, Geoffrey N. Fieger, Wednesday told reporters his client would likely continue helping people like Badger and their pain by ending their lives. Fieger described Badger as a multiple sclerosis victim in unrelenting pain.

Fieger said he didn't expect Kevorkian to be prosecuted for consulting with Badger, and he was critical of Maida for "trying to impose his morality" on an unresponsive general public.

The cardinal Tuesday announced the Archdiocese of Detroit has launched "Project Life" as alternative for people thinking about getting an abortion or ending their own life.

"Before you pick up the telephone to schedule an appoint-

ment with an abortion clinic or to schedule a consultation with Jack Kevorkian, call 'Project Life,' the cardinal said.

Another Kevorkian attorney, Michael A. Schwartz, said he considers the "Project Life" to be a public relations response to a genuine medical problem. "Is he going to heal these people riddled with cancer?" the attorney asked.

Among the 1.4 million Catholics in metro Detroit, however, the response was mixed. "We're very supportive," said Fr. William Murphy of Our Lady of Refuge Catholic Church in West Bloomfield.

Murphy said his church will have a special mass at 8 p.m. today (Thursday) as part of a "day of prayer" — organized by

Catholic officials as part of the church's effort against abortion and assisted suicide.

As part of "Project Life," Maida said a special hot line will be active 24 hours a day. That number, (313) 237-6755 was inundated with calls early Wednesday, according to archdiocese spokesperson Howard Hoefflein.

But not all the calls were supportive, Hoefflein said. About 25 percent of the calls were obviously hostile from people who were critical, angry or both.

Late Wednesday morning, as news of the body at POH circulated, the archdiocese issued a

statement that said, in part, "A tragedy in and of itself, this latest apparent suicide also supports the Cardinal's belief that 'Project Life' is a critical necessity."

Fieger called a press conference at the Wayne County Circuit Court, where he was in trial, to talk about the latest developments. He told reporters his client has personally taken the bodies of assisted suicide patients to save relatives and loved ones the painful duty.

Fieger said Badger had been in contact with Kevorkian for several months during which

time the attorney said she had been in agony. Badger was accompanied from California to Oakland County by one of her two daughters, the attorney said.

Fieger also said Kevorkian did not mean to "bait" the Oakland County prosecutor by his action in Oakland County. The prosecutor's office lost two felony trials against Kevorkian earlier this year.

Oakland County chief assistant prosecutor Lawrence Bunting said the office has not decided on any possible prosecution of Kevorkian, in part because witnesses have been reluctant to talk to investigators.

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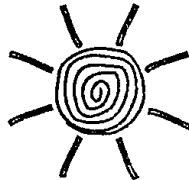
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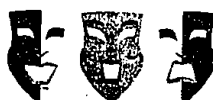
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