

Ecumenical group fears HHS mandate will create 'immense injustice' to needy

PITTSBURGH (CNS) – The Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, one of the largest regional ecumenical agencies in the United States, urged the Obama administration to broaden the religious exemption in the federal government’s mandate requiring that most health plans cover the cost of contraception, sterilization and some drugs that can induce abortion.

As it stands now, religious employers who are morally opposed to such coverage may be forced to shut down various ministries, including outreach to the poor, which would result in an “immense injustice” to those in need, the organization said in a statement.

It said the mandate violates the Constitution’s guarantee of religious freedom and also called “health care for all” a “moral imperative.”

The statement, released April 13 at a news conference at the organization’s headquarters in Pittsburgh, was signed by the leaders of several church bodies, including the Catholic Church.

“Our deep concern over this mandate does not arise from the varying convictions we have on the moral content of this mandate, but from our common commitment to the right of religious freedom that all people of faith expect to enjoy in this country,” the statement said.

“The Constitution of the United States guarantees every religious institution and its affiliated bodies the inalienable right to define its own identity and ministries and to practice its own beliefs, not just its freedom of worship,” it added.

The signatories included Bishops David A. Zubik and Lawrence E. Brand, who head, respectively, the Latinrite dioceses of Pittsburgh and Greensburg and Father Eugene Yackanich, interim administrator of the Byzantine Archeparchy of Pittsburgh. (Archbishop William C. Skurla was to be enthroned as head of the archeparchy April 18.)

“Many religious institutions are now placed in the untenable position of (a) violating their consciences, (b) ceasing health insurance and paying ruinous fines, or (c) INJUSTICE, page 3

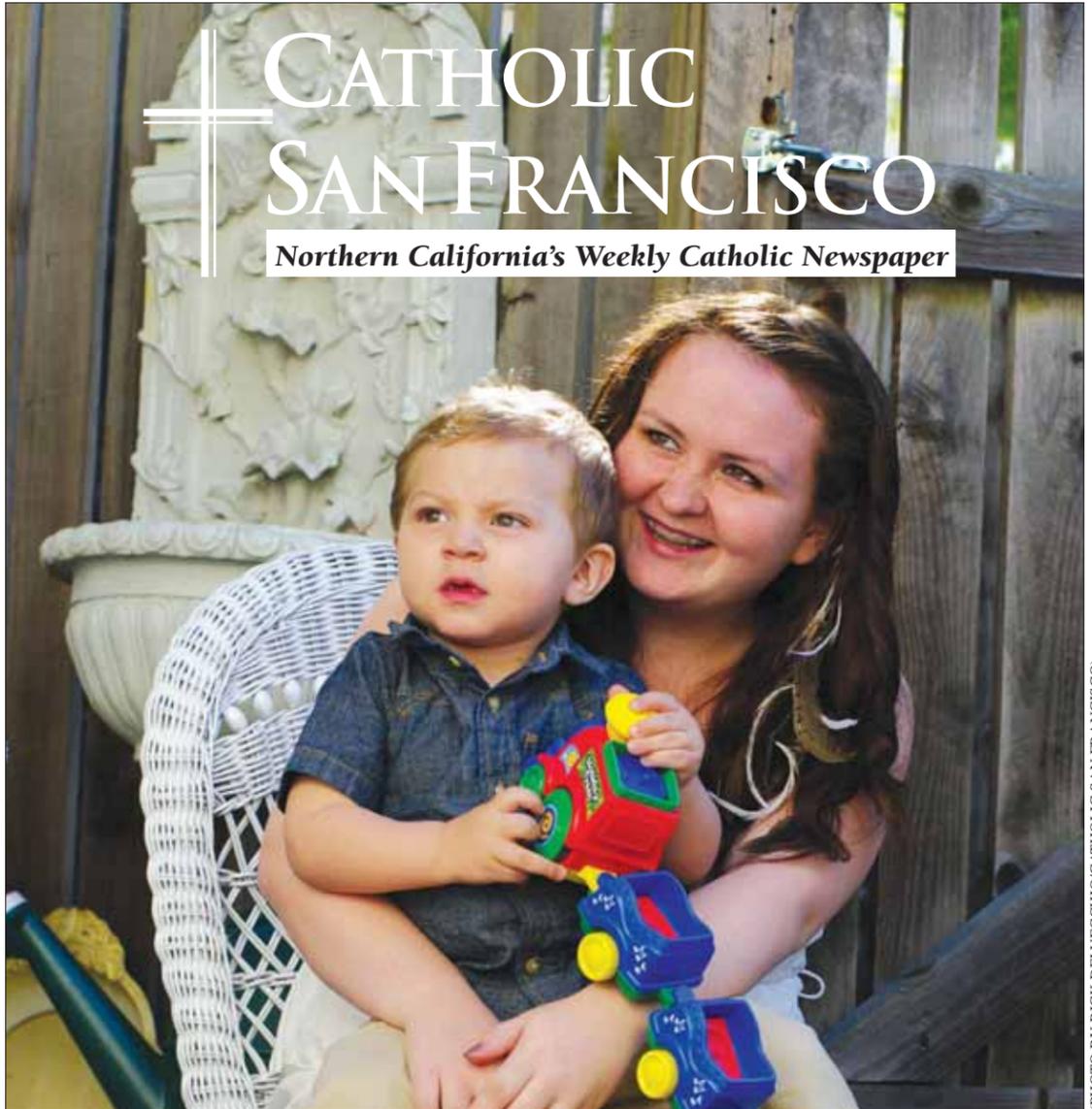
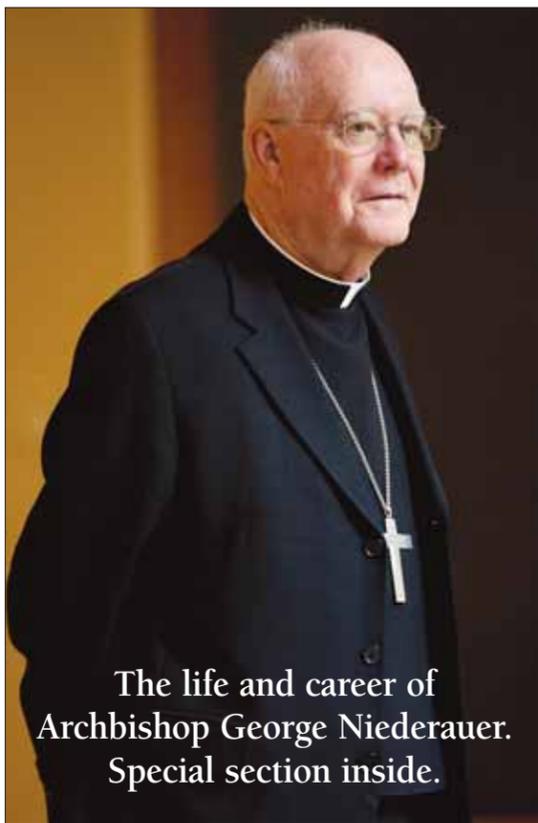


PHOTO BY RICK DELVECCHIO/CATHOLIC SAN FRANCISCO

Saving baby James

Alison Lynch is pictured in San Mateo April 15 with her son James Lopez-Lynch, whose birth became a celebration in part because of support by parish Gabriel Project volunteers for a young mother at a difficult time. Alison attends high school and hopes to become a paralegal.

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The life and career of Archbishop George Niederauer. Special section inside.

‘We cannot just stand by and watch’

Filipino priest who opposes mine to protect indigenous people’s land wins Goldman prize

By George Raine

The indigenous people of Mindoro, the seventh-largest island in the Philippines, eke out a living growing upland rice, root crops and bananas, but the crops are grown on their ancestral land and to destroy it by way of mining for metal would destroy them. Imagine the harm toxic waste would do, wending its way into Mindoro’s water resources and forests, dumping into the sea to kill the fishermen’s catch.

This is the nightmare of Father Edwin Gariguez, a Catholic priest for the island’s mission who has led a dogged opposition to a Norwegian company’s ambitious plans to mine nickel. The work has led, at least temporarily, to the suspension of the developer’s permit and thwarted the project.

For his determination and courage – he has earned a place on a list of “dissident terrorists” drawn up by the military in the Philippines – Father Gariguez on April 16 was one of six recipients of the prestigious

2012 Goldman Environmental Prize, awarded in San Francisco. The awards, established in 1989 by the late San Francisco civic leaders and philanthropists Richard and Rhoda Goldman, are given to, as prize administrators note, “a group of fearless emerging leaders working against all odds to protect the environment and their communities.”

Father Gariguez’ campaign to protect Mindoro Island’s biodiversity and its indigenous people, known as the Mangyan, began only a few years after his ordination in 1993. He had come from Quezon Province on the Island of Luzon. He asked for the Mindoro assignment, as pastor of the Mangyan Mission Church, seeing it as an opportunity and a challenge. The challenge came in spades when Intex Resources of Norway began laying plans to mine nickel, abundant in the island’s soil.

He told the story during an interview in San Francisco prior to receiving the prize. He said Intex – which did not respond to an email from Catholic San Francisco GOLDMAN, page 4

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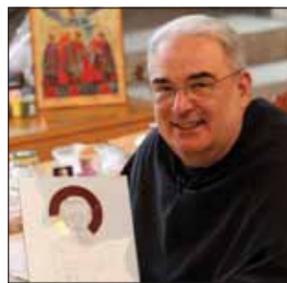
Catholics urged to join in ‘fortnight for freedom’

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Gabriel Project parish 'angels' watch over troubled moms, families

By Lidia Wasowicz

A teen whose baby united a family that had pressed her to abort him, a young woman whose toddler returned home from foster care just in time for Christmas, an abandoned new mom whose infant opened the door to a loving friendship – all believe the Gabriel Project “angels” who took them under their wing can work miracles.

For their part, volunteers in the nationwide, parish-based program named after the bearer of the good news of Christ’s birth to Mary attest that making a difference in the lives of others has changed their own.

Many participants in the Gabriel Project retain close ties long after completing their official mission of bringing comfort, consolation and care to troubled mothers-to-be during their pregnancy.

“I cannot begin to describe how incredibly fulfilling this ministry is,” said Patsy Gonzalez of Redwood City, an “angel” at Church of the Nativity Parish in Menlo Park.

Staying in touch, she was asked to be the godmother of one of the newborns she supported and was joined on a recent Walk for Life West Coast by the child’s grandmother, who made the initial contact in early 2010.

At the time she first called the Gabriel Project hotline, Phyllis Palmer, a hospice nurse in San Mateo, was desperately seeking support for her 15-year-old pregnant daughter, who wanted to have and keep her baby despite adamant opposition from her father and stepparents.

“Patsy was always there to talk about (my) concerns and to stand by me,” Palmer said.

Her daughter, Alison Lynch, now 17, sees Gonzales as a cornerstone in the foundation of love and faith she’s convinced will help her son James defy the discouraging odds facing most babies born to teenagers.

“It was God’s grace and the Holy Spirit that brought Patsy into our lives,” said Lynch, who plans to pursue paralegal studies after graduating from Peninsula Continuation High School in San Bruno on May 31.

Her son’s birth on Sept. 24, 2010, transformed her life and family dynamics.

“Even my father, who wanted nothing to do with me when I refused to have an abortion, has come around and has a wonderful relationship with James, carrying his picture and acting the proud grandpa,” Lynch said.

Having served as a guide on this “very rocky journey,” Gonzalez considers her involvement “a true blessing” and Palmer’s friendship “a great gift.”

Her sentiments resound with other “angels” in the 13 Archdiocese of San Francisco parishes participating in the project born of a similar program started by a Houston priest in the wake of the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

“I’ve worked with a lot of ministries and social justice causes, but this one has such an amazing impact, it’s indescribable,” said Mila Ramirez, who coordinates the



PHOTO BY RICK DELVECHIO/CATHOLIC SAN FRANCISCO

What might have been a family tragedy became a cause for celebration and renewal when Alison Lynch, lower right, gave birth to James Lopez-Lynch 18 months ago. The healthy birth and the teenage mom’s success at motherhood were in part the result of support by Gabriel Project volunteers at Church of the Nativity in Menlo Park, led by project “angel” Patsy Gonzalez, upper right. Pictured in San Mateo April 15 with baby James is the child’s grandmother, Phyllis Palmer, who also played a crucial part in the success story. The Gabriel Project is a parish-based program, dedicated to the sanctity of life, to help women in what might seem to be a crisis pregnancy.

10 “angels” and assistant “angels” at St. Andrew Parish in Daly City. “It’s by far the most hands-on.”

In one case, Ramirez and her team took turns babysitting a baby for five months so his mom, a 29-year-old with two other children who had been set on terminating the pregnancy, could work.

The young woman’s mother had asked the “angels” to pray that her daughter have a change of heart. They did, and she had. Matthias was born Aug. 19, 2011.

“He’s wonderful and cute, robust, healthy and handsome and loves to be cuddled,” said Helen Reguindin of Daly City, a member of the Gabriel Project at St. Andrew who helped care for the baby for two months. “I can’t think of a better way to spread the love than to give our time and effort in such a fulfilling way.”

Thanks to that time and effort, Marlyn Fuentes, 33, of Daly City got “the best Christmas present of my life” last year – her 2-year-old son Patrick, who had been taken away by social services 11 months earlier when the family became homeless.

Ramirez worked tirelessly to secure them shelter and provide guidance that brought the little boy home on Dec. 19 and his sister Judith Antonielli into the world two months later.

“They never imagined there would be people who would help them the way we did,” Ramirez said. “That’s restored their confidence in God and in people.”

The children’s father was baptized Catholic on Easter Sunday. The couple plans to wed on July 14 in a religious

“Operation I Do” ceremony at St. Thomas More Parish in San Francisco for those in civil or common-law unions.

“Mila is the reason I believe in miracles,” Fuentes said.

A lasting friendship also developed between Dawn Scannell of Our Lady of Loretto and St. Anthony of Padua in Novato and Eva Ugarte, a single mom deserted by her now 6-month-old daughter’s father when he learned of the pregnancy.

Ugarte felt “desperate, hopeless and totally alone” when she glimpsed a “Gabriel Project” sign through her tears as she walked by St. Anthony Church.

One phone call and a couple meetings later, she had rent money for the next month, piles of baby items, a maternity wardrobe and a blossoming relationship with her “angel.”

By the time Gianna was born Sept. 13, 2011, Scannell had fully opened up her heart and home to Ugarte, her baby and her 7-year-old daughter Natalia from a previous marriage.

She invited the trio to holiday dinners, family functions, the movies and a celebration for Ugarte’s 26th birthday.

Such blessings have rekindled Ugarte’s faith in God and her future. She is returning to the Catholic Church and to school to earn a degree in phlebotomy, the drawing of blood samples.

“Because of the Gabriel Project,” Ugarte said, “I have hope, confidence and, most special of all, an ‘angel’ without whom all of this would be impossible.”

For more information on the program, call (415) 614-5551 or email sfgabrielproject@gmail.com.

Injustice . . .

■ Continued from cover

withdrawing entirely from providing the social services to the wider community that have long been a social justice hallmark of their ministry,” the statement said.

“Creating gaping holes in the public welfare safety net is in and of itself an immense injustice.”

The statement concluded by calling on the Obama administration to alter the contraceptive mandate by broadening “within it so that both the constitutional right to the free

exercise of religion for all and the moral imperative of health care, likewise for all, in this country may not be impaired.”

Other signatories included Archbishop Robert Duncan of the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh and chair of the Christian Associates, and representatives of the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, the Disciples of Christ, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Church of Christ, the Baptist Church and the Orthodox Church in America.

Founded in 1970, the Christian Associates organization includes 26 church bodies representing 2,000 local congregations and 1 million Christians in southwestern Pennsylvania.



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