

Bishop

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Nobody's Fool

demed 'morally

inappropriate'

for Catholics

By TERRI JO RYAN
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The Diocese of Austin is urging Catholic parents not to send their children to the July 11-12 conference at the Waco Convention Center, saying the program's material is "morally inappropriate."

Helen Osman, spokeswoman for the Catholic Diocese of Austin, said Tuesday that the "strong recommendation" came down through a June 18 memo from Bishop Gregory M. Aymond to local clergy. The recommendation subsequently was published in parish newspapers and periodicals.

"The program material is devoid of Christian moral regarding sexuality," the diocese warning continued. "Our diocese does not approve of the program and strongly encourages Catholics not to utilize it."

John Pisciotta, co-director of Pro-Life Waco, said Tuesday that the diocese's move marks the first time the Catholic authority for the area encompassing Waco has come out against the increasingly controversial Nobody's Fool.

Pisciotta garnered national attention in anti-abortion circles for orchestrating a boycott

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500 expected to attend program

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Against this year's Bluebonnet Council of the Girl Scouts of America cookie drive, based on the council's previous association with Nobody's Fool.

"This whole thing really started with John Pisciotta," said the Rev. Angelo Bertini, pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption Catholic Church in Waco. "It didn't come to the diocese's attention until John raised it."

Osman confirmed the diocese was unfamiliar with Nobody's Fool until Pisciotta raised the issue. The diocese was concerned if it did not express its disapproval, some Catholics might assume it was giving tacit approval to the proceedings, she said.

"It is not life-giving and not in accord with Catholic teachings," she said of Nobody's Fool. Some 500 area youths are expected to attend this summer's Nobody's Fool. Planned Parenthood of Central Texas' annual conference for girls and boys entering grades five through nine. The organization



John Pisciotta brought Nobody's Fool to the attention of the Diocese of Austin.

describes it as an event "to provide teens and preteens with factual information about growing up, puberty, dating, relationships, sexual issues and sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS."

Planned Parenthood officials say the goal is to improve communication between teens and their parents.

But some area parents object to the distribution of two controversial books at Nobody's Fool: Fifth- and sixth-grade students receive copies of *It's So Amazing* by Robie Harris. Seventh- through ninth-graders receive copies of Harris' *It's Perfectly Normal*.

Amid banter between a curious bird and a squeamish bee, the author educates readers on issues of children's sexuality and health. While her books have been lauded by educators and recommended by *School Library Journal* and *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, as well as child development specialists, some school

districts have banned the works for being too explicit. They depict, in cartoon fashion, human genitalia and intercourse and offer discussions about masturbation, homosexuality and abortion.

Pam Smallwood, executive director of Planned Parenthood of Central Texas, was unavailable for comment Tuesday. Another official with the organization said she did not want to be quoted.

But Mary Duty, a longtime supporter of the organization, disputed the charge Nobody's Fool was "devoid" of morality.

"I'm not sure which Christian morals they are talking about," she said, noting that in addition to the Reform synagogue and the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waco, eight Christian congregations are co-sponsors of the event.

"Lots of Jesus-lovin' places and people are involved in getting this message (responsible sexual behavior) out to the kids," said Duty, a member of Highland Baptist Church. "I see deacons of churches and other people from faith-related events around here at Nobody's Fool. They feel, as I do, that kids need an education about these things."

Osman said most parishes handle "explanations of Catholic sexual morality within



Mary Duty is a Christian advocate of Planned Parenthood's program.

their own programming," but Duty disputed their effectiveness.

"The Catholic Church isn't even comfortable with the notion of contraception," Duty said. "The Catholic Church is way, way behind what mainstream America considers health education for adults, much less children."

In late June, several hundred teens attended an alternative adolescent sex-education event, conducted by the McLennan County Abstinence Project. Bertini said that while the Catholic Church was not a "sponsor" of the McCAP event at Reichert High School, his flock showed its support by providing scholarships to those students who could not afford the \$10 program fee.

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