

Standing up for life

Archbishop speaks at life rally in Frankfort

Standing before hundreds of people in Frankfort's Capitol Rotunda on January 28, 2004, Archbishop of Louisville Thomas C. Kelly, O.P. proclaimed, "Our pledge is to stand up for life and in particular to protect the unborn." In his remarks, offered during the annual Rally for Life marking the 31st anniversary of the United States Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, Archbishop Kelly recalled being in the presence of Pope John Paul II 25 years ago on October 7, 1979 and witnessing an electrifying address given by the Pope on the Mall in Washington, D.C.



On that day the Holy Father with passion in his voice said, "I do not hesitate to proclaim before you and before the world that all human life...is sacred, because human life is created in the image and likeness of God. Nothing surpasses the greatness or dignity of a human person. Human life is precious because it is the gift of God whose love is infinite; and when God gives life, it is forever. And so, we will stand up every time that human life is threatened. When the sacredness of life before birth is attacked, we will stand up and proclaim that no one ever has the authority to destroy unborn life."

Fetal homicide law passes by wide margin

Finally, after more than 20 years of hard work by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky and other advocates for life, the General Assembly sent a fetal homicide bill to the desk of Kentucky's governor. Eighty-eight State Representatives and 33 State Senators voted for passage of this important life legislation.

House Bill 108, sponsored by Representative Bob Damron, created a separate crime of fetal homicide and included an emergency clause so that it became law the day Governor Ernie Fletcher signed it, February 20, 2004.

In its original form, HB 108 could have increased the use of the death penalty in Kentucky. The Conference met with the sponsor very early in the session and he agreed to amend the legislation so that a conviction for committing fetal homicide would not result in the sentencing of yet another human being to death. The maximum penalty in capital cases related to fetal homicide will be life without parole.

House Bill 108 is an excellent example of how public policy can encompass the church's consistent ethic of life teachings. This law upholds the human dignity of the fetus by making accountable anyone who would take the life of an unborn child; and it recognizes the human dignity of the perpetrator by forbidding the state to execute anyone convicted for this crime. The dignity of every person is at the core of Catholic social justice teaching and respect for all human life, even that of the guilty, is at the heart of our belief. CCK thanks everyone who made passage of this bill possible.

Catholic voices fill the halls in Frankfort

For years, Catholic Charities in Louisville has promoted constituent visits to Frankfort while legislators meet. This year, Mark Bouchard, Coordinator of Advocacy for the Parish Social Ministry Department, brought 125 Faithful Citizens to visit lawmakers and attend rallies, press conferences and committee hearings. Participants came from these parishes and organizations: St. Augustine, Lebanon; Saint Bernard; Cathedral of the Assumption; District Long-term Care Ombudsman Program; Epiphany; St. Frances of Rome; Holy Trinity; St. James Elizabethtown; St. Rose School; St. Francis of Assisi, Loretto; St. Monica; St. William/Christ the King; Senior Social Services; Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. Also, 16 seniors from Notre Dame Academy in Park Hills visited Frankfort to meet their legislators.

Faithful citizens bring Gospel message to Frankfort

In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process, a moral obligation. Thus, 100 Kentucky Catholics gathered in March for Catholics @ The Capitol.

They learned about many public policy issues being considered by their Senators and Representatives: how to treat human life; raising sufficient revenue to meet Kentuckians' needs; healthcare for the poor, and treatment of immigrants.

During Mass on the first day, Bishop of Lexington Ron Gainer urged attendees to engage their legislators; on day two, they did, by visiting them in their capitol offices and asking them to honor the dignity of all human beings when voting on bills.

Through Catholics @ The Capitol, the Catholic Conference seeks to build a network of faithful citizens who will bring the Good News of Jesus to bear on public policy and law.

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Lawmakers fail constitutional duty

Catholic Conference tracked many bills



Rev. Pat Delahanty

Kentucky's legislators left Frankfort in mid-April without fulfilling their only constitutional duty — adopting a budget.

As we go to press, some slim hope remains that the Governor will call them into special session to resolve this difficult and embarrassing situation.

Should they go back into session the Catholic Conference will continue to urge that monies for the Affordable Housing Trust fund be included and that the not-yet-opened prison in Elliott County remain in state hands, and not be given to a private concern. CCK will also urge legislators to fund Medicaid adequately, provide responsible levels of funding for childcare, and making sure enough money is in the Transportation Cabinet budget to provide busing for non-public school students.

During the regular session Governor Ernie Fletcher pushed hard for passage of a tax modernization plan that the Conference opposed, except for some elements like taking low-income earners off the tax rolls. It clearly failed to conform with the principles adopted by our Kentucky bishops which are found on page 5 of this newsletter. Should he attach this to any legislation during a special session, CCK will continue to oppose its regressive nature and seek to persuade others to adopt a tax modernization package that is fair to all, most especially the poor whom Kentucky mistreats severely under the current individual income tax law.

During the regular session that began in January, CCK measured several bills by our consistent ethic of life standard. In addition to supporting the fetal homicide bill described on page 1, CCK also supported **HB 170** and **HB 171**. Both bills related to human clon-

ing and promoted human life and dignity. Neither received a hearing in the House Judiciary committee.

CCK also supported all legislation related to ending or limiting the use of the death penalty: **HB 88** to abolish the death penalty; **SB 166** and **HB 475** to abolish the death penalty for juveniles. **HB 475** did receive a hollow hearing in the House Judiciary committee, but the chairman did not allow his members to vote on the legislation. Legislators forced him to have the hearing by attaching floor amendments to other bills in order to get the attention of House leaders.

Lawmakers introduced some measures to repair the broken death penalty system in Kentucky. Of these, **HB 390** did clear the House Judiciary committee, but did not receive a floor vote. **HB 390** would require that all interrogations of suspects in capital cases be electronically recorded in their entirety. This is already the law in several states and the Conference will support future versions of this legislation.

Two Senate bills—**SB 25** and **SB 163**—would have expanded the use of the death penalty. CCK opposed these. Though they passed the Senate, **SB 25** died in the House Judiciary Committee. **SB 163** cleared the House Judiciary Committee, but was sent back and committee members removed the death penalty provision. In the waning hours on the last day of the session, **SB 163** cleared the House, but ran out of time in the Senate. It, too, failed.

The treatment of mentally ill persons in general and more specifically when they encounter the criminal justice system is of primary concern to the Conference. **Senate Bill 64** called for the creation of a “telephonic behavioral health jail triage system.” This bill died, but lawmakers added its provisions to **HB 157**, related to brain injury, on the last day of the session.

As part of the Coalition for a Safe Kentucky, CCK supported **SB 170**. This

Continued on page 6- see Bills

Life-long education and faith formation

An important responsibility of faithful citizens

We know how fundamental education is to the development of the individual. In their 2004 document, *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility* (see <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/bishopStatement.html>), the Bishops write:

All persons, by virtue of their dignity as human persons, have an inalienable right to receive a quality education. We must ensure that our nation's young people, especially the poor, those with disabilities, and the most vulnerable, are properly prepared to be good citizens, to lead productive lives, and to be socially and morally responsible in the complicated and technologically challenging world of the twenty-first century. This requires that all educational institutions have an orderly, just, respectful, and non-violent environment where adequate professional and material resources are available. We support the necessary initiatives that provide adequate funding to educate all persons no matter what school they attend—public, private, or religious—or their personal condition.

We also support providing salaries and benefits to all teachers and administrators that reflect the principles of economic justice, as well as providing the resources necessary for teachers to be academically and personally prepared for the critical tasks they face. As a matter of justice, we believe that when services aimed at improving the educational environment—especially for those most at risk—are available to students and teachers in public schools, these services should be available to students and teachers in private and religious schools as well.

“The Bishops of Kentucky take the

Church's responsibility for education very seriously,” said Leisa Speer, CCK Education Committee Chair. “The Education Committee plays an important role in bringing our four dioceses together for consultation and to develop consistent approaches to education policy and practice.”

Professional educators from each of the four dioceses serve on the Education Committee, which has two subcommittees: Schools and Religious Formation. The Schools Subcommittee focuses on academic standards and other school issues, and the Religious Formation Subcommittee focuses on religious education.

The Schools Subcommittee deals with issues like standardized testing and accreditation. It has also developed a protocol for criminal background checks of paid and volunteer staff. It sponsors Catholic Identity Workshops and follow-up in all four dioceses. Each year members of the Committee participate in USCCB Congressional Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C. It works to send students to the annual pro-life march in Washington, DC.

The Schools Subcommittee supports education on the death penalty. All Kentucky Catholic schools received the CCK produced capital punishment video and pamphlet.

The Religious Formation Subcommittee focuses on religious education issues. One of its chief accomplishments was the development and publication of *The Statewide Guidelines for Religious Education*, which are used widely throughout the United States. These guidelines provide direction, unity, consistency and credibility for religious education across the state of Kentucky. They reflect lifelong catechesis in faithfulness to the Church's traditions and beliefs, including the teachings about social justice and a consistent ethic of life. They are designed on a life continuum basis, early childhood through adult and are available on the resources/publications page of the CCK website at: <http://www.ccky.org/publications.htm>.

Catholic Conference Education Committee

Covington

Dr. Lawrence Bowman
Sr. Stella Marie Gough, OSB
Eugene Kuehne

Lexington

Patrick Guentert
Sr. Bernadette McManigal, BVM

Louisville

Sue Grenough
Leisa Speer

Owensboro

Patricia Blair
James Mattingly

The Education Committee of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky is a statewide advisory committee to the Kentucky Roman Catholic Bishops which

- ◆ Identifies educational issues of importance relating to Catholic schools, public schools and lifelong religious formation;
- ◆ Plans and networks the direction of Catholic education in Kentucky;
- ◆ Serves as a resource to the CCK Executive Director on the legislative and legal issues affecting all education in Kentucky.

Catholic Conference Pro-Life Committee

Covington

Robert Greene
Rev. Ronald Ketteler
Sr. Dorothy Schuette, OSB

Lexington

Rev. John Moriarty
Rev. Mr. Jim Paris

Louisville

Helen Rothgerber
Rev. Tony Smith

Owensboro

Rev. Richard Meredith

The mission of the Pro-Life Committee is to advise the Bishops of Kentucky on matters pertaining to the dignity and preservation of human life in all its stages.

The Committee is charged with examining critical issues of the day and encouraging cooperation among all pro-life people.

The Committee develops plans and programs which will inspire the people of God to live and give visible witness to their faith within the Church and in the community.

The Committee assists in the development of a public policy effort that advocates for the protection of human life in all its stages.

Consistent life ethic guides work of committee

“Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person, whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.... We hope that voters will examine the position of candidates on the full range of issues, as well as on their personal integrity, philosophy, and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which to address issues in the political arena.” This is the teaching of the Bishops in the 2004 *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*, (see <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/bishopStatement.html>).

“The Pro-Life Committee has emphasized the consistent ethic of life in its work because of its moral persuasion and moral integrity,” said Helen Rothgerber, CCK Pro-Life Committee Chair.

The Kentucky Bishops have spoken eloquently and forcefully on the consistent ethic of life in three pastorals on abortion, health care directives, and the death penalty.

Reverence for Life: The Pursuit of Justice (Updated and re-issued October 1999) sets out the context for this moral framework. “The consistent ethic of life has several distinctive advantages for it allows the unified moral vision of the Church to address a wide range of issues that endanger human dignity. That unified moral vision originates from a single moral principle—opposition to the deliberate killing of innocent human beings.

“The broad scope of the consistent ethic opens the concerns about abortion to all other contexts where respect for human life is undermined and threatened. While each issue on the spectrum of life questions is subject to distinct moral analysis, each issue becomes linked together in a common foundation—the inviolability of human life.”

To promote public policy that reflects this consistent life ethic, each Kentucky bishop appoints persons to serve on the Pro-Life Committee as advisors to Catholic Conference staff.

Some are theologians, others persons who work pastorally to promote the consistent ethic of life. One person possesses the special legal expertise necessary to advise CCK staff on finer points of law regarding *Roe v. Wade* and other such matters.

Committee members review potential legislation and provide guidance about strategies for promoting bills that protect human life, limit access to abortions, and ensure that parents are not shut out of their children’s decisions about abortion. The Committee has also had to study and provide advice on some very complex issues related to bioethics.

In recent years, CCK staff have relied on the theological expertise of committee members to provide testimony opposing attempts to pass legislation that would allow embryonic stem cell research to take place in Kentucky. This is a morally impermissible form of cloning.

Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility states, “Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person’s life and dignity must be respected, whether that person is an innocent unborn child in a mother’s womb, whether that person worked in the World Trade Center or a market in Baghdad, or even whether that person is a convicted criminal on death row. We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person.”

For further information about life issues, CCK encourages your use of our website: www.ccky.org. All three pastoral letters on life are in the Resources section, as well as links to other helpful materials.

Be a life supporter by becoming a Catholic Conference Faithful Citizen Advocate. Visit www.ccky.org today and join the growing list of Catholics demonstrating a deep respect for life.

CCK staff is available to visit parishes and discuss these matters with study groups, RCIA participants, and others.

Common Good sought by Social Concerns Committee

“As we approach the elections of 2004, we renew our call for a new kind of politics—focused on moral principles not on the latest polls, on the needs of the poor and vulnerable not the contributions of the rich and powerful, and on the pursuit of the common good not the demands of special interests.” This invitation is set out in *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (www.nccbuscc.org/faithfulcitizenship/bishopStatement.html#3). The Social Concerns Committee hopes to bring this invitation to all of Kentucky’s voting-aged Catholics.

A “new kind of politics” is certainly needed in Kentucky. Since passing a biennial budget is the most significant policy decision made by our political leaders, the Social Concerns Committee recommended to the four Kentucky Bishops a set of principles about raising and spending money in Kentucky. The Bishops adopted these principles and Catholic Conference staff urged Kentucky legislators to create the 15 billion dollar budget and tax policy according to these principles. Social Concerns Committee Chair Fr. John Rausch of Stanton said, “These principles are an invitation to Catholics and people of good will to heed the Gospel call to raise money to care for those in need according to our ability to advance the common good.”

Catholic Conference of Kentucky Principles of Taxation, Allocation of Revenue, Contributing to the Common Good

1. Spending by the State of KY should first assure that the basic needs of all people - especially those who are poor and vulnerable - are addressed as a priority before other appropriations are made. Just as in a family’s budget, spending for recreation and entertainment should come only after paying for shelter, food, clothing and other necessities.

2. All citizens have the right and responsibility to contribute to the common good through the payment of taxes. The collection of taxes is an important and justifiable role of government. Taxes are an individual’s contribution to the common good. In any society, the common good

should be viewed of greater importance than the good of any individual or special interest group. Paying taxes is one way that citizens give something back to society.

3. The State of KY should seek and maintain revenues sufficient to meet the basic needs of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Effective stewardship of resources is always of concern to any branch of government, but even the most careful management of resources cannot overcome a fundamental lack of income. As do prudent families, the State of KY should maintain savings for periods when revenues are less than needed. Tax cuts, while popular, should result from a reduction in revenue needs, not as a result of providing favors for special interests.

4. Taxation in any form should be based on one’s ability to pay. If KY tax policy is to remain faithful to Catholic teachings, it should first assure that the system collects taxes according to one’s ability to pay. Catholic social teaching supports a more progressive form of taxation. Our contribution to the common good should reflect our blessings. From those to whom much has been given, much should be expected. Those who make the most profit from our economic system benefit most from the structures and infrastructure that make economic enterprise possible. Tax exemptions and tax incentives should not change the fundamental requirement that taxes should be based on one’s ability to pay.

5. All forms of taxation should be fair and just in their treatment of the poor. Taxation can be used as an economic strategy to level income distribution in a society. Systems of taxation can also grant certain advantages to those in different income brackets. Unfortunately, such advantages are often granted on the basis of power and politics rather than on moral principles. Those who are poor should not pay a disproportionate amount of income in the sum total of taxes paid. This is especially true in the case of property and sales tax, which low- and moderate-income people tend to pay in higher percentages of their total income and are therefore considered more regressive taxes. Those who are wealthier should consider their higher tax bracket as part of their Biblical obligation to tend to the “widow and the orphan.”

Catholic Conference Social Concerns Committee

Covington

Sr. Joan Boberg, CDP
Sr. Ruth Kettman, CSJ

Lexington

Ted McCormick
Sr. Frances Moore, CDP
Mary Alice Pratt
Rev. John Rausch

Louisville

Steve Bogus
Mark Bouchard
David Dutschke
Sr. Mary Schmuck, RSM

Owensboro

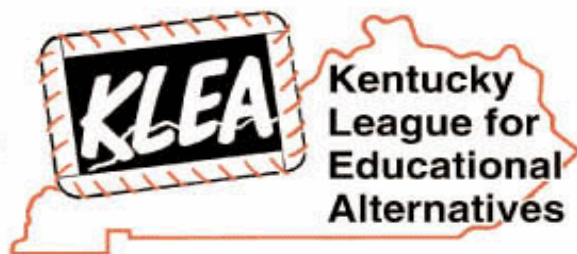
Richard Murphy
Veronica Wilhite

The Catholic Conference of Kentucky website has links to the complete Faithful Citizenship



document as well as other materials prepared by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops for the education of parishioners and others regarding the important issues that need to be addressed by those seeking elected office.

We encourage website visitors to add their names to the CCK Faithful Citizen Advocate list and receive timely action alerts on pending legislation.



The following excerpt is from a document produced by the United

States Catholic Conference entitled "Principles for Educational Reform in the United States."

As citizens and as teachers, the Catholic bishops of the United States have a great interest in and a responsibility to contribute to the public discussion of issues that affect the nation's common good. We feel the strong need to address a critical aspect of the common good which is the topic of great concern in our nation: the ability of our nation to provide a quality education, one that effects a person's intellectual, moral, spiritual, and physical development, to all our children, whether they attend a public, private, or religious school. Since our children are the nation's future, we need to stress that the provision of a quality education for all children is the responsibility of all members of our civic community.

The issue is clear. The academic performance of our nation's students in reading, math, and science still lags behind students in other industrial nations; significant numbers of students are retained in grades or drop out of school completely; often even those who graduate lack the basic skills needed to obtain a productive and rewarding job or to succeed in college. All too often, especially for the most vulnerable children, the educational experience is not filled with hope and nurturing but fear and failure. In addition, there is evidence that we are losing our young people

to a variety of personal and social problems that can be traced, at least in part, to a fundamental lack of education in basic religious, moral, and civic values.

We wish to make a positive and lasting contribution to the discussion that is currently taking place on the national, state, and local levels of our nation as to how best to produce true, comprehensive, and lasting educational reform. We seek to outline some basic principles that should guide our nation's approach toward addressing the urgent needs of all our nation's children. In doing this, we draw upon the long and successful history of our Church in the area of education at all levels and in all types of settings.

The Catholic Church has consistently held that one of its primary functions is the education of young people. In the United States, the Church can proudly point to a positive and productive record of serving the educational needs of our nation's young people almost from the nation's first days. Today, Catholic elementary and secondary schools are educating almost three million children nationwide. Independent research on Catholic schools consistently points to their success in educating students to the highest standards of scholarship and moral and social responsibility, often under pressing economic conditions. We believe that our nation can learn much from what we do and how we approach this most important endeavor.

From the preceding statement, the Bishops sought to establish a system of support for Catholic education in America. Thus, Kentucky's Bishops founded The Kentucky League for Educational Alternatives (KLEA) to activate private school parents to take an active part in the political process and cause changes at the state level that would bring tax dollars into the Catholic schools as a matter of fairness and justice. In future articles we will review our goals, mission and progress.

Visit us at www.kleonline.org.

Bills

Marriage amendment on November ballot

Continued from page 2

bill would allow undocumented immigrants to qualify for driver licenses if they passed all the tests. With licenses they could purchase insurance and drive legally. This legislation ranked among the highest priorities listed by those attending the Catholic Hispanic Summit in

November 2003. Unfortunately, an unfriendly committee chair would not hear the bill. The Conference will continue to build the Coalition and press for future passage of this bill.

By December 2003, legislators had introduced several bills and resolutions related to the sanctity of marriage

and defining it as the union of one man and one woman and forbidding the State to recognize any other civil unions as marriages. None of these bills moved, but another one, **SB 245**, introduced late in the session, did clear the Senate and was sent to the House.

After several procedural votes to delay its passage, a version of the bill was sent from committee to the House floor. This amended version failed to pass, though the Conference supported it. After several days of protests, the House considered the original Senate bill, which the Conference also supported, and it passed.

Because SB 245 seeks to amend the Kentucky Constitution, Kentucky's voters will see it on the ballot on November 2, 2004.

Visit www.ccky.org for more information.

KENTUCKY'S PREGNANCY HELPLINE 1-800-822-5824



Crisis!!! In Chinese the word "crisis" is made up of characters that say "dangerous opportunity." *Opportunities for Life* is a big name for an agency with a big

job. *Opportunities for Life* is a ministry that serves women and their loved ones. It is a Catholic pastoral ministry for women who are struggling with an unplanned pregnancy.

This pregnancy often creates a state of crisis for the women and their loved ones. This, indeed, can be a time of both danger and opportunity.

In a nutshell, *Opportunities for Life* operates a 24-hour, 7-day helpline. So, listening -with empathy - is the most important thing we do. If we do that well, then we earn the privilege of sharing the important information we keep at our fingertips. That information is a database of resource referrals for many different programs and agencies that offer assistance to help individuals deal with the complex problems and issues that arise with pregnancy, especially when that pregnancy does not fit someone's current life circumstances.

In 1986, the Roman Catholic bishops of Kentucky established *Opportunities for Life*. Representatives from the four Kentucky dioceses requested that the bishops establish a life-affirming ministry to help women find alternatives to abortion. The issue was referred to the Catholic Conference of Kentucky Pro-life Committee and *Opportunities for Life* was born. Since that time, a team of well-trained volunteers has been continuously answering the helpline. We know that some mothers have been empowered to choose life because of the support and

referrals we were able to provide them.

Empathy! What place does empathy play in your life? According to Stephen R. Covey in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, the ability to show empathy is an important skill. And a skill it is. This means that even those of us who do not seem to have intuition as a natural trait can learn how to show empathy. Empathy does not imply agreement. (Sympathy implies agreement.) Nor does empathy confer any type of judgment. What it does do is "seek first to understand." When people feel truly understood, usually they can relax a bit and find some inner strength to cope. Folks who feel understood might be open to hearing information we can offer.

Our volunteers are from all walks of life. We are stay at-home-moms, retired persons, nurses, teachers, counselors, doctors, principals, privileged, and impoverished. Everyone participates in a training program with a correspondence segment and weekend workshop. We learn about the complex issues that surround this tough topic and we practice listening skills. We learn about how once someone is pregnant it is just tough. We study the different perspectives of the choices available to women today: abortion, parenting, and adoption. Nothing is easy.

One thing that is easy is volunteering. The helpline operates under a call-forwarding system so calls are answered in volunteers' homes. Volunteers live all over the state and answer calls initiated throughout the Commonwealth. Our trained volunteers answer the hotline or serve as prayer volunteers, pro-life leaders in their parishes, or local mentors. Some serve as pregnancy care center volunteers. Others help us keep informed about local resources available in Kentucky's 120 counties.

We are always seeking additional participants. Contact our office at 1-888-496-3638 for more information about our next volunteer training session.

Visit our website at www.opportunitiesforlife.org.

Also, if you know of someone who needs support with her pregnancy - even just encouragement - please share our helpline number: 1-800-822-5824.

Civility *Continued from page 8*
Self-righteous advocacy of public moral values without the witness of charity tends to undermine the persuasiveness and the force of arguments.

Michael Novak commented on the return of the judgment of "good and evil" to public rhetoric in the wake of the attack by terrorists on September 11, 2001. But he also warned of the dangerous intoxicating impact on those who invoke the term "evil." Novak draws on the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr who in the climate of evil during World War II had pondered "the persistent power

of evil over good, even through corrupting the good."

Niebuhr's own words about the paradox of the corrosive power of evil over good are telling: "The final enigma of history is therefore not how the righteous will gain victory over the unrighteous, but how the evil in every good and the unrighteousness of the righteous is to be overcome."

This article by Rev. Ronald Ketteler is based on his address at the 2004 Catholics @ The Capitol event described on page 1. Fr. Ketteler is Director of Ecumenism and Continuing Education of Priests in the Covington diocese, Episcopal liaison to the diocesan newspaper, the Messenger, and Chair of the Humanities Department at Thomas More College.

Civility: the style of witness in the public square

Nowadays public conversations seem to be growing disproportionately confrontational, hostile, derisive, and insulting. Dialogue frequently degenerates into cacophony.

Without a doubt, a widespread *lack of civility* continues to suffuse the culture at large but takes on a particularly high-profile in the arena of politics.

Last September, in his The Cardinal's Column, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago explored the question whether civility is a Gospel virtue? (*The Catholic New World*, September 14, 2003)

In scanning the cultural horizon Cardinal George composes a litany of the telltale signs of the eclipse of civility. A short list of the leading cultural indicators of diminished civility includes: "...the coarseness of language and vulgarity of thought now fairly pervasive in the media... public irritability, undisguised rage, raw ambition, lack of basic honesty and plain rudeness...."

Cardinal George ascribes the rising tide of incivility in the mainstream of public life to the ebbing of "common standards and common goals for our society." He contends that "(c)ivility vanishes when passion and prejudice take the place of reasoned discourse."

Humility is a characteristic of civility—"the recognition that one is not the center of the universe, of the desire to be properly submissive to God and those whom God has given us as companions on our earthly journey, especially those most in need."

Insofar as civility is a sign of love, patience, humility, and openness to God, civility is an attribute integral to being disciples of Jesus.

Cardinal George's brief analysis of civility as a Gospel virtue recalls a more in-depth treatment of civility and the style of the Church's public witness given by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin (d. 1996).

Cardinal Bernardin, the architect of "the consistent ethic of life," conceived the style of the Church's religious testimony in the public order as an expression of "the theological virtue of charity which in turn, produces the virtue of civility." In *Remaining a Vigorous Voice for Life in Society*, Cardinal Bernardin advocated a vigorous witness to Catholic convictions about the ultimate issues of life and death. At the same time, while cautioning against the questioning of the motives or the character of adversaries on public issues, he called for a style of public witness on the part of the Church that entails fairness and respect.

Consonant with Cardinal Bernardin's theme of civility, *Reverence for Life ---The Pursuit of Justice*, the 1999 pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, notes

that the pro-life advocacy of the Church should be invigorated with the spirit of civility—"respect, fairness, and restraint."

The whole range of justice and rights issues calls for "respect, fairness, and restraint." But, the pro-life issues of abortion and euthanasia are such fundamental challenges to basic human rights that approaches in the defense of human life stand as a crucial test for the need for courageous conviction in a context of civility.

Cardinal Adam Maida of Detroit delivered a trenchant analysis on the rightful role of religion in shaping culture, law, and public policy: *Shaping Culture and Law: Religion's Voice*. [Origins 28:42 (April 8, 1999): 721, 723-726.] Cardinal Maida aligned himself with Stephen Carter's assessments in *Integrity* for the need for civility in public argument.

Cardinal Maida acknowledged that on occasions and with specific controversial issues religious voices are discredited as a result of failing to engage in genuine dialogue.

For this reason, the viewpoints of religious people are in effect silenced, if not simply dismissed. The failure to build a necessary consensus in the broader society may well stem from tactics which communicate a tone of condemnation evidenced by the volley of "harsh judgments against people who think differently than themselves."

The pastoral letter on abortion and the consistent ethic of life issued by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky stresses the demand for respect towards fellow citizens. In this regard *Reverence for Life* quotes from an article by Cardinal Bernardin wherein he had urged rejection of the temptation "simply to proclaim positions, forgetting that in a pluralistic society, we must persuade, build coalitions, and reach out to shape public opinion to support human life."



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