

Chavez Union Opposes Abortion, Birth Control

Hauppauge, N.Y. [RNS] — Although known principally as a force to root out poverty and exploitation among the nation's farm workers, Cesar Chavez' United Farm Workers have surprised some of their supporters by taking a strong stand against birth control and abortion, it was learned here.

In an interview with the Long Island Catholic, Rockville Centre diocesan weekly, Chavez pointed out that UFW clinics are not permitted to dispense birth control pills or devices, and they are not allowed to perform abortions.

"It really wasn't hard for us to take the stand we took (on abortion)," said the farm worker leader during a stopover here. "Honestly, we hadn't even given it much thought. We just assumed we were all against it."

He said the initial UAW stand was against birth control pills.

"Aside from the religious issues involved, that's a very private, family thing. And the clinics were set up to take care of the farm workers' health problems, not to support birth control," he added.

"Later, two young girls came to the clinics asking for abortions," Chavez recounted. "We turned them away, but later some of the doctors came to us and said that we were interfering with these women's rights."

"So we took the issue to the union's executive board. There are nine members on the board, not all Catholic — I think one is Protestant and one is Jewish — but we unanimously agreed that we would take this stand."

Chavez pointed out that the

eight clinics operated by the union are staffed by volunteer medical personnel, who receive only room, board and expenses. When the UFW stands on birth control and abortion were announced, the UFW leader said, a few doctors left the clinics and others who promised to work at the clinics did not meet their commitments.

"We had hoped some Catholic doctors who agreed with our stand would come forward and offer to support us with their skills," he added. "We haven't heard from anyone yet."

Another side effect of the farm worker movement, according to Mr. Chavez, has been that the predominantly Catholic workers — mostly of Mexican or Filipino backgrounds — who had lost faith in their Church are now moving back to the Catholic faith.

"We're not a religious movement, we're a union first," he said. "But we're not only concerned about our workers' material well-being. Poor farm workers had stayed away from the churches because they didn't feel wanted, or because they didn't have the right clothes to wear, or because they worked seven days a week," he noted.

He explained that when some priests began working with the union movement "we started out having a Mass whenever we could, usually before our rallies. At first, only the women and a very few men would come to Mass."

Yet, he said, having the Masses at the rallies helped show the people that the Church was something not only to preach to them, but something to look to for leadership and help.

Declaring that the Church now means "quite a bit more to many of the people," Chavez said "we've helped bring the Church to the people."



Photo by Dave Witbeck

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan administers the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Mary's Church in Waterloo Sunday. Father Albert J. Shamon assists. Story, other photo page 1.



Photo by Susan McKinney

Borchard Street Players

Working on behind-the-scenes stage techniques for the Borchard Street Players' productions are Jim Candela, [left], Jerry Whitty and Dan Izzo. A non-profit organization, the Players will present an original musical comedy, "Savage Man," July 25-28 at Aquinas Auditorium beginning at 8-p.m. Tickets are \$2.

Women 'Unaware' Of Church Roles

Cleveland [RNS] — Declaring that women should move to a "sense of quality and wholeness" as individual persons, a leading spokeswoman for U.S. Roman Catholic nuns said that women are generally "unaware of the vast opportunities open to them in the Church and in religious life, and in 'our free and liberated society' today."

She particularly lamented the lack of women in roles close to the Church and said she feels that this stunting of growth and talent had held up much of the life flow of the Church itself and the parish.

Sister Francis Borgia Rothlueber, OSF, a member of the school Sisters of St. Francis and president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), told some 200 Catholic men attending a First Friday club meeting that women have too

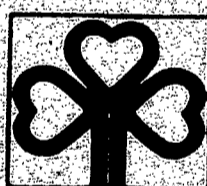
long been idealized as "the power behind the men, as the holder of ultimate virtue, as an ornament, a sex object, a mere body."

She added that "women have had little value in their own right, they acquire value only as they marry or have children."

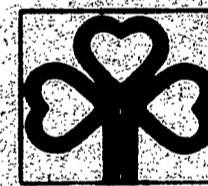
Sister Francis Borgia, who sees the necessity of developing "a sound, sensible balance of women in the Church," said that Christ never mapped out a special role for women anywhere in the New Testament. "He took women like Mary Magdalene, Martha, Mary and His mother, and the Samaritan woman at the well as He found them."

She asserted that women outside as well as within religious life should be opening themselves to the broad scope of services of humanity.

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