

# Bishops' panel issues statement on Webster

By Mark Pattison  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court's July 3 ruling that allows states to enact more restrictive abortion statutes "marks the beginning of a new debate," said a statement issued Aug. 9 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

That debate requires that "many voices must be raised in defense of life," said the statement, entitled "The Supreme Court's Webster Decision: An Opportunity to Defend Life."

"We do not intend to be ruled out of this or any social debate," wrote the committee's seven bishops, headed by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago.

Ruling in *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* — one of the most hotly debated abortion cases since its original *Roe vs. Wade* ruling 16 years ago — the Supreme Court upheld most parts of a controversial Missouri law making it more difficult to obtain an abortion.

The bishops said the new ruling "opens up challenges" to "develop and expand efforts" in the areas of:

- Education and public information.
- Pastoral services for women, children and families.
- "Public policy efforts to ensure effective legal protection for the right to life of the unborn."

The statement said the "central truth" about the humanity of the unborn child "is often obscured in the current debate, where abortion is presented solely as an exercise of personal autonomy or as a conflict between state prerogatives and the individual right of privacy."

But "as Catholics and as U.S. citizens we have a duty to participate in shaping our nation's public policies so that they truly protect, nurture and defend human life," the statement said.

The bishops said anti-Catholic sentiment "has never been entirely absent from the pro-abortion campaign," but abortion-rights advocates seem to be trying to put new life into it "now that the efforts of Catholics and other pro-life citizens have

begun to bear fruit."

Catholics involved in the abortion debate are accused, the statement said, of "seeking indiscriminately to impose our moral ideals on other Americans: an attitude that would exclude us at the outset from this debate."

But, the statement said, "We are committed to establishing constitutional protection for the unborn child to the maximum degree possible." The statement urged "legislators, especially Catholics, to help build a consensus in our society in support of the unborn child's right to live."

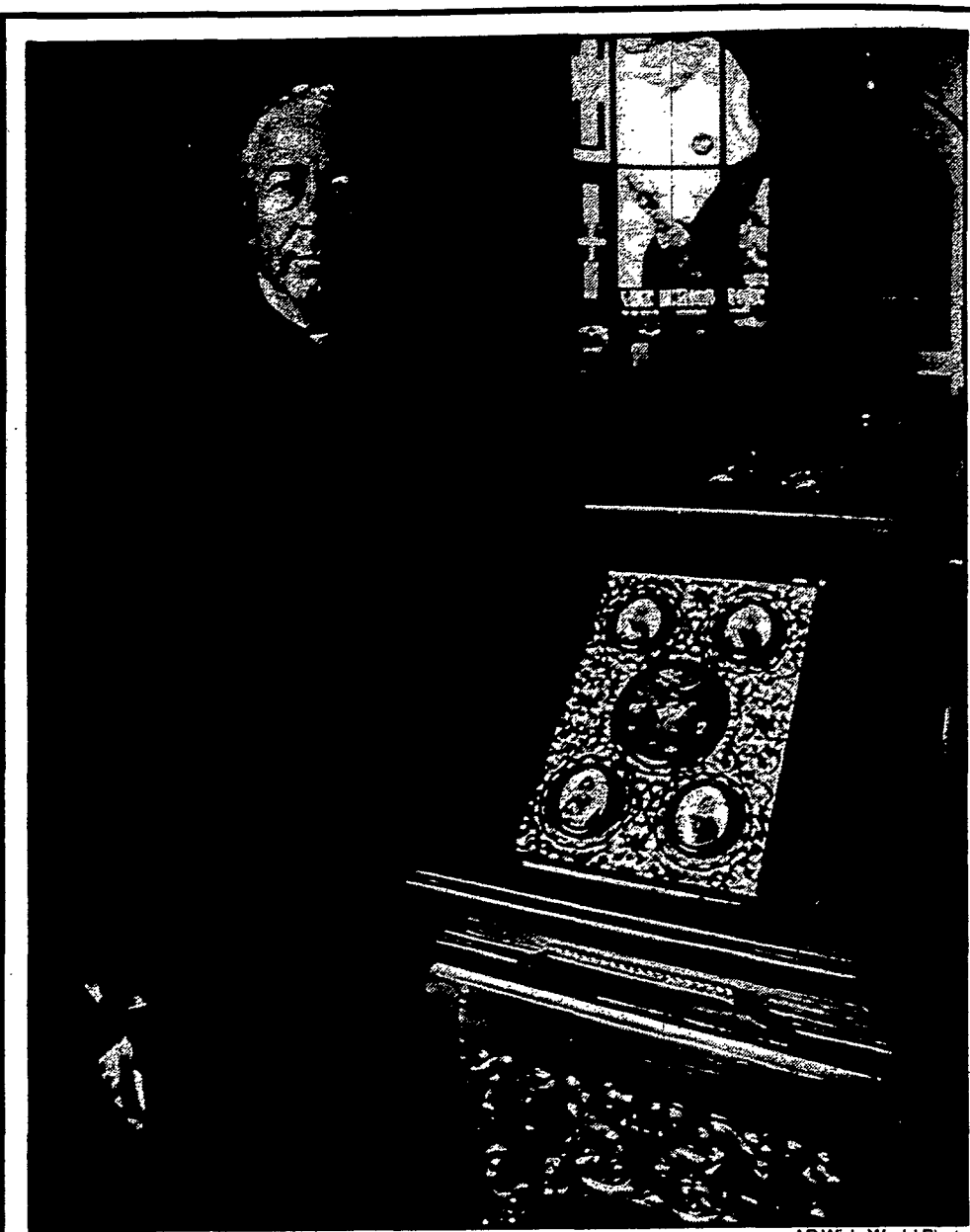
The Webster case has opened "limited and complex" opportunities to state legislators, the bishops said, but added that some short-term efforts could address limits on direct and indirect government funding of abortion; parental notification and consent; safeguards to prevent uninformed abortion consent; and restrictions on late-term abortions.

Lawmakers will be urged to "improve public programs of prenatal care, parental leave, child care and other needs of pregnant women and their families," the statement said, to complement "essential programs" sponsored by dioceses and Catholic organizations that "must be continued and expanded" in their service to pregnant women.

The statement said church-sponsored services include free or low-cost maternity care, adoption services, and emotional and spiritual support; educational and vocational assistance; and foster care, social services, and other assistance to neglected or needy children.

"Providing alternatives to abortion serves all of us, especially mother and child," the statement said. "By working together with other concerned Americans we can bring about a change of heart and a change of policy in our society so that unborn children will enjoy the law's protection."

What abortion opponents demand of civil law, it said, is "recognition of the principle that all human beings — regardless of age, sex, race, ability or condition of dependency — share the same inalienable right to life."



The Rev. Anthony Moschonas of St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church stands next to the Bible cover he and others claim was involved in a miracle. The priest says droplets of blood appeared on the cover's icon of the crucifixion.

Signing the statement were Cardinal Bernardin; Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York; Archbishop William J. Levada of Portland, Ore.; Bishop Edward D. Head of Buffalo; Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J.; Auxiliary Bishop Francis J. Dunn of Dubuque, Iowa; and Auxiliary Bishop Edward J. O'Donnell of St. Louis.

Commenting on the statement, Bishop McHugh said Catholics "have to have the courage to take a stand on the issues and the bishops wanted to provide leadership."

The Supreme Court decision made it necessary for the committee to make a statement, Bishop McHugh told the *Catholic Star Herald*, Camden's diocesan newspaper.

Since the decision, Bishop McHugh said, "the general press coverage and political response has overshadowed the fact that abortion means destruction of the life of the unborn child." The press has also focused on the "ideology of radical feminists," he said.

Bishop McHugh, director of the bishops' pro-life office from 1972 to 1978, said the position of "free and easy abortion without any serious justification ... paid for by the government" must be seen as "an extreme position and it must be labeled as such and rejected."

The refusal by the U.S. House of Representatives Aug. 2 to continue prohibiting the District of Columbia to spend local government funds for abortions is not a "signal of any kind of tidal wave" in favor of abortion, Bishop McHugh said. Pro-lifers, he added, need to "carefully work out political strategies."

Pro-lifers in New Jersey are working on adding a state constitutional amendment that would protect the right to life from conception to natural death, Bishop McHugh said. The Camden diocese, he added, will use Respect Life Sunday, Oct. 1, to begin a "year-long education program" on pro-life issues.

## Sisters storing mementos

Cardinal Mooney High School's year-books, clippings, scrapbooks, photos and memorabilia will be housed at the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester. For information, call 716/288-7120.

The school's records, transcripts and alumni information for class reunions will be located at and can be requested from: St. Joseph Center, Box 113, Road #5, Valatie, N.Y. 12184. Address requests: Attention — CMHS Records. For information, call 518/784-9481.

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