

Women discuss abortion at hearings in Milwaukee

By Maryangela Layman
Catholic News Service

MILWAUKEE — The conclusion of a series of six hearings for Catholic women to speak on abortion is "the beginning of a long road, not the end," said Milwaukee Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland.

During the final three sessions in the series, women continued to question whether Catholic teaching on birth control could be changed and whether any circumstances existed that would permit abortions.

About 475 women attended the last public session, more than twice that of the previous two public hearings. About 200 attended the three invitation-only private sessions.

The small groups, in which participants discussed their views with a facilitator, gave a wide range of thought on abortion and other human sexuality issues.

"The church's lack of alternate methods of birth control make some choose abortion," said one group at the public hearing. Another agreed, but still others downplayed any connection between abortion and artificial contraception.

One group's statement that the notion of pro-life needs to go beyond conception and birth to the child's entire life drew loud applause, but one woman said "a lot (of women) feel abortion is being put on the back burner because so many other issues are being incorporated into it."

Responding to the criticism that the church has not done enough to oppose abortion, Archbishop Weakland said, "My

answer is you're the church."

The public session also attracted the only pickets for any of the hearings.

One group calling itself Catholics for Responsible Action distributed literature questioning the purpose of the hearings, and left small plastic replicas of fetuses on the discussion tables where its members were participating.

Another group of about 15 men held what they called a "pro-life rally and prayer vigil" outside the hearing site.

"We will remain outside of the center because men are excluded from the sessions," said a prepared statement by the picketers. "We will give voice to another group that has been excluded from the sessions — unborn children."

Fred Patz, who organized the demonstration, told the *Catholic Herald*, Milwaukee's archdiocesan newspaper, that the hearings "give a platform to dissenting views and allow people to speak in favor of abortion."

Archbishop Weakland told the session participants that "men have a voice to be heard. But I see these hearings as the beginning of a long road, not the end." He added, "We are only beginning to scratch the surface of the topic. Many things are yet to be said."

At a private hearing for social workers, nurses, doctors and employees of teenage pregnancy centers, many took their professional experience into account when stating their views.

In one small group discussion, a social worker prefaced her remarks by saying her youngest client was a 10-year-old mother of twins.

Some groups said abortion could be defended under certain circumstances, including mother's health, well-being of the family, poverty, and quality of life.

But during the "open mike" part of the session, one woman said, "I've heard a lot of excuses today for why abortion might be OK, but this is a denial of what it really is. God made all these babies and they are all important in some way."



AP/Wide World Photos
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AT&T defends canceling funds

LOS ANGELES (CNS) — The chairman of American Telephone & Telegraph Co. defended the company's decision to cancel a \$50,000 annual contribution to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America during a shareholders' meeting in Los Angeles April 18.

At the same meeting, shareholders followed an AT&T management recommendation and overwhelmingly voted down an anti-abortion proposal calling on the company to "refrain from support of

any organizations that endorse, counsel or perform abortion." Both moves came from corporate officials in an effort to keep the company neutral on the abortion controversy, AT&T officials said.

Robert E. Allen, chairman and chief executive officer of AT&T, defended cutting corporate funding for a Planned Parenthood teenage pregnancy prevention program, saying "Planned Parenthood has raised the level of their political advocacy with respect to abortion."

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