



## Debate continues within Catholic press

### Should papers present all sides in church coverage?

The letters to the editor published by any newspaper over the course of several editions easily demonstrates that readers form widely different opinions about a publication's overall style of coverage — and even about a single story.

Not unlike their readers, a newspaper's editor and publisher may disagree from time to time as well. Many television viewers were introduced to this possibility through periodic conflicts between the editor and publisher portrayed on *The Lou Grant Show*.

Catholic newspapers are far from exempt from such disagreements about the nature and content of news coverage. They may, in fact, be even more susceptible to such conflicts than are their secular counterparts, since most Catholic newspapers have bishops as their publishers and lay people as their chief editors.

According to the 1991 *Catholic Press Directory*, nearly 80 percent of the 164 U.S. diocesan newspapers operate under a bishop-publisher and lay person-editor. At most of the remaining papers, a priest, nun or deacon serves as editor.

The inherently different perspectives of a diocesan bishop and a lay journalist can give rise to conflicting understandings about the purpose and responsibilities of a Catholic newspaper. In various dioceses across the country, such differing views periodically have sparked disputes — some that ultimately resulted in the discharge of editors and the restructuring of entire publication staffs.

Conflicts of this nature are a prime concern to members of the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada, an organization that brings together the publishers and staff

members of Catholic newspapers, magazines and general publishers. CPA membership is nearly 600.

In an effort to derive a consistent understanding of the obligations of Catholic newspapers, the association will devote a considerable portion of its agenda to the topic when it meets in Milwaukee, Wisc., this May for its 1992 national convention.

Robert Zyskowski, chairman of the CPA committee that will present a draft document on the subject at the Milwaukee convention, told the *Catholic Courier* that his committee is addressing "not just what story can you print or not print, but what should you be communicating? Why are we in business in the first place?"

Zyskowski, editor of the *Catholic Bulletin* in St. Paul, Minn., said he believes Catholic newspapers are obligated to report all aspects of what's happening in the Catholic Church, even if some of those aspects are controversial.

Regarding those who complain about Catholic press coverage of controversial issues, Zyskowski observed, "They're very short-sighted. They don't give people of the church enough credit that we can deal with the tough issues. Dealing with (such issues) is the only way we can improve the situation."

Thomas Lorsung, director and chief editor of Catholic News Service in Washington, D.C., agreed.

"You need to express what's happening in your church," said Lorsung, whose service provides national and international reporting by satellite to Catholic publications across the United

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