

# Church groups dissatisfied with Elders' apology

By Jerry Fliteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Leaders of several Catholic and Protestant groups sharply oppose Dr. Joycelyn Elders as U.S. surgeon general despite a recent public apology.

Her public remarks belittling the Catholic Church and Christians who oppose abortion should still disqualify her, they told reporters at a press conference Sept. 2 convened by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

Elders, former Arkansas director of public health, was expected to be confirmed as surgeon general when the Senate reconvened this week despite the accusations of religious bigotry and the opposition of some to her outspoken advocacy of abortion and the distribution of free condoms to teenagers.

Critics at the press conference said her recent letter to Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, apologizing for "any offense" her comments may have caused Catholics or pro-lifers, was

inadequate.

"No such apology has been offered to evangelicals and other Christians who have been the target of her vicious attacks," said James A. Smith, government relations director of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission.

Even the apology to Archbishop Keeler was only "half-hearted," Smith said.

The nominee's "apparent religious bigotry" should disqualify her from holding any high government office, said the September issue of *Insight*, a newsletter on public affairs from the National Association of Evangelicals. The association was not among the press conference's sponsors, but a representative distributed copies of the newsletter to reporters afterward.

"It is highly offensive to label those who oppose abortion as 'non-Christians with slave-master mentalities,'" said a joint statement by the Catholic League and other sponsors of the press conference, referring to one of the remarks by Elders that concerned them.

Co-signing the joint statement with

the Catholic League were Smith in his capacity as a Southern Baptist spokesman, Catholic War Veterans, American Family Association and Eagle Forum.

Patrick Trueman, Washington office representative of American Family Association, said Elders first made her "bigoted statements against Catholics in January 1992" and subsequently refused at least two requests for a retraction or apology by an Arkansas Catholic pastor, Father James P. West of St. Boniface Parish in Bigelow.

In light of that, Trueman said, it smacked of political convenience for her to apologize to Archbishop Keeler "only at the 11th hour" before her confirmation vote in the U.S. Senate.

Archbishop Keeler, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote to President Clinton in July objecting to Elders' "contemptuous" depiction of Catholic opposition to abortion as coming from "a celibate and male-dominated church." He also protested her assertions that abortion opponents are unconcerned about life outside the womb.

In early August he received a letter

of apology from Elders and a separate letter from Clinton reaffirming the president's trust in her as his nominee for surgeon general.

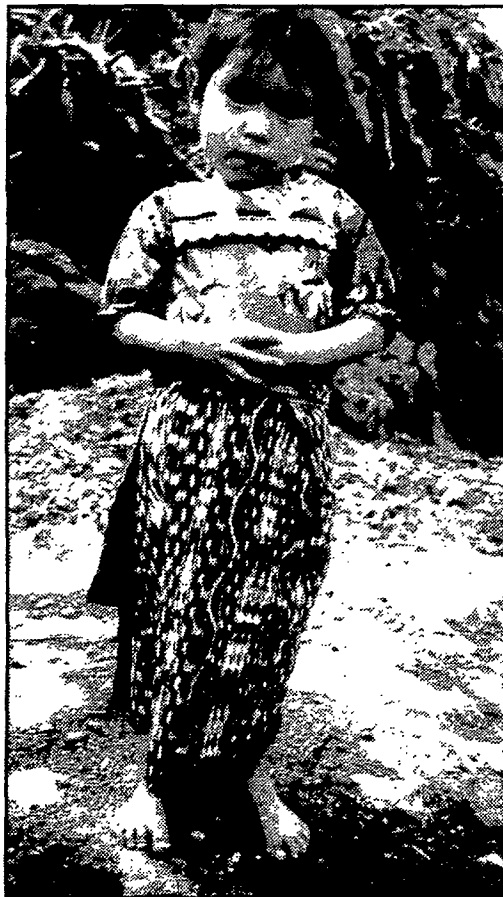
The NCCB released the letters Aug. 31, saying it decided to put them out for the public record "due to the growing public controversy." The bishops conference does not endorse or oppose nominees for appointive office, it said.

Patrick Riley, director of the Catholic League's Washington office, said of Elders' response to the archbishop: "All she said was, well, if you're offended, I'm sorry. She doesn't withdraw what she said. It's hardly an adequate apology."

In her letter Elders said she was "distressed that some have interpreted my remarks as evidence of bigotry against particular religious denominations. I abhor bigotry in all its forms.

"I never meant to malign or blaspheme the Catholic Church," she added. "If my statements have caused any offense, I sincerely apologize."

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## National head of Pax Christi will speak in Rochester this weekend

ROCHESTER — Sister Anne McCarthy, OSB, national coordinator of Pax Christi USA, will speak at all Masses this weekend at Corpus Christi Church, 864 Main St. E.

The head of the 12,000-member national Catholic peace movement will speak on the "Gospel Call to Recon-

ciliation" during the 5 p.m. Mass Sept. 11, as well as the 8:45 a.m. and 11 a.m. Masses Sept. 12. She will also host a question-and-answer session at 10 a.m. Sunday.

A member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Sister McCarthy has headed Pax Christi since August 1991. She has been a member of the peace organization's staff since 1985. Sister McCarthy has also been long active in Benedictines for Peace.

She has accompanied Pax Christi-led peace delegations to El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and most recently to Zagreb, Croatia, located in the former Yugoslavia. As part of her visit to Rochester, Sister McCarthy will talk with J. Thomas Malthaner, a Corpus Christi parishioner and one of 2,500 peace activists from around the world who attempted to march to Sarajevo in early August.

Due to fierce fighting and a lack of protection from U.N. forces, only one bus load of activists eventually made it into Sarajevo.

For information on Sister McCarthy's visit to Corpus Christi, call 716/325-2424.

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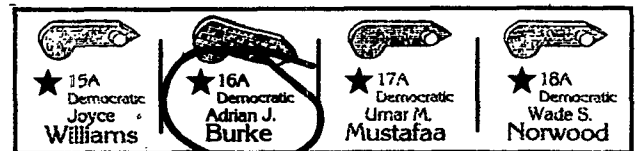


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