

WORLD & NATION

Common ground project draws mixed reviews

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A Catholic unity initiative by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago has drawn strong support from some quarters but questions or criticisms from others.

Cardinal Bernardin announced his initiative, the Catholic Common Ground Project, at a news conference in Chicago Aug. 12.

He said he is "troubled that an increasing polarization within the church and, at times, a mean-spiritedness have hindered the kind of dialogue that helps us address our mission and concerns."

"The unity of the church is threatened ... and our witness to government, society and culture is compromised," he said.

He issued a 3,000-word framework statement for the project, titled "Called to be Catholic," which the National Pastoral Life Center in New York drew up in consultation with him and a number of other U.S. Catholic leaders.

The statement says, "American Catholics must reconstitute the conditions for addressing our differences constructively — a common ground centered on faith in Jesus, marked by accountability to the living Catholic tradition and

ruled by a renewed spirit of civility, dialogue, generosity and broad and serious consultation."

It decries the "distrust, acrimony and deadlock" and "dynamic of fear and polarization" that it sees as diverting Catholic energy from such crucial tasks as revitalizing parish liturgies and educating the next generation of Catholics in the faith.

"Unless we examine our situation with fresh eyes, open minds and changed hearts," it says, "within a few decades a vital Catholic legacy may be squandered, to the loss of both the church and the nation."

Cardinal Bernardin announced an advisory committee of seven other bishops and 16 other Catholic leaders — priests, religious, lay men and women — that will assist him in the project. He said he hopes as a first step to convene a conference on the church and U.S. culture in 1997.

In separate statements Aug. 12 and 13, Cardinals Bernard F. Law of Boston and James A. Hickey of Washington criticized "Called to be Catholic," saying the statement is an inadequate basis for resolving the current divisions in the church.

They expressed concern that it gave insufficient attention to the need for any dialogue among Catholics to have as a start-

ing point an acceptance of authentic church teaching and church teaching authority.

"Dissent from revealed truth or the authoritative teaching of the church cannot be 'dialogued' away," Cardinal Law said.

"We cannot achieve church unity by accommodating those who dissent from church teaching, whether on the left or on the right," Cardinal Hickey said.

At least three national groups widely known for their advocacy of the ordination of women in the Catholic Church — the Women's Ordination Conference, Call to Action and the We Are Church Coalition — expressed support for the idea of the Catholic Common Ground Project but argued that topics apparently off limits, such as women's ordination, ought to be part of any dialogue.

Bishops on the advisory committee include Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, Archbishop Rembert G. Weak-

land of Milwaukee and Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, who, like Cardinal Bernardin, is a former president of the bishops' conference.

Also on it are Bishop Edward J. O'Donnell of Lafayette, La.; Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, N.M.; and retired Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, also a former NCCB president.

Among the clergy, religious and laity on the committee are former Pennsylvania Gov. Robert P. Casey, 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals Judge John T. Noonan Jr., AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney, American Enterprise Institute scholar Michael Novak, *Commonweal* Editor Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, Harvard Divinity School professor Father J. Bryan Hehir, Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon and Fordham University theology professor Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson, a Sister of St. Joseph.

Wisconsin judge halts extension of vouchers to religious schools

By Eugene Horn
Catholic News Service

MADISON, Wis. — Church-state separation was the principal issue in a Wisconsin Circuit Court judge's refusal to allow children from low-income families to attend religious schools under Milwaukee's program for school choice.

Dane County Circuit Court Judge Paul B. Higginbotham ruled Aug. 15 that an existing injunction against religious schools participating in the voucher program should remain in place until he makes a final decision about their participation.

A year ago the Wisconsin State Supreme Court imposed an injunction that prevented expansion of the Milwaukee's school-choice program for nonreligious private schools and the inclusion of religious schools.

The choice program was begun in 1990 and is limited to schools within the city of Milwaukee.

In his action, Higginbotham lifted the block on expansion for nonreligious private schools.

With regard to religious schools, Higginbotham said the constitutional separation of church and state that prevents outright state funding of religious schools cannot be circumvented by channeling taxpayer funds through parents by using vouchers.

Higginbotham said that although funds from the choice program are not intended to advance a parochial school's religious mission, that is in effect what happens. The trial program allows state voucher money to be used for any purpose deemed appropriate by the school, including teachers' salaries and operating costs.

Candidates 'congregate'

Bishop Henry J. Mansell greets Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, his wife Elizabeth, running mate Jack Kemp and his wife, JoAnne, following Mass Aug. 18 at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Buffalo. During a campaign swing through the Buffalo area, the Republican candidates and their spouses attended the 10 a.m. liturgy, where they heard Bishop Mansell decry abortion. Dole and Kemp also attended a rally at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where a crowd estimated at 10,000 greeted them, and a Pulaski Day parade in the Buffalo suburb of Cheektowaga.



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