



Catholic Courier

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 107 NO. 51 ■ THURSDAY, September 19, 1996 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES

POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

- REFUGEES
- DISCRIMINATION & RACISM
- WELFARE REFORM
- IMMIGRATION
- ABORTION
- VIOLENCE
- ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
- CAPITAL PUNISHMENT
- EDUCATION

Bishops: Catholics called to involvement in politics

On Aug. 18, in St. Stephen's Church, Geneva, Marie Milligan fielded a question that has been raised repeatedly about religion and politics. The question concerned her work that morning at a voter registration table in the church.

At first, somebody questioned it. "Why would you be doing it in church?" reported Milligan, who heads the parish's social ministry committee. "I said, 'That's how social change happens: by people voting.'"

The man, Milligan said, accepted her response — and the parish registered 16 voters.

Father Robert L. Beligotti was recently asked a similar question. He had been publishing a series of statements on political involvement from the United States Catholic Conference, in Auburn's St. Francis of Assisi Parish bulletin. The statements have mentioned such concerns as economic insecurity and welfare reform.

The pastor said he replied that he was printing them "because the bishops have spoken out on this, and (said) what we should be thinking about about these issues."

"I'm hoping that some of the issues we've mentioned in the bulletins might come to the fore when people go to vote," Father Beligotti added.

These two parishes are among many across the Diocese of Rochester taking steps to help encourage awareness of

Catholic teachings concerning a number of political issues — and urging Catholics to be involved in the political process.

In doing so, they are carrying out goals set last November by the bishops of the United States Catholic Conference's Administrative Board in a statement on the 1996 elections, "Political Responsibility: Proclaiming the Gospel of Life, Protecting the Least Among Us and Pursuing the Common Good."

"As citizens," the bishops wrote, "we need to face our own public responsibilities; to register and vote; to understand issues and assess candidates' positions and qualifications; and to join with others in advocating for the common good."

The bishops went on to declare, "In the Catholic tradition, citizenship is a virtue: participation in the political process is an obligation."

"The Gospel message calls us to love our neighbor, and one way we can love our neighbor is to respond to immediate needs," observed Jack Balinsky, director of diocesan Catholic Charities.

Although the church has to avoid endorsing specific candidates — and consequently jeopardizing its tax-exempt status — the church still has much to say about a broad array of issues, Balinsky noted.

Continued on page 10

Lifelong Learning
Monthly focus on catechesis

Story by Lee Strong Photograph by Matthew Scott