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## **Politics**

#### Continued from page 1

"Despite our best efforts, and I've been at this 25 years, Catholic social teaching is one of the best kept secrets in the United States," Balinsky asserted.

Church positions on some 20 general issues are cited in the bishops' political responsibility statement. Those issues include refugees, communications, housing, abortion, discrimination and racism, capital punishment, environmental justice, euthanasia and welfare reform.

'It is the church's role as a community of faith to call attention to the moral and religious dimensions of secular issues, to keep alive the values of the Gospel as a norm for social and political life, and to point out the demands of the Christian faith for the just transformation of soci-

ety," the bishops wrote.
"We have to address the policies which create living conditions for all of us,"

Balinsky explained. "Just as we are called not to just sit there and pray in church when our neighbor is hurt outside, so are we called to be involved in the political process."

To help encourage involvement in that process, diocesan Catholic Charities and the Diocesan Public Policy Committee this June distributed among parishes a packet of materials about political responsi-

bility. That packet includes both a summary and the complete text of the bishops' political responsibility statement, excerpts from it for inclusion in bulletins, ideas for homilists, prayers, get out the vote do's and don'ts, a resource manual, and voter registration tips and guidelines.

The statement cites six guiding principles that shape the church's approach to public life:

• The life and dignity of the human per-

• Human rights and respon-In the Catholic sibilities; • The call to family and comtradition, citizenship is a virtue:

• The dignity of work and the rights of workers; The option for the poor;

 Solidarity with the poor across the world.

The bishops explain that these principles are drawn not only from Catholic teaching and tradition - with an emphasis on a "consistent concern for human

life" - but also a history of working with the poor, the elderly and immigrants.

The diocese will also soon distribute a USCC 1996 presidential candidate questionnaire that was sent to Bill Clinton, Bob Dole and Ross Perot. Clinton and Dole responded; Perot did not.

Jeanne Shanley, director of social ministry at Rochester's Holy Family Parish, had praise for the diocesan packet - and especially appreciated that fact that the bishops and the diocese are dealing with issues, and are not endorsing candidates.

"The whole packet has been really helpful, both the facts it provides and the attitude it sets," Shanley said.

That attitude, she explained, is one of encouraging people to look at the human dimensions of issues and of encouraging people to bring into play faith values as they consider a broad range of issues.

"I know while many people, including myself, have personal favorite issues, it's always a challenge to say 'Do I vote on that one issue," Shanley acknowledged.

As part of efforts to promote political involvement, her parish held the first of three consecutive weekends of voter registration Sept. 14-15.

Shanley explained that the voter drive is an attempt to help allay some people's fears about voting - such as how they will be able to get to polling sites and whether those sites are handicap accessible. The goal is to reassure them that help is available and thus ease them into involvement.

There are a lot of people who hold to the idea you don't mix church and politics," Shanley said. "Yet we are followers of Jesus, who was one of the most political figures in history."

Shanley noted that Jesus sometimes ran afoul of the political leaders of his day, and frequently asked people to consider carefully the laws by which they were living, such as the law forbidding work on the Sabbath - a law which he himself technically broke when he cured the man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-6).

"Jesus invited them to look at (the laws) more closely, at the letter of the law and the spirit of the law," Shanley suggested.

By drawing people into the political process, and by providing them with background information about church positions on issues, Shanley said, she hopes to encourage the people to keep those positions and their faith in mind as they look at the issues and the candidates' positions.

"Hopefully, some of our parishioners will be more informed and less fearful of it," Shanley said.

Some parishioners at St. Ann and St. Ignatius Loyola churches in Hornell are likewise hoping to help fellow parishioners become more informed.

On Sept. 8, representatives of both parishes met to form a joint public policy group. According to Susan Einhorn, who took part in the meeting and is a member of the social ministry committee at St. Ann's, the new group will initially focus on voter registration and on studying issues affecting families and children.

"There's a lot of poverty in the area," Einhorn explained. "We're going to try to study the issues, talk to people and find out what we can do."

The group will also make use of materials from the USCC to help encourage people to be involved in the political process, "just to make people more aware that they can have a voice in government," Einhorn said.

"People hear so much about separation of church and state, and they don't realize it's an obligation to get involved," she

Balinsky has a strong belief in that view. "We are not a religion about individualism and isolation for the community," Balinsky noted. "God calls us to be in-

volved." Milligan pointed out that being involved in the political process is a means to help bring to fruition the social teachings of the church.

"Politicians listen to registered voters," Milligan said. "Look at the things you can make change by voting. If you want to advocate for change, you have to do it. That's part of the Catholic tradition."

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