

## COLUMNISTS

## CLE moves us toward dialogue

As we reflect in this week's issue about the Consistent Life Ethic, I can't help but think about Cardinal Bernardin for a few minutes. Although the foundation for the CLE was actually established decades ago at the Second Vatican Council in the document titled "The Church in the Modern World," No. 27, it was Cardinal Bernardin who advanced the CLE in the church in the United States.

The original paragraph from the document reads: "The varieties of crime (against humanity) are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide; all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures; all offenses against human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, degrading working conditions where persons are treated as mere tools for profit rather than free and responsible persons; all these and the like are criminal. They poison civilization and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honor of the creator."

As powerful as these words are, council documents are no different from any other church document: They require real people to bring them to life in the real church. As striking as the passage



the  
moral  
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By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

from No. 27 is, it still needed "flesh" to bring it to life. The genius of Cardinal Bernardin was that he locked into the significance of this important passage while employing his pastoral experience and expertise to bring them to life. In doing so, he was also able to address two important pastoral concerns that had come to his attention, and which threatened the well-being of his own church, the Archdiocese of Chicago.

The two issues that Cardinal Bernardin faced as he formulated the consistent life ethic for all of us were these:

First, he recognized that faith needs to be lived in public. With many other leaders of the post-Vatican II church, Cardinal Bernardin was concerned that we had arrived at a point that neglected the fact that faith has a public, social and political dimension. Along with appreciating faith as a private category, touching the most intimate parts of oneself

and one's relationships, it also has a dimension that calls Christians to public witness. We all need to live out our faith not only in private, but in public as well. With the overwhelming societal evils that threaten the well-being of human beings, Cardinal Bernardin sought to emphasize the public side of faith by his promotion of the CLE.

Second, he also saw that the response of some Catholics to certain life issues had actually become divisive in the church. Some parishioners in his diocese were so adamant about the evil of abortion, for example, that they had undertaken actions and engaged in verbal debates in ways that were causing real division within the community. Cardinal Bernardin recognized that despite their strong convictions, their clear compass for detecting right and wrong, their wealth of information and good will, some were expressing their devotion to a single position in a way that prevented dialogue and compromise. Thus, conviction to a good cause was having a disruptive effect on the progress that Cardinal Bernardin hoped could be available to the whole church of Chicago on issues of life and death. Cardinal Bernardin saw this same phenomenon not only in relation to abortion, but in regard to other issues as well, including war and peace, nuclear disarmament, poverty and homelessness, the rights of women and minorities.

In advancing his vision of the consistent life ethic, Cardinal Bernardin sought to provide a framework whereby Christians would realize that in addition to being "right" on particular issues, and caring fiercely about them, we also need to avoid division and isolation from one another as we strive to act on our values. Through the CLE Cardinal Bernardin sought to emphasize that for Christians there is more than just being right on the issues. There is also the matter of the communion among us that makes us not just a collection of individuals, but a people who belong to one another as members of the Body of Christ.

The consistent life ethic is a brilliant move by a skilled churchman to achieve two important goals. It invites us not only to care about and act on behalf of the individual life issues that we are most troubled about. It also invites us to move beyond being single-issue people from a single perspective. It invites us to be members of real, concrete communities where we also care about genuine dialogue, genuine listening and genuine care for positions that may not be identical to our own, but that are important to us because of the others who are also members, with us, of the one Body of Christ.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

## Kids' Answers from page 12

1. b 2. g 3. e 4. c 5. f 6. d 7. h 8. a



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