

## 'Courier' updates political advertising policy

In February 1997, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, headed by Archbishop John P. Foley, issued the document "Ethics in Advertising," which assesses the effects of advertising on modern society. In releasing the document, Archbishop Foley — former editor of *The Standard and Times*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia — asked the media and Catholic publications, in particular, to foster broad-based discussion of its points and to take its message to heart.

As part of the *Catholic Courier's* efforts in that regard, our cover story May 29, 1997, focused on the document and the way the advertising community has received it. In addition, the document caused the newspaper's staff and Board of Directors to realize it was high time to formalize our existing informal policies with regard to the acceptance of advertising, and to reassess those policies.

The Editorial Committee (a misnomer for a group that addresses all content questions) of our Board of Directors set about that work in late 1997. Using Archbishop Foley's document as a starting point, it solicited input from the staff and the full board. Ultimately, the *Courier's* full Board of Directors unanimously approved a final draft Advertising Policy on June 10, 1998.

The full text of our new policy statement is at the end of this column. But — given the time of year — I'd like to highlight the most significant changes. It has been the *Catholic Courier's* policy for many more years than the 13 I've been around to accept political advertising from all who seek to place it. As a not-for-profit corporation, the *Catholic Courier* is prohibited by Internal Revenue Service regulation from intervening in the electoral process — whether by endorsing specific candidates



between  
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BY KAREN M. FRANZ

in an editorial format or by barring certain candidates from using the newspaper as an advertising vehicle.

Thus, if the newspaper decides to accept political ads from some candidates, it must likewise accept ads from all other candidates — regardless of their positions. As the policy itself states, "Selective acceptance is not an option." Even if selective acceptance were possible, it's impossible to name "the Catholic candidate" in almost any electoral race, as this week's cover story amply demonstrates. Very, very few candidates espouse the church's position on a full range of issues.

Admittedly, IRS regulations have never forced the *Courier* to accept an ad from a candidate who favors abortion. Openly pro-abortion candidates simply realize it would be a waste of money to place ads in a Catholic newspaper. But as a number of readers have pointed out over the years, the *Courier* has, in fact, published ads for anti-abortion candidates who are very much at odds with the church on many other important questions. One reader even charged that we were selectively accepting ads only from Republicans; however, in that year at least, candidates from that party were the only ones who sought to buy ads in this newspaper.

Thus our Editorial Committee found itself in a quandary: Should we maintain the current practice in order to give candidates access to Catholic voters, or better to stop accepting political ads so as to avoid the perception of endorsing candidates who may or may not support church teaching on a full range of issues. Ultimately, the committee decided to cease accepting political ads effective this year.

Also in an effort to eliminate inaccurate perceptions that the *Courier* endorses this product or that idea, the Editorial Committee decided to restrict advertisers' efforts to make ads look like news stories and to ban ads that proclaim the advertiser's position on controversial issues. The full text of our new Advertising Policy follows. We plan to publish it several times a year as a reminder, and to distribute it to all current and prospective advertisers. As always, we look forward to your comments.

### Advertising Policy

Since advertising can be a pervasive, powerful force in shaping attitudes and behavior in today's society, the *Catholic Courier* establishes the following policy regarding advertising. Catholic teaching, truth, the dignity of the human person, and good taste shall be guiding principles.

1. GENERAL — The *Catholic Courier* does not accept advertisements for products or services that are contrary to Catholic teaching or from entities that — in the judgment of the newspaper's management — have as their primary focus those products or services. The *Catholic Courier* retains the right to edit or reject all advertising copy. Advertisements in the *Catholic Courier* will not be labeled as such unless they meet the criteria for labeling outlined in Item 3 below.

2. POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS — The *Catholic Courier* wishes to foster the participation of Catholics in the political process. However, to retain its non-profit tax status, the newspaper must choose whether to accept political advertisements from all candidates — regardless of how their positions relate to Church teaching — or to reject all such advertisements. Selective acceptance is not an option. Due to the complexity of moral and political issues today, the acceptance of advertisements from politicians whose positions may disagree with various Church teachings stands to confuse our readers. Therefore, it is the *Catholic Courier's* policy to decline all political advertisements.

3. "ISSUE ADVERTISEMENTS" — The *Catholic Courier* does not accept advertisements in the form of essays expressing the advertiser's views on controversial issues or promoting an agenda. If an advertisement appears to be an article it must be identified as a "paid advertisement." Ads may not contain "bylines" or "datelines."

4. GOOD TASTE AND HONESTY — The *Catholic Courier* does not take advertisements that — in the judgment of the *Catholic Courier's* management — are in poor taste; manipulative; deceptive; or intended to frighten, shock or in any way take advantage of the newspaper's readers. All advertisements must show respect for persons and for the truth. If it comes to our attention that an advertiser has not been truthful, the advertisement will be discontinued.

5. PERSONALS — The *Catholic Courier* will not accept "personal" ads related to dating or ads for private adoptions. Acceptance of other ads of a personal nature will be subject to the discretion of management.



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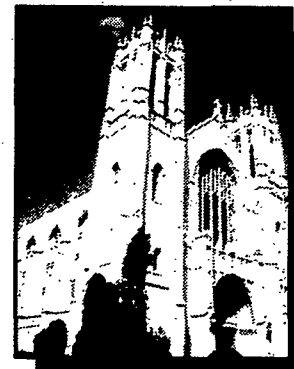
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