

CONTINUED...

Polite

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public interest groups as the League of Women Voters.

- Outreach to communities and congregations through candidate and issue forums, and a "Dear Clergy" letter warning against "blatantly partisan" voter guides.

- Distribution of a guide for houses of worship concerning election activities and federal tax regulations, and distribution of issue papers on campaign finance reform, affirmative action, immigration, housing and employment for gays and lesbians, prayer in schools, poverty and welfare reform, and curbing gun violence.

"Our goal is simple — to echo the scriptural calling found in all of our religious traditions, the call to treat each other with the basic human dignity endowed by our

creator," the Rev. Philip J. Wogaman, alliance board president, said at the press conference.

Behaving this way does not compromise any tradition's agenda or positions, but "reflects respect for our diverse republic," said Rev. Wogaman, senior minister at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington.

He said alliance members "strongly believe that, if we can effectively create a civil discourse around the critical issues affecting our community, people will be motivated to be more active and involved in the democratic process in the coming year."

Local voices

Local interfaith alliances — including the chapter in Rochester — will help carry out these initiatives, and the Rochester chapter has already worked to make elections more civil.

For example, the Rochester chapter en-

couraged Monroe County candidates this year to make a "Fair Campaign Pledge," according to the Rev. Paul Hammer of Brighton, a United Church of Christ minister and retired professor of New Testament interpretation at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

Hammer is president of the Rochester alliance. Muslim, Jewish, Protestant and a handful of Catholic representatives serve on the alliance's 27-member board of directors. In conjunction with the local chapter of the League of Women Voters, the alliance asked several Monroe County politicians to sign a "Fair Campaign Pledge" in August.

More than 100 candidates — including Jack Doyle and Bill Benet, the incumbent Republican county executive and Democratic challenger respectively — signed the pledge, a number representing more than 50 percent of those running for public office in the county this year. The fair campaign pledge asked candidates to commit to the following principles:

- Honest and open campaigns featuring fair debates.
- No defamatory attacks on opponents, and no invasions of an opponent's privacy unrelated to the issues.
- No use of campaign materials that misrepresent, distort or otherwise falsify the facts about an opponent.
- No dissemination of campaign materials that do not properly identify the politician behind them.
- Repudiation of support from any individual or group that does not support the pledge.

Issues, please!

But does asking politicians to remain civil risk creating a climate in which the intense debate necessary for a substantive

campaign is curtailed? Not according to Rev. Hammer, who himself ran for the Monroe County Legislature in 1971.

"Civility does not mean simply acquiescing to everybody," he said. "It means we call each other to accountability. We can do that in a way that doesn't have to be personally nasty."

For example, he said, while personal character is important in a campaign — especially in the wake of President Bill Clinton's sex scandal last year — it can be discussed without name-calling and blistering attacks. It's all right to say that a politician's actions are inconsistent with the values one supports, Rev. Hammer noted. But campaigners need to be aware that they can stir up hatred when they use more vicious rhetoric. He said he wants politics to move beyond the disclosure of skeletons that lurk in officials' closets.

"I think what (negative campaigning) does is that it begins to give politics a very bad name," he said. "Politics ... means caring for civil life. I think we need to lift that up rather than degrade it."

Sister L'Esperance echoed Rev. Hammer's sentiments. Like the minister, she noted that, in recent years, personal attacks on opponents have, at times, overwhelmed thoughtful debate on issues between politicians. She said she hoped that presidential candidates would choose to focus on such issues as the environment, health care, education and poverty rather than each other's alleged personal faults.

"I think you can be civil and talk about the issues and say, 'This is what the right policy should be,'" she said. "But I think civility requires that you don't attack the character and motivation of an opponent because Scripture says 'Judge not,' and how would you know how to judge the motivation of your opponent?"

'Active' Catholics moving toward Republican party, survey indicates

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A national survey commissioned by *Crisis* magazine found that Catholics who are regular churchgoers are becoming more conservative voters.

Catholics also strongly support raising the minimum wage — with more than half saying it should be a top priority in Congress — while nearly half oppose efforts in Congress to end "no-fault" divorce for couples who have children under age 18.

The poll data was collected last winter in a telephone survey of 1,001 people who identified themselves as Catholics. Some analysis of it was released in April. The second phase of the national survey was made public in late September at a luncheon hosted by the Heritage Foundation, a Washington think tank.

Steven Wagner, president of QEV Analytics, the Washington polling firm that did the survey, predicted at the luncheon that 30 million Catholics would vote in the November 2000 elections, compared to 19 million who voted in 1998.

Part of the reason for that high number, Wagner said, is that "10 critical Senate races will be taking place in key Catholic

states." And because 39 percent of Catholics today are "swing voters" — without a firm commitment to either party — those voters will "hold the balance of power in a presidential race," he said.

The survey defined those who said they attended Mass at least once a week as "active Catholics." Active Catholics are gradually shifting toward the Republican Party, Wagner said.

Asked last winter whether they supported Vice President Al Gore or Texas Gov. George W. Bush for president, 44 percent of all Catholics chose the Republican Bush, while 26 percent selected the Democrat Gore. Another 26 percent were undecided, and 3 percent refused to answer.

Voters defined as active Catholics supported Bush over Gore by 49 percent to 24 percent, a 25 percent spread Wagner called "statistically insurmountable" by the effects of other voting.

Among Catholics, 21 percent were characterized as "dependable Democrats," based on questions related to voting behavior, and 23 percent were deemed "reliable Republicans." Another 18 percent did not vote, and 39 percent were swing voters.

COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL

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Treaty

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to take the treaty off the Senate schedule only if President Clinton promised not to bring it up again during his presidency, and passed on verbal and written pleas from Clinton to table discussion.

A bipartisan compromise to pull the treaty before a vote was scuttled by some Republican senators who made the same complaint about the compromise that they had been making about the treaty: The language was not strong enough to close tight-en loopholes. When it went down to defeat, all but four of the 55 Republicans voted against the treaty. All Democrats voted for it save one, Sen. Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, who voted "present."

Declining to pinpoint blame, Archbishop Martino said a "fruitful dialogue" between the Senate and the Clinton administration before the treaty was brought up for the vote might have dealt with questions raised by lawmakers.

He expressed hope the Senate might reconsider the treaty after better preparation had been made. Archbishop Martino said the U.S. vote might slow the process of gaining other countries' approval of the treaty, but he hoped those that had not ratified it would go ahead and do so.

When President Clinton signed the treaty three years ago, Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Worcester, Mass., chairman of the U.S. bishops' International Policy Committee, warned: "Unless the treaty is approved in timely fashion, it may irreparably damage the moral credibility of our efforts to stem nuclear proliferation."

Archbishop Martino made his comments after delivering a previously scheduled Vatican statement to the U.N. General Assembly committee reviewing disarmament efforts. That statement did not refer to the U.S. action, but strongly reaffirmed the Vatican's condemnation of nuclear weapons.

"While militarism of all kinds must be checked, the abolition of nuclear weapons is the prerequisite for peace in the 21st century," it said. "What has been promised for

a long time by the Non-Proliferation Treaty must be achieved," the statement said.

Although the archbishop did not blame individuals or parties for the treaty's failure, other observers were eager to do so.

The Rev. James B. Dunn, president of the Baptist Joint Committee Endowment and a professor at the Wake Forest University Divinity School in North Carolina, assigned much of the blame to Senate Republicans. "They allowed Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Trent Lott to use Senate rules in taking advantage of a president who is disadvantaged by his own history," he said, referring to Clinton's sex scandal and impeachment trial.

On the other hand, Rev. Dunn said, White House officials "haven't been talking about it the past two years, and they should have. All the blame is not at Jesse Helms. Just 98 percent of it."

More blame came from Fran Teplitz, policy director of the Peace Action Education Center in Washington, which had campaigned strenuously for the treaty's passage.

"We're extremely angry and disappointed that the treaty was killed by essentially partisan politics," she said. "We feel that it wasn't taken seriously after years of foot-dragging. They did a major disservice."

Teplitz said the treaty can come up for discussion again at any time, but did not expect that to happen in this century. "We need to revisit this, but in a thoughtful manner, not in a rushed and hurried manner," she said. Teplitz noted Vice President Al Gore has already said he would give the treaty top priority should he win the presidency next year.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty was adopted by the General Assembly Sept. 10, 1996, and opened for signature by the U.N. secretary-general Sept. 24.

Noting that the committee was meeting during the General Assembly's last session before the beginning of a new century, Archbishop Martino said that the 20th century had brought more war deaths — 110 million — than had the previous 19.

He called for use of international legal authority to stop "acts of barbarism" that had "scarred the memory of this century."