

GOP platform pleases delegates



Joanna Lightner/CNS photo

A former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, Thomas Melady, reads at a July 30 Mass for delegates to the GOP convention in Philadelphia's cathedral.

PHILADELPHIA (CNS) — Despite moves to weaken the pro-life plank in the Republican platform, delegates to the Republican National Convention approved without debate July 31 a guiding document that strongly affirms pro-life principles.

"As a country, we must keep our pledge to the first guarantee of the Declaration of Independence," the platform reads. "That is why we say the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed."

Specifically, the GOP platform supports a human-life amendment to the Constitution, opposes the use of public funds for abortions and calls for the ap-

pointment of judges "who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life."

The platform was approved by voice vote as one of the first agenda items on the convention's first day. Wisconsin Gov. Tommy G. Thompson, a Catholic who chairs the convention's Committee on Resolutions, said the document was "one that every Republican can be proud of," resulting from "the most open platform process perhaps in our party's history."

"There is so much more that unites us than divides us," added Thompson, who made no specific mention of abortion in his 10-minute talk.

Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic who chairs the Republican National Coalition for Life, praised the platform's affirmation of the party's pro-life character and chastised those who are seeking to change the party's stand on abortion.

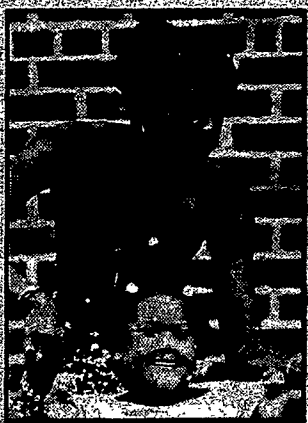
"They have been trying for 10 years to weaken or remove the pro-life plank, they've had four years to organize for this convention, they have only one issue to organize around, and yet they admit their organizational skills may still be lacking," she said. "What is lacking is significant support for the extremist abortion-on-demand philosophy advocated by these groups."



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High schools: 'We're still Catholic'

Of more than 3,000 students who will be attending seven Catholic high schools across the diocese this year, half may never see a religious or priest in the classroom — or even the hallway.

In the 1950s, by contrast, 44 Basilian priests were associated with Aquinas-Institute and lived in nearby quarters, according to Patrick Hanley, president.

"The point is, for older alumni, if you went to Aquinas you were taught by Basilians. They would come across the football field to teach biology, mathematics,..." Hanley said, rattling off numerous high school courses. Now none remain on staff.

So what makes such schools Catholic today?

To formulate an answer, the diocese needed "to get a little more involved," acknowledged Timothy Dwyer, diocesan superintendent of schools.

"To their credit," he said, "Aquinas came to us, and wanted to assure parents it would continue to be a Catholic school even after the Basilians left."

The plan

"The Catholicity of the school has never been in question," Hanley quickly remarked, noting that the school had begun as Cathedral High School under Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid's direction in 1902. Not until 1937 were the Basilian Fathers given full administrative authority.

"If (Aquinas) were not a Catholic school the board of trustees would close the doors," he said.

Yet Hanley noted that the presence of priests at Aquinas declined until this June when only one Basilian remained, as a counselor. That priest's departure was

widely reported. "Now all of a sudden everyone is asking, 'Are we still going to be Catholic?'" Hanley said with admitted exaggeration.

Particularly with concurrent changes at Bishop Kearney High School and Aquinas, however, Bishop Matthew H. Clark became concerned, according to Dwyer. "He has canonical responsibility to oversee the Catholicity of all the schools," he said, noting that when high schools are run by religious orders, the bishop has delegated oversight to the sponsoring orders.

At Bishop Kearney, such oversight had been granted the Christian Brothers and School Sisters of Notre Dame. But today only two Christian Brothers and one SSND remain on staff.

"To me, the biggest difference is you don't have the presence of as many clergy," said Carmen Urzetta, Kearney's director of alumni relations, who was one of the school's few lay teachers 36 years ago. "You

don't see a change in principles, ethics and morals."

To help ensure that such a change does not occur, the superintendent's office and principals and presidents of the seven high schools developed a plan in May.

They agreed that key areas were religious curricula, school culture and governance. The plan calls for the schools to **continued on page 14**



Illustration by Linda Jeanne Rivers