

WORLD & NATION

Irish say 'no' to tighter abortion laws

By Cian Molloy
Catholic News Service

DUBLIN, Ireland — The Irish bishops are disappointed at the narrow defeat of an abortion referendum, said a spokesman for the bishops' conference.

The spokesman, Father Martin Clarke, told Catholic News Service that Irish citizens missed an opportunity to tighten the country's abortion laws.

"Obviously, we are disappointed, particularly as the result means that the constitutional protection of the unborn continues to be undermined by the 'X case' judgment," Father Clarke said, referring to the 1992 Irish Supreme Court case that allowed an abortion if a pregnant woman threatened suicide.

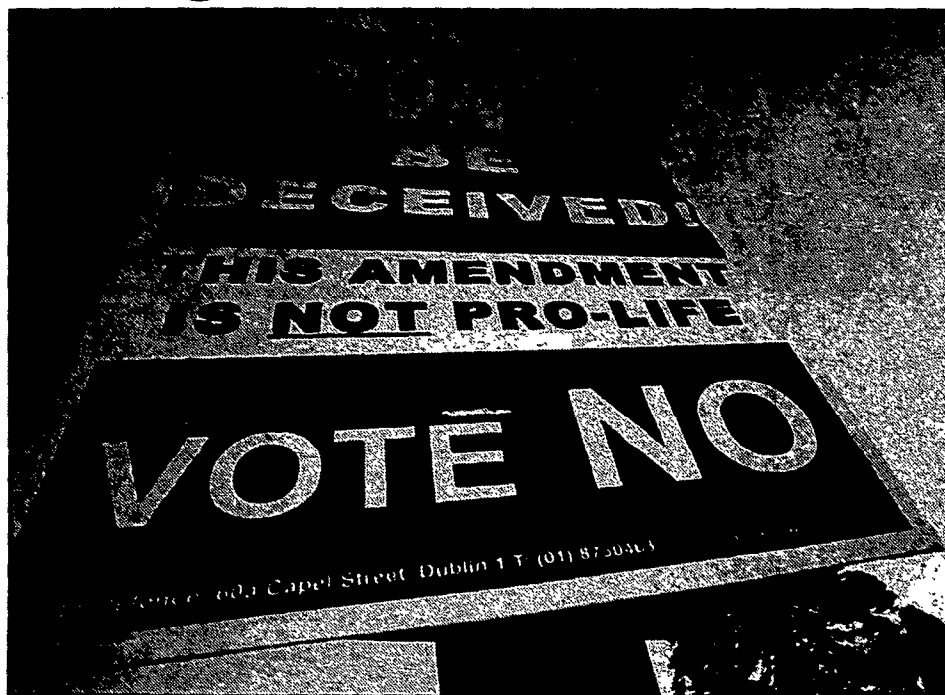
The March 6 referendum included a measure to end the suicide provision, but the proposal was rejected by a margin of less than 1 percent.

About 43 percent of the electorate voted, a figure Father Clarke called "disappointing." Before the election, some voters expressed confusion about the referendum's wording.

"If there had been a bigger turnout in rural areas particularly, the referendum would be carried. A lot of the bishops said in their pastoral letters that it would be wrong if the referendum was decided by a relatively small part of the population because of a low turnout," he said.

The referendum result revealed an urban-rural divide, with voters in urban areas more likely to vote "no" and voters in rural areas more likely to vote "yes." Voter turnout in urban areas was far greater than rural areas, observers said.

Also influencing the referendum's outcome was a division among pro-life groups. While the bishops and the Pro-Life Campaign backed the referendum, other leading personalities actively cam-



Pro-life posters in Killarney and elsewhere in Ireland, urging both affirmative and opposing votes, indicate the level of confusion surrounding an abortion referendum on March 6. Dublin's Cardinal Desmond Connell said that pro-lifers who oppose the referendum were "well-meaning but misguided." The Vatican supported a "yes" vote on the referendum.

aigned against its passage.

Dana Rosemary Scallon, a former Catholic television personality and now an Independent member of the European Parliament, said the referendum did not protect the fetus from the moment of conception.

"The vote is a victory for the unborn child. If there had been a wording acceptable to the whole pro-life community, this would have been carried by a big majority," she said.

The Irish bishops were expected to discuss the referendum's result during

their mid-March conference.

Some voters complained about Catholic schools being used as polling stations since religious images — crucifixes, portraits of Pope John Paul II, saints and founders of religious orders — hung on the walls of some polling halls.

Following an objection at two polling stations, a Bible was removed from view. Bibles are used in Irish plebiscites for voters who do not bring identification material with them; they must swear on the Bible that they are who they claim to be.

Birth-control bill debated

BALTIMORE (CNS) — A bill that would require Catholic hospitals to provide information to rape victims about emergency contraceptives that can cause abortions has been introduced in the Maryland House of Delegates.

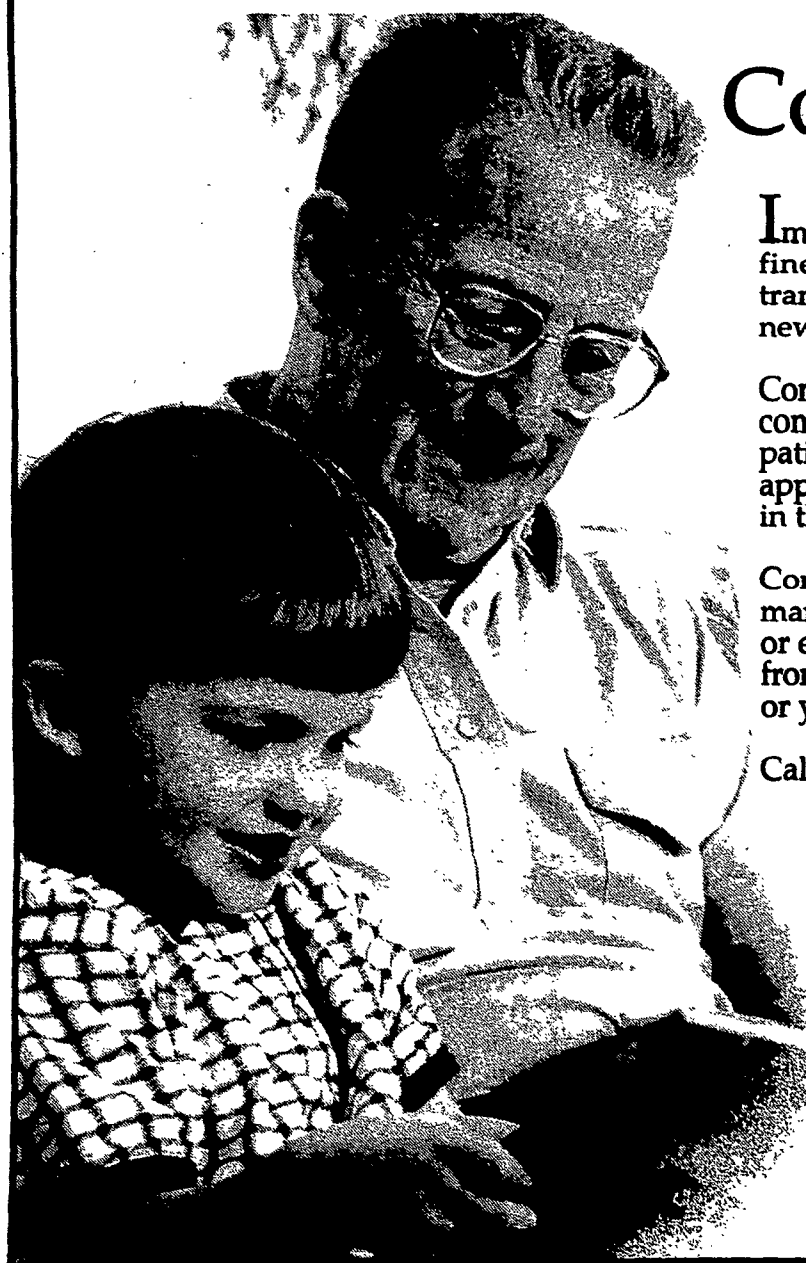
The bill would require all Maryland hospitals, no matter their religious affiliation, to develop protocols for providing information about emergency contraceptives.

Jeffrey F. Caruso, associate director of social concerns for the Maryland Catholic Conference, said Maryland's bishops are opposing the measure.

The bill's proponents say emergency contraceptives only prevent pregnancies. But Caruso said they sometimes also prevent the implantation of a fertilized ovum, which results in the destruction of a newly conceived life.

"It's a scientific fact that these pills can sometimes block implantation, and when that's the case we think hospitals have an ethical obligation to inform the assault victim of that fact," Caruso said. "It is not the state's role to determine whether or not proceeding in that matter is an acceptable protocol."

The ethical and religious directives that govern Catholic hospitals say that if there is no evidence that conception has occurred, a rape victim may be treated with medication that would prevent ovulation or fertilization or change sperm function. They say it is never permissible to initiate or recommend treatments that directly cause the removal, destruction or interference with the development of a fetus.



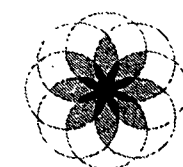
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