

## REVIEW BOARD EXPECTS BISHOPS' COOPERATION

NEW YORK (CNS) — The lay board set up by the U.S. bishops to monitor their handling of sex abuse cases reported at a meeting Jan. 16-17 that it was moving ahead to carry out its mandate with expectation of full cooperation by the bishops.

Board member Robert S. Bennett, a Washington lawyer, said the lay was "not going to tolerate" a refusal of cooperation.

A major accomplishment of the meeting was reaching the stage where the board could authorize Kathleen L. McChesney, the former FBI official who directs the bishops' new Office for Child and Youth Protection, to begin negotiations with agencies to provide professional assistance in drawing up reports.

## BUSH PUSHES FOR CAP ON MALPRACTICE SUITS

SCRANTON, Pa. (CNS) — Catholic health officials applauded President Bush's attention to a medical malpractice crisis that has doctors in several states threatening to close their practices and hospitals curtailing some services.

In a speech at the Jesuit-run University of Scranton Jan. 16, Bush renewed a push for federal legislation that would put a \$250,000 cap on noneconomic and punitive awards in malpractice cases.

Bush said people who have a legitimate malpractice claim must get a fair hearing, but he said too many frivolous lawsuits and large jury awards were driving up the cost of medical malpractice insurance.

## CRIME-TRACKING SYSTEM DEVELOPED BY JESUITS

ST. LOUIS (CNS) — Thanks to a Web site developed by St. Louis University's Geographic Information Systems Lab, St. Louis residents can now use the Internet to track where crimes are occurring in the city.

Using crime report data from the St. Louis Police Department, the Web site — <http://64.218.68.50/stlouis/news/npd/newer.htm> — is continually updated with the most recent four months of crime reports and police calls. It allows citizens to type in an address and see the type and frequency of crimes that have been reported near that address.

# Rome: Vote to support life

Cindy Wooden/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Catholics must not promote or vote for any laws that would lead to attacks on human life, said a new document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

While the freedom of conscience leaves Catholics free to choose among political parties and strategies for promoting the common good, they cannot claim that freedom allows them to promote abortion, euthanasia or other attacks on human life, the congregation said.

The 18-page "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life" was approved by Pope John Paul II and released Jan. 16 at the Vatican.

"Those who are involved directly in lawmaking bodies have a 'grave and clear obligation to oppose' any law that attacks human life," it said. "For them, as for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for them."

"A well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals," it said.

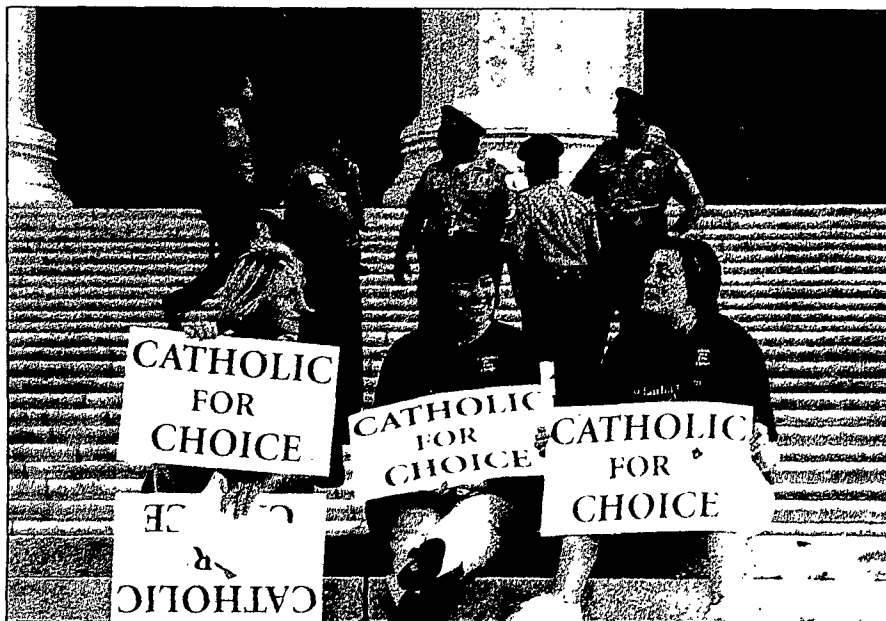
Nor does a Catholic who focuses exclusively on one issue fulfill the obligation to work for the common good by promoting the values encompassed in Catholic social teaching, the document said.

"The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility toward the common good," it said.

Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Ill., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said he hoped the document would give encouragement to Catholics already working in the political sphere to protect basic moral values and remind everyone of the duty "to work without exception or reservations for all of the goods rooted in our human nature."

The document, he said in a Jan. 16 statement, also insisted "Catholic politicians cannot subscribe to any notion which equates freedom or democracy with a moral relativism that denies these moral principles."

In their own statements on the political responsibility of Catholics, Bishop Gregory said, the U.S. bishops, like the document, "have stressed the fundamental and in-



CNS file photo

Women promoting a pro-choice view demonstrate during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1996. While freedom of conscience leaves Catholics free to choose among political parties and strategies for the common good, they cannot claim that freedom allows them to promote abortion, euthanasia or other attacks on human life, said the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in a document released Jan. 16.

alienable ethical demands of our human nature which support the life of every human person from conception to natural death."

The central focus of the document is an explanation that in a democracy, Catholics have a right and a duty to vote according to their consciences as formed by church teaching.

Especially in European countries with a Catholic majority, some commentators have tried to paint political debates on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning and divorce as a debate between those who favor democracy and those who want to impose church teaching on society.

"Living and acting in conformity with one's own conscience on questions of politics is not slavish acceptance of positions alien to politics or some kind of professionalism," the document said.

Rather, the congregation said, it is the way in which Christians offer their contributions to building a society which is more just and more respectful of human dignity.

"This would include the promotion and defense of goods such as public order and peace, freedom and equality, respect for human life and for the environment, justice and solidarity," it said.

The document said Catholics have a special responsibility to defend the truth about the meaning and dignity of human life when proposed laws come up against "moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation," particularly

regarding abortion and euthanasia.

Laws must defend the basic right to life from conception to natural death, it said.

The congregation also quoted Pope John Paul's 1995 encyclical, "The Gospel of Life," in which he said that in situations where it is not possible to repeal a law legalizing abortion or to stop it from becoming legal, "an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality."

The doctrinal congregation also listed as particular obligations: "the duty to respect and protect the rights of the human embryo"; to safeguard the family "in the face of modern laws on divorce"; to oppose attempts to legally equate cohabitation or homosexual unions with marriage; and to defend the rights of parents to educate their children.

Other obligations it listed included: protecting children; fighting "modern forms of slavery" including drug addiction and prostitution; promoting religious freedom; working for justice and solidarity in the economy; and promoting peace.

The congregation said, "Peace is always the work of justice and the effect of charity. It demands the absolute and radical rejection of violence and terrorism and requires a constant and vigilant commitment on the part of all political leaders."