

# Laity has role in church governance

The tragic sexual-abuse crisis that has afflicted the Roman Catholic Church over these past 12 months has had at least a few good effects. One of its most positive by-products has been the awakening of many lay Catholics to their own responsibilities for the life, mission and ministries of the church.

All across the United States, Catholic lay women and men are newly energized and eager to seize whatever opportunity arises to contribute to the betterment of their faith community.

The Second Vatican Council called upon the laity almost 40 years ago to exercise more meaningful responsibilities as members of the church: "As sharers in the role of Christ the Priest, the Prophet, and the King, the laity have an active part to play in the life and activity of the Church" (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, n. 10).

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church was just as specific. The laity share equally, although in different ways, with the hierarchy, clergy and religious in the three-fold mission of Christ — of teaching, ruling and sanctifying (n. 30).

Pastors, the council declared, "were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world." They must recognize the ministries and charismatic gifts that the laity also have, and they must work



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

with the laity so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.

Vatican II urged that pastoral councils, made up of laity, religious and clergy, and presided over by the bishop, be established in every diocese (Decree on the Bishop's Pastoral Office in the Church, n. 27), and that bishops not only seek the advice of laity but also "allow [them] freedom and room for action," encouraging them to "undertake tasks on [their] own initiative" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 37).

"The Church," the council declared, "has not been truly established, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ [in the world], unless there exists a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy" (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, n. 21).

The same spirit of collaboration must exist at the parish level as well. The council urged parish priests to listen to their

parishioners "willingly," to take their opinions and recommendations seriously and to "recognize their experience and competence in the different areas of human activity" (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, n. 9).

The laity, therefore, are not restricted to the temporal order alone, leaving the bishops and priests to manage the affairs of the church without lay involvement (or "interference"). On the contrary, the laity "exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders" (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, n. 5).

On January 24 the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of St. Francis de Sales (d. 1622), one of the church's greatest pioneers and promoters of the lay apostolate and of the spirituality that should undergird it. He insisted that the way of spiritual perfection is not only for the elite few nor does it require great austerities or withdrawal from the everyday life of the world.

Vatican II reinforced those views, entitling the fifth chapter of its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness."

Francis de Sales would have gladly embraced the council's teachings on the laity. So should we all.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

## Other ills are related to abortion

To the editor:

During the Fatima apparitions in 1917 three Portuguese children were told that wars were the result of sin. In recent times Mother Teresa said that abortion was the main cause of violence in the world.

Yet Pax Christi and other war protestors seem to ignore the root causes of violence and instead target U.S. response to violence.

However, it is not clear that a war against Iraq is the right response. This is especially true since North Korea has announced its military buildup. Also our borders are borders that are not adequately protected.

Returning to the pro-life message of Mother Teresa I believe the threat of violence and war would greatly subside if abortions would greatly diminish.

Would that the war protestors target abortion clinics for their war on unborn children.

Robert Bart  
 Ithaca

## Voices yet lead faithful in prayer

To the editor:

When now and the hour of death became one for Msgr. Cirrincione, it is safe to say that the angels led him into paradise and Our Lady of the Rosary was there to welcome him home.

I had the good fortune to cross paths with Msgr. Cirrincione many years ago while still in my early teens. He was my most profound teacher, a deeply humble and spiritual priest, he set the course for my spiritual life.

On the evening of January 17, 1977, the day our late beloved Bishop James E. Kearney was laid to rest, Msgr. Cirrincione marked the occasion by playing a tape on "The Family Rosary for Peace" of Bishop Kearney reciting the rosary. Msgr. Cirrincione prefaced the tape by saying "...through the modern miracle of electronics we still have the voice of Bishop Kearney to lead us in the rosary..." Now both familiar voices live on in the tapes made available over the years.

How appropriate that Msgr. Cirrincione was called from this life on a feast of Our Lady. Could it have been any other way!

Joan Floegel  
 Ultra Vista Drive  
 Maitland, Florida

## Paper offers diverse views

To the editor:

I always find food for thought in Father Richard McBrien's column. My previous diocese had a newspaper in which nothing remotely controversial appeared. The *Catholic Courier* is a genuine newspaper — and not only because of Father McBrien's column.

Contrary to a reader who found fault with Father McBrien's criticism of American businesses that discourage workers from organizing, I thought the column was timely in an America increasingly divided between the rich and the poor. Unions have had in the past an important role to play in moderating the worst excesses of capitalism, even as the Church has taught.

However, the main message I took from Father McBrien's column is that we all are, in one degree or another, "cafeteria Catholics"

### Catholic Courier

©2002 Rochester Catholic Press Assn.

1136 Buffalo Road  
 P.O. Box 24379  
 Rochester, NY 14624  
 585/529-9530

800/600-3628 outside Rochester  
<http://www.catholiccourier.com>  
 e-mail: [info@catholiccourier.com](mailto:info@catholiccourier.com)

President  
 Bishop Matthew H. Clark

General Manager/Editor  
 Karen M. Franz  
[kfranz@catholiccourier.com](mailto:kfranz@catholiccourier.com)  
 Editorial Department

Assistant Editor  
 Jennifer Ficaglia  
[jficaglia@catholiccourier.com](mailto:jficaglia@catholiccourier.com)  
 Staff Writers

Rob Cullivan  
[rcullivan@catholiccourier.com](mailto:rcullivan@catholiccourier.com)

Mike Latona  
[mlatona@catholiccourier.com](mailto:mlatona@catholiccourier.com)

Staff Photographer  
 Karin von Voigtlander  
[kvonvoigtlander@catholiccourier.com](mailto:kvonvoigtlander@catholiccourier.com)

Editorial Assistant  
 Louis Litzenberger  
[llitzenberger@catholiccourier.com](mailto:llitzenberger@catholiccourier.com)

Business Department  
 Office Manager  
 Mary DiPonzio  
[mdiponzio@catholiccourier.com](mailto:mdiponzio@catholiccourier.com)

Administrative Assistant  
 Arlene S. Gall  
[agall@catholiccourier.com](mailto:agall@catholiccourier.com)

Circulation Manager  
 Donna Stubbings  
[dstubbings@catholiccourier.com](mailto:dstubbings@catholiccourier.com)

Graphics Department  
 Graphics Manager  
 Kim Parks  
[kparks@catholiccourier.com](mailto:kparks@catholiccourier.com)  
 Graphic Artist  
 Linda Jeanne Rivers  
[lrivers@catholiccourier.com](mailto:lrivers@catholiccourier.com)

Advertising Department  
 Display Advertising Executives  
 Tracy Moses  
[tmoses@catholiccourier.com](mailto:tmoses@catholiccourier.com)  
 Donald P. Wilson  
[dwilson@catholiccourier.com](mailto:dwilson@catholiccourier.com)

This pair  
 Parish r  
 St. Jose

— and so  
 Catholic  
 means c  
 universa  
 will and  
 perhaps  
 Thomas  
 because  
 worship  
 ent ways  
 spirit to b  
 cluding r  
 people in  
 levels of  
 come, ar  
 tures. In  
 but let u  
 versity!  
 er is, in  
 newspap

War  
 to d  
 way

To the edi  
 Sister  
 Fuersts i  
 of the Cat  
 fortably  
 tions tha  
 against I  
 refuse to  
 reality tha  
 war of St