

# Voting in good conscience

The presidential selection process is again upon us. All the major Democratic Party candidates seeking the presidency agree that women should have a right to choose abortion. So can any of these candidates be a viable choice for Catholics who take the teachings of the faith on life seriously?

Catholics, of course, are not told by the church how to vote or think. But, as the catechism reflects, it is part of the church's mission "to pass moral judgments even in matters related to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man ... require it." Human life is such an issue.

Does that mean Catholics may not in good conscience support one of these candidates? The church speaks only indirectly here. While it is abundantly clear that it is never proper to "take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of a law (permitting abortion)," the Holy Father has addressed his most direct counsel to candidates or elected officials, not voters. Those in public positions can accept an imperfect law limiting abortion if they make their personal opposition to the practice well known and the legislative compromise limits the harm.

What of Catholic voters? Like all people of good conscience, they must be careful not to cooperate formally as direct participants in an act against human life or "share in the immoral intention of the person committing" such an act. Lamenta-



Douglas W. Kmiec

ble and mistaken as advocacy of a right to choose abortion is, it is not formal cooperation in an abortion. Presumably, then, so long as Catholic voters make their own views in favor of life known by avoiding those aspects of a Democratic candidate's campaign that advocate abortion, they are morally free to support whomever they choose.

In a church that celebrates religious freedom as a matter of human dignity, unfettered freedom of franchise is as it should be. Refraining from political endorsement illustrates both the church's integrity and the fact that the church is intended to be a sign of transcendent unity, not division.

Democratic senators consistently have filibustered or shunned President Bush's Catholic nominees for the federal bench who oppose abortion. So, if the Democratic leadership acts in a fashion so as to say "no Catholics need apply," why should Catholic voters give Democratic candidates who uniformly thumb their nose at a fundamental precept of faith (not to mention a self-evident truth of the repub-

lic) the time of day?

Like every voter, Catholics must inevitably select a candidate on a range of issues from the economy to education to the preservation of family and marriage to national defense. Each area faces modern and complex challenges. Catholic voters have a duty to evaluate the substantive merits of all candidates' policies. Insofar as civil leaders are called to serve the people and the common good, Democratic candidates who fail so completely to make courageous choices in support of life certainly make it difficult.

During the 1984 campaign, Mario Cuomo, speaking at the University of Notre Dame, said that "there is neither an encyclical nor a catechism that spells out a political strategy for achieving legislative goals." Not entirely true then, and now, after the encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, not true at all.

Neither Catholics nor any other American should artificially separate moral reality from political choice. As Henry Hyde answered then-Gov. Cuomo, referencing St. Ambrose, "Not only for every idle word must man render account, but for every idle silence."

Democrat or Republican, Catholic voters, questioning and evaluating candidates during primaries, cannot afford to be idly silent in defense of the sanctity of life.

Douglas W. Kmiec is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

## Jesus' words on sinfulness were direct

To the editor:

A recent Gannett news article reports that a group of our Diocesan priests have taken exception to a Vatican document stating: "Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in (homosexual) unions would actually mean doing violence to these children." Father Joe Marcoux has countered by saying: "That has not been our experience, that these children are put in a violent atmosphere." Apparently, the phrase "doing violence" is found objectionable by Father Marcoux and other signatories of a protest letter to the Vatican.

This is an unfortunate misreading of this phrase, since "doing violence to" is not equivalent to saying that those persons are violent, or that the children are in a "violent atmosphere." One dictionary definition of "violence" reads: "An intense, powerful force, as of a hurricane." We could add that this refers to a *harmful* force.

Now certainly, if two persons are living in a state that the Church regards as sinful, whatever children they are responsible for are, of necessity, subjected to that environment. The same could be said of two unwed heterosexuals, or of two married heterosexuals who habitually engage in im-

moral or illegal activities. They are giving that example to their children. Such individuals are falsely presenting as *correct* activities and practices that the Church condemns. Consequently, they too are presenting a powerful influence of wrong-doing to their children, and are "doing violence" to them.

On the other hand, parents whose marriage represents a moral and sacramental commitment are confirming a way of life that the Judeo-Christian faith has approved for thousands of years. If, as Father Marcoux indicates, the Vatican's language is "divisive," what must he think of Christ's language about persons giving scandal to children: Tying a millstone around their neck and casting them into the sea is pretty direct!

Rosalie P. Krajci  
Murphy Road  
Corning

## Seeks reform of NY homes for the aged

To the editor:

My mother died in a nursing home in 1997, but I continue to be concerned about nursing home conditions. And I would like to see the Catholic Church play a more active role in promoting nursing home reforms.

A recent report by the General Accounting Office (GAO) is very upsetting to me.

The report found that states often failed to refer a substantial number of nursing homes that had a pattern of harming residents for immediate sanctions. New York State accounts for 20 percent of these cases.

The report also indicated that New York has a large percentage of inexperienced surveyors who have to deal with a huge backlog of complaints.

New York scored poorly in the area of survey predictability. In order to avoid predictability, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services directed all states to avoid schedul-

### Catholic Courier

©2004 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 Cullivani  
[rcullivan@catholiccourier.com](mailto:rcullivan@catholiccourier.com)

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

Jennifer M. Burke  
[jburke@catholiccourier.com](mailto:jburke@catholiccourier.com)

Staff Photographer  
Mike Crupi  
[mcrupi@catholiccourier.com](mailto:mcrupi@catholiccourier.com)

#### Editorial Assistant

Louis Litzemberger  
[llitzemberger@catholiccourier.com](mailto:llitzemberger@catholiccourier.com)

Photo Intern  
Lauren Long  
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

Advertising Director  
Daniel M. Zollo  
[dzollo@catholiccourier.com](mailto:dzollo@catholiccourier.com)

Display Advertising Executives  
Jerry Rivers  
[jrivers@catholiccourier.com](mailto:jrivers@catholiccourier.com)  
Donald P. Wilson  
[dwilson@catholiccourier.com](mailto:dwilson@catholiccourier.com)