

# Eucharist debate sparks questions

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

IRONDEQUOIT — In January, St. Louis Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, then the bishop of LaCrosse, Wis., touched off a still-simmering debate when he announced that lawmakers who support abortion or euthanasia were not eligible to receive Communion in his diocese.

At stake in the debate is "our Eucharist, our participation in the Eucharist ... and the relationship of the Eucharist to our life in this world," observed Father Robert Kennedy, pastor of Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish.

Father Kennedy discussed the subject during "Elephants, Donkeys and Jesus, Oh My!" an Aug. 17 session of Theology on Tap at Johnny's Irish Pub. If any of the nearly 50 young adults who attended hoped to be told what to think about the issue, they were probably disappointed. Rather than provide any concrete answers, Father Kennedy helped participants understand the factors involved, including church law on excommunication and on the Eu-

charist, the meaning of conscience formation and the separation of church and state.

This issue has caused many Catholics to ask what it means to come to Communion worthily. In deciding whether some legislators and politicians are worthy of receiving Communion, several bishops have quoted the second part of Canon 915 of the Revised Code of Canon Law, Father Kennedy said. This canon states those who have been excommunicated and "others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion."

The code goes on to explain that a manifest sin is one which is publicly known, and that obstinate perseverance is indicated when a person persists in the sin without adhering to church teaching. Some bishops have applied this canon to politicians who adopt a consistent pro-choice platform and voting record, saying these actions constitute obstinate persistence in the manifestly grave sin of abortion, Father Kennedy said.

Canon 912 states that "any bap-



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier  
Father Robert Kennedy (top), pastor of Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Parish, gives a Theology on Tap presentation called "Elephants, Donkeys and Jesus, Oh My!" Aug. 17, at Johnny's Irish Pub. Those gathered discussed whether pro-choice lawmakers should receive Communion.

itized person who is not prohibited by law can and must be admitted to Holy Communion." According to Canon 1398, those who have successfully procured an abortion are excluded from holy Communion, as are those who served as necessary cooperators in that act, deliberately helping the individual procure the abortion.

Participants asked Father Kennedy whether voting in favor of pro-choice legislation makes a politician a necessary cooperator in the act of abortion and what responsibility Catholic politicians have to Catholic voters, who constitute a significant percentage of the U.S. electorate but are divided over the question of abortion rights.

Instead of generating clear-cut answers, the ensuing discussion raised even more questions. One participant asked why the church takes such a strong stand on the issue instead of letting people make their own choices with the free will God gave them. Citing the legality and availability of alcohol as an example, she said she *could* go out and get drunk, but makes a moral decision not to do so.

God did make humans in his own image and likeness, complete with free will, Father Kennedy agreed.

"What role does conscience play in

this, for you and me in the voting booth? A very crucial question to that is, 'What shapes our conscience?'" said Father Kennedy. Answering his own question, the priest explained that personal conscience should be formed on the basis of Scripture, the full tradition of the church and the best of human wisdom in light of each individual's own particular situation.

Several audience questions related to the separation of church and state, which Father Kennedy said some people mistakenly believe means faith shouldn't influence social or political decisions. The real idea behind the separation of church and state is that the government will not interfere in the free exercise of religion, while religion will not exercise undue control over government, he added.

Liana Eisenman, 20, who belongs to Irondequoit's St. James Parish, came to the discussion in hopes of hearing a faith-based perspective that could guide her when casting her vote in the upcoming presidential election. She said the evening gave her a lot more to think about.

"I definitely came away with either the same amount of questions or more," agreed 21-year-old Elissa Maltzan of Rochester's Most Precious Blood Parish.

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