

Abortion, war are key election issues

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Our daughter has a picture of George and Laura Bush on her refrigerator. A son has a John Kerry bumper sticker on his car.

"Don't tell me you are going to vote for that war mongerer!" yelled my son. "But Kerry is going to kill more children in the womb. They are more numerous and more innocent than Iraqi civilians," pleaded my daughter.

I knew they were going to turn to me to solve this dilemma: "You are both right in your conclusions about how many people each candidate is responsible for killing. But you are both wrong to feel so positive about your choice. If you're not wrangling with this decision, you're not really thinking."

In other words, the consistent-life-ethic vote will not be sold. Don't get me wrong. I wish I could find a candidate I could raise money for and for whom I could go door-to-door passing out flyers.

My children are into the numbers game. One says that *Roe v. Wade* has killed more unborn children and harmed more women than all the wars that have taken place in the last three centuries. And Bush could change that with the appointment of new judges that are sure to come up in the next four years. She's very likely to be right about that. My son says our military budget of \$399.1 billion is no way to demonstrate diplomacy in dealing with the re-emerging nuclear threat, a threat that we in our country have created. These arms have the firepower to kill in the millions. He is probably right about that too.

While there are other issues to consider as Catholics, clearly these are the most critical issues that take human life directly. War and abortion mute issues that affect the quality of human life because they literally destroy on a massive scale those who would be the beneficiaries of a more humane existence. As important as they are, policy issues that support universal health care and minimum wage for the poor, for instance, pale in light of war and abortion that deliberately wipe out the poor.

Poverty is a by-product of greed and consumerism and capitalism, and as such is one cause of abortion and war. However, neither presidential candidate will tell you that poverty is a "religious" issue they're not going to impose on other people. Just think about it. Thousands don't march on Washington proclaiming a constitutional "right to be poor."

This overt dogma, that it is necessary to kill people, overwhelms



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Carol Crossed of Brighton is a consistent-life-ethic advocate.

subtleties like tax benefits for the rich. How can we ever expect people to be compassionate toward the poor, when it is a "choice" to destroy human beings?

What is the nature of politics that creates this polarization? While we Catholics struggle with how to deal with it, I solemnly and respectfully conclude that the Catholic Church has in part created it.

Think about it. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has a Pro-life Office that challenges (mostly) Democrats and an Office of World Peace and Social Development that challenges (mostly) Republicans. This does more than give the impression that there are "conservative" Catholics and "liberal" Catholics. It actually creates two camps and leaves politicians catering to one or the other.

So we separate our advocacy, we compartmentalize our homilies and prayers. I visited a parish one recent Sunday where the Prayers of the Faithful mentioned the victims of unemployment, domestic abuse, war and even the hurricane victims in Florida, but not a word about the victims of abortion. A parish speaker may be prophetic on abortion but justify war.

JustFaith, a program designed by

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The Forum

For this month's viewpoints section, the *Courier* invited a consistent-life-ethic advocate to write about what she sees as key issues in the 2004 presidential campaign.

Catholic Charities USA, is an example of how our church creates camps. For 30 weeks, participants watch videos and discuss books on social justice. But the program does not have a segment dedicated to abortion. A local church had to devise its own pro-life component of JustFaith. And we wonder why George Bush and John Kerry separate the issues?

One small attempt to counter this dichotomy is Democrats for Life of America with 33 state chapters. On Monday night during the Democratic National Convention in Boston, pro-choice stalwarts like Ted Kennedy spoke to the state delegates at the Fleet Center. Meanwhile, his sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver attended a dinner sponsored by DFLA to promote pro-life Democratic candidates seeking office. Our host was Thomas Finneran, pro-life Democrat and Massachusetts speaker of the house. Another speaker was Robert Casey Jr., son of the late Pennsylvania Gov. Bob Casey who was not allowed in 1992 to speak at the DNC because of his pro-life views.

The next morning, Democrats for Life held a rally at Faneuil Hall at the statue of Sam Adams, the Father of the Revolution. Democratic Party revolutionaries we heard from that day were U.S. Senator Ben Nelson, Congressman Charles Stenholm and Pastor Caesar LeFlore, an African-American Democrat. We

heard from Democratic women state representatives and labor-union people who said our party has become the party that champions individualism over community.

In 1978, 292 members of Congress were Democrats, and 125 of them were pro-life. Today, 205 members of Congress are Democrats and 26 vote pro-life. Our numbers have been reduced nearly proportionately. I don't think that is a coincidence.

I will let you in on a little secret. I am what some people would call a "single-issue voter." My first time voting was 1963 during Civil Rights, and that was the most important issue to me then. The most important issue to me in the mid-1980s was the nuclear buildup. Exit polls have shown the majority of voters have one issue that overrides all other issues.

We have an opportunity now to vote for a president who may more likely address war in a less violent way and shift money to social programs. Or we have an opportunity for a president who may curb the abortion holocaust by appointing Supreme Court judges that will reverse *Roe v. Wade* for at least the next 30 years. And never the two shall meet. It is enough to give me diarrhea for 24 hours before I go into the voting booth.

In the 1990s, a reporter for *The New York Times* asked Father Brian Hehir, who worked for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, about John Paul II. The reporter, who knew that the pope opposed the Gulf War and also abortion, asked, "Is this guy radical right or radical left?"

I love this question. It teaches us the radical nature of consistency. It is better than Kaopektate.

Carol Crossed of Brighton is president of Democrats for Life of America.

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