

What makes a politician truly 'pro-life'?

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Being a pro-life politician means more than simply being against abortion, according to Sister of St. Joseph Donna Del Santo, chairwoman of the Diocese of Rochester's consistent-life-ethic committee. Being pro-life involves supporting policies that protect human life in all its stages, she noted.

Sister Del Santo talked about the church's consistent life ethic and its role in public life before more than 40 young adults during an Aug. 31 session of Theology on Tap at Johnny's Irish Pub on Culver Road. This session of Theology on Tap, a dis-

cussion series for young adults, was cosponsored by the Diocese of Rochester and the parishes of Blessed Sacrament and St. Mary's in the city.

The consistent life ethic — sometimes referred to as the "seamless garment" ethic — opposes war, abortion, euthanasia, violence, economic injustice and the death penalty. Yet few, if any, politicians oppose all these evils, she noted.

"I support candidates who are across the board," Sister Del Santo said — although she acknowledged having voted for some who didn't fully support the consistent life ethic when not having a choice to do

Young Adult

otherwise. She added that she believes it is time for Catholics to "raise up" consistent-life-ethic candidates and support those who embrace the church's ethic. She noted that she herself is supporting a local candidate who embraces the consistent life ethic.

"I think if Catholics are saying they're really pro-life, they have to live and embrace all of (the ethic)," Sister Del Santo said.

Vocation director for her congregation, Sister Del Santo noted that she's had many experiences that have helped her reflect on the consistent life ethic, including working with pregnant teenagers and incarcerated women.

The committee she leads supports people and programs that exemplify the consistent life ethic, Sister Del Santo said in an interview following her presentation. The committee selects recipients of the diocese's annual Vita Awards that recognize people who embody the consistent life ethic, and also selects such programs as crisis-pregnancy centers, food cupboards and homes for the dying to receive diocesan Consistent Life Ethic grants, she added.

During her presentation, Sister Del Santo noted that the church's consistent life ethic has been developing for many years. Among the documents and movements she cited were 19th- and 20th-century papal encyclicals that supported

workers' rights; the Second Vatican Council's acknowledgment that nonviolence was a legitimate stance for a Catholic to take; and Pope John Paul II's decrying of the "structures of sin" that impoverish nations. She added that the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago formally enunciated the consistent ethic of life in 1983. She gave her audience copies of his arguments on its behalf.

"We cannot urge a compassionate society and vigorous public policy to protect the rights of the unborn and then argue that compassion and significant public programs on behalf of the needy undermine the moral fiber of the society or are beyond the proper scope of governmental responsibility," Cardinal Bernardin wrote.


Following Sister Del Santo's presentation, audience member Denise Flanigen said Catholics need to learn more about the church's social teachings presented during the session.

"I think it pointed out to me that there's so much more the church can do from the pulpit," said Flanigen, a parishioner of St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Irondequoit.

Beth Blodgett, youth minister at St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Greece, said she came to Theology on Tap because she didn't want to be "an ignorant voter." She added that she would take the church's teachings into account when choosing a candidate.

"Whether I'm going to write someone in, or vote for Kerry or Bush, is still up in the air," she said.

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