

# USCCB explores Communion issue

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Patricia Zapor/CNS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops will develop a "Reader on Catholics in Public Life" and two of their committees will take up the matter of church teaching on when it is proper for Catholic politicians, and all Catholics, to receive Communion.

The prominent attention to that area of Catholic teaching in this year's presidential election campaign was addressed by the U.S. bishops in a three-page written report issued Nov. 17 without comment or discussion. The reader and committee consideration were two of the steps the task force set out as ways of engaging all Catholics and those in public life.

With the nomination of Democratic Sen. John F. Kerry of Massachusetts, a Catholic who supports legal abortion, one of the presidential campaign's underlying themes this year became whether Catholics would be sinning by voting for Kerry or other candidates in similar situations.

The task force report reflected on the "challenges and controversy" for the church that "generated more discussion than perhaps ever before about what it means to be a Catholic and a citizen of the United States."

Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick of Washington, who chaired the Task Force on Catholic Bishops and Catholic Politicians, told Catholic News Service later that, although the issue and the church's teaching were manipulated by partisans outside the church, the net effect of the attention to church teaching and politicians "is a blessing."

"Catholics are thinking more about their role as citizens, about their responsibilities as Catholics," he said.

In September 2003, the U.S. bishops formed the special task force to develop guidelines for bishops in implementing the principles spelled out by a Vatican doctrinal note issued in late 2002.

The Vatican document, among other things, emphasized the moral duty of Catholic politicians to oppose legislation that allows legal abortion and euthanasia. But the document did not speak of sanctions, such as denying Communion.

Throughout the 2004 presidential campaign, U.S. bishops continued to issue individual statements and pastoral letters, some closely following the outline set by the conference's June statement, others taking a firmer position that Catholics would be sinning if they voted for politi-

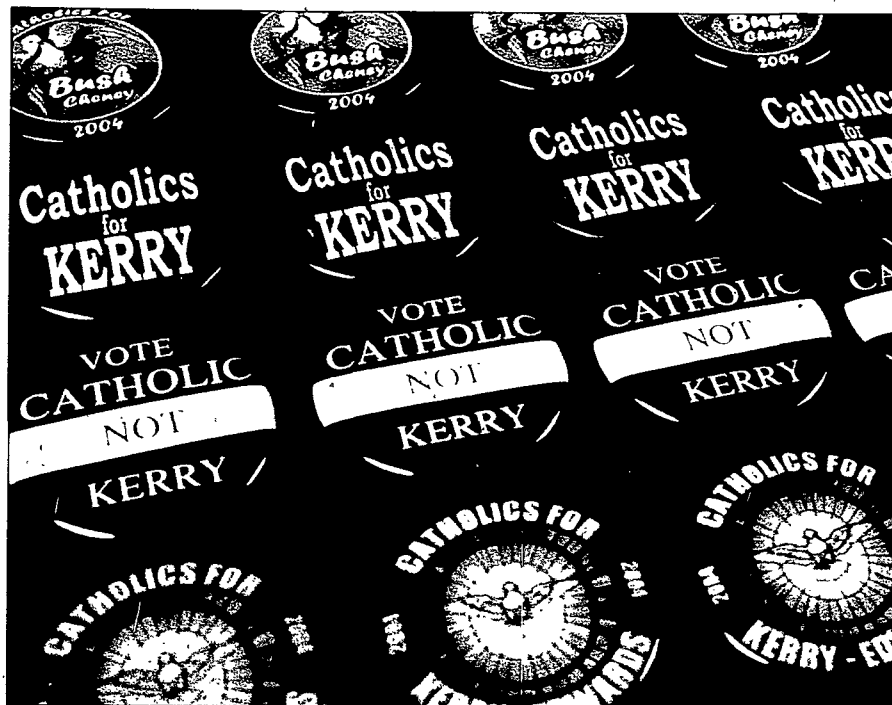


Photo Illustration/CNS

Since the issue of when it is proper for Catholic politicians to take Communion was heavily debated this election year, two committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will take up the matter of church teaching surrounding the topic.

cians who did not support the church's pro-life positions.

Cardinal McCarrick's report noted that while it has "been a very good thing" that bishops, pastors and parishioners across the country "have been wrestling with how our faith should shape our decisions in public life," it has not been an easy process.

"The media or partisan forces sometimes tried to pit one bishop against another," the report said, adding that some bishops have been unfairly attacked as partisan and others have been called cowards.

"Some have been accused of being 'single issue,' indifferent to the poor or unconcerned about the war," it said. "Others have been called unconcerned about the destruction of unborn human life, but preoccupied by poverty or war. That is not who we are."

The bishops are united in their defense of life and the dignity of the human person, the statement said. "We have continued to work together to preach the Gospel of life in all its dimensions."

Now that the election is over, it said, "we have an important opportunity to come together around our common commitment to protect human life and dignity and advance the common good."

It said Catholics have "a pre-eminent obligation to protect the lives of unborn children, to oppose euthanasia and to defend marriage. Our tradition also clearly calls us to stand

up for those who are poor and to promote justice and peace. These are not options for us, but obligations of our faith."

It said the church's commitment to human life and dignity and the support of justice and peace are not competing causes.

"While we do not believe that all issues have equal moral claims, we will work to protect those whose lives are destroyed by abortion and those who are dying of hunger, and we will strive to protect human life from the moment of conception until the moment God calls us home and we will strive to pursue peace. We will work for human life and dignity, for justice and peace."

The report said the Committee on Doctrine and the Committee on Pastoral Practices have agreed to take

up the matter of church teaching on the proper disposition for reception of Communion, "not only for politicians, but for all of us."

To keep their pledge to "teach more clearly," the task force is developing a reader that includes excerpts from statements by Pope John Paul II, the Second Vatican Council and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on the responsibilities of Catholics in public life. It would be made available to bishops to use as the basis for "teaching, dialogue and persuasion," the report said.

The task force also noted that the bishops are committed to "maintain communication with public officials who make decisions every day that touch issues of human life and dignity. We will continue to reach out to leaders in public life to explain our principles and to dialogue with them."

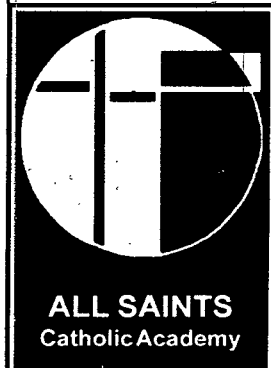
Task force members "affirmed that the Catholic community and Catholic institutions should 'not honor' those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles." The report said the task force will consult with leaders in Catholic education, health care and social services about how to carry out that philosophy.

The report also said there would be continuing consultation on the theological and canonical aspects of the subject within the conference and with the Vatican.

Cardinal McCarrick told CNS that the partisan use of the issue of Catholic politicians and their relationship to the church did more to discredit those who tried the tactic than anything else.

The commitment mentioned in the task force report to provide a guidebook on the topic and to "really engage in dialogue" are the way to protect against future manipulation of the church's teaching, he said.

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One in Community**



All Saints Catholic Academy will hold an

**OPEN HOUSE**

on Thursday, December 9, 2004 at 7:00 p.m.  
Students from grades 5 through 7 are invited to attend.

For information please call

**585-429-6010**

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