

THE Catholic VOICE

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JULY 5, 2004

Bishops craft report on communion and Catholic politicians

By Barbara Erickson
Associate editor

In a public statement released June 18, Catholic bishops stood united in opposing abortion on demand as "a sin against justice," but also declared that the Church should respond to this evil with an effort to teach and "persuade all people that human life is precious."

The statement, "Catholics in Political Life," followed announcements by some bishops that they would deny Communion to politicians who support abortion. In their statement, which passed by a vote of 183-6, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops followed canon law in stating that it is up to individual prelates to decide how to deal with the issue.

However, in an interim report on the issue, Cardinal William H. Keeler of Baltimore noted that the great majority of U.S. bishops would not deny Communion in the circumstances. "Among those who expressed a view," he writes in a document posted on the bishops' web site, "the majority were negative on refusing Communion by a margin of roughly 3-1."

Cardinal Keeler also stated in his report, "Denial of Communion is not the current practice of the Holy See or of other bishops' conferences."

Although most bishops would not deny Communion to pro-abortion politicians, the conference was clear in condemning abortion. "The killing of an unborn child is always intrinsically evil and can never be justified," they stated, adding that those who knowingly cooperate in abortion are "guilty of grave sin."

Catholic public officials who act consistently to support abortion on demand risk making themselves "cooperators in evil in a public manner," they said. They will continue to counsel these officials, they wrote, "in the hope that the scandal of their cooperating in evil can be resolved by the proper formation of their consciences."

It is up to all Catholics, they stated, to "examine their consciences as to their worthiness to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord. This examination includes

(Continued on page 11)

Pray for Iraq, says bishop

By Daniel Burke
Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS) With the transfer of power in Iraq June 28, Catholic bishops from the United States and Great Britain are urging Catholics to pray "for the people of Iraq, and for a region and world broken by violence and longing for peace."

"A brutal dictator has been deposed, but a year later Iraq does not appear to be a nation clearly on its way to security," Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said June 22.

Bishop Gregory said that the United States had incurred a "grave moral responsibility" by pre-emptively invading Iraq, and

that the war has raised "fundamental questions about the U.S. role in the world."

Foremost among those questions, Bishop Gregory said, is how to balance America's prosecution of a "war on terror" with abiding respect for the sanctity of human life.

"Our nation cannot accept a permissive interpretation of international law, the inevitability of civilian casualties or the abuse of human rights, or an over-reliance on military responses to the problem of global terrorism," Bishop Gregory said.

Echoing the concerns of many religious leaders, Bishop Gregory evoked the Geneva Convention, the treaty that outlines permissible treatment of prisoners of war. The United

States is a signatory to the agreement, but critics say the conduct of U.S. soldiers in an Iraqi prison and documents from the Justice Department suggest that the United States has ignored the treaty's rules.

"We are deeply concerned . . . about overly aggressive tactics which can place civilians at risk, ignore important cultural and religious sensitivities, and fuel violence and terrorism," Bishop Gregory said.

Joining Gregory in his concern for a peaceful Iraq are Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, archbishop of Westminster, and Archbishop Patrick Kelly of Liverpool. The British prelates had called for a day of vigil and special prayer on June 29.



A malnourished Sudanese refugee child lies down at a feeding center in Iriba Town in Chad, June 23, part of what the U.N. calls the "greatest humanitarian" crisis in the world.

Crisis builds in Sudan

By Voice staff

Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese are at risk of severe malnutrition and death in the Darfur region of western Sudan and the neighboring country of Chad due to a crisis many blame on the government in Khartoum.

As aid organizations, including Catholic Relief Services, rushed to provide help before the rainy season, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell met with Sudanese officials in Khartoum, asking them to stop supporting militias that are driving people from their homes.

Thousand have sought refuge in Chad in what many call an ethnic cleansing operation. CRS has recently received permission to operate in Darfur and is already providing food, shelter and medical supplies to refugees in Chad.

To make donations to assist CRS, call (800) 235-2772 or send a check marked Chad or Sudan to: Catholic Relief Services, 209 West Fayette St., Baltimore, MD 21201-3443.

O'Dowd teacher joins peace team in Hebron

By Barbara Erickson
Associate editor

Lorin Peters has faced threats and violence often enough over the past 36 years — in a Thai village, in the West Bank of Palestine, on the streets of Oakland — and all for a purpose, he says, as God's way of preparing him for a new phase in his life.

This month Peters, a parishioner at St. Leander Parish in San Leandro and a faculty member at Oakland's Bishop O'Dowd High School, will put himself in harm's way once more when he begins a six-week stay in Hebron, a conflict-ridden city in the heart of the West Bank. He is joining the ecumenical organization, Christian Peacemaker Teams, as a long-term member, committed to practicing the power of love in the midst of violence.

Peters is quick to say that his journey to Hebron actually began in 1968 when he was a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand. It was then that a village headman — a

squat and powerful man with blackened teeth and a full body tattoo — threatened to kill him. The man was trying to take control of the village water system, and Peters was fighting his plan.

The conflict came to a head one night on a dark road when a Thai official told Peters the headman wanted him dead. Peters reacted with a sense of fury, and for two weeks he suffered bouts of fear and rage, jumping at odd noises and plotting to enter the village at night to intimidate the headman with a bullet through the walls of his house.

Then one afternoon Peters began to wonder what Jesus would do in his situation. "Some things were suddenly clear to me," he wrote in a statement for CPT. "Jesus would not have gone into the village with a gun. He would not have gone in the middle of the night. Rather, he would have gone openly, armed only with truth and love."

That was how Jesus entered Jerusalem,

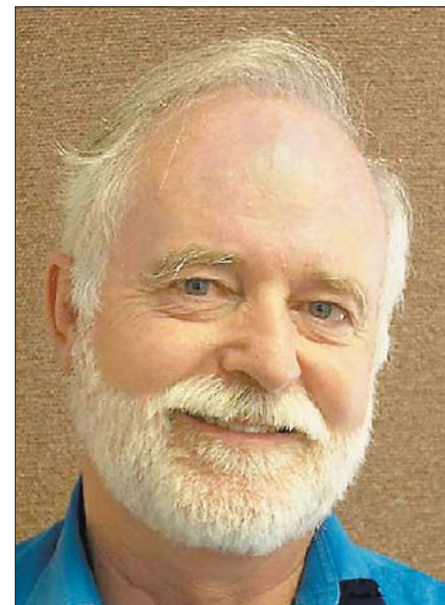
he thought, and he felt Christ's presence beside him as he, too, walked openly into the village where the headman lived. "That," Peters said in an interview, "steered me in a very different direction. It's been unfolding for 30 years."

Peters grew up in a family where the Gospels were read aloud each day. His mother was raised in the Salvation Army, his father as a Mennonite, and he became a Presbyterian. His Thai wife, Lacksana, is a Catholic, and while he was still in Thailand he joined the Church to share her faith.

As a young adult Peters had never taken part in protests for peace and justice, even when classmates at UC-Berkeley joined the Free Speech Movement. But now, with his experience in Thailand, he began to look at the effects of war and for the first time read Gandhi.

"I was electrified to discover that someone else had thought the way I think," he wrote. "Gandhi shows me almost every-

(Continued on page 8)



Lorin Peters

Consistent denial

Those who would deny Communion to public figures who advocate freedom of choice should be consistent, and with equal emphasis also deny the sacrament to those who openly support the death penalty. Both procedures take human life. "Thou Shalt Not Kill."

Donald Donovan
Alameda

Geographically-based sin

The letters in the June 21 Voice, relative to the election and faith issues, were provocative to say the least. I sympathize with the writer who noted the phenomena of geographically-based sin.

I live in Oregon part of every year and it would appear that I may vote for John Kerry if my chief reason is NOT his pro-choice stance, but I am to contact him and tell him I don't approve of it.

However, should I visit Colorado Springs, I will apparently risk salvation if I vote for Kerry. When I visit my kids in Los Angeles, I am told that the Cardinal would welcome Senator Kerry to the altar and, presumably, myself as well.

In the spirit of looking for some continuity of episcopal thought, it should be noted that the bishops have a "Faithful Citizenship" document available on their own website which deals with Respect for Life issues from the womb to the tomb in a thoughtful, if somewhat lengthy, manner and emphasizes a consistent pro-life ethic very effectively.

I support the writer who asked for dialogue. We are, after all, looking at "respect" issues at many levels. The U.S. bishops' own document calls for civil discourse; a respect for personal conscience suggests respectful dialogue; and if I remember my Natural Law theology correctly, the Spirit works from the top down and the bottom up.

Joan Leslie
Orinda

Make cathedral look Catholic

What is wrong with having a cathedral that people will actually know is Catholic? The current design could easily be mistaken for a new hotel by anyone driving by. I'd be more inspired to get a room for the night, not to go in and pray.

My opinion has nothing to do with fearing the modern world. Father Schmit (Forum, June 21) states (and I agree) that

"we just need to bring Christ to (the modern world) and allow Christ to incarnate it."

How exactly does the current design choice for the cathedral do this? Is it because it is devoid of any human or historical references to Christ's Church? Nonsense. If we shun where we came from, we will surely lose sight of where we are going. From the tone of Father Schmit's letter, you'd actually think it was evil to build a cathedral that looks Catholic.

Let's just admit that Craig Hartman's design is one that a certain group of individuals prefer. Call a spade a spade. Please just don't try to pass this off as what the modern Church looks like or what the parishioners of this diocese have chosen. There have been plenty of churches designed since Vatican II that you can tell in an instant are Catholic, and this is not one of them.

Minerva Mendoza
Pittsburg

The only solution

Letters in the June 7 Voice dealt with death and real problems facing our Church and country. I feel the one —and only — solution that works, which was not mentioned, is the simple power of prayer.

I urge all readers to pray the rosary; a group of us pray every Wednesday evening at 7:30 pm for a solution to these and all problems.

Dan Lydon
Alameda

Real prayers needed

The June 7 Voice article, "Teacher takes Castro Valley students on a cosmic walk" by Sharon Abercrombie smacks of paganism. Are these teachers disciples of Matthew Fox?

This world needs real prayers like the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy, the Rosary, Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, etc.

The Almighty God's hand is about to strike the world, so please give this matter urgent attention. Otherwise a lot of people are going to land in hell because of the garbage that is being taught to innocent children.

Nina D'Souza
Piedmont

Decoding Da Vinci

A number of books have recently appeared about "The Da Vinci Code."

Most of them show the many falsities contained in the novel. Two can be recommended in particular. The first is Amy Welborn's "Decoding Da Vinci: The Facts behind the fiction of the Da Vinci Code," published by Our Sunday Visitor. This book is very readable. Doctrinally sound, its treatment of Opus Dei, while not perfect, is the best of all these books.

The second is Carl E. Olson & Sandra Miesel's "The Da Vinci Hoax," (Ignatius Press). This book is longer and more thorough. It aims to be the definitive treatment of "The Da Vinci Code". It is also doctrinally sound.

Mary McMahon
Livermore

The ultimate judgement

I applaud Jim Crowley (Forum, June 7) in his recognition that "abortion is the most

serious public sin in American history." I am baffled that in this great country we — the civilized, the educated, the leaders — not only allow but in some cases encourage the killing of babies. People who choose not to accept the seriousness of this sin and their role in the legalization of abortion are rejecting Christ.

With that said, they, as all us sinners, need the nourishment of the Eucharist. The Church is not in the position to judge who is worthy of Communion; none of us are.

Joseph Maraccini (Forum, June 7) states that we should weigh health care, retirement, homelessness, unemployment and hunger issues collectively with abortion. I strongly disagree. As long as those inflicted with poverty are alive, they have hope.

I don't intend to make light of their suffering. However, the poor are not having life denied to them.

I am sure each voter can justify his/her vote. Yet, the day will come when each of us will face the ultimate judgment.

Karen Reedy
Pleasanton

Causing divisiveness

Bishop Vigneron was right in not giving publicity to Voice of the Faithful. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. I have seen the letters recently in the Forum, and I can no longer keep silent.

My parish, which is not in the Oakland Diocese, has come under attack from this group. They have interjected themselves into concerns not of their business. They have caused divisiveness, and have used unprofessional, un-Christian tactics, all in the name of the VOTF. Our kind loving pastor has been unfairly attacked. Be careful what you ask for!

Maureen Scagliotti
Via e-mail

In VOTF's defense

In response to Michael Arata (Forum, June 7), Voice of the Faithful associates with all Catholics who agree with its three goals, none of which are outside the teaching of the Catholic Church — a fact that several bishops have publicly affirmed. VOTF is not responsible for members' or speakers' opinions beyond the three stated goals any more than the Church is responsible for divergent opinions among its faithful.

We see nothing that VOTF does as being in conflict with the whole teaching of "Lumen Gentium" about the Church.

Vatican II's call for the universal pursuit of holiness, for shared responsibility for the life and mission of the Church, and for an apostolate aimed at the transformation of our world, all arose from and depended upon an adult Church of prayerful, responsible, educated, thoughtful priests, religious and lay people working in concert.

Peter Davey
Chair
VOTF, East Bay

Don't subsidize Cuba

The Cuban and U.S. bishops are correct about criticizing new economic sanctions on Cuba (Voice, June 7). Open dialogue and trade are needed.

But, as I wrote to my representatives in 2000 and every year since, I believe the populace of Cuba suffers the results of

Correction

A photo accompanying a June 21 Voice story on school closures should have stated that the balloons were released at a final BBQ for parents of St. Paschal Baylon School in Oakland.

Castro's communist dictatorship. The U.S. is neither responsible nor to blame.

All these years Cuba has been free to trade with other countries for the goods and services equal to those from the U.S. despite sanctions. If Cuba had the money.

Now the spin in Congress is to help the Cuban people. The U.S. taxpayers would go further into debt to be altruistic and patronizing, and aid would go on and on, controlled by Castro's communism without virtue, ethics or honor.

If Castro's Cuba is our communist enemy, and trading with the enemy is treason, then how could Congress (or anyone) consider subsidizing Cuba?

Philip Tribuzio
Alameda

Love your enemy

President Bush refuses to accept the U.N.'s Geneva Conventions that there is to be no cruel or inhuman punishment. What happened to Lincoln's declaration (on winning the Civil War) — with charity towards all; with malice towards none?

Arabs and terrorists are our brothers too, and we should treat them with love and kindness and decency. Jesus said, "Love your enemy" and "Do good to those that hate you."

Catherine Clark
Alameda

High cost of Catholic schools

Regarding Harold Verdun (Forum, June 23) who is upset because only two of the 18 Catholic high school graduates featured in the June 5 Voice will attending Catholic colleges, I think one of the reasons, and it's a big one, is that Catholic colleges are just too expensive for the average family. It has been a struggle for most of them to pay for tuition of a Catholic high school.

State universities and even the University of California system offer excellent educations at a much lower price. I don't know how families with several children manage the cost of private colleges. My hat goes off to them.

Wesley Risedorph
San Leandro

Want to write?

Contributions to Reader's Forum should be limited to 250 words. Letters must be signed and must include the writer's address and phone number for verification purposes. All letters are subject to editing.

Mail your letter to: The Catholic Voice, 3014 Lakeshore Ave., Oakland, CA 94610. Fax: (510) 893-4734.

Our e-mail address is: CathVoice@aol.com. *Opinions expressed in letters to Reader's Forum are the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Catholic Voice or the Oakland Diocese.*

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Jack Haines, one of 36 Muffin People, loads donated bread into a car for delivery to food programs in Oakland.



Norma Colbert, a staff member at A Friendly Place, takes donations from John Di Palermo, a co-founder of the Muffin People.

Retirees rescue edible food for their rolling breadbox

By Robin Schoettler Fox
Special to The Voice

Shopping carts brimming with "sell by (today)" bakery goods sit unattended behind the Orinda Safeway, parked between the store's back door and the dumpster. I breathe in a bakery blend — French bread and sour dough loaves, sandwich slices and cookies. It smells familiar and homey.

Today I'm riding shotgun with one of the Muffin People. Think new-age Robinhoods, retired men and women in minivans, pickup trucks and — on this day — a silver VW hatchback. Muffin People rescue edible food and give it to the hungry.

And it's not happening just at Orinda's Safeway. Lunardi's and Trader Joe's are on the list. So are four Starbucks, the Lafayette Safeway and Toot Sweets. Some donate every day. Others donate a few times a week. It takes two Muffin People, each driving his or her own car, to handle one day's volume of bread, vegetables, dairy and bakery products.

Most Muffin People start their routes by 7:30 a.m. The daily team splits the pick-ups then meets in Orinda, the last stop before the tunnel. Today, we're the first to arrive. The VW is already pushing capacity. We pack what we can and wait for today's other Muffin-Mobile, a minivan.

Minutes later, we're driving through Oakland's poorer side. It's about 8 miles from Orinda to A Friendly Place, a day shelter for homeless women. This section of San Pablo Avenue looks tired, worn and abandoned. So do the people clustered in doorways and against the side of buildings.

Double-parked near the shelter's side entrance, one Muffin Person unloads food as the shelter worker peers into the minivan, pointing to this bread, these vegetables and those cookies she can serve the shelter's guests. Suddenly, a burly man in tired jeans and a faded green shirt appears next to the

other Muffin Person as she stands alone behind the open hatchback.

"I'm homeless," the man says. "Can I have a piece of bread?"

"I'm sorry," the Muffin Person says. "I can't do that."

The man grumbles, but the Muffin Person is firm. She's been warned against distributing food out of the car. That encourages crowds and, here, crowds can quickly turn into trouble. I move closer. I don't like that this woman faces the man alone.

The man, steely-eyed and angry, finally gives up. I breathe easier, but the Muffin People remain nonplused. You can't regularly

drive carloads of free food into this neighborhood without learning how to handle these situations. We finish unloading and move on to our next stop and then the next. By 10 a.m. the cars are empty and we head back through the tunnel.

The story of the Muffin People is the story of neighbors helping neighbors. It starts with two men from St. Monica Parish in Moraga helping one Oakland nun fill food bags. It was 1988. The people around St. Mary Parish needed food, but Holy Names Sister Baptista Dean's budget was anemic.

Enter Joe Stuart and John Di Palermo. Newly retired, they had time for the right project. They heard about Sister Baptista at the Saturday Morning Men's Fellowship meeting at St. Monica's.

First they had to find the food. The hardest sell then is still the biggest hurdle

to adding new donation sources. Store managers don't like to waste food, but they can't afford to waste labor. There's no room in grocery store margins for expenses associated with culling donations left unclaimed.

Volunteers have to show up, not just some of the time but every time. And that's what Muffin People do. It's what Di Palermo says has been the key to the program's success.

In the beginning, there were no Muffin People. It was just the two friends, taking turns picking up food at stores in Moraga and driving it to Oakland. Two pickup stops, one drop-off location, two or three times a week.

As the number of volunteers grew, a worker at A Friendly Place dubbed them the "Muffin Men," a moniker which stuck but was later changed to Muffin People when women joined the ranks.

Now, 36 volunteers take turns filling two daily Muffin People spots, six days a week. They get food from nine merchants and deliver it to six Oakland outreach organizations.

"We tried to fill a need," explained Di Palermo. "And it mushroomed."

If you look closely at the Muffin People program, you'll see that it's not just neighbors helping neighbors. It's also seniors helping seniors.

Some of the outreach organizations that get food from the Muffin People focus on feeding seniors.

Sister Baptista retired, but St. Mary's Center, the agency she founded, remains a core Muffin People drop-off stop. Its

current food program provides daily meals for seniors, as well as snacks for kids in its pre-school program and emergency food bags for needy families. St. Mary's Gardens, a senior housing facility, provides meals for its residents, using the Muffin deliveries to augment other food donations.

The Muffin People also help seniors who help others.

New Orleans native Shirley Weber, 72, has spent the last 18 years cooking meals at Oakland's St. Andrew-St. Joseph Soup Kitchen. Regulars just call the place "Shirley's Kitchen." Many who eat here live in two nearby senior citizen buildings. The Muffin People don't show favorites when it comes to food deliveries, but they'll tell you that they get something special at this stop — "a hug from Shirley."

Mother Mary Ann Wright, who turns 83 this month, has been helping feed Oakland's hungry since 1980. While other organizations pick and choose among the Muffin People's offerings, Mother Wright will take all they can spare. She shares the food, no questions asked, with hungry people who come to her warehouse door each afternoon. Extra bread is stowed on a shelved cart parked on the sidewalk just outside her warehouse, free for the taking.

Where are those original Muffin People? Stuart worked with the group until his death in 1991. Di Palermo, a World War II veteran, has been driving food through the tunnel for 16 years. Has he seen a change? Is the hunger situation worse now?

"The need was always there," he said. "We just weren't aware of it."

Neither was I until I rode with the Muffin People. But then again, though they are based out of my parish, I didn't even know the Muffin People existed, quietly doing so much for so long. I wondered if others had noticed. Have the Muffin People ever won an award? I asked.

Di Palermo just laughed and said, "What for?"

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