

2001 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CCK staff quickly began surfacing issues and establishing priorities as day one of the first annual session of the General Assembly approached. A number of issues remained unfinished from the 2000 General Assembly and new legislation being developed for the 2002 session determined much of the Conference's legislative agenda for this session.

Topping CCK's 2001 agenda were several respect life and social justice bills. Bills passed in the session include:

- Rep. Jesse Crenshaw's (Lexington) **House Bill 281 simplifies the application process for restoration of civil rights for eligible felony offenders after completing their sentence.**
- Rep. Steve Nunn's (Glasgow) **House Bill 305 grants new authority to the Public Service Commission to approve low-income energy assistance programs created by regional utility companies.**
- Senator Gerald Neal's (Louisville) **Senate Bill 76 requires police departments to establish policies prohibiting the use of racial profiling.**

House Joint Resolution 30 authorized a legislative subcommittee of the Appropriations and Revenue Committee to make recommendations on state tax policy for the 2002 General Assembly.

Many important bills failed to be acted upon including:

- Developing a mechanism and legal protection for mothers of newborns seeking to terminate their

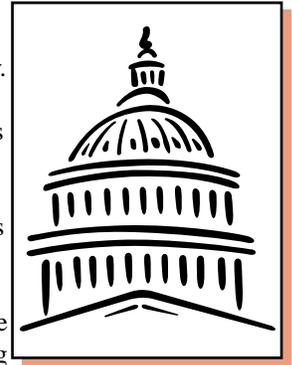
parental rights and place their child in emergency state custody.

- Establishing legal protections for pharmacists who have religious or ethical objections to dispensing medications known to terminate a pregnancy.
- Repealing the use of the death penalty, prohibiting the execution of juveniles and the mentally retarded, and establishing a five-year moratorium and study of the death penalty's application.

For the third session in a row, the working poor saw no relief from their excessive state income tax burden. CCK continues to work in coalition with other citizens and statewide advocates to seek relief for those who work full-time yet live in poverty.

It is an exhilarating and challenging time when the General Assembly is in session. CCK looks forward to meeting those challenges and invites Catholics from across the four dioceses to join in serving as witnesses to the Gospel values during the 2002 General Assembly.

Check our web site at www.ccky.org for updates and resources.



CCK STANDING COMMITTEES

Ecumenism

Education

Finance

Health Care

Hospitals

KLEA

Long-term Care

Prolife

Social Concerns

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**A RESPONSE TO THE
EXECUTION OF
TIMOTHY MCVEIGH**

We Roman Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, as pastors and teachers, have an obligation to speak to our Catholic people and all persons of goodwill concerning Timothy James McVeigh. The Church's commitment to the value and dignity of every human life in all its stages leads us to oppose the use of the death penalty. In response, we are calling for a day of prayer and reflection on June 11th for the bombing's victims, their families, Timothy McVeigh and our nation as our government deliberately destroys yet another human life.

There is no doubt that Timothy McVeigh is guilty of committing a heinous crime. What must be questioned, however, is the collective action of our representative government and our continued use of the death penalty in the United States. As more murder victims' families publicly share their stories, we have learned that executions fail to bring genuine peace or erase their agonizing memories. Timothy McVeigh's actions must not be our focus; the focus must be our actions as a civil society.

Roman Catholics across the country are especially blessed by the example of Bud Welch. Mr.

*Don't kill
for us.*

Welch's daughter, Julie Marie, was 23 years old when she died in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. We are fortunate to have had him visit our

Commonwealth many times to share his personal journey through anger, pain and doubt. Mr. Welch's story of healing and peace shines brightly during this dark moment in our nation's history. He has fully embraced the Gospel of life, found an enduring peace and now opposes the use of the death penalty. As a Christian people, we are obligated to do no less.

As a people of faith, our rightful response is to ask God for wisdom and help so that as a society we may have the courage to end the violence of the death penalty. Along with our brother bishops we again affirm that our witness to respect for life shines most brightly when we demand respect for each and every human life, including those who fail to show respect for others. In calling for respect of human life, our message remains consistent and simple: life belongs to God alone.

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I N S I D E

- *During a Legislative Interim*
- *Roe v. Wade Observance*
- *Opportunity of Democracy*

**POULTRY INDUSTRY
LABOR STANDARDS**

Catholic bishops in Kentucky joined with 150 national religious leaders and community leaders in calling on the U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Elaine Chao to maintain the DOL's scrutiny of the U.S. poultry industry's compliance with federal labor standards. Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly, Bishop John J. McRaith and Bishop J. Kendrick Williams signed an open letter in support of the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice's (NICWJ) statement of concern to Secretary Chao regarding settlement negotiations with the poultry industry.

Approximately 5,500 employees work in four poultry processing plants located in rural Western and South Central Kentucky.

The Catholic tradition views work as more than simply a way to make a living; all workers have a basic right to decent working conditions and a just wage. The DOL has a special obligation to monitor and protect these workers in accordance with federal labor standards. Historically, DOL has fought to protect workers, especially in low wage industries. The effort by the NICWJ is to persuade DOL to make compliance by the poultry industry a high priority.

IN OBSERVANCE OF THE 28TH YEAR OF ROE V. WADE

The Catholic bishops of Kentucky issue this statement in observance of 28 years of the tragic U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* to address the fundamental human rights issue of our day – the right to life of the unborn. We view the current policy of abortion on demand as a national scandal which strikes at the heart of our civilization. The legally sanctioned taking of the lives of the most vulnerable human beings in our midst erodes respect for all human life.

The violation of the most fundamental right – the right to life – can lull the social conscience in ways ultimately destructive of other human rights. Sadly, *Roe* has served to coarsen our great nation's character. *Roe* contributed to the creation of not only a culture of abortion, but also a culture that advances death as an acceptable answer to personal, societal and economic problems. These

Human freedom confronts a choice between two roads – a road to life or a road to death.

solutions hold out false hopes of relieving the pain of murder victims' families, curing physical illness and injury through discarded fetal tissue, and offering death with dignity for the terminally ill. Delusions of health and happiness founded in a contrived notion of a constitutionally guaranteed "right to choose" are mere shadows of what is true and just.

We renew our pledge to activate the resources at our disposal – parishes, schools, health care

institutions, and social service agencies – to provide alternatives to abortion and to engage all of us and others in the struggle to create an environment supportive of human life. The Catholic community's efforts to live out the Gospel of life must continue to reach across the Commonwealth in both prayer and action.

To the Catholic people of Kentucky, we issue a call to action on behalf of the consistent ethic of life. All can answer our call by prayer and sacrifice on behalf of the sanctity of life. Civility – respect, fairness, and restraint – should above all mark the Catholic pro-life movement. Women, because of their unique role in nurturing human life, play a special role in promoting the Gospel of life with a new pro-life feminism. We ask our priests and religious to be aware of the opportunities to weave the consistent ethic of life through preaching and other teaching roles. Healthcare professionals, lawyers, researchers, educators are asked to make their contribution in public discussion and within their professions. We also call upon public officials to exercise their moral responsibility to protect the weak and defenseless.

Kentucky is a state that has been strongly pro-life with regard to the unborn. Much has been accomplished yet much remains to be done. Each generation decides the future of a nation. Human freedom confronts a choice between two roads – a road to life or a road to death. Let our choice be guided by the biblical injunction:

"...I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live." (Deuteronomy 30:20)

OPPORTUNITY OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy challenges all citizens to be informed and involved participants. Catholic social teaching challenges its believers to go one step further and calls Catholics to action as "faithful" citizens concerned with the common good of all in society. Guided by the Gospel values, Catholics have a unique opportunity to shape our government's public policy with a special concern for the poor and vulnerable of the human family.

Turning out to vote on Election Day is a simple way to exercise one's civic responsibilities. Sadly, however, many see voting as optional and unimportant. Low voter turnout is generally attributed to skepticism and, at the very worst, contempt for a system that is unresponsive to the real needs of voters. But, it has not always been this way and CCK continues to seek ways to change these

misconceptions. Reducing cynicism about politics and increasing the number of Catholics interested in participating in the legislative process are top priorities at CCK. For Catholics, the call to action can and must go further.

CCK continues seeking Catholics interested in exploring democracy's opportunities and becoming

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citizen advocates for action in the public arena. Those who have joined CCK as citizen lobbyists in previous sessions of the General Assembly

(Continued on page 3)

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Staffers at the Catholic Conference are often asked the question about what it is that we do when the General

Assembly is not in session. This is a legitimate question and one that deserves a full response as we all take seriously the stewardship of church resources in Kentucky. I find myself premising a response with the reminder that Kentucky now has annual sessions and that this has prompted significant change in the ways that we go about our work. Annual sessions will certainly allow for a more timely response as specific issues develop and the ability to move on them is within a matter of months rather than a year or longer.

CCK's broad range of issues creates lots of homework and the interim affords us some time. We read everything we can get our hands on, ranging from several daily newspapers through Church and secular resource periodicals to the newsletters of our colleagues in other states as they report their work on similar issues. We eagerly await the various pastoral letters from the Holy Father and the U.S. bishops as they shepherd us through the complexity of our issues.

Frankfort is a mecca for meetings and these meetings are an effective resource for forecasting and understanding the work of the General Assembly. Staffers attend interim committee meetings of the legislature and those task force meetings that touch upon our issues. This also serves as a time when we can continue building relationships with legislators and key Legislative Research Commission staff. It is not as hurried a time as the annual sessions and we often find our conversations fruitful.

Coalition work is an important strategy for the Conference. Our work, when done in concert with

others, can reach further in its effectiveness. Some of the matters that we have dealt with



Jane Chiles, Executive Director, CCK

through coalition work include health care, the death penalty, tax fairness, and welfare reform. Key partners have included Kentucky Youth Advocates, KY Association of Community Action Agencies, the KY Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, the KY Council of

Churches, AARP, and others. This keeps us busy!

The interim is an ideal time for CCK staff to visit parishes and talk about political responsibility. We welcome these invitations and we work to keep our PowerPoint presentation both lively and timely.

The Catholic Conference builds its legislative agenda on the advice that it receives from its advisory committees. These committees meet on an ongoing basis and are adept at identifying those issues around which it is appropriate that the Conference engage. Committee members bring a range of skills to this work and their advice receives serious consideration by the bishops.

Public policy work is challenging, particularly when carrying the often counter-cultural message of the Church. However, we view our work as an honor and celebrate both our trials and our victories!

OPPORTUNITY OF DEMOCRACY

(Continued from page 2)

have had a lasting and empowering experience.

The 2002 General Assembly is quickly approaching and CCK is planning to again bring Catholics to the Capitol. CCK's overall goal is to simply increase the number of vocal Catholics participating in all levels of the democratic process. Staff is reaching out to Catholics across the state and inviting them to become more involved in the legislative lobbying process during the 2002 General Assembly. Diocesan social action staff and CCK staff are planning forums in each of the dioceses to discuss issues of importance to the Church and to listen for emerging issues and the opinions of "real people".

CCK knows that even the most motivated citizens find difficulty in scheduling travel to Frankfort during a General Assembly. Additionally, experience has proven the importance and value of developing relationships with legislators in their home districts. A special effort will be made to empower Catholics to act in their communities.

As January 2002 gets closer, staff will make available a combination of advocacy tools and resources to individuals and parishes across the four dioceses. Look for parish bulletin inserts and check the CCK website at www.ccky.org for more information.