

# “Opinion-Poll Catholics” and Their Church

*[box type="shadow"]This piece by Don Feder appeared in the New York Post on August 16, 1993. We thank Mr. Feder for giving us permission to reprint this piece. Mr. Feder is the author of **A Jewish Conservative Looks at Pagan America**, published by Huntington House. Anyone interested in obtaining a copy of this excellent and very readable collection of his columns can call the publisher at 1-800-749- 4009 for information.[/box]*

The news media will never be guilty of originality. In preparation for the pope’s third visit to the United States, which ended yesterday, it resorted to a timeworn tactic – opinion polls of American Catholics, so-called .

Two days before he arrived in Denver, a front-page story in *USA Today*, America’s comic-book newspaper, trumpeted the divergence between John Paul II and his flock.

According to this survey of Catholics ages 30 to 49, one can use birth control (89 percent), have sex outside marriage (57 percent), divorce with- out an annulment (71 percent), have an abortion (57 percent) and not go to confession annually (71 percent) and still be a “good Catholic.”

We’re so subtle. The pleading fairly leaps off the page: “See, see, even his own people disagree with him on every controversial issue. How many loyal divisions does the pope have? His views are quaint ecclesiastical anachronisms, representative of nearly no one.”

As an accompaniment, we heard from the habitual harping chorus of “disaffected Catholics” the media invariably deploys to pre-empt papal sojourns – feminist Catholics, homosexual Catholics, those who think the priesthood should be a 9-to-5 job (off with the vestments, back home to the wife and

kiddies), trendy theologians and proponents of cafeteria Catholicism.

What qualifies opinion-poll Catholics to have an opinion on a faith from which they are alienated and of which the majority are clearly ignorant?

Now, if *USA Today* had run a survey of adults who had a Catholic education, were steeped in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Cardinal Newman and Fulton Sheen, attend Mass weekly, go to confession, take Communion and are active in Catholic life, their perspective might be significant.

However, for the media's purposes, it is enough to be born into a Catholic family to be counted in these studies. That's far too much deference for a tenuous connection. Opinion-poll Catholics will be found in church only for weddings and baptisms. (The average evangelical has a better understanding of Catholic teaching.) Their affinity for the ancient faith is essentially nostalgic.

One of the conscientious Catholics quoted in the *USA Today* piece is Fred Ruof of Baltimore, who – while proclaiming his opposition to the Vatican – insists: "It's a church I love." But what precisely does he love – the music, the candles, the stained-glass windows, bingo?

These are to Catholicism what bagels and cream cheese are to Judaism. To love the Catholic church on this basis is like saying one loves America because July is his favorite month and red, white and blue his preferred colors.

Say you met a man who said he "loved" America but it was the Constitution, representative government, our history and heritage he couldn't stand. (Besides which, the American Revolution was a tragic mistake.)

Having rejected the essence of Americanism, his profession of devotion would be a travesty.

When we say that someone is a good whatever – Jew, Baptist, Rotarian, Republican – we usually mean the individual is loyal to a creed, understands and accepts the tenets thereof, is willing to sacrifice for that with which he identifies, is committed to making his actions conform to certain norms.

But language has become so twisted that words have lost any semblance of meaning. Thus academic liberals can consider themselves champions of free expression while seeking to suppress opposing views. Democrats are paladins of the people while raising taxes. Gay right proponents label immoral those who refuse to condone immorality.

Hence the notion of good, anti-papal Catholics. At what are they good? Ignoring the dictates of their faith? Uncritically absorbing the values of their culture?

In the final analysis, even assuming opinion-survey Catholics were knowledgeable and committed, would it really matter? To be a Catholic is, by definition, to submit to authority. Doctrine isn't determined by the temper of the times but is validated by a more venerable source.

The idea of democracy, while fine in its realm, isn't universally applicable. Religions are based on revelations, not plebiscites.

No one elected God. Once dogma is subject to popular opinions, what will be sacred? Perhaps all of the Gallup Catholics should get together and vote on the concept of the Trinity – (“let's see a show of hands”) or the Christian doctrine of atonement and redemption.

There's nothing more sobering than listening to the theologically unwashed lecturing a 2,000 year-old church.

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# WORLD YOUTH DAY 1993

by Karen Lynn Krugh

*Editor's note: Karen Lynn Krugh recently joined our national office staff as an executive assistant. She attended World Youth Day in Denver and submitted this report for our readers.*

Our nation has experienced division in many ways and for many years. Each generation, it seems, endures a period of tribulation and suffering when peers become foes and battles erupt. America's young people today are no exception. We have witnessed and perhaps participated in social and spiritual battles across the country, from the streets of Los Angeles to the classrooms of New York City, from abortion clinics to scandals in our own churches. Our generation, Generation X, the Lost Generation, has given birth to phrases such as "Can't we all get along?" and songs like "Cop Killer," "I Want Your Sex," and "Papa Don't Preach," among many others.

Yet, despite the recent crime wave in the city of Denver, despite the groups organizing to protest the Catholic Church and its stand on controversial issues, despite the inherent bias which would cloud the coverage by the mass media, despite the difficulty some experienced in explaining this journey to friends and loved ones back home, despite all circumstances which were against us, nearly 200,000 youth from every corner of the globe came together for five days as one body in Christ in Denver, Colorado for World Youth Day (WYD) 1993.

By today's standards, what we did was unusual, perhaps even weird, if you were to ask some friends back home. A speaker at a catechetical session I attended quoted a confused friend who

had said, "You're going *where*? To do *what*? To see *who*? **WHY?**" The uproarious laughter which followed confirmed that many had experienced similar questioning.

We came together to show the world we had faith, and the Catholic faith at that. At a time when it seems our church is still an acceptable butt of jokes, when many think young people incapable of serious commitment, when "the church" is considered by some to be outdated and out of touch, we stood tall and we stood together. We defied convention.

"A great multitude which no man could number," as our Holy Father quoted from Revelations (7:9) came together from North, Central and South America, from Asia and Africa, from Pacific rim nations and from Europe. We were greeted in fifteen languages. There were catechetical teachings in eight languages. For five days, we were a sign for one another, for the church and for the world, of the universal and unified church.



But all that power and love, all that conviction and the very message of World Youth Day is not what the national media chose to portray. Over and over again, in talking with friends and family back home, I heard about the protesters who were on TV, or the interviews with young people who were participating despite their disagreements with or disapproval of the Pope, or how the rain dampened our spirits and caused everyone to

flee during the opening ceremony or how how the heat caused numerous medical emergencies and even deaths during the closing mass.

Because of my Catholic League connection, I was keeping an eye out for anti-Catholic sentiment, protests and literature. I repeatedly came in contact with and was referred to one organization – the Loving Way

United Pentecostal Church of Denver. No other organization – if there were any – was readily identifiable.

We encountered a few individuals along the way who shouted “Go! Worship your pope! Worship Mary! You’re all going to hell!” They held signs proclaiming “Beware False Prophets! (Mt. 7:15)” Members of my youth group responded “We’ll pray for you” and “We love you.” I don’t think this found its way into the news.

After mass on Sunday we encountered a silent, grinning man wearing a tilted foam miter who handed out “Wanted” posters with a picture of Pope John Paul II. Among other things the pope was wanted for being the Anti-Christ, for mutilating and murdering thousands during the middle ages, and for stockpiling an arsenal of weapons donated by cooperating countries. The man was unwilling to talk with us.

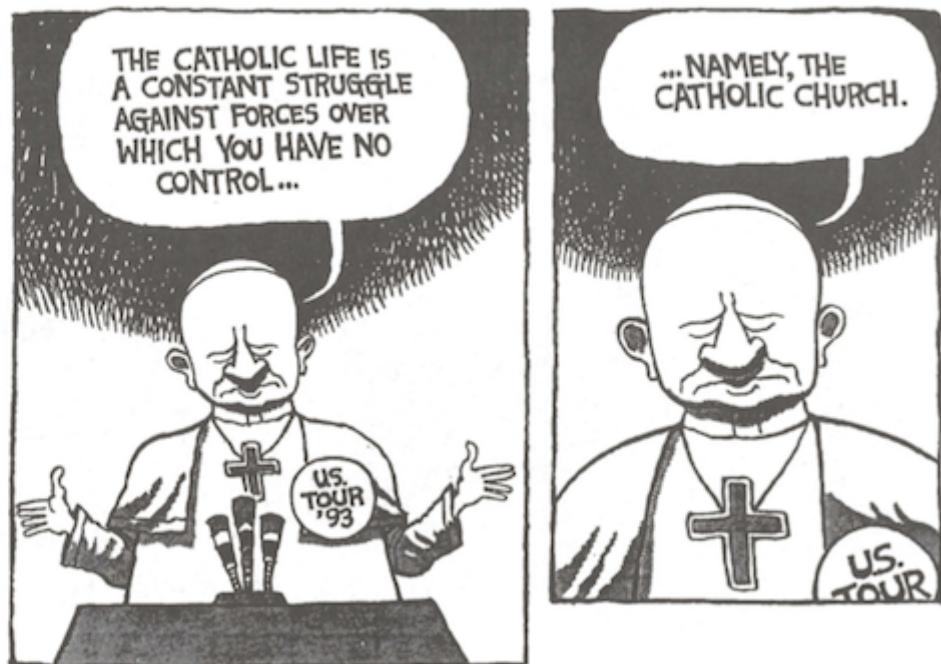
I had heard that Civic Center Park – renamed Celebration Plaza for the week – was the place to find protesters. But their presence was either greatly exaggerated by the media or else I managed to consistently miss them. Most of those I spoke with had neither seen nor heard any protesters . A few recalled some background noise during the opening mass but knew of nothing since that time.

The slogan printed on the straps we wore around our necks proclaimed “The Pope and young people. Together.” And anyone who witnessed the deafening welcome which the Holy Father received at his every appearance would be hard pressed to

question his universal appeal and approval.

Yes, the American church appears to have more dissension in its ranks than other countries, but the majority of this great crowd was comprised of American youth and they were clearly in approval of their charismatic leader. The youth in Denver actively stood behind the Pope's call to respect life. Some traveled to abortion clinics where they prayed. Still others volunteered to help Habitat for Humanity build housing for the poor. And we stood behind the pope's call to be pilgrims, traveling first to Denver itself and then from site to site assisting our brothers and sisters along the way. And we became one body as we met other believers from around the world, worshipping and celebrating together, trading crosses and rosaries, stories and addresses.

This cheap shot originated with the Pittsburgh Press Gazette but was widely reprinted. The Chicago Tribune was among the many papers which saw fit to give it space and even wider circulation. In a strongly worded letter to the Press Gazette, League President Bill Donohue made it clear that this cartoon had overstepped the bounds of good taste.



For those of you who observed World Youth Day via the mass media, did you see: the different reactions received by the Holy Father and the president upon their arrivals at Stapleton International airport and again later when videos of their arrivals were shown at Mile High Stadium; the appearance of a huge rainbow over the stadium when the pope began to speak to the crowd gathered for the welcoming ceremony; the Italian

group who, though sleeping in a parking garage, were still happy and excited enough to sing and dance for over an hour before their first catechetical; the Spanish group joined by youth from other nations who played guitars and tambourines and sang during the entire pilgrimage to Cherry Creek park; the enthusiastic participation of young people from war-torn, impoverished and former communist states -including Bosnia-Herzegovina – and the vast number from Vietnam; the tears of joy shed by Pope John Paul II and many, many of those who attended the Saturday evening prayer vigil; the crowd total given by announcers at the mass – between 500 and 750,000; the Holy Father's excitement during the closing mass as he repeatedly went "off script" and reached for a microphone to ad-lib some heartfelt sentiment to the vast crowd; the generosity of the people of Colorado; the smiles of the pilgrims which accompanied each participant back to their own homelands?

Were you privy instead to: the protesters at Civic Center Park; excerpts from Clinton's speech at the airport and details of his vacation; the dampened spirits caused by the rain and the quick exit of rain-soaked young people from Mile High Stadium; too much live "reporting" and not enough live tele-casting; the lack of adequate accommodations and the long food and restroom lines; the difficult pilgrimage conditions including cold, damp nights and oppressively hot days; the lower counts given of those attending the closing mass – 350,000; regular tallies of those fallen sick from Sunday's heat?

I realize that the news media have time and space constraints on their reporting and that it's impossible to be everywhere at once. But I do feel that I can legitimately object to the manner in which the media reported the event that was World Youth Day. If an event is 95% positive and 5% negative, is the media absolutely duty bound to seek out and cover the 5%? Must they look with such earnestness for that "other point of



view," or can they share an entirely positive story just once?

Did you hear the chant which followed the pope throughout his trip? It made its way onto banners and t-shirts and a host of other things. But did you see it on television? Or read it in the paper? For five days, everywhere he went, it was there, sometimes quietly, sometimes rocking an entire stadium: "J.P. . II, we love you! J.P. II, we love you! John Paul II, we love you! John Paul II, we love you! JOHN PAUL II! WE LOVE YOU! JOHN PAUL II. WE LOVE YOU!"

If you listen, very carefully, you may still hear it echoing in your neighborhood.

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## The Media trashes the Pope

*This piece was written by the League's Patrick Riley and appeared in the Chicago Tribune on August 19, 1993*

The press, by all appearances, is out to get the Pope. Anyone surveying the sea of print media during John Paul II's visit to Denver would find its waters red with his blood and roiling with anti-Catholic sharks.

The papal youth rally in Colorado was seized as an occasion to drag out tired anti-Catholic cliches, from sexual repression to the repression of Galileo. In fact the two were combined by a syndicated columnist named Georgie Anne Geyer, who seems to think the Church's age-old condemnation of contraception dates only twenty-five years back to the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

This condemnation, like the condemnation of Galileo, is "basically unscientific." It is "spiritual poison." It "cannot be simply respected as the theological position of one

church," but "has become the business of all of us." Why? Because the world "is adding 97 million people every year," and "30 million are starving in Africa alone."

Does Ms. Geyer think drought, bad government, or war might have something to do with famine in Africa? Not that we can see. Papal teaching is the villain.

She concludes:

*So, as the pope visits the Rocky Mountains this week, his teachings and policies on birth control can no longer be seen merely as the business of Catholics. The church's teachings ... could now instead lead to the death of us all.*

If Catholic teachings threaten our very lives, shouldn't they be outlawed? Right reason would surely tell us so.

But if you think Ms. Geyer is alarmist, try *Washington Post* columnist Judy Mann:

*Pope John Paul II is scheduled to visit Denver this week in connection with World Youth Day. The anti-abortion forces are taking the occasion to stage a variety of demonstrations and to whip up the zealots. It is only appropriate that the rest of us take the occasion of his visit to reflect on the disastrous consequences of the church's stand against artificial birth control methods and abortion. The dead children of Rio – as many as 14 were killed in the incidents that night- should not be forgotten.*

You see, the Pope and his "disastrous" opposition to contraception and abortion are responsible for the murders of street children in Rio de Janeiro.

For incisiveness, it's hard to beat the rebuttal of Russell Shaw, a national board member of the Catholic League and an official of the Knights of Columbus. He wrote in the *Washington Post*:

*Judy Mann blames the wretched condition of street children in Rio de Janeiro on the Catholic Church and its teaching on birth control and abortion. I have only one question. On whom does Ms. Mann blame the wretched condition of children in Washington, D.C., where birth control and abortion are condoned, accepted, and encouraged by the public authorities?*

Not all taking part in this papal feeding frenzy were professional journalists. One of them aborts babies for a living. Dr. Warren Hem, a nationally-known abortionist in the Denver suburb of Boulder, claimed in the *New York Times* that he "began wearing a bulletproof vest to work" because the Pope was coming to town.

*The Pope and his bishops have so harshly attacked abortion for so long, it has created a climate of permission for the most radical activists. Now the church does not wish to take responsibility for the unpredictable, violent consequences of its rhetoric... I hope that when Catholic officials next hear of a violent attack against a physician or a patient at an abortion clinic, they can bring themselves to ... realize their own culpability.*

The headline given Dr. Hem's article by the *New York Times*: "The Pope and My Right to Life."

Another non-journalist, a schoolteacher in Virginia who had been a Jesuit seminarian, was given a full page in the *Washington Post* to expatiate on various criticisms of the Church, including the charge that it is run "by old men in Rome who have an anti-woman mentality."

To this claim Professor William E. May, a Catholic League member who is also a member of the Vatican's International Theological Commission, responded that the writer should read Pope John Paul's letter on the dignity of woman.

Even campus journalism has caught the anti-papal bug. The *Broadside*, a student newspaper at George Mason University

across the Potomac from Washington, ran a cartoon blaming the Pope for deaths from AIDS. Actually the campus newspaper went the professional newspapers one better, showing the Pope gloating over the graves of his victims.

Anyone who thinks anti-Catholicism is passe need only read the newspapers for a rude awakening. Contemporary anti-Catholicism, if anything, is more venomous, more explosive politically, than the naive nineteenth-century biases of Thomas Nast and the Know-Nothings.

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## **Anti-Catholic comment taints NY mayor race**

Anti-Catholic bigotry has reared its ugly head in the New York City mayoral campaign and the Catholic League quickly called the source of the defamatory comments to account.

During a radio show Ms. Ronnie Eldridge, a New York City Councilperson (and wife of columnist Jimmy Breslin, a world-class Catholic basher), remarked that Rudolph Giuliani was "suspect" as a candidate because of his Catholic school education.

League president Bill Donohue immediately issued a news release calling Ms. Eldridge's remark "a scare tactic" that was "designed to influence voters by drumming up fears about the nefarious effects of a Catholic education.

"We thought that we had long since passed the day when attendance at a parochial school disqualified a candidate for public office," Donohue said.

Donohue concluded by noting the Catholic League is the largest Catholic civil rights organization that “defends the right of Catholics lay and clergy alike – to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination.”

Ms. Eldridge sent an apology to Mr. Giuliani but not before the story hit the New York media. The *New York Post* headlined the story “Jab at Rudy sparks fire & brimstone.” The League made it clear that it was not seeking to boost Giuliani but was far more concerned about “Catholic-bashing.”

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## Speaking up...

*Editor's note: Dr. Donohue's letter appeared in the Wall Street Journal on August 17, 1993.*

### **Kids and Sex Ed: War of Ideologies**

Mr. Criner's splendid article demonstrates both the folly and the malevolence of the sex-ed industry. There is by now an avalanche of data that conclusively shows how ineffectual it is to pursue the education-determines-behavior school of thought favored by the sexperts. It is values, not education, that determines behavior. If it were education, then surely we would have far lower rates of unwanted pregnancies today than we had in the “ignorant and unenlightened” 1950s.

But what is most disturbing about the sex-ed industry is its determination to monopolize the sex-ed curriculum through coercion. By going to the courts to cleanse the classroom of abstinence-based approaches, Planned Parenthood and its friends at the ACLU hope to shield students from a pedagogy that finds sustenance in religious doctrine. But this just goes to show how deeply ingrained is their religio-phobia.

Believe it or not, even atheists have been known to prefer the efficacy of the abstinence-based approach.

And if the schools are to be purged of every teaching that was ever grounded in a religion, the commissars of the sex industry will be very busy indeed. For starters, we could ban all teaching that holds insubordination, theft and violence to be taboo. What's next I do not know, but there's a rumor about town that holds that a number of Catholic schools are actually teaching algebra. Better head for the courts now before we all fall victim to another round of religious indoctrination.

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.

President

Catholic League for Religious & Civil Rights

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## **ABA ducks abortion stance vote**

During its annual meeting, the American Bar Association's House of Delegates, the group's policy-making body, voted against a proposal submitted by the State Bar of Texas to put to a vote of the organization's full membership last year's endorsement of abortion rights. The 1992 action reversed a 1990 vote of the House of Delegates which narrowly rescinded the pro-abortion stance which had been adopted 6 months earlier.

After the vote last year, 3692 members of the organization resigned and many more expressed their outrage over the adoption of the pro-abortion policy. Subsequently, the State Bar of Texas sponsored a resolution calling for a mail ballot of the group's 360,000 members to determine whether the A.B.A

should return to a neutral position on abortion.

Prior to this year's meeting in August, the Catholic League was instrumental in getting the Guild of Catholic Lawyers to urge concerned attorneys to attend the A.B.A. meeting to express their concern about the abortion issue.

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## League challenges university policy

In a letter to the editor published by the *St. Cloud Times*, Rosemary Kassekert, a member of the advisory board of the Catholic League's Minnesota Chapter and Chair of its legal task force, has criticized St. Cloud State University's controversial policy statement mandating its definition of acceptable student attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Ms. Kassekert urged the university to change the policy because it is a "blatant form of religious discrimination" and denies students their "right of conscience."

The position paper, which would apply to students seeking entrance to the school's social work department, contains the following statement:

*Accepting gay and lesbian people does not mean accepting them as individuals while simultaneously abhorring their assumed behavior. The separation of the client from the client's behavior cannot be used to resolve a social worker's personal dilemmas regarding this protected population.*

Paul L. Ringsmuth, a Catholic and vocational rehabilitation counselor has voiced his objections to the policy. In a letter to the *St. Cloud Times*, he called on anyone supporting his

challenge “to join or contribute to the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights” because “they are going to need all the financial support they can get to protect our religious rights.”

The policy is currently being reviewed by the Minnesota Department of Human Rights in order to determine whether any action will be taken.

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## Worth Noting

Daniel Meenan, a member of the Chicago Chapter of the Catholic League has written a timely essay from which we quote the following tidbits. We thank him for his permission to reprint these remarks.

*Until we, as a nation, abandon our overly materialistic approach to many of our present day problems such as rampant divorce, standards of ethics, abortion, pornography, pre-marital sex, condoms for children, and the like, start to approach them first as legitimate moral questions and therefore as part of our spiritual nature, rather than merely mundane matters, we are bound to experience a continuing failure of communication accompanied by misunderstanding, suspicion, hostility and unhappiness. The Bible tells us how God confounded some of his people when their materialistic vanity prompted them to build the great city of Babel without any reference to God and “the Lord confused the speech of all the world. “*

*Though we consider ourselves too intelligent and advanced to be subjected to “Babel, “similarities prevail within our great nation today and until we start to put first in our deliberations, as individuals and a society, the God who made*



*us, we will continue to be faced with widespread misunderstanding, confusion and wide divisions we witness and which satisfies no one. Certainly, the chaos and ultimate destruction of the Godless Soviet Union should serve as an example of what can happen when we humans shut out God and morality from our public lives.*

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## **New York Daily News discovers Catholic League**

New York *Daily News* Religion editor Charles W. Bell wrote a solid piece on the Catholic League (August 21) following an interview with League president Bill Donohue.

Headlined “Catholic group uses media to defend faith,” the well-written and positive article compared the League’s role to that of the ADL. The article dispelled the myth that the League is somehow supported or subsidized by the church by pointedly noting that we pay rent to the New York Archdiocese for the space occupied by our national headquarters.

“Blacks, Jews and homosexuals get more respect in this country than Catholics,” Donohue told Bell. “I’m going to relentlessly hammer this home.”

Donohue made it clear that the League wasn’t interested in attacking well-intentioned humor or satire involving the church but he noted, “There is a line and it is crossed when Catholics are held up to ridicule simply because of their faith.”

Bell and Donohue frankly discussed some of the difficulties encountered by the League in the transition years following

founder, Father Virgil C. Blum's death. Donohue made it clear that as far as he and the board of directors were concerned, that was history and the League was moving aggressively forward to build its base of support and make itself the Catholic counter-part of the Anti-Defamation League.

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## CHAPTER NEWS

### **Long Island Chapter**

The chapter's annual Awards Dinner is scheduled for October. Honorees have been notified.

Ten League members attended the annual Red Mass sponsored by the Guild of Catholic Lawyers. League President Bill Donohue was seated on the dais for the brunch at the Plaza Hotel.

### **Wisconsin Chapter**

Executive Director George Koch is now working out of his home office and may be reached at (414) 476- 7364.

The Blum Center at Marquette now has a Wisconsin Desk to deal specifically with state parental choice issues. Senate Bill 310 and companion Assembly Bill 627 are being closely watched. Public hearings were held in early August and we will keep you posted on subsequent progress.

### **Greater Philadelphia – South Jersey Chapter**

Executive Director Jim Nolan has recruited several volunteers to work in the chapter office.

Jim reports that he had two of his letters published in the Philadelphia *Daily News*.

He was recently elected as one of the five directors of the

newly formed Committee for Life. Three of the other four directors also serve on the chapter board.

### **California Chapter**

The chapter's annual dinner has been scheduled for Friday, October 22 and Catholic League president Bill Donohue will be the featured speaker. There will be a Mass at the historic San Gabriel Mission followed by a dinner at Startup's. Chapter members should watch their mail for further details. Meanwhile, mark that date on your calendars!

Chapter Executive Director Ted Mayer is wearing a new hat as the League's Western Regional Coordinator. One of his special projects has been overseeing the League's participation in the Combined Federal Campaign. Ted is planning a small scale advertising campaign in selected military base and Catholic newspapers during this year's enrollment period in order to increase participation. All members in the military or other federal service may support the League through this convenient payroll deduction program.

Ted Mayer and chapter board member Tom Brandlin met recently with Anti-Defamation League officials to discuss areas of mutual concern.

They report that the meeting went well and are looking forward to a time when the two organizations can be of mutual help to each other.

### **Massachusetts Chapter**

Frances Kissling of Catholics for Free Choice finally admitted on the air that her organization has no members and that it has funding from the Playboy Foundation. The revelations were made during a broadcast debate with Eastern Regional Director Joe Doyle on WRKO radio on August 21.

A second broadcast debate on another station several days later was canceled. It seems that no one from the other side wanted to go toe to toe with Joe. If you've ever heard him on

the attack, you'll appreciate their timidity.