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Group hits parishes in key states with anti-abortion brochure

by Michael Humphrey



Kansas City, Mo.

An antiabortion brochure that claims voting for Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, "flagrantly violates Catholic teaching," is being distributed to parishioners at Catholic churches across nine battleground states and beyond.

The method of distributing the flier, titled "Faithful Catholic Citizenship Based Upon the Gospel of Life," includes placing brochures on cars parked outside of parishes, handing them out before or after Mass and distributing them online. No Catholic dioceses have sanctioned the brochure or its distribution methods and one archdiocese told *NCR* they strongly disagree with the methods of disseminating the material.

Several persons distributing the gospel of life brochures who refused to leave church properties have been arrested for trespassing.

Nevertheless, Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, told *NCR* he is targeting nine states he thinks are key to this year's election: Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, New Hampshire, Nevada and Colorado. But he's sending brochures to whoever requests them, even if the state is not in play.

"We have over 500 teams across the country who are distributing two different brochures," Terry said, "and we're looking for more volunteers. I recognize in many people's minds we are skating on thin ice, but so was St. Thomas More and St. Catherine of Siena, and many prophets who spoke the truth when it wasn't sanctioned."

Terry's brochure is designed to reflect the November, 2007 document put out by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," which can be distributed freely in parishes. Terry referred to the visual similarities as "comic relief," rather than an attempt to confuse matters, and noted that his brochure stresses "Catholic Faithful Citizenship."

A second brochure, entitled "Is It Immoral to Vote for Obama for President?" is targeting non-Catholics and being distributed at Wal-Mart's and malls as well as Protestant churches.

Terry would not give exact numbers of how many brochures are being printed, stating there are "a lot" and agreed it was in the tens of thousands. The brochures, along with other materials, including a "Palinator" t-shirt that shows Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin brandishing a weapon are being distributed on line.

The brochure, which is written in question and answer form and most often quotes Pope John Paul II, at one point references "certain clergy and laymen" such as Catholic author Doug Kmiec, who is quoted, "it violates no aspect of Catholic teaching for a Catholic voter to endorse, support, or vote for Barack Obama." The question asked is, "Are they correct?"

The answer: "No. They are not correct. Endorsing, support, or voting for Obama in the 2008 Presidential election flagrantly violates Catholic teaching."

The argument that voting for a Democrat violates Catholic teaching, because of the abortion, has been cited as a key element of the 2004 victory for President George W. Bush, especially in Ohio.

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Unlike that election, says Eric McFadden, former director of Catholic Outreach for Hillary Clinton's campaign, Democrats are not caught off guard.

"This time around the left has a very strong and viable presence," McFadden says. "They are taking opportunities to share the breadth of Catholic social teaching, not just one issue. Mr. Terry claims to be working with faithful Catholics, but they are openly defying the bishops."

Terry is not arguing that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops supports his stand. He disputes the November 2007 document released by the USCCB on faithful citizenship, which states that, "there may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons."

?The faithful citizenship document is not the teaching of the Catholic Church,? Terry said. ?*Evangelium Vitae* (an encyclical by Pope John Paul II in 1995) is the teaching of the Catholic Church. The Faithful Citizenship document is a disaster. It?s being quoted by every pro-abortion group out there.?

So Terry?s group, which is sometimes confused with the Operation Rescue in Wichita, Kan. (Terry left there in 1991 and there is pending litigation over the group?s trademark), is deliberately doing acts of civil disobedience on church properties.

Tuesday morning, Joseph Landry was in court on charges of trespassing at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore on Sept. 14. He was arrested after being asked several times to leave the shrine?s property by security guards and later by police. Maryland is not considered a contested state, with polling showing Obama ahead by more than 20 points.

Landry said in an interview with *NCR* that this was his third arrest for trespassing, once in St. Petersburg, Fla. and recently in Arlington, Va., which are both contested states in this election.

?No one from the Baltimore Basilica showed up,? said Landry, 27, ?so they dismissed the case for non-prosecution. I don?t know what?s going to happen in the Arlington case.?

Asked if he?s willing to serve jail time, Landry said, ?Yes, that?s fine.?

Sean Caine, director of communications for the Baltimore archdiocese, said the archdiocese was not named in the complaint against Landry, so couldn?t comment on the status of the case. He did say that the archdiocese strongly disagrees with the approach Terry?s group is taking.

?I think to the reasonable and objective person,? Caine said, ?their efforts could be seen as intentionally aimed at getting arrested and getting the attention that comes with getting arrested. We provide materials that are approved by the archbishop and the U.S. bishops. There are any number of ways of getting a message out, but they have to be appropriate.?

The problem with that thinking, said Terry, is that it implicitly allows for ?the murder of hundreds of thousands of babies.? ?When babies are about to be murdered,? Terry said, ?and you can stop it by lifting up your voice on church property, the bishop does not have the authority to tell you to remain silent.?

McFadden strongly disagrees that Terry?s primary objective ? overturning *Roe v. Wade* ? would even begin to stop abortions.

?The abortion rate is affected by many different issues, including health care, education, the biggest is the economy. If you are unable to provide for that child, I would say the abortion rate is going to spike. A McCain administration will not have policies that actually reduce abortions. They?ll supply the same tired politics of the last 30 years.?

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