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California Catholics buy ad supporting teachers asked to sign addendum

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NCR Today

Concerned about the morale of Catholic school teachers in the Santa Rosa, Calif., diocese who are being asked to sign an orthodoxy addendum to their teaching contracts, a small group of parishioners has purchased a full-page ad in their local paper supporting a person's right to follow his or her conscience.

"We want to show our support for teachers, whether they sign the addendum or not," said Cynthia Vrooman, a former adult education director in the diocese who is coordinating the effort.

"Our teachers are devastated" by the requirement, she said. "They feel they are being singled out to prove their orthodoxy."

Bishop Robert Vasa wrote the addendum to the letter of intent teachers were to sign by Friday indicating they would renew their contracts for the 2013-2014 school year.

In signing the addendum, a teacher agrees to be "a ministerial agent of the bishop" and to reject "modern errors" that "gravely offend human dignity," including "but not limited to" contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage and euthanasia. It requires all teachers and administrators -- Catholic and non-Catholic -- to "agree that it is my duty, to the best of my ability, to believe, teach/administer and live in accord with what the Catholic Church holds and professes."

The ad, which will appear in the Sunday edition of Santa Rosa's *The Press Democrat*, features text from the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on Religious Freedom." The headline reads, "... a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully," followed by selections from the document supporting the primacy of conscience. The names of almost 200 supporters are listed. Many contributed the \$4,000

needed to design and purchase the ad. One of the signatories is a retired priest in the Oakland diocese.

In addition to affirming the teachers, Vrooman said the group wants to let the broader civic community know Catholics "do honor the primacy of conscience." She also said there was concern about the confusion the addendum might cause among non-Catholics with children in Catholic schools.

"We want them to know their children won't be forced to adhere to Catholic doctrine," she said.

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