

# **Alaska's Catholics played key role in passage of parental notice law**

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - Alaskans passed a ballot initiative Aug. 24 that requires abortionists to notify a parent before performing an abortion on a minor girl in Alaska.

Passage of Proposition 2 was a long-sought and welcome victory, particularly for parents and Catholics around Alaska - many of whom had collected petition signatures, waved signs on street corners and prayed hard to ensure the protection of parental rights.

"I was happy to see that common sense prevailed," Anchorage Archbishop Roger L. Schwietz told the Catholic Anchor, archdiocesan newspaper, after the vote. "Parents, no matter where they are on the abortion issue, understood: to be parent is to be a parent. You have responsibility for your children and therefore you should be able to know what they're doing, and not have other people take away the right to know."

In fact, keeping parents in the dark about minors' abortions, he added, amounts to "stabbing at the heart" of family life.

In marriage, Archbishop Schwietz said, "God has brought man and woman together to bring forth children out of their love for one another and then to care for those children, to prepare them for life. If their ability to do so is taken away from them, then the state is usurping, it seems to me, the right of parents and the power of God, himself."

For a year leading up to the vote, the Catholic bishops of Alaska - Archbishop Schwietz, Bishop Edward J. Burns of Juneau and Bishop Donald J. Kettler of Fairbanks - rallied Alaska's Catholics to support the parental notice initiative.

From Anchorage, Archbishop Schwietz sent letters to the diocese's 32 parishes and published statements in the Catholic Anchor encouraging his flock to sign a statewide petition required for the ballot proposition, collect other signatures and

otherwise “actively support” the parental notice initiative.

He prompted priests to address the issue from the pulpit and post notices in parish bulletins. Parishioners were urged to collect petition signatures on church property and in their neighborhoods.

Alaska’s Catholics helped collect more than 47,000 signatures for the petition, which was submitted to the state in January. Jim Minnery of Alaskans for Parental Rights, the local group that spearheaded the effort, lauded Archbishop Schwietz for his “decisive leadership” in rallying support and the “dozens of parishes” that participated in signature gathering.

“The support of the Catholic Church played a crucial role in our success,” he said.

Once the state certified the petition, a ballot question was prepared for the August primary election. And the Knights of Columbus sprang into action. Councils from around the state, along with the national Catholic men’s group, raised more than \$80,000 for radio and television advertisements in support of Proposition 2. Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood and other groups poured over \$800,000 into opposition ads.

As the August vote drew near, notices supporting Proposition 2 appeared in Catholic church bulletins and prayers were offered at Mass.

Sherry Grenier of the Respect Life group at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church in South Anchorage distributed yard signs and bumper stickers. And on busy intersections, Catholic families, including St. Benedict parishioners Megan Walsted and her children, joined throngs of supporters waving “Yes on 2” signs to rush hour drivers.

On Election Day, Alaska’s Knights of Columbus offered rides to the polls. In Anchorage, the group provided 23 rides to voters who lacked transportation, reported the Knights’ district deputy, Cal Williams.

The day after the vote, Williams was rejoicing over the passage of Proposition 2. “I’m bubbling over with joy!” he told the Catholic Anchor.

Notwithstanding the anticipated court battles over the new law’s enforcement,

Alaska joins 35 other states that require an abortionist to communicate with a minor girl's parent before performing an abortion on her.

But Williams observed that the campaign for parental rights in Alaska had the positive side effect of encouraging communication between parents and children, too.

"It caused a discussion that has long been" avoided, he said. "Families did have to discuss this, no matter how they were going to vote. Mothers and fathers, hopefully, did have discussions with their teens, and the lines of communication are going to be wider open."