

# Diocesan newspapers deserve new emphasis

WASHINGTON - Diocesan newspapers deserve new emphasis as a means of spreading the Gospel and connecting Catholics to one another and their church, said the board of directors of the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada.

"Diocesan publications can light the fire of faith that warms hearts to action for the good of all," the CPA board said in a statement released April 10.

"Recently the Italian Federation of Catholic Weeklies announced a bold initiative, the opening of 76 new diocesan newspapers. The goal ... was that each of Italy's 226 dioceses would have at least one publication to serve its members," the board said.

"That same type of emphasis is needed in the United States and Canada," it said.

CPA members include a wide range of national and international Catholic newspapers, magazines and newsletters, but the 173 diocesan newspapers of the United States and Canada that belong to the association form nearly half of its member publications.

Helen Osman, CPA president, told Catholic News Service April 10 that the board statement was sparked by the strong support Pope Benedict XVI expressed for the diocesan press at a meeting with the Italian federation last November.

The pope said diocesan papers "can represent significant places of encounter and attentive discernment for lay faithful involved in the social and political arena," promoting dialogue and "convergences and objectives for joint action in the service of the Gospel and the common good."

"Continue to be 'newspapers of the people and among the people,' stages for a loyal exchange and debate among diverse opinions in order to promote an authentic dialogue, which is indispensable for the growth of the civic and church communities," the pope told the group.

Diocesan newspapers “serve a vital role in our local churches,” the board said in its statement. “They are vehicles of evangelization and accountability, offering a way for Catholics to make their faith relevant to their daily lives.”

“The great value of a diocesan newspaper is that it is edited for the needs of a local audience by editors who live within the local church and are sensitive to the information needs of their readers,” it added.

The board said that in many Catholic households the diocesan newspaper may be the only Catholic reading material that comes into the home.

“Diocesan publications are often the first step for Catholics who are interested in reading and learning more about their faith,” it said.

It added that a diocesan newspaper offers the local bishop an opportunity to reach out directly to his people on a regular basis. “As one bishop noted, it may be the only time his flock hears from their shepherd other than when they receive his annual appeal for a contribution to diocesan funds,” it said.

The board said diocesan newspapers help their readers “realize that they are part of a larger family that extends well beyond their parish” to the rest of the diocese and to the entire Catholic world.

Diocesan newspapers offer readers “a reliable source of information about church news,” written by professional journalists committed to exploring “the full and richer story of the church” often not covered in secular media, the board said.

Echoing Pope Benedict, it added that effective diocesan newspapers are also “a forum for the exchange of ideas.”

“Dialogue as a way to enrich the faith has been evident in the church from the very beginning,” the board said. “That exchange is even more important today, not as a means of attacking the church, but as a teaching tool and another way of evangelization.”

Ms. Osman said that after the papal comments last November the CPA board decided it should develop a new statement on the value of the diocesan press. A draft circulated by e-mail led to various suggestions and refinements, and a final

version was adopted by the board in a telephone conference call April 4, she said.

The full text of the statement, "The Value of Diocesan Publications," is available on the CPA Web site, [www.catholicpress.org](http://www.catholicpress.org).