

Voices of Faith

In the span of three days, the power of concerned faith communities of Maryland was on display as people of varying religious traditions recently came together to positively impact the political process in our state on three very important issues.

First, the effort to redefine marriage in Maryland failed when the bill before the House of Delegates failed to garner enough support for passage. The result surprised, even shocked, a good many who thought passage was “in the bag!” From the bill’s most ardent supporters in the legislature to political pundits in the news, credit (or blame, according to some) for the effort’s failure was attributed to Maryland churches and their people.

I know that our Catholic people played a critical role in the political discussion that ensued after the bill was introduced. With the encouragement of many active in parish leadership, Catholics became better educated about the Church’s position on marriage and sent a very clear message to Annapolis and their elected officials.

The debate, though sometimes rancorous, was especially helpful because it caused many in our state – regardless of faith – to consider the purpose of marriage and the value it holds for families and the greater community. It also brought to the fore the need for respectful and civil discourse in our legislative process, as well as the need for greater sensitivity for those of our sisters and brothers who are same-sex attracted and seeking respect and fairness.

We must not allow our differences regarding the issue of marriage prevent us from seeing the face of God in our neighbor, regardless of opinions regarding sexual orientation.

Forty-eight hours later, I was joined by religious leaders from eight other faith families at the Basilica in Baltimore for a prayer service calling for an end to capital punishment in Maryland. We each spoke about the issue, invoking the teachings of our faith.

I shared my own personal journey – from believing the death penalty was a deterrent to realizing there is no place in civilized society for state-sanctioned murder – citing

the landmark statements of Pope John Paul II as the reason for my “conversion.”

If other bloodless means of punishment are available to protect society from murderous violence, the Pope said, these should be employed as being more in keeping with the common good. In contemporary society, he said, such means are at our disposal. In all candor, I acknowledge we have an uphill challenge in bringing many Catholics on board regarding capital punishment.

To those in attendance – and those who heard our message as a result of the assembled news media – our united, faith-filled message was stronger than any we could have made alone. Imam, Rabbi, Minister, Reverend and Priest stood together for the common good of society, and we pray that the elected leaders who represent us were listening.

They could not help but listen a day later, as hundreds gathered in the state capital to pray, march and rally for an end to abortion and the lax abortion clinic regulations that help to make Maryland one of the most abortion-permissive states in the country.

I applaud everyone who came to Annapolis last week for this strong show of support for the lives of the unborn children of our state, and the women who are woefully unprotected every time they enter an abortion factory in Maryland. Most especially, I thank Baltimore Ravens center Matt Birk, for using his public image to promote life and the pro-life movement.

Special thanks to Mary Ellen Russell, of our Maryland Catholic Conference, and surely to Cardinal Donald Wuerl and Bishop Fran Malooly, for collaborating in a successful effort.

It was a good three days for people of faith in the Free State. Their witness to matters of conscience serves as an important reminder, to lawmakers and constituents alike, that some issues can – and must – transcend party platforms and political ambition.

Continue to make your voices heard on these and other issues important to you, to our Church. Don’t be stifled by people who claim we hold positions that are

discriminatory or that we seek to impose our beliefs on them. In this and in any democracy, we don't impose – we propose. Alone, our voices are significant. United, they can make a difference.

What's on your mind?

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien welcomes topic ideas for his column, Thoughts on Our Church. To suggest a column topic, email communications@archbalt.org.