

# Washington archbishop says denial of Communion is up to local bishops

WASHINGTON - Following criticism that high-profile Catholic politicians who support keeping abortion legal were permitted to receive the Eucharist during the U.S. papal Masses in Washington and New York, Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl reiterated his position that such an action should be left to the discretion of the bishop heading an individual lawmaker's diocese.

In the archbishop's April 30 column in the Catholic Standard, newspaper of the Archdiocese of Washington, he said he has not accepted the suggestions that he supersede the authority of an individual bishop when dealing with public figures from those jurisdictions who serve in the District of Columbia.

"I have always respected the role of the local church and the ministry of the individual bishop as shepherd of the church entrusted to his care," Archbishop Wuerl said.

"A decision regarding the refusal of holy Communion to an individual is one that should be made only after clear efforts to persuade and convince the person that their actions are wrong and bear moral consequences," he said. "Presumably this is done in the home diocese where the bishops and priests, the pastors of souls, engage the members of their flock in this type of discussion."

The archbishop's remarks came two days after an April 28 column by syndicated columnist Robert Novak criticized him and Cardinal Edward M. Egan - head of the New York see - for inviting to the papal Masses U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, U.S. Sens. John Kerry, Christopher Dodd and Edward M. Kennedy and former New York Mayor and GOP presidential candidate Rudolph Giuliani, all Catholics who have supported keeping abortion legal and all of whom were reported to have publicly received Communion.

Cardinal Egan has since said he had an agreement with Mr. Giuliani that he was welcome to attend Mass in New York City, but that he shouldn't receive Communion. The cardinal said he wants to meet with Mr. Giuliani about his decision not to honor that pact during the papal Mass.

Though Rep. Pelosi acknowledged that she and Pope Benedict XVI differ on the abortion issue, she was thrilled to attend the papal Mass at Nationals Park in Washington and as a practicing Catholic receives Communion on a regular basis. She also says she personally received Communion from Pope John Paul II in a 1987 papal Mass in San Francisco.

"I have a sort of serenity about the issue," the California Democratic congresswoman said during an April teleconference with Catholic News Service and other media representatives. "I come from a family who doesn't share my position on pro-choice. The church sees it another way, and I respect that."

However, she said she hopes the bishops won't use the refusal of holy Communion as a way of punishing Catholic politicians who don't heed church teachings on abortion.

"Think of that word Communion, that which brings us all together as Christians, as Catholics," Rep. Pelosi said, adding that denying a Catholic the Eucharist "would be something that would shatter that union."

In 2004, the U.S. bishops adopted the statement "Catholics in Public Life," developed by a task force headed by Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, then archbishop of Washington. The statement urged the bishops to use courage in clearly laying out church teaching, but it also advocated prudence regarding their own local circumstances and indicated they could "legitimately make different judgments" when it came to eucharistic discipline.

In 2006 Cardinal McCarrick said the church has a threefold role with politicians: to "teach fearlessly," to "dialogue honestly" and to "act lovingly."

Honest dialogue is meant to keep the door open, he said, pointing out the need to work with politicians and other public officials rather than alienate them. For

example, money is needed for Catholic hospitals, charities and education, he said.

“Just as Catholic voters are not asked to leave aside the most deeply held moral convictions of our faith when they enter a voting booth, so Catholic elected officials are not asked to deposit the moral and ethical convictions of the church at the door of Congress or at the state assembly where they serve,” Archbishop Wuerl said.