

Judge Anne Burke addresses Church controversies at CHC

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Judge Anne Burke of the Illinois Appellate Court spoke in Rehm Library last Monday as part of The Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture at the College Holy Cross lecture series titled, "Healing, Renewal and the Church." Burke served for more than two years as Interim Chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People. The title of the talk was, "Lay Catholics and the Future of the American Church."

Burke began her lecture by discussing the February 2004 report that the Review Board had issued detailing the sexual abuse scandals that have shook the Church to its core in the past few years. She also stated that she could, "Think of no more important group of educators to help repair the image of the Church than those here at Holy Cross," observing that ultimately, "The mission of Holy Cross is the mission of the Church."

She outlined a brief history of the Catholic Church in America, explaining how she felt that the Church had gained great forward momentum in the 60's with the Second Vatican Council. When she began to discuss the abuse scandal of the past few years her tone changed. She stated that there was, "No reason to mince words," and that after all she had learned if she was going to write a book about the "horrific scandal" and the current state of the church she would title it either, "Asleep at the Switch," or "Who's Running this Joint?"

Burke went on to attack the hierarchy of the Church, whom she said had refused to act with justice, citing that the most serious aspect of the crisis was in many ways that the guilt of the crimes, "Flowed from the top down." Burke stated that a pervasive environment in the Church characterized by a, "Disjointed notion of human sexuality," held by many, had contributed to the scandals and the criminal cover-ups. She explained that the "Style of controls (in the Church) hatched the whole scandal in the first place." Burke continued by discussing the thousands of good priests who felt victimized by everything that had happened and how the varying degrees of cooperation that her board met underscored the deep roots of the problem. She had been shocked by the political reaction of the Church to many of the board's efforts, and that the top figures on the international level, including Vatican Cardinals, were overall much more receptive than church leaders in America.

The Judge called upon the laity of the nation to unite and turn the widespread feeling of mistrust and disgust around through action and involvement. Burke stated that, "'No more passive Catholics is my mantra now.'" She outlined many ways in which people could help the Catholic Church in America try to recover, allowing that, "We will for the rest of our lives live with the damage of this scandal, but we can widen the road to redemption." Burke also called upon Holy Cross and other Catholic organizations to insist upon an expanded role of leadership for the laity. Burke closed her remarks by saying that, "We can change things once we are willing to know them."

This lecture was also part of the annual Bishop J. Flanagan Lecture Series on Religion and Public Affairs, which was started in 1991 to build a relationship between Holy Cross and the Diocese of Worcester on social justice and peace issues. The series is named in honor of the late Bishop of Worcester, a member of the Holy Cross Class of 1928, who was known for his lifelong dedication to peace, social justice and ecumenism. The talks are meant to provide an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration between the Church and the College concerning issues that face the American Church.