

Editorial

'Did not respond to survey'

Would you vote for someone who tells you they've been too busy to answer your questions, or who tells you that letter you sent seems to have been misplaced, or who tells you he would rather not reveal how he stands on certain issues because you're, well, Catholic, but, uh ... mahalo for asking?

You probably would, because, here in Hawaii, in many cases, you ain't got much choice.

The election survey on issues important to Hawaii Catholics published in this issue of the Hawaii Catholic Herald (see special pull-out section) presents the views of Hawaii's candidates for U.S. Congress, the governor and lieutenant governor's offices, and the state senate and house of representatives. Or rather, half of them.

The other half of the candidates chose not to respond to the survey.

Why? One wonders.

There weren't that many questions — 10. Nine for congressional hopefuls.

It wasn't an essay exam. The answers were "yes" or "no," or for those who couldn't decide — "undecided."

Not hard. You could do it in the 80 seconds it takes to microwave your instant oatmeal in the morning. Your secretary could do it. Surely, she or he knows how you think about things.

You could do it out of basic courtesy to Hawaii voters.

This candidate survey is not a Johnny-come-lately. The Hawaii Catholic Conference has been asking and publishing the positions of political hopefuls in Hawaii elections since 1994. The Hawaii Family Fo-

rum joined the effort in 2000.

The questions are important ones, and not always asked in other forums. Catholics may be more tuned into marriage and life issues, but only because they have long recognized them as vital to the health and wellbeing of our society. The same goes with the issues addressed by the other questions — homelessness, minimum wages, gambling, education, health care.

The survey questions may be grounded in religious values, but true religious values do not emerge from narrow minds (as some with closed minds would have you believe), but from those that cherish the common good, seek truth, pursue justice, and value human dignity.

These are, first and foremost, American and Hawaii values, right down the line.

For the Catholic citizen, voting is not (and never has been) an act of proselytizing, but an act of responsible citizenship.

Our readers are not naïve. They know that many candidates disagree with them on any number of issues. But a candidate disrespects the voter, Catholic or otherwise, if he thinks he can slip into office avoiding fundamental issues.

It seems ironic that, simultaneous to the poor survey showing, we read headlines about Hawaii's voter turnout being the lowest in the nation.

Perhaps it's not irony at all. Maybe there's a direct connection. Maybe 50 percent of Hawaii's eligible voters won't bother to vote this year because a solid half of their candidates can't be bothered to respond to legitimate constituent questions.

How do we know that many of these ab-

sent candidates are apathetic? Because Hawaii Family Forum, who conducted survey on behalf of itself and the Diocese Honolulu, asked. Each candidate was mailed a survey. Each mailed survey was followed by a phone call, or in some cases, several phone calls.

A few candidates were straightforward in their explanations of why they did not respond. Some said that going on the record in a Catholic newspaper on issue pertinent to Catholics readers would harm their votes. We disagree, but at least were honest.

Others said — without the least bit of embarrassment — that they were too busy.

Some said they didn't like the question.

Others responded that they "don't do surveys." My goodness, what do they think election is?

The Hawaii Family Forum/Hawaii Catholic Conference survey results will appear in the Hawaii Catholic Herald's 30,000 circulation issue. It will also be distributed to at least twice as many Protestant families through many island congregations, and will be available to many more on the internet. Based on past experience, the Hawaii Family Forum estimates a survey readership of 80,000. More than enough to sway a election or two.

These readers will check out the answers of those who responded. They will value those responses alongside their own values.

They will also see those who "DID NOT RESPOND TO SURVEY." But all is not lost. Our survey has included the phone numbers of the candidates. Feel free to call.