

Oklahoma Priest Offers Catholic Perspective on Business Ethics

"The duty of the Catholic person is to have a well-formed conscience, so that they can make good ethical decisions. The definition of a conscience is that, in all that we say and do, humanity is obliged to follow faithfully what they know to be right and just." — CCC 1778

By Eliana Tedrow
For the *Sooner Catholic*

OKLAHOMA CITY — It may seem like a contradiction: Business and Ethics. In a culture that stresses getting ahead at any cost (i.e. reality TV shows, steroids in athletics, tearing down political opponents to win) — is there still a place for faith-driven, ethical decision-making in corporate America?

The answer was sought out by the Oklahoma Business Ethics Consortium, an organization established in 2003 by local business leaders, that strives to establish Oklahoma as a state known for high personal and corporate ethical standards.

"Even though we are a non-sectarian organization, God truly propelled us forward," said Shannon Warren, one of six original founders. "Back in late 2003, six of us thought it would be a good idea to have an informal forum to have discussions about ethical issues we were encountering in the workplace. From there, we kept surging in number every month until we grew, primarily by word of mouth, to nearly 700



Father Rick Stansberry makes a point during the Nov. 4 event.

members by the end of September 2009."

On Nov. 4 nearly 300 Oklahoma business leaders convened to discuss the importance of ethical decision-making in the workplace. Among these: a rabbi, a Protestant minister, a Muslim leader, a Buddhist academic and a Catholic priest unanimously stressed to the crowd, "Although we appear very different in faiths, there are guiding principles on which we all agree. These are basic guiding principles that each of us, no matter what faith we are, carry to work with us every day."

In what otherwise appear to be

totally separate faiths, a fundamental belief in "The Golden Rule" can be found in most religions. Each of these religions have a version of "Do unto others" and carry this philosophy to work.

However, in a world that doesn't uphold the Golden Rule, can we still live it? Especially at work?

Father Rick Stansberry of Christ the King represented the Catholic perspective. For Catholics, he explained, our Catechism lists the "Formation of Conscience" (CCC 1778), The Ten Commandments, Corporal Works of Mercy and Holy Scripture as references for ethical decision-making.

"For instance," Father Stansberry said, "If a Catholic were to help with an abortion, that person would be held responsible ... We, as Catholics, believe that God created us as free human beings; however, all of our actions have consequences ... We must always remember what St. Thomas says, 'The end does not always justify the means.'"

"The Golden Rule is hard," Father Stansberry said, "but it should guide us." In the workplace, an ethical person recognizes that "winning" is not the overriding goal.

Each religious leader agreed — not everything that is lawful is acceptable. For instance, in many religions, although drinking is legal by the state, it is considered wrong to drink. If you declare bankruptcy, for instance, you still owe people money. It may be lawful to invest in stocks; however, if you invest in stocks that promote pornography or alcohol, even if they make you money, that may not be the ethical thing to do.

According to the rabbi, there is no separation from the holy, the sacred and the mundane. There should be a sanctity to society — we are all under a covenant. We are ultimately servants of God, not of servants.

The Protestant minister agreed. "Commerce should be about living and making the world a better place — not taking advantage of other people and getting as much as you can, especially at the cost of going against what is ethical."

Guthrie Students Recognized for Top Scores