

Bishop calls on Kansas governor to stop taking communion: Sebelius vetoed recent abortion bill

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The Catholic archbishop of Kansas City, Kansas, said he hopes Governor Kathleen Sebelius will abide by his request for her to stop receiving communion before he has to take further punitive measures because she supports abortion rights.

“There are a number of pastoral alternatives open to me at this time” if Sebelius refuses, including barring the governor from communion or excommunicating her from the church, Archbishop Joseph Naumann said in an interview May 12.

“I’m not sure that’s an action I would take,” Naumann said of excommunication, “but I’m not eliminating any options.” The archbishop also said he could ask his priests to refuse the sacrament to Sebelius, but “it seems to make more pastoral sense to me to put the responsibility on the politician first.”

Catholic doctrine holds that abortion is “intrinsically evil”—wrong in all circumstances. A spokesperson for Sebelius said the governor will respond to Naumann by letter and has no comment at this time.

“Even if I am not able to help the governor understand the error of her ways, then my other pastoral concern is to protect other people from being misled,” Naumann said.

Naumann asked Sebelius to refrain from receiving communion in a column in the archdiocesan newspaper, the *Leaven*, saying the governor’s support for abortion rights sends a “spiritually lethal message” to other Catholics. He said he has met with Sebelius to discuss their disagreements at least four times.

Governor since 2003, Democrat Sebelius has vetoed several legislative efforts to restrict abortions in Kansas, most recently on April 21. Her name is often floated as a possible running mate for presidential hopeful senator Barack Obama (D., Ill.).

Sebelius has said she personally opposes abortion and has worked to reduce its frequency by supporting adoption incentives, health care services and sex education. She said she vetoed the most recent bill—which would have allowed family members to seek a court order preventing a woman from obtaining an abortion—because it was “likely unconstitutional” and did not adequately protect women’s health.

The issue resurfaced in April elsewhere when several Catholic politicians who support abortion rights took communion at masses celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI in Washington and New York City.

Cardinal Edward Egan of New York said former mayor Rudy Giuliani broke their “understanding” by taking communion at a papal mass April 19. Earlier, Massachusetts senators John Kerry and Ted Kennedy and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) took communion at a papal mass at a baseball stadium. *-Religion News Service*