

COURIER-JOURNAL

How the COURIER-JOURNAL Serves the Church

Scope of the statement

We want to identify the elements of service presently offered by the COURIER-JOURNAL. We believe that many Catholics lose sight of these services. Our publication is part of the existing church; it is easily taken for granted.

Our effort here, then, has been to identify the elements which would be included to complete the statement: "The COURIER-JOURNAL is vitally important to the church in Rochester; it is deserving of support because . . ."

While the primary goal of the COURIER-JOURNAL is to provide information to and about the Catholic church, we all recognize that this service is much broader than the work of an ecclesiastical house organ.

After promulgation of the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, it is clear that the religious life of Catholics must include a Gospel-guided response to all the human, cultural, economic and political concerns of modern life. The religious information needed for such response is the subject matter for the Catholic press. Also, of course, it must provide the ecclesiastical information and background needed by its readers for responsible life in their church.

Moreover, the ecumenical and interreligious perspective of contemporary religious thought makes it clear that our publication is a channel of communication to interested members of other religious traditions. And we should be providing information to Catholic readers about the religious experience and realities present in these other traditions.

The church is, by definition, a community. When you look for the actual connections which bind this community together — in its local, national and international life — you can identify only a few: 1) Our common revelation. 2) Our common worship. 3) A chain of authority. 4) A system of ecclesiastical structures. 5) And the diocesan newspaper.

A community must have some way of perceiving itself as a community, of conversing with itself to formulate its experience and judgments. For most Catholics, the instrument of this perception and conversation is the Catholic press.

I. The News Function:

A. Significance of the news function:

This vitally important function is recognized by very few of our readers, and by very few of our church officials.

As the general press does — or should — provide readers with the information they need to make decisions regarding political, social, economic and other matters, so the Courier tries to provide readers with the information needed to make decisions regarding issues of religious significance.

This means that public affairs which involve religious values and issues are appropriate subject matter for us.

To live fully mature, responsible Christian lives, people must have the information needed to be aware of needs and opportunities, to decide how they should respond, to recognize the contributions they can make.

The Courier is the instrument in which the church reflects on and recognizes its community experience. It is a forum in which the church as a whole can formulate its mission. It is not only a link between the various elements of the community; it aids and strengthens each of these elements.

In striving to provide all this information, the Courier must inevitably present material that may disturb or offend some readers. If the significant voices in the church do not recognize the importance of this news function, some of the coverage will be seen as sensationalism.

B. Specific news services:

1. The COURIER-JOURNAL provides the general Catholic audience — and professional church personnel — with most of their information regarding authoritative statements, national and international programs, developments in the life of worship, ministry and education.

It also provides us with a knowledge of the life and

experience of the church in other parts of the world, in other cultures. Such a knowledge is necessary for our understanding of the church as universal.

2. It provides similar information regarding the people of the local church. This information is essential to the creation of a sense of identity for a diocese, for the Catholic community of a nation. Such knowledge gives us not only necessary information for our participation, but also provides the inspiration of witnessing Christ working through His people.
3. The Courier provides "campaign" service of generating attention and support for major church efforts. (e.g., diocesanwide fund appeals, the liturgical reform, the Campaign for Human Development, Missions, sensitivity to issues such as the abortion struggle.)
4. In reporting the life of the church, the paper is the only adequate mirror of the universality and the complexity of Catholic life.
5. It serves to translate ecclesiastical language and categories into terms which are comprehensible to various audiences.
6. We offer to the general society a means of seeing how news events are perceived and evaluated within the Catholic community. Such an expression of Catholic perception can be helpful in the efforts at ecumenism and interreligious understanding. It contributes to the work of evangelization.
7. We serve as the only instrument, within the church, by which Catholic agencies, institutions and officials can render accountability to the community which is the church.
8. It provides a link by which many diverse activities and organizations of the church can be seen as related one to another and can be recognized as elements of a total church life.

II. The Forum Function

1. The COURIER-JOURNAL provides an instrument in which persons can reflect on the Christian message and can seek its richer application in complex, changing situations.
2. The Courier reflects the wide range of opinion and judgment which is, in fact, found in the Catholic community. In debate and analysis, it tests these various opinions for their consistency with Catholic teaching and values.
3. The Courier, in news coverage and in by-lined articles, provides a forum in which Catholic views are brought to the attention of outside groups — government, other religious bodies, service agencies, the general press, for example.
4. The goal of more complete participation in life and ministry of the church requires a widespread distribution of information about the ecclesiastical life of the church and its efforts to minister to human needs. There is no other agency capable of providing such a volume of complex information, making it available to large numbers.
5. Proper use of the editorial function allows for publication of Catholic viewpoints on specific social issues without drawing the magisterium into the concrete details of many complex issues which clearly have a moral dimension.
6. Editorials, by-lined articles and letters provide us with an important channel of communication upward to the official leadership of the church. It is important for these officials to understand the thinking and sensitivity of the community if they are going to provide effective leadership.
7. The Courier provides a voice for the expression of church concerns in local issues, controversies, etc.

III. The Educational Function:

1. The Courier provides a wide range of educational services to the Catholic community, from tools for the teaching of young children to a presentation of the most sophisticated theological thought.

2. The Courier presents widespread distribution of important documentation: Encyclicals, other Vatican statements, national and local pastoral statements.

3. The Courier often is the source of information needed by the professionals who minister to the church community. (Information on the liturgy, music, religious education, social services, etc.)
4. The variety of needs, interests and levels of education among congregations make it impossible to provide effective adult education from the pulpit. Yet, the church recognizes that a great many American Catholics have had little formal Catholic education in recent years, and that those educated in the pre-Conciliar years need to have their knowledge and understanding updated. The Catholic press is the only means available for such adult education aimed at large numbers of people.
5. The Courier regularly provides a national audience for the statements of gifted church people whose influence would otherwise be limited.
6. The paper provides an opportunity for "witness" articles in which the experience of Christian life and ministry can be shared with many others. The term "inspiration" seems dated today, but such accounts can provide a very important element of encouragement and challenge to those striving to lead a Christian life.
7. The Courier provides a means by which those outside the Catholic community can be aware of the development of current Catholic sensitivity and scholarship. Thus, it serves as a useful instrument of ecumenical understanding.

IV. Practical Advantage

1. As a large, complex communication service, the Courier involves relatively little direct expense to church organizations.

While it is true that many publications exist with some sort of subsidy, all our expense is covered by circulation and advertising income, and by typesetting sales.

V. IF the COURIER-JOURNAL did not exist:

1. Most international, national, diocesan statements would have to be channelled through the mail to rectories and through the pulpit to congregations.
2. This would make it almost impossible to communicate effectively messages which require precise terminology, complex reasoning.
3. The awareness of the church as an international community would be limited, for the most part, to the understanding we could derive from occasional mentions in the general press.
4. To a great extent, lay Catholics would perceive the official church only in their parish priests. Apart from the knowledge, interests and abilities of these men, the congregations would have no access to the life, thought and activity of the total church.
5. The church would be forced to rely more heavily on radio, somewhat on television. While broadcasting has advantages in the number of persons reached, it also has severe limitations in cost and in the amount and kind of information which can be communicated effectively. Television and radio cannot provide the in-depth treatment needed for an understanding of many of the issues facing the church, and one cannot return to them for rereading and further study as one can with the press.
6. The pattern of change and development in the life and thought of the church continues. The only effective alternative to confusion and aberration is a well-informed community of Catholics. The Courier offers the best opportunity for providing the adult education needed by the church.
7. To appreciate the value of the Courier we should look to the intense efforts on the part of other local churches to develop such publications where they do not exist or where they must function under severe government restraints.