

Editorial

Of 'good news' and 'bad'

Dear Readers,

On this page you will find several letters referring to our coverage of Brother John Walsh's arrest. Some of these letters strongly take issue with that coverage for a variety of reasons; others agree with our rationale, either fully or for the most part.

We believed that the editorial of two weeks ago explained our position on that case, yet it seems to have been unclear to several of these letter writers. Therefore, rather than responding to the letters individually, we will make this last statement on the case:

Many people see the Courier-Journal as a bearer only of "good news." In the ideal situation that would be the case. Unfortunately, ours is not a perfect world. Because it is made up of erring human beings, bad things sometimes occur. We may wish these things did not happen, but we cannot wish them away.

We are reminded that had the writers of the original "Good News" — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — chosen only to record only "good news" we would never have learned of Peter's denial of Christ, Judas' betrayal or Thomas' doubts.

We Catholics — whether clergy and religious or lay people — often take issue with the problems we perceive

in society: the climbing abortion rate, the neglect of the poor, the decay of family life, etc. These are points that must be made, and it is imperative that our voices are heard.

Yet how can we expect to be taken seriously — how can we expect others to heed our words — when we refuse to talk about our own problems? If the Courier-Journal publishes only "good news" about the Church, how can it speak authoritatively about "bad news" in society? When we report on a U.S. Conference of Bishops criticism of the Supreme Court's rulings on abortion, we want that report to be taken seriously — by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. But if we refuse to publish stories about the Church that may seem negative, we will be seen only as "mouthpieces" for the Church, and our credibility will be lost.

Some of the people who have called and written us about the Brother Walsh case feel that we have been uncharitable to him — that the Church position on those accused of crimes is one of forgiveness and compassion. That is true, but we do not accept the theory that we have been uncharitable toward Brother Walsh. Our account of the case — although including some unpleasant details from the police depositions — was strictly factual. Some writers seem to

believe that the factual tone of the article did not provide balance because it did not give a "good side" to the story. Again, we disagree. Our story contained two significant aspects that were omitted by the daily press: 1) the fact that Brother Walsh had not been directly identified by the boys in the case, and 2) a clarification of what Brother Walsh had and had not admitted to. We believe that our fuller report is more fair, or charitable if you will, to Brother Walsh than some other reports have been — especially ones that dredged up a vague connection to a dissimilar and highly emotional case of many years ago.

Moreover, it is difficult to present a positive outlook on such a story when no one — the diocese, Cardinal Mooney High School, the provincial headquarters of the Brothers of Holy Cross nor Brother Walsh himself — was willing to offer any comment on the case. Although from a legal standpoint we can understand their reluctance to comment on the specifics of the case, it seems unreasonable that neither the school nor the provincial headquarters would tell us even how many brothers teach at the school (information easily found in various diocesan and national Church publications).

Some of our readers have objected to the placement of the article within the newspaper, rather than to its content. The articles that appear on page one of any newspaper are generally those judged to be of greatest concern to the paper's readers. Burying (i.e., putting a major story toward the back of the paper because it will offend some people) the Brother Walsh story wouldn't have been charity, it would have been poor journalism. We at the Courier-Journal see ourselves as professional journalists, working by the ethics and standards common to all good journalism. We resent the implication by some that our story was sensational and representative of reporting common to publications found at grocery store check-out stands.

Still others have complained that the story reflects badly upon the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and Cardinal Mooney High School. Why is it assumed that because one member of an order is accused of a crime, all other members of that order are disgraced? Many of us are graduates of parochial elementary and high schools and agree with two writers that the vast majority of teachers in such schools are "very wonderful and competent people."

Enough said, we hope.

And opinions

Mercy Congregation 'concerned' about Brother Walsh coverage

To the Editor:

We would like to express our concern over your method of covering the incident involving Brother John Walsh in the September 4 issue of the Courier-Journal.

- In particular, we object to:
- 1) the placement of the article on Page 1;
 - 2) the inclusion of details which had already been printed in the daily paper;
 - 3) the lack of balance in the article — since so much unfavorable information was given, that no positive comments about the school or its faculty were included;
 - 4) the implication in the editorial that parents and all members of the diocese need to be concerned about one isolated though unfortunate incident. Parents could have been encouraged to weigh this matter against all of the good accomplished over the years by faculty and staff at Cardinal Mooney High School;

5) the seeming lack of sensitivity, however unintended, to all parties involved.

We have worked for 23 years with the Brothers of Holy Cross at Cardinal Mooney High School, and we have always found them to be fine religious educators and men of character and integrity. We suffer with them at this time.

Neither do we wish to minimize the trauma experienced by the two young boys and their families, who have our deepest sympathy and understanding.

We do respect your views and the need for freedom of the press. We affirm your efforts to make the Courier-Journal more vibrant with your creative reporting and photography. And we especially appreciate your coverage of our installation ceremony in August.

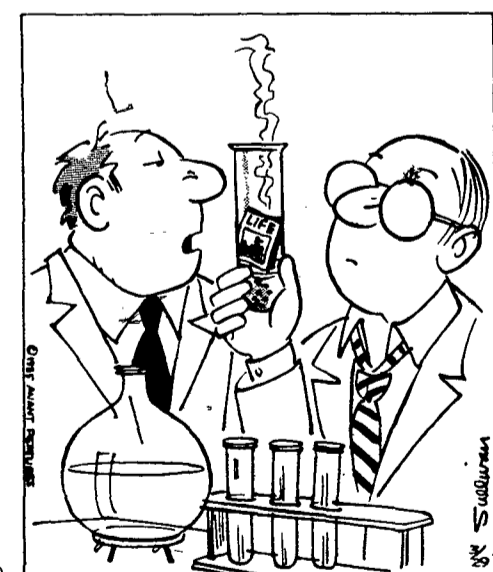
But we believe in this case that more prudence and moderation could have been

used if indeed you felt the need to report the incident.

We believe too that a Catholic diocesan newspaper has a responsibility beyond that of simply "printing the news" freely — a responsibility to be attuned to the needs of all of our diocesan family, particularly when pain and suffering are present to such an intense degree.

It is our sincere hope that in the future, the Courier-Journal will be more circumspect in the manner in which such sensitive issues are covered.

Sister Jean Marie Kearse,
Superior General of the Sisters
of Mercy of Rochester and members
of her council: Sisters Ann Miller,
Janet Korn, Nancy Whitley and
Kathleen Milliken.



"NICE WORK, OSGOOD, BUT THAT'S NOT THE KIND OF LIFE WE HAD IN MIND."

'Writer 'outraged' by Courier coverage

To the Editor:

I was saddened by the Mooney kidnapping story as it appeared in the secular press, but I'm outraged by the way the Courier-Journal of September 4 reported it, devoting one-quarter of the front page along with a photograph, and then a follow-up on page 4.

I'm not suggesting that the matter be swept under the rug, but out of a sense of charity you might have treated it less blatantly. This kind of reporting one expects to find in those scandal sheets on sale at grocery markets and not in a publication with a religious orientation.

Harry P. Seeback
120 Country Club Drive
Elmira

'You are right' in publishing story

To the Editor:

Thank you for the recent review and reformulation of policy with regard to events that appear to becloud the Church or members of religious communities.

As you expressed the decision (to publish a detailed report of Brother Walsh being charged with kidnapping), it was to publish out of a sense of journalistic integrity and to eliminate undue speculation.

Mine has been a life-long friendship with the congregation of Holy Cross, first inspired by blessed Brother Andre's fidelity to St. Joseph, Montreal; later as a student at the University of Notre Dame.

So I feel, in a special way, the grief engendered from the inclusion of the Cardinal Mooney story.

Yet you are right. It is your responsibility to judge whether to acknowledge in print the adverse realities of the day, to avoid sweeping under the rug something due to receive extensive publicity elsewhere or already widely felt in the faith community.

As a fruitful result, many may be called to a non-judgmental spirit of support and compassion — that all who experience trauma in interpersonal relationships will thereby come to know the healing power of prayer and reconciliation.

Frank Carver
P.O. Box 200
Trumansburg

Supports decision on Walsh coverage

To the Editor:

I support your decision outlined in your editorial regarding the story on the school administrator recently charged with a crime. I firmly believe that the Courier-Journal is, in fact, a communications and news vehicle of the diocese, and to "duck" unfavorable stories abdicates your responsibility to be journalists. We don't need another Catholic teaching manual; we need a credible Catholic newspaper.

I disagree with your policy regarding the

print shop story. After reading of the occurrence in the daily press, what is your reader to surmise from the lack of mention in your newspaper? It wasn't important? We don't talk about bad things? It's embarrassing, so we swept it under the diocesan rug?

Please review your policy to cover only "good news." I believe it detracts from the mission of the Catholic press.

John W. Oberlies
242 Shoreham Drive
Rochester

'Let others speculate' on details of case

To the Editor:

I'm outraged by the front-page article with picture of Brother John Walsh. Your sympathetic explanation in the editorial really made it clear what your true motivations are. Surely you could have put the article further back in the paper, if necessary at all. There are many people who no doubt will say: "I'm glad we have not sent our children to a parochial high school, if that is how the members of the religious orders act." My six children attended Cardinal Mooney, and I

consider the religious who teach there to be very wonderful and competent people.

I would like to know what aspects you included in your article that clarified what our wonderful newspapers haven't already quoted.

Let others speculate. We should be more compassionate and forgiving.

George A. Bunting
26 Eglantine Road
Rochester

Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writers' signatures, full addresses and telephone numbers. They should be sent to: Opinion, Courier-Journal, 114 S. Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607

Opinions should be brief, typed, double-spaced, and no longer than 1 1/2 pages.

We routinely condense letters, edit offensive words and libelous statements, and reserve the right to reject letters. Generally speaking, however, only limited grammatical corrections will be made, and the letters will reflect the writers' own styles.

Because submitted opinions exceed the space reserved for letters, we publish only original letters addressed to us. We will not use poetry, open letters, or copies of letters sent to other publications or persons. To ensure diversity, we limit each writer to one letter per month.