

The Editor's Desk

Les Miserables

From our wire service, Wednesday, January 14: "Unemployment of 6 to 7 percent and poverty that traps one in seven Americans are morally intolerable and must be combatted, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan of Brooklyn, told the Senate.

"In testimony Jan. 13 to the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, Bishop Sullivan explained themes of the Catholic bishops' new pastoral letter on the economy and urged attention to 'moral and human dimensions' of poverty and unemployment. Bishop Sullivan is chairman of the U.S. Catholic Conference Committee on Social Development and World Peace."

Paraphrased from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Friday, January 16: A middle-aged man robbed a Rochester bank, asking the teller to give him \$280 in cash. Leaving the bank, he realized that he had been "overpaid." So he returned to the teller's window to give back the excess money. "When the police get here, I'll be in the parking lot," he told her.

Police officers reported that the man was sitting in the parking lot and crying as they arrived. He told the police that he needed the \$280 because he was out of work and could not find a job. His brother had thrown him out of their residence the night before.

"He has a place (to stay) now, at least for one night," the arresting officer said.

That sounds a bit crass on the surface, but then the irony comes through. When a well-meaning person comes to believe that the only way he can put a roof over his head is to steal money or land in jail, something is drastically wrong with our society. Perhaps a lack of shelters for the homeless brought the man to this conclusion. Maybe he was frustrated because the system didn't work for him. Or maybe society at large gave him the subtle message that it simply didn't care about him.

As our legislators consider both the state and federal budgets, let us remember this man — just one example of the "moral and human dimensions" of poverty and unemployment.

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



Sound barriers

People who have been revived after being declared clinically dead have reported that no one talks in the afterlife, yet thoughts and messages are conveyed perfectly.

My column this week essentially serves as a reflection on the content of my page-six article, "Living with deafness: a 'vocation,' not a disability." That article focuses on a group of people who — like the people in heaven — are able to communicate perfectly, but in a way different from that used by most of us. These people are deaf.

I began researching the topic of deafness for a number of reasons. This year, a deaf woman was hired to teach at my daughter's Montessori school. At first, because I consider myself open-minded, I didn't think much of it when the principal told me the news.

But things started to come together one weekend when I had the opportunity to attend a parent-teacher conference with Lynn's teacher, Sharon McKenney-Dutille, who is deaf. It was then that I began to experience first-hand what it must be like for a deaf person to try to communicate with a hearing person.

The parent-teacher conference was on a Friday. Coincidentally, that Saturday night I attended the movie "Children of a Lesser God," which is about the struggles involved in a relationship between a deaf woman and a hearing man.

As if to emphasize the issue further, that next Monday morning, I had a providential conversation with a woman named Kim, who works at the front desk at the YMCA. Kim told me that she had recently gone to a dance for the deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology. Marlee Matlin, the deaf actress who starred in the movie I had just seen, had been at that dance. At that point, I decided that the issue might be worth exploring.

When I later talked with several deaf people, I sensed something stirring inside them. As they shared their experiences of deafness with me, they seemed to be in touch with a part of life that many of us miss. At times during these conversations, I found myself deeply moved by what was being said. Somehow the deaf people with whom I was talking brought me in touch with the pain and the joy that deafness brings to those who must live — without hearing — in a hearing world.

Only when I recognized deafness as a vocation — a gift from God — did I begin to relate the experience of being deaf to my own vocation. From that perspective, I also began to understand the concomitant mixed blessing that comes with any God-given gift.

In the end, I humbly weighed the privilege of being able to share a little of life with a few deaf people and with a few hearing people who work with the deaf.

But an outsider I shall remain until, using my heart and my head, I can break down the barriers of sound that separate my world from the world of the deaf.

At St. Mary's Church for the Deaf, where I visited for liturgy, Father Ray Fleming introduced me to the congregation by saying that I wanted to interview some of them after Mass. Father Fleming, whom I had interviewed previously, ended his introduction of me by joking, "... and his questions are not dumb, really."

I guess Father Fleming and other deaf people are familiar with dumb questions. And, judging by their smiles and their lives, I think they know how to answer those questions with love, patience and acceptance.

Letters

Media apathetic over nursing home conditions

To the Editor:

According to a recent U.S. Senate Committee on Aging report, 85 nursing homes in New York state violate one or more basic federal standards intended to ensure the health and safety of their residents. Forty of these nursing homes had three or more serious deficiencies when last inspected; 20 of New York's nursing homes violated at least three critical standards in at least three of the last four inspections.

Thus many of our state's nursing homes, according to the report, are "repeatedly defying federal regulations and subjecting older Americans to inadequate care and squalid

conditions." And due to inadequacies of the inspection process itself, the Senate committee adds that many nursing homes rated as satisfactory are really substandard.

The report was released six months ago. Since then, there has been an absence of editorial criticism of nursing home conditions. The media have not bothered to learn the identities of the worst nursing homes or to undertake journalistic investigations as to why these places are permitted to mistreat patients year after year.

During the 1970s, the media spotlighted nursing home abuses, but the spotlight prematurely shifted elsewhere. Perhaps the news media's

current lack of response to this issue is due to compassion fatigue — deadened sensibilities and emptiness in that part of the social conscience where indignation should be. Yet such indifference is largely responsible for the dramatic increase in standards violations by nursing homes whose managers know they are unlikely to be de-certified for non-compliance.

So it is important for the news media to tackle this issue once again — and, if necessary, again and again — until basic standards of decency are strictly enforced.

Joel Freedman
N. Main St.
Canandaigua

God's love called 'a freely given gift' we can accept or reject

To the Editor:

In reply to Father Cuddy's column, "Smile! God loves you" of Dec. 18, 1986: God does love us whether we sport buttons, signs or smiles.

God the Father so loved the world that he sent His only Son into the world; the Son so loved us that He was willing to die on a cross for us. The Holy Spirit came not to holy people, yet His love turned cowardly, frightened men, hiding in an upper room, into apostles ready and willing

to die for the love God had for them.

The father of the prodigal son did not stop loving and waiting for his son to return, but watched for his return. When the son did return, the father saw him coming from far away and ran to greet him.

I would refer readers to the First Epistle of John 4:7.

Salvation does not automatically flow from God's love. I cannot go forth and commit whatever sin appeals to me and think I will be

saved. If I repent and return to God, however, I am always forgiven. I punish my child for wrongdoing, but I do not stop loving him. So it must be with God.

I know there is no way I can deserve God's love; therefore, I believe it is a freely given gift that I can either accept or reject, yet it's always there. It is the one constant, unchanging fact in my life.

Mary McKenna
186 Greenway Blvd.
Churchville

Writer refutes position that homosexual acts are 'natural'

To the Editor:

I am responding to Sandra Behnke's letter claiming homosexual acts are "natural" and that 10 percent of the population has "always" been gay. These are clearly the standard cliches used to legitimize homosexuality.

What sort of poll was taken in Christ's time and before, during the Middle Ages, or even as recently as

the American Revolution to support such a ridiculous, though widely quoted, claim regarding the percentage of practicing homosexuals? And what makes homosexuality "natural?" Where in nature do animals completely reject the opposite sex and keep only to the same? Many psychologists believe the vast majority of homosexuals came to that way of life through learned behavior rather

than physical need.

Our free society seems to have created a tendency to let everyone "walk to the beat of a different drummer." But allowing people to live as they choose within the law should not and cannot be confused with accepting that way of life as morally right.

Nancy L. Thon
Dublin Road
Penfield

Letter writers exhorted to love their epistolary 'enemies'

To the Editor

As we begin 1987, let all of us Courier-Journal readers ponder these words from Jesus Christ and adopt them as our New Year's resolution:

"I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you must also love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:34).

"Love your enemies and do good" (Luke 6:35).

During 1986, I noticed the absence of love in the tone of a great

many letters to the editor. Written by Catholics attacking other Catholics, they appear to me to be filled with hatred, not love.

Paul was a great letter writer. He once wrote: "You must love your neighbor as yourself. Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbor; that is why it is the answer to every one of the commandments" (Romans 13:10).

Surely there is plenty of room for disagreement among us Catholics. Room for strong arguments, too — but can't we disagree in a Christian way, with respect and love? Then Tertullian might have been writing

about us in Apologeticus 39, when he wrote: "See how these Christians love one another!"

Harold Hacker
East Avenue
Rochester

Principal thanks writer for 'tickling fancies'

To the Editor:

Thank you to the Courier-Journal and Terri Parsons for the fine article (C-J, Dec. 11, "Cartoonist tickles students' fancies, teaches value of words") that focused on the St. John's School writing program.

We would like to add a note of thanks for a grant we received from the Wilson Foundation that is making a valuable contribution to the success of this program.

Sister Barbara Hamm
Principal
St. John School
545 Humboldt St.
Rochester

Sisters of St. Joseph in Brazil send greetings to supporters at home in Rochester diocese

To the Editor:

The Sisters of St. Joseph in Brazil send our love and greetings at Christmas to our friends in the diocese of Rochester, you who support us in our mission here.

The Incarnation takes on a deeper meaning for us this year. With the assassination of Vilmar Jose de Castro, a young pastoral agent with whom many of us worked in Cacu, we are realizing that taking the side of the poor and powerless, becoming more one with them, arouses reactions of fear and violence on the

part of the rich and powerful. Jesus' birth among the poor was a threat to Herod. Vilmar's love for children and landless rural families was perceived as a threat to the wealthy landowners of Brazil. From the Church of Latin America, we ask you to pray with us that the all-powerful love that sent Christ into this world will conquer the thirst for wealth and domination that divides our societies and violates the dignity of His people.

The Sisters of St. Joseph in Brazil

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, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

Opinions should be brief, typed, double-spaced, and no longer than 1½ 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.



A GREAT NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION FOR YOU WOULD BE TO SET A BETTER MORAL TONE IN KINDERGARTEN.