

The Editor's Desk

Working at cross purposes

It seems peculiar to set aside funds for an undertaking and then to devise rules that would deny the money to almost every group involved with that undertaking. But that's exactly what the U.S. government is doing with regard to homelessness (see story, page 4).

While Congress busily holds hearings and develops legislation, the Department of Urban Development is devising regulations on how federal money for the homeless should be spent. HUD has proposed that funds from the Homeless Housing Act of 1986 "may not be used to renovate, rehabilitate or convert buildings owned by primarily religious organizations."

A look at the shelters in the Rochester area illustrates the futility of such schemes. Of the roughly 10 emergency shelters in Rochester, all but one are operated in buildings owned by one religious denomination or another. Only the Volunteers of America are strictly non-denominational.

But what of the rest — including the local network whose efforts on behalf of the homeless earned it the New York state Eleanor Roosevelt Community Service Award? Those three shelters are operated within the facilities of Catholic churches and would, therefore, be ineligible for grant money under the proposed HUD regulation.

Just who, I wonder, does HUD think is going to use the Homeless Housing Act funds, if not religious denominations? Based on past performance, I can't imagine local governmental agencies jumping on the chance to renovate public structures for use as homeless shelters. So how does HUD think the homeless will benefit from federal funding if religious denominations aren't allowed to act as intermediaries?

As the attorneys for the U.S. Catholic Conference stated in opposition to the proposed rule: "Excluding (religious organizations) from participating in the program can only diminish its effectiveness in providing needed shelter for the homeless at a time when the numbers of persons in need of emergency shelter are increasing ... The Supreme Court has affirmatively and repeatedly rejected absolute rules excluding religious organizations from participating in governmental programs."

When all is said and done, the HUD proposal will probably be abandoned or ruled unconstitutional. But while bureaucrats and lawyers debate the separation of church and state, homeless people continue to shiver in the streets.

Victor Bartolotta Jr.

A Closer Look



Betty Jane's gift of hope

God sometimes uses special people to reduce the gap between heaven and earth. Such people are able to teach us that heaven and earth are closely connected, when we consider that our citizenship is in heaven.

Betty Jane Oughterson of Geneva, N.Y., was one of those special people. Last week she died at the age of 55. She possessed the unique gift of hope, a gift that bridges space and time, which separate life on earth from life in heaven.

For 20 years, Betty Jane battled cancer, enduring pain and the unsettling results of disfiguring surgery. Yet she remained hopeful about the future. Her faith and hope in the life to come gave her the inspiration she needed each day to keep going and to help others who suffered as she did.

I was introduced to Betty Jane in 1978 by her brother, John. I had recently left the seminary in Washington, D.C., and had taken a position as youth minister at St. Stephen's parish in Geneva. Both Betty Jane and John were anxious to offer their support to me.

The relationship that developed between Betty Jane and me, while not one that involved frequent contact, was one of mutual respect. Even after I left Geneva, Betty Jane and I continued to support one another. I tried to keep abreast of her activities; she in turn would often inquire about me and send greetings through friends.

On a visit to Geneva this past December, my mother-in-law informed me that Betty Jane's condition had worsened. Betty Jane had made a request to see me and my young daughter, Lynn, when or if we should arrive in town. We were able to respond to her request two days before Christmas.

The ensuing conversation beautifully depicts the faith, the strength of character and especially the hope that were so much a part of this woman's life. When I saw her, Betty Jane looked good and was walking about, even though she was receiving strong medication for pain.

"I just hope I don't linger too long," she told me halfway through the conversation, "you know, for John's sake." She lived with her brother, John, who was caring for her.

"Gosh, Betty Jane," I said, somewhat surprised, "you seem so open in talking about your death?"

"Oh," she said. "I'm looking forward to it. I just know there's a better place out there when we die."

The conversation shifted, and after a pause, I said gently, "Betty Jane, my mother-in-law tells me that you've been thinking a lot about Maxie." Maxie is my wife, who died of cancer and whom Betty Jane knew.

"Yes, I have," she said. "I think a lot about her and what she went through."

After some silence, I ventured, "And do you pray to her for help?"

"Oh, yes," she added sincerely.

We talked for a bit more and then, realizing that she was perhaps getting tired, I got ready to take my leave. But before I left, I felt I had to say one more thing. "And Betty Jane, if, if," I stressed, "you get there before I do, give Maxie a big hug for me, will you?"

"I will," she said confidently, with some sadness but with a self-confidence that only comes from a pervasive faith and hope in a loving God.

Betty Jane Oughterson learned to live with pain, but to work for others. She learned to hope for a better life. In her hope, she helped to shrink the gap — largely created by human beings — that separates heaven from earth.

Letters

Childhood memories of January day

To the Editor:

January 22 of 1973 still stands out in my mind; I was eight years old at the time. My parents' dinner conversation that night centered on the Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion. I had heard mention of it in the news that day and of the controversy surrounding it, but couldn't grasp what was being implied. My parents explained, and I was devastated.

At that age, the idea that this could take place had never entered my thoughts. Who would want to terminate a pregnancy in such a manner? That the conception of a child would be such an unwelcome event that the mother would decide to abort this growing life was a thought as unthinkable to me as it was repulsive.

My own mother was pregnant at the time with my second sister. Her previous pregnancy had ended in a stillbirth, and so the anticipation and awe with which we held that nine-month period was intense and reverential. Every night we prayed for a safe delivery both for mother and child.

All life was sacred to my family. We lived on a small farm and celebrated the seasons. In the autumn we would harvest our land, thankful for its fruits. In the winter we grew silent with the earth and anticipated new birth and the awakening of life.

With the spring my family rejoiced in the unfolding life of the season; there wasn't a spring that went by without the expectant excitement of discovering newly hatched birds and other newborn animals. In the summer we nurtured the life around us, caring for the animals and tending to our gardens. I couldn't help growing up with a profound respect for all life.

That January day still haunts me; millions of infant voices haunt me, as they search for an identity stripped from them in the womb. I had always been proud of my country, but on that day the grandeur and nobility of American history were suddenly confronted with the unsettling realization of human fallibility. A child, I could see that not only individual adults could go wrong, but whole bodies of ruling people could make grievously wrong decisions.

Ever since that day, I've had the

feeling that I am losing younger siblings. Little brothers and sisters who were meant to be a part of my life are being taken from me and forever lost. Children who might have shared their lives with me are gone, never to be reclaimed. There is a real part of me that misses them. I am an older brother to children who will now never be.

What are we missing out on?

Kevin C.A. Elphick
Cobbs Hill Drive
Rochester

Reader lauds recent editorial on ploy of condom merchants

To the Editor:

What a refreshing change to see the editor of a Catholic newspaper finally taking a positive stand against an intrinsic evil. I am referring to the editorial of Jan. 29 concerning the latest ploy of the birth control merchants.

I have been a registered (ASCP) cytotechnologist since 1968, having recently retired. In the early days of screening Pap smears, about 20 years ago, it was uncommon to see herpes virus effects on cells, even less so condyloma acuminata or chlamydia.

Within the last decade, with the availability of numerous birth control devices, which spawned the so-called "sexual revolution," the above-named loathsome diseases turned up with increasing frequency. They are either incurable or can lead to complications at childbirth or eventually to cancer. Of course, using birth control methods, one couldn't get pregnant, so not to worry.

Now we have an even more fearsome illness, a real killer. What is the response? Abstinence? No, a push for more birth control in the form of condoms.

When will the public wake up? (Members of) the medical profession and, sadly, to a great extent, the clergy, appear to have their heads buried firmly in the sand. All moral considerations aside, every person should understand that the only "safe" sex is no sex, and each individual has to be responsible for his or her actions.

Cancer of the cervix uteri was the chief killer of older women when Dr. Papanicolaou perfected his technique, which resulted in the saving of thousands of lives. It is depressing, to say the least, that this cancer now strikes a much younger group of women, even some in their teens. Shouldn't this also tell us something about the way we live?

Joyce P. Szwaigiel
Drummond Street
Auburn

Real teachers don't settle for minimal competence

To the Editor:

In response to the article on Catholic educator Elinor Ford (C-J, Feb. 5: "Society suffers from decline of Catholic schools, education expert says"): Ms. Ford was sadly mistaken when she remarked that Catholic school teachers challenge students, whereas state schools settle for "minimally competent" students. An educator, if a true professional never settles for minimal. Her efforts are always to go beyond, to reach higher possibilities.

Having taught in both systems, I find offense in Ms. Ford's words which undermine all teaching professionals. If a system is at fault, it would be more correct to state that the Parochial system is in error for

its inability to meet the needs of all children. Unless these needs are met, the educational system is sorely lacking.

Does Ms. Ford truly believe that "values" and "ethics" are devoid in state schools? Perhaps her experience is only with New York City schools of which I am unqualified to speak. I contend — values are not prayers and Masses but they are only that — prayers and Masses. True prayer is not allowed, nor are objects of prayer allowed in public schools. However, values are present, taught, and fostered. How could it be otherwise? Has Ms. Ford ever heard of E.P.I.C. a program that is essentially teaching morals and ethics. Has she ever observed a public school teacher? She is wel-

come in my classroom any time. There she will see "caring" children working together with the knowledge that we are all one family striving to learn and grow together. Abiding by rules that are for the good of all and helping each other achieve our best for we truly believe that is the best climate for learning.

Education in any system means "knowledge". With this knowledge comes the realization that we all can be the person we want to be. But, we need each other to make the road easier and more enjoyable. This is what is taught in my public school classroom.

Deanne Czebatol Delehanty
Second grade teacher
#14 School, Rochester

Social ministry wish list funnels donations to needy in parish

To the Editor:

The social ministry committee of St. John the Evangelist Church in Spencerport urges other parishes to get involved in an easy method of helping the needy in the area.

First, we established a "sister relationship" with St. Augustine's Parish in Rochester. St. Augustine's is fortunate to have a part-time social worker who, in working with the poor, funnels "needs" to our parish.

Our church bulletin then publishes

a wish list, which describes the needs and lists a coordinator's phone number. The generous people of the Spencerport area have for many months donated numerous items, such as small and large appliances, clothes, furniture, household items, etc. The wish list items usually run for two weeks, to allow sufficient response. A rotating list of people with trucks and vans is used to help deliver large items.

If your parish would like to start a project with Christmas spirit the

whole year 'round and would like more information, contact me at (716) 352-0834.

Richard R. Gallagher
Ogden Parma Town Line Road
Spencerport

Inclusion of Father McBrien's column praised by grateful reader from Auburn

To the Editor:

Please publish this letter in praise of Father Richard McBrien.

His column is another welcome feature in your newspaper, which is becoming increasingly more stimulating and thought-provoking.

While the hierarchy treads slowly

to ease offense and disillusionment in inherited mass orthodoxy, the educated thought cannot stop cold in order to protect it.

Esther C. Giacalone
Kearney Avenue
Auburn

Guidelines

The Courier-Journal welcomes your opinions. Letters must bear the writers' signatures, full addresses and telephone numbers. They must be brief, typed (double-spaced, please) and no longer than 1½ pages.

Letters should be mailed to: Opinion, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

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.