

The Editor's Desk

Policy philosophy

The new letters-to-the-editor policy printed below is a product of much discussion and reflection on the part of the editorial committee of the Courier-Journal's Board of Directors. It was unanimously approved by the full board of directors at the board's June 25 meeting and replaces the "guidelines" that have frequently appeared on this page. The new policy is intended to serve both as a statement of rules and of mission; it is designed to help all of us — readers and C-J staff alike — operate on the same wave length.

For some time, other C-J staffers and I have lamented the dearth of formal policy upon which to base our decisions regarding the publication of letters. In general, we have opted to publish every letter we receive, except for those I term irrational — i.e., letters in which a writer asserts that he/she is God or that the Vatican is being overrun by murderous Freemasons. (I do not mean to be flippant; I actually receive letters and phone calls like that.)

I suspect that at one time or another, each of you has questioned our judgment in publishing a given letter. Some of you have asked why I publish letters in which the writers display a clear lack of understanding regarding the issue they are discussing. Others wonder why we publish letters angrily condemning the newspaper, the diocese, the bishop or other individuals.

And while some of you may have been incredulous at our decisions, we have been frustrated by writers who assert that we are obliged to print their letters. We've long marveled that the once-a-month limitation imposed by the outgoing letters guidelines has been interpreted by some writers as a once-a-month guarantee. Thus John Smith may feel perfectly justified in re-wording the letter he sent last month and sending it again and again and again.

I've also been frustrated by having no policy leg to stand on when the writer of the 100th letter criticizing renovations at St. Whatsits Church calls to ask: "Why haven't you published my letter?" Likewise, we lacked a clearly articulated answer for the writer who in June sends a letter regarding an article we published in March.

I don't want to give the impression that the C-J staff has been helpless in handling these concerns; we have dealt with them again and again over the course of the last two years. Yet lacking a public and clearly articulated policy to refer to, those whose letters are rejected inevitably jump to the wrong conclusion, accusing us of refusing letters simply because we disagree with them.

The above provides a framework for the editorial committee's discussions which eventually produced the statement below. As the policy states, the letters column remains open to all of our readers, regardless of their geographic or ideological spheres. From now on, there will be no once-a-month restriction; neither will there be a once-a-month guarantee. Writers may submit letters as frequently as they wish, but the Courier-Journal staff will select which letters will be published, basing their choices on "likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play."

In practice, this portion of the policy will probably have little effect on which letters are published, except with regard to an endless stream of letters on one subject. When this occurs, we will choose representative letters — maintaining, insofar as possible, a sense of the numerical weights of opposing views. Letters that are hopelessly out of date or unrelated to Church life will be discarded. And writers who use different words to say the same thing over and over will see few of their letters in print.

Henceforth, writers also will be held accountable to the phrase regarding fair play. Although we have tried to enforce our own informal policy on fairness, we have lapsed at times, allowing writers to wage battles and spew forth bile at institutions or individuals. No longer. If you write a critical letter and expect to see it published, be certain that your criticism is leveled in a fair and Christian manner. Meanwhile, I'll keep reminding myself of this "fairness doctrine" as I go through my mail, to ensure that nothing slips through the cracks.

The new policy doesn't rule out debate and criticism; it only attempts to eliminate deliberate unfairness and spitefulness. Moreover, those of you who think some C-J letters lack factual basis and clear logic will probably continue thinking that way. Some opinions are solidly based on concrete evidence, while others stem from emotional convictions. That is the nature of opinions, and we do not intend to censor them based on our evaluation of their validity. As the policy says, our "discerning readers" are more than capable of thinking for themselves.

In conclusion, I should note that although the policy does not reiterate the former guidelines' request for typed, double-spaced and concise letters, this editor would surely be pleased if your next letter appeared in that form. Happy writing!

As our photo-notice on page 3 indicates, we will not publish an issue on July 9, in keeping with our postal permit. In addition, I'll be on vacation until July 14, so there will be no Editor's Desk column in the issue of July 16. See you on the 23rd.

C-J Letters Policy

The Courier-Journal wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome all signed, original letters about current issues affecting Church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the Church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letter writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters. Mail them to: Letters to the Editor, Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.

Letters

Writer notes lack of justice or equality

To the Editor:

A few weeks ago, Bishop Clark asked our priests to start training girls to be altar servers, even though the liturgical norms of our Church still state very clearly that girls may not serve at the altar. Parents now have a dilemma. If we follow the bishop's lead and let our girls serve, then we are consenting and participating in teaching our children disobedience and disrespect for Church law.

Apparently the bishop's motives are based on justice and equality. But if you think about it, there is no complete justice or equality in this world, nor was there necessarily ever meant to be. Even our Lord Himself singled out certain apostles to have more privileges than the rest.

When the leadership of a diocese decides to put itself "above the law," it simply reinforces the Protestant theory that important decisions of right and wrong may be based on private opinions rather than on the firm foundation of Christ and His Church. The disastrous effects of such Protestant thinking are that we can end up with as many "churches" as there are people with differing ideas.

I urge parents and priests to think very seriously before allowing little

girls to become altar servers. We all know how difficult it is today to get children to respect even the simplest rules and regulations. They don't need encouragement from their religious leaders to be disobedient; that comes naturally. What they really need to see and hear is a reaffirmation of respect for authentic Church authority. And they need to learn the value of waiting, as well as the importance of accepting "no" in their lives. These are traits that will prepare them to say no to temptation and the pressures of the future. Justice, equality and "feeling happy" are worthy issues but hardly soul-saving issues.

Of course everyone knows the hidden agenda in all of this is to manipulate law. As the saying goes, "Custom dictates law." Soon Rome will be told, "Everyone is doing it, so make it legal." But do we really want our children taught defiance or manipulative techniques by the very ones who should be teaching them to follow Christ in humility and obedience?

Our bishop challenges us to explain to a little girl why she can't be an altar server! We have five children and have done this already three times. Our girls — ages 27, 19 and 8 — have had no difficulty accepting Church law. They have all been taught to re-

spect it as well as to realize that to love God is the most precious gift a child can have either inside or outside the sanctuary.

I suggest that our clergy show little girls the beauty of the hiddenness and humility of Christ and how it doesn't matter where they serve Him as long as they love Him above all things. If they walk away sad, they will get over it, unless they've been taught not to.

Now Bishop Clark says he is convinced that our Church is "impoverished" because some women feel wounded, unfulfilled, barred and excluded from making contributions to the Church. But let us look humbly at Christ our model: His whole life was spent in humility, submission and obedience. He who was everything was content to be nothing. He was God, and yet only once did He lead a service or preach in the temple. He spent 90 percent of His life in hiddenness and obscurity.

I ask you: Was Christ wasting His talents? Was He unhappy or unfulfilled? Was the Church impoverished because of it?

Mrs. Edward P. Schwenkler
West Church Street
Elmira

'Silent' observer voices support for bishop

To the Editor:

For many years I have been a member of the "silent majority," often intending to write that letter which somehow never materializes. I have followed with great concern the ongoing dialogue in the Courier-Journal's letters to the editor regarding the stance of Bishop Matthew Clark on some issues, nodding my head in vigorous agreement with some letters, shaking my head sadly at others.

Having ministered in this diocese for the past four years, I have only gratitude and respect for the leadership, the vision and the courage of Bishop Clark. I believe that he is a deeply spiritual man, one who is not afraid to publicly take a stand and question some issues and decisions coming from the Vatican which have nothing to do with faith or morals.

His most recent statement regarding the role of women in the

Church is an excellent example. Through centuries of church history, we have seen countless instances of change coming through the action of the Holy Spirit on the grass-roots level. That same Spirit is operative today. I pray that we not be quick to

condemn, but rather to ask to be open to the action of the Spirit at work in our time, in the Rochester diocese.

Sister Anita Rourke, r.c.
East Avenue
Rochester

Bishop Clark designated 'a great teacher'

To the Editor:

I like the way Bishop Clark, in his "Along the Way" column—which I never miss reading—presents to us his reflections and various issues or concerns of the Church such as the role of women in the Church in ministries not requiring ordination (June 4). He is a great teacher, for he is not only understanding and compassionate but very intelligent. And he does not underestimate the intelligence of the people he leads. For that, I respect him greatly.

I hope and pray that God will always give him the wisdom and courage for giving us his pastoral judgment about the life and growth of our local Church. I am not against criticism, but I cannot understand why some people attack Bishop Clark for whatever reason. Is it because there is so much hatred in their hearts that there is no room for Jesus?

Zdenka Tyr
Villevood Drive
Rochester

McBrien detractor insists God is no 'wimp'...

To the Editor:

After suffering in silence for some months over the McBrien column, I now feel compelled to write, after reading the column of June 4, in which Father McBrien bemoans a critic's "hardline Messiah."

Do Father McBrien and his followers believe that God is some sort of wimp? Sure. I can see him now, discussing an abortion a yuppie couple chose to have.

Couple: You know, Lord, it just wasn't the right time for us to have a

child. God: Hey, far be it from me to question your decision to kill your child. I guess I didn't realize just how upwardly mobile you two are at this point in your lives. Maybe we'll all try this again when you have obtained all your earthly desires.

God has never been a wimp. Just read the Bible. Jesus rid the temple of those using it for their earthly gains and desires.

Just how much manipulation of His Church and His teachings do you think the Lord will put up with? I believe in a merciful God, but he never has been an indecisive wimp!

Mary Ellen Frisch
Gillett Road
Spencerport

... while another reader balks at censorship

To the Editor:

Over the last 1,900 years, the Catholic Church has changed in many ways. If we put a clamp on the opinions of those who differ with the pope, we are doing a great injustice. Many past popes had ideas that were changed by succeeding popes.

I am in a small way trying to say we should not condemn men like Father Richard P. McBrien. Time will tell if he and others like him are right or wrong. This applies to the women as well.

James J. Liebel
Carling Road
Rochester

Critic protests 'direct slap in the face' of tradition ...

To the Editor:

Your use of the column of Richard McBrien (I won't give him a title of respect) was a direct slap in the face to traditional Catholics. For years, McBrien has been in the forefront of those tearing down the Church, this being covered up by the liberal media and the clergy.

McBrien has been called the American media's leading Vatican-basher. A recent article about him is called in part "Portrait of a Dissembler." I would like to see you use the writing of Joseph Sobran, who is a leading liberal/modernist-basher.

I talked to a young married woman today who had no idea of the extent of the damage to the Church, but expressed her dislike of priestly actions in several churches,

including their intransigence. All these people will start to add up.

John F. Starkweather
Middle Road
Rush

...and supporter hails diversity of opinion

To the Editor:

I want to express my appreciation for the inclusion of Father Richard McBrien's column in the Courier-Journal.

It has always been my experience that there is a lot of diversity in parish work. Father McBrien's column, in my opinion, brings some

diversity to the Courier that was very much needed.

Unity does not need to mean uniformity in all matters, and I am grateful to be able to read different opinions concerning issues.

Helen Halligan
Dewey Street
Churchville