

Editorial & Opinion

An Advent call to sample seasonal fruits of contemplation

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

In a few moments, I'll be leaving for the Pastoral Center to meet with the major superiors of the congregations of women and men religious who serve in the Diocese of Rochester. I expect that it will be a fruitful and productive day, not because we have a heavy agenda of things to do, but because we'll spend most of the time reflecting together on how we can better be with one another in the work of building up the Kingdom of God.

I look forward to the time as one totally consistent with the spirit of the Advent season and the attentiveness to which God calls us during these weeks of special preparation before Christmas. That call to attentiveness means different things to different people, according to the widely varied circumstances of our lives. To all of us, it should mean a desire and readiness to find the will of our God in all of our human experience and relationships. In addition to that search for deeper meaning in all of human experience, I believe the season calls us to a real patience with our limitations — even with our sins — because of our sure knowledge that God is faithful and God's love for us never ends.

It is relatively easy to note the above as the general call we share. It is a more difficult task to specify exactly how I or any one else responds to it in the concrete

Along
the Way

circumstances of daily life. I suppose attentiveness must include such things as a practical and consistent availability to those who in any way need us, a genuine effort to truly listen to those who speak to us from their hearts and an awareness of the times when others have no words, but still communicate with us in other ways.

A help in all of this may be a reminder that we are flesh and blood, that attentiveness involves not only the mind and the will but the gift of our wonderful senses as well. In keeping with that, let me encourage you during this season to pay particular attention to the aroma of food cooking, the scent of pine and incense. Try to take special delight in the splash of seasonal colors, and

be careful to distinguish between them. If you have the opportunity, listen to music that pleases you in some quiet, dark place so that you will be especially aware of the gift of hearing. Touch with a lingering care the hand of an infant, a piece of delicately carved wood, the skin of the person you most love.

Walter Burghart describes contemplation as a long, loving look at the real. I think he means that we get to deeper things only if we attend to the surface; that we come to the lasting only when we are somehow in touch with the passing; that we are in touch with what we hold in common only when we are attentive to the distinct and the particular.

To you, my dear friends, I extend the same invitation I have offered in different ways several times before. It is to become more aware of the meaning of life as it swirls around you each day, and to do that by taking some time each day to collect it and to hold it before the Lord in simple offering. The fruits of such experiences are often greater insight into what really matters to us, and a capacity to be more available at the center of ourselves to those who most count on us.

Finally, let me encourage you once again even at the risk of nagging you — to speak your experience of life to someone who loves you.

Peace to all.

Letters

Writer encourages
activists to unite

To the editor:

In response to Mary Ellen Frisch's letter of November 26 ("Protest legal killing, not warheads"), I must suggest that reality can be arrived at from many perspectives. (Ms. Frisch) would serve herself better through a more magnanimous regard for that of others.

Yes, it is sadly true that innocent lives are lost every day through legalized abortion. Protest against this human tragedy is necessary and appropriate. It is also true that an incalculable number of innocent lives are destroyed through poverty and malnutrition, before and after birth, while we squander our resources on weapons of destruction. This, too, is reality.

Nuclear proliferation is more than a "potential" hazard. It is a willful, violent aggression against humankind that proposes to convert the earth into an ultimate abortuary, if deemed necessary. This, again, is an undeniable reality.

Protests against nuclear warheads, whether at the Nevada test site, the Seneca Army Depot or the Pentagon are usually treated as prayerful, solemn and holy events. The one referred to in Ms. Frisch's letter, however, was an exception since it was a commemoration of the life of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement. Dorothy Day was early in her outspoken and passionate opposition to abortion. She understood well the common denominator of violence in all forms of institutionalized killing, be it in war making, capital punishment, abortion or poverty. She understood that peace must be waged consistently on all fronts.

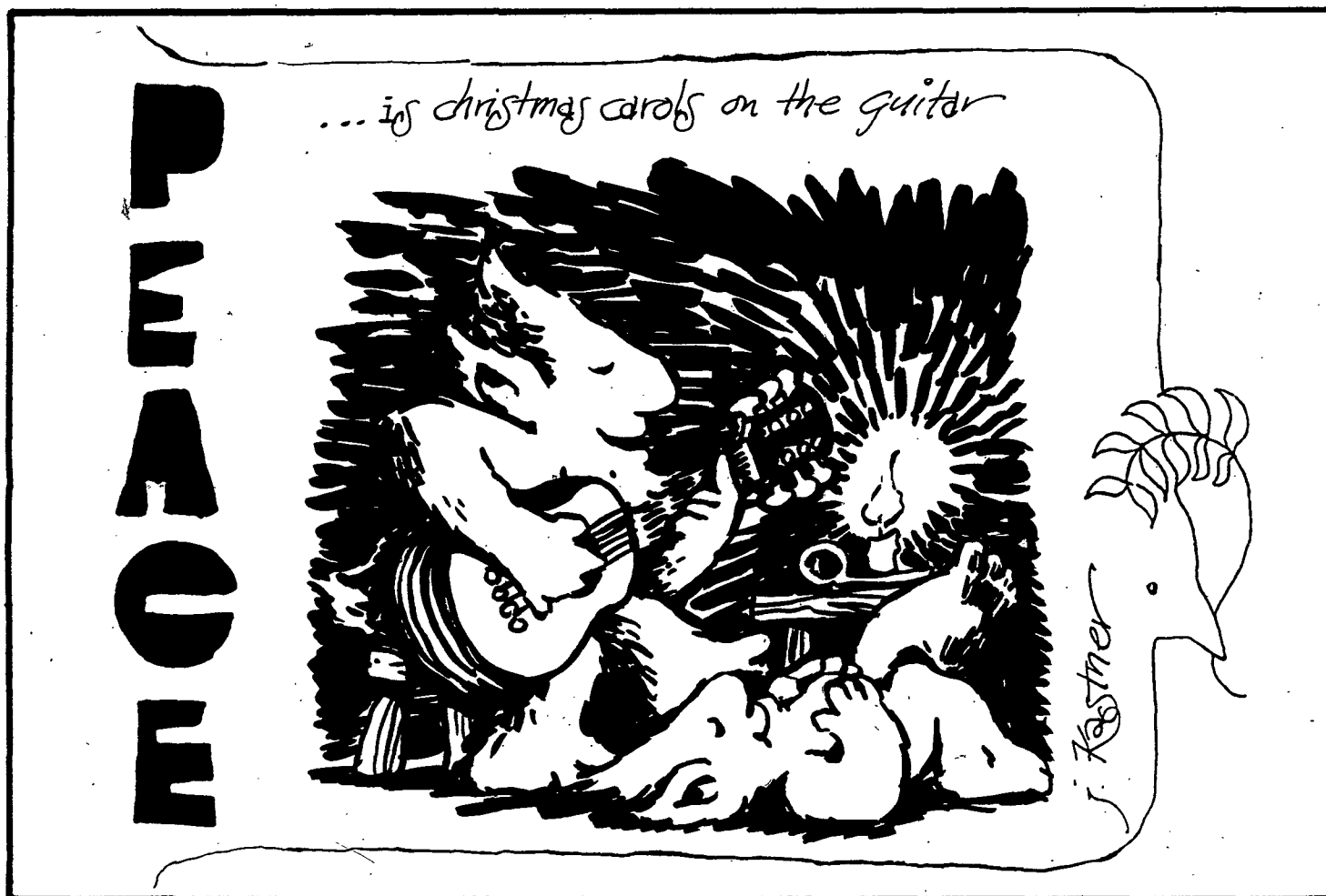
Those who act against one form of violence deserve the respect and support of those who commit to work in opposition to another. For those who cannot act against one without working against all, the burden is greater, the need for support even stronger. To denigrate or minimize the efforts of others who seek to act against violence or injustice in any arena is counter-productive and, frankly, less than Christ-like.

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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 ex-pressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the Church. We will



An unchanging Church awaits returning ex-Catholics

To the editor:

Ex-Catholics were the stated theme of Father McBrien's column of November 5, but as with any other of Father's columns, the underlying message was one of criticism directed both at the pope and those true to Catholic teachings on faith and morals.

To refresh your memory, Father McBrien infers in his article that ex-Catholics who saw hope in the dissenters are further driven away from the Church when the "Pope . . . reassures them . . . that today's Church is still the same old Church they quit — strict about sex, unyielding on marriage rules, intolerant of independent thought and insensitive to the gender gap."

How can Father McBrien tolerate being intimately associated with a Church that's "strict," "unyielding," "intolerant" and "insensitive?" And further how can he be the effective witness he ought to be for that Church?

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.

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Reading Father McBrien always causes me an intense sorrow, but on this one occasion, I couldn't help but thanking God for Father's pointing out that the Roman Catholic Church is still the same Church that wants to welcome ex-Catholics back; that it is still one, holy, Catholic and apostolic; that it will always have Christ at its head; that its teachings on faith and morals haven't changed with the winds and foibles of time for over 2000 years.

Let's look more closely at Father McBrien's statement, "The Church . . . is strict about sex." Yes, that's true, but then, so are the commandments, so is the Bible, Christ's own words. And maybe even nature tells us the same message that the Church is telling us. That message is this: If one chooses not to be sexually chaste but rather to fornicate, commit adultery or sodomize, nature is saying, "You do it, you die!" You literally do die from the sexually contracted AIDS virus, but other sexually transmitted diseases may leave you permanently scarred, prone to genital cancer, infertile. Nature is strict as she deals with the body. Shouldn't the Church be even stricter when she has to deal with the life and well-being of the soul?

Next, the Church is "unyielding on marriage rules." In a society where 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce, it would almost seem that we yield too much. The Church does and should urge healing in a troubled marriage, not departure. Divorce doesn't simply mean the separation of two individuals, it means the breakup of a family! And we all need families individually and as a society in order to survive.

Is the Church "intolerant of independent thought?" Or may it be that it is only intolerant of destructive criticism? Our minds are so finite, the good God gave us a fail-safe method of preserving the truth in the areas of faith and morals. He has given the pope when speaking ex cathedra or in union with the body of the magisterium an inability to err in faith and morals. The pope not only has the right to teach us these truths; he has the obligation. Once he has spoken therefore, all the "independent thought" in the world can't change the truth.

Lastly, maybe the Church is "insensitive to the gender gap." I know for sure nature is! That natural difference in me — as I differ from man — has allowed me to bear and mother five beautiful children. No man can ever have the joy of that experience. It is unique to women. We alone have that extraordinary ministry. Men have different and complementary ministries to ours. The Church seems to recognize our differences in a society that is bent on the "unisexual" ideal.

The Church must make it perfectly clear to our ex-Catholic brothers and sisters that they are always welcome back. The arms of a never changing, always faithful friend await you. They await not to give you an easy way, a worldly way, but to give you a way that needs courage, strength and humility. The only way that gives "the peace surpassing understanding."

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