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Editorial & Opinion

Creating awareness of vocation-discernment programs

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

In recent months much has appeared in the Courier-Journal and in this column about our diminishing number of priests and about the remarkable emergence of dedicated and skilled lay ministers. We have been trying to study these phenomena and, in light of that study, to plan for the adjustments we'll all have to make. The current round of regional assemblies is an important piece of that work. My hope is that these assemblies will make our parish communities more aware than they generally are now that the adjustments to be made are upon us. They are not far off in the future. In addition to bringing home the reality of our needs and opportunities, my hope is that these regional assemblies will convince people that we will face these issues in the best possible way when we do so together.

I discovered in the midst of these discussions that some people have a sense that we no longer put much emphasis on the ordained priesthood or at least that we don't promote vocations to the diocesan priesthood as strongly as we once did. That perception has been of some concern to me, because I want to promote vocations to the diocesan priesthood as vigorously as I possibly can. And so does Father Tom Valenti, whom I have asked to offer leadership in this effort. Tom and I have spoken often about this, most recently last week.

Improvement is always possible, I suppose, but I am convinced that we have a thoughtful and very solid program in place to encourage young men to think about the priesthood and to assist them strongly when they be-

Along the Way



gin to do so

Let me give you some information on this issue. Since January of this year, Tom has personally interviewed at length 37 young men who are interested in the priesthood. At the present time, 34 young men have gone beyond the interview stage to participate in one of four programs designed to help them explore more deeply the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood. Seventeen of these men are in our high school Seek Program; seven are in our college/post-college Seek Program; six are in the Affiliate Group and four are at Becket Hall. (In addition to these men, we have six students at the level of theological studies and five others who have begun these studies but are now on leaves of absence.) These programs are designed to help individuals at different levels of interest and maturity, but all involve close personal guidance by Tom and those who work with him, plus the prayer and support of peers.

How do young men find out about these programs? They are often referred to Tom by parish staff members and campus ministers. Other make contact by returning to Tom the tear-off inquiry cards attached to vocation posters. Others have come forward from Teen Retreat programs and from the youth retreats held during the summer at the University of Steubenville.

We celebrate Vocation Awareness Week in our diocese beginning this Sunday. Posters and new brochures promoting priesthood are being distributed to all Catholic high schools in the diocese. A mailing will be sent to all youth ministers. That mailing will include the brochures and an offer to present a discernment session for the parish youth group. Every pastor will receive 10 copies of the brochure with the request that each brochure be put into the hand of a young man whom the pastor wishes to invite to consider priesthood. In addition, homilies on vocation awareness will be offered in our parish communities this Sunday.

We can't expect this special week to work magic, but we can pray that the effort will, among other good things, place the ordained priesthood before possible candidates as a worthwhile and deeply satisfying choice in life. I know that it is for me.

If any of you desire further information about our work to promote vocations to the priesthood, please contact your pastor or write to Father Tom Valenti at 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624 or call him at (716) 328-3210.

Peace to all.

'What does it take to offend' C-J?

To the editor:

What does it take to offend our local Catholic paper? Our Lord and Savior is shown fornicating, is shown as a fool and a wimpy character. He curses the poor and the sick. The apostles depicted as money grabbers and self serving. Judas is the only decent one. At the last supper the bread and wine change back to real flesh and blood and they puke it out. His mother Mary tells everyone he is crazy and not to pay any attention to him.

The most revered convictions of our faith are being assaulted. For God's sake where do you draw the line? Your reviewers (C-J September 8: "Panel finds 'Last Temptation' weak, flawed film") all found some things wrong with the film, but they all seemed to find more things to praise. Father Falcone says that he is not sure that the picture is an acceptable human portrait of Christ. What possibly could be more unacceptable? Your editor Karen Franz saw the film thinking that she would be repulsed — but she evidently wasn't. The former theology teacher of Nazareth seemed to be most offended because the film emphasized old stereotypes of women. The deacon candidate said that the film was certainly not blasphemous although he found many parts offensive, but most of these are excused because the director Scorcese is a great artist and these are artistic liberties, a disclaimer at the start of the film excuses all. Are these the people whose opinions we should respect? Why didn't you ask the leaders of Citizens for a Decent Community for their opinion of this film.

No, I did not see the film. My time was spent on the picket line and in church praying along with hundreds of others — you paper didn't even report the holy hours at Holy Rosary — in reparation for this insult. I read parts of the screenplay and reviews of this film in other Catholic papers whose opinion I trust. Their opinion was that the film was certainly blasphemous and a direct and intended insult to Christ and our faith.

I suppose it is useless to ask the *Courier-Journal* and the diocese to support a boycott of the Little Theater and Universal Studios in this matter.

It's a good thing that Christ in the movie didn't say that women priests would never be allowed in His church or the wrath of the bishop and diocese would certainly descend on the movie and its makers. Insulting Christ and our

Letters

faith however, is perfectly alright and even to be encouraged.

John D. Foy Shore Acres Drive Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: Only because inaccurate or misinterpreted synopses of this film have already caused so much consternation, I feel obliged to point out that information in Mr. Foy's first paragraph is largely inaccurate. The reality of the matter isn't much better, however.

For the record, I wasn't repulsed by the film; it's too preposterous to inspire such a strong emotion. It's a pathetic excuse for a movie, and were it not for the protests, it would have been a box-office disaster — exactly what Scorcese and Universal deserved for making a film that offended so many people, myself included.

Also for the record, the Courier-Journal would have publicized the prayer services at Holy Rosary if they had been announced before we went to press. Unfortunately, the threeday delay between our final deadline and the actual delivery of the paper to readers' homes frequently leaves us unable to disseminate lastminute announcements.

Thanks active retired priests

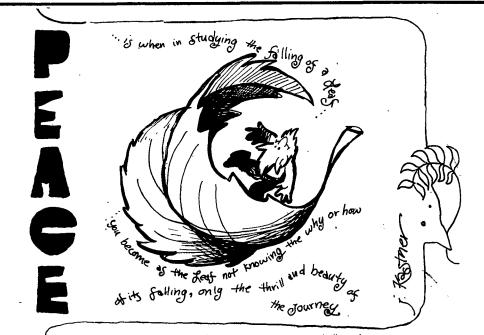
To the editor

This letter is written in response to an article written by Lee Strong in the *Courier-Journal* (of) Thursday, September 15, 1988 ("Parishes assemble to avert staffing crisis").

He stated that today, the diocese has approximately 240 active priests. This statistic does not include several retired ACTIVE priests, dedicated priests, serving and assisting parishes all over the diocese, spreading the "Good News" and sharing their invaluable experience in faith to all of the faithful.

May God bless them, one and all, and may God give them the strength and health to continue in God's work.

Jane A. Compitello East Genesee Street Clyde



Protesters lacked Christian attitude

To the editor:

On Thursday night, Sept. 1, I went to the Little Theatre to join the protesters there for the showing of *The Last Temptation of Christ*. I was appalled and saddened by the spectacle I witnessed.

I expected a peaceful, ecumenical prayer vigil in reparation for the distorted character of Jesus portrayed in the movie. Instead, I saw fanatic Bible-thumping Christians using bull-horns to shove Christianity down the throats of moviegoers and passers-by alike.

Movie patrons were yelling obscenities at the preachers, and others looked on with amazement and reacted with laughter. This is Christianity?

I felt that I could not join this type of protest, so I moved across the street to pray my rosary. I was now subjected to a more serious assault. One of these so-called Christians passing out literature approached me and proceeded to attack my Catholic faith, demean the rosary, inform me that I was not saved and that Catholics still have Jesus on the Cross.

I have interacted with fundamentalist, evangelical Christians frequently in the last few

years, and my patience with their contempt for Catholicism finally came to an end. The anger and frustration I experienced that night remains with me. I am sick of their bigotry and ignorance of Catholicism, and I am tired of their endless efforts to convert Catholics.

If these Christians were truly Christ-like, then they would be more respectful of other people's faiths. They should stop blindly believing the ignorant and completely false premises that their leaders teach about Catholicism, and use the intelligence God gave them to learn the truth. The God they believe in is a narrowminded, intolerant God who condemns all who do not subscribe to their brand of Christianity. Where is their Christian love?

I hope and pray that all Christians can overlook their doctrinal differences and move ahead together against the evil in our society. I appeal to all my fellow Christians, and I ask for more understanding, love and respect for each other.

Janet Parulski Lakecrest Avenue Rochester

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

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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: Courier-Journal, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY, 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.

Columnist's criticism violates objective policy

To the editor:

One of the features I admire most about the Courier-Journal is the objectivity of including the four columnists every week. As family members of a universal — catholic — community, it is obvious that we do not all, nor can, think alike. These columnists, especially Fathers Paul Cuddy and Richard McBrien, help us celebrate the fact that we can be different yet still love and respect one another.

In the August 25 issue, however, Father Cuddy's column concentrated on criticizing an earlier column by Father McBrien, in which Father McBrien expressed his sadness over the bishops' recent decision to collaborate with Mother Angelica's Eternal Word Television Network. I found the critical nature of Father Cuddy's column a violation of the objectivity I've come to enjoy in the Courier-Journal. Father McBrien's column is a nationally syndicated piece, and he has no opportunity to criticize Father Cuddy's column — nor do I think he would if he had the opportunity. Let's keep these columns self-contained. If Father Cuddy or the Courier-Journal wishes to have a debate on this or any other subject, then let's create guidelines for a fair one. This kind of bad-mouthing is not respectful — and certainly not an instrument of growth for the readers.

Ray Repp Frontenac Road Trumansburg