

# Should 'occasional' column's evolution continue?

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

*Along the Way* has been appearing in the *Catholic Courier* since early in 1983. I remember doing the first column at the end of a short retreat I made at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

In that column or one that appeared shortly thereafter, the editor appended the note that I would be writing occasionally for the paper in the future. Since then I have written the column almost every week except during the month of July and during my recent sabbatical leave. It is a way of being in contact with thousands of good friends each week and, for that reason, it has been work I have found pleasant and very much worthwhile.

Over the years many readers have been kind enough to tell me that they read the column regularly and that it has been helpful to them from time to time. Those who comment kindly on the effort very often say that they have come to know me better through reading it. That has always pleased me a great deal because I have considered the column to be more an informal, personal means of communication than a for-

mal, issue-oriented enterprise. Others have commented, no less kindly, that they would welcome occasional, more lengthy pieces that would treat more formally and in more depth timely theological and pastoral themes.

This question was among those to which I gave some thought while I was on sabbatical and about which I have been thinking since I returned. The idea of longer contributions about significant issues appeals to me. For example, I could follow the practice of my friend, Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany, who does a monthly piece of 2,000-2,500 words.

I have explored this possibility with Karen Franz, and it seems that we could work out an arrangement along those lines. If we were to adopt that format, we would not lack for issues to treat each month. Think of the recent attention we have given to such questions such as Christian Formation, Stewardship, Vocations to Diocesan Priesthood and other church ministries; life issues; and questions of church structure and evangelization.

Another possibility might be to develop

some pattern combining the current format and the one outlined above. For example, it might be possible to develop a longer monthly piece and to do two or three other columns each month using the present format. And, obviously, we could retain the format we have been using for the past six years.

I don't want to change just for the sake of change, but I do think there can be some benefit derived from looking at our established patterns and changing them from time to time. Such adjustments can often bring new perspectives and fresh impetus to our efforts. And so I want to ask for your advice.

Should we keep the usual format for *Along the Way*? Should we move to a longer monthly piece that deals more in depth with a significant pastoral or theological theme? Do you favor some combination of these two? Or some other possibility?

If you have a response to my question, please share it with me the next time we meet or drop a line to me at 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624.

Thanks and peace to you.



Along The Way



## Writer says develop religious education programs

To the editor:

I was educated in Catholic schools and appreciate the people who made that possible. I know this is a difficult time for many who are faced with their schools closing, but I, for one, wish that all the parish schools would close.

My wife works at home to be with our children, and I work in the human-service field. We cannot — or choose not to — afford a Catholic education for our children. I resent very much being asked by our church to contribute to the school to subsidize those families who can afford the tuition.

I wish, instead, that all families sent their children to public school so they might share our concern for developing a comprehensive religious-education program for all children in our parish. I would like

to see religious-education classes more than once a week, and look for other ways to support spiritual, moral and religious development among children and families.

Support of a parish school frequently takes half of a church's revenue. There is never enough money. Though we know that spirituality should be the center of church life, more often it is fundraising that holds this place of honor. As the parish schools require the majority of church resources, most other worthy causes require their separate fundraisers. It's hard to get out of church some days without buying fruit, flowers, candy bars and pledging 10 cents a unit for walkathons, rockathons or bowlathons. I'll be happier when church collections will support some of the worthy activities that now have separate fundraising efforts. This can only happen if the

schools stop draining church resources. My hope for parish school closings is not related to the quality of Catholic education. I think they've done a good job. But there is a question of affordability. The schools require so much time and money that we're missing other opportunities.

Jerry Callan  
Rawlinson Road  
Rochester

## More school studies needed, writer says

To the editor:

For several years now, the existence of many Catholic schools has been in jeopardy primarily due to rising tuition costs and declining enrollment. Until now, the final solution has been to close the schools that could no longer operate. To alleviate future problems, the Diocese of Rochester has now hired a committee to investigate putting all Catholic elementary schools under diocesan control.

While I'm sure their intentions are good, the committee has failed to include principals, teachers, and most importantly parents, in the decision-making process. I am one of many parents affected by a consolidation.

Though the northeast quadrant — Irondequoit and bordering areas of the city — not the northwest are those in financial trouble, the plan will encompass all grammar schools in the diocese. Therefore a school might be able to sustain itself now, but will it if things change? Tuition rates will rise. A family rate will be replaced by one figured on a per child basis. Rising costs could lower enrollment. The parish would maintain the school building, but the diocese would own them.

A better idea would be to use the northeast quadrant as an experiment, leaving the rest to operate independently. Examine the proposal at work before risking declining enrollment and higher tuition. Or better yet, do further studies before the planned implementation for the 1990-91 school year.

Parents ultimately finance and decide where their children are educated. The new tax laws no longer allow deductions for private school tuition. The new plan will raise costs even more. "Neighborhood" schools will cease to exist, while prohibitive costs may catalyze the end of Catholic education. Why drastically disrupt a system if it works, while drowning out the parental voice that funds it?

Laura Foley  
Ridge Meadows Drive  
Spencerport

## Priest corrects misquote and explains position on controversial book

To the editor:

In an article concerning the proposed Pre-Cana couples' manual *When Families Marry*, I was misquoted (*Courier*, May 25: "Pre-Cana book draws ire of parish team members"). What I actually said was "(The manual) gives the couples the options balanced by certain information that they need to make an informed conscience decision." And what is an informed conscience? It is my own best judgment as to how God would have me act in a particular situation, which judgment is reached through the prayerful choice of a particular option after careful consideration of the pros and cons of that option and the teach-

ings of the Church's bishops and theologians about the situation being considered. In my judgment, objective truthful medical information about the pros and cons of various methods of birth control is required in order for couples to make an informed conscience decision.

The Pre-Cana team couples quoted in the article imply that the engaged couples who come to Pre-Cana cannot be trusted to use the birth control information responsibly. I believe that the couples who come to Pre-Cana are adults and should be treated as such. Give them the information. Trust them to use it responsibly. Urge them to pray over their decision. And remind them

that whatever brings them closer together is God's plan for them; whatever draws them apart is not.

In conclusion, I once again affirm *When Families Marry* as a realistic, sound, factual, and responsible Catholic marriage preparation manual. I am the former diocesan director of Family Life, responsible for Pre-Cana Conferences from 1970 to 1977.

Father Robert L. Collins  
St. Thomas More Church  
Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the article in question, the word "conscience" was inadvertently omitted from Father Collins' statement.

## Women religious voice opposition to death penalty return

To the editor:

It was heartening to read the statement of the Rochester Area Religious Leaders and Genesee Ecumenical Ministries in which they unanimously and unequivocally spoke against the reinstatement of the death penalty in New York State.

We add our endorsement to their statement and we urge citizens to consider the overwhelming evidence as to the inefficacy of the death penalty as a deterrent for major crimes. Statistically, states which have the death penalty have a higher incidence of capital crimes, the appeal process is lengthy and more costly than incarceration, and innocent persons have been executed in the past.

As citizens of this state, what is most objectionable to us is the fact that, in imposing such a punishment, the state would be acting in our names to take a human life.

Lawmakers have every opportunity to study the evidence against the effectiveness of the death penalty and have an obligation

by reason of their office to consider the moral reasons against the state's acting as an instrument of violence. If our lawmakers choose to act contrary to evidence and morality, we as citizens have the right to know why, and the explanation must be stronger than political expediency in response to a climate of panic and fear over criminal activities. Lawmakers in our state need to be more committed to addressing the root causes of serious crime rather than proposing a simplistic and violent response like the death penalty.

Sister Elizabeth Anne LeValley  
and Council  
Superior General, Sisters of St. Joseph  
of Rochester  
Sister Jean Marie Kearse and Council  
Superior General, Sisters of Mercy  
of Rochester  
Sister Dolores Banick  
Vicar for Religious,  
Diocese of Rochester



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