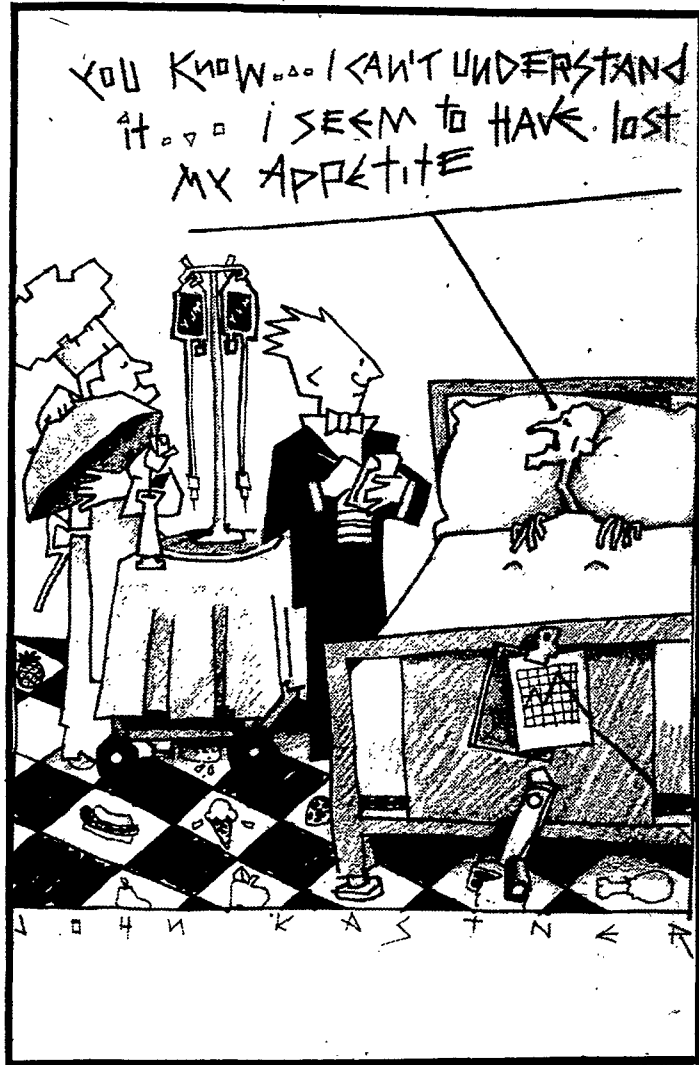


Sustenance is a human right



By the end of this month, the U.S. Supreme Court will likely decide whether to allow Nancy Cruzan to starve to death.

"Starve to death." The words evoke brutal images of swollen-bellied children and concentration-camp inmates, of painful, gnawing hunger and wasting limbs.

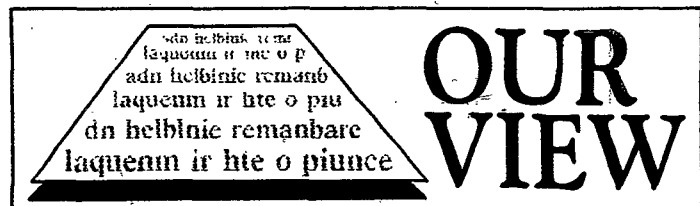
But equally compelling is the contorted image of the 32-year-old Cruzan, who has lain in a "persistent vegetative state" since her brain was damaged — irreversibly, her doctors say — in a 1983 car accident.

Although her eyes appear to follow movement, and she reacts to sounds and painful stimuli, doctors consider these motor functions to be mere reflexes.

Cruzan's parents are appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court for permission to stop their daughter's feeding by artificial means — a tube into her stomach. They assert that their daughter would have preferred to die of starvation rather than to face the prospect of living another 30 years without any awareness of herself or her surroundings, or any reasonable hope for improvement.

Food and water are the most basic of necessities, the most fundamental of human rights. Our impulse is to reject any attempt to deny such sustenance to another human being — particularly one who is incapacitated by age or illness.

But is artificially administered food and water an ordinary means of sustaining life, or should it be considered extraordinary medical treatment? What kinds of treatment are hospitals and nursing homes obliged



to provide, and how much life-support are patients morally or legally obliged to accept?

In its November, 1984, document, *Guidelines for Legislation on Life-Sustaining Treatment*, the Committee for Pro-Life Activities of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote that "certain basic measures such as ... hydration, nourishment and the like must be maintained out of respect for the human dignity of every patient."

In an April, 1989, pastoral letter on treatment for dying patients, Florida's bishops stipulated that such life-sustaining measures as artificial nutrition and hydration could be withdrawn if such measures were useless — because the patient's death was imminent — or "excessively burdensome" — painful, destructive of the patient's body, psychologically repugnant to the patient, suppressive of the patient's mental life or prohibitively expensive.

The total care of a patient like Nancy Cruzan may be a burden, but as the pastoral letter points out, "it is the burden of this particular treatment that must be judged, not the burden of the person's life itself. We can never justify the withdrawal of sustenance on the basis of the quality of life of the patient."

In other words, the quality of Nancy Cruzan's life may indeed be dismal, but we cannot judge it to be without value.

— The Editors

Christians in Action founder challenges letter's criticism

To the editor:

You recently published (Jan. 25, 1990) a "Letter to the Editor" from a Joanne K. Palmer in which she encouraged Catholics to keep their distance from the groups Project Life of Rochester and Christians in Action. As the founder of both agencies, I felt it my duty to respond to Ms. Palmer's letter by letting your readers know what these two groups really do — the facts, that is.

I might start by pointing out that Ms. Palmer has implicated herself in a Sept. 25, 1989, "Letter to the Editor" of the Rochester Gannett newspaper as being among those who demonstrate for "choice" ...

Project Life enjoys the hearty endorsement of over 80 of Rochester's Protestant clergy. Fifty different Protestant pastors are in regular attendance at our area pastor's conferences, weekly pro-life dem-

onstrations, and even our rescue missions. Over 25 percent of our annual funding comes from local Protestant churches including many prominent churches such as Bethel Full Gospel in downtown Rochester. If, as Ms. Palmer asserts, we have "failed in our attempt to gain support from recognized Protestant churches ...", I would like to see what success would be.

Christians in Action is anything but an attempt "to find disciples" in the Catholic church for our "own political agenda." In

fact, Christians in Action is a service agency designed to assist churches in mobilizing their people for Christian ministry. Five area Protestant ministers and a Catholic priest make up the majority of our board of directors. Churches as far away as Spokane, Wash., are already requesting our services in helping them start a housing ministry for unwed mothers.

Several prominent national leaders have commented the vision and work of Christians in Action, including Pat Robinson of

the CBN 700 Club and Dennis Peacocke of Strategic Christian Services, Santa Rosa, Calif.

But then again, what would Ms. Palmer know of people she has only seen from across the street? I would challenge Ms. Palmer and the readers of your paper to get the facts about Project Life and Christians in Action.

David Long
Project Life

Southeast needs alternate junior high configuration

To the editor:

I'm writing to clarify a statement I made in the article (Jan. 18) which covered the school closings within the Southeast Quadrant. While the System Framework plan does recommend regional Junior Highs it does allow for an alternative con-

figuration if substantial reasons can be given.

Being a member of the Southeast Quadrant planning committee we worked diligently to come up with a facility within the quadrant that could be used for a Junior High. Likewise the Commission could not find a building or even two that could be used to provide a program for our Junior High students that would be equitable with the Northeastern Catholic Junior High. The buildings that were chosen are not large enough for our numbers and do not allow for the variety of programs that are needed at the Junior High level. Also there is simply not enough time to put those programs into place by this September.

Being a Junior High teacher I do believe in the Junior High concept: We do need Junior Highs with enough students to offer

programs that are educationally sound as well as affordable. I also believe that the Southeast Quadrant is unique because of its geographical layout. Transportation is a major concern for not only the suburban parents but the city parents as well.

Because of our geographical spread and the fact that we have a large number of students already coming from outside of Monroe County the Southeast Quadrant must look to an alternative Junior High configuration which will offer quality programs and be within reasonable distance for all our students. While the finances are a major factor in our restructuring I do not believe that either the Bishop or the Commission would sacrifice quality for money.

Sister Helen Lynch, principal
Good Shepherd School

Church condemns sinful acts, not sinners

To the editor:

The recent *Catholic Courier* article "Disease works mixed messages" (Nov. 23) related the plight of two suffering individuals; a homosexual and an AIDS victim.

This front page article then went on to criticize the church for being callous and judgmental.

Examining these charges and the role of the church, it should be obvious that the church's primary mission is to save souls.

Homosexual acts are sinful. Sex outside of marriage is sinful. If AIDS were not a punishment from almighty God then why

do those who indulge in sex outside of marriage contract AIDS?

AIDS then can be viewed as a punishment or as an opportunity to repent.

Certainly our Lord wants us to save our souls.

While there are those who have contracted AIDS through no fault of their own, the vast majority of AIDS sufferers brought it on themselves.

By condemning sinful acts, not sinners, the church echoes our Lord's advice when he said: "Go and sin no more."

Robert Bart
Ithaca

Reader supports Courier, bishop, columnist

To the editor:

My wife and I read carefully most of the articles and editorials that appear in the *Catholic Courier* each week. We find that the *Courier* presents much that is useful to us in evaluating our own thinking on social, political and ethical issues. In this rapidly changing world (evidenced so strongly in Eastern Europe at this time), there is a need for everyone to constantly review and evaluate fundamental beliefs and commitments.

We wish to express our very strong positive support for the courageous positions that have been taken frequently by Bishop

Clark. His intellectual and spiritual wisdom illustrates the very best that we see in the Catholic Church.

We also wish to endorse and support the bold, creative, and intelligent ideas presented by Father McBrien. For those who wish to "bury their heads in the sand" and not deal with evolving social and political issues, all of which have ethical and religious significance, he is naturally offensive. To us his is a breath of fresh air. Please encourage him to write more.

Joseph D. Novak, Ph.D.
Ithaca

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