

# Question the hero, but not his kids' needs

Whether Father Bruce Ritter is guilty of bad judgment or corruption, his present troubles reinforce nagging doubts about the trust we place in people we publicly admire.

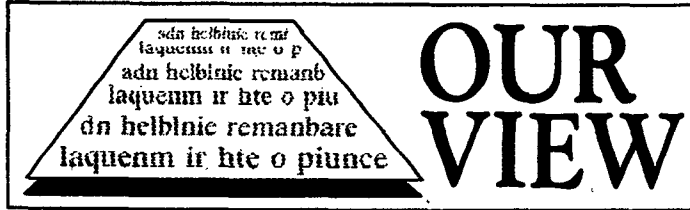
That kind of doubt recently emerged regarding a proposal to rename a Rochester school after Nelson Mandela. Don't get carried away with elation over Mandela's release, opponents of the move warned. Don't name any babies or buildings in his honor. So long as he's alive, he can still let us down.

Not even martyrdom can safeguard a public figure's reputation, as damaging revelations about President John F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King have demonstrated.

Certainly, we ought to pin our faith to eternal values, not fallible humans. But it's difficult to watch as yet another hero is tarnished.

Father Ritter was one of those rare people who, like Mother Teresa, draws approval from Catholics across the ideological spectrum. Beyond politics, beyond theological debate, his care for society's throwaways, his determination not to turn a kid away and never to abandon hope for conversion seemed to trace the route a modern-day Jesus would follow should he suddenly appear in midtown Manhattan.

There is, as yet, no conclusive evidence supporting allegations that Father Ritter engaged in sexual relationships with several Covenant House clients. In-



investigators may never find enough evidence to definitively prove or disprove those charges.

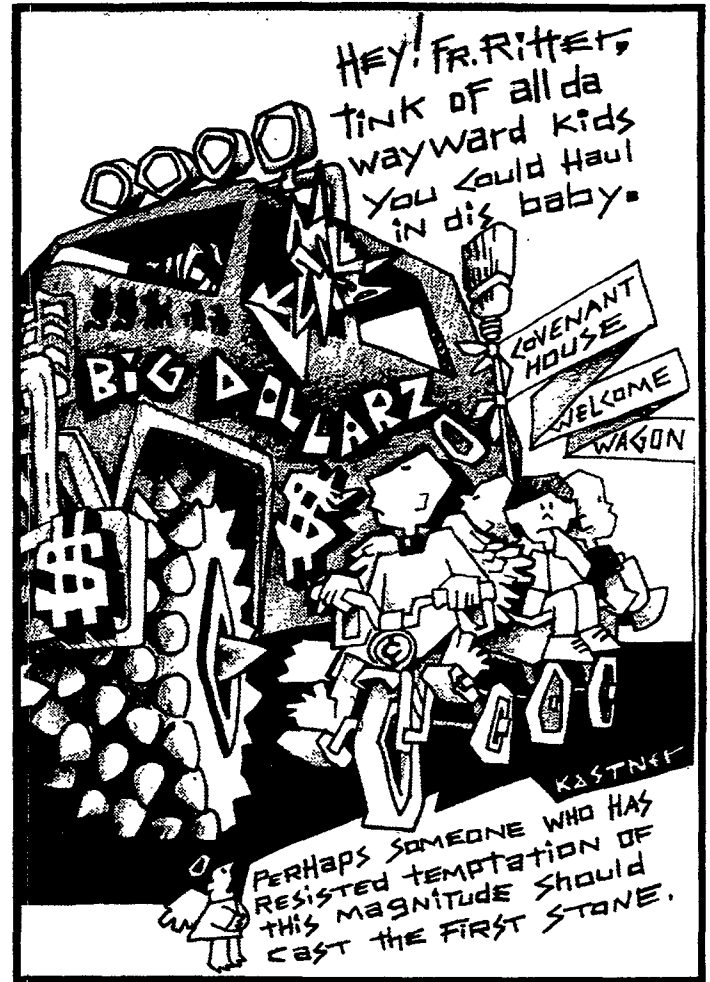
But many of those who at first rose indignantly to Father Ritter's defense are now holding their tongues as the wave of ugly charges continues to crest, and as investigators turn up apparent instances in which Covenant House funds were inappropriately used.

Amazed, we read of hundred-thousand-dollar salaries, trust funds and personal loans for executives who administered Covenant House programs? How could the man who never let us forget about the kids who slept on his floor allow Covenant House to become a trough for "poverty pimps" who skimmed profits from funds meant to help runaways.

Perhaps time will reveal Father Ritter as a martyr to media-fueled rumors and speculation. Or we may yet be astounded by proof of his duplicity.

But whatever happens to him, the principles Father Ritter espoused remain irreproachable, and those he served still need our help as desperately as ever.

— The Editors



# Return to confession might restore deteriorating values

To the editor:

As Catholics, most of us are aware of a world that seems to be rapidly deteriorating in values. We have literally stood by and watched our society be de-Christianized. Today many of the television programs or radio broadcasts tend to range from offensive to obscene, not to mention the magazines and books published today. Our Government officials have taken it upon themselves to rewrite the Ten Commandments, by passing laws that

allow abortion, and doctors have found a need to rewrite the Hypocratic Oath in order to justify the murdering of unborn children. The most astounding factor that exists, is that many of these people claim to be Christian. Has Jesus changed his mind about the things he considered right or wrong???

I'm sure there are experts out there furiously trying to determine what is happening to our society, and how we can better educate people to stop the rapid dete-

rioration in our society's values. We will often find these changes attributed to divorce, substance abuse or even blamed on the Vietnam War. What many of our experts fail to realize is that these are only the end results of a more serious change that has taken place. Until the cause is directly addressed, the likelihood of a return to higher values is improbable.

When Vatican II introduced communal penance services, this seemed to be the license to many Catholics not to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation. This ruling's purpose was not to replace reconciliation with a communal penance service. But since this is the sacrament least liked and the most difficult, we have chosen to interpret it in this manner. ...

If we understand that reconciliation is a

determining factor in bringing back a consciousness of sin, we have to realize that this may be the key to many of the problems we face today with declining values, low self-esteem, suicide, abortion, and substance abuse, the list goes on and on. ...

I don't have all the answers, but it might not be a bad idea to remove communal penance services from our churches, since it has only been used as a convenience. Christ's life and death was not a "convenience," nor was it "easy." The least we could do, is the return to the confessional. It may not be a bad idea for our priests to reeducate us on the importance of confession. Ultimately we aren't going to change the values, if we don't attack the root of the problem. ...

Stephanie Jones Penfield

# Coordinator claims DOVE article missed program's justice aspect

To the editor:

It was good to see a reference to the DOVE Program in the feature article, "Church aims at stereotypes that write off elderly," in the March 8 *Catholic Courier*. However, the program as you report it is rather inaccurately represented, and the following important points need to be noted.

DOVE was and is established in a Church Social Ministries context precisely because it contains a challenge to stereotypes. It views all people as precious in God's sight and as mutually dependent on each other for care and concern. It was purposefully introduced on Respect Life Sunday as a way of living daily a reverence for all life and of doing regular work for unity and peace after the words of St. Augustine: "There will be one Christ Loving Himself." DOVE views elderly or disabled parishioners as indeed quite capable of ministry to one another, as the semi-homebound Mary Bertino clearly noted. Nor is it limited to the homebound; it promotes companionship, activity, respite care, Eucharistic visits, support care, child care, newborn focus, and opportunities for communication and relationship building among all ages and faiths and regardless of the nature of the need. It is, quite simply, not a "service program" in the conventional sense, but a response to marginalization, isolation and violence and a way of both reflecting divine love and recognizing the role of every person as a minister and potential saint. At the same time, it calls us to see caregiving as a human activity flowing from one vulnerable heart to another and not as an "act of charity" by the powerful

"helping" the powerless. DOVE volunteers are asked first and foremost to acknowledge their own need for love and support before they can commit themselves to the ministry.

We hope these clarifications will present DOVE more faithfully and we regret that the justice component of our vision, missed by your important article, seems to be as difficult to communicate as the essentially simple words, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

Jennie Luciano coordinator DOVE Program

This letter was also signed by DOVE's assistant coordinator and the pastoral assistant at St. Stephen's, Geneva.

# Father Mugavero's activism backed by priests, deacons

To the editor:

We priests and deacons in the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., stand together with our brother and friend, Anthony Mugavero.

He exemplifies the words of the late Robert F. Kennedy, "Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues, the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential quality for those who seek to change the world that yields most painful to change."

Tony's witness and courage is an inspiration to the people of faith. It is manifested in his gentle spirit and unconditional love for all of life.

Thirty-two priests and 12 deacons signed the above letter.

# Father Champlin responds to his book's critic

To the editor:

Two people have sent me copies of Dorothy Macaluso's critical letter about my book "Together for Life" which appeared in the *Catholic Courier* Feb. 1. Her attack on the orthodoxy of that text forces me to respond.

First of all, she misquotes and quotes out of context my section on Responsible Parenthood.

Secondly, and more significantly, she ignores the fact that from its very beginning, 20 years, 35 printings and five million copies ago, "Together for Life" has always been published with the imprimatur

of a bishop. Ms. Macaluso, by setting herself up as the judge of a book's doctrinal content, thus undercuts the authority of a bishop. As a result, she causes a harmful disunity in the Church itself.

I have no objection to her or other critics' comments about my style and emphasis. I do protest attacks on my loyalty to the Magisterium, especially in view of the fact that every one of my 35 books has been published with ecclesiastical permission indicating its freedom from error in faith or morals.

Father Joseph M. Champlin Syracuse

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