

Threat of pesticides calls for united action

A curly-headed moppet sits on a set of porch steps, his freckled face alight with pleasure as he pops grapes into his mouth, while a soothing voice urges us to "Enjoy (grapes) one by one by one ..."

The image is part of an advertisement by a grape growers' association presenting their product as all-American health food.

The United Farm Workers, in their video "The Wrath of Grapes," offer a less wholesome image of the grape industry, showing migrant farm workers



suffering from cancer and miscarriage, and their children stillborn or born with severe handicaps.

For the last six years, the farm workers' union has tried to persuade Americans to stop eating California table grapes. Many of those who handle and harvest the grapes are convinced that such birth defects and health problems stem from the pesticides with which the produce is treated, and harm not only the farm workers, but consumers as well.

Nearly 20 diocesan parishes and organizations support the current boycott — including the board of the diocesan Office of Social Ministry, which voted its approval in November, 1989.

But boycott organizers want more.

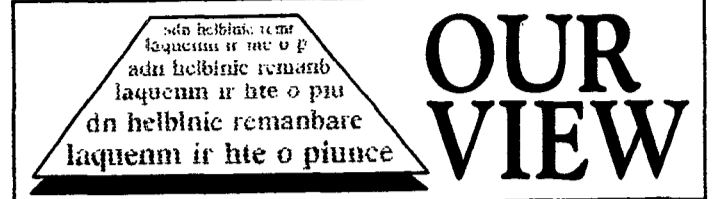
The diocesan division of social ministry has so far failed to back its endorsement of the boycott with so much as a cent's worth of financial or staff support, according to Father Dan O'Shea, a diocesan priest and local boycott organizer.

Specifically, a local coalition of labor and religious leaders supporting the boycott asked to locate a March 11 press conference at the diocesan Pastoral Center.

Social ministry officials refused the request, saying later that — because they were not directly involved in the strategy leading up to the press conference — it was "more relevant for the press conference to be held at a union facility."

Father O'Shea has since met with Bishop Matthew H. Clark and diocesan officials, urging them to make the diocesan endorsement of the boycott "public, explicit and clear" by taking the following steps:

- calling on representatives of Tops, Bells and Wegmans to meet with boycott supporters regarding the possibility of removing California table grapes from their produce aisles;
- fielding a clear diocesan presence during UFW



president Cesar Chavez' April 4 visit to Rochester;

- and reassessing its commitment to the local farm-worker community.

Dollars, of course, are not the only measure of support. Father John Firpo, head of diocesan social ministry, pointed out that the division has spent significant staff time preparing its own strategy for supporting the boycott. This strategy proposes to:

- address at the state level legislation dealing with farm-worker issues of health and work environment;
- offer input to the proposed federal farm bill;
- and explore avenues for raising the agricultural pesticide issue with representatives of local supermarkets.

Father Firpo's list isn't a perfect match for Father O'Shea's, but the issue is too important to dissipate much energy in argument. New York state is the second largest consumer of table grapes in the country, and farm workers are at risk not only in California, but in Wayne County and western Monroe County as well.

We support efforts by diocesan social ministry and local boycott organizers to limit the use of harmful pesticides on agricultural products, and we urge both groups actively to support one another as well.

We also commend Bells, whose representatives so far are alone among local supermarket chains in agreeing to consider a meeting with boycott organizers.

— The Editors

'Church' of materialism outdraws local church services

To the editor:

In an effort to gain a perspective on some of the concerns of the day, it might be wise to recall Matthew 23:37-38: "Jesus said to him: you shall love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, with your whole soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The failure of leaders to teach the rest of us to practice these doctrines has led the people of the United States into virulent materialism and hedonism. Some of the symptoms of the "Me" era are: rampant crime, rising drug abuse, racism, abortion and unconcern for problems of the poor. Do-gooder has become a pejorative term and the pool of people interested in a spiritual vocation is getting smaller year by year. The overly simple answer to most of these symptoms is: Let's make a law. For crime — try capital punishment; for drugs

— interdiction and jail; for racism — a hundred years of laws. All these laws have failed because they ignore the basic love of God and neighbor. Over the ages millions of laws have been written because people failed in following the simple doctrines of Christ.

In the case of abortion, people are expected to be in one of two camps, pro-choice or pro-life. The pro-choice position can be summed up in the words of William Henley: "I am the master of my fate. I am captain of my soul." This is the antithesis of Christ's commandments. Arrogating to oneself the life or death of a neighbor, in this case a baby, is pure pride, a deadly sin.

The pro-life group, originally people concerned with correcting life-threatening actions in various areas, has now become an anti-abortion force only. Recognizing the failure of leadership and practice to combat hedonism and materialism, they have fallen back on "let's make a law."

Entering the political arena, they have backed elective candidates with only one considered criteria — what is their stand on abortion? The politicians may be the greatest exemplars of materialism, the most profligate people in government but if they agree to all or part of the abortion position, they will get the backing of the pro-life people. The end justifies the means?

In the spirit of old-fashioned ward-healers, some princes of the Church have consigned to Hell political persons by name, not because they practice or advocate abortion but because they disagree about the effectiveness of law in combating abortion. Christ would never condone such acts of pride. If the pro-life people had devoted the energy and dollars spent in the past 10 years to trying to eradicate the disease instead of one symptom, they would be more in the spirit of Christ's commandments and in the end, have saved

many more babies.

In the same vein, the actions of some people and pastors on the question of Catholic school reform are reflective of the "Me-ism" that affects society. Vilifying the intention of our Bishop, who is trying to preserve Catholic education for all who wish it, they ignore Christ's second commandment. Saying that Catholic education belongs to this or that parochial group because it can afford it is certainly a poor message to expound as Catholics and a sorry example to be giving their children. Sending a few cans of food at Christmastime into the inner city is not what charity (love) is all about.

It behooves Catholics to teach and practice what Jesus taught about love of God and neighbor. Pope John Paul II recognizes the problem when he preaches against materialism both in communist and capitalist countries. In the Rochester area, we have a long way to go, as evidenced by attendance at a recent mall opening. Built in the shape of a church, this mall attracted more worshippers for a longer time than all the churches in the area.

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Diocese rejoices in legitimate freedom to disagree

To the editor:

There is joy in this diocese which goes much deeper than the current Catholic schools crisis, even though the Catholic schools crisis seems to hide that joy at times. We are a diocese which is alive and aware of the work of the Spirit. We rejoice in the freedom to disagree with non-infallible Vatican pronouncements. We are priests, religious and laity who have only one agenda — to follow Jesus Christ.

Our local church does not and cannot exist apart from other local churches including the Church of Rome. We recognize the special responsibility of the Church of Rome to be the final authority in matters of faith and morals. We are one with the Church of Rome, but in all that is non-infallible we resist uniformity and rejoice in pluralism. We are called to challenge clericalism, centrism and catechism.

We are one as a diocese with our Ordinary who truly teaches, sanctifies, and

governs this local church in union with all the bishops of the universal Church, who shows us by the example of his own life the meaning of forgiveness, humility and obedience, and a proper spirit of sacredness and reverence for our liturgies and all the received teachings of the Church. In addition to genuine Christian attention to the seamless garment of mercy and justice issues, Bishop Clark's ministry strives constantly to repair the seamless garment of unity with which the Body of Christ should be clothed. And he allows healthy theological discussion and responsible liturgical experimentation. The *Catholic Courier* plays an important role in fostering healthy theological thinking and pastoral practice. It is not just an expanded parish bulletin; it is a newspaper moderate and balanced in its approach to news and commentary. It balances Father McBrien with Father Cuddy; it balances liberal and conservative views in its selection of letters to the editor. It is a joy to read for it makes

a positive, thoughtful contribution to the faith life of our diocesan family.

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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.

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