

Must tradition trample a few to serve many?

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OUR VIEW

Nazareth Academy's rich tradition calls on graduates to accept their diplomas dressed in white, floor-length gowns, carrying bouquets of red roses. Senior Lauren Maslanka's unusual hairstyle — shaved short on the sides and back except for a long tail in back and three-inch bangs in front — threatened to disturb that tradition, or so school officials believed last month when they told her and another senior, Tonya Harding, that each would have to wear more appropriate hairstyles or forgo the graduation ceremony. Maslanka plans to capitulate, but no longer feels accepted by faculty at the school. Harding will not participate in the graduation ceremony.

"A long tradition does not just cease to be, just to make exception for two — it continues to include the all," explained journalism teacher Sister Mary Anne Coughlin, SSJ, in an editorial commentary published in the March edition of Nazareth Academy's student newspaper, *The Gabriel*.

Catholic women have heard that kind of reasoning before, regarding issues less innocuous than a hairstyle. Express yourself within the bounds of traditional roles. Be yourself, but do it as a mother, a wife, a religious. Teach religious education, organize fundraisers, serve on committees. Pattern yourself on Mother Teresa, not Thomas Aquinas.

It's too bad tradition most often prevails over individuals who ask for inclusive language in liturgical prayers, readings and hymns; who can't or won't ignore a call to preach; who interpret theology from a female perspective; who challenge those traditions within the church that oppress members based on their gender.

To their credit, the six bishops — including Bishop Matthew H. Clark — who wrote the second draft of a pastoral letter on women's concerns, supported



women's participation in liturgical ministries that don't require ordination, and urged a study of whether women could be ordained as permanent deacons. The draft pastoral, released in April, termed sexism a sin, and recommended that men and boys be educated to recognize that sexual exploitation is sinful.

But the scenario that the pastoral letter describes is still light years ahead of the painful situations thousands of ordinary women face in many parishes today.

Catholic women — as well as lay men — can be denied the opportunity to administer Communion when enough "ordained ministers" are present. Catholic girls are denied the chance to serve at the altar. And parish communities are denied the chance to hear a

Mother's Day homily — or any homily — from a woman's perspective. Each of these prohibitions is an attempt to insulate the tradition of ordaining only men.

We do not discount the value of high-school dress codes or of tradition in the church. With Dolores Leckey, executive director of the U.S. Bishops' Secretariat on Laity and Family Life, we believe that Catholics are "part of a universal fabric... We have limits, we have givens, and I'm not convinced that's a bad thing."

But we do question the choice to painfully sacrifice the gifts and sensitivities of a few in order to preserve tradition, especially cosmetic tradition, for the many.

— The Editors

Medjugorje's validity remains matter of individual faith

To the editor:

In response to the April 26th article: "Bishop issues booklet renouncing visions," for millions of people, Catholic, non-Catholic, young and old, Medjugorje has been a source of renewal in our faith like no other in our time. Our Lady's mission has been to bring her children closer to her son through her messages. She is doing exactly that, something I can personally testify to. This enables us to live our lives in a fashion that would be more pleasing to God, rather than the way our society has led us in the past years. This is done, only, by the grace of God.

You might suspect that the response from those who believe in Medjugorje might be anger at such a book, but Our Lady has not taught us to respond in such a manner. This book is probably of no surprise to those who are familiar with Medjugorje. Bishop Zanic had made a statement which was televised in the documen-

tary, "Medjugorje the lasting sign." The video is distributed through Caritas of Birmingham, Ala. He said, "It is nonsense that Our Lady would interfere in the affairs of the Bishop." It seems quite evident that Bishop Zanic is suffering from a bruised ego, and has lost his sense of humility. It is sad to think that a Bishop, because of his position, might be above heavenly criticism. We should pray for him, because he must be experiencing great turmoil in his life. We can only hope and pray that he soon will find some peace, truth and order to his life.

When we speak of the validity of Medjugorje, we have to realize that the actual validity is not found in a book, TV program or a Papal Letter. The validity is found in the hearts and faith of each individual. This statement is in no way indicating disrespect for the Pope and his decision. The Pope, being a man of such great faith, would be the first to understand

such a statement. We do realize the precautions necessary in matters such as this, but I truly doubt that those who believe in Medjugorje, or those whose lives have been changed as a result of Medjugorje, are losing sleep over this book or approval from the Vatican.

Thank God, we have a faith that allows us to ignore books such as this. the purpose

Avon school deserves special consideration

To the editor:

Regarding your April 26 article on St. Agnes School in Avon possibly closing; one important aspect of St. Agnes School which was not addressed is that it is the only Catholic grammar school serving Northern Livingston and parts of Southern Monroe County. If it were to close, there would be no alternative school for which busing would be available.

St. Agnes serves several parishes, including St. Joseph's in Livonia, where we are parishioners, as well as parishes in Caledonia, Geneseo, Lima, Honeoye Falls and Conesus. I feel for this reason alone St. Agnes deserves special consideration from the diocese.

Also as a member of the School Board at

of this letter is not to defend the validity of the Apparitions at Medjugorje, but in thanksgiving to Our Lord, who through Our Lady has so lovingly given us so much in the past eight years.

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