

# Moral values need to be caught and taught

Swerving through construction-bound traffic with abandon, the silver car squealed to a stop in front of a red light. Three young male occupants bounced to the beat of music that rattled car windows all around them; one youth shouted and gestured at someone in the next car, while another gobbled fried chicken and tossed the bones out the window.

As the light changed and the car peeled out, a carton full of food debris flew out the window and rolled into the gutter.

What those youths did was no felony. They littered; they were nasty and reckless. No one was harmed directly by their actions, yet something in their attitude suggested they wouldn't have cared if someone had been.

At least a few of the people watching from the surrounding cars or the sidewalk probably shook their heads at the state of young people in general. Maybe others wished they had done something to express disapproval.

It's difficult to know how to stand up for an ethical standard of behavior in a meaningful way. You worry about ridicule; you even fear violence.

We all bear the responsibility for upholding

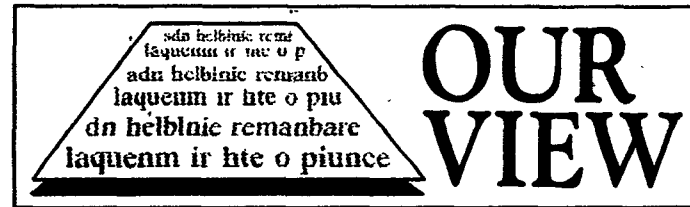
society's moral values, yet we most often think of young people as not measuring up. We are quick to blame their sometimes disturbing behavior on the breakdown of families, the failures of our educational system, the inefficacy of religious leaders.

Yet moral values aren't simply an educational problem; they aren't only lacking in young people, or in a particular stratum of society.

The problem may be systemic, but the fault lies with individuals of all ages and backgrounds who don't take their own values as seriously as they do the moral education of others.

How often do we propound the church's teaching on abortion, euthanasia, contraception and economic justice, and — without any sense of contradiction — treat someone unjustly in the name of "good business," disparage an elderly person, flip through a porn magazine, cheat an insurance company, lie about a product we sell?

Such little "indulgences" don't end with us. Someone's watching, and it's not just God. In a recent Girl Scouts Survey on the Beliefs and Moral Values of America's Children, 56 percent of high school participants said adults in their lives "really let them



down" in regard to ethical behavior. Forty-seven percent of those questioned said they trusted their own experience as the "most believable authority in matters of truth," with parents and religion as distant runners-up.

One of the study's authors concluded that "very few people and institutions, including parents after a certain age, take moral education seriously."

In fact, the study seems to suggest that young people may take values somewhat more seriously than do the adults around them. If that's difficult to believe, imagine some of the explanations you might have to concoct if a son or daughter or some other young person followed you around to act as your conscience for a day.

— The Editors

## Interviewee claims writer's 'fluff' missed essence of talk

To the editor:

I recently made a trip to your fair city of Rochester and was greeted with someone telling me that I was quoted as saying, "the Diaconate was a perversion." I wondered what that was all about. Not until the day I left Rochester did I spy a copy of the *Catholic Courier* and remember a telephone interview with staff writer Lee Strong. As I recall, we must have talked about 25 or 30 minutes about the diaconate. I talked a great deal about the position Archbishop Hunthausen has taken on canceling the diaconate until the church

can better deal with women's issues; how I support his position. I told Lee Strong that I had written a congratulatory letter of support to Archbishop Hunthausen and urged others to do so also. By the end of our conversation it was clear to me that although I greatly appreciate Mr. Strong's calling me for an interview, he seemed to have no idea of what I was talking about or why. It was like he hadn't heard a word I said. ...

The church needs to ordain women to the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate. All three orders must be considered at the same time. They cannot be

divided away from each other theologically ... Some women consider the diaconate would be a foot in the door for ordination to the presbyterate. I personally consider it would be a bone thrown to the women, a hush puppy to keep us quiet while the main meal goes to the men. However, I do believe women should have a choice, and right now they have no choice. This is what I told Mr. Strong.

Instead I was quoted out of context, a "proof-texting" to show how some people oppose the diaconate, with never a reason I gave as to why. "These questions are among those raised" is not true. I raised far deeper structural questions than the fluff written by Lee Strong.

Besides mentioning that in my diocese of Arlington, Va., the male deacons become "holier than the pope," I talked about forced vows of celibacy. That is the central structural reason why I oppose the diaconate for men today. And it is why I would not like to see it for women. I told Mr. Strong of how sad it is that lay men are forced to take an oath of celibacy when they are obviously are not called to celibacy; for if a man is married and becomes a deacon he must promise if his wife were to die that he would not remarry. If he is not married, he must promise never to marry. Not many people know about that, and most just laugh it off when they hear about it or say, they would just break the vow. I take vows too seriously to laugh like that. The vow of celibacy has to be imposed upon lay people who obviously are not called to it. That is a perversion. That is creeping clericalism. Once again the church cannot deal with women and sex.

I would greatly appreciate your printing

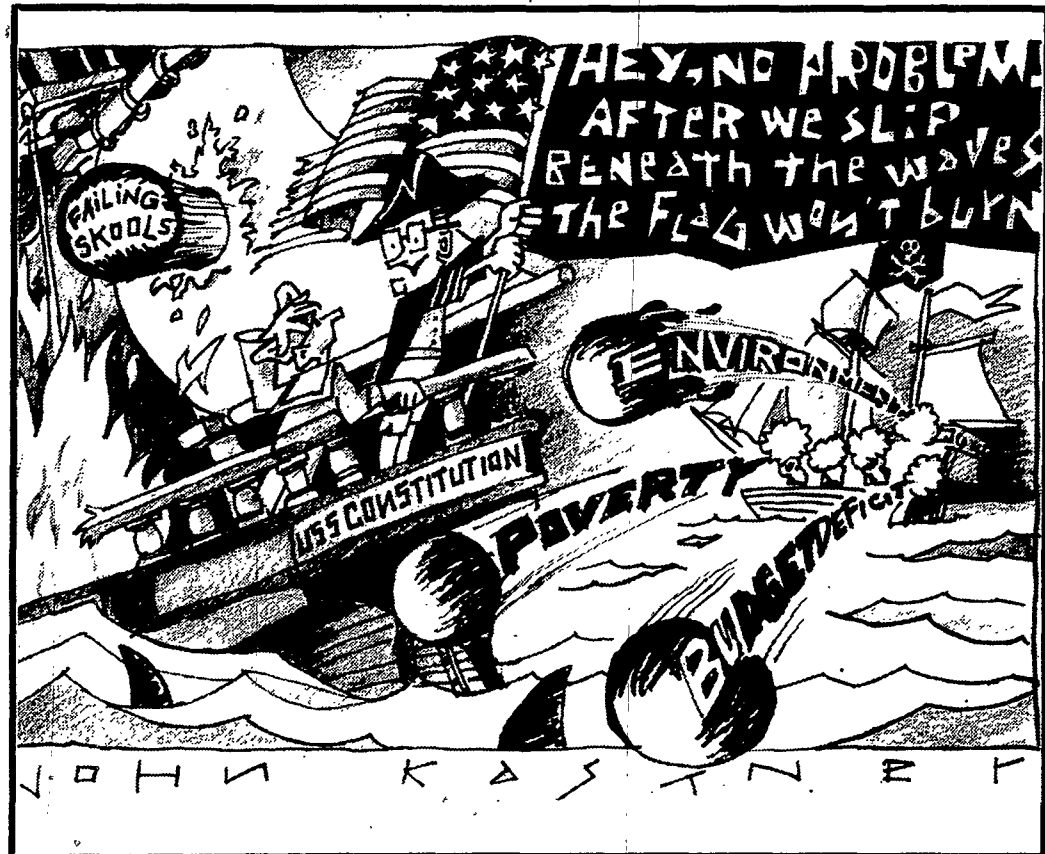
this letter of correction to clarify my quotation, which is purely out of context. If this were a 30-second TV interview segment, I would understand, but to have this happen in a quality newspaper like yours that has page after page devoted to the subject of the diaconate as well as the ordination of women, does a real disservice to your readers as well as to me and to the Women's Ordination Conference.

Ruth McDonough Fitzpatrick  
national coordinator  
Women's Ordination Conference

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The article, "Diaconate weathers 20 years of changes" (CC: June 7), quoted McDonough Fitzpatrick as saying, "I'm not in favor of men becoming deacons. I'm not in favor of women becoming deacons. I see that (the permanent diaconate) has become perverted into another clerical caste." That's not quite the same as saying she called the diaconate a perversion.

Although the *Courier's* mandate requires us to explore church issues in greater depth than that possible in other news media, space limitations often force our reporters to distill lengthy conversations into a few sentences — a task that can be disappointing to those interviewed. Inevitably, speaker and listener at times disagree about what ought to have been printed and what was left out.

Moreover, Lee Strong's June 7 article covered changes that have taken place in deacons' ministry as a whole. Thus the issue of whether women ought to be ordained to the diaconate — however timely and controversial — was only a part of the story, and deserved only part of the space.



## Like deacons, lay people do not 'casually volunteer' for the church

To the editor:

I read the articles on ordination to the permanent diaconate with interest as I have friends who are part of that ministry. Though the controversy surrounding that ministry is plentiful, this letter is not in reference to that controversy.

In those articles, Deacon James Steiger was quoted as saying that one major difference between lay people and permanent deacons was that "ordination is a permanent commitment to service. It is no longer a casual volunteering where lay people can say, 'I don't want to do this anymore. I want to quit.'"

I am sure I am not alone when I say that my own baptismal commitment is as permanent as a commitment to ordination and I hope his is also. I take that commitment very seriously along with many other people and I certainly do not look at it as casual volunteering. I do not feel I have the luxury of quitting when I don't want to do it anymore — and those times have been present.

As one of the People of God whom deacons serve, I find it overwhelming that a deacon about to be ordained thinks so little of the commitment those people have.

Gretchen Dent Rochester

**CATHOLIC COURIER**  
Bishop Matthew H. Clark, President  
Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, Gen. Mgr.  
Karen M. Franz, Editor/Asst. Gen. Mgr.

1150 Buffalo Road • Rochester, New York 14624 • 716/328-4340

**Editorial Department:**  
Richard A. Kiley, Managing Editor • Teresa A. Parsons, Associate Editor  
Lee Strong, Staff Writer • Rob Cullivan, Staff Writer  
Babette G. Augustin, Photographer

**Business Department:**  
Mary E. Bittner, Office Manager • Bernie Puglisi, Advertising Manager  
Jeanne A. Morin, Circulation Mgr. • Kathy Welsh, Ad. Account Executive

**Production Department:**  
Lorraine Hennessey, Graphics Mgr. • Wayne A. Holt, Graphic Artist  
John Kastner, Contributing Artist