

Letter from African priest puts holiday in perspective

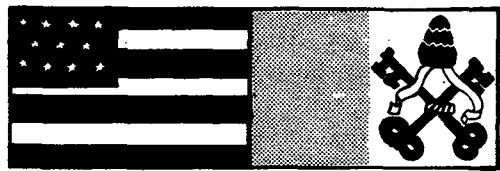
By Father Paul Cuddy
Courier columnist

The best Christmases I ever had were during our six years at St. Bernard's Seminary. Our training at that time was rigorous and austere — even overly so some believe.

Instead of going home to our families for Christmas, we seminarians and faculty members stayed on and continued classes up until three days before the feast. Then we had a retreat to prepare spiritually for the great day.

The midnight Mass was glorious, with 230 male voices singing the Solemn High Mass. The solemnity of the ritual centered on the authentic spirit of Christmas.

We went to bed after Mass, waking up the next morning for Mass and a special dinner. The following day we had off to



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

relax. Then it was back to the books the next day to prepare for mid-January examinations. After finishing our exams, we went home for about 17 days. Christmas was a happy memory.

Some thought it was a mistake not to allow us home during the Christmas season. I do not think so, especially as I observe holiday preparations among believing Christians. I am talking about the hubbub that comes with shopping; the

worry over getting proper gifts; the concern about overlooking someone; and the spoiling of children with expensive toys and clothes.

I was recently told that one skateboard can cost \$100, and certain sneakers over \$80! It should give us pause to consider the needs of the Third World when we see huge bills accumulating after the holidays.

Last summer, Father William J. Amann, pastor of Hamlin's St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, took a sabbatical in East Africa in order to study the church over there. After meeting the people of the country, he returned with edifying reports and dozens of slides.

In his travels he befriended a young priest — only ordained for three years — who wrote to him upon his return. He asked for books written by Archbishop Sheen,

and for any Sheen cassettes. Father Amann shared with me the letter Father Charles Bundu wrote to him:

"Dear Father Amann, this is Bundu Charles saying hello to you. Hope you got home without any problems. I was busy with our catechumens who were to be baptized during Easter. 40 adults and 26 girls from the secondary school. Father, I was very happy to have you here for that few days. I enjoyed your presence.

"Thank you for the book by Sheen and I was very happy to get it, and I went through the book once and I liked it. I thank you again for the tapes — 21 of them which I got yesterday. I have gone through more than half. They are very good.

"For November the first I got a new appointment — vice rector and spiritual director of St. Pius Seminary, so these tapes will be of good and great help to me. I will always thank you for Sheen tapes and book. At the seminary we got video machine so anything — tapes, radio, videotapes — will be good.

"Yesterday I had a talk to a big convent here in town, about 30 nuns were there. My talk came from Sheen's tapes. The Mass was lovely. So thank you for what ever you gave me.

"I am as well as spiritual director for two societies of nuns in my diocese. Before December I will be giving talks to different houses of nuns in my diocese. You can see how much I do need Sheen's help in my new job.

Thank you very much and welcome again. Father Charles Bundu."

After reading this letter, I thought about the great good done simply by enriching the evangelization of the young priest. But I also thought about the dreadful waste of money spent on foolish things at Christmas.

Do you wonder at my wonder at a secular Christmas?

Christmas is a season for celebrating God's love

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) Luke 1:26-38; (R1) 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16; (R2) Romans 15:25-27.

The Annunciation story climaxes the Advent Season. William Griffin tells the story beautifully in his book entitled *Jesus for Children*:

"Stay where you are," said the young girl, "or I'll scream!"

"My name is Gabriel," said the tall stranger.

"Are you an angel?" asked Mary.

"I have a message for you."

"You shouldn't go around surprising people," said Mary, closing her book.

"Angels are for surprises," said Gabriel.

"I didn't know that," said Mary.

"You are one of God's favorites," said Gabriel. "He wants you to know that."



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

"Thank you for telling me," Mary replies.

"And he wants to ask you a favor. He wants you to be the mother of his child. The child the Scriptures speak of. The child that will save all of the people of the world. Will you do God this favor?"

"Does he have to ask?" Mary questions.

"God always asks," says Gabriel.

"He knows I read the Scriptures and will do whatever he asks," Mary replies.

"Blessed are you among women," said Gabriel, and the angel was gone.

As she returned to her book, Mary thought that God did have to ask; and yes, she would never say "no."

The angel announced to her that she would have a child. God would not be content to communicate with his creation by satellite or by skywriting. He would actually become one of us. That is mind-boggling.

Have you heard the story so many times that you have forgotten what it is saying? The manger of Bethlehem becomes the entry place for God to reveal himself in human flesh. That's deep!

As the Christmas carol goes: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight." That child of Mary is the hope of all the world.

Group meeting to discuss Planned Parenthood rental

ROCHESTER — Members of the Nineteenth Community Ward Association concerned about the leasing of space in the association's building to Planned Parenthood will hold an organizational meeting at the Knights of Columbus, 670 Thurston Road, on Thursday, Jan. 17.

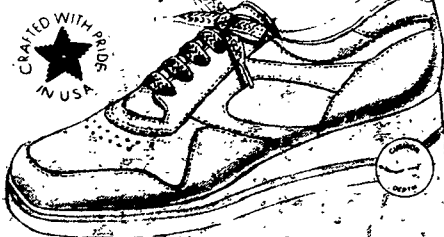
The group is opposed to the leasing because of Planned Parenthood's involvement in abortion referrals, not because it provides birth control information or educational services, according to a statement released by Ken and Mary Maher and Father Robert Gaudio, pastor of St. Monica's on Genesee St.

For information, call the Mahers at 716/436-6122, or Father Gaudio at 235-3322.

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How can I help a
grieving friend?

People in early grief often are shocked and unable to believe what has happened. They may feel angry or guilty and have difficulty organizing their life, sleeping or eating. If you wish to help you should encourage expressions of feelings. This means listening to the grieving as they talk about the death and their pain over it. You can also provide practical assistance such as babysitting, organizing the household and driving your friend to appointments. Attending the funeral or visitation gives you an opportunity to express your feelings and to give needed support. If you can't go to the funeral or visitation contact your friend and express your feelings as soon as possible after the death.

We purchase all forms of insurance to protect our family & assets, not because we expect the worst to happen, but to be prepared. Doesn't it make sense then to prepare for what will happen. Let our trained counselors assist you with the many options available in planning for a worry-free future.

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