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Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome all signed, original letters about current issues affecting church life.

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.

We reserve the right to edit all letters. Mail them to: *Catholic Courier*, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624. Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.

Church sexism causes imbalance

To the editors:

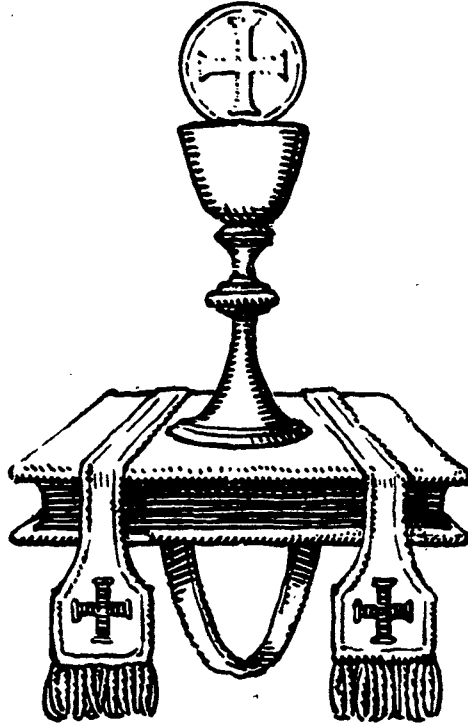
I'd like to compliment Barbara Ann Homick for her balanced appraisal of the sexuality situation from a Roman Catholic viewpoint (*Catholic Courier*, July 11: "Church holds line on sex"). It is further evidence of the continual improvement I've noticed in the *Catholic Courier* over the past several months.

I agree with Father Paul Schnacky's appraisal of the need for direction and standards and applaud his long-standing sensitivity to the human struggle and to the complicated issues of human sexuality. And Father Bouchard's view on condom use and skill training in chastity makes his moral theology realistic and compassionate, as, it seems, Jesus' was.

Praise also to Anne Wegman Paluskiewicz for her emphasis on the comprehensive nature of sexuality as a vital aspect of being human and on the importance of learning how to manage it, though I think she could have come up with more productive and satisfying ways of expressing love than holding hands, telling jokes and drop-till-you're dead dancing!

Both Father Kawiak and Father Shannon expressed critically important views necessary to restore balance in our understanding and management of our sexualities. Parental education in this sensitive and deeply personal area and working to overcome our fears around this issue, along with an openness on the part of the church to listen to the view of married, sexually active people, as well as to young or old, troubled inquirers are all so critically important. The tone of compassion, rather than of condemnation, was refreshing and nurturing.

Father Albert Shamon's column in the same edition, in which he attempts to in-



This modern arrangement of several symbolic elements is often used to signify the sacrament of Holy Orders.

terpret the mind of Christ in choosing only male priests, was an interesting and disturbing contrast. I can understand his particular viewpoint and bias, given the entrenched sexism in the Roman system. It seems to me that there would not be nearly as much confusion, ambiguity, immorality and pathology around sexual issues in our culture if there were leadership — and why not from the church? — in addressing the pervasive cultural belief that there is something superior in being gendered as a male!

... A culture infected with a sexism that is male-biased and with a homophobia that

creates fear of and violence toward the feminine aspect in self and others creates the seedbed for an essential imbalance in the way we view our total sexuality, whether as women or men. Let's work on that problem, along with adequate and competent family-based education and example, as essential to a healthy understanding of sexuality — both for catechesis and praxis.

I'd like to offer some suggestions about how to begin to restore the balance within the Roman system.

1) If the first "priests" — I'm not sure that they thought of themselves as such — were all men, we ought to remember that they were also Jewish. Why isn't that one of Father Shamon's requirements?

2) The "priesthood of all believers," though considered an "heretical" notion by some, is a pretty clear sense of the meaning I derive from the tradition. Let's leave the role of celibate "priest" to those men who feel called to that way of life. ... And let's open up full ministry, sacramental and pastoral, to both women and men, married or single, who feel called to serve with the fullness of their humanity ...

... The Church is such a sleeping giant! And instead of waking up and using its tremendous capacity for the good of all, its leaders legislate and control, and its members bicker and squabble — for example, over whether to stand or kneel at the consecrations, as in General Instruction #21!

The Good News is that Jesus could care less, simply because He cares so much for each and every one of us, no matter what our bias or viewpoint!

John Gormley

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EDITORS' NOTE: This letter was edited to comply with space requirements.

Women's identity more than childbearing

To the editors:

I just read Father Albert Shamon's column in (the July 11) edition of the *Courier*, and the Scripture passages quoted by him do not shed any more light on the question of the ordination of women, for me.

In fact, his column only raised more questions in my mind, for example: he spoke of Mary having been present in the Upper Room with the apostles, yet they passed over her when seeking two candidates over which to cast lots to elect one to replace Judas among their numbers. And he gave the reason for passing over her as the apostles knew that it was contrary to the will of Christ to ordain a woman.

While I sincerely doubt that — it was certainly contrary to the prevailing custom of their day, as the only priesthood they were familiar with was Levitical priesthood, which was passed on through family lineage, usually from father to son. And if those men could accept that the Lord spoke to them through the casting of lots — which today we would consider a form of gambling/magic — why is it so hard to believe that the Lord could also be speaking to and through a woman's desire to be an ordained priest today? Or on any other issue

of the day?

The gospels record Jesus as having indicated that Mary's real greatness lies in having heard the word of God and in living it. Prior to becoming pregnant, Mary heard the word of God and then lived it in and through the power of the Holy Spirit; thus she became a co-creator with God and a partner in redemption (Luke 8:21 and 11:27-28). The People of God or the Church is composed of both females and males, and of clergy, religious and lay persons who are also called by the Lord and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be co-creators and partners with him throughout their lives in their own individual, ongoing redemptive experience or conversion process.

Mary was an individual person long before she became a mother, and forever afterward. And it was within her own unique individuality that she responded to the Lord's invitation, that is she didn't run to a priest and seek the answer. She responded from within her own being with all her heart. So why all this focus only on parenthood?

I find some consolation to today's situation in the American Bishops' response

with their Pastoral Letter draft on women's concerns in the Church which does not go far enough for me, yet nonetheless, perhaps the Bishops are the first men in the history of the Church who have really listened to women's concerns, heard them and acted upon what they heard.

The men who listened to those holy women who were at the tomb on the first Easter morning did NOT really hear them, dismissing them as "merely hysterical women." Yet these same hysterical women were commissioned by the Risen Lord Jesus to "go and tell my brothers" (John 20:17 and Matthew 28:10).

It didn't matter to the Risen Lord that they were women, he made them his apostles anyway, sending them as messengers of his word. They were to speak the word/message he had given them, but they were NOT accountable or responsible for their listener's response or lack of it.

I hope that when I die, I will be remembered for more than having given birth to six children — three boys and three girls.

Patti Federowicz

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Apalachin

'Listening sessions' dominated by fringe feminists

To the editors:

Your Editor's Note following Sharon Peart's June 13 *Courier* letter ("Mary's submission wasn't passive") refers to Barbara Ann Homick's quotations coming from the second draft of the U.S. bishop's pastoral letter on women in the Church and points out that said quotations "summarized what numerous women told the bishops during listening sessions conducted nationwide ..."

These so-called "listening sessions" warrant clarification. Donna Steichen, journalist and author, and well experienced

through interviews and attendance at feminists gatherings writes that "listening sessions were exercises in political theatre, controlled by the 'pain and anguish' lobby and designed to freeze out, if possible, or edit out, if necessary the testimony of faithful Catholic women, while providing an opportunity for feminists to recite their rote complaints. It is a consciousness raising technique. Women without grievances are dismissed as too culturally conditioned to recognize their own victimization."

Monsignor George Kelly writes that "only the naive consider the so-called

'listening sessions' to be genuine. Activists and veto groups usually dominate such hearings."

The negative response to the bishops first draft demonstrated the effect of excessive reliance upon listening sessions which are non-representative of the concerns of women who do not define their lives according to a feminist agenda. A panel of predominantly feminist consultants also contributed to the demise of the first draft.

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