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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.

Mary's life speaks to new generations

To the editors:

I am responding to the letter titled, "Virgin Mary was not an unwed mother" by Anna Eugena Johnson, in (the March 18) edition of the *Catholic Courier*.

I read Ms. Johnson's letter through twice, and still came away questioning, if Mary was married to Joseph at the time of the Incarnation of Jesus, why then was Joseph so afraid to take her into his home as his wife? Why did it take a special intervention of God to reassure and encourage him to take Mary into his home as his wife?

I will grant that by the time Jesus was born, Mary was not an unwed mother. But by her own admission to the Angel who brought her the word of the Lord, as I recall, she said: "How can this be, for I know not man?" Apparently she was still unmarried by whatever definition of marriage existed in her time and culture at the time of Jesus' conception.

Why would the authors of Scripture preserve her words for all generations to come? And how did they learn of them, for no one else was present except Mary and the Angel? When one reads it in the Scriptures, it sounds more like a private revelation. Did Mary share about it with some of them?

Joseph was a God-fearing man who abided by the Laws of his religion and culture, so perhaps God was also encouraging him to look beyond the legalism of his time? Could it have been that same religious legalism that prompted his fear? After all, that same religious legalism required stoning of pregnant unwed young women back then.

Ms. Johnson writes as if Mary is ashamed or scandalized at being thought of as an unwed mother. Yet, Mary responded in Faith to the Angel's message, she had no reason to feel shame, regardless of what anyone else thought or said. She believed God's word to her which was her confidence and strength, so much so, that she took



off to visit Elizabeth, who the Angel had told her was also pregnant — in her old age. She certainly was not lacking in self-esteem or scandalized at what had happened in her life. It sounds more as if she were empowered by it.

I am not scandalized by Mary being thought of as an unwed mother; perhaps I should be, but I am not. If this aspect of Mary's experience is being highlighted at this time in history, I can also see God's magnificent and compassionate hand of providence stretching throughout the centuries, ever revealing hope and love for generations to come.

There are numerous unwed mothers today that need hope and encouragement, as well as faith and support. They need to know God's love and care for them in their plight, not condemnation

and scandal. I believe that Mary is just as concerned about them as the Lord is; and perhaps Mary herself can relate to them in a very deep and special caring way due to her own experience.

If I didn't believe this so strongly, I would never have been able to accept our own daughter's unwed pregnancy, nor the beautiful grandson she presented us with in her junior high school year. He, by the way is currently preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, and I thank God that his mother decided to give him life instead of death.

I'm sorry, but after reading Ms. Johnson's letter I am left unconvinced of her argument, and wondering who is it really, who is scandalized?

Patti Federowicz
Clover Road, Apalachin

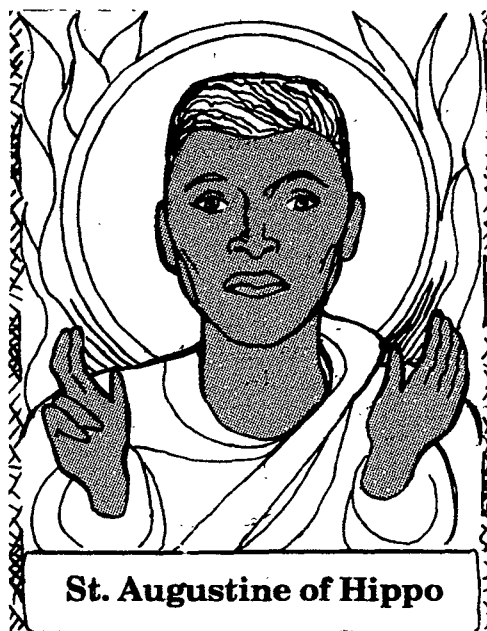
Story offered introduction to universality of the church

To the editors:

A belated but enthusiastic thank you for your March 4th cover story, "Church roots run deep into Africa's fertile soil." It was a fine introduction to an important part of early church history and to Christianity in Northern Africa.

We know so little about the history of our faith and our church. Often we presume that the church is rooted in Europe, but it arose in the Mediterranean culture of late Antiquity, primarily in Asia and Africa. By the end of the third century the majority of the people in Western Asia Minor, Armenia and a section of North Africa were Christian, whereas in Europe Christians constituted a large minority of the population in only a few regions — nowhere a majority. These were the formative centuries of our faith.

The article also stated that the racial background of some African saints is unknown. It is sobering to realize that this is probably because the ancients were not preoccupied with race to the degree we are. Nevertheless I think we can say that many early Christians were black, and that Christianity was not meant to be a "white" religion.



St. Augustine of Hippo

File Illustration

St. Augustine of Hippo, considered among the founders of Western theology, was one of several African saints noted in the article.

Reading the article reminded me of a conversation with a Methodist minister several years ago. Before he entered seminary he served in the Peace Corps in Cameroon, where he was part of a Christian community. His eyes were opened when he realized that much of what he thought was intrinsic to Christianity was actually Western and North American cultural accretions. We Catholics — our very name means universal — need to learn this lesson.

Sheryl B. Zabel
Lyndon Road
Fairport

Abortion means killing human soul

To the editors:

On Dec. 8 we go to Mass for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. As Catholics we should know that this celebrates the conception of Mary in St. Ann's body. At Lourdes the Blessed Mother told St. Bernadette "I am the Immaculate Conception." This means that original sin, which we all inherit from Adam and Eve, never touched Mary's soul. Thus it follows that her soul had to be there at the time of her conception as you can't call something that doesn't exist "immaculate."

Given this, how can people call themselves Catholic, believe in the "Immaculate Conception," and then say they are Pro-Choice, ready to accept the killing of a human soul?

I have to believe they don't understand.

Kay Allocco
Summit Parkway, Canandaigua

Column is insightful

To the editors:

Once again, thank you for Rev. Father Richard P. McBrien's Column in the *Catholic Courier*. I, and many others look forward to reading his informative insights in a variety of topics relevant to today's changing times.

Vi Venuti
White Springs Road
Geneva