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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.

# Dissenter seeks thoughtful hearing

**To the editor**

As our bishop has noted so gracefully, the church's birth control teaching does not rest easy in the minds and hearts of many devout and faith-filled Catholics. The letters which appeared in the September 2, 1993, edition of the *Courier* seem to bear witness to a lack of understanding of this fact. Some very inaccurate and unloving assumptions were made about us "dissenters" in these letters, assumptions which I would like to correct. I would appreciate the grace of a thoughtful hearing from all of you who wrote or cheered those three letters.

Although I can primarily speak only for myself, I believe sincerely that I speak for many. I dissent from the church's teaching on one and only one point. I believe it can be licit for married, Catholic couples to use artificial means to regulate the sizes of their families. I believe that Catholic marriages should be open to children and that the sexual relationship is ideally both unitive and procreative, but that not every act of intercourse is or even should be open to conception.

This position is a far cry from that portrayed by the letters of September 2. Perhaps those who accuse us of being too lazy to read and understand *Humanae Vitae* could spend a few hours learning what we dissenters actually believe! It is hardly fair to assume we endorse fornication, abortion, divorce, and the transmission of venereal disease. Nor is it charitable to assume that we oppose the teaching out of an unwillingness to take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

Nor does dissent necessarily have anything whatsoever to do with Natural Family Planning. NFP is an effective,

natural, marriage-centered means of regulating the size of one's family. But, personally, I can find no moral difference between using a barrier and choosing to abstain during periods of fertility, since the intention in both cases is to avoid conception. I think it unfortunate that NFP seems to have been promoted primarily for its value as the "moral" choice of conservative Catholics when, in fact, it is a very viable option for many couples.

I consider myself a devout and faith-filled Catholic. I am fully aware of what

this teaching entails, yet my conscience will not allow me to assent to it. However, I don't like dissenting from a church teaching. I would appreciate it if, in the future, those of you who do not struggle with this particular teaching would strive to be more accurate about what you think we believe. I'd also appreciate it if you could, in charity, give the rest of us the benefit of the doubt as to the quality of our faith and devotion.

**Christine Bravo-Cullen**  
Lee Road  
Dryden



## Couple offers to provide copies of encyclical

**To the editors:**

We welcome Father Richard McBrien's proposal (*Catholic Courier*, Aug. 19: "Anniversary breaks wall of silence") that we renew our discussion of Pope Paul VI's writing *Humanae Vitae* on the regulation of birth.

In order to foster an informed discussion, we would like to offer a free copy of *Humanae Vitae* to anyone who has not

yet read it or would like to review it. It is easy reading and, as many have discovered, it is an inspiring and prophetic work.

Please send a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope to: James and Patricia Wheeler, 3565 River Road, Piffard, N.Y. 14533.

**James and Patricia Wheeler**  
River Road, Piffard

# 'Compassionate' dissent hampers virtue

**To the editors:**

In the aftermath of the Synod sessions, I'm struck by a certain discrepancy. The First Theme asked us "How can we as Church help strengthen Christian marriage and family life in all its forms?" The Third Theme raised a related question "How can we help those facing... burdensome pregnancy...?"

While all of the practical suggestions for dealing with immediate crises seemed laudable, I can't help but think back to the survey taken by my church in the fall of 1991. The results include both parish and national Catholic percentages:

1. Is artificial birth control wrong? 13 percent agree, locally/11 percent, nationally
2. Is divorce and remarriage wrong? 16 percent agree, locally/15 percent,

nationally

3. Is premarital sex wrong? 46 percent agree, locally/49 percent, nationally

4. Is adultery wrong? 90 percent agree, locally/91 percent, nationally

5. Is abortion wrong? 53 percent agree, locally/58 percent, nationally

Now, if the survey had asked, for example, "Do you use artificial birth control?" and 87 percent of respondents were to say they don't believe artificial birth control is wrong — in spite of Church teaching — that (would be) a failure of Church leadership; a failure of catechesis.

Refusal to promote the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*, in their entirety, is not a matter of "loyal dissent." It is a matter of outright rebellion against the centuries-old teachings of the Church on

birth control — and other sexual matters. As the above statistics suggest, those teachings are a thorough shambles. The confusion is everywhere. How can there **not** be unwanted pregnancies when 54 percent of Catholics don't believe pre-marital sex is wrong?

In addition; though couched in matter-of-fact language, the very need for two synod Themes addressing Family Issues is added proof — if any were necessary — that family life in this country is also a shambles. To pretend to see no connection between these facts is willful blindness.

Five years after the release, and subsequent rejection, of *Humanae Vitae* we were "blessed" with *Roe vs. Wade*. Can dissenters see no common thread running through their cavalier attitude toward artificial birth control, the culture of convenience such an attitude encourages, and both the soaring divorce rate and the 30 million-plus abortions such a culture has inevitably produced?

The dissent I speak of is all done in the name of "compassion." Well, of course; nobody wants to be beaten over the head with his sins. But only the lazy or insincere Catholic wants his sins accommodated, and defined out of existence. The conscientious Catholic wants to be inspired and challenged to reach for heights of heroic virtue. The only heroism expected of Catholics nowadays, though, is in their "charitable" role as taxpayers ...

**Michael L. DeLorme**  
Park Avenue  
Rochester

**EDITORS' NOTE:** This letter has been edited because of space limitations.

# Scripture doesn't support reputation

**To the editors:**

In the Aug. 5 edition of the *Courier* a reference was made to Mary Magdalene, "the best-known prostitute in history." There is no basis in Scripture for this appellation. Mary Magdalene is clearly identified in Scripture. In Luke 8:2, she along with Suzanna and Joanna have been cured of many devils — sign of serious illness — and ailments; they with other unnamed women follow Jesus and the disciples and use their own resources to provide for the disciples. Mary of Magdala is mentioned in the four Gospels as being present at the death of Jesus and the first person to whom Jesus appeared in his resurrected being. At no time is Mary identified as a sinner or as a woman of poor reputa-

tion. The identification of Mary of Magdala with prostitution is, according to the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, "a later Western romantic tradition." In the early church Mary Magdalene was held in memory as a woman of great compassion and fidelity. For this reason, she is an excellent patroness for a group of women reaching out to others at risk of serious illness.

**Sister Eileen Conheady, SSJ**  
Lake View Park  
Rochester

**EDITORS' NOTE:** The reference in question occurred in an editors' note to a previous letter. It referred only to the popular perception of Mary Magdalene, and we certainly do not dispute her worthiness as a patroness.