

Conversation begins to better newspaper

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

In the January 24 edition of *Along the Way*, I asked readers to write to me in response to three questions I raised about this newspaper. It was my hope in issuing that invitation that it might be the beginning of a conversation that would improve our paper by making it of even greater service to our community.

I present here the three questions followed by excerpts from your comments. I hope these excerpts represent fairly the feedback you have offered. Following that report I will list the suggestions you make for the improvement of the paper, offer a few comments on the material received and offer further questions by which I hope we might continue and deepen our conversation.

1.) What do you consider the greatest strength of the *Catholic Courier*?

"A balanced approach of views — liberal and conservative."

"News coverage is open and appears to be uncensored."

"... commitment to Vatican II appears to be paramount in tone and purpose."

"... openness to different opinions ... all have a chance to express themselves ... spiritual food through columnists' voices — both liberal and conservative."

"... it is a vehicle by which you can foster and maintain communication with your people ... read and enjoy your column each week."

"... your own column, Father McBrien's and Father Shamon's together with an occasional letter to the editor are all I find to help interpret my faith."

"... vehicle for communication, dialogue and teaching ... McBrien's, Pierce's and your column ... invite the reader to reflect on various dimensions of living a Gospel response but also are happy combinations of solid input and pastoral sensitivity."

"... interesting and open-minded variety of coverage ... wealth of information ... has helped me to discover a new awareness of Christ in my life."

2.) What do you consider the greatest weakness of the *Catholic Courier*?

"... too much sports coverage ... too little Southern Tier coverage ... Elmira, Corning, Ithaca, Geneva, Bath, Hornell have a lot going on ... all of the time ... people love to read about themselves! We need practical approach to regional news."

"... was appalled by CC of January 20 ... expected deploring of the 21st anniversary of the infamous decision of the Supreme Court, *Roe vs. Wade*. Not a word in the whole newspaper ... seems the church does not care that millions of unborn children are killed ... that organs are used in experimentation ... would appreciate the reason for silence ... having social items is all right but what about also being spiritual, inspirational and religious? ... the paper is void of these ... also, am not interested in what is going on in Rochester."

"... whatever people read (in the *Catholic*



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Courier) they think is what you think (you are the President) ... it becomes easy to become confused."

"... would enjoy less of the news as reported in the secular media and perhaps more personal, spiritually uplifting, Catholic articles."

"... very little of interest or relevance for parishioners in the Southern Tier ... Found recent Synod to be most stimulating experience, yet CC has done little to pursue these ideas."

"... greatest weakness is editorial judgment exercised in printing some of the stories and some of the letters ... Letters to the Editor section has potential as forum for honest dialogue on issues ... however, all too often letters are vitriolic attacks on individuals or groups ... Policy states that not every letter is printed ... why then do vicious ones appear from time to time? Letters section often close to giving scandal ... official organ of community choosing to publish letters that deeply offend against charity ... hope for more careful evaluation ... Applaud openness to painful, controversial issues ... but crossed the line of responsible journalism in Naples story."

"... glaring weakness: a couple of pages in every issue devoted to the sports programs of Catholic high schools ... enough of that in daily press ... focus on only small fraction of high school population ... all matter ... not just those in Catholic high schools or those in sports."

"... news pertains mostly to City of Rochester and environs ... little or no interest to remainder of diocese ... rarely mention Notre Dame, Elmira ... problem of clustering in Elmira receives not the attention we would like ... Why not provide information about new catechism? ... some of the theology in the CC is in language which is over the head of the average reader."

"For instance, your current *Along the Way* (Feb. 3 regarding the Synod) ... you are so proud of the Synod. So am I ... hope of reforms and really addressing issues ... but you folks can't sit back on your laurels and keep rewinding the tape of pleasure about everything that was discussed ... you have the blossoms but no fruit."

"... see no real weakness but would somehow like to see more of our connect-

edness to one another."

3.) Suggestions for the improvement of the *Catholic Courier*:

a). Another columnist — a woman. Suggest Sidney Callahan and/or Dolores Curran.

b). A weekly summary of what the Pope has to say ... otherwise, how are we different from other Christian Churches? (And you don't have to take all the heat!)

c). Is it possible to have a column aimed at collegians?

d). A column on Church History would help us to learn from past mistakes, emulate successes of the past.

e). An adult education column written to help us deal with today's problems ... brief synopsis of Saint Bernard's courses included in CC ... Why don't parish priests ever refer to the CC? ... CC could be such a vital force ... takes time to prepare columns but scholars of all ages could share load.

f). CC should reprint articles of special significance, make them available to individuals, groups ... encourage more people to write to and for the CC ... offer prizes for good contributions.

g). Youth Feature very attractive, especially as they reveal young people of diocese living their faith ... inspiring and challenging ... Recommend expansion of this feature, less sports ... More extensive, consistent coverage of other end of the age spectrum.

h). How about professional stringers covering different sectors of diocese? ... regular feature focusing on flesh and blood implementation of Synod priorities in "models of excellence" parishes and groups?

I have included in the above material what I hope is a full and fair representation of readers' responses to my questions. I did limit myself in this week's column to responses that relate to the editorial content of the *Catholic Courier*: Thus, I did not include the thoughtful comments submitted by a couple of readers about our subscription/circulation policy. We will be exploring that and other similar matters in later entries in this series.

Now that our conversation has begun, I invite you to think about the comments of readers presented here. Please be free to write to me about any of them, or to present any ideas you might have to make our *Catholic Courier* a better, more useful publication for you. I will keep all comments in a running file and share their content with our Board of Directors and our professional staff.

A particular question to which I would invite your response: Our recent Synod identified moral education as one of our highest diocesan priorities. Would you please tell me in your own language what is the most challenging moral question you face and how this newspaper might serve you as you face that question?

I will welcome your responses at 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

Peace to all.

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