

Newspaper dialogue addresses moral issues

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I am very grateful to you for your letters about the *Catholic Courier* and about the practical moral questions you face in day-to-day living. In this column I will present what I hope is a full sampling of the range of moral issues you presented in your letters. Following that, I will offer a few comments on your letters and then present a request by which I hope to extend our conversation about our newspaper.

1. Moral issues: Your letters dealt with a wide range of issues. "... how to respond as an individual to the wars and atrocities in the former Yugoslavia? ... What should our church be doing? Is pleading for peace enough? ... So what can we do? ... Why are we so helpless?... The *Courier* can help by printing interviews within people who are facing tough moral decisions."

One writer mentioned concerns about racism: "I think it is morally wrong that the needs of black Catholics are not adequately met in this diocese ... they have special needs which can not be met by emphasizing parish ministry alone ... Is it possible for the *Catholic Courier* to keep us better informed, both from the wire service and locally on what is happening with Black Catholics on a more regular basis?"

"The greatest moral question?: the degenerate society in which we live ... back to basics ... strive for quality ... teach responsibility ... our foundations are crumbling ... we have to build them up again ... put ecumenism on the back burner ... Bottom line: Get God out of the closet."

"Our concern is for our family ... marriage no longer the norm ... sex before and outside marriage considered good ... chaste lives scorned and ridiculed ... children looked on as problems ... violence against children and spouses increasing ... message from the church too often muddled, nuanced or danced around, leading so many to conclude that in these matters anything goes, as long as I think it is OK."

"Questions that make clear our obligations in regard to caring for our body are very important ... obliged to chemotherapy and/or radiation, when there is no real assurance of a cure or real improvement? ... obligations regarding nutrition and hydration ... extreme expense to preserve life ... cigarette smoking ... drinking ... organ donation —



LONG THE WAY

obligatory?"

"Concerned about prayer, parenting, moral issues of war, peace, genetics, poverty."

"My concern is supporting and defending an institutional church that acts as though it is in full possession of the truth rather than as a church on a journey toward truth."

"Many things are reported in the *Catholic Courier* ... That is good ... however, without interpretive comment doctrinal and moral loose ends cause confusion among the faithful and could be the occasion of scandal ... Please give guidance in such matters."

"We feel it is time to push ahead wisely and strongly with the teachings and the spirit of *Humanae Vitae* ... a lifestyle of true freedom and true humanity ... Christian love rather than selfish love."

"... disrespect for the Blessed Sacrament ... chewing gum when receiving Holy Communion ... Let's quiet down our Sunday services, and remind all of us that we can visit outside."

"We checked and the Ten Commandments are moral issues. To disobey does apply here; therefore we ask you — did you give our parish priest the permission for us to have altar girls?"

"I messed up my marriage ... how do I deal with the loneliness of being single."

2. Comments:

a.) I must have misfiled a couple of letters from a couple who named the Church's exclusion of women as a serious moral issue for them. I can't quote them, so I did not include them above.

b.) Several letters referred, directly or indirectly, to the issues of moral

development and formation of conscience. Some welcome, even require, detailed and clear instruction about every moral question. Others prefer a clear statement of principles and much freedom for an honest application of them.

c.) Writers were interested in doing the right thing. To them this meant not just doing good and avoiding evil. It often called them to decisions that required them to choose between two or among many good choices.

d.) The letters you so kindly sent were a clear seconding of our Synod priority #3, which calls for moral education. People are dealing with some challenging moral questions today and, often enough, do not feel well equipped to deal with them.

e.) I am happy to tell you that the *Catholic Courier* is planning a regular column that will explore the kinds of moral questions with which people deal in today's world. Details of that new feature will be announced soon.

3. A request: It has become very clear to me in the course of our developing conversation about the *Catholic Courier* that readers a.) are highly attentive to our Letters to the Editor section and b.) quite discontent about the negative tone of a fairly high percentage of them.

Some correspondents criticize the *Catholic Courier* for publishing letters they judge to be vitriolic and bitter, unfairly critical of individuals, mocking and demeaning of others and their ideas.

Other contributors wonder why people with a positive view of things write much less frequently than do people who have a complaint to make.

If such matters are of interest to you, I invite you to respond to the following questions:

- Are there creative ways in which the *Catholic Courier* can promote a healthy and lively exchange of ideas between readership and the paper, among our readers?

- Do you have any suggestions to make about the kinds of letters you judge to be appropriate for inclusion in our Letters to the Editor section?

I will welcome your comments on these questions and will share your response in *Along the Way* next month.

In the meantime, I wish for you and your loved ones many blessings for the Easter season.

Peace to all.

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Question: What starring actor in *The Fugitive*, was also in *House of Cards*?

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