

OPINION COMMENTARY

Catholic Courier

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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 original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life. Please limit them to 500 words or fewer.

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 letters writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters for length as well as legal concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable.

Mail letters to: *Catholic Courier*, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address.

True charity overtakes indifference

To the editors:

Our government was unconscionably late in getting help to the unfortunate refugees from Rwanda. The government initiated its belated action only as a result of the graphic press coverage which exposed the staggering scope of this tragedy and, while the government and many organizations and individuals are now doing their bit, the need is, and will continue to be great. The Rwanda story does not end at starvation, dysentery, and cholera. I believe that there will be more to follow.

We are all familiar with the expression that admonishes us to remember that, "Charity begins in the home." It is a grave mistake to believe that Charity also ends in the home. Parents must teach their children the broader meaning of Christian Charity by their example as they shake off their own indifference and act out their version of the parable of the good Samaritan and

thereby reaffirm Christ's definition of "our neighbor."

Richard B. Blankfield
Nichols Street, Spencerport

EDITORS' NOTE: Mr. Blankfield requested that we publish the cartoon above with his letter. We do so with the kind cooperation of its author, John Trever.



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Bishops state: 'Death is never the answer'

To the editors:

Advocacy for a Consistent Life Ethic is an important element of our Synod Implementation process. This second Synod priority calls us as Catholics to take a pro-life stance about life in all its forms. Belief in the Consistent Life Ethic leads us to oppose abortion and euthanasia, to advocate for measures which enhance the quality of individual life and the common good, and to oppose such measures as the death penalty which legalize killing by the State.

In recent weeks, there has been discussion in the Diocese about Church teaching in reference to the death penalty. Attention has been called to the fact that the new catechism does not exclude the death penalty as an appropriate response to crime in "cases of extreme gravity."

An important role of the Bishops in the Church is as teacher, helping the Catholic community to apply the principles of Church teaching to the particular conditions of a given society at a given time. Collectively the Bishops of

the United States exercise this teaching function through the United States Catholic Conference. The Bishops of the State utilize the New York State Catholic Conference for this purpose.

In recognition of the specific conditions and circumstances which prevail in the United States at this time in history, the Bishops of the United States and of New York State have consistently and vigorously opposed the death penalty over the last 20 years.

In 1974, the United States Catholic Conference adopted a resolution that it go on record as opposed to the death penalty. In their November, 1980 "Statement on Capital Punishment," the United States Bishops stated their conviction that "the abolition of the death penalty would promote values that are important to us as citizens and Christians," by sending a message that we can break the cycle of violence, and that we need not take life for life.

Again this year, recognizing that "violent crime has reached unprecedented levels in our State and our nation," the

Bishops issued a follow-up statement: "Death is Not the Answer: A Reaffirmation of Opposition to Capital Punishment." In this recent document, the Bishops state: "the death penalty is an affront to the human dignity of both those on whom it is inflicted and those in whose name it is employed."

Certainly, violent crime and the fear it generates are a reality which touches all of us. Certainly, the debate about capital punishment in this State is far from over. The Bishops' February statement contributes to this debate:

"Capital punishment is the easy way out of addressing the complex, pervasive and expensive problems which surround us. The death penalty is no more the answer for violent crime than abortion is the answer to unplanned pregnancies. Death is never the answer."

Jack Balinsky,
Diocesan Director
of Catholic Charities,
and **Rev. Michael J. Bausch,**
Chairperson,
Diocesan Public Policy Committee

Catechism takes precedence over bishops' opinion

To the editors:

This letter is in reply to Sister Patricia Schoelles' commentary on "Abstract norms."

"Bishops are the successors to the apostles in teaching authority. Together, with the Pope, and never without him, they have supreme authority over the Universal Church. But this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Holy Father."

This statement is taken from the official proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (22) and clearly defines the proper relationship of the opinions of one or more bishops on faith and morals and their potential to represent official Church teaching.

The new Catechism was approved by the Holy Father and by his Apostolic Authority declared its contents to accurately reflect the Church's faith. The Pope, himself, stated, "It is a sure norm for teaching the faith and is a valid instru-

ment for presenting the teachings of the Magisterium and ... it provides solutions to problems and situations which had previously never existed."

It is difficult to consider why someone would consider less accurate sources to be as valid as the New Catechism in forming moral opinion, especially if they conflict with it and don't carry the weight of the Magisterium. Unless documents accurately reflect the teachings of the Holy Father, they will mislead the faithful. Confusion over moral issues in the last 25 years has resulted not from oversimplification of moral life, but from disregarding the teachings of the Holy Father in many areas and instead espousing the beliefs of those with less authenticity. It is similar to the situation of a physician offering his or her patient two radically different choices for treatment but not indicating which one is the better of the two and instead telling him to discover the correct treatment on his own.

Church leaders all over the world must apply universal teachings in ways appropriate to their regions but they must accurately conform with the teachings of the Magisterium or else cause moral harm. Although the statement of the American Bishops on the death penalty is reflective and well researched, it is not in complete agreement with official Church teaching on the subject as expressed in the New Catechism and does not bind the faithful to obedience. Opinions of bishops on issues of public faith and morals must be in conformity with those of the Holy Father and sometimes require his scrutiny, not vice versa.

The New Catechism is one of the best ways to deepen our faith and to develop a closer union with Christ. Let us all learn all we can about this document to more faithfully proclaim Christ to others and to build up His kingdom on earth.

Michael R. Aiello, M.D., President
The Catholic Physicians Guild