

OPINION COMMENTARY

Catholic Courier

1150 Buffalo Road
Rochester, NY 14624
716/328-4340

©1995, Rochester Catholic Press Association.

President

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

General Manager

Bishop Dennis W. Hickey

Editor/Asst. Gen. Mgr.

Karen M. Franz

Editorial Department

Managing Editor

Richard A. Kiley

Senior Staff Writer

Lee Strong

Finger Lakes

Staff writers

Rob Cullivan

Genesee Valley

Mike Latona

Southern Tier

Staff Photographer

S. John Wilkin

Photo Intern

Wendy Longlade

Business Department

Circulation Manager

Jeanne A. Morin

Office Manager

Mary DiPonzio

Receptionist

Lenna Hurley

Advertising Department

Advertising Director

Ray Frey

Assistant Ad Manager/ Classified Director

Kathy Welsh

Sales Representative

Bernie Puglisi

Production Department

Graphics Manager

Lorraine Hennessey

Graphic Artist

Kim Parks

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.

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 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 for verification purposes.

Prayer group draws reply from pro-life leadership

To the editors:

This letter is in response to the March 2 letter to the editors which questioned whether the U.S. Catholic bishops and Bishop Clark, specifically, have given much effort to fighting abortion.

Our bishops recognized the need to raise up church teaching on the value and dignity of human life before the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision legalized abortion. When state laws protecting the unborn were first threatened in the '60s and '70s, the bishops established the Respect Life Program to call the Catholic community to prayer, education and dialogue on life issues, and to a renewed commitment to advocacy and service in support of life.

Dioceses across the country have, since 1972, reserved October for celebration of Respect Life Month to launch year-round efforts. Packets of materials — a program manual, liturgical and homily suggestions, posters, fliers, etc. — are distributed to parishes every year to facilitate observance.

Advocacy campaigns regarding abortion and related concerns have been a regular part of the Diocese of Rochester's Respect Life Program: from the early days of collecting signatures on "Life Roll Cards" to the diocesan-wide participation in the New York State Catholic Conference's legislative forum in Albany on Feb. 28 of this year. There, legislators were visited and urged to vote, among other things, against Medicaid funding of abortions, and in favor of parental notification and informed consent.

The annual January Respect Life Program remembrance of the Supreme Court decision has also prompted advocacy efforts such as the '93 Project Life Sunday postcard collection to defeat the radical Freedom of Choice Act which sought to impose abortion on demand on every community in all 50 states; and the '94 Project Life Sunday postcard campaign to keep abortion out of Health Care Reform.

With the formation of the Diocesan Public Policy Committee, publication of a Legislative Agenda was undertaken. The document is distributed widely to government, religious, and community leadership. In the '93, '94 and '95 editions protection of human life figures prominently on both the state and federal level recommendations.

In their 1985 Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Reaffirmation, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops note:

"A consistent ethic, far from diminishing concern for abortion ... recognizes the distinctive character of each issue while giving its proper role within a coherent moral vision."

That vision affirms the dignity of human life in all its various stages and circumstances. We would conclude by referring all to Bishop Clark's October '94 letter to parishes regarding the Respect Life Month observance, in which we were called to "pray that the Holy Spirit will guide this faith community's recommitment to passionate advocacy on all life issues, and compassionate service for the unborn, undocumented, unemployed, disabled, isolated, imprisoned, addicted, infirm, any individual or family in crisis seeking life support."

**Father Michael J. Bausch, Chairman
Diocesan Public Policy Committee
and Jack Balinsky, Director
Diocesan Catholic Charities**



Article took 'ho-hum' tone

To the editors:

The *Catholic Courier* article on cohabitation (Feb. 9) left us both mad and sad. Mad at the "ho-hum" attitude of the article; sad that "more than half of the couples who register for marriage preparation in the diocese are living together;" mad that the Diocesan Coordinator of Sacramental Catechesis states that "current diocesan sacramental guidelines shed no light on the subject" and sad that "many priests don't know how to deal with it."

Co-habitation also implies pre-marital sex and even though times have changed in American society, sex outside of marriage is still a sin against God according to the new Catechism of the Catholic Church. In trying to condemn the sin and not the sinner — since we are all sinners — one of our intentions when we confess our sins and approach the altar is a resolve to try to avoid those sins in the future. How does cohabitation show any resolve to avoid the sin?

The Catechism says that marriage is a Sacrament. That means that it is something sacred — something special, and we believe that to do be true. And sex goes hand in hand with Marriage because of one of the signs of our honesty and purity of heart when we enter into marriage is our virginity — both husband and wife. Speaking in today's language, think of marriage as a "profession" — the most demanding, time-consuming, personal, interpersonal, blood-sweat-and-tears profession in this world. And though the pay may not be great, the rewards and benefits are "heavenly." ...

... But experimenting with marriage by cohabitation only tests a tiny part of marriage — the early years when the sparks of romance still exist and before kids. No, cohabitation doesn't even come close to being a true test of marriage — it's only the tip of the iceberg. The real test comes when familiarity sets in, living with each others' habits over a long period of

time and facing some of the hardships of life as well as the good times. Nothing, NOTHING tests the profession of marriage like raising kids — each stage of which becomes more complicated than the last. Cohabitation isn't the answer. And by not making the commitment before God, it's too easy to call it off when the going gets rough. We have to endure some of life's hardships, and with God's help they make the marriage stronger.

As sincere as the intent may be to "test the waters first," it's cheating — cheating each other and cheating God's sacredness of marriage. It is also stealing — stealing some of the sweetness of marriage, like the togetherness and sharing your bed — without making the commitment by marriage. We enjoy sex as much as anyone, but when we or society place the pleasures of sex above its beautiful and miraculous power to create new life, that's when we get into trouble with God — both as couples and as a society. So we encourage elevating the profession of marriage to the high level that it deserves. Marriage is a lifetime profession and even more importantly it is a Sacrament. That means that God will be with us if we try to make Him the center of our lives.

For those who think that pre-marital sex is OK and it's not a sin against God nor violates the sacrament of marriage, then maybe we do need some direction from the pulpit by our Bishop and Priests. But let that direction be straight, simple and unified based on the teachings of the Church — not individual opinions. If we are going to be Christians — followers of Jesus — then let us try to live as he teaches. After all, he did give up His life for us. We encourage you to read the new Catechism, especially Sections 1601-1605 and 1612-1622 on the Sacrament of Marriage, Sections 2360-2367 on the Sixth Commandment and Section 2353 on sins against chastity.

**Rod and Mary Discavage
Baird Road, Penfield**

Cohabiting is 'life without shame'

To the editors:

In my book you don't live together as husband and wife unless you are husband and wife via "marriage." To me co-habitation is "Life without Shame;" where have I heard that before?

My friend in Maryland was co-habiting when he approached his minister with his co-habitor. They were told to live apart or he wouldn't marry them. He moved out immediately and marriage preparation began. Why does the Catholic church look the other way or condone this behavior?

I respect Father Paul R. Schnacky's option — Right on! How can different pastors have different feelings on this matter? In the same Catholic faith?

Mike and Diane feel this decision is between them and God. Did God make an

exception. Didn't God give Moses the 10 Commandments? Wasn't one of them "Thou shalt not commit adultery?" (fornication if not married).

A member of my family tried to rationalize to OK a lifestyle — he knew it was wrong and so did we — it didn't wash!

Father John J. Philipps takes a very liberal stand and has a blame attitude.

I was brought up in the Catholic Faith — premarital sex and cohabiting was sinful. If you truly repent, all the Mikes and Dianes should live separately and then begin marriage preparations. Let's not make "Life without Shame" OK.

My friend in Maryland didn't become bitter. He listened to his minister and all is just fine.

**Marion Scowcraft
Bradford Road, Pittsford**