

## Pope calls us to move beyond despair

By Patricia Schoelles, SSJ  
Courier columnist

I am in the process of studying the new encyclical from Pope John Paul II. The title of the encyclical is taken from its opening phrase: *Evangelium Vitae*, or, in English, "The Gospel of Life."

Its main theme is that we live in a culture that threatens human life in myriad ways. Pope John Paul uses this, his 11th encyclical, to call us to transform our societies into cultures of life instead of cultures of death.

In the opening pages of the work, many inspiring passages catch the eye of even the most casual reader. For theologians and those who study these documents in depth, many interesting theological "moves" accompany the inspiration of these opening pages.

For example, the pope cites a passage from *Gaudium et Spes*, one of Vatican Council II's most important documents and one cited by many as a firm foundation for "the consistent life ethic" so prominent in the church of Rochester since our own synod.

The passage establishes a definite link among the many issues that threaten human life, and as Pope John Paul states: "Today this proclamation is especially pressing because of the extraordinary increase and gravity of threats to the life of individuals and peoples, especially where life is weak and defenseless."



### THE MORAL LIFE

The passage from *Gaudium et Spes* 27 reads: "Whatever is opposed to human life itself such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction; whatever violates the integrity of the human person such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body and mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons: All these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society..."

By citing this important passage, Pope John Paul links the intention of his own work, coming 30 years after *Gaudium et Spes*, with that of the drafters of the conciliar document. A few paragraphs later, the pope cites several additional problems characteristic of our own times. He writes:

"And how can we fail to consider the violence against life done to millions of human beings, especially children, who are forced into poverty, malnutrition and hunger because of an unjust distribution of the resources between peoples and between social classes? And what of the violence inherent not only in wars as such, but in the scandalous arms trade, which spawns the many armed conflicts which stain our world with blood? What of the spreading of death caused by reckless tampering with the world's ecological balance, by the criminal spread of drugs or by the promotion of certain kinds of sexual activity...?"

For Pope John Paul, as for the authors of the council document, the issues that threaten life are linked together. We confront not just individual issues that threaten life, but also an entire culture that lets life assume a less important place on our scale of values than the place we accord to some other goods.

The pope offers the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis as a context for the rest of the encyclical. He repeats the story and offers a reflection

on it. He writes: "Brother kills brother. Like the first fratricide, every murder is a violation of the 'spiritual' kinship uniting mankind in one great family, in which all share the same fundamental good: equal personal dignity."

Many of us feel very keenly the violation of a "spiritual kinship" in our own country these days. The terrible bombing in Oklahoma City has shattered some of the security and trust we thought we had with one another in this country. Even before the bombing, we knew that our own country has the highest rate of murder and violent crime in the entire world. Many live here in an atmosphere of fear and constant distress because of the threat of injury and death.

Pope John Paul's encyclical is a clear call to begin again to transform our culture, which promotes death and diminishes life in so many ways. We may be tempted in our own society to fall into a kind of despair because of the overwhelming presence of violence all around us.

The pope's encyclical calls us to move beyond this sort of paralyzing despair, and to refuse to let violence and the culture of death triumph. He lets us know that we have important resources to help us in this task. We have our church's constant tradition, reflected in his citation from *Gaudium et Spes*, and we have the Scriptures, which reject violence and murder even from the opening pages of Genesis.

## Weathering rough financial waters

By Karen M. Franz  
Editor in chief

In articles about the recent establishment of an alternative daily newspaper for Rochester, observers have noted that — due to skyrocketing costs for newsprint paper — the present is a difficult time to launch a new publication.

Combining those costs with an ongoing series of postal increases, I might add that the present also is a difficult time to continue publishing a not-for-profit, mailed newspaper.

A year ago, for example, our variable costs — those associated with printing and mailing an edition of various sizes — were 17 to 25 percent lower than they are today, depending on weekly page count. Last May, a 16-page issue cost us \$5,536 to print and mail, whereas this current issue will cost \$6,662. And those figures do not include staff wages, such overhead items as rent and utilities, the fees of news services to which we subscribe and other "fixed" or administrative costs!

Those of you who purchase Rochester-area daily newspapers at



### BETWEEN THE LINES

newsstands have seen the per-copy price rise almost 43 percent in recent months, as Gannett Rochester Newspapers has passed along some of its increased newsprint costs to transient customers. (Subscribers thus far have been shielded from such increases.) Newspapers all over the country reluctantly are following the same course.

The *Catholic Courier*, which has mi-

nuscle newsstand sales, has been forced to notify parishes that it will raise subscription prices by 12.6 percent. Direct subscribers will experience comparable increases when their current terms expire.

Although our postal costs rose more than 13.5 percent per issue in January, 1995, and newsprint price increases drove our printing costs up by 30-35 percent last month, the subscription-price increases do not go into effect until July 1, 1995. This delay is necessary to avoid confronting parishes with increases unanticipated in their current budgets. (Parishes begin their new budget year on July 1.)

In the interim — and in the almost certain event that newsprint prices will continue to rise after July 1 — the *Catholic Courier* finds itself in a financial bind. Given that our entire financial structure is geared toward breaking even — and putting a small amount aside for unforeseen circumstances — how will we absorb these cost differentials?

First of all, we are carefully monitoring our administrative costs, pruning them insofar as possible and ensuring that no extraordinary costs are

incurred.

Secondly, we are considering the possibility of raising our advertising rates later this year. Such a move would come on top of the annual increase we imposed in January, 1995.

Thirdly, we are holding down the size of each week's edition. Based on the formula we used prior to 1995, last week's edition would have been 20 pages rather than the 16 we actually published. Under the new formula, this edition actually should be 12 pages instead of 16, but — even though we will incur a loss of approximately \$1,500 — we cannot justify reducing our "newshole," or editorial space, that much.

Finally, we are aggressively pursuing greater advertising revenues, expecting special sections scheduled for later this spring to generate revenues that will cover whatever losses we encounter prior to the July 1 subscription-price increase.

As the media observers noted, these are turbulent times for the newspaper industry. We hope you will be patient with us — and our current inability to present more news — until we reach calmer shores.

"To become a saint, one only has to WILL to be a saint."

— St. Scholastica

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