

OPINION COMMENTARY

Catholic Courier

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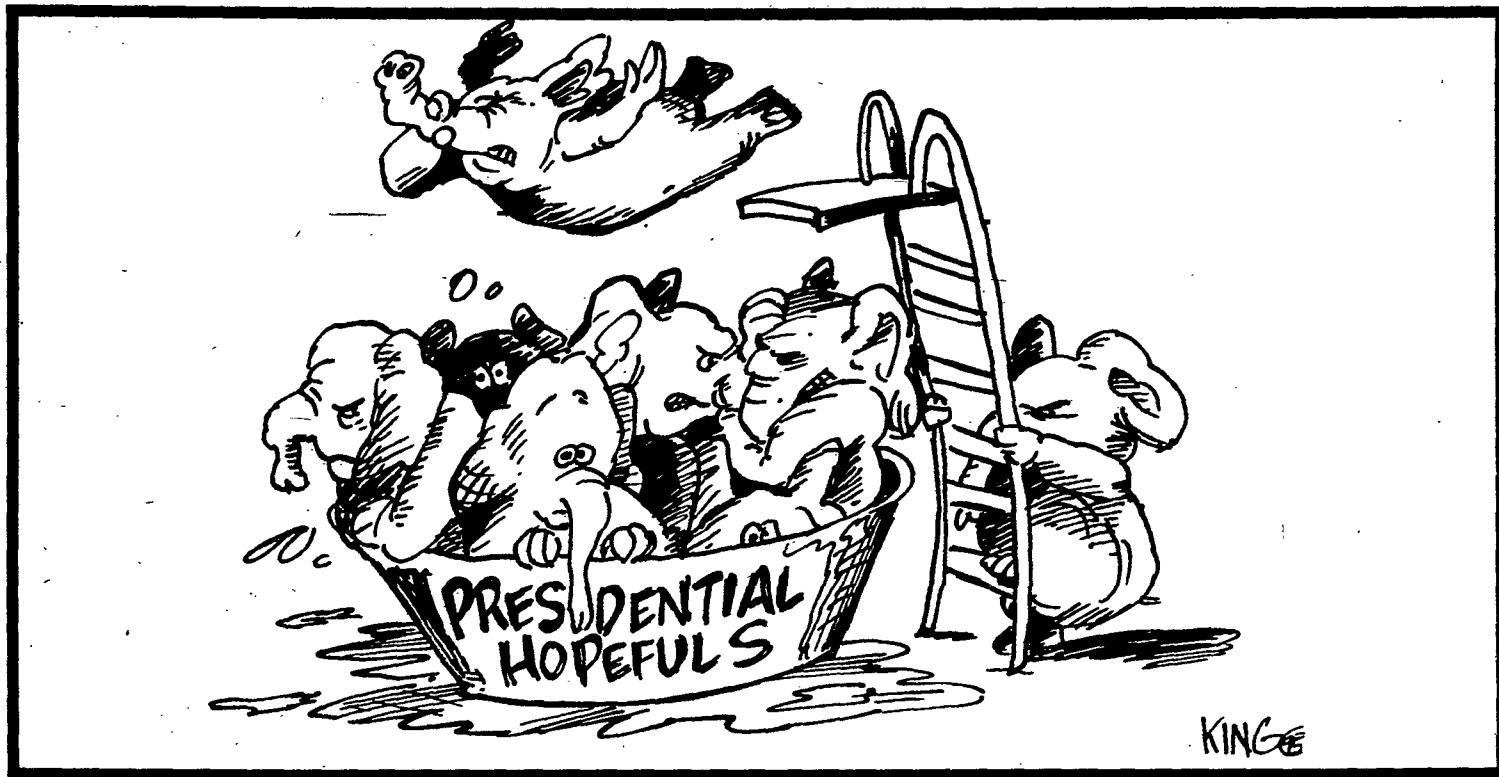
Letters Policy

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.

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.



The church is bigger than just one's parish

To the editors:

In reference to the letter printed in the July 6, 1995 "Courier" from Cheryl E. Russell, I'm not sure whether I'm angry, frustrated or feel sorry for her. She writes about the appointment of Father Peter Clifford as Pastoral Administrator last fall. Please Ms. Russell be happy you have a warm body to lead your church.

About 10 years ago we had an administrator appointed to our then church. He came every Sunday to say Mass at our and a neighboring church. He then appointed two lay people to meet with the Bishop. I was one of them. We met. The task was formidable and in the end our

church closed! I tell you this story because there is a priest shortage.

My two daughters have since been married. Neither could be married at St. Michael's, Montezuma because they closed our church. The reason I mention these happy occasions in our family is because each was married in the Roman Catholic Church. We, as a family, have moved on to realize how BIG this



church is.

The idea of church is to many of us now more than "bricks and mortar." It is a union with Christ that for me and others has changed because we are part of the Northern Cayuga Cluster. There are three church buildings, two parish houses and one body of Christ. The feelings of community are certainly strained at times but more important than any of this, my daughters were married in the CHURCH!

We in the Cluster work very hard to maintain the "security blanket," a building with a priest (pastor), of long ago. The number of priests is declining. You need to seek viable alternatives to meet your needs. Maybe an administrator, cluster or closing is what the large picture includes in the future.

I have learned many things about MY Church in the last few years. Perhaps this will help you and people like you remain practicing Catholics. Try to keep the we in your view of Church. Don't get too me orientated. Even more importantly, you can take the people out of the church but you can't take the Church out of the people. Maybe if more people in the world had a little church in them, including the we, some of the moral dilemmas we face in the world would be or look differently.

I don't mean to be too tough but I want to share my experiences with you. Thanks for reading on and on. God love you. Keep the faith.

Roxanna M. Smith
Northern Cayuga Cluster
Montezuma

Consciences are subject to error; church's teachings offer guidance

To the editors:

Sister Patricia Schoelles tells us in her May 18 commentary in the *Courier* that she received a letter from one of her readers asking "whether the church really wants us to obey our consciences" and not "just do what the church says." This question suggests that there could be situations where one is faced with following one's conscience or following the Church's teaching.

While one must always follow his or her conscience, as Sister Patricia and the Church herself maintain, I contend that a conscience in conflict with Church teaching is a conscience in need of formation. While Sister Patricia detects in current Church documents a "move to a less restrictive interpretation of the role of church teaching in the formation of conscience," I see (in those same documents and others) just the opposite.

The Vatican II Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) does indeed give us a beautifully and authoritatively worded description of conscience, which Sister Patricia cites, but it also warns us "that conscience goes astray through ignorance" and while this would be excusable in cases of unavoidable (invincible) ignorance, it cannot be excused in the "one who takes little trouble to find out what is true and good" or ("whose conscience) is almost blinded through the habit of committing sin" (GS

#16)...

What is missing in Sister Patricia's response to her reader's question is the fact that our consciences are subject to error and in need of help from the Church. To follow one's conscience (which is always the right thing to do) does not mean that the judgments of our consciences are always right. "Conscience is not an infallible judge; it can make mistakes," as Pope John Paul II makes clear in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, a definitive exposition on the Church's moral teaching.

We have, therefore, an obligation not only to follow our consciences, but also to form our consciences, and we will be judged on how sincerely we do both. And in that formative process, we can and should turn readily to Church teachings, confident that ... the Church, when she pronounces on moral questions, in no way undermines the freedom of conscience of Christians. This is so not only because freedom of conscience is never freedom "from" the truth but always and only freedom "in" the truth, but also because the Magisterium does not bring to the Christian conscience truths which are extraneous to it; rather it brings to light the truths which it ought already to possess ... (VS #64).

Joseph O'Donnell
Edgely Road, Bethesda, Maryland
EDITORS' NOTE: This letter has been edited to comply with space limitations.

Christians are called to give witness

To the editors:

I agree with Elizabeth Shipley's letter of 6/15/95 regarding protesting against abortion. I believe that being a Christian includes giving witness to one's Christianity and that walking and praying in

front of an abortion place is a good form of witness. Also this presence can inform people of the many places where abortions are being performed.

Mary M. Studier
Mosley Road, Rochester

Priests deserve praise for work done for Christ

To the editors:

For years people have taken the priests for granted. Some are always ready to criticize and never giving them credit for all the good work they do.

Priests do not fall from the sky. They have families and have experienced sorrow, joy and disappointments. Yes, they are real human beings.

How many of us would like to be on call twenty-four hours a day? Not many I can assure you.

So we should all do our best to lighten their duties. When help is needed offer your talents, that's the least we can do.

Let us not forget they have given their life to Christ. We should always let them know, that we appreciated all they do for us.

Marie J. Kowalczyk
Cristine Circle, Penfield