

# OPINIONS

## 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 letter writers' opinions.

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, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for verification purposes.

## 'News' item didn't offer wider view, reassurance

### To the editors:

For some time people have debated the role of the Catholic press in the Church of the 1990s. The place of the *Catholic Courier* in the ministry of the Church of our Diocese has been a part of that debate.

Personally, I have wrestled with this and have not found a sure answer on one side or the other. There are times when I see the value and potential opportunities for the Diocesan newspaper in the efforts to challenge and renew parishioners and leaders in the Church. At other times, one wonders how much impact the once-a-week newspaper has in helping our parishes to wrestle with the issues of today.

In light of recent events in which one of our priests was arrested and allegations of sexual misconduct were made, I think our local Catholic press has missed an opportunity to serve our Diocesan Church.

This sad news story was reported by the *Catholic Courier* merely as a news story, by the time of publication, warm news at best. I anticipated that our paper would take a different approach to this news and offer a broader view of the issues involved. I expected that you would revisit the guidelines and policy that our Bishop established in 1993; further it would have been a good opportunity to



reassure our people that these matters are dealt with differently today than they have been in the past. While Bishop Clark's editorial piece in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* was helpful, your paper has coverage for the whole Diocese.

A broader presentation might have included a summary of how the Diocese deals with issues of inappropriate behavior of all employees, clergy and lay. Further you could have included an informative article on how volunteers such as CYO coaches are covered by policy as well as Scout leaders whose troops are sponsored by so many parishes.

I do not think the Catholic press should offer the same as we get from the local newspaper. Part of your mission should be, I believe, to help all in the Catholic community understand the policies and procedures that guide our Church today. In this case, I think you have let us down.

Thank you for this opportunity for allowing me to have my say.

Father Kevin P. Murphy, pastor  
St. John the Evangelist Church  
Floverton Street, Rochester

**EDITORS' NOTE:** The Courier staff learned of this news story when a local radio station broke it on Friday, Feb. 16. Our Feb. 22 issue went to press just two business days later (Feb. 20), preventing us from doing any substantive analysis or background reporting at that time. As we already have informed Father Murphy by telephone, in mid-April the Catholic Courier will present a thoroughly researched analysis of the local and universal-church response to clergy sex abuse.

We might also note that the Courier provided extensive coverage of the diocesan sexual-abuse guidelines in June, 1993, and also published Bishop Clark's essay in its Feb. 29, 1996, issue, after the essay had appeared in Rochester dailies and secular papers outside Monroe County.

## Abuse victim encouraged by bishop's policy

### To the editors:

This is in response to Bishop Clark's column of Feb. 29 dealing with sexual abuse, specifically the charge of abuse against Father Emo. This topic once wouldn't have been dealt with this openly. I often wondered whether the diocese had a policy dealing with sexual abuse accusations made against priests.

I am pleased to see the Diocese acted so quickly in removing Father Emo from ministry. Till the charges against him are resolved, he should be kept away from children. Though the person believed to have been abused by Father Emo is in his

30s, he has the mentality of a child.

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I know the long-lasting effects this traumatic experience can cause. If nothing is done to help the victim, and steps are taken that protect the perpetrator, the child is victimized again and again. He or she is not allowed to become a survivor as long as this victimization continues.

When I was growing up, priests were perceived differently than the rest of the population. We never talked to them as young people are able today. Thank goodness that's changed.

Since priests were not viewed on the same level as others, we never knew if they perhaps had gotten away with things others didn't. But who could we go to with a complaint? Anyone else in Church authority was also a member of the Religious life, and they might have stuck up for one another.

When I was 19 years old, I had a very unfortunate experience with a Priest. He didn't touch me, but he did re-victimize me with things he said to me. I was completely devastated, but I felt I had no recourse in the matter.

I had no idea who in the Church family I could turn to. As a result, I left the Church for a long period of time. This was a very depressing time in my life. This incident brought back many memories that had been buried from my childhood abuse, feelings of shame, of being dirty, of not being able to trust people, especially men.

Several years passed before I found my way back to the Church. Many changes occurred while I was away. Happily one of those changes allowed us to see that priests and other religious were flesh and blood like the rest of us.

Now Bishop Clark has committed the Diocese to be open in investigations of alleged clerical abuse. He has apologized to all victims of unscrupulous members of the clergy. He has let us know evil deeds cannot be hidden behind priestly collars. I thank him on behalf of all of us who had our youthful trust violated. This is a giant step in our healing process.

It's also a promise to children that they are a precious gift from God, and should always be protected. Maybe now we survivors can let our inner child know that the world is becoming a safer place for all children.

Barbara J. Miller  
Painted Post

## State Catholic conference urges informed electoral participation

### To the editors:

Thank you for your extensive coverage of the New York State Catholic Conference's annual Public Policy Forum, which was highlighted in the March 7 issue of the *Catholic Courier*. We are encouraged by the fine turnout for the event as well as the general level of interest among Catholics in matters relating to public policy issues.

Particularly in this, an election year, we urge the Catholic faithful to look beyond the candidates' clever commercials and one-sentence sound bites to find out where they stand on important issues of the day. We urge deeper examination of the Church's rich social teachings and Gospel values in order that we might properly analyze the policy proposals made by the candidates. As our Bishops tell us "... we are called to become informed, active and responsible participants in the political process."

The Forum is just the beginning. We

encourage follow-up visits with legislators in district offices, ongoing letters, phone calls, dialogue with elected officials. We urge legislative networks and parishes to continue the process of education which has begun, through adult education forums, religious education programs, schools, and other formats. The Catholic Conference (518-434-6195) stands ready to assist the Diocese of Rochester in any way possible.

As we approach the joyous Easter season of rebirth and transformation, let us put aside cynicism, distrust and apathy toward our political system. We must join together to give democracy an authentic and solid foundation. By bringing our moral convictions and Gospel values into the public arena, we can begin to transform society for the better and advance the common good of all.

John M. Kerry, executive director  
New York State Catholic Conference  
465 State St., Albany 12203