

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.

Have we already crossed the line?

In recent weeks, federal courts in California and New York handed down decisions that allow doctors to help patients kill themselves.

And on April 10, President Clinton vetoed legislation banning partial-birth abortions.

In and of themselves, these actions are troubling attacks on life. But they may have more ominous implications.

In his 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in San Francisco, Judge Stephen Reinhardt extended the so-called "right to privacy" supposedly embodied in the 14th Amendment to include the right to commit suicide when a person whose death is imminent wants to die with dignity.

The right to privacy also was part of the basis for the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe vs. Wade* decision, which effectively legalized abortion in the United States.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Circuit Court in New York City argued that New York state laws prohibiting assisted suicide violate the Constitution by failing to treat people equally. The court asserted that people should be allowed to end their lives through medication because patients on life-support systems legally may be disconnected from those systems at their request. The court said the state had no interest in prolonging a "life that is all but ended."

Meanwhile, as President Clinton vetoed the partial-birth abortion ban, he said he would consider signing the bill if it were changed to include an exemption based on the health of the mother.

Health of the the mother is the same criterion that has been applied to all abortions since *Roe vs. Wade* and its sister decision, *Doe vs. Bolton*. As a result, courts have interpreted "health" so broadly that a woman can obtain a legal abortion at any point in her pregnancy simply by arguing that carrying the child to term would cause her to experience depression, clinical or otherwise. Indeed, a number of partial-birth abortions are already being done for this reason, even though the unborn children suffer no maladies and pose no physical threats to their mothers.

The two recent circuit court decisions and President Clinton's veto all open the door to similarly broad interpretation.

If doctors can assist in the suicide of a terminally ill patient, how soon will they offer the same "assistance" to those suffering incurable but not necessarily terminal diseases — as Dr.



EDITORIAL

When will death with dignity become not a right but an obligation? To predict our own future, we need only look at recent developments in other nations that have followed the course on which we now embark.

The Netherlands decriminalized physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia in 1984. In "Euthanasia in the Netherlands," published in the winter 1990 edition of *Issues in Law & Medicine*, Dr. Richard Fenigsen reported the findings of his study of various Dutch government and medical-association reports about the practice of physician-assisted suicide in that nation. He noted that:

- people are already being "euthanized" without their consent;
- handicapped newborns are being "actively terminated";
- some decisions to terminate patients are based on perceived value of the patient to society. Thus, for example, some seniors who are not in immediate danger of death have nevertheless been given lethal injections.

In 1994, meanwhile, the Dutch Supreme Court sanctioned assisted suicide for people with severe mental illness.

In China, aborted babies are being eaten for health purposes, as reported in 1995 by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities.

Far-fetched? Consider the fact that, after a decade of U.S. debate over using fetal tissue for research and medicinal purposes, a woman not long ago conceived a baby specifically for the purpose of providing transplant tissue for one of her older children.

One no longer has to wonder where we will draw the line when it comes to the sanctity of life. Now we can only ask: Have we already crossed it?

Parishes can become set in their ways

To the editors:

In response to Grace Carnes' letter of March 14 ("Perplexed by essay about groups") and her perplexity about my description of attitudinal problems in the Church which impede evangelism:

Is it true that in 90 percent of the parishes in the diocese you will find the people in any one congregation represent a diversity of races, cultural background, and lifestyles? I think the answer is no.

I made a modest attempt in my letter to rebuke spiritual impediments to evangelism in the Church. In no way am I demeaning anyone's personal faith, insulting them, or calling them names.

It is not un-Christian to identify ignorance, a grudge bearing heart, or illiteracy, and call it that, using whatever spiri-

tual insight one may have. It would be folly to indulge all of the above, and God, we are sure, does not love foolishness.

Now "family groups" is an admittedly imperfect term to describe the kind of extended family networks that can develop in a closed social unit such as the parish Church has been known to become. Folks will stick to their own kind long before they will look for the challenge of broader social relations, won't they? If you agree, then it's useful to know that folks in the Church might feud in their hearts. Righteous intolerance and limited self-knowledge in an authoritarian personality can yield the mentality of a closed-minded religious, ready to exclude others, and not include them.

If folks don't feel like sharing the Gospel, but make a big financial contribution instead, then the pastor may let them off the hook, may get off their backs. So they are indulged, and receive a "temporal indulgence."

The point is that traditional folk behavior and attitudes need not be valued above a Gospel which calls us to a radical transformation from sin to salvation. Often we need to change the way we've been doing things for years and years with our kith and kin if we are to grow in faith or bring others into the faith. And if we cannot take the Gospel to the world outside the Church because changing behavior is just too fearful, then who is it who will be Christ's ambassadors?

W.G. Beeney
Rock Beach Road, Rochester

Coordinators invite couples to try Marriage Encounter

To the editors:

We are grateful to Victor and Christine LaBaro for providing us with this opportunity to clarify what Worldwide Marriage Encounter is all about. They lamented in their letter of April 11, 1996, ("Make time to protect marriages") that our Church does little beyond recommending Marriage Encounter for enrichment of Catholic marriages.

We coordinate Marriage Preparation for St. Mary's Parish in Bath and together with Father Jack Murray, CSB, we are the Rochester Area Coordinators for Worldwide Marriage Encounter. We applaud the LaBaros for promoting the idea that "God is the author of marriage and mar-

riage is one of the seven sacraments of the Church." In Marriage Encounter, we also emphasize the sacramentality of marriage and promote ongoing growth in a married couple's relationship.

In addition to Marriage Encounter weekends — offered regularly in Rochester, Bath, and Canandaigua — Marriage Encounter offers ongoing community support in the form of Small Christian Communities which meet regularly all over the diocese. Couples who have experienced a Marriage Encounter weekend are offered the opportunity to join one of these groups. Many couples continue meeting for years after their weekend. The Weekend atmosphere of

listening, acceptance, and love encourages wives and husbands to continue to grow in their relationship.

We invite the LaBaros and any other interested couples of any faith to experience a Marriage Encounter weekend and see the reason that the Church recommends it so strongly. Pope John Paul II has said "I place much of my hope for the future in Marriage Encounter."

For information, please contact John and Belinda Brasley at (607) 776-4870 or Gary and Carol Stevens at (716) 637-0601.

John & Belinda Brasley
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