

# COLUMNISTS

## Schools' pages produced mixed results

I've received several thoughtful responses to the series of questions I posed in my last column. I'll use most of this and the next few columns to tell you about those responses (in the order I received them), respond to the ideas presented and then ask your opinion.

The first letter came from Kathy Peters, principal at St. Michael's School in Newark. In response to my question about how to get more people to sample the *Courier*, Mrs. Peters suggested that we give each of the 54 diocesan elementary schools — and, I assume, the seven Catholic high schools — one or two pages per year for self-promotion. Her idea entailed asking the schools to prepare articles and photos for their page(s).

"I feel this would not only promote and educate the readers on what Catholic schools are doing in this Diocese, but it would sell more newspapers," Mrs. Peters wrote, noting that St. Michael's alone reaches more than 220 families. "Maybe once people saw the *Catholic Courier*, they would continue to order it."

Before I respond to this idea, I should note that the *Courier* participated — albeit on a scale much smaller than what Mrs. Peters suggests — in a similar 1980s endeavor called "Expressly Elementary." Each month the *Courier* published one full page of material prepared by the diocesan schools office from items submitted by individual schools.

The "Expressly Elementary" installment published 12 years ago today (May 9, 1984) contained 10 items from



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BY KAREN M. FRANZ

schools and school groups: four identically sized photos (two candid shots and two posed ones) of mediocre to poor quality; announcements of four upcoming events, two of which were open to the public; progress reports on a tuition program newly implemented at one school and of a now-defunct diocesan parents' group; and reports of activities that had occurred two months earlier at various schools. Several of the 10 items consisted primarily of name listings.

As I recall, one or more installments of "Expressly Elementary" were pending publication when I took over as editor in April 1985. I canceled those installments for two basic reasons:

1) I believe a newspaper's staff should have full responsibility for and control over all coverage the newspaper presents; it is unethical for a newspaper to give individuals and groups control over "news" about themselves.

2) I couldn't understand why any one interest group in the diocese should be entitled to a page per month — or one to

two pages per week — when other diocesan groups cannot receive equal space allocations. That puzzle also has been the basis for the *Courier's* reluctance to grant standing column space to any number of groups over the past decade.

Continuing to publish "Expressly Elementary" in 1985 would have given Catholic schools more than 6 percent of the *Courier's* total "news hole" of four local pages. While we have four or more times as much local coverage space today, Mrs. Peters' idea still would allocate 7 to 15 percent of our current news hole to Catholic schools, depending on whether each school got one or two pages per year.

That just doesn't seem proportionate to the number of readers who have shown strong interest in Catholic schools. As evidenced by the huge volume of public-school graduation notices parishes have been sending to our office for the past month, far more Catholic children attend public school than Catholic school. I'm sure Mrs. Peters hopes the *Courier* could help change that fact by publishing school pages, but I don't think any amount of newspaper coverage would generate a significant enrollment boost. Moreover, we would have to eliminate other coverage to make room for the schools pages.

What's your opinion? I'll fill you in on some more of your fellow readers' ideas next time.

Almost a year ago we attempted to launch a series of monthly editorials on

issues of concern to Catholics. That effort stalled on takeoff; the 1995 "series" consisted of a single installment. To mark Catholic Press Month this year, however, we decided to give it another try. Editorials have appeared on Feb. 8 and monthly thereafter.

Several people have noted, however, that I neglected to offer any introduction or explanation for this new feature. So let me offer just a few belated remarks on the subject. As you know, lifelong religious education was the No. 1 goal defined by our diocesan Synod. In support of that goal, the *Catholic Courier* has stepped up its efforts to provide more material to enrich the religious education of adult readers.

Whereas the *Courier's* orientation over the last decade was almost exclusively toward news, during the past year we have added components — monthly catechetical cover stories, "The Moral Life" column by Sister Pat Schoelles, and monthly editorials among them — to help readers interpret news events in light of their faith and church teachings. Thus recent editorials have discussed the ethics and morality of corporate profit maximization at workers' expense; the need to protect the poor amid welfare reform; and the slippery moral slope of physician-assisted suicide.

We hope you have found these editorials useful and interesting, and we welcome your feedback.

Franz is general manager/editor of the *Courier*.

## Collection offers poets' views of work

"Why has poetry traditionally ignored the working life?" Nicholas Coles and Peter Oresick ask in their introduction to *For a Living: The Poetry of Work* (University of Illinois Press, 1995). "It may be," they answer, "that the traditional reticence about work is not so much that of poets themselves as of those who collect and edit their work."

To prove their point, Coles and Oresick put together this anthology of 185 poems by 96 contemporary poets about the nature and culture of work — specifically nonindustrial work, that is, work that has in common the production of services or information rather than more tangible or durable goods. Instead of only reproducing poems published elsewhere, the authors also mailed a call for manuscripts to each of the 5,000 practicing poets listed in *A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers* and received thousands of submissions.

Unfortunately for those interested in the spirituality of work, most of the po-



faith &  
work

BY GREGORY F. AUGUSTINE PIERCE

ems are about how awful work is. Wanda Coleman writes in "Drone":

i am a clerk  
i am a medical billing clerk  
i sit here all day and type  
the same type of things all day long  
insurance claim forms  
for people who suffer chronic renal  
failure  
fortunately these people I rarely see.  
...

Mark Defoe tells how difficult it is to work at McDonald's in "The Former Miner Returns from His First Day as a Service Worker":

All day he grinned while the public,  
with bland  
Or befuddled faces, scowled over his  
head  
And mumbled, whispered, snarled,  
and snapped. ...

Some poets do manage to find the spiritual in work. In her poem, "No Fear of Blood," Kirsten Emmott describes how much she loves her job delivering babies:

It's the most beautiful red there is.  
And the hot red blood smells good,  
it's a strange animal smell,  
odd the first time you notice it.

And Tess Gallagher writes about ironing her husband's shirt in "I Stop Writ-

ing the Poem":

I bring the arms of his shirt  
together. Nothing can stop  
our tenderness. I'll get back  
to the poem. I'll get back to being  
a woman. But for now  
there's a shirt, a giant shirt  
in my hands, and somewhere a small  
girl  
standing next to her mother  
watching to see how it's done.

"There is the sense that doing this work is as holy as the writing of the poem," Gallagher explained, "and that a woman's creative life is more intermittent, full of pauses and duties, interrupted yet sustained by certain not to be disparaged useful gifts to order the household."

It seems that for poets, as for the rest of us, the spirituality of work is what we make of it.

Pierce is co-publisher of ACTA Publications, Chicago.

## ☆☆ Coming Attractions ☆☆

from the Catholic Courier

### Summer Guide

Publication Date: May 23 • Advertising Deadline: May 19



As *Courier* readers prepare for the summer months, this special supplement will present them with a host of activities for their consideration. From nearby church-sponsored festivals and retreats to places beyond, this supplement will serve as a well-used summer planning guide.

### Graduation

Publication Date: June 13 • Advertising Deadline: May 30



(Bonus distribution to graduating students)  
A look at the high school Class of '96 as its members prepare for life after high school. In addition to the annual listing of graduates' names, this special supplement also will contain feature articles on selected graduates, with special emphasis on their expectations and plans for the future.

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