

# OPINIONS

## Catholic Courier

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Rochester, NY 14624  
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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.

# English martyrs set clear example

In 1535, Cardinal John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, England, and Thomas More, the nation's former chancellor, were beheaded for refusing to accept the Act of Succession, which effectively named King Henry VIII head of the church in England.

The initial dispute that led to Henry's demand for control of the church was Pope Clement VII's decision not to annul Henry's marriage to Queen Catherine. The pope stood his ground despite claims of a troubled conscience, then pressure, cajoling and threats from the English king, who wanted to marry his mistress, Anne Boleyn.

To get what he wanted, Henry simply made himself head of the church — exempting himself from the laws of the Roman Catholic Church and the rulings of the pope.

A handful of Catholics joined Cardinal Fisher and More in martyrs' deaths to defend their church and its teachings. But Cardinal Fisher was the only English bishop to denounce Henry's claim to control the church. And More was the only major political figure to side with the church in its conflict with the king.

Both More and Cardinal Fisher were leading intellectuals known and respected throughout Europe. In addition, Cardinal Fisher had written numerous works defending the church against dissidents and Protestant reformers, and was often held up as a model bishop. Thus their deaths resonated throughout the West.

In a touch of irony, Henry VIII had, just a few years earlier, earned the title of "Defender of the Faith" for his opposition to the reforms proposed by Martin Luther.

The 461 years since the conflict have perhaps obscured its significance. Indeed, the issue that blossomed into their struggle over church authority and led to Cardinal Fisher and More's deaths — divorce — may seem trivial to some

people in light of contemporary moral standards.

But the three men caught up in that 16th century confrontation are really not so alien to us.

Henry placed his own opinions and desires above obedience to his Catholic faith and the teachings of Rome. Recent debates among Catholics over such issues as abortion and birth control suggest he is not alone in doing so.

More resigned his position, saw his political career destroyed and ultimately gave up his life because he could not act against his moral beliefs and the rules of his church. How many times have we heard modern Catholic politicians declare, "Personally, I am opposed to — abortion, physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment,

etc. — but ...?"

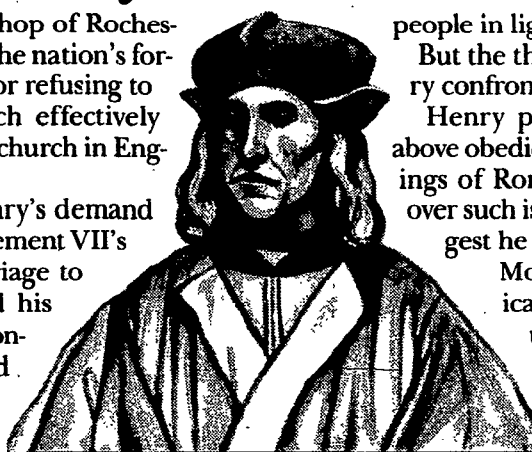
Cardinal Fisher refused to cite "pastoral concerns" or the desire to take a "positive" approach as reasons to publicly accept a king who placed his own desires above church law and papal authority. Yet how many of our pastoral leaders give these as reasons for not confronting church members over such issues as cohabitation, unjust business practices or supporting corrupt governments in other nations?

Henry did marry his mistress — then eventually executed her and went on to marry four more times before his death. Cardinal Fisher and More were declared saints in 1935.

In reflecting on their conflict, some final questions come to mind.

How many times and under what circumstances have we, like Henry, allowed our personal desires to outweigh church teachings and papal pronouncements?

And how many of our political and church leaders, like Cardinal Fisher and More, have shown themselves willing to uphold their beliefs and not simply settle for political or pastoral expediency?



## EDITORIAL

## Caption misidentified leader of anti-abortion rally

### To the editors:

In the wake of recent acts of violence ... the thoughtful among us have begun to examine more closely the relationship between inflammatory speech and the acts of terror it may incite. I would like to commend Suzanne Schnittman for her letter (May 30) questioning Father Marx's views on diocesan efforts to pursue Catholic teaching on life issues in a non-violent manner. While Suzanne and I disagree on abortion, we both know that we hold many values in common, and we are always respectful of one another when we meet.

A concern that has not yet been raised is that the protest at Planned Parenthood on May 18th was indeed led by the person in your photograph (May 23), but the person in the photograph is *not* Father Marx. It is Father Norm Weslin, a Catholic priest who recently moved to the Syracuse area from the Midwest. Father Weslin is the founder of the Lambs of Christ, a group of itinerant protesters dedicated to blockading women's clinics where abortion services are offered. He, and many of his followers, have been arrested numerous times for clinic invasions, chaining themselves to clinic walls, forming blockades, etc.

Anyone who is concerned about restoring civility, coming to terms with differences without violence and hate, and modeling behaviors that we would want our children to emulate, *should* be concerned about the views espoused by these men. Father Weslin is closely associated with individuals who advocate the murder of physicians who do abortions. While it is true that the protest that day was physically "peaceful," it is also true that our patients and their partners — regardless of the purpose of their visit here — were harassed and intimidated, escorts and staff were accused of being murderers, and he repeatedly called on God to close "dirty" Planned Parenthood. There were also a handful of pro-choice individuals on the other side of the street, shouting at the protesters to go home and leave Planned Parenthood — and women — alone. On our side of the street Planned Parenthood escorts stood



quietly and attempted to ensure that our patients could get in and out with a minimum of trouble.

It is true that speech is "free" in the United States, but it is not free of consequences. We have seen in recent months what a thin line there can be between inflammatory rhetoric — protected speech — and irretrievable and tragic incidents of terror and violence — criminal acts. I call upon all of us, on either side of any issue, to consider

the impact of our speech more thoughtfully, and our associations with those who are not similarly cautious.

**Ellen J. Gertzog**  
Public Affairs Coordinator  
Planned Parenthood of Rochester  
and the Genesee Valley

**EDITORS' NOTE:** The Courier did, in fact, misidentify Father Weslin, who led the march, as Father Marx, who had been scheduled to lead it. We regret the error.

## Exclude opposition from coverage of events

### To the editors:

The excellent article (about) pro-life advocate Father Paul Marx (May 23) had one glaring contradiction in the photo accompanying it and I'm very puzzled as to why that particular one was chosen to be printed. Surely the photographer takes more than one solitary picture of events.

In the prominent foreground, right side, taking up one half of the picture is a person wearing a garment printed with large letters proclaiming "pro-choice clinic escort." It can't be missed, there's no overlooking it and I deeply resent the pro-abortionists being given such unwanted,

uncalled for publicity. Where are the pro-life signs? I'm sure there were dozens of them carried by dozens of the marchers. Why were they ignored, left out?

I find it a discouraging, disheartening betrayal of the consistent life ethic being touted throughout our diocese. No excuses. There is no need for a devil's advocate in a Christian newspaper.

**Kay Yankton**  
Hoffman Street, Auburn

**EDITORS' NOTE:** The purpose of photojournalism is not to depict life as one would like it to be, but to show events as they are. That is what the photo sought to achieve.