

COLUMNISTS

Readers will have say in selection of columnists

When we last "talked," — before this column went on an unplanned summer hiatus to conserve precious room for news and features — I had begun telling you about some very thoughtful reader feedback I had received.

Despite the time lag, I hope you won't mind if I pick up right where I left off.

Although they offered some broader commentary on our efforts, two of my correspondents focused heavily on the selection of columnists we carry.

Genevieve Scott of Rochester noted that her favorite parts of the *Catholic Courier* are the columns of Bishop Matthew H. Clark, Father Richard P. McBrien and Sister Patricia Schoelles, as well as the letters to the editor.

In response to my request for suggestions, Ms. Scott said she "would like to see the paper used more as a teaching tool, rather than a social update. For instance: explanations of some of the Documents of Vatican II and the Pope's encyclicals could be highlighted."

A Brighton resident who did not give his/her name praised Father McBrien's column as one of the *Courier's* strengths and suggested that another one or two columns of similar quality could be



between
the
lines

BY KAREN M. FRANZ

added.

The writer also suggested columns on politics and economic factors, while recognizing that those subjects can be controversial.

Well, it so happens that our staff and the editorial committee of our board have been busy over the summer considering what to do with the columnist opening created by Greg Pierce's decision to discontinue "Faith and Work."

We considered a range of columns on such topics as theology, social justice and family life. Two of the top candidates are carried by the Catholic News Service and can be added immediately. They are Father John Dietzen's "Question Cor-

ner," which responds to reader questions, and Father Eugene Hemrick's "The Human Side," which addresses issues from a pastoral perspective.

Both of these CNS columns speak to Ms. Scott's desire for teaching. Father Dietzen, for example, frequently helps readers resolve questions about such matters as annulments, sacramental regulations and somewhat obscure church terminology.

Father Hemrick, by contrast, takes a pastoral approach, often integrating the teachings of Vatican II into his discussion of current issues.

We're currently discussing options with two syndicated columnists: Loretto Sister Mary Ann McGovern, who writes about economics and social justice, and George Weigel, a conservative writer who heads the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

These two columnists, obviously, speak more to the interests of my anonymous Brighton correspondent. Both will assess economic and political circumstances in light of church teachings — but each will approach those issues from vastly different perspectives.

Since each of these four writers has

unique insights to offer, we've had a tough time trying to select just one for our lone columnist opening.

So we've decided to pass the buck — to you.

Each week for the next few months, we will publish a sample from each of the four potential columnists. We'll keep rotating their columns through the end of this year, ensuring that you get a representative sample of each writer's work.

Then, early next year, we'll seek your feedback — through this column, of course — on whether to select one of them as a regular columnist or to continue the rotation for the indefinite future.

Look for the first sample column by Father Hemrick in next week's edition.

Meanwhile, the next installment of this column — which will appear in four or five weeks, rather than four or five months! — will address reader comments on increasing our advertising revenues and other suggestions for improvement.

Till then, feel free to address any comments, suggestions or criticisms to me in care of this column.

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

All the faithful have a vocation

Last week at Mass someone prayed for an increase in religious vocations. I'm sure we have all prayed for this intention at one time or another. No problem: We're all pretty sure that the church probably *would* benefit from a few more people willing to consider priesthood and life in religious orders.

But I become increasingly impatient with the idea that "vocation," or even "religious vocation" refers only to those who take up the call to ordained ministry or ministry through life in a religious order.

In fact the very notion of "vocation" has undergone some serious rethinking throughout the history of Israel and Christianity. Basically, we have used this term to refer to a divine call to embrace a particular "state of life" on behalf of God or the community.

In my lifetime, even while we've most often used the term in the "religious" sense, we usually added on somewhere that marriage and the single life were also genuine vocations.

But today the discussion of vocation is almost always conducted within the context of a larger question about the nature of ministry. Today priests and members of religious orders discuss their roles in terms of "ministry."

Theologians interested in these issues



the
moral
life

BY PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

ask about how we can define the uniqueness of the ordained ministries and life in the orders, how we relate these ministries to lay ministries, and how all of it relates to the mission of the church.

One of the major moves of the Second Vatican Council was to pay more attention to the vocation of the laity than to those of either the priesthood or religious life.

The council held that Christian ministry isn't rooted in ordination or vows at all. The council held that all Christians have a vocation to serve the church's mission in the world, and that the sacrament of this ministry is baptism, not ordination. "Vocation" is bigger than particular "calls" to "states of life."

The council maintained that we *all*

have a vocation to salvation and holiness, we are *all* called to ministry by virtue of our baptism.

So the council left behind some notions that dominated much of my own "coming of age" experiences and assumptions. Now, vocation is no longer the province of the few who take up the life of religious vows or ordination, but is recognized to be the duty of all who belong to Christ.

On the heels of all this, my thoughts at the time of that prayer for religious vocations shifted, and I suddenly wanted to pray not that more people would take up these particular "states of life," but that we would *all* take more interest in promoting the mission of the church.

I became aware of how much we need to provide more opportunity for people to investigate which ministries the church needs to carry out its mission to the world, and how we can encourage one another to take up these ministries. I thought about our obligation to recognize that real *church* ministry includes what we do at our jobs, in our families, as we vote, as we become neighbors to those around us.

Shouldn't we be praying about vocations in this way, too?

And as we pray, I think we should also

be looking for ways to learn more about new developments in our religion, to "train" for faith lives that are rooted in the real world and the real church and the real Gospels.

Today we as a church spend enormous resources of time, money, dedication, stature and prestige helping some of us prepare for priesthood and "religious vocations." But what do we spend to help those taking up married life, with its commitments and very real call to ministry?

And how do we help prepare one another to understand our careers as "vocations" and "ministries"? And how are we applying our resources to nurture the vocations of the laity who are now called to work as church professionals?

As we pray for "religious vocations," we should also be asking a whole host of questions, and praying that we will assume our own call to be part of what God is doing and wanting for the world today. And we should all work, and should rearrange our priorities, so that we promote and nurture the vocations we *all* have to carry out the mission of the church to the world — the call we all have to let God's love enter the world through us and to be active there on behalf of the kingdom.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

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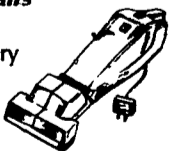
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