

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.

Letters must not exceed 500 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

Supreme Court has imperfect history

EDITORIAL

On Jan. 8, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in two physician-assisted suicide cases. If the justices follow their normal pattern, sometime around the end of June they will issue a decision as to whether people have a constitutional right to kill themselves with a physician's help.

Whatever the justices' decision, we must keep one thing in mind: The Supreme Court is not always right.

This week, for example, we mark the anniversary of a decision that has had tragic consequences for our nation: *Roe vs. Wade* (1973).

That decision, coupled with the related *Doe vs. Bolton* (1973) ruling, effectively legalized abortion on demand in the United States. Since those decisions, more than 30 million children have been aborted, and millions of emotionally scarred mothers and fathers have missed out on the joy of holding their babies.

In addition, the issue has poisoned political campaigns and sometimes turned the streets — and courtrooms — into battlefields.

Legal scholars and historians readily point to other questionable decisions by the Supreme Court.

In *Dred Scott vs. Sandford* (1857), the justices upheld slavery and expanded divisions that led to the Civil War.

Through *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896), segregation — couched as a "separate but equal" system — held African-Americans back for more than 50 years.

In *Lochner vs. New York* (1905), the court bolstered unfair labor practices by ruling unconstitutional a law limiting bakery employees' work weeks to a maximum of 60 hours.

With *Hammer vs. Dagenheart* (1918) — also referred to as the "Child Labor Case" — the justices declared unconstitutional congressional efforts to restrict the practice of child labor.

Decisions such as these prolonged conditions the court defined as "legal," but which were clearly immoral.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we called to recognize a higher law that supersedes the perhaps well-meaning but nevertheless flawed decisions of human judges and lawmakers. In his 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* ("The Gospel of Life"), Pope John Paul II noted the distinction between what he termed the moral and civil laws.

While we are called to obey legitimate civil laws, we also recognize that moral and civil laws sometimes conflict. When this happens, as followers of Christ, we are called to challenge — and in serious cases — *non-violently* disobey the civil laws. The people we honor as martyrs and saints frequently suffered and even died precisely because they chose moral over civil law.

Indeed, in *Evangelium Vitae*, the pope boldly declared that in the case of civil laws permitting abortion and euthanasia, "There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead, there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection."

Thus no matter what the Supreme Court justices decide about physician-assisted suicide, or what rules they impose concerning abortion, those of us who claim to be Christians have our own choices to make about obeying these civil laws.

Our individual decisions will say much about our true allegiances.

Passing evokes reflections on priesthood

To the editors:

Father Bill Tobin's death (Oct. 29) in Elmira brought back memories of a good parish priest. I was a 12-year-old altar boy at Our Lady of Perpetual Help parish when Father Tobin was assistant pastor in charge of altar boys.

One summer day he took a bunch of us with him while he visited the sick. We spent the afternoon waiting for him in

hospital parking lots at Genesee, Highland, Strong Memorial, St. Mary's and old General Hospital on West Main. In between we talked to him; I don't think he even bought us an ice cream cone.

A few weeks later I awoke in a Genesee Hospital bed with no idea how I got there. Before I had time to panic, Father Tobin arrived — ahead of the doctor — to assure me that I had suffered a slight concussion

on the playground.

For us kids Bill Tobin was a dashing figure in his neat black suit and late-model car. He looked like cowboy-movie star Randolph Scott. He carried a set of golf clubs in his car trunk for emergencies.

In 1942 we OLPH kids knew Bill Tobin as a special priest and saw how he ministered to people. We heard stories too about Rochester diocese priests who were serving as chaplains to the troops in World War II.

It was a time when vocations to the priesthood were plentiful. The seminary was only a city bus ride across town. Now, Bishop Clark's pastoral letter (Oct. 24) reminds us that the times and the culture of vocations are changing. More than altar boys are hearing what seems to be the call of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Clark is asking the whole church of Rochester for prayer, study and thoughtful parish conversations. We need good priests. As the Bishop says, the "Sunday Eucharistic liturgy is at the core of our life and nothing can equal it" — or replace it.

**P. David Finks
Sanford, NC**

Ministry leaders explain process

To the editors:

There seems to be some misunderstanding as to how priests names are chosen for the "Monthly Prayer Request for Priests" calendar.

We use the Diocesan Directory for all priests: active — or inactive for whatever reason — we make no distinction. Also included are priests names from all religious orders. All priests prayer days are chosen through prayer and each priest has his own prayer day. Exceptions are Pope John Paul II, Bishop Matthew Clark and priests on sabbatical. These appear monthly on each calendar.

With this number of priests — over 375 — we will be obliged to use at least three months of 1997. We anticipate the 1996 MPRP calendar will be completed by April 1, 1997. We ask your patience if

your priest's name has not appeared. When the 1996 calendar is completed and we begin the new calendar there will be no indication of the change, it will simply be ongoing.

We do love our priests, we thank God and His Mother Mary for them. We are sincere in our efforts to give you the easiest and best way of remembering to pray for our priests. This is what the Monthly Prayer for Priests is all about — Priests and Prayers!

We hope that thousands of you are praying for our priests.

Thank you for this and for your continued financial support.

**Lee Beaudrault and Mary Reilich
Monthly Prayer Request for Priests
70-A Green Knolls Drive
Rochester, N.Y. 14620**

Seminarian's mother seeks parish assistance to encourage students with prayer, packages

To the editors:

This letter is in the nature of a call for support for the young men who are studying for the priesthood far from home and friends. This past month my husband and I spent two weeks visiting our son who is studying at the American College in Louvain, Belgium. We were invited to share prayers and meals with the community and so spent some time in conversation with these young men.

We were impressed with the depth of faith and the joy they expressed as they study, pray and discern what their Lord wants from them. We also heard the feelings of being alone and their need for all of our prayers and practical support. Sometimes, when things get tough there is a need for more than the family can supply.

I would like to start some kind of a Prayer/Practicality Support group, on a diocese-wide level, that would see that all

of our seminarians were being supported by all of us. We are indeed all one Body and some of our members are studying to be able to serve the rest of us in the future. These members are in need of prayers during Mass, cards and letters from home, cookies, their parish newsletter and anything else that will let them know that they are not out of mind just because they are out of sight.

If there were one person from each of the parishes that would act as a coordinator for this group, all of our seminarians would be supported by all of us. I have a list of all of these young men with their addresses and would be happy to send a copy to anyone who is interested in this ministry.

Thank you very much for listening.

**Anne VanDurme
38 Jefferson St.
Dansville, NY 14437
716/335-5999**

Sisters in Brazil send prayers, gratefulness

To the editors:

Christmas calls us to look deeply into the mystery of God's presence in our midst. Here in the central-west of Brazil we experience daily the Incarnation of our God in and through the poor who live with hope in the midst of so much difficulty. We are grateful to each of you in the Diocese of Rochester who support our presence and work here. So few of us are present in May to say thanks when the Diocesan Mission Collection is taken. Your generosity and prayers really are essential in maintaining the presence of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in Brazil. May you and your families be richly blessed with hope, peace and joy this Christmas — you are in our prayers.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester in Brazil: Barbara Orczyk; Catherine Foos; Christel Burgmaier; Dolores Turner; Ellen Kuhl; Ireny Rosa da Silva; Janet Conner-ton; Jean Bellini; Katherine Popowich; Maria Jose Monteiro de Oliveira; Marlena Roeger; Maureen Finn; and Suzanne Wills

EDITORS' NOTE: A backlog prevented earlier publication of this December letter.