

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.

Compromise offered false hope

EDITORIAL

The United States Senate did the right thing when it voted May 15 not to approve compromise bills on partial-birth abortion.

In particular, the senators were correct in rejecting Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle's proposal to ban all late-term abortions.

On the surface, his proposal seemed stronger than the partial-birth abortion ban the Senate is expected to pass. The South Dakota Democrat's bill called for a ban on all abortion procedures performed in the third trimester.

But that strength was illusory.

Daschle's bill allowed two exceptions: when the pregnancy endangered the mother's life, and when the pregnancy posed "grievous" threats to her physical health.

The second exception is the one that undermined his bill.

Courts consistently have interpreted the word "health" very broadly with respect to unwanted pregnancies. Concerns passing the judicial "health" test for abortion have included potential emotional distress over having to continue a pregnancy. Given such interpretations and the fact that Daschle's bill gave abortion doctors the authority to determine whether a pregnancy poses a "grievous threat" to physical health, it seems unlikely that the bill would have had any significant effect.

Other than giving some politicians an easy out when challenged on their abortion positions, that is.

Moreover, Daschle's proposal would have done nothing to

prevent the majority of partial-birth abortions, which are performed late in the second trimester.

As he did last year, of course, President Bill Clinton has indicated that he will veto the partial-birth abortion ban, which is expected to pass in the Senate (as of *Courier* deadline, the vote was imminent) and had already gained House approval.

And, as was the case last year, unless there are last-minute switches, the Senate probably will come up short on votes to override the veto. That, despite the fact that on May 19, the American Medical Association's Board of Trustees announced that it had endorsed the partial-birth abortion ban. (See Page 4.)

Thus we will be stuck with a barbaric procedure.

For whatever we call the operation, and however cynically we manipulate semantics, the facts of the procedure remain.

An unborn baby — healthy and fully capable of feeling pain, in the vast majority of cases — is partially delivered, stabbed in the base of the skull with scissors or some other sharp instrument, and has its brains vacuumed out so its skull will collapse for easy removal.

A living being is painfully, inhumanly, killed.

Without anesthetic.

This brutal description may offend some readers who do not like to hear about such unpleasant things. But think of the brutal offense being perpetrated on each of those babies.

And in the spirit of speaking bluntly, let's also be clear about what to call "compromise" bills like Sen. Daschle's: Shams.

We overlook issues graver than gender

To the editors:

In Bishop Clark's column of April 24, he shared with us some loving personal responses to the Mass for gays and lesbians, and commented that none of them suggested the Church was in any way backing away from "the moral norms that call us to lead honest, just and loving lives."

I have no animosity or hatred at all toward gays and lesbians, and I surely wouldn't presume to judge the inner workings of anyone's heart. I'm a sinner like everyone else on the face of the Earth, and it's my position as a sinner that gives me the right to speak out against sin — sort of like the slave who indicts the evil nature of chains.

Condemning the sin and condemning the sinner are two very different things. Confusing the two has led to a counterfeit division in the Church, as if love and holiness were mutually exclusive.

We aren't judging hearts when we denounce sin. We are recognizing the standards set before us in God's word, and trying like blazes to maintain opposition to those "powers and principalities" that lead us into spiritual laziness and confusion.

We cannot equate love and compassion for the individual — which is a holy thing — to a laissez-faire policy toward sin — which is a disaster entirely.

It's unfortunate that homosexuality has become a major battle ground between conservative and liberal. There are many issues that are far more profound in their impact on spiritual absolutes. There are many within the Church who dismiss the existence of Satan and Hell, thereby dispensing with the threat of accountability. Some question the Resurrection, and others approach the living Word of God as if it were secular literature, denying the power and immutability of its Truth. And there are an increasing number who do not even believe that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, but have adopted the deceptively "inclusive" idea of universal salvation — such a clever way to stifle evangelization.

With such assaults on sound doctrine, the Church is facing grave danger at Her very foundations. The issue of homosexuality pales in comparison.

**Sandra Dunn
Mattie Street, Auburn**



Protesters followed God's law

To the editors:

Dr. Martin Luther King and Ghandi lived by the motto that an unjust law is no law at all — so no one is obliged to obey it.

Sending folks to jail for trying to keep innocent babies from being killed in abortuaries — which is what 11 folks are being accused of in Rochester's Federal Court — is unjust! So would you readers please pray for those who must appear before Judge Jonathan W. Feldman and Judge David G. Larimer at the Rochester Federal Court House. Better yet, call also the

Federal Building switchboard and get the mailing address for those judges and write them and tell them these folks trying to save babies at the dirty brown house at 114 University Avenue are following God's law written on the hearts of all people!

It is time we replace the Culture of Death in our land of the free and home of the brave with the Culture of Life as we get ready to start the third millennium!!

**Mary Rita Crowe
East Main Street
Rochester**

'Altar call' may step up vocations

To the editors:

Reader Joseph Murray wrote to point out the success other dioceses have in nurturing vocations. On April 20, my family and I attended Mass at St. Mary's, Fredericksburg, Va. After the sermon, the priest began to talk about the importance of vocations. He asked the congregation to bow its collective heads and pray. He said that he so believed in the power of prayer that he was confident our prayers for vocations would be answered.

He then asked anyone present who thought they were being called to approach the altar, leave their name and address and he would forward these to the diocese for follow-up. This step was likened to a Protestant "altar call."

We still had our heads bowed in prayer, so there was some sense of confidentiality. Although, since families tend to sit together, I'm sure parents would notice if the "feet" of one of their children disap-

peared. One of our teenagers "peeked" and said there were at least five people up at the altar.

Maybe this helps explain why Arlington has 33 seminarians.

**Renee Rigoni
Shepard Road
Rochester**

Ministry to gays is nothing new

To the editors:

Regarding Bishop Clark's ministering to gays and lesbians: Haven't clergymen been doing this in prisons and even at the gallows? Some people have run out of stones.

**Raymond J. Tierney Jr.
Village Lane
Rochester**