

OPINIONS

Catholic Courier

©1997, Rochester Catholic Press Association.

1150 Buffalo Road
P.O. Box 24379
Rochester, NY 14624
716/328-4340
800/600-3628 outside Rochester
<http://www.catholiccourier.com>

President

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

General Manager/Editor

Karen M. Franz

Editorial Department

Associate Editor

Lee Strong

Copy Editor/Staff Writer

Kathleen Schwarz

Finger Lakes

Staff Writers

Rob Cullivan

Genesee Valley

Mike Latona

Southern Tier

Staff Photographer

Matthew Scott

Photography Intern

Kerry Huller

Business Department

Circulation Manager

Jeanne A. Mooney

Telemarketing Manager

Lenna Hurlley

Office Manager

Mary DiPonzio

Secretary/Receptionist

Donna Stubbings

Advertising Department

Advertising Director

Ray Frey

Account Executive

Loretta Lowans

Production Department

Graphics Manager

Kim Parks

Graphic Artist

Zoe Maves

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.

Time to call government's bluff

EDITORIAL

At the July 10-11 Institute for Catholic Education conference at the University of Rochester, Brother Peter Pontolillo noted that many nations around the world aid their Catholic schools, but the United States refuses to do so. (*Catholic Courier*, July 17)

Brother Pontolillo, secretary general of the Society of Mary, suggested that U.S. government officials might change their position on aid to Catholic schools if the U.S. bishops suddenly threatened to close all Catholic schools.

Why?

Consider the potential situation in Geneva, a city near the heart of the Diocese of Rochester and home to St. Francis de Sales/St. Stephen School and DeSales High School.

During the 1996-97 school year, the two schools had a combined enrollment of approximately 450 students, about 400 of them from the city of Geneva. If the schools suddenly closed, the Geneva City School District would have absorb those 400 students.

According to district figures, the average cost of educating one pupil in Geneva's public schools during the 1996-97 school year was \$5,358. Based on that figure, Genevans would face more than \$2.1 million in unbudgeted school expense if the district suddenly had to accommodate an extra 400 students.

Moreover, the district would likely have to hire more teachers and add classrooms, further increasing the cost. The school bill could easily increase by \$3 million, which would have to be paid by the state and Geneva's taxpayers — and voters.

And Genevans would get off cheaply. According to the New York State Board of Regents, the statewide average "approved operating expense" per pupil was \$6,100 for 1996-97.

The combined Catholic elementary and high school enrollment in the diocese's 12 counties is more than 16,000.

Applying last year's statewide average per-pupil cost, the sudden closing of all Catholic schools in the diocese would cost school districts in those 12 counties a combined total of approximately \$100 million — not including the cost of adding classrooms and teachers.

With enrollment figures of more than 2.6 million in Catholic schools throughout the nation, just imagine what would happen if all U.S. Catholic schools suddenly shut their doors.

Could such a threat really work?

Brother Pontolillo noted that the bishops of Australia threatened during the 1970s to close all Catholic schools in response to a lack of government funding. Not surprisingly, the Australian government found a way to redistribute education funds.

Of course, such an action here would raise sticky constitutional issues.

In addition, making such a threat carries risks. The government could refuse to change its policies, forcing the bishops and congregations that operate Catholic schools either to close schools or to back down on the threat and lose credibility.

Moreover, church officials have a strong sense of obligation to the people the schools serve.

Government officials know that. They count on it.

But in recent years we have watched too many Catholic schools slowly, painfully dying; loyal parents struggling to pay tuition bills; parishes straining under the burden of school-related expenses; dedicated but underpaid teachers weighing their love of vocation against their families' needs.

All things considered, maybe it's time for the bishops to call the government's bluff.

Don't waste forgiveness, compassion on McVeigh

To the editors:

I write in response to the letter opposing the death penalty for Timothy McVeigh submitted by my former pastor Father Kevin Murphy. While I enjoyed Father Kevin's tenure as pastor of St. Patrick's, I disagree completely with his views on appropriate punishment for crimes of this nature.

To begin with I will point out that the official catechism of the Roman Catholic Church holds that the death penalty is justifiable in grievous matters. If this deliberate and well planned bombing and mass murder of 168 total innocents, including the occupants of a nursery school, is not a grievous matter then I am totally confused regarding what a grievous matter would be.

Prior popes have held that the death penalty is justifiable and many, many theologians both today and over the history of our church do not share or have not shared Father Kevin's feelings regarding the death penalty.

Father Kevin's letter, it seems to me, is full of misapplied compassion for a convicted witness mass murderer, platitudes about the sacredness of life — I wonder why that did not occur to McVeigh — fears of lowering ourselves to McVeigh's level as if mass murder and just punishment are totally equal and comparable, and suggestion that true Christians could not favor capital punishment in spite of our catechism and its statements to the contrary.

Pardon me Father Kevin but please save the plea you made for forgiveness and reconciliation for the confessional where it is appropriate — not sending McVeigh is appropriate does not seem to be the case — but render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and let simple justice be done and the only truly proper punishment for this horrible crime be applied.

Walter C. Ervin Jr.
West Water Street
Elmira



Evil man, not society, is to blame

To the editors:

I must respond to Janet Reid in the July 31 edition about Tim McVeigh. She and Father Hewes seem to blame society for the Terrorist bombing in Oklahoma. She said "we created Timothy McVeigh and now we want to feel innocent." Well, we feel innocent because we ARE innocent. Tim McVeigh killed innocent people because he is a bad person, period! It is not my or anyone else's fault. Society didn't kill anyone, to think so is foolish. I'm sure there were evil, murderous people before the "shameful deterioration of public morality and sensitivity." What is their excuse? Society was better then. Maybe they were bad people too!!

Also, I'm confused about her reference to the Gulf War: "no one in this country pronounced it a war crime to kill civil-

ians..." No one pronounced it a war crime because it wasn't a war crime. The civilians were not the target. She talks about the proud fight against "fascism," then complains about Dresden and Hiroshima. What were we supposed to do? Talk them into giving themselves up?

Next she complains about the lack of sensitivity but quotes Malcolm X. I guess he was showing his sensitivity when he referred to white people as "blue-eyed devils."

Finally, I was at the Oklahoma City bombing site one year later, talked to witnesses and saw remaining elements of destruction, and I thank God that my sister was not injured in the blast. No one blamed society, just an evil person.

**Joseph Smith
Walworth**

Death penalty protects innocents

To the editors:

Two recent letters to the *Catholic Courier* voiced the opinion that vengeance is not a valid reason for supporting the death penalty.

Vengeance, of course, is only part of the reason. The other and most important part is for protection. As long as a murderer is alive, other law-abiding lives are at risk.

Several years ago a female prison guard was murdered by a man already serving a

life sentence for murder. What happens now? Another life sentence?

Unfortunately according to one column murderer serve an average of only five and one-half years for their crime.

Let's move on from the philosophy that "there's no such thing as a bad boy" and take measures to protect law-abiding citizens, now.

**Robert W. Bart
Ithaca**