

OPINIONS

Catholic Courier

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P.O. Box 24379
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716/328-4340
800/600-3628 outside Rochester
<http://www.catholiccourier.com>

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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.

Readers chime in on infants at Mass

To the editors:

We found the recent article about children at Mass very interesting (*Catholic Courier*, July 31: "Should children be seen and heard at liturgies?"). As parents of four children ages 9, 7, 5, and 1 years old, this is an issue we are dealing with. There are a few problems that we see with bringing toddlers to church. Parents spending the Mass paying attention to a child do not get to participate fully and reap the benefits of the Mass. There is also the chance of bothering those around you. We know there are people who will argue that they still feel children should be there regardless of those objections.

Toddlers have virtually no attention span, do not sit still, do not understand the need to be quiet, and should not be expected to. In most situations their normal behavior is fine. However at church this behavior is not appropriate. Parents must feel the same way because what we see at church is parents trying to coax their child to sit and stay quiet by using food, drink, toys, books, and the parents' undivided attention. Any child care expert will tell you that this is called "rewarding negative behavior."

Instead of changing the behavior, you



are reinforcing it. The child learns if they yell, cry, run around, etc., mom or dad will feed them, read to them, play with them, etc. The child is also not seeing good role models from their parents. Instead of seeing Mass as a time of prayer and adoration, they see Mass as a time to talk and play; after all that is what mom and dad are doing.

We were able to go to Mass as a family for about two years until recently because our youngest does not know how to stay quiet. Unfortunately we have to go separately or utilize the nursery. In our expe-

rience when our children reached three or four years old they wanted to go to church. We would purchase church clothes and church shoes. We would explain the behavior expected at church. They would be taught to bless themselves with Holy Water, genuflect before the Tabernacle, and keep their hands folded during Mass. All of which show reverence for the Mass and that going to Mass is special. If their behavior was not appropriate, which was often the case, they were not allowed to attend Mass the following week. They never brought food or toys, just themselves to offer to God. We realize others may not agree with our method, but we have gotten frequent comments about how well behaved our children are at Mass.

We look forward to the time when once again we can all go to Church as a family, but Mass is not the only time to share our faith with our children. We have morning and evening prayers as a family, grace before meals, reading Bible stories, viewing religious videos, and of course setting an example by living a Christian lifestyle.

Richard and Suzanne Monczynski
Pleasant Way
Penfield

Liturgists should consider stress on parents

To the editors:

Your July 31 lead article on children at Mass hit a nerve. Liturgists and pastors seem to have no idea of the stress they cause parents and children when they demand everyone worship together at Mass.

I have raised seven children and ushered for a number of years. A year ago, our new pastor closed the crying room/balcony in our church. I twice wrote him about the problems this would cause; even met with him; but he held firm that all should worship together.

For nine months, the four ushers that served in the back of the church at our busiest Sunday Mass listened to parents complain, some in tears: "Why doesn't Father want me to bring my baby to Mass anymore?" "I have a four year old son with hyperactivity problems and I can't leave him in the nursery so now I have to leave him at home." "Well, if Father won't open the crying room we'll just have to go to Mass elsewhere because I need some spiritual enrichment too!"

One winter morning I followed a young mother with a babe in arms out into a sleet storm and invited her back into the building; she felt her daughter was too noisy even in the vestibule of the church — she wasn't. And one Sunday a father was on his way out with his whole family because the crying room/balcony was locked. Several families who came before the closing are seen no more.

Why can't our clergy and liturgists not be sensitive to the fact that children, even within the same family, are quite different and some are really hard to control? Also, parents need an opportunity to benefit from worship; and parents differ in their own levels of tolerance to say nothing of many being under a great deal of stress in

their daily lives.

Why can't we invite our families into an environment that makes them most comfortable and able to benefit from being at Mass, be it a crying room, an area like a balcony or vestibule, a nursery, a children's liturgy; whatever works for them? Our liturgists and pastors do great harm by not being sensitive to the needs of our families because, even with parish councils, the pastors have the power and the real needs of

our parents and children become ignored.

The situation became so bad at my parish that we four ushers resigned last March. We could no longer support a policy that was causing such anger and harm. The pastor is responding to the liturgy problem, however, by preparing plans and holding parish meetings to build a new church!

Art Maurer
Old Barn Circle, Penfield

Mass is public prayer for all

To the editors:

Concerning your article about children at Mass; there seems to be a large number of Catholics still living in the middle ages, or worse yet, in the Protestant — fundamental — model of only a one-on-one relationship with God. Although we need to develop a personal relationship with our Lord, the Mass is supposed to be a community celebration of our Lord's last meal with his friends. The Mass is not intended to be individual prayer time, but community celebration. Our liturgies need to be inclusive, not exclusive. If we are to exclude children, even disruptive children, are we then also to exclude the lame with their noisy canes and walkers? How about those who say their Amens a little loud or sing off key?

"God put our bodies together in such a way that even the parts that seem the least important are valuable... Together we are the body of Christ. Each one of us is part of His body" 1 Cor. 13:24, 27. Children are an integral part of any community, of the body of Christ, and no such body can be sustained without them.

Jesus chastised his Disciples when they sought to hold back the kids (Matt. 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-17, Luke 18:15-17), we should not hold them back either. We teach best by example, so let's exclude infants from church and wonder why they don't behave when they're older. Don't include kids, bore them silly, and wonder why they have to be dragged to church when they're teens. Don't embrace teenagers; don't include them or let them have fun, and then wonder why they don't attend church after high school. Satan himself couldn't think of a better way to destroy faith.

Those who long for "the old (quiet) ways" should study our Hebrew roots, our history, our Bible. "All the Lord's followers often met together, and they shared everything they had... They broke bread together... shared their food happily and freely, while praising God" Acts 3:44-47. There is a place in our lives for quiet, contemplative meditation; but, a public Mass is just that, public, and open to all.

George Roy
Pertl Road, Odessa

Finding middle path requires charity, consideration

To the editors:

I read, with great interest your cover story on children in church and the noise levels at today's Mass.

I strongly believe in families worshipping together. As Joan Workmaster so beautifully expressed it these baptized babies should be included in our celebrations — and yes, it is public worship, not private meditation.

It is to be expected that children will be restless and a baby will cry. All of this is part of life; however, the blatant non-stop screamers and the children who are run-

ning the aisles and more importantly, the parents who ignore them, is very upsetting.

I feel sorry for the celebrant, the homilist, the readers and musicians, all of whom have prepared so carefully for this liturgy.

To imply that you cannot expect so much from children is ridiculous. Children must learn self control, respect and reverence — they must be taught that it is expected of them.

I went to church with my parents and I knew I was expected to behave. My chil-

dren went to church with us and they behaved. If they didn't, we took them out.

It seems to me that above all else, Christian charity calls us to be courteous and considerate of one another.

As for me, I am longing for a quieter, more reverent Mass. I totally agree that we must be supportive to young families in today's world, but don't forget Grandma and Grandpa. They're part of the family too!

Catherine E. Read
South View Drive
Macedon