

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.

Priest cites acts of real leadership

To the editors:

During the course of this year Bishop Matthew Clark has made valuable contributions to the life of the Church of the Diocese of Rochester in two significant respects. His first contribution concerns gays and lesbians in the Church. His second contribution focuses on the exercise of authority in the Church and how such exercise impacts on the respective roles of the pope and the local bishop.

Recognizing as he does that sexual orientation has been acknowledged by both the medical community and the Church as a genetic condition, the bishop has given expression to what many of us Catholics have felt, but have done little to put into practice. The Church belongs to everyone regardless of sexual orientation. Jesus came for the salvation of all without exception. I applaud the Bishop's action in inviting gays and lesbians and their families to a Mass of hospitality and welcome. I was present at that Mass and was glad that I was there. I sensed the compassion and I felt too the healing of many hurts caused by the ignorant prejudice of the past. At no time was there the slightest hint that sexual activity other than between husband and wife in marriage was being condoned.

In *New Theology Review* recently the Bishop had published an article entitled "The Pastoral Exercise of Authority." He



has also given recent presentations on the subject as part of the St. Bernard's on the Road fall program. In substance the Bishop's position is this: to affirm and uphold the authority of the local bishop in his diocese, with the discretion that this implies, is not to repudiate the authority of the pope. Such a position, the Bishop suggests, corresponds with the principle of subsidiarity acknowledged by several of the recent popes. Subsidiarity and respect of the hierarchical order are not in conflict, but rather they complement one another. In this complex and technological age, where people are better educated than ever before, where pluralism is a fact of modern life, is it not better to leave to the bishops of a country, or to the local bishop at the local level, a measure of flexibility and independence of judgment appropriate to the local scene? In Europe of the Middle Ages a measure of independence exercised by the local churches was the inevitable consequence of the slow means of communication and the

difficulty of travel of that period in history. Just because we live in an age of instant communication there is no need surely for the rein of control from Rome to be tightened. A looser rein is more optimistic, more trusting, more visionary. It is also more practical.

I consider myself to be a faithful member of the Catholic Church, who loves his priesthood and who is totally committed to the tradition of the Church and to the primacy of Peter. I believe that we are truly blessed in Bishop Matthew Clark, who to my mind epitomizes the qualities of pastoral leadership that are appropriate to a Catholic diocese in the United States in this present age. In the words of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* the Bishop seeks to scrutinize the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. This takes courage. He deserves our support and encouragement.

Father Alexander H. Bradshaw
Church of the Holy Ghost, Rochester

Who has the right to set selves as judges?

To the editors:

My wife and I have been following the series of letters complaining about Bishop Clark's efforts to make our churches places of welcome for all who choose to worship God in our tradition. We have become increasingly dismayed by the demeanor of those who write such angry, even hateful letters, filled with calumny about the work of Bishop Clark. That they can refer to themselves as "true Catholics" and "defenders of the faith" is a travesty!

One may ask, "How do they dare set themselves up as judges and juries on the matter of faith and obedience to the Holy Father when they impugn the dignity and reputation of the one the Vatican has deemed worthy to be our Bishop?" Perhaps they feel the Holy Spirit was wrong in guiding the Holy Father in his selection! Over the many years Bishop Clark has led this community of faith, we have never known him to exclude anyone from choosing to worship God in our churches. All are welcome — saints and sinners alike, and in doing so, he emulates Jesus, who had open arms of love and welcome for all who

came to him. For this, Bishop Clark is being persecuted by a self-righteous few who seek to have him removed from his office. Shades of the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time!

To them, we can only say, "We will pray for you all, that your hearts may be turned from ones of stone to ones of love, and be healed of your animosity. To all who support Bishop Clark, continue to pray for him. May we suggest that you write to the Bishop, to the *Catholic Courier*, AND to the Vatican, expressing your love and support for him as he struggles with this torrent of hate and persecution. Pray too, for those

whose hearts and minds are so troubled when someone tries to live out the values of Jesus Christ, who was against the legalism of his time, and who instead promoted the love of God in all he did. For Bishop Clark, let him be comforted by Christ's words from Matthew 5, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Gene and Karoly Edwards
Blackwell Lane, Henrietta

Focus on fundamental truth

To the editors:

In response to the article regarding the authority of bishops, etc. I believe that Bishop Clark is a very caring person trying to heal some hurts in the community. However, it is a well known fact that along with few vocations to the priesthood we also have a large number of annulled marriages and aborted babies in this diocese. Since true love for one another only generates what is good then isn't it a twisted compassion that puts the focus on creatures demands to support their quests rather than our Creator's commands? The "Word" seems to be compromised for a more popular

choice or political cause. It doesn't seem that the questions regarding celibacy, women in the priesthood, more authority for the Bishops, etc., are going to make a bit of difference when there is lacking a sound faith based on fundamental truths. I would like to see Bishop Clark focus his attention on helping us to live our faith, to know the meaning of vows and commandments, and to truly love one another enough to stand firm with Our Lord. Spiritual direction, and dialogue with Our Lord rather than with one another is what I feel is needed.

Jane Cantin
Mount Hope Avenue, Rochester

Let spirit of peace direct disputes

To the editors:

The *Courier* Letters page offers a mixed bag of opinions that makes one wonder what the one, holy, apostolic and universal church is coming to. The pictures of those with scurrilous signs reveal a weird sense of church. Our bishop is not a branch manager to the bishop of Rome. For those who think the "good old days" were best, remember that the Pope is

primus inter pares. Bishop Clark was ordained to be successor to the apostles, and a legitimate teacher in the church.

I don't mind honest and charitable disagreement (dare I say dissent?), but the spirit of meanness is not sign of peace, nor an understanding of the presence of the Spirit Who guides the people of God.

Monsignor William M. Roche
Redwood City, California