

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.

'Supporting' talk offered opportunity for rebuttal

To the editors:

As members of the Catholic community know, Christopher Hitchens recently appeared at the University of Rochester to lecture on Mother Teresa. He was invited by a student organization and presented his video entitled "Hell's Angel." Known for his disdain for Mother Teresa and Catholicism, and an "in your face" atheism, he delivered a sarcastic portrait of Mother Teresa and the Catholic Church. This is Mr. Hitchens' mission in life and, ultimately, his problem.

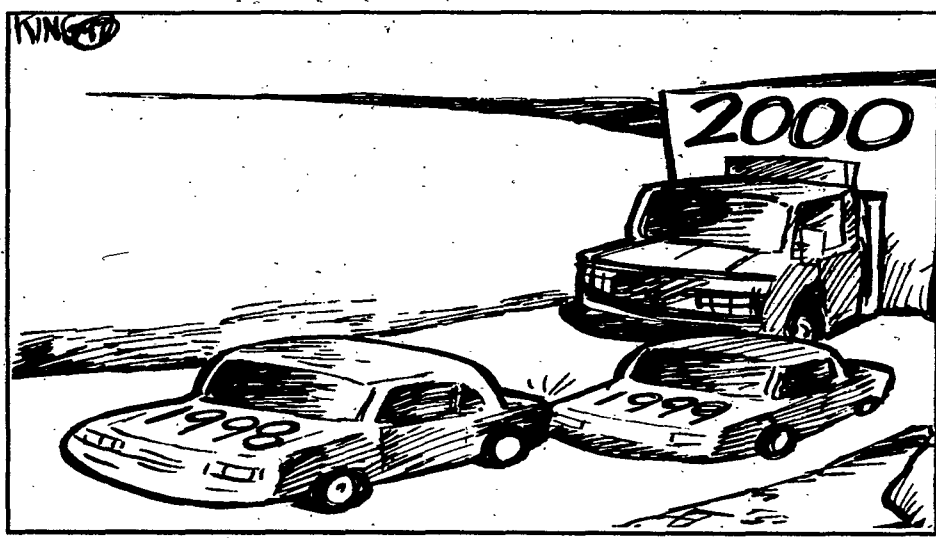
Certain Rochester Catholics are convinced that the Department of Religion and Classics, as well as the Newman Chair in Catholic Studies that I hold, endorse Hitchens' point of view. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Department of Religion and Classics, like several departments at the University, made a small contribution to the student organization that invited Mr. Hitchens. This is normal. Student organizations have limited funds and solicit support from academic departments to finance student-sponsored events. The Department's support of the students, however, was not an endorsement of Mr. Hitchens' point of view nor connected in any way with the Newman Chair in Catholic Studies. We could have refused to contribute anything, but Hitchens still would have appeared on campus. The Department contributed a modest amount of money because we believe student organizations deserve support and the mission of any university is to engage in the free discussions of ideas — even those we frankly dislike.

I was present for Mr. Hitchens' lecture and perhaps this requires explanation. As a member of the Department of Religion and Classics, I am committed to the reasonable analysis of religion. As the Newman Professor of Catholic Studies, I am responsible for helping students at the University better understand who we Catholics are as believing people. Knowing what Mr. Hitchens would do in his presentation, I had to be present to challenge his anti-Catholic perspective. Had my Department not helped the student organization financially, my intervention would not have been possible. Given Mr. Hitchens' presentation, riddled as it was with animosity and inaccuracies, I was glad to have a few minutes to challenge his presentation.

As American Catholics, we live in a society that treasures free speech and freedom of religion. As outrageous as Hitchens' ideas are to us as Catholics, he has every right to hold them. And we have every right to refute them. Hitchens entertained us with a hatchet job on all things Catholic. Many people present, Catholic and non-Catholic, were offended and challenged his point of view. Refusing debate and taking refuge in hostile conservatism is the last thing we Catholics can afford to do. It only gives credence to the Christopher Hitchens of this world who market anti-Catholicism along with secular fundamentalism. The best way to disprove their biases is by being respectful toward each other and even with those who do not share our point of view. This is the best way to put the lie to those who lie about us.

Father Curt Cadorette, M.M.
Newman Community
University of Rochester

EDITORS' NOTE: A backlog of letters prevented more timely publication of Father Cadorette's response to this event, which took place Nov. 7.



'Leap to extremism' is worry

To the editors:

I am writing this letter with some reluctance, due to the reactions I've seen in the Courier to other letters to the editor. I am disappointed by the tone of many of the letters I've read in this paper. I enjoy reading and listening to different opinions; I believe that sharing of different views forces us to think through our own opinions and convictions.

I recently attended a weekend at the Notre Dame Retreat House and the focus was on the various aspects of Peace. One of the priests led a talk on peace within the Church. He used as an example some actual letters printed in the Courier that clearly "stepped over the line" in terms of a lack of respect for others in our church. It was pointed out that the same approach taken to "force our opinion" on others on talk shows or used in the political process has spilled over into our church. I agree with his analysis. We have been taught that others should see Catholics as living "differently" — demonstrating respect, humility, and reverence. I'm sad to say, a number of the letters published in this paper have no evidence of these virtues.

In some cases, these letters take the approach — "if you don't accept my opinion, I will confront you, harass you, and judge you." Some frequent examples have to do with Bishop Clark or other local leaders

not following Church Law or the teaching of the Vatican, as if the authors of these letters are the local authority. Or, Bishop Clark is leading the Diocese down the path to hell, that he's corrupting our local church. I don't have a problem that we have different views on various subjects, but it's this leap to extremism that disturbs me.

I pray during the upcoming holiday period for peace, particularly peace in our church. Hopefully, we will look different from the rest of society in the future.

Jack Howell

Alderwood Lane, Rochester

EDITORS' NOTE: Due, in part, to reader input and an ever-growing backlog of letters to the editors (note Father Cadorette's letter as an example), we have adopted a new selection procedure for 1998. From now on, we will select for publication the best four to six letters received in any given week. Among our criteria for determining which letters are "best" will be: timeliness, importance of the topic, respect for the dignity of others, insight and/or fresh approaches to the issues.

We will no longer carry forward more than one week's worth of letters. Any letter not judged by our staff to be among the best received that week will be discarded immediately. We hope this new procedure will improve the timeliness of our Opinion page and enhance overall reader satisfaction with its tone.

Respond freely to great 'I Am'

To the editors:

I am responding to James A. Urda's letter published in the Nov. 13 edition of the Catholic Courier regarding the so-called "altering" of God's Word. I have been a long-standing member of St. Margaret Mary's, Apalachin — 30 years — and I was present during the liturgy in which a hymn titled "Our Father, Our Mother" was sung, and I found it full of life and love, and joyfully refreshing.

As I reflect on Scripture, I see that even Jesus was criticized by his contemporaries for addressing God as his "Abba," because in doing so Jesus altered the standard practice of the day, which at that time was definitely NOT to address God in any such intimate term as "Daddy."

Jesus also treated women a great deal differently than what his contemporaries did; which was counter to the prevailing Jewish

culture of that time, and which further antagonized the religious authorities in power then. However, just like the TV Energizer, Jesus kept on going, going, going ...

In all of Scripture, the only time I recall where God actually announced a name for God was in response to Moses at the burning bush when God said, "I Am." Is that male or female?

The Holy Spirit frees us to be who we are, children or the great "I Am," both male and female, to give praise, honor and glory to God. Any limitation is our own doing. Julian of Norwich, the great 14th century English mystic addressed God as both "Father," and "Mother," believing we all have the freedom to do so. And so do I.

To Mr. Urda I would simply say, believe in the God Who believes in you.

Pat Federowicz
Clover Road, Apalachin

Devote energy to renewing face of the earth

To the editors:

We, as a Renew small faith-sharing group of St. Ambrose Church, raise our voices to counter the extremely vocal minority that has recently condemned Bishop Clark's understanding of his teaching authority, and his outreach to gay and lesbian Catholics.

Through the Holy Spirit, and guided by tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church, we can be brought to the fullness of our Christian maturity and responsibility. Our mission is to particularly speak out and act on behalf of all who are discriminated against, to be a healing and reconciling commu-

nity after the example of Jesus who welcomed all to his table, who condemned structures of oppression and dehumanization.

In this spirit we stand in solidarity with our bishop and with our gay, lesbian and bisexual brothers and sisters. Let us not waste our time and talents by attacking those who are striving courageously to do the will of God. Rather, let's use our energies to change those things which stifle love and the human spirit, that we may renew the face of the earth.

Renew Liturgy Team Small Group
St. Ambrose Church
Rochester