

COLUMNISTS

Don't equate disagreements with divisions

Monday morning is rarely my favorite time of the week. In fact I always greet it with a little resentment because I've never quite achieved my goals for the weekend. This morning was no exception. Then, the local section of the morning paper greeted me with a headline printed in much bigger, bolder letters than the others: "Gay issue divides Catholics."

I'm no expert at journalism, but one of my wiser conclusions has been that a dominant perspective held by the American news industry, underwritten by all of us who purchase their products, is that "division sells." American newspapers, news magazines, newscasts all capitalize on separations that cause rifts among groups and peoples. By portraying every issue as a "for" and "against," the news media actually promote the very separations they purport simply to report. Are you "for" Clinton and "against" Starr, or are you "for" Starr and "against" Clinton?

This for and against mentality means that Catholicism finds American life a really tricky setting in which to exist, because by its very existence Catholicism confronts and rejects "the division mentality." By its very existence and structure, the Catholic religion flies in the face of "a community being torn asunder" sensationalism promoted by this kind of thinking. Our 2000-year-old "de-



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

nomination" is among the longest-living institutions on the entire planet — in part because, by the very way we are "constructed," we don't split apart. We don't separate when we differ.

The Catholic Church is not simply another Christian denomination. We're not even just another "European-based-American religion." We have — for nearly 2000 years — adopted a unique sort of church structure. Sometimes even lifelong church members miss the significance of the singular way we're organized. The structure of the Catholic religion is "churches in communion."

The structure of our church is the union of individual churches: churches all over the world unite together to form the "catholic" — meaning universal — church. In this unique structure of Catholicism, each diocese is both an in-

dependent church, and united with the whole church. That alone makes our church structure more complicated than other Christian churches, and certainly more complicated than most American media can swallow, since it takes longer than a 90-second sound bite to explain and understand.

Does this mean that every diocese and every parish is exactly alike? Hardly. Individual dioceses, headed by the local bishop, must take on the issues of the particular country and region in which they are located. African Catholic churches — dioceses — can hardly be identical with European dioceses. And just as individual parishes take on their own unique perspective and "personality", individual dioceses assume different visions and unique characteristics. Believe it or not there really is provision for flexibility "built into" Catholicism to allow for differences among dioceses. Contrary to what our vigorous ultra-conservative brothers and sisters maintain, there always has been room for flexibility and difference among the individual dioceses that make up the Catholic church.

Does it mean, then, that every diocese can do just what it wants, or that there are no limits to what each parish can do and express? Hardly. Individual dioceses and the parishes that comprise them re-

main in communion with all others. Individual churches accept some limitations in order to show that "belonging together in communion" is, for us, a primary value. Catholicism demonstrates at the very core of its being — more than other Christian denominations, perhaps — that we don't go it alone. We belong together. We need one another.

That means, of course, that we all have to "put up with" our church hardly ever being just where we want it to be. It's usually moving either too fast for us, or too slow for us. We're either waiting for the others to catch up to where we are, or we're being pulled to where we're not quite ready to go yet. But for the sake of the communion that is Catholicism. We keep on struggling. It's part of our identity, and it's a part of life that Catholics demonstrate to the world.

American media will never understand this. They'll keep right on writing big splashy headlines shouting "Gay issue divides Catholics," never recognizing that while we may disagree on "gay issues," we simply will not be divided by them. If they want proof, we can offer them 2000 years of it.

•••
Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's Institute.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE 1999 DIOCESAN DIRECTORY?

- a telephone listing of every parish, priest and pastoral-staff member • a guide to all diocesan offices and personnel
- complete Mass schedules for every diocesan parish — plus times for the sacrament of reconciliation!
- a listing of religious communities and spirituality centers, complete with contact information.
- a directory of Catholic organizations operating in the Diocese of Rochester — from devotional societies to fraternal groups and alumni organizations

ORDER YOUR INDISPENSABLE DIRECTORY TODAY!

We're 85% leased. Call us today!



"When looking into retirement communities, I made sure I understood the variety of options available to me. With no entrance fee, I feel I get a real value because I'm not locked into any type of program. And having that kind of freedom allows me to travel extensively, which I have always enjoyed. Then, when I return to the security and comfort of my home at Chapel Oaks, I continue to relish my excursions by presenting tracebacks of my fabulous trips, both near and far."

Marquerite "Peg" Pinnen
Irondequoit, New York

"I Fell in Love with the Incredible Value."

The French call it *joie de vivre*, or love of life. That ability to approach life joyfully and fully appreciate all that each day has to offer. Every day, residents of Chapel Oaks, Rochester's newest and finest rental retirement community, are finding the joy of retirement living. Once you've experienced life at Chapel Oaks, you may find yourself falling in love with the true joy of living all over again.

Fall in love with the *tradition* of St. Ann's of Greater Rochester, Inc., who for 125 years has provided senior adults with a truly fulfilling retirement lifestyle. The *location* of being perfectly situated on 14 beautiful, secluded acres of the St. Ann's campus and just minutes away from Rochester's finest shopping, entertainment and cultural activities. The *independence* to continue an active lifestyle without routine maintenance and tiresome daily chores. The *value* of a rental concept with no entrance fee, which makes Chapel Oaks Rochester's most affordable retirement living option. The *convenience* of exceptional services and amenities, and the spacious one- and two-bedroom

apartment homes. Or, fall in love with the *security and peace of mind* that comes from having priority access to a full continuum of health care services right on the St. Ann's campus.

Retirement is your time to seize the day and enjoy life to its fullest; to experience your "joie de vivre." Please call (716) 342-3052 for more information about Chapel Oaks or to arrange your personal tour. Once you see all that we have to offer, you may just find yourself falling in love with the true joy of living all over again!



A GROWING TRADITION.
1550 Portland Avenue Rochester, NY 14621
(716) 342-3052

An affiliate of St. Ann's of Greater Rochester, Inc.

