

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.

Death penalty presents dangerous odds

Angel Mateo's murder trial is now underway in Monroe County Court.

For those not familiar with the case, Mateo is accused of taking part in the 1996 kidnapping and execution-style slaying of Juan Rodriguez-Matos. In addition, he faces trials in connection with three other homicides (See Page 3).

If found guilty in the current trial, Mateo could be sentenced to death under New York state's restored death penalty — thus becoming the first person in Monroe County since 1952 to face execution.

Even as the Rochester case was on recess over the Nov. 14-15 weekend, however, Northwestern University Law School in Chicago was holding a conference concerning the death penalty.

But for the grace of God and the efforts of some activists, 30 people at that conference might well have been unable to attend the event.

They might have been dead.

Those 30 men and women had all spent time on death row, wrongfully sentenced for crimes they did not commit.

Since the death penalty was reinstated in the United States in 1976, some 75 people have been released from death row after they were found to have been falsely or improperly convicted. There have been 486 executions in that same span. How many of those executions involved people innocent of the crimes for which they died? How many other innocent people are sitting on death row today?

Only God knows.

But that's precisely the point.

Only God knows what lies in the hearts of individuals — both the "guilty" and the innocent. Only God knows what potential for good these individuals have. But when we execute



Greg Francis/Staff photographer
Mary Ann Keefer protests outside the Monroe County Hall of Justice on the first day of the Angel Mateo trial Nov. 12.

EDITORIAL

practically nonexistent."

New York state has an extensive prison system. Even those individuals guilty of heinous crimes can be confined. Society can be adequately protected.

Unlike the people gathered at the Northwestern conference, Angel Mateo may be guilty of the horrible crimes of which he is accused. If so, he should be punished.

But he should not be executed.

Other life issues pale in light of abortions

To the editors:

Your article of Oct. 29 — "Think Before You Vote" — revealed to me the reason why abortion is alive and well. We seem to have lost the sense of "outrage" among Catholics in regard to abortion and in fact have become rather complacent about it. Our Catholic Faith is universal. Yet, it seems on one side we hear Father Matthew Habiger state that voting for one who favors abortion and uses tax dollars to fund it is aiding and supporting the continuation of this abhorrent practice. This concept is consistent with Catholic teaching. On the other side, however, Father Brian Cool addresses the muddiness of human situation, human living and American politics. He wants equal time for other issues — euthanasia, war, economic injustice and the death penalty.

Could we reason, at least, that the most important issue is the one that produces the greatest amount of dead victims? In the case of abortion, one and a half million unborn infants are destroyed, annually. Some are receiving an even more horrific death called "partial

birth abortion." Although I do not believe in the death penalty, less than ten persons are actually put to death a year. They also have the right to appeal up to the last hour. A helpless infant, whose only crime is to exist, has no rights and no appeals. In economic injustice we often find, most candidates would truly like to solve the problems of the poor. Each may have a different means of doing so. Even the experts in economics differ. Therefore, it would be difficult to use moral judgment in deciding between candidates on this issue. As far as issues on war, I don't know of any person running for office who desires war. All candidates are morally sound in that quest. I was pleased to see euthanasia was included in Father Cool's collection of issues. Since *Roe v Wade*, we have been warned that euthanasia will soon follow the path of abortion. The disregard for human life spreads like a plague. The idea of ending human life, according to the choice or decision of other individuals, resonates throughout our land. Unless we believe and fight for the one and a half million infants who will face death

next year, all other good issues will have little or no chance of reaching fruition in our country.

May God, who made each of us in His own image and likeness, help us to recognize the great value He placed on human life and make it our greatest cause as His children.

Rita B. Sartori
West Clinton Street, Elmira

Choirs can stop masses' singing

To the editors:

I read with great interest the story about music at Mass and would like to share my thoughts about the use of choirs at Mass. It has been my experience that those parishes with the finest choirs have the least participation by the general congregation.

Why this situation exists is a conundrum. It seems that those parishes have the finest music leaders and fine musicians to accompany the voices and yet...

I would be interested if anyone has done any research on this matter, that is, does a choir encourage or inhibit the general congregation joining in the sung prayer of the church? Or is my personal bias coloring my perception of the situation?

Yes, I am biased against the choir singing at Mass. There is a place for choirs, but when the need for innovation and singing in parts necessary to maintain interest in the many hours of preparation these dedicated people volunteer overwhelms my ability to join in the sung prayer at Mass, I then resent the choir. That is certainly not a proper attitude for the reception of the Eucharist.

The Mass "belongs" to the presider and the congregation not a singing group, no matter how dedicated, prayer-filled, or well-trained these folks are.

Allen Weaver
Aurora

Embargo attacks Iraqi children

To the editors:

I'm very happy to see the response of the US to the natural disaster which has occurred in Honduras and Nicaragua in which 10,000 people have died. However, these numbers pale when compared to the horrific situation of the Iraqi people that has been ongoing since the imposition of economic sanctions against Iraq in 1990. An estimated 700,000 (!) children have died from a lack of medicine or food, and a further 1,000,000 children are said to be malnourished. This is worse than any disaster that I know of.

Of course Saddam is at fault in this situation, but he is not the one who suffers. It is the whole of Iraqi society. I doubt that Saddam will change, but he is not the point. The well-being of the Iraqis is the point.

The loss of a child is devastating to any family. Can you imagine the intense suffering that Iraqi society is currently enduring?

The economic sanctions need to be ended immediately. Furthermore, military action against Iraq will not change Saddam and will only make a terrible situation more terrible.

If anyone else feels the way that I do, I hope that they would contact our Senators and Representatives and express their opinion. It would also be a good thing to express their opinion to our President and The Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan (UN HQ, Room S-3800, New York, NY 10017).

Daniel Quilty
Kosciusko Street, Rochester