

OPINIONS

Catholic Courier

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1150 Buffalo Road
P.O. Box 24379
Rochester, NY 14624
716/328-4340
800/600-3628 outside Rochester
http://www.catholiccourier.com
e-mail: cathcour@frontiernet.net

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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.

Protesters have right to voice views

Pro-life activists have scheduled a week of demonstrations April 18-25 in Buffalo, Batavia and Rochester. Abortion is the primary focus of the protests, but they also will address such issues as child pornography and euthanasia.

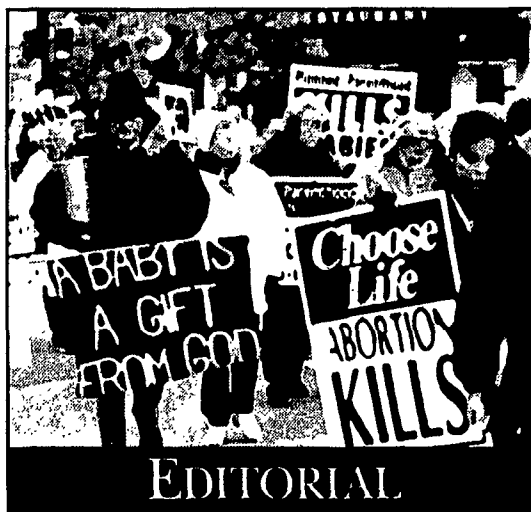
With the backing of pro-choice groups, New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer has filed suit to restrict protesters who will take part in "Operation Save America" (see Page 3). That suit has drawn criticism from New York's bishops, including Bishop Matthew H. Clark.

Meanwhile, a coalition called "Save Our Civility" ran a two-page ad in the Sunday, April 11, *Democrat and Chronicle*. In the ad, the coalition notes the occurrence of violent incidents involving abortion clinics and doctors who perform abortions, and asks organizers of the campaign to "please cancel it and prevent the environment for violence that it will create in our community."

The ad was signed by a long list of people in the community, including some religious and civic leaders.

Ironically, many of those who signed the letter have themselves been involved in or supportive of activities that once were accused of creating an "environment for violence."

If we followed the signers' apparent definition of "civility," protests never should have taken place for civil rights and women's rights; for migrant workers; for labor unions; for welfare recipients and the rights of the poor; for the rights of



Tibetans; against the Vietnam War; against U.S. military action in Iraq; against nuclear arms at the Seneca Army Depot; against drug dealers; against the School of the Americas; against the death penalty; etc.

While some extreme members of protest groups have indeed committed acts of violence, protesters also frequently have become the targets of violence by their foes — as happened to civil-rights marchers in the 1960s.

A more germane example is the 1992 Spring of Life protests in Buffalo, frequently cited in connection with the upcoming protests. More than 600 pro-lifers were arrested for nonviolent civil disobedience. The only arrests

for acts of violence involved pro-choicers who attacked the pro-life demonstrators.

For the sake of accuracy and fairness, perhaps Attorney General Spitzer should add the names of some pro-choice activists to the laundry list of individuals he would force to stay 60 feet away from abortion clinics.

Protests traditionally have not involved "civility." They frequently involve strong emotions and strong words on both sides. Sometimes they involve tactics that make us uncomfortable.

But in this country lawful protests are part of our constitutionally guaranteed right to free speech.

Maybe in their concern for civility, the sponsors of the ad should have paid some attention to civics.

Make it harder to walk away from marriage

To the editors:

I have for a long time been disturbed about the ever increasing incidence of annulments, and never more so than after reading the article in the *Catholic Courier*, March 18, entitled "Changes improve flow at backlogged tribunal." I found the facts, numbers and information in this article staggering and sickening. The numbers cited were followed with a statement that "backlogging woes began after 'user-friendly' changes were made in September 1996, creating an increase in petitioners." One of the changes recognized was a new application form in which extensive marital history was eliminated. Petitioners are now only required to briefly describe reasons why they feel the marriage is invalid.

Does anyone have a conscience? Certainly there are situations that truly earn the decree of annulment, however, does anyone believe that all the annulments handed out in these staggering numbers is the ethical answer? What do we call the children of these annulled marriages: legitimate children of an invalid marriage? Marriage is not to be taken lightly, and the church recognizes this. In an effort to educate couples for this lifetime commitment, the church made pre-nuptial training mandatory. Teams were put in place and lengthy weekend encounters and classes prepared couples for some of the situations and difficulties found in marriage. Pope John Paul II has made plain and very clear his displeasure with the number of Catholic marriages that are annulled, saying "annulments are granted too easily." I quote from the *Corning Leader*, October 18, 1998, "annulments should be a last resort," cautioning that great care should be taken in explaining them "to avoid the danger of its being conceived as divorce under a different name." How does the "user-friendly" terminology honor our Holy Father's advice? I find the new approach of handling annulments similar to handing out "library passes" at the local high school.

The process of dissolving a marriage or considering it invalid, ought to, at the least, be as thoughtful and difficult as the decision to begin a marriage. How many marriages can be annulled? If lessons aren't learned and personal changes made before the second marriage takes

place, then can that marriage also be considered invalid if it also "doesn't work?" I'm sure you understand my point. We have truly become a disposable society; does the church need to modernize in such a way as well? Is this really progress, or an easy way out of a growing problem? For now perhaps the tribunal could cut their costs and numbers by reminding petitioners that there is accountability and

consequences to making a choice to end a marriage, especially if there is another marriage already waiting in the wings.

Let's restore dignity to the sacrament of marriage. Make it a little more difficult to walk away from this lifetime commitment "still feeling good about oneself."

Karen M. Bartone
Scenic Place, Watkins Glen



'Civility' push is diversionary tactic

To the editors:

I had to laugh when I first read about the "Save Our Civility" campaign to stop pro-life demonstrations in Rochester in April. Who do the backers of this campaign think they are fooling? They're not interested in "civility." They're interested in silencing those who publicly oppose abortion.

Those who have signed on to this campaign, like Mayor Johnson, Sister Beth LeValley, and Rep. Slaughter, know that the majority of the people who protest abortion do so from deep moral convictions. They know that the vast majority of pro-lifers wouldn't use violence to get their message across.

Abortion proponents, with the aid of the media, are good at diverting attention. As long as they can portray those

who actively oppose abortion as a threat to the community they take the spotlight off abortion. The protesters then become the issue and abortion is secondary.

I applaud Bishop Clark's statement criticizing this propaganda tactic by supporters of "Save Our Civility." As an aside, did you notice the Bishop's statement never appeared in the *Democrat and Chronicle*, yet the story about the "Save Our Civility" did?

I have one question for the self-appointed guardians of our civility. Would you be as eager to "Save Our Civility" if the protesters were gay rights activists, environmental activists, or animal rights activists who also act from conviction?

Raymond N. Buonemani
Holcroft Road
Rochester