

OPINIONS

Columbine's killings challenge all parents, schools to know their kids

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.

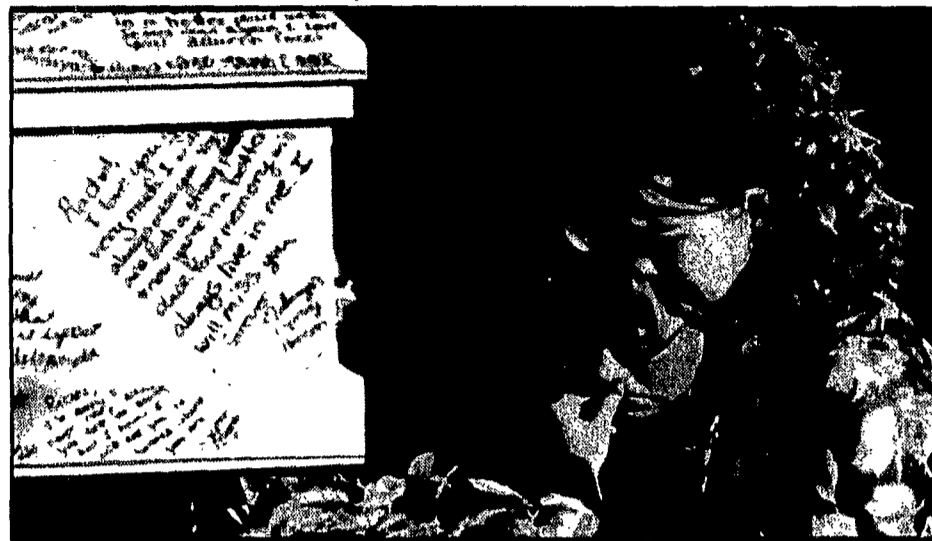
Mail letters to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

To the editors:

With news headlines filled with the tragedy at Columbine High School, American society is given a "wake-up call" — a message which reminds us that our sense of security is a false one. We question: Who is responsible? For the horrible massacre, the answer is the teenage shooters. But who was responsible for giving those boys guidance through their various life problems? The answer: their parents, as well as social institutions such as schools and churches.

So, what went wrong? How did they fail in their tasks? Simple: Society suggested that all is "quiet on the western front," and families get the idea that there is no need to warn kids of the various dangers in life, or even simply to talk to their kids to try to understand what adolescents may be going through. Parents too often think that just because a teenager's life consists merely of school and "hanging out" with their friends, there isn't present in their lives pressures, burdens and conflicts. As a result, parents don't take the time to try to understand their kids and lifestyle. And when was the last time parents suggested to their teenagers to look to God for answers?

Society is also responsible for the way an adolescent develops. Social institutions, like schools and churches, are set up in order to instruct, guide, and integrate adolescents into society. However, lately, many institutions have spent so much energy trying to encourage independent self-identity that it's led to segregation, the growing strength of cliques and a mix-up of priorities. Institutions, now, try to correct the problem by attempting to reintegrate its



Reuters/CNS
Kimmie Cornell (right) and Brittney Pastine mourn at the casket of their friend Rachel Scott during her funeral service in Littleton, Colo., April 24. Scott was among the 12 students killed at Columbine High School.

members, but they go about it the wrong way — their priorities are misplaced. For example, while I attended Bishop Kearney High School, many disturbing things occurred: cases of sexual harassment, ... satanic cliques responsible for carving satanic symbols and sayings on bathroom walls and lockers, drug use ... and, of course, an overall disrespect for authority. Instead of trying to correct the problems, the administration often turned a blind eye — because "this stuff doesn't happen in a Catholic school" — and worried more about whether or not a student's shirt was untucked or whether or not a student's shoes met uniform requirements. Go figure.

Though the Columbine killings were ex-

tremely devastating, perhaps something good can come from it in order to save the future. If society is lucky, parents across the country are sitting down with their children and starting a conversation with "Is there anything you'd like to tell me?" or "I want to help you through this." Perhaps parents will get reinvolved in their children's lives, if they aren't already, and get to know their kids all over again, in order to help them efficiently develop into adulthood.

Please, for the future's sake, get to know your kids: who they are, what they are going through and why, and what they are feeling and why.

Frank Palermo, 19
Westchester Avenue, Rochester



Greg Francis/Staff Photographer

Help protect life by available means

To the editors:

A Consistent Life Ethic doesn't always have to mean enormous tasks.

I attended the reception at St. John of Rochester on March 15 and the dinner downtown on April 10 for the honorees for this year's Vita Award. From various conversations I had after the reception especially, I know I was not the only one to have felt nearly overwhelmed at the list of accomplishments and activities of the nominees this year. Comments emerged like: "Where do they find the time? The strength? The energy? I could never do all that."

Those of us who might have felt that way need two reminders in order to not become discouraged or unsure of the value of what we do:

- 1) We can do more than we think we can if we let God do it through us, and
- 2) not all of us are called to the same tasks.

It is wonderful that there are those among us who are willing and able to ac-

complish the larger tasks, but the Lord told us, "Whatever you do for the least of my people, you do it for me." Whatever you do, He said. You may be called to open your home to someone in need, or you may be called to say a rosary for one unborn child who is in danger. You may be asked to stand vigil in testament to your belief in the sanctity of life, or you may be asked to write a check to support an organization that espouses that same belief. Whether you are ministering to refugees or sponsoring a child in a country where clean water is a luxury, chairing a committee or writing a letter to someone who is lonely, your task is sacred in the eyes of the Lord if it is done with love, in His name.

So let us thank God for all those among us who listen to the call of the Holy Spirit and respond according to the gifts they were given, no matter what those gifts might be.

Elaine M. Batterby
Macedon

Process aims to safeguard rights of all

To the editors:

This is in response to the April 15 letter writer's concern ("Make it harder to walk away from marriage") that the tribunal's change to a "user-friendly" application form might add to the "ever increasing incidence of annulments."

Since it was not mentioned in the March 18 article (to which the letter responded), the writer is probably unaware of the concurrent process change that added a petitioner interview. The new process intimates fewer petitioners and, at the same time, allows for a focused discussion of how the same material detailed in the previous process relates to invalidity of the marriage.

As before, however, the tribunal must determine with "moral certainty" that a given marriage failed to meet the minimum standards for validity established by the church. A key player in this is the "defender of the bond" who argues for the validity of the bond. In some cases, the decree of invalidity also requires the petitioner to go to a counselor, or satisfy some other restriction, before he or she is permitted to marry in the church. The entire process is designed to uphold the dignity of the sacrament of marriage.

At the same time, we want to make sure the process itself is not the reason why fewer than 20 percent of the over 6 million divorced U.S. Catholics touched by a broken marriage exercise their right to seek a declaration of invalidity. Our mission is to provide the means by which all persons may vindicate their rights.

Casey Lopata
Tribunal Administrator
Diocese of Rochester