

# OPINIONS

## Justice for the second victim

### 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.

By **Cathy Deeds**  
Guest contributor

An Air Force airman beats up his eight-month-pregnant wife so badly that their unborn child dies as a result. An Arkansas man hires thugs to beat his pregnant girlfriend in the stomach to deliberately kill the child he did not want. Three pregnant women die in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. What do these tragic cases have in common?

Each of these real-life cases clearly involves two victims: the pregnant woman and the child growing in her womb. These examples, and many others, cry out for recognition of the unborn child as a crime victim. "Fetal homicide" laws, which protect the unborn child either throughout pregnancy or during later stages, have been enacted in about 24 states, a majority enacted during the 1990s. Such laws acknowledge that the child in the womb is a distinct human being deserving legal protection — a reality that even the U.S. Supreme Court allows to be recognized in law, so long as such laws are not used to forbid abortions. Where a crime against a pregnant woman results in prenatal injury or death, the law may punish two crimes with separate penalties.

Despite positive activity at the state level, an anomaly exists in federal law. When a pregnant woman is assaulted or killed within a federal jurisdiction (e.g., on a military base) and her unborn child suffers injury as a result, federal law punishes only the harm done to the mother. But now many in Congress are trying to correct this. The Unborn Victims of Violence Act (H.R. 2436) sponsored by Rep. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) extends federal protection to the "child in utero" in these situations. It does not change or override state laws in this area, but declares for the first time that an unborn child can be a victim of a federal crime.

Although such laws specifically disclaim any application to

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abortion practice — as they must do so, so long as the Supreme Court's *Roe vs. Wade* decision stands — pro-abortion groups have nonetheless attacked them as violating *Roe*. Because fetal homicide laws acknowledge the unborn child as a human being with a right to be protected from violence, opponents fear such laws will lead to abortion restrictions and threaten a woman's right to "choice." But in fetal homicide cases, a third party has committed a crime, to which the pregnant woman obviously has not consented — the crime is first committed against the woman herself. The *Roe* court did not rule on injury to unborn children outside the abortion context — and it claimed it was not deciding "when human life begins," leaving states free to act in this area.

Abortion aside, people like Michael Lenz, whose wife, Carrie, was killed with her unborn child in the Oklahoma City bombing, deserve justice and acknowledgment that he not only lost his wife to this crime but he lost his child as well. This attack on the Murrah Federal Building would fall under the Unborn Victims of Violence Act. Lenz summed up his feelings this way when he testified on July 21 before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution: "I lost the two people I loved most that day, and the official death toll for the Murrah bombing remains at 168. In addition to Carrie, there were two other expecting mothers in the building that day that died. ... In my mind 171 people lost their lives that day, and three 'Daddies to be' became widowers."

**EDITORS' NOTE:** The House passed the Unborn Victims of Violence Act Sept. 30 by a 254-172 vote. To date, the Senate has not taken up similar legislation.

*Deeds is a public-policy analyst with the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, National Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

## Lack of education dooms many to poverty

#### To the editors:

In Sister Schoelles column, "Faith should call us to political action for poor" in the September 16, issue of the *Catholic Courier*, she writes, "Christians are called to work through political and economic activity to grant access to those currently excluded from the social and economic goods of this country." She goes on to say that this is in part because of, "...rules set in Congress." I would like to suggest that more people are excluded from sharing in the wealth of this country by the Supreme Court and the American Civil Liberties Union than by the Congress.

The Supreme Court has fostered a manifesto that teaches that the rights of the individual are supreme to all other rights, even the rights of society; and the ACLU goes to great lengths to support this extremism, which ultimately gives us the right to make self-destructive decisions if we wish. These misguided attempts to protect the rights of each of us is, in fact, dooming many of us to the prison of poverty.

This belief in the paramount rights of the individual manifests itself in state laws, too. The laws of this state tell us that a student, when he or she is 16 years old, can leave school if he wishes to! How can we expect to have people share in the wealth when, as children, they are given the legal right to make a decision of this magnitude. And how can children be expected to take school and their education seriously when teachers and staff are constantly restrained from doing their jobs by the ever-present threat of lawsuits?

We always speak of our rights; never about our obligations. We have an obligation to remain in school, work hard, and get the best and most education possible so that we can contribute to society, get a good job, and share in the wealth of this country.

My purpose in writing is to suggest that we begin to think about, and perhaps act on, this more insidious way in which people are excluded from the bounty of this country and the world: the lack of a good, basic education which can lead to not only a better life, but a better quality of life. The only effective way to combat poverty is to ensure that all of our children receive a quality education taught in a safe, serious environment. We have an obligation to do that!

Every year at Christmas I read *A Christ-*



*mas Carol* by Charles Dickens, and every year a chill goes up my spine when I read the words, "They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meager, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shriveled hand, like that of old age, had pinched and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where

angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing.... This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware of them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom...."

Charles Dickens was right!

**Robert F. Carson**  
Walker-Lake Ontario Road  
Hilton

## Appreciates columnist's insights

#### To the editors:

I want you to know that I never miss the wonderful column of Father Shamon — "A Word for Sunday." He enriches my homilies every week!

Why not collect them together and publish them? They would be a great help for priests and people who don't live in the

Rochester Diocese and get your paper.

**Father John Kilian**  
Catholic Chaplain

Attica Correctional Facility

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Father Shamon publishes a number of volumes on different topics each year. Contact him at 5 South Marvane Ave., Auburn, N.Y. 13021.

## Previews indicate film exploits Crucifixion

#### To the editors:

After seeing the Coming Attractions of the film "Stigmata," I certainly would not see this movie as it appears to be an exploitation of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which is a sacrilege.

**Joseph P. Beirne**  
Baty Street, Elmira

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