

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.

Encourages diocese to think globally

To the editors:

Much of the recent press on the "shortage" of priests is geared towards the politically correct notion that the only answers to the "shortage" are to 1) provide for the laity to oversee communion services, 2) allow priests to marry, and 3) allow for the ordination of women. The articles go on in doomsday fashion to describe the concerns and how we had better address the "shortage" by embracing one of the above options. We are even being conditioned for this "shortage" as some of the existing parishes voluntarily experiment with communion services in place of daily Masses. But one thing that never seems to be considered is the universal nature of the Body of Christ, the Church. The consensus seems to be that the "shortage" must be addressed as if our Diocese is separate from the rest of the Church. In other words, when it comes to solving this issue, we seem to be working inside a "little box" of our own making; and yet, when it comes to other issues we are encouraged to think globally!

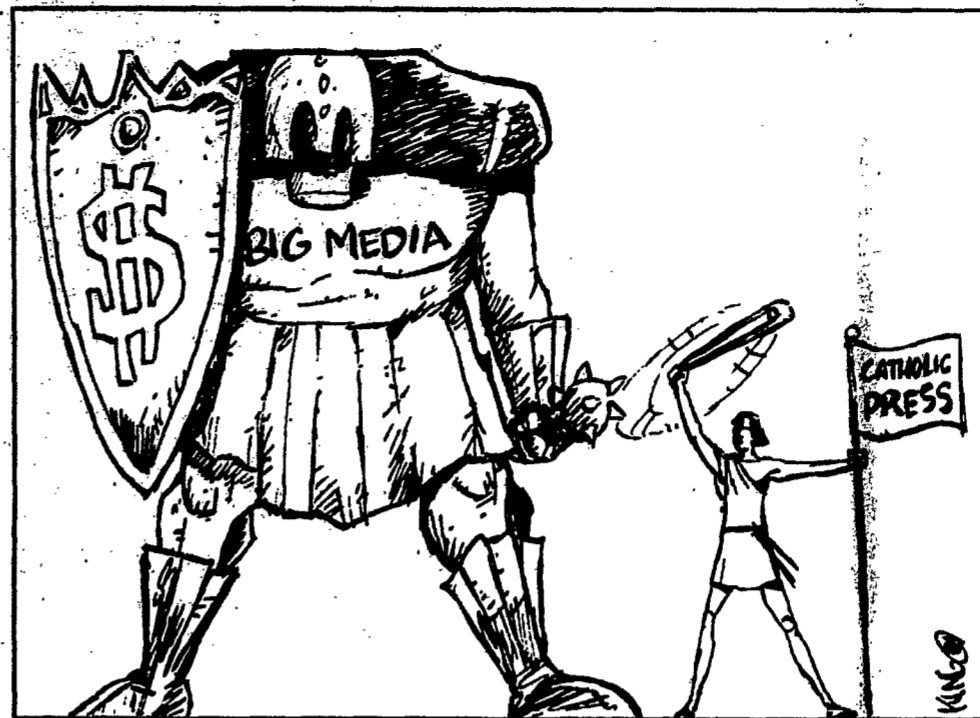
According to the 1997 Statistical Yearbook published by the Holy See, the number of priests worldwide is 404,000. Twenty years ago it was 420,000. The Yearbook also lists the number of seminarians at 108,517. Twenty years ago it was 63,882. The increase alone in the number of seminarians exceeds the shortage that the priesthood has experienced. It seems that recovery is on the way and that within the next few years the crisis of vocations may be over, globally speaking.

In the meantime, many Bishops are pro-active in recruiting priests from other countries where vocations are at an all-time high. What about Rochester? Why haven't we actively recruited any such priests? Is it that we are concerned that priests from Third World countries are not capable of bringing the Gospel message to us? If anything, their exposure to poverty and the lower standard of living would be an eye-opening experience for those of us who are part of the most affluent society in the world. Or is it that we are afraid to be presented with these inequities because we might be challenged to do something about it? Or just maybe it's that if we fill our "shortage" with priests from the outside then we would have no reason to pursue or promote the other three politically correct options?

Many wrongfully claim that the only answers are the first three outlined above. But when we look outside our "little box" to the Universal Church, we see that the Holy Spirit has a different answer. It's time that we, as a Diocese, break out of the box we have built around this issue. It's time we stop bucking Church teachings and time to reflect on the movement of the Holy Spirit within the whole Church. Otherwise we may find ourselves stuck in the pit-of-despair we created by our personal agendas, our isolationist views, and our silly concerns about being politically correct.

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Multifaceted plan designed to raise vocations awareness

To the editors:

In a recent letter to the editor, the Diocese was asked what it is doing to foster priest vocations. Is there a thrust toward a drive to attract priest/religious vocations?

I am happy to say, "Yes, there is." While discernment groups, Becket Hall (a formation and discernment center which has been a part of the Diocese for nearly 40 years) and other programs have been in existence for years, a new position has been created by the Diocese called Director of Vocations Awareness. I have been in this position for 10 months. Working with Father John DeSocio, and other priests, our focus is on creating a dynamic vocations awareness process in our Diocese. Emphasis is placed on the importance of the priesthood and other church vocations in today's world. Primary to this role is the development and strengthening of vocation awareness throughout the 12-county Diocese.

With assistance from many in the diocese and nationally, a vocation awareness action plan is now in place to guide our efforts as we collaborate and interact with a wide range of people. For example we are sponsoring an inter-collegiate retreat, which will focus on service in the church and how to understand where God is calling you. Another retreat, at the end of June, will invite men to consider the priesthood. Bishop Clark is joining us at both events.

A vocation web site is being developed which will provide information

about a variety of vocations. The Internet is a powerful tool which can be used to help people in the early stages of discerning a vocation.

For elementary and high school students, vocation information has been sent and will continue to be sent to all religious-education personnel and youth ministers. Successful programs on vocations have been presented to youth groups at St. Lawrence and St. Rita's parishes. More of these programs are on the agenda in the future.

Parents and families have a role to play in vocations as well. We currently are forming Parish Vocation Committees in which parishes, in conjunction with the Vocation Office, tailor vocation programs and efforts for their particular parish or community. The pilot group at Holy Name of Jesus Church in Greece is off and running and more groups are being established as well. If you'd like to establish a vocations committee at your parish, please call the Vocation office at (716) 328-3228, ext. 229.

These are just a few of the efforts underway. Vocations are everyone's responsibility. We are all advocates for encouraging church vocations and inviting people to consider the priesthood or religious life. Working together, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may the Lord bless us with an abundance of vocations to serve our church.

Patricia Finnerty
Director of Vocations Awareness
Diocese of Rochester

Priest's 'job' offers many rewards

To the editors:

Your front page story on vocations (*Catholic Courier*, Feb. 10: "Can priests hold up under job demands?") certainly points out the increased duties and responsibilities of priests today.

However, to be fair and to attract new vocations, we should also mention the many blessings and privileges that we priests enjoy. After looking at different professions and careers, I have it so good!

Reflecting on my 40 years of priesthood, I always had a roof over my head, enough food on the table, and cookies in the kitchen. Only once in my life I had to sleep on a hard wood floor and wait in line for a handout of food. But so did other parishioners. It was a week in June of '72 when eleven inches of flood waters came through our parish in Corning. Otherwise, rectory life in the city and in the Southern Tier has been comfortable.

We priests also have job security — plenty of work with no possibility of lay-off. And we have loads of people who love and respect us. For example, although I retired five years ago, phone calls, visits and cards continue.

In addition, we see the love and support of our people by the number of volunteers and laity in ministry today.

Some added gifts of our priesthood are spiritual opportunities and environments, along with the Lord's peace that follows.

The blessings, rewards and joys of priesthood outweigh the heavy workload described in the article.

As Lacordaire said years ago: "To teach and to pardon, to console and to bless always. My God, what a life! And it is yours, O priest of Jesus Christ."

Father Elmer Schmidt
McAuley Residence, Rochester