

OPINIONS

Angered by Star 'exposé'

To the editors:

(I do not share *Democrat and Chronicle* columnist Mark Hare's) idea that celibacy should be altered as a primary vow for those who achieve ordination to the priesthood. (But) his column of Feb. 2 on the *Kansas City Star's* "exposé" about HIV priests, which was published locally on Sunday, Jan. 31 is laudable. I would like to add something to what he wrote.

I am an unmarried Catholic who is celibate because it is what the Church commands of all unmarried people and it is also something I have chosen for myself as a means to achieve sanctity. Thousands have throughout our sacred history. Catholics are taught that sexual communion belongs within the confines of a sacrament: Matrimony. It is there that an animal act is raised by God to a sacred sacrament, giving it something more than a mere need or function that so many say it is. Sexuality has been so debased by Hollywood and the modern world, it no longer is looked forward to as a spiritual act of great beauty, but a common experience that far too many partake of ... with little or no concern for ... the spiritual responsibilities, not to mention the physical responsibilities it carries. I have many friends and acquaintances who eschew the Church's teaching on human sexuality, many of whom have forfeited their lives due to unsafe and unchecked sexual behavior...

Priests have 12 long years to contemplate the vow of celibacy before ordination. If they break this oath, they have the sacrament of Reconciliation with which to make amends with God. The very idea that priests are more infected with HIV than others proportionally is patently absurd and false. All the years I worked in the laboratory at Community Health Network, our local AIDS clinic, I do not remember a single Catholic clergyman or woman who received treatment. This is not to say that they haven't, but not in my vast medical experience locally. I know many priests in our diocese. I am outraged that a Midwestern newspaper would print such blatant errors from a study that is both specious and questionable, for it undermines the fundamental role the priest plays in the sanctity of souls and the tremendous results they have accomplished over the centuries. I am an expert on the disease and this article smacks of more than a modicum of misrepresentation. Priests have access to many materials about sexuality, for example, and are highly educated. Blaming the Church for not teaching priests about celibacy is nonsense; sadly, they know more than many lay persons.

I am happy that Mark Hare addressed this issue; he is surely a watchdog for some of the most ridiculous claims that surveys and newspapers print in order to attack and defraud the most charitable institution on the face of the earth. The Catholic Church and its ministers were promised by Christ that the "gates of hell will not prevail against it." It has lasted longer than any organization in human history. Newspapers should contemplate the heavenly fire they tempt before they misconstrue facts to demean and blame.

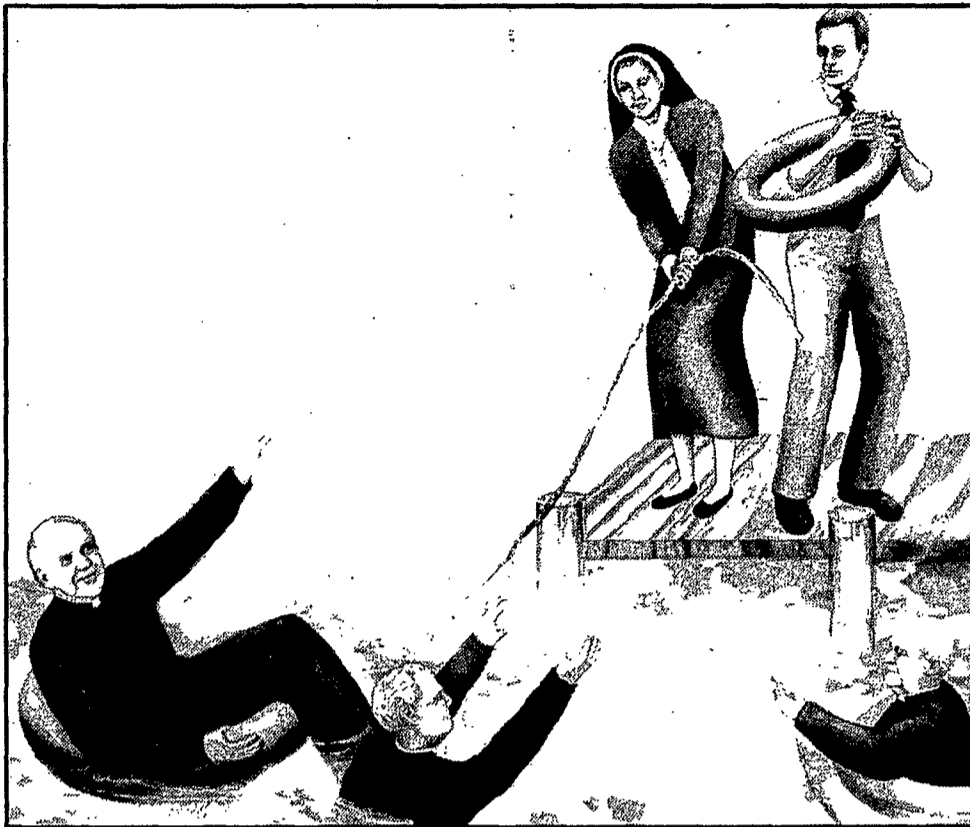
Michael H. Pierce
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Crossed emulates Day

To the editors:

Your feature article about Carol Crossed (February 24) reveals a person of unmatched courage and simplicity. Her consistent witness against war, abortion, and capital punishment is in the best tradition of Catholic social justice in the spirit of (Saint) Dorothy Day.

Donald L. Muench
Richmond, Surrey, UK



Catechism offers solution

To the editors:

Please refer to the recent articles of "priest shortage" and "burn out" in our *Catholic Courier*. I believe that we are overlooking a most obvious solution, probably because of the fast pace of our lives. The blueprint for our problem is the new Catechism of the Catholic Church and, as a bonus, we are now enjoying a beautiful Jubilee Holy Year. Both of these means, thanks to the Holy Spirit ever guiding our Catholic Church, is the way out. We need to have a closer look at ourselves in relation to Christ and his Church.

For encouragement, please turn to page four under Arrangement of the Material in our new Catechism of the Catholic Church: "It (Catechism) should also help to illumine with the light of faith the new situations and problems which had not yet emerged in the past." Thus, we have to continue with hope and joy, religious and laity alike, to pursue adult re-

ligious education of our Catholic faith in all its fullness.

This present Jubilee Year is a real gem. Pope John Paul II says in his prayer for the Jubilee, "Father, grant that we may live this Jubilee Year docile to the voice of the spirit, faithful to the way of Christ, diligent in listening to your Word and in approaching the wellsprings of grace."

In the measure that we change our hearts and lives we find favor with God. I truly believe that the blueprint of our new Catechism of the Catholic Church, together with the bonus of our present Jubilee Year, are two powerful ways to bring about the solution which is so urgently needed in our Diocese and elsewhere in our nation regarding "priest shortage" and "burn out."

Clara Pasto
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Stress a symptom of dissatisfaction

To the editors:

(Regarding the Feb. 10 article "Can priests hold up under job demands?"): Yeah, like the rest of us are on a "cake walk!" I am not a psychiatrist, but my experience would indicate stress to be about 98 percent psychological. If you enjoy what you are doing, 40 hours seem like 10; if you do not, 10 hours seem like 40. I offer you the premise that if priests are feeling stressed, it is because they simply do not enjoy what they are doing. Perhaps the question priests should be asking themselves is whether or not the conditions causing their disenjoyment will ultimately bring them joy. I recommend to you contemplation on the "sorrowful mysteries" of the rosary to obtain the proper focus for this question.

As I get older it seems to me that most

people think they cannot be happy until they are "God like," i.e. live forever without pain and only work on intellectual pursuits. Again, my experience has shown me that truly happy people are "like our God", i.e. willing to be hung on a tree for their fellow man, silently, without recrimination. I am fortunate that most priests I have known fall into the second category. My advice to priests feeling excessive pressure is 1) accept the calling God chose for you 2) accept the fact you are human and entitled to falter once in awhile and 3) allow the people under your care to be human also by giving them responsibility and letting them succeed or fail according to their efforts, not yours.

John P. Slauson
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Weedsport

Do beliefs bespeak behavior, or behavior beliefs?

To the editors:

Recently I came across some papers from Confirmation classes of a few years ago. In one of the sessions, the students did a list of questions/concerns they had in regard to the Eucharist. Before disposing of those notes, I wanted to share the gist of the concerns expressed most often. The comments represent three classes over the course of three years and a total of about 18-19 students.

Many of the students found it difficult to believe that Jesus was truly present in the Eucharist and gave the following reasons for their opinions:

If the priest really believes that he is holding Jesus in his hands when he lifts

the consecrated Host, how come (some) ... do it so quickly? don't really kneel down after, but just sort of "bend"? look like he is in a hurry?

If the people who receive the Host truly believe Jesus is present in it, how come (some) ... are chewing gum when they go to the altar? take the host — one student wrote "grab the host" — and walk away looking at everyone else instead of putting it in their mouths quickly and reverently? leave right away without kneeling even for a minute, and others talk to each other right away?

If the people who help distribute the Hosts — eucharistic ministers — really believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist,

St. Francis parishioner wonders why

To the editors:

We were told it would happen! We shouldn't have been surprised! We had heard the words we dreaded to hear — St. Francis of Assisi Church, 77 Whitney St., Rochester will close Sunday, June 30, 2000. We were grateful that we got to joyfully celebrate the parish's 70th anniversary. We will not be able to celebrate our 71st anniversary.

We were told that the parish had money in the diocesan pool or bank but we were "people" poor. Only the elderly made up the attendance and these mostly came from the surrounding suburbs.

Attendance dropped gradually at the 9 o'clock Mass. Did it warrant having a priest include us in his schedule? We heard and read over and over that there was a priest shortage, not enough to go around. Father Tomasso was pastor of five west side parishes. We could see him running himself ragged.

There were a lot of questions but few answers. We parishioners had some questions, but no one had answers; or if they had answers, they weren't told to us. Questions:

1. Deacons were hired within the past 6-8 months to work at four area churches in the City West Parishes. These are now thriving — people are coming back. None was hired to work in the Anglo community of St. Francis. Two deacons are working to serve the Hispanic community.

2. Nuns were hired or assigned to evangelize at two of the five churches — none at St. Francis.

3. Was this the beginning of the slow and agonizing death of a church and its community?

4. Why is it that only 15 — maybe 20 — parishioners live in the church's boundaries? The rest drive in from Brighton, Gates, Chili, Spencerport, Greece. Has anyone tried to find out why these people love St. Francis enough to drive in as they passed five or six churches nearer to their homes?

5. There are few or no children at our Mass and this number too has practically ceased to exist. Gone are the days when Monsignor Cirrincione went out to gather the children. But there are children in the area. Why hasn't anyone asked Mr. Spezio, principal of #17 school, or Gail Blanchard, director of Charles Settlement House, about these children who might partake of their services?

A few of us are striving to turn this dismal and depressing picture around.

But we ask, "Why hasn't anyone thrown a life preserver to us as we slowly sink and drown into a past with no foreseeable future? What we attempt to do now — is it "too late, too little"? But "better late than never."

Phyllis Burruto
LeManz Drive, Gates

how come (some) ... look like they are bored? are in such a hurry? they bring back the plates (patens) afterwards stacked up like dirty dishes after a regular dinner?

Compiling and organizing the comments of these assorted teenagers was not easy and I almost gave up the effort, but I felt that their concerns are valid and we all should give them some thought. I hope you consider publishing this letter. If we as Catholics really believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in body and soul, then HOW COME...we act the way we do?

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