

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.

Remove punishment from the canons

To the editors:

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia the object and effect of excommunication is "loss of communion, i.e. of the spiritual benefits shared by all the members of Christian society." That really means Catholics and essentially means denial of the sacraments. Doesn't that sound like being a Catholic is like being in a country club? Pay your dues and you get benefits not available to others, including other Christians. Is that what Christ would do? I don't think so.

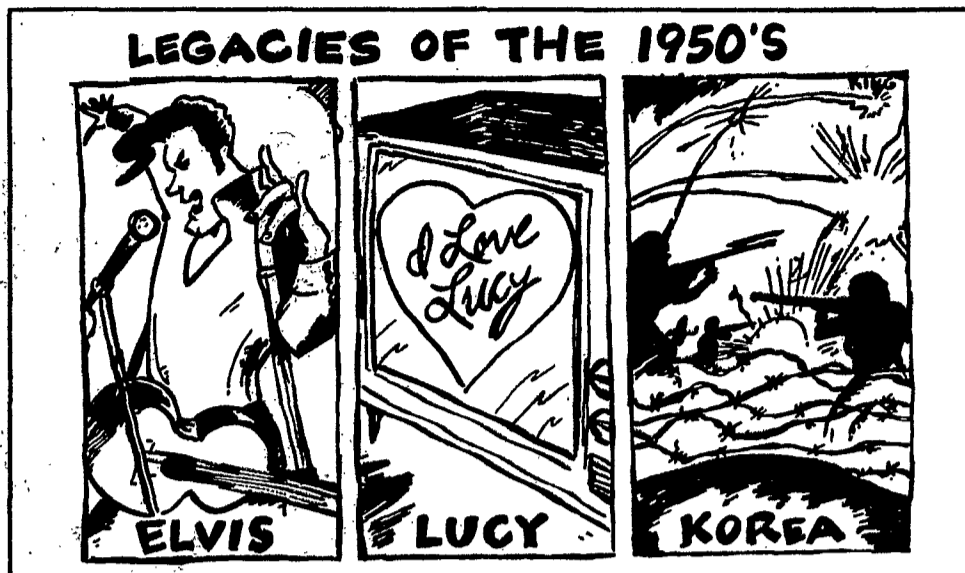
The notion of heresy and casting out of the group is one of the things we inherited from our Jewish roots. The first "excommunications" were not for heresy but for apostasy. Not all early Christians were steadfast. Some were weak and the penalty for denying worship of the god-emperor was severe. Excommunication from the Christian society followed. Early church regional councils met to decide, among other things, canons on how long ex-Christians had to remain "out" before being readmitted. As a theology developed a perceived intense need for conformity developed with it. This conformity seems to be a human society need as we see it many times throughout history, with ostracism and worse for nonconformists.

Christian intolerance for nonconformity took a big step up when Constantine first legitimized Christianity, then tried to use it as a unifying force for the empire. He was the one who convened the first ecumenical council for the purpose of resolving the first big heresy, of Arius. This Church-State relationship got worse, much worse, in 380 when Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official state religion. The Church now had the power and resources to really root out heresy and used them for centuries. Excommunication was a common penalty for heresy. Unfortunately burning at the stake was not unheard of. I doubt if Christ would have done the former, certainly not the latter.

What would Christ do? What should we do? Certainly pray for the nonconformist. Certainly forgive. Tolerate without condoning. But deny them the sacraments? Who needs the sacraments more, saints or sinners? The sacraments shouldn't be a reward for being good. They are a source of grace, spiritual food. The nuns in parochial school convinced me that you must be "worthy" to receive communion. Must be in the state of grace with the sacrament of penance a prerequisite and fast from midnight prior to receiving. Today the main test of worthiness seems to be just being Catholic.

I believe it is time for my church to move away from our exclusive, country club mentality. We can start by wiping excommunication from our canon law books. We should cancel any current excommunications in force. We should find a more Christian way to deal with heresy and deviant thinking. WWJD?

Bill McNeill
Watchet Lane, Fairport



Priesthood is higher calling

To the editors:

This Diocese may have trouble recruiting candidates for the priesthood, but its difficulty is not universally shared. Vocations numbers are surging in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World. In America interest in Order priests is similarly growing. The Society of St. John, located in Shohola, Pennsylvania, just south of the New York border received 200 applicants for just seven openings. Among dioceses in the United States, a number of dioceses have received more applicants than they have room for.

What do they have in common, those Orders and bishops for whom the vocations crisis is nonexistent? They are orthodox, meaning, among other things, they inform interested candidates that the priesthood is a higher call, requiring an extra-special devotion to prayer, holiness, self-sacrifice, the better to sanctify the rituals only the priest can perform. The so-called vocation crisis began almost to the

day that recruits were told that the priesthood is no different — and by implication, no better — than other vocations, such as husband, father, doctor, lawyer, or carpenter. I understand this was an effort to alter the past practice when priests, by virtue of their office alone, were elevated to a supra-mortal status, but tell a young man that he can serve God just as well by marrying, having children and buying a nice house and joining the country club, and it is not too hard to guess which path he is going to choose.

If the Diocese is serious about remedying the shortage of priests here, it should send its vocation recruitment team to the Diocese of Nebraska or Steubenville to see how they attract bunches of candidates, and in the meantime, bring in Order priests and priests from the Third World countries.

Christopher S. Ciaccio
Caversham Woods
Pittsford

Priest helped kids overcome woes

To the editors:

I have contemplated adding one more tribute to Father Elmer Heindl, but had demurred out of deference to so many other and finer tributes.

Do you suppose these few words of kudos would be helpful?

I have several memories of Father Elmer Heindl as he served as an assistant at Old St. Mary's, downtown Rochester, in the late '40s and early '50s.

Father Heindl organized the altar boys into the "Knights of the Altar" and made a bunch of us rag-tag kids honored to serve at Mass; most of us came from broken and/or poor homes that one pastor described in a Sunday sermon as "hovels." No priest ever came to visit our "hovels" and no one seemed to care about us until Father Heindl came along.

Father Heindl was a master sailor and frequently took us sailing. He also bought

us banana splits and took us on outings to Powder Mills Park, etc.

These may be materialistic things, but they mean a lot to boys who had nothing, not even a father to take them anywhere. I sensed that Father Heindl sensed this. And he did not neglect the spiritual element. I still have a plaque of the Sacred Heart and a St. Christopher's medal awarded to me for service in his "Knights of the Altar."

I do not mean to demean the efforts of many other worthy priests who have done this and much more. I merely wanted to add a few telling anecdotes to corroborate the great priestly treasure that Father Heindl has been and an enduring awareness of what he meant to a bunch of kids from "hovels," most of whom turned out well, in no small measure to his priestly role-model and caring. Ad multos annos.

Charles A. McKay
South Goodman Street, Rochester

'Cafeteria' critics inconsistent on the death penalty

To the editors:

Many Catholics denounce other Catholics who use what they call a "cafeteria" mentality in their faith, meaning they choose what they want to believe and reject what they don't like even though it is a Church teaching. For instance, they are often adamant about those who advocate ordaining married priests or women, those who support birth control or homosexuals, or priests who offer the Eucharist to everyone in the congregation. These attitudes are viewed as outside of true Catholicism.

Many of these same people, however, support the death penalty. All of the Catholic bishops and the Pope himself say the death penalty is wrong and should be stopped. If you reject the Pope's teaching

and the bishops' pleas to end the death penalty in this country, aren't you also picking and choosing in the Catholic cafeteria? At the very least, stop pointing fingers and realize that if you claim the right to reject certain of the Church's teachings, others

have that same right. Or if you want to follow all that the Church officially says, then join those of us who are anti-death penalty and make your views known.

Dorothy Siegel
Morgan Road, Scottsville

Praises Stations at parish, prays for revival

To the editors:

Although I am not a member of St. Dominic's Parish in Shortsville, I had the pleasure of attending the Stations of the Cross every Friday night during Lent with Father Cosgrove leading them accompanied by two candle bearers. The Stations were traditional in that they focused on the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, not

on our present-day problems and concerns.

We have lost two generations who do not have a clue as to the meaning of the Stations of the Cross and that is sad since this is a beautiful devotion. I pray for its revival.

Mary Gilardo
Colton Avenue, Newark