

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.

Critical 'house' can't foster vocations

To the editors:

I am deeply troubled. It seems to me that week after week I read one article after another in both the Catholic and secular press concerning the shortage of priests and how we as a diocese are not doing anything about it. The critics seem to be on all sides. Many who identify themselves as more "traditional" or "orthodox" point to dioceses and religious orders which seem to abound in their numbers of seminarians and ordinations to priesthood. Yet, these same people do not look at the number of resignations from active ministry of the newly ordained. Many of these dioceses and orders have very low retention rates — our diocese has quite a high one! Some say that we — meaning the ordained clergy and those who work for the diocese — are not doing enough to promote vocations to the priesthood and that we are not promoting an idea of priesthood as a "higher calling" apart from, let's say, marriage. While I will admit to not having a perfect memory, I do not recall in any sacramental theology class any professor stating that the Sacrament of Orders was qualitatively superior to the Sacrament of Marriage. I do remember that we believe all sacraments to

be vehicles of God's grace.

Lest we think the critics of the vocation issue are only on the right, the "left" has spoken out many times as well. Many will speak out that a "repeal" of the mandatory celibacy is all that is needed for the ranks to swell. I didn't realize that celibacy was that awful or had become a four letter word. Other quick fix solutions abound: Get the priests from Africa and Third World nations to come here. Even though the numbers of Catholics are growing at high rates in Africa and that the dioceses of Africa experience a worse clergy shortage than we — our American arrogance takes over and we want priests to come here so that we can continue being spoiled with many Masses, available when we want them. Further, let us not forget those who advocate a no ordination policy — that if everyone can't be ordained, no one should be ordained. I have never understood how if a celibate young man denies his own vocation how that will promote another's?

Isn't it time to stop finger pointing, blaming, judging and accusing? Do we honestly think that condemning our bishop or diocese or church will bring about more vocations to the priesthood or reli-

gious life? If one grows up in a house of constant condemnation of the legal system — it is highly doubtful that house will produce a lawyer. If one grows up in a house of constant condemnation of the church — it is highly doubtful that house will produce a priest or sister. It seems more and more clear to me that we have to stop finding fault and begin affirming the giftedness of the church, those who serve us in ministry and those around us.

Having staffed the retreat of some 40 young men who gathered to learn about the priesthood, having talked to more than that about the priesthood, and being able to serve a parish community that supports all vocations to church ministry — I am grateful! I find great affirmation and hope in these things. But, unfortunately, I have encountered too many — including some clergy and religious — who have nothing but negative things to say about our church. Maybe we need to heed Pope John XXIII's words at the opening of Vatican Council II and not pay attention to the prophets of doom and gloom. With him, I prefer to look for the giftedness of all people. In His Name.

Father Lee Chase, pastor
St. Thomas More Church, Brighton

'Relieved' parishes offer thanks to donors, diocese

To the editors:

The members of the Roman Catholic Community of Geneva, St. Francis De-Sales and St. Stephen's parishes, join me in grateful acknowledgment of the generosity of individuals, parishes, the *Catholic Courier* and the Diocese. Their cumulative kindness through the Jubilee Debt Forgiveness Fund has removed a heavy burden of debt from our parishes.

Debt forgiveness has lowered the amounts our parishes owe the Diocese and the *Courier* from \$120,533 to \$5,284. Contributions given by parishes and individuals to the Jubilee Debt Forgiveness Fund account for 57% of the relief. The remainder comes directly from the Diocese (31%) and the *Catholic Courier* (12%).

We appreciate not only the generosity of the assistance, but also the sensitivity of the process by which it was given. Whenever debts accumulate, one question that arises is "Why?" Explaining the "why" of our situation would take us into some areas that are easy to detail and others that are awkward to discuss. The process did not require us to explain ourselves or to prove our worthiness for assistance. Granted, the generosity sought and received from individuals and parishes had to be honored.

Generosity facilitates progress

To the editors:

For nearly two years we, the parishioners and staff of Corpus Christi Parish, have struggled to rise above the past and move toward a new beginning in unity with the Diocese and the greater Church in harmony with the Spirit. The results of this struggle are now manifested in a vibrant, growing faith community dedicated to the service of God and neighbor.

We recognize that throughout our trials we have never been alone. We recognize the workings of the Spirit in the generosity of our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Rochester. Countless times you have come to our assistance. We wish to acknowledge your great generosity in your prayers for us. We wish to acknowledge your continual offerings of financial resources. We wish to acknowledge the

Bishop Clark accomplished this by naming an ad hoc committee of priests and laity to administer the Jubilee Forgiveness Fund so that, as he put it, "this debt forgiveness does not artificially bolster communities that are no longer financially viable."

Recent decades have seen much change in our parishes, but they remain financially viable. Our Finance Committees and Pastoral Councils have supported tough decisions to insure the continuance of this viability. At the same time the concern shown has reminded us never to let financial pressures squeeze generosity to the needy out of our priorities.

The spirit of the Jubilee Debt Forgiveness Program was epitomized for me in a chance meeting with a parishioner from my prior assignment. A widow, she related that a *Catholic Courier* article describing our May golf tournament mentioned our financial hardships. She promptly sent a donation to the Forgiveness Fund. Talk about a widow's might!

You are in the prayers of our faith community.

Father Roy Kiggins, pastor
parishes of the Roman Catholic
Community of Geneva

tremendous sharing of your talents and time over the last two years. Our words of thanks are inadequate to the great gift of Christian brotherhood you have extended to us in our time of crisis. You have taught us well what it means to be Church.

In the midst of our thanksgiving we are overwhelmed by the generosity of the Jubilee Debt Forgiveness Fund. In the words of Bishop Clark, as a recipient of debt relief we can now "move forward focused on the future instead of being shackled by the past." It is the grace of the people of the Diocese of Rochester who make all this possible.

We are proud to stand together with you as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Father Daniel McMullin,
parishioners and staff
Corpus Christi Roman Catholic
Church, Rochester

Penalties aid in preserving community

To the editors:

A recent letter to the *Courier* (June 29: "Remove punishment from the canons") opined that canonical penalties such as excommunication reflect an exclusionist mentality, are somewhat "medieval" and should not be a part of the structure of church order today. In fact, following the Second Vatican Council and the efforts made to revise the Church's legal system, there was much discussion among the members of the code of canon law's revision commission about the propriety of maintaining the penal system that had developed over the centuries. Some members argued in a similar vein to the *Courier* writer, insisting that in the post-Vatican II Church, a serious overhaul and even removal of sanctions was now appropriate.

The consensus that seemed to emerge and that was reflected in the 1983 Code of Canon Law was that some means were still needed to ensure that those important aspects of the Church's life such as doctrine and essential church teachings needed to be preserved in some fashion. There was an acknowledgment that although the church exists as a "graced community," it is also a community of sinners with all the limitations that humanity imposes. Unfortunately, and occasionally, there will be circumstances when the behavior of certain members contradicts what can be described as the Christian way of life — e.g., sexual misconduct involving minors by those in leadership positions. Such behavior has devastating effects upon the entire ecclesial life and some remedies must be available to those in authority in order to maintain the integrity of the faith and life of the community.

In keeping with the pastoral mission of church law that had been the hallmark of Pope Paul VI's papal ministry, the code commission pushed to reduce the number of penalties. Of great concern, and included in the code is that due process and rights be scrupulously observed in any penal process. The code was also to emphasize a non-penal, "pastoral" approach, with the infliction of a penalty to be used only as a last resort, with all other means for correcting the offender exhausted.

Father Kevin E. McKenna
Chancellor, Diocese of Rochester