

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.

Conditions of penalty rarely met

To the editors:

The very fine recent article on Rachel Vineyard Retreats (*Catholic Courier*, Oct. 5: "Rachel's Vineyard offers fruit of God's forgiveness") states that "The Catholic Church teaches that cooperation in the procurement of abortion incurs excommunication for all involved." Unless this is correctly understood it gives a distorted view of the church's teaching.

Father William Maestri in his book *Do Not Lose Hope* states: "In order to fall under the penalty of automatic excommunication, the woman who obtains the abortion would have to do so with full knowledge, deliberation, intention, and be free from any circumstance which might prevent or mitigate the penalty. Again such would be quite rare." This book has both the *nihil obstat* and the imprimatur.

In my experience of hearing women's stories of fear, abandonment, and pressure, as well as talking with many others involved in Project Rachel, it would be rare that these conditions for excommunication would be present in most women that have had an abortion. In my conversation with Father Jim Coriden (the commentator on the *New Code of Canon Law*) and Father Kevin McKenna, they also agreed that although it is possible, it would be rare that all the conditions for excommunication would be present in this situation. This does not in any way lessen the fact that abortion still remains a serious moral evil.

Pope John Paul II in *The Gospel of Life* states: "In the church the purpose of the penalty of excommunication is to make the individual fully aware of the gravity of a certain sin and then to foster genuine conversion and repentance." It is not meant to be harsh punishment to a person or to remove them from the church. Plus, priests of our diocese are delegated by Bishop Clark to remove the censure. Canon Law in this situation merely points out the reality the person already is experiencing — alienation from God and the Faith Community. We must remember that the law conveys a teaching purpose — to give special protection to the unborn because of the degree of their vulnerability to attack and to deter the woman from an act that will cause destructiveness to herself, as we see so often in Project Rachel. Hopefully it would cause a person to rethink her decision to take the life of her innocent unborn son or daughter. Maybe even to search out someone — like from a parish that has signed the Faith Community Pledge for Life — to find another alternative than abortion.

Any woman who already feels so fragile from the trauma of abortion in reading the article may hesitate to approach someone in the church, if she misinterprets the awesome sounding language of excommunication. Some women wonder if God will ever forgive them and if God does, what punishment will God exact. They don't feel the same when they enter the church, if they enter at all. This is especially true since some studies estimate that over 30 percent of all the abortions in our country are done on Catholic women. In other words there are a lot of hurting women in our diocese. What they need perceive from us as church is not further alienation but an invitation to come home to their community and to the Lord. They must be helped to name the tragedy they have been involved in, acknowledge their participation, experience sorrow and most importantly accept the tender forgiveness of our loving God. We must as God's people be the human instruments to help them see that healing resides in the heart of the Church and the heart of Christ.

Father Jim Hewes
Coordinator, Project Rachel

THE DAY AFTER ...



Stand united, end divisions

To the editors:

Why, in the name of God, do Christians vilify, abuse, even kill other Christians? Have they arrived at the judgment that their victim believes the wrong things, in the wrong God, that the victim in fact has no faith at all?

The moral and political issue of the Church's — and many others' — opposition to abortion has so separated our civil society as to split people in opposing camps where they assign to those who do not think, act, protest and vote exactly as they do the title of "enemy." Enemy of the cause. Enemy of right thinking. Enemy of God!

It is with sadness and real horror that I read just such an attack on Judith Kiehl, one of the most consistent and life-upholding people I have ever met, in the *Courier* (of Oct. 5). Judith's letter a week or so before issued a very sensitive and forceful call for those of us who call ourselves "pro-life" to be multi-dimensional in our

understanding of life and the activity we must do to be for it. The writer deems this an "insult to God ..." For this welcome and balanced invitation to be met with the language of enmity by a brother in Christ who also is "pro-life" sadly and frighteningly only mirrors the incivility rampant in a society which does not recognize God as its center. We must do better.

Many of us who came to a Consistent Ethic of Life stand have originally come out of one-issue positions. After honestly, lovingly and prayerfully meeting and embracing others whose issue or issues also promoted God-given life, we realized that the work we do is many-dimensional, and that together we stand to do much good. Alone, or sadly in opposition to one another, we most surely fall.

Please, brothers and sisters, in the name of God, we must cease the divisions!

Father Paul F. English, CSB
Director of Campus Ministry
St. John Fisher College, Rochester

Work to close down SOA 'clone'

To the editors:

This is a reminder to your readers that once again, Nov. 17-19, thousands — even more than last year — will gather at the gates of Ft. Benning, Georgia, to commemorate the massacre of the six Jesuits, their co-worker and her teenage daughter in El Salvador, and to honor their memory and the memory of all who suffered and died at the hands of School of America grads. They will call for the closing of this infamous "School of Assassins."

This grassroots movement is not taken in by any name change and supposed reforms. It is the same school, but those who run it now propose to call themselves the Western Hemisphere Institute for Professional and Educational Training.

Since its inception in 1986, the SOA has produced an atrocious historical record, with more than 600 graduates implicated in massacres, political assassinations, rape,

torture and "disappearances" throughout Latin America.

Together we must live out the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was one killed, who stated, "Those who have a voice must speak for the voiceless!"

What can we do?

1. Pray for those going to Ft. Benning. Post a note on your bathroom mirror! If you can make the trip, call St. Joseph's House - the Catholic Worker, for details.

2. Write to Washington urging more careful scrutiny of this newly named CLONE and legislation to close it once and for all.

3. Send a small donation if you can to help defray the costs of this demonstration to SOA Watch, PO Box 4566, Washington, DC 20017, Tel. 202/234-3440.

Grace B. Carnes
Eagle Ridge Circle
Rochester

Parish's event, speaker deserved coverage

To the editors:

A few weeks ago I telephoned the *Catholic Courier* and asked if an article could be printed concerning St. Christopher's Scripture Study Program. Leon Katzen, a devout Jew and prominent local attorney, was coming to speak to the group about Jewish traditions and also about the Old Testament Book of Esther. I was told that the staff was quite busy and if this were a diocesan event, rather than a parish event, perhaps there could be coverage. We had 55 people come to our program and it was a very informative evening.

Shortly thereafter I attended a diocesan prayer service. There were cameramen, news reporters, etc. Twelve people were in the congregation.

In the future I would recommend that

the *Catholic Courier* determine what will be covered in the paper, not by who is hosting, but by the content and interest of the event. Without parishes there wouldn't be a Diocese.

Mary A. Lynch

Dickinson Road, Webster

EDITORS' NOTE: Perhaps our explanation was unclear. Hundreds of Bible-study sessions take place in diocesan parishes during the course of the year, many of them featuring interesting guest speakers. Since we do not have the resources to cover all these sessions — and doubt readers would be interested in that many Bible-study stories even if we did — we opt not to cover this type of event. We did offer to provide advance publicity on our calendar page, but Ms. Lynch declined to take us up on that offer.