

# 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.

## Jesuit was a blessing

### To the editors:

Father William C. McCusker, SJ, or Father Bill as he was known, died January 6, 2001. He was a Jesuit priest, teacher, counselor, spiritual director and smiling friend to all who knew him. I knew Father Bill because my two sons Stephen and Justin were students at McQuaid where he taught for over 30 years. I also got to know him even better because he faithfully drove out to St. Catherine's Church in Mendon to celebrate the Eucharist and share his wonderful gifts with our faith community.

We had a remembrance celebration of Father Bill's life at St. Catherine's on January 24 and several parishioners spoke of their memories and how he had touched them. My son, Justin, drove over from Buffalo to share with us some of his favorite Father Bill stories. One was a story about Father Bill's annual ministry to those students serving JUG (McQuaid version of detention). One day in May, as things brightened up, he would go to JUG and ask for volunteers to help him with an important job. He didn't describe the task, but would guarantee a nice drive to the country and some great exercise. The students thought this was a much better idea than picking up garbage or writing "responsibility" or "integrity" a thousand times each. Then they would pull up to our family farm in Ionia. He would hand each one a pitchfork and plastic bag, and with his signature smile, point to the manure pile. Every year for many years he put those young men to work returning with some organic matter to enhance the poor soil at McQuaid. And as the soil got better so did his gardening and his beloved tomatoes, which he took to raising from seeds. He nurtured and nourished those seeds and plants as he did with our spiritual needs.

Another of his gifts was the way he strengthened our connection with those who preceded us in our faith. Every week we were introduced to a new Jesuit, many martyrs and more saints than we knew existed. And with Scripture and the weekly homily he had a wonderful way of bringing them right on home so that we always left church feeling a sense of peace and a special union with our faith. He spent a lot of time on his homilies and helped us understand the lives and ways of the people who lived in the time of Jesus. He truly had a special gift in that area.

Last May he celebrated the Eucharist for my son's wedding to Brenda Wonder at St. Catherine's. Everyone commented on what a wonderful ceremony it was. He took great care and patience in helping them plan the ceremony. And his homily was beyond words, yet simple, bringing us back to the time of Jesus. He talked about how people truly valued the salt and spices of the earth to bring taste to their food, creating a simple metaphor for them to always remain the spice of life for each other. He also made a special effort to include people of all faiths in the celebration. We are ever grateful to him for making that day so sacred for our family.

Another special gift he had was touching the lives of the children around him. He had a special brown bag with a great stash of lollipops, candy and even sometimes small plastic dinosaurs and toy soldiers. After Mass he would often be seen sharing some small gift with the young altar servers or young children he knew. I remember my granddaughters were truly impressed when he presented them with a lollipop after Mass for the first time.

Yes, we were all truly blessed if we knew Father Bill. In his spirit let us always remember the gifts he extended to us. And when we remember the saints and Jesuits, may he always come to mind. God bless, Father Bill. We'll miss you.

Judy DeVecchio  
Ionia, N.Y.



## Faith calls for perseverance

### To the editors:

Our Protestant brother in Christ, Mr. Giancursio (letter, Feb. 22), is right that Jesus doesn't want us in fear about our relationship with Him — the Catholic Church teaches the same. But he implies the Church promotes — as he would call it — "works righteousness." This is simply untrue. The Bible and the Church teach the same thing: salvation is a free gift (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 169, 620, 1811 etc.). Yet we are expected to accept this gift in faith properly. How? Mr. Giancursio unwittingly says it himself: we are to "then live it."

Yes, the thief on the cross was saved. By the way, he did at least two good works before dying: he made an act of faith, and he rebuked a blasphemer. Here's a question: if he were not dying, but instead were standing at the foot of Jesus' cross, could he have continued to sin unrepentantly and, when he died eventually, go to heaven? Mr. Giancursio would agree: No.

So why not, if sin doesn't affect salvation? Many Protestants say in that case the thief would lose heaven because he didn't have "real faith," or was "deceiving himself" and despite his seeming confession of faith was "never really saved in the first place." Unfortunately, that explanation also applies to those who start life as a Christian virtuously but later "backslide" into a life of serious sin and die that way. Talk

about fear: never to know if you're "deceiving yourself" or "got saved for real" until you die!

The Bible and the Catholic Church show us a better way out of this dilemma. Jesus is Lord as well as Savior: we can't say we "truly believe in Him" if we aren't willing to live our lives as He told us to. We can know that we know Him if we are keeping His commands (1 John 2:3-6). Romans 2:6-8 says God's reward for those who persevere in doing good is eternal life. Not because they've earned it — no one ever could — but because when you "work out your salvation in fear and trembling" (I leave that last phrase to Mr. Giancursio's prayer and pondering) it is in fact "God working in you" (Philippians 2:12). His love is so amazing that He rewards us for accepting His own gifts! All we can do on our own is refuse these daily graces, earned by Jesus, by which we are "being saved" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

In short, Mr. Giancursio, we Christians — Catholic and otherwise — have every reason to trust in our very good God (but not pridefully in ourselves) for the grace we need to remain in His love and to "endure to the end" so that we may be saved (Matt 10:22). Our faith in Jesus calls forth our vigilance, perseverance, obedience and love. What a wonderful God we serve!

Karen A. Webb  
Lilac Drive, Rochester

## We can turn from God anytime

### To the editors:

I am writing in regard to the letter from Mr. Giancursio (*Catholic Courier*, Feb 22), in which he states "... it concerns me to hear (Catholics and others) say they do not know if they are saved ..."

If Mr. Giancursio is a Protestant, I understand his concern, but if he is a Catholic? Protestants do not understand the Catholic faith, although many think they do. I would like to ask Mr. Giancursio to read the second chapter of James, verses 14-26 on faith and works. One verse in particular, verse 19 states, "You believe that God is One. You do well. Even the demons believe that and tremble."

If all we have to do is believe, then the demons would be in heaven. They not only believe, they know Jesus is the Savior, and they tremble, because they know the power of God, but have chosen not to follow Him.

We have to apply what we believe, just as Mr. Giancursio explains when he says,

"Our hearts and lives need to change." The only difference I see in the "Protestant" view is that Catholics know this is an ongoing process, not a one time "once saved, always saved" deal. We, as Catholics, know we can turn away from the Lord anytime we choose to.

A Protestant woman told me once that if you turn away from God, He will always bring you back because you declared at one time that He was your personal Lord and Savior. Just because we say we believe, does not mean we can't renounce God at a later time. He won't interfere with our choice. God allows this. He gave us all free will.

I could hear a great love for Our Lord in Mr. Giancursio's words. I could hear an evangelizer at work in his words. May God bless him as he continues to spread the word of the love of God through Jesus' saving grace.

Theresa Trickler  
Swift Street, Waterloo

## Hopes for leadership on liturgical practice

### To the editors:

I was amazed and delighted to read Raymond Buonemani's letter in February 8 issue ("For unity's sake, stick to the rules for liturgy"). His well-reasoned explanation of the need for unity in the outward expression of our faith was long overdue and I hope that the clergy all read it.

Of course reading this common sense approach may not be enough. Perhaps the Bishop could offer his leadership on this issue which, while not essential to the deposit of faith, is certainly a close occasion for scandal and disunity.

Allen Weaver  
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