

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.

Churches in Europe were often renovated

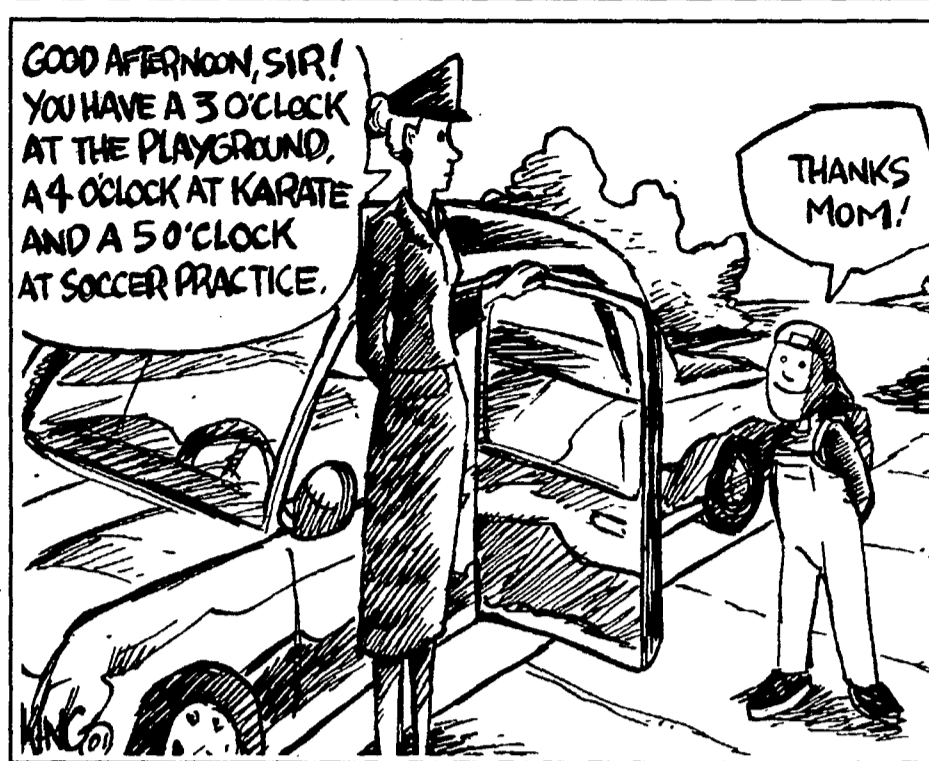
To the editors:

In the various letters written to speak about the changes to individual churches and especially last week (March 29) the changes with Sacred Heart, they have used the churches and cathedrals of Europe as reason to keep Sacred Heart as it is currently. Ms. Melfi asked, "What if our ancestors had decided to 'gut out' the beautiful church interiors of Europe that are still standing centuries later?" I would like to offer to her and others that that is exactly what they did.

In Cordoba, Spain, you will see the Romanesque walls of the 9-10th century were cut off and then a low Gothic wall erected. Then they cut a huge hole in the roof and took off the top of the church. Gothic arches columns of the 12th century are then added to allow more light into the area. The arches are now covered over and the altars replaced by Baroque carvings from the 17th-18th century. These changes were to allow the people a more direct line of sight and access to the altar. The altar screens were taken away and a rail was put up. In Aachen, where the cathedral was the church of the Holy Roman Emperor for some time, you will see the places where the old was taken out and replaced by the new only to be replaced years later by other new ideas and architecture.

These changes were not made because of age or falling down — as times changed and the needs of the people changed, the churches had to change with them.

Go to St. Peter's in Rome, the marble at the transept is the old altar that was dismantled and reused in a different way. If



you want to see the Blessed Sacrament there, it is not anywhere near the high altar that we see on television. It is off to the side in a small Eucharistic chapel modified for that purpose with modern furniture. I have been blessed to have attended Mass on two occasions with the Holy Father himself in his private chapel. A life-changing experience to say the least! There you sit on stools with no kneelers. We stand — priest and lay person alike — during the consecration, unlike what some television personalities want you to believe.

I think people need to be informed that today these churches all over Europe are being protected because they have become museums! If you want to know where the people pray and worship in these large churches in Europe, look off to the side where you will see a 20th century altar, art, and seating. It is here where the people of the parish live and pray and worship God. Unlike here in the museums of Europe, the celebrations at (Sacred Heart) Cathedral are filled to overflowing. The Chrism Mass or ordinations are great examples, but even the regular community there on Sunday needs the space to have the best wor-

ship space possible. There, as well as every parish church, needs to reflect the changes in the awareness of liturgy and light and sound and movement in the celebrations. That is how we praise and worship God — not in protecting and making architecture into the sacred.

Some say that they are defending the traditions of the church. I wonder about the oldest tradition that we have of trusting. I wonder about people that have read a book or two about churches and want to challenge people that have made the study of liturgy and architecture their life's work. What about the tradition of respecting the authority of the bishop and trusting that he will get absolutely the best group of people that he can to make these changes?

Our ancestors did change their churches and they continue in the tradition to this very day. I hope and pray that we continue is this, the oldest tradition we have: growing toward God.

Father Patrick Van Durme
American College of Louvain

EDITORS' NOTE: Ordained for the Diocese of Rochester last summer, Father Van Durme is continuing his studies in Belgium.

Look for solutions to underlying problem

To the editors:

Over the past several weeks we have seen our Bishop share his view of the Diocese over the coming 25 years. We are told that we should expect the number of priest to drop precipitously to about 64 by the year 2025. An amazing projection. Some 24 years into the future we will have 64 active priests! Imagine that!

The *Courier* has given us the results of the efforts in "problem solving" done by the diocesan Office of Planning, headed by Bill Pickett, that provides a number of "models" defining the parish of the future based on this projected reduction in vocations in our Diocese. In my opinion, we continue to reap the results of hard work within this Diocese to define a new priest-

hood that aspires to many worthwhile ministries for the priestly people, confusing the role and value of the ordained priesthood.

After years of vague catechesis, for many the exclusive role of the priest, "in persona Christi," at Holy Mass is beyond understanding. Mass practices vary widely from parish to parish, adding to the confusion. Sadly, many don't accept the "Real Presence" in the Blessed Sacrament. We all discuss our individual perspectives on the continued decline in priestly vocations. The fact is that good and holy priests remain as the best source of encouragement to men to consider the priesthood. In the short term, we have few real choices beyond prayer to resolve the shortage of priests in our Diocese.

Asserts it's time to change policy

To the editors:

On April 26 a reader stated that in order to have more vocations, praying to Jesus is what will be most effective.

The saying, "God helps those who help themselves," is another help. How many parents today encourage their children to consider a religious vocation? Due to the fact of smaller families, most want their children to marry and produce grandchildren. My grandparents had eight children, and one became a priest. My parents had five, and one became a sister.

The stronger reason for the priest shortage, which has been ongoing for at least 30 years, is the church's policy of celibacy. Our Protestant brethren seem not to have this problem.

If either Martin Luther King's father or grandfather had not married, we would never have had this great civil-rights leader.

Until we have a change of this policy, which is not mandatory — most of Jesus' apostles were married as were priests in early church history — we can expect a future of deepening shortage.

Thousands of former priests who have married would love to come back. They loved their jobs. Many of those who are attracted to the priesthood would join if only celibacy were lifted.

It will take many years to make up for the losses of the past 30 years. What is the Church — the Pope — waiting for?

Dorothy Willett
Thornclyff Road, Spencerport

In the secular world, we would look for a problem solution that not only deals with how we would organize given a great reduction in the leaders or managers that are needed to run our critical business. If we were committed to the business, we would look at what is needed to recruit and train the new leaders and managers to continue the business, or even grow it.

If I were to rashly assume that it takes eight or so years to train and finally, ordain a priest, I would look at a problem-solving process focused on why the men in this diocese aren't entering the Seminary in enough numbers to serve our local needs. None of us has the complete perspective on this problem, but it would be helpful to enlist the best Catholic minds in this Diocese to address this problem with the highest priority. It would be wise to ask those who have left this Diocese in recent years seeking ordination, to help us understand why the Holy Spirit moved them away to serve outside of this Diocese. Can we imagine that we are perfectly conforming to God's will, and that this shortage is His will? Are actions specifically being taken within this Diocese to thwart the call of the Holy Spirit and discourage valid vocations? What are we doing in this Diocese to build up the priesthood?

I hope that (the diocese) will initiate another problem-solving process and get to the real root cause of our Diocesan priestly shortage, and then get on to planning the solutions that surely can start to turn the tide of this dreadful 25 year projection.

David Coriale
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