

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.

Encourage efforts of youthful missionaries

To the editors:

Much has been written and discussed about the recent violence in our schools, a heartbreaking loss of children silenced before their time, and parents whose lives will never be the same (*Courier*, March 22). Much has also been brought to our attention of the growing number of youth who are sincerely trying to make a difference, are dedicated to community service, and are determined to work and pray together for peace. As stated in the On the Move section (*Courier*, April 12), we are in need of "roaring lambs" who not only speak about their faith but put it into action! With understanding and belief in these young men and women, our wounds will begin to heal, we can look forward to a fresh revival of the spirit and a new world with renewed values. I would like to introduce our readers to one of them.

Shannon Buckley is a junior at Hornell High School and a member of St. Ann's Parish. She is a special young lady who is deeply concerned about human rights. Through Internet, she became aware of the persecution and injustice suffered by the people of Tibet. Together with worldwide organizations and a group of caring students, she has formed a coalition to "Save Tibet." Once an independent country, it is now under Communist rule. Since its political and spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, was driven out, the people constantly live under the shadow of the cross! They cannot practice their religion, do not have freedom of speech, are tortured and executed.

The primary goal of the coalition is to promote awareness of the situation and initiate projects that will provide aid to this country. They have held two concerts, distributed informative pamphlets and have sent petitions to government officials in China and Washington requesting they take action to alleviate this terrible oppression.

Shannon traveled to Ireland and Japan last summer where she observed and learned about different cultures. She has created a large sign that has a permanent place in the school hall. It displays a different, positive message every day for fellow students to read. The purpose is to alert them to work and play together peacefully, and to promote respect, tolerance and compassion.

I am writing this because I strongly believe we should listen and support these wonderful young people who are actively living the message of the Gospel. They are budding missionaries reaching out to all of humanity as advocates of justice and peace. They are teaching us that the freedom we enjoy comes with a responsibility not only to ourselves but to our neighbor.

Shannon plans to attend college after graduation and pursue a career as a political activist. She and many others like her give us new hope and the promise of a brighter future, one where all people of the universe can live and love without fear and enjoy the precious freedom to be all that God intended them to be!

Leona Dessena
Davenport Street, Hornell

E-mail your opinions to:
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Speaker pushed audience to touch the poor, outcast

To the editors:

Jean Vanier recently gave a day of reflection for students at Toronto's School of Theology centered at St. Michael's College. Vanier's words give flesh and spirit to those dry bones in Ezekiel offering his version of "hope for the new millennium."

Vanier warns us about missing the incredible beauty of people with disabilities who possess qualities of "directness, welcome, wonderment and spontaneity." He tells of waiting with Fabio and other L'Arche community members for an audience with John Paul II. Fabio looked around for the best chair in the house, and when he found the papal throne, sat on it. The monsignors observing this were speechless. Another member, Pascale, had a way of embracing the cardinals. He would go right through function and see only the person. "He has a way of conquering people who need to be conquered." Linda, a beautiful woman with Down syndrome from L'Arche Daybreak, observed, "We are all broken, we are all handicapped in one way or another but the worst handicap is a heart unable to love." God has chosen the weak among us to shame the wise and the strong.

Vanier asked the participants to look inside themselves to find their deepest fears. "What are you most afraid of? Failure? Not to be loved? Pain? Death?" Don't turn away from but embrace the brokenness inside you and inside others. We must form communities that recognize our brokenness as a gift from God.

Vanier reminds us that Jesus asked very

little of us; to receive the Eucharist in memory of him, to wash each other's feet, to love one another as he loved us, and to receive the word of God as a personal message: "that you are loved, that you are precious to God. You are challenged to become in your flesh 'good news,' not just to announce 'good news,' but to become in some way the face of Jesus."

Vanier addresses the need to touch the poor, the outsiders. "It is not just doing things for people but discovering we are changed when we come close to them. If we enter into friendship with them, they change us. Here we touch a mystery that the person we reject because of prejudice is the one who heals us."

Vanier believes that even if we have been deeply wounded, that "gaping wound of the heart can become a meeting place with God. Prayer is not just saying prayers; it's listening. It's being with Jesus, remaining in his love. Anger, violence, and hate can rise up very quickly and be very deep. We create prejudice as a system of protection so we don't get close to others. If I do, maybe some of my certitudes will change. The acceptance of difference implies a strengthening of the inner person. Where are the schools of love? Who will teach us to accept difference, to listen, to forgive, to discover reconciliation and non-violence? When are we going to teach our children how to make peace?"

Colleen Neary-Gates
and Emmett Neary
Rochester

Profile was 'wartime propaganda'

To the editors:

Your feature article "Top Consultant Assesses Cathedral" which appeared in the *Catholic Courier* of May 3, was no more than a wartime piece of propaganda, served up to quell the masses. It is a very telling piece. You devote such a large amount of space to promoting Father Vosko's views and his photos. You mention some of the reasons why some are unhappy with the project. Yet you do not take the effort to quote any sources, nor probe why they are upset.

There are many reasons people are disturbed with the proposed renovations. In my opinion, it is primarily because we see our churches being turned from a God centered place of worship to a man centered social gathering space. Jesus, present in the Holy Eucharist, is being sent down the hall, or around the corner. Has He been a bad boy? In His place, we get carpeting, cushy seats, gathering spaces, and babby brooks, all for our comfort

and entertainment. There is a grave error alive in the Church today: We need to be entertained as we participate in the Holy Mass. Wrong! We are present to adore our Lord, to ask forgiveness of our sins, to give thanks and ask for assistance from our Lord.

Has any of this "renovation" work in our churches brought one person into the Catholic Church? Where are the "cost" and "benefit" analyses? Why don't we spend our efforts and money where we can see tangible results? We need vocations to the religious life. We need to bring fallen away Catholics back into the fold. We need to evangelize as did the Apostles, as we read from Acts in this Easter season.

William A. Bayer
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EDITORS' NOTE: The article in question was not intended to be a news story about the cathedral renovation project, but simply a profile of Father Vosko.