

OPINIONS

Catholic or not: Who decides?

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, NY 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

By Maureen Kramlich
Guest contributor

For my grandmother's funeral, I returned not too long ago to St. Catherine's parish and grade school in my hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My great-grandmother was one of the first contributors to the building of the church. She sent my father and his three siblings to the parish grade school. My four siblings and I attended the school from kindergarten through eighth grade, as did my niece and a nephew.

As the funeral homilist retraced my family's history in the parish, I was keenly aware of my connection to that history. That day as I visited the neighborhood, parish and school grounds, I was struck by a deep sense of pride for its service to the community. St. Catherine's once served a mostly German and Catholic immigrant population. Today it serves a mostly African-American and non-Catholic population. It is an integral part of the community, and it serves its people with distinction based on the church's social-justice teaching. But if some have their way, it may not always be able to do so.

In recent years there has been an effort to redefine Catholic institutions, including Catholic grade schools like St. Catherine's, as non-Catholic or non-religious — as secular institutions, in fact — if they serve a mostly non-Catholic population. This legislative sleight-of-hand occurs in, of all things, mandates to require contraceptive coverage in employee health-care plans, except when those plans are purchased by "religious employers."

Some of these laws use an American Civil Liberties Union de-

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inition of "religious employer" that transforms Catholic organizations into non-Catholic ones. For example, *The New York Times* summarized a proposed mandate in New York state as follows: "The new bill provides that a religious institution could deny birth control coverage through its employee health plan only if most of the people it employs and most of the people it serves share that religion."

The Times' Feb. 4 article "Albany Bill Would Cover Abortion" captured the absurd implications of this definition in its next sentence: "That way, the exemption would not apply in most cases to Catholic hospitals or colleges, but it would apply to churches, dioceses and, in many cases, Catholic grade schools" (emphasis added).

Many Catholic schools educate children who are not Catholic, children whose parents sacrifice so they can have the benefit of the excellent education Catholic schools provide. To suggest that Catholic schools and organizations are not Catholic if they serve non-Catholics betrays a total ignorance of Catholic social teaching, which requires service to those who are poor, not just Catholics who are poor.

My visit to the parish of my childhood brought home the important role that this parish and its school have played — as have parishes across the nation. Allowing the ACLU to redefine "Catholic" is beyond the pale. If we allow this to happen, all of us — Catholic and non-Catholic alike — will lose.

Kramlich is a public policy analyst with the Pro-Life Secretariat of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

For some, sign may be rare blessing

To the editor:

In response to the disheartened woman (Jan. 17) who wishes to start a campaign to do away with shaking hands of peace I have written this letter.

I am glad that we have the handshake of peace. The handshake is a wonderful way to reach and touch someone. Reaching out to press hand flesh against hand flesh with another human being is a sincere way to express love and peace. Every day I have the opportunity to physically touch other people in loving, sharing ways. Unfortunately not everyone has the wonderful gift. Perhaps only one time a week for those short moments during Mass do some people come in contact with another human being in a loving nurturing way. Being together and celebrating Eucharist is the ultimate celebration we have, and certainly taking a few moments to turn to each other to share the blood warmth of our bodies via handshake only palely reflects the life-blood response that Christ himself gave to us.

I understand the hesitation the "disheartened" woman has, but she needs to understand that the decision to reach out with our hands is not mandatory. I am sure that if a hearty smile and "Peace be with you" are what she desires to give, any recipient would be thankful.

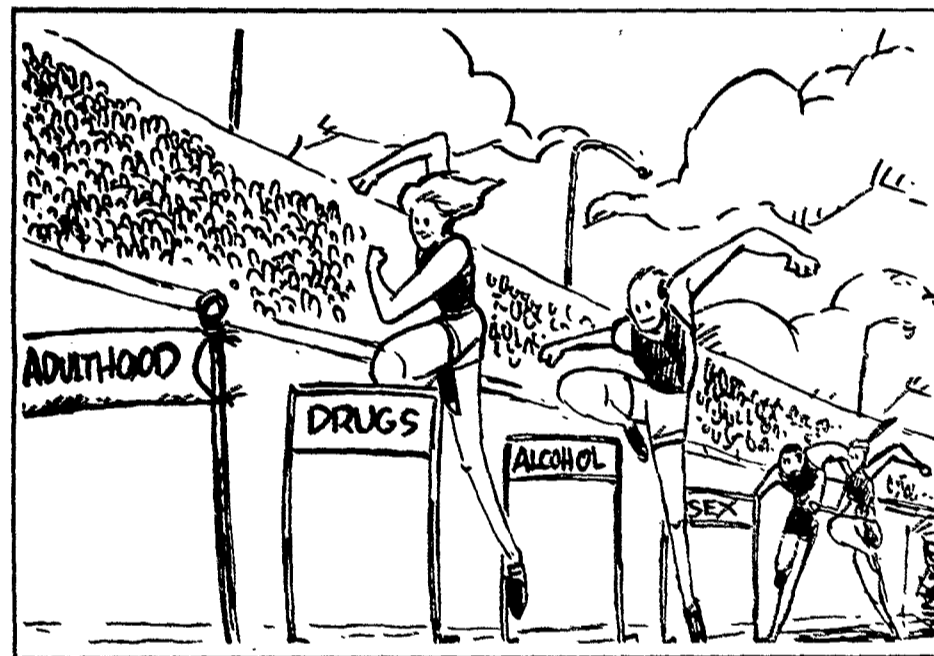
Virginia Stefano
Pennemite Road, Livonia

It's common sense: keep illness to self

To the editor:

I understand Jean Strong's position (Feb. 14) on shaking hands during the sign of peace at Mass. The right thing to do about this would be for everyone to take responsibility to NOT shake hands if they have a cold, are coughing or have some other malady they think could infect others. The same goes for receiving the Blood of Christ. If you — and only YOU know — have second thoughts about drinking from the Cup, listen to your Guardian Angel, and don't partake. It's just common sense.

Judy Maldonado
Hale Haven Drive, Hilton



Stay at home if you're sick

To the editor:

Oh my stars! My eyes are distressed at the sight of three responses in agreement with Mary Wallman's stance on handshakes during Mass! My 15-year-old daughter and I concur that personalizing the celebration with the handshake is one of our favorite parts of the Mass. We love the sense of community it brings forth. There are a sea of smiles at that time.

Yes, we should all be careful not to receive the Blood of Christ when we have a cold, and we should not administer to the

congregation. We should remain at home when it is a bad cold; we should use common sense. Now WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?? He'd hug you, kiss you, and shake your hand! He is the example we all are to follow! My suggestion to all who fear viruses, "bugs," etc. — wear your white gloves that you put away back in the early '70s and keep that smile intact!

May God bless all of us!

Margaret Diell
Haley Road
Ontario

Takes issue with assumptions in letter about diaconal service

To the editor:

The letter in the Jan. 31 edition ("Put church's ordained deacons to better service") regarding "the diocese not utilizing its ordained ministers, the deacons" was very disturbing. The writer asserts that the diocese is pandering to the "feminist agenda" when women serve as parish administrators. He assumes that women couldn't possibly be qualified for the position. It will no doubt come as a surprise to the writer that many women earn degrees at St.

Bernard's Institute — right along with their male counterparts. Being a woman doesn't preclude a person from having leadership and academic credentials. It only prevents her from being ordained.

Rather than ignoring the God-given talents and abilities of half the population, qualified candidates should continue to be considered for jobs without regard to their gender.

Diane C. Brule
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Send your views to letters@catholiccourier.com