

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

## Seeks data on celibacy, pedophilia

### To the editor:

The *Catholic Courier* reported on four questions asked in an editorial of the diocesan newspaper in Boston. Two of them were: If celibacy were optional, would there be fewer scandals of this nature (pedophilia) in the priesthood; and does the priesthood attract a disproportionate number of men with a homosexual orientation?

Both questions are fact questions. What are the pedophile cases among clergy of Christian Churches that have no celibacy requirements? Are Catholic priests' rates significantly higher or not? If you know, report it; otherwise find out! Definitely ask the local D.A.'s office whether the rate of Catholic priests' prosecutions and/or investigations is higher or lower than that of Christian clergy from other (non-celibate) denominations during the last decade. Opinions in this volatile issue are usually worthless, what matters is the data.

For the second question, there are anonymous surveys that ask men to identify their sexual orientation. Using the same methodology, is the rate among priests significantly higher than the national average, and is it significantly higher than the rate of non-celibate Christian clergy? Is the rate higher among seminarians (a recruitment issue) or only among priests (a selection issue)? Again, find out and tell us. Although there are no good reasons to exclude gay men from ministry, there are also no good reasons to keep the laity from knowing the true composition of the priesthood in this regard while protecting individuals' right to privacy. Respect for gay priests goes together with accuracy and transparency toward the laity.

I find it tedious and uninformative all these articles about what priests think, what staffers in the diocese think, and what high ranking officials in the Church think. The truth is that priests and diocesan newspapers have a large conflict of interest in accurately investigating and reporting on these issues and dealing with them in a transparent manner. The universal ethical practice when a conflict of interest is present is to remove oneself from the decision-making body. How are we doing on that ethical principle? In the cases of pedophilia, what I want to know is what the civil authorities think about diocesan policy — is it enough — and what parents of young children think. No biased samples of well-disposed parishioners will do; conduct a good random survey and ask a representative sample of parents in the diocese if the diocesan policies to deal with pedophilia are transparent enough, or reassuring enough or fair enough. Do a similar anonymous survey on priests to determine if the policy is fair to them. Ask the people affected first in a systematic and unbiased manner. Imagine the impossible, a church making decisions based on actual systematic and unbiased data on how those most affected view the issues. Now, that would be a collaborative Church fully benefiting from the diversity of its members.

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## Did bishops believe priests deserved special treatment?

### To the editor:

The present "questions" (*Catholic Courier*, March 21, p. 5) among Catholic bishops and priests of America and elsewhere turn my thoughts back to my study of Ontology during my seminary years of Philosophy. I struggled then, but my powers of memorization were fairly good at the time and I passed, not *cum laude*, but I passed.

It seems to me that we learned that there was an indelible mark — character — that came to priests not only through Baptism like many other Catholics, but through Orders. Baptism (and Confirmation) make people special, but the mark of Orders make us very special.

Maybe the Catholic hierarchy, educated in this firm but questionable discipline of Catholic Ontology felt that they must give priests special treatment even to the detriment of their baptized brothers and sisters who suffered abuse.

Dare I suggest that this theology from the Council of Trent give way to the theology of the Second Vatican Council, solemnly promulgated, but in recent years, soundly squelched?

Father Edwin B. Metzger  
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EDITOR'S NOTE: Father Metzger is a retired priest of the Diocese of Rochester.

## Notes that late priest provided spiritual treasures for his people

### To the editor:

Thanks to Fathers Richard and Robert Beligotti for their wonderful tribute to Father Benedict Ehmann, "Late pastor's devotion was model for their vocations" (*Catholic Courier*, March 28, 2002). I'm sorry I never knew him. It's obvious that he was a wise man and a good shepherd. He certainly knew that to foster growth spiritually it is necessary, from time to time, to be lifted out of the world in which we live to the other world, our spiritual home, represented inside the walls of the church. While I would never suggest that we return to the days before Vatican II, I do believe we should look back at the many of the qualities of worship, the wonderful devotions, art and music which were a part of the church and which Father Ehmann provided for his people. Sadly, some of these things have been cast aside. They helped create in his people a desire for things not of this world. It

seems that the more we focus on, and take into our daily lives these other-worldly habits, the more we grow spiritually.

In these days when we're all concerned about the future of the church in light of the declining number of priests, we should pay close attention to the final paragraph of the good Fathers' letter: "How could we not be moved by the truth, the goodness, the beauty of God made so real to us. We celebrated the mysteries of our faith with delight. We were overcome by the beauty of the Lord's house. We absorbed all this beauty by osmosis. No wonder we wanted to be part of it. We were drawn to the Lord and to His Church. We wanted to be like Christ, our High Priest. We desired to be like our father in faith, Father Ehmann."

Find your old copy of the *Catholic Courier* and read or re-read their letter.

Robert F. Carson  
 Walker-Lake Ontario Road, Hilton

## Pay attention to observations about liturgy

### To the editor:

Fathers Richard and Robert Beligotti's letter praising the late Father Benedict Ehmann is much more than a fitting tribute to a wonderful priest. Like any good eulogy, it provides inspiration for those of us who remain behind.

They cite features of worship that helped draw them to the priesthood: The Eucharist as "an anticipation of the glory of heaven ... reverence, dignity ... transcendent music ... lovely uplifting plain chant ... the beauty of our Catholic heritage and art."

Despite specific instructions in the Vatican II liturgical documents to the contrary, all of these treasures have virtually vanished from Catholic life.

So have vocations.

While no one would suggest that this is the primary factor in the dearth of vocations, one wonders why this observation is being missed or worse, denied by our hierarchy and their liturgists. For the love of Christ and His Church, it deserves attention.

Frank Quinn  
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