

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.

Believes church needs new council

To the editor:

Vatican II, releasing the Spirit on the modern world, was a breath of fresh air. We abandoned the fundamentalist illusions that only Catholics could be saved and that we contained all truth while other religions offered nothing of value. While restorationists try to undo Vatican II and contain the Spirit, what today's Church really needs is Jerusalem II.

The Council of Jerusalem had to determine how to mediate the Gospel into a different historical and cultural experience. The basic questions were who belongs to the community and how do Gentile Christians become part of the community. Before meeting the centurion Cornelius, Peter had a vision where he was presented with "unclean food" to eat. He refused but a voice said, "What God has purified you are not to call unclean." Three times this vision happened. The law of threes says pay attention, this is important. Peter learned. Upon meeting Cornelius Peter said, "God has made it clear to me that no one should call any man unclean" and later, "I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality. Rather the man of any nation who fears God and acts upright is acceptable to him." Wow!

Peter went to Antioch just after this experience with Cornelius and participated in common table fellowship with Gentiles but withdrew from this practice when it was unacceptable to Jewish Christians. In Galatians Paul says he withstood Peter to his face on the question of table fellowship. Paul rebuked Peter for backing away from what he knew was right. The Council of Jerusalem eventually freed the Church of its Jewish roots and opened up a more universal, inclusive vision of Church espoused by Paul.

Who belongs to the community today? Jesus' parables showed a preferential option for the poor; the last, the least, the lost and the little, clearly countercultural thinking. He was always stretching outside to bring people inside to the center reminding us that such is the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 21 immediately after Jesus drove the money-changers from the temple because they were exploiting the poor we read that the blind and the lame came to him *inside the temple* and he cured them there. Imagine the procession of the blind and lame forbidden by Leviticus from even entering the temple being healed by Jesus who provided access to the sacred for those on the perimeter.

The mystery of the Trinity tells us that God is relationship and we are baptized into that relationship. By a self-emptying of divine love we share this communion of Trinitarian love. We live at the center but we cannot stay there alone. Like the scriptural Jesus we must reach out to the edges and draw others to that same center of divine love. Saint Augustine once said God has many that the Church does not have and the Church has many that God does not have. Doesn't the Great Mystery of Church demand that we close the gap?

Emmett Neary
Bakerdale Road
Rochester



Wants diocese to speak out

To the editor:

Where is the voice of our diocesan leadership and the Diocesan Life Ethics Office condemning current U.S. war policies?

Jesus taught by his words and example that his followers must return good for evil, love for hatred. Sadly, the Church has virtually rendered Jesus' teachings of love meaningless through the compromises of the Just War Theory — a theory which is, in fact, of pagan origins, and which remains to this day not dogma, but simply theological theory.

It is extremely doubtful whether any of the wars fought by Christians over the centuries have even met Christian Just War criteria. We can be certain, however, that recent U.S. wars against Iraq, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan violate Just War requirements on many counts — beginning with the criterion that war be fought only as a last resort.

We Rochester-area Catholics desperately need to hear Christ's message con-

demning our country's slaughter of enemies and innocents alike. We need to hear it coming clearly from our bishop, clearly from our pulpits, clearly from our Life Ethics Office. The Church cannot be said to be preaching the Gospel unless the entire Gospel is being preached, including Jesus' emphasis on total rejection of violence against enemies. If we lose popularity and support due to preaching the words of Jesus, so be it. Jesus warned his disciples that they, like him, would be reviled.

The people of Afghanistan, the people of Iraq, and all targeted and suffering people need us to preach words of truth and courage. People watch to see if we Catholics are truly pro-life, or whether we only condemn life-taking in certain instances. Humanity is always watching — to judge whether being Christian really does make a difference.

Jan Bezila
Highland Avenue
Rochester

Time for church to end hypocrisy

To the editor:

It was interesting to read the front page of the May 16, 2002 issue of the *Catholic Courier*: "Healing process begins." The healing process will not begin until all incidents of sexual abuse of minors by priests are uncovered. The perpetrator priests must then face judiciary punishment. Finally the victims must be given the help they need to heal their psychological wounds and be compensated for their damages.

There has been too much cover up by church leaders such as Cardinal Law. The man should be removed! As a faithful Catholic I feel like a victim myself as I read about the hypocrisy within the Roman Catholic Church. I am disappointed in the responses from the Vatican. Apparently there are two sets of laws — Canon law for our priests and judicial law for the rest of

us. Wrong. Priests are subject to the same criminal penalties as everyone else. I was ashamed, embarrassed and pained to hear some of the comments coming from the Vatican. "Sins such as homosexuality, abortion, and marriage of a divorced Catholic cannot be forgiven but an abusive priest can be." This is absurd!

Let's stop the excuses, the smoke screens, and "buck passing" and accept responsibility for the shortcomings of the Church and its priests. The Church is not above the law.

In closing, I compliment Bishop Clark on the actions he has taken within the diocese in regards to abusive priests. It had to be very difficult for him. He handled it properly and with sensitivity, and with concern for both the priests and the victims.

John T. Senka
Route 224, Montour Falls

Statistics provide perspective on sexual abuse of minors by priests

To the editor:

A few days ago a priest in his homily held out as a consolation that even the Son of God had a "failure" rate — may we say it? — of 7.7 percent in choosing His Apostles. One of them after all betrayed Him!

There seem to be no nationwide statistics available as yet to the public on priests' sexual misconduct in the United States. However, two dioceses have provided reliable studies and made them available to legal authorities and to the public. (*America* magazine, April 22, page 10) The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has recently reviewed its records going back to 1950. Of

their 2,154 priests, allegations are recorded against 35 priests. A rate of 1.6 percent. Likewise the late Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago commissioned the review of Archdiocesan records from 1950 to 1991, and a rate of 1.8 percent was found for sexual misconduct by 40 priests out of 2,200 priests who served.

Although we feel even one such lapse an unbearable sorrow, yet it seems that some perspective is given to the enormity of the situation when we consider the faithfulness of the vast majority of American priests.

It seems also that the public in each diocese has the right to learn now the basic

facts of the extent and nature of the misconduct with no less detail than was communicated in Philadelphia and Chicago — with special efforts on the part of the diocesan authorities to achieve a transparency that has been notoriously lacking till now throughout the nation.

We are grateful to our fellow citizens for bearing with us as well as they have, and we hope that the Roman Catholic Church — both members and leaders — will be humbled and purified by God in the trials which we are now undergoing.

Francis D. Champion
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