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.

Equality is necessary for justice

To the editor:

The inconsistency of the justice meted out to two Catholic personalities caught my eye in the May 30 issue. On the front page we have Archbishop Weakland, whose reputation is "tainted," and on the opinions page we have David Higbee, whose reputation is destroyed.

"I have never abused anyone," said the Archbishop. Abuse in the Random House dictionary is defined thus: 1. To use wrongly or improperly; 2. To treat in a harmful or improper way; 3. To speak insultingly, harshly and unjustly to or about; 4. To commit indecent assault upon.

Certainly the Archbishop committed abuse. 1. He used, wrongly, church monies at his disposal to buy the silence of his male lover. 2. He treated his office as priest and spiritual father in a harmful and improper way. 3. He spoke harshly and unjustly about the young men who "squealed" about having been abused by priests. 4. He committed indecent assault upon the person of a 30-year-old male and criticized the charism of celibacy. In addition he has frequently acted contrary to the desires of the curia, for example, his much ballyhooed renovation.

In contrast David Higbee admits he acted improperly at a time when he was not employed by the Church, an action for which he was apparently dismissed. He spoke to his future Catholic employer about it and suffered again as he was fired years later, thrown out of his home, and his reputation wrecked; double jeopardy. Higbee's behavior as a Catholic employee has been exemplary and has been the cause of many a person, young and old, embracing the Catholic faith. Meanwhile, the archbishop is still employed, still housed by the church, will retire without official mention of his infidelity to his spouse, the Church, and his pension is secure.

This is fundamentally unjust. In order to get rid of the cancer of sexual impropriety, the required remedy for the Catholic Church is an opportunity to render justice all round. As Martin Luther King has said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Jan E. Fredericks
Birr Street
Rochester

Acquired orientation could be involuntary

To the editor:

Father Shamon's essay, "A Word for Sunday," in the June 13 *Courier* seems to have provoked a lot of passioned response from readers. I think the main problem is that he was not entirely clear on how he believed a homosexual orientation originates.

Some have speculated that homosexuality is neither inherited nor chosen, but acquired involuntarily, like a phobia. A person who has a phobia about flying in an airplane was not born that way, nor did he or she choose this condition. He or she cannot just decide not to be afraid anymore, but with psychotherapy it is possible to overcome the phobia. I suspect that Father Shamon believes the same to be true of a homosexual orientation.

I myself don't know whether a homosexual orientation is inborn or acquired, as I am not familiar with the state of the scientific evidence on this issue. However, I do not believe Father Shamon thinks that homosexuals choose homosexuality.

Chris Potter
Gregory Street, Rochester

Urge governor to veto bill

To the editor:

On June 17, 2002, the New York State Legislature, at the urging of abortion and contraception advocates, passed a bill to force Catholic facilities to offer insurance coverage for contraceptive drugs and devices in employee health plans. Governor Pataki has indicated that he will sign the legislation when it reaches his desk.

Because the use of artificial contraception is contrary to the teachings of the Church, the Bishops of New York State have long sought a conscience exemption for all Catholic facilities. However, the final bill contains only a very narrow exemption pertaining to dioceses, parishes and religious communities. Catholic ministries outside of these narrow confines – health facilities, charities agencies, colleges and even some elementary and high schools – do not qualify for the exemption and will be forced by the state to offer contraception coverage or cancel employees' prescription drug coverage. By exempting some ministries but not others, our state is making a determination as to what is and is not Catholic based on an absurd and unconstitutional set of criteria. I urge you to make your voices heard by expressing your outrage over this violation of religious liberty to Governor Pataki and to your state Senator and Assembly Member. At the same time, I urge you to thank those lawmakers who voted to support religious liberty by opposing the bill. You can find who your legislators are and how they voted by visiting *www.nyscatholicconference.org.*

Richard E. Barnes
Executive Director
New York State Catholic Conference

We all battle tendencies toward sin

To the editor:

Many of the opinions I have read in the *Courier* recently have been concerned with whether or not homosexuality is an inherited or acquired tendency. Many readers have indicated that if indeed it is inherited, then it must be acceptable. This reasoning confuses me, given what I have read in the Catechism (see paragraphs 2357-2359, p. 556). The Catechism says "They do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial." But at the same time it says "homosexual persons are called to chastity."

We are not born as "blank slates," and each of us, through no fault of our own, has tendencies that could lead to sin. We all know people with bad tempers, who must struggle to avoid violent words or actions, and others who are, and always have been, calm and cheerful under difficult conditions. I've heard psychologists say that children from abusive homes are more likely to be abusers, while those from loving homes are more likely to love others. Are we to take credit for the happy accidents and exonerate ourselves from the unhappy ones? In many ways we did not choose who we are. When we struggle with sin, God rushes out to embrace and forgive us. Tirelessly, He gives us His joy and asks us to try again, to act uprightly in response to His love. He insists that we not give up, not give in to sin, but instead struggle our entire lives to grow into the beautiful children He knows us to be. And He will always be waiting patiently to catch us if we fall.

Michael Hicks
Warren Road, Ithaca

Supports columnist's perspective on issue

To the editor:

What better person to persecute than Father Shamon. No one can handle it better than this saintly man. He is possibly the most intelligent and spiritual priest in the diocese. I cannot recall his claiming to be an expert on anything, however.

Having read many articles and attended several classes and lectures on human sexuality – the latest being two months ago by a priest of a different diocese – most of what I have heard and read has been in agreement with Father Shamon. It's just that the ones who disagree and have excuses to make are more vocal, as the June 27 *Catholic Courier* indicates.

If Rev. Robert Kennedy wants a name change for Father Shamon's column, perhaps he should also suggest a name change for the *Catholic Courier,* since other than Catholic topics are discussed.

Having read the Bible cover to cover two plus times, but not claiming to be well informed, I have yet to find anything that says homosexual activity is acceptable. Quite the contrary. The Bible says it is an abomination.

Of course the Bible is nearly 2000 years old. I guess that is too outdated for some.

God bless you, Father Shamon, as you bless us each week with your column.

Mary McCarthy
Page Place
Bloomfield