

# 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.

Effective Sept. 15, letters must not exceed 350 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.

## Why do Catholics tolerate sex abuse?

### To the editor:

To date, the Rochester Diocese has placed six priests on administrative leave due to credible allegations of sexual abuse – most against young teens. Additional cases are pending. News accounts call these incidents "inappropriate relationships." As a parent of a teen, I have some questions about these "relationships." I hope other parents, and the community at large, will consider them with me.

Is the crime of sexual assault of a teen an "inappropriate relationship" only when the perpetrator is a Catholic priest? How many parents would make that distinction if their teen were victimized by a priest?

Why are so many unwilling to tolerate the sexual assault of a minor when the perpetrator is an ordinary citizen, but quite ready to accept and "forgive" if the perpetrator is a priest? Recently, two men were sent to prison for the rape of a Sodus teen (*Finger Lakes Times*, Aug. 22). Why should sexual assault by priests be considered any less serious?

What effect does this "inappropriate behavior" have on the lives of the teen and their family? What effect does it have on their faith and their ability to worship in community?

Why do people denounce the rape of prepubescent children yet are willing to view the sexual assault of a teen as some, how "not as bad?" I know of many suicide victims who, as teens, had been sexually assaulted by priests. All were at a very vulnerable time in the development of their self-image and character. None could overcome the devastating effects of these violations.

How do you think Catholic victims and their families feel when they see parish communities rally around a clergy perpetrator with the very things which they need most and are, seemingly, denied – the love, support and prayers of the Catholic community?

Given this reception, is it any wonder why victims "take so long" to expose the abuse? Would these same supporters feel differently if their teen were the priest's victim?

Why should the Church make the safety of our children – prepubescent and teen alike – a priority if rank and file Catholics refuse to demand consequences when that safety has been violated?

As importantly, if accountability is not demanded of clergy perpetrators, what makes people think they will receive any better treatment – from either the church or their faith community – when it is their child who is the next victim of sexual assault at the hands of a Catholic priest?

Peter Saracino  
McIvor Road, Phelps

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In articles appearing May 16 and June 27, Mr. Saracino told the *Catholic Courier* of the ordeals he has suffered as a result of alleged sexual abuse by a priest at the age of 7.



## Choose life even amid pain

### To the editor:

I would like to address the question of abortion from Biblical faith and our common experience. After Jeremiah it became an accepted Biblical theme that God forms the young child in the mother's womb. Jeremiah 1:5, Psalm 139:13-16 and Job 10:8-12 are even more significant considering they were written in a patriarchal culture that devalued women, children and pre-born children. Deutero-Isaiah was addressed to God's people discouraged, tired and desperately in need of consolation. It is in this context that we find one of the most touching expressions of divine love in the entire Bible: "But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.' Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child in her womb?" The love of a mother for the child in her womb is held up as the greatest of all human love. What has happened to us?

My strongest argument against abortion comes from experiencing the joy of three precious granddaughters. Words could not express the great gift they have been for us. Consider your own precious children or grandchildren and then try to imagine life without them. You see what I mean?

Now there are situations in life when an unwanted or untimely pregnancy by worldly wisdom calls for an abortion so life can go on uninterrupted. But there is another

solution. By entering deep into your pain and choosing life you will enter into the Paschal Mystery and receive the gift of God's self. Sometimes our most cherished blessings are hidden in painful situations but we are too broken at the time to recognize the gift that is hidden in our pain. Grace transforms everything.

One of my favorite Irish songs written by Johnny McEvoy portrays the words of a father to his young daughter about her mother who died birthing her. It concludes, "One lovely year was all we had until the sickness came that stole the roses from her cheeks, my tears they fell like rain. For nine long months she carried you but in the end she died. She chose to go so you might live, long, long before your time. So you ask me why I look so sad on this bright summer day, or why the tears are in my eyes and I seem so far away. It's just you seem a lot like her as your eyes look into mine and you smile so much like she did, long long before your time."

I conclude with a prayer for my friends who are pro-choice. Be pro-choice in the spirit of Deuteronomy 30:19, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life then that you and your children may live."

Emmett Near  
Bakerdale Road  
Rochester

## Urge representatives to close SOA

### To the editor:

Could you forgive someone who tortured you? Seems too much to ask, and yet for a Christian that is part of our calling.

On a recent Witness for Peace delegation to Colombia I met such a person. Diego, who had been tortured by a graduate of the US Army School of the Americas (SOA), told our group, "I have said from the first day that I forgive him. If I saw him today I would embrace him. But I can only be fully reconciled to him when the SOA is closed, where he learned to leave me trembling forever."

If Diego can forgive his tormentor, what should U.S. Christians do to help him attain reconciliation? We must close the SOA, recently renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC). Since 1946 the SOA/WHISC has trained Latin American soldiers in counterinsurgency warfare, commando

tactics, and combat strategies. These deadly skills are employed against citizens in their homelands. Who is responsible? Ultimately we are, because our taxes pay for this training.

Let's do the Christian thing by writing our representatives, senators, and president and tell them to close the SOA/WHISC. You can learn more about the sordid legacy of the SOA/WHISC, before writing, by contacting SOA Watch at (202) 234-3440 or [www.soa.wa.org](http://www.soa.wa.org).

We cannot love our neighbor, as Jesus commanded, if we're training others to torture, kill, or "disappear" him/her. Being neighborly to Diego and others like him means shutting down the SOA/WHISC, because that will facilitate the healing process which leads to reconciliation.

John W. Honeck  
Bankside Drive, Hamlin

## Column seemed balanced until 'pathetic' crept in

### To the editor:

Concerning Sister Patricia Schoelles' discussion of her course on morality and warfare (Aug. 1, "Alternative model to war needs to be determined"), on the whole, it seems a balanced and thought-provoking presentation of the issues and a sincere, well-motivated attempt to open up the question of alternatives to war. But why did she feel the need to include the statement

"the pathetic negligence of (the United Nations) by the United States?" This was the only instance of Sister's editorializing and – I would say – reveals a stridency and political view which serves only to polarize a discussion. She is not quoting any of the participants, but simply "reporting." She lost me there, and I would suspect most anyone else who tries to stay balanced on these questions. I think "negligence" might

have held me, but she lost me with "pathetic."

Joseph R. Struble

Strathallan Park, Rochester

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** We do not wish to debate Mr. Struble, but a distinction should be drawn between news articles, which are strictly objective presentations of facts, and columns, which are intended to present the authors' opinions as well as pertinent factual information.