

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.

Call to live good news is ongoing

To the editor:

The Catholic Church is what we, the people of God, and God have decided and allowed it to become thus far. Vatican II documents speak of the Pilgrim church, journeying, not already at our final destination but striving to become more faithful and loving both as individuals and collectively. It means we are not a perfect people, not without sin or error, do not have all the answers and are in need of continual reconciliation, conversion and redemption. We're not finished and God isn't finished with us yet. Is that so bad or hard to admit?

Denial of this idea is what I think gets the church in trouble at times. An openness to change, constructive criticism and dialogue in good faith are all parts of healthy growth and a dynamic tradition, one that responds and seeks answers in dialogue with the community and its present needs in conjunction with a respect and use for, but not a total or slavish adherence to, the past. Creativity and originality are also parts of our tradition; a creativity inspired by the Holy Spirit acting throughout the whole church, not just one or two particular groups.

A father of our church, St. Augustine once said, "God became man so that man might become God." Are we shocked to hear that God holds us in such high esteem? All of us?

A lingering sense of the heresy of Jansenism, which doubted the intrinsic

goodness of human nature and which infiltrated American seminaries and thus American Catholicism for generations, may have contributed to some of our negative sense of self and negative images of God and spirituality.

Also, a misunderstanding of the biblical term, "a fear of the Lord," may keep some people from embracing a more positive and loving relationship with God. Fear in Scripture refers not to the emotion of fear, it rather means being in right relationship with God, based on trust in a loving and concerned God, which then leads to a reverence, awe, and gratitude for God's gifts of tender mercy and affection. It's more like the feeling a child gets when led into a huge toy store filled with their favorite playthings. They're overcome with awe, so much that they stand speechless, unable to move. It's like the ex-

perience of Peter falling to his knees after Jesus filled his nets with fish, acknowledging his sins and yet being picked up and loved in his weakness, not castigated. This is the God of Scripture and experience, I think.

And then Peter and we are invited to go and share the gifts of love we have received with each other and all of humanity. It is a call to live and preach the Good News here and now regardless of our walk of life. To avoid, minimize, or deny this is to abdicate responsibility for ourselves, our world and our church. In a way, it is denial of our very self, and a denial or at the very least a lack of awareness and trust in the love and goodness of God in us and for us.

Tom Agness
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Society, not church, changed sexual norms

To the editor:

In response to Mr. Buckheit's letter (Aug. 15, "Church, AMA lack writer's 'data'"), I would like to clarify some points.

The Church has much "data" which could help us come to honest conclusions about homosexuality. The "Catechism of the Catholic Church" has undergone some revisions since its origin. One of those revisions is in a phrase that was quoted by Mr. Buckheit. No longer does the Catechism state, "They do not choose their homosexual condition." The reason for the deletion is the very same reason about which we are speaking. There is no legitimate proof of this opinion. The next section in the Catechism dealing with homosexuality (#2358) needs to be stressed since there lies the individual's responsibilities. It states, "Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom ... , by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection."

God is all-good and faithful. He cannot

declare a sin to be an abomination, be it homosexual or heterosexual sin, then make it impossible for people to live sinlessly. Since God created humans, he could not have created us with an inbuilt "need" to sin. That would mean it would be beyond our capacity to choose good. Sin would be the only option and, therefore, God would not be God, the everlasting Truth.

How do we know the practice of homosexuality is a "sin?" Faith tells us through the Word of God (Gen. 19:1-29; Rom. 1:24-27; 1 Cor. 6:10; 1 Tim. 1:10) and the Tradition of His holy Church. The Church from its creation till the present has consistently taught us so. No new revelation.

Christ indeed embraces the sinner. That embrace shows us — since we are all sinners — His love, and by giving us the knowledge of how destructive sin is to ourselves and to others, He shows that we can and must repent and change. ALL of Christ's embraces were followed by, "Go, and sin no more!"

The encyclical letter "Faith and Reason" by Pope John Paul II compares faith and reason to the two wings of the human spirit that wishes to ascend to the Lord. The Pope does NOT equate faith and reason but lets us see that by natural law they must work together. He explains that if at one point our reason may SEEM to be saying something different than the Faith, rest assured, reason is the faulty one!

Mr. Buckheit's questions have answers, but none that sanctify the sins of homosexuality or of sinful heterosexuals. Because we as a society have so separated the unitive and procreative aspects of sexuality, there seems no longer a reason to be monogamous, heterosexual for life. Children aren't welcomed! Selfishness and self-satisfaction are the focus of the day. Taking away the real reasons for our sexual nature, a destructive aberrant sexual expression has replaced the self-giving, life-giving love relationship between a husband and a wife.

Barbara A. Fredericks
Birr Street, Rochester

New York needs 'option' to assist the working poor

To the editor:

One of the pieces of unfinished business for Congress this fall is reauthorization of the federal welfare (TANF) program.

Anti-poverty advocates continue to urge Congress to strengthen its effort to assist participants in moving into employment that pays family-sustaining wages by increasing access to education and job training, and expanding the use of public funds for job creation. The goals of welfare should be to assist families in becoming economically independent while providing an adequate safety net for children, disabled individuals, and those unable to find employment.

One common sense reform would be

to provide income supplements to low-wage workers without triggering welfare time limits. One quarter of all TANF recipients currently are employed but not earning enough to get off of welfare. With the average person leaving welfare in New York State earning about \$7 per hour at jobs providing less than full-time employment, many of these working families struggle at the end of the month to make rent payments and to put food on the table. However, these working families are the average success story for the legislators who enacted federal welfare reform. That is, the goal was to get welfare participants into a job regardless of wage level because any job is better than welfare.

Now that so many of the families did

what was asked of them, why penalize them by applying TANF time limits? Sen. Jack Reed for instance plans to introduce the "Working Families Option" to allow states to use TANF funds to pay for income supplements to low-wage workers without triggering time limits. New York State cannot afford to have this Option fail in Congress since our State and Counties end up picking up the tab for these time-limited families through our State Safety Net program — a bill that will be harder to pay for the upcoming State budget session given the projected \$4 to \$6 billion budget deficit.

Bich Ha Pham, Executive Director
Hunger Action Network
of New York State