

True miracles further God's message, mission



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

Statue of Mary at St. Ann Church, Hornell

MORE LETTERS

tals must start respecting the bodily integrity of all male infants, and not wait for more lawsuits before they do so.

Petrina Fadel
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Argues need for changes

To the editor:

The latest update on Sacred Heart Cathedral speaks about the need to move the central altar. It quotes the *Ceremonial of Bishops* (#48), which states that "the altar should be freestanding to allow the ministers to walk around it easily and to permit celebration facing the people." The cathedral at present has a freestanding altar which allows the ministers to do exactly that. Therefore some might question the need for its removal.

The intended displacement would move the altar closer to the center of the cathedral. People currently in the first eight rows or so would view the altar obliquely behind the celebrant, rather than from the front as they do now. The choir/folk group would be moved to where the altar stands at present. This would place them squarely behind the celebrant. The

consultant, Father Vosko, argued that this move would make the altar more visible. At first glance this seems reasonable.

This rearrangement, however, demotes a significant proportion of worshippers to second-class participants since they would be mostly viewing the back of the celebrant. Rather than improving, it weakens their ability fully to participate. This once again proves the adage: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

If it is "broke" on the other hand, fix it properly. According to the *National Catholic Register* (June 8), the renovators of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, are proceeding correctly. Like ours, their cathedral is Gothic and was originally built not as a cathedral but as a parish church. Unlike our planners, however, the Bridgeport designers will place the altar in front of all the worshippers. The tabernacle will be in full sight behind it. A new baldacchino will highlight the altar. The important stuff remains important.

After thoughtful discernment, our costly alteration appears needless, practically flawed and liturgically subversive.

Jan E. Fredericks
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I remember thinking as a child that many of the people around Jesus must have been dim-witted. How, I wondered, could people stand and watch healings take place right in front of them and not confess faith in Jesus? How could they witness people rising from death to life and not claim Jesus as their savior? How could they witness hungry people fed with food that multiplied right in front of them and not believe?

These impressions centered on a Jesus I perceived largely as a magician working all sorts of tricks. I assumed that Jesus' goal was to impress the audience through magical displays that would prove that he was "the one," so that everyone would become baptized.

A similar view of miracles seems to have been in the minds of several students I taught some years ago. One Saturday I encountered a carload of students leaving on some sort of journey. They stopped to greet me, and I inquired about their trip. They informed me they were traveling to a Catholic parish in Pennsylvania to see a "miracle" involving a crucifix on which the figure of Jesus had begun opening and closing its eyes.

As they drove away I remember my skepticism rising to the surface, especially regarding the connection they made between the perceived eye movements of statuary and the Kingdom of God. I did not understand what aspect of God's action



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The Moral Life

among us as revealed in Christ could be disclosed in such a supernatural event. If Scripture tells us that Jesus came to reveal God's love and to invite us to enter into relationship with God, how does a blinking statue advance that message? If we as church are called to facilitate conversion to friendship with God and right relationship with one another, why would we associate that calling with abnormal or even bizarre phenomena?

True miracles occur when God's message and mission are furthered. From Jesus we learn that the healing of human suffering is part of God's activity. Such healing is not confined to the curing of disease or infirmity; it can even take place in the midst of raging disease processes. Although I do not doubt that God can intervene in extraordinary ways to cure diseases, I also trust that medicine and science can restore people from sickness to health.

Really miraculous healings are those that bring people from isolation to community, from anger and fear to acceptance and con-

fidence, from despair to hope. We all will die and we all will be sick sometime or other. But we can nevertheless be healed.

Many scholars have titled the first portion of the fourth Gospel "the book of signs," because in these chapters Jesus performs many miracles. I like that title because it indicates that genuine miracles are actually signs of God's action and power at work among us. If we believe that God's wish is for us to love God and one another, real miracles look very different from magic tricks.

The reconciliation of a broken friendship, a sincere effort to apologize or forgive, an act of solidarity with impoverished or marginalized people, a commitment to volunteer in a human-services effort, a genuine act of courage or justice in the workplace, a sudden appreciation of the diminishment of the human caused by racism, sexism or poverty all look like miracles to me! We also can see God among us in the dawning of a renewed relationship with God after years of indifference, or in a sudden experience of joy, beauty or belonging.

The entire notion of gratitude — which resides close to the core of our faith and sacramental system — could be enhanced if we simply recognized the miracles that happen around us all the time.

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Letters Policy

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