

# Parents need choice in educating their children



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

## MORE LETTERS

come fixated on a single issue, even one as important as abortion. To counter the culture of death we must be a culture of life — one that stubbornly defends the inviolable dignity of human life, even in the case of those who have so gravely violated the moral law.

Finally, if we are truly concerned with “confusing the faithful,” perhaps we should refrain from unjust criticism of Church leaders who are upholding Church teaching and speaking with its voice of authority.

James Lynn  
Smith Street  
Mumford

## How would change help?

To the editor:

According to Father McBrien's (Sept. 11) claim that the *Boston Globe's* survey found that the “plurali-

ty” of the people polled in Boston were against married priests. For conversation sake, let's take him at his word. How would married priests — assuming he meant the conventional definition of marriage between *man* and *woman* — have spared the church embarrassment for the recent scandal of homosexual activity by some of its priests? These men of the cloth preyed on other boys and men.

I miss the point Father McBrien tries to make when he assumes marriage is the answer. Unless, of course, he is talking about these priests being married as same sex couples. If that is what Father McBrien has in mind, I'm afraid he should search elsewhere for such an arrangement, perhaps in the Anglican Church.

Michael P. Valerio  
Malin Lane  
Penfield

“Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and, crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance” (Robert F. Kennedy, June 1966).

“I'll defeat [the] school voucher bill” (Edward M. Kennedy, September 2003).

There always has been something ennobling about the Kennedy family. Yes, history has shown JFK and others in this often tragically destined clan to have shortcomings. We all do. Yet their words and dedication to others' well-being resonate with the pope's reminder that we “find ourselves by giving ourselves to others.”

That's why it is especially troubling to learn of Sen. Kennedy's renewed opposition to giving parents, especially low-income parents, a choice between public and private schools.

Recently the senator threatened to use every legislative tactic possible to block parental choice legislation in the Senate. In 1995 he torpedoed a voucher program for the poorest District of Columbia families, claiming then, like other voucher opponents, that the Constitution precluded allowing Catholic and other religious families to direct their fair share of the public-



Douglas W. Kmiec

education fund to private religious schools.

Today that stale constitutional objection is a footnote to a sad history of discrimination against religious education.

In 2002, the Supreme Court held unequivocally that so long as parents are given a true choice between public and private educational options, there is no violation of the First Amendment's prohibition of an established church. It was fatuous ever to suggest there could be one.

Why does the senator still object?

He argues that choice plans drain funds from public schools and award it to private institutions that do not meet testing and accountability standards.

Failing public schools hardly merit increased funding. Despite per-pupil expenditures in excess of \$11,000, 94 percent of fourth-grade students in the nation's capital are not proficient in math, and 90 percent lack reading proficiency, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

These statistics suggest

why a broad cross-section of political leaders, including Washington's Democratic mayor, Anthony Williams, and Sen. Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.), now support increased parental choice.

The accountability argument doesn't wash either. Six states — Colorado, Florida, Maine, Ohio, Vermont and Wisconsin — have programs allowing at least some families to exercise public/private choice. Six more states allow families tax credits or deductions for private tuition. Studies of these programs by respected researchers at Harvard, the RAND Corporation and the Government Accounting Office show that children of choice families are scoring higher, with restored levels of parental satisfaction.

And rather than “draining” public schools, parental choice makes them better. Public institutions that face competition exhibit higher levels of achievement.

Senator, since the House has passed the voucher bill for the District of Columbia, why not join your brother's memory and sweep away the “mighty wall of oppression” denying low-income parents the primary role in their children's education?

It's the same role your parents sought to play with love in your own life and that of the brother whose memory still calls us “to seek a newer world.”

Douglas W. Kmiec is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

The *Catholic Courier* provides space for readers 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 to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 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 or e-mail to [letters@catholiccourier.com](mailto:letters@catholiccourier.com). Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for verification.

Letters Policy