

POINTS OF VIEW

We need to be cautious in what we tell our children

Recently, I moderated a community forum at Farmington First United Methodist Church focusing on the impact — through the media — that today's messages of violence, death, promiscuity, profanity, abuse and horror have on children.

This came after I'd watched a television news show titled "What Do We Tell The Children?" It centered on the media's favorite topic of the past year, and I need not tell you what that is. Media defenders argued that what they provide us has no real societal influence, it is only "entertainment," and a mirror of the world in which we live. Ironic, then, that so many advertisers pay so much money to influence our purchasing decisions, and that the program asked what we should tell our children — for if the messages do not poison innocent children's minds, we would not need to tell our children anything.

And so, I thought, just what do we tell the children? Not just about Clinton, but about the endless stream of media messages — real and fantasy involving societal violence and reckless behavior invading our homes 24 hours a day?

In an earlier church town-hall forum focusing on youth violence, stemming from school shootings around the nation, experts all agreed the media bear a burden of responsibility

for the influences leading to school shootings and various societal problems. The panel consisted of local professionals in law enforcement, social work, psychiatry, education, and ministry — and all stated it is up to parents to overcome irresponsible media entertainment by monitoring what children see and explaining right and wrong.

The nation's top-rated programs regularly feature a mixture of how cheap life really is with tales of homicide, verbal and physical assault, bloody scenes, and meaningless rampant promiscuity without consequence. Most theater movies are about murders and feature mass killings, the more graphic carnage and doomsday themes the better, with meteors, monsters, aliens, or psychos killing everyone in their path. We spend much money to watch murder and Armageddon.

The children are fascinated to see these shocking and graphic portrayals. Studies have said that by age 18, a child will have seen 100,000 acts of violence on television. We are deluged with daily messages of unmarried sex, and reckless behavior of all kinds is featured on trashy talk shows. The pop music charts are topped with messages of abuse, drugs, depression, rebellion and suicide with many videos straight out of what can only be described as a nightmare. If that's

GUEST COLUMNIST



KENNETH KORTE

not enough, we can always count on the daily news and headlines to tell us who got gunned down today. If it bleeds, it leads.

And yet, we watch. Is it any wonder that children are killing children? Where do you suppose they get the idea?

According to Dr. William Rowell of the Psychological Institute of Michigan, children see violence early and often, and don't necessarily associate the fantasy with reality, and need to. "How many times has the Wile E. Coyote fallen off the cliff," he said, "only to get up and walk again?" "In real life, you go splat, and that's it," Rowell added, saying if we as a society continue to watch the gore and fighting, it will sell, and that means the profits that drive the media. "It's called greed," stated Judy.

White, an assistant superintendent of Farmington Schools, of the values which drive the media. She added that studies show children spend an average of 28 hours a week watching TV, which can lead to over-stimulation and easy boredom, needing "special effects" to maintain classroom attention, along with declining reading and comprehension abilities, and a lessened vocabulary with slang, swearing, and put-downs. White also said negative media role models often foster less respect in children for themselves and others. Children imitate role models.

We must tell the children that violence is not an appropriate way to solve interpersonal problems, and there is always the "power of the plug," Rowell said, we can turn it off. Rowell said to not "overreact," to the messages, because to children "that must mean it's really interesting," and they'll want to see it more. "Set limits," as to what children see, he suggested, risking temporary unhappiness, and closely monitor what the children view.

White warned to "know the homes your kids are going to," adding that children may get to view objectionable material outside of their home. She added that parents should "keep an open line of communication" with children to make sure they don't mimic out real-life problems as they see on

TV. White suggested parents activate their children into community service, games, sports, religion and creativity while also generating "quiet time," as alternatives.

In the end, parents must not be more interested in their own entertainment values than in their children. While we cannot overprotect every minute, we must make sure the children have a sense of discernment between fantasy and reality, are aware of the consequences of reckless actions, and understand right and wrong. Without a definition of right, there can be no wrong — and the more we soak in what is inherently wrong, the more we'll get used to it and tolerate it in our nation.

Today, there is much talk of legacy. So, what will be our legacy? Will we be remembered as the generation that didn't care about viciousness, vulgarity, and irresponsible carelessness shown as a commonplace and acceptable vision of America to the children? Or we can stand up in our homes and families to challenge that vision, and lead our children toward the desire of goodness, honesty, respect, character, and love.

Kenneth F. Korte is a member of the Council on Ministries, Farmington First United Methodist Church. He is Livonia Jaycees past president and Michigan JCI senator.

LETTERS

Oppose vulgarity

A few weeks ago, I read a letter in your paper from a courageous sixth-grader at East Middle School who was concerned about the use of vulgar language in her school. How incredibly great it was to see there are still those with morals and regard for decency. To her, I say thank you for stepping forward — you are an inspiration!

My son is also a sixth-grader at East. Many times, he has commented

to me about his disgust in having to hear obscenities spoken on his bus, in the halls and the classrooms. He has had to approach teachers asking to be moved to another section of a classroom in an attempt to escape the offensive language, but to no avail, it seems this is a pervasive problem. It appears use of this language is the norm for some students at East, totally disregarding the rights of those who are offended by it. Perhaps the students who use this language, believe it somehow makes them seem

adult or special. Ironically, it is the ones who do not speak in this manner who stand out as mature and exceptional; vulgarity these days is so common.

I wanted to thank that brave young woman for taking a stand against abusive language. Middle school is a time where "fitting in" with the crowd is of such great importance. It is impressive to see there are those still willing to stand up for what they know is right rather than give into the crowd.

OK, East, your students have let you know there is a problem. Obviously if there is some rule against vulgarity in place it is not working, so let's find another way. Perhaps a student/parent committee to combat vulgarity could be formed. I can think of at least two students who would likely be willing to serve on that committee, I am willing to bet there are even more.

*Carol J. Lucas
Farmington Hills*

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335. Or they can be faxed to (248) 477-9722.

THE **Observer & Eccentric** **MediaOne**
NEWSPAPERS **travel**
17th Annual

FARMER JACK **FANTASYLAND**
National City

BUD LIGHT **W4 Security** **Q955** **WARM UP CENTER**

Jan 18 & 17 • Listen to Q-95 for details

Warm the family at the Plymouth Masonic Temple • Culinary Delights by Schoolcraft CC

Accommodations by Mayflower Hotel Plymouth Quality Inn

MEIJER **Big Boy** **PHILIPSON** **DANNON** **REPSI** **McGraw-Hill** **PHILIPS**

Full Schedule on our Web Site: <http://online.com/plymouthice>

Presented by The Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular, Inc.

RELIABLE SERVICE IS WORTH A FORTUNE. NOT PRICED LIKE IT.

FREE Nights & Weekends
200 Peak Minutes
\$29 ClearPath™ Digital Phone with Free Car Adapter
\$39.95/mo. — or —
FREE Nights & Weekends
100 Peak Minutes
\$29 StarTAC™ 3000e or Free Profile Phone
\$39.95/mo.

\$30 off new pager purchase.
Free News, Sports & Entertainment updates on text pager.
Free custom greeting for one year.

Available at over 400 locations, including the following **SEARS** stores.

4 YEARS IN A ROW

AMERITECH CELLULAR SERVICE
HIGHEST OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AMONG CELLULAR USERS IN DETROIT

Many locations open today!
CALL 1-800-MOBILE-1
For additional locations near you.
www.ameritech.com/wireless