

BELIEFS Values

Messenger

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ST. ANASTASIA

St. Anastasia Catholic Church, 4571 John R. Troy, will hold Summer Bible School from 9:11-30 a.m. June 28-July 1. \$10 per child, Grades K-6. Register by June 7. Call the church at (248)689-8380.

FAITH LUTHERAN

"The King's Yemen" will appear at 9:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. Sunday, June 13, in the sanctuary of Faith Lutheran Church, 37636 Dequindre, one quarter mile north of Big Beaver in Troy.

These five high school and college students from Milford will demonstrate their unique talent with yo-yos while sharing their faith and showing how to apply God's word in everyday life. They provide entertainment for the entire family with flashing yo-yos, music, lights and juggling.

For information, call the church office at (248)689-4664.

# Prayer is a good 1st response to evil

FOCUS ON THEOLOGY



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

Not many managed to watch the television coverage of the Columbine High School massacre without shedding tears. We wept, and we became angry, and then we began looking around to find someone to blame. There is some fault here, of course. Nothing either good or bad happens in a vacuum. The entertainment industry has been too ready to profit by appealing to our violent instincts. Guns are too readily available in our society, and people trust in them far too much. Kids can be cruel to each other and adults often don't notice or know how to intervene. Parents, pulled by multiple obligations, may not know their children well enough. And yet, not every child subjected to these influences loses control of their anger.

We look for someone to blame because if we can find out who's at fault, it would seem as though we can keep it from happening again. Human beings have a hard time accepting the fact that there are some things that we simply cannot control. To feel powerless makes us anxious. It seems as though there must be something we can do to guarantee our own safety,

and the safety of our children.

That may be why some are so ready to blame the parents of the killers. If the parents failed in their parenting obligations — if they raised their child badly, or ignored signs of a serious problem, or neglected to seek some therapeutic remedy — then we can feel different from them. If it was the fault of the parents, then we can take care to avoid similar failures. Then nothing terrible is likely to happen in our family — right? Then there's nothing to worry about — right?

Unfortunately, that's not right. I know absolutely nothing about the families of Eric Harris or Dylan Klebold. But I have known parents who have, as far as anyone can tell, been

excellent at parenting, but without a good outcome. If someone should scrutinize the ways they raised their children, it would be hard to find fault. In other cases, indifferent parenting seems not to have damaged the children of a family. A bewildering mixture of influences combine to shape a human being — and not all of them are under the control of parents.

Society would do well to scrutinize the entertainment industries and the gun lobby more carefully. Adults who interact with children and young people might learn to observe more diligently and intervene more skillfully. Young people themselves can develop greater sensitivity to one another. There's always room for society to become a more caring, nurturing place for children and teenagers — and for everyone else, too. But even under maximum conditions, things will go wrong.

Those who live by the Christian tradition use the word "evil" to describe phenomena like the Columbine tragedy. It's a deliberately vague word, in one sense, because it doesn't attempt to identify any one person as evil. It

doesn't deny that there are both social and psychological dynamics at work here. But the outcome is evil. Evil rises up out of the chaotic mixture of genes, nurture, the social environment, and spiritual sickness. Even when we can identify responsible persons at the heart of it, we can't say precisely how evil has taken hold in and through those persons. But we recognize evil as evil, and understand that, though we may counter it, it's not entirely under our control. Evil is at work in the Balkans — sometimes rising up exactly where forces have been marshaled against evil. Bombs kill the wrong people. Violence that has been held in check by the pretense of peace breaks out furiously once the peace is clearly broken. Evil looks for an opening where intentions are most honorable, as well as in those places where tribalistic jingoism leads us to look for it.

In the face of evil, the instinct to do something about it might well lead first of all to "Let us pray."

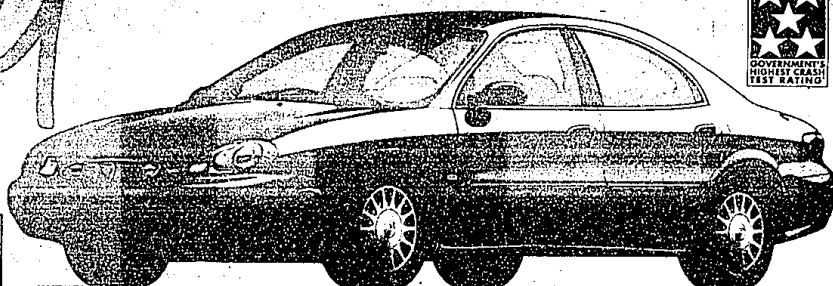
Ronald P. Byars, Ph.D., is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham.

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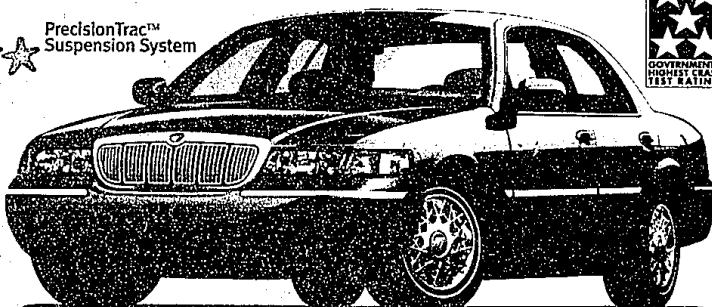
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