

Letters to the Editor

When sending letters to appear in Catena please contact the Editor (not Head Office):

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A HUGE Thank You

Sir, I am writing to say a HUGE thank you to all Catenians for the prayers, cards, Masses for Michael and the support for me. He is now home but this has been quite a battle to get this result.

Michael is not cured or even any better. He remains tetraplegic (paralysed from the neck down) and is totally dependent on breathing with full ventilatory support. He is supported in his home in Dorridge by two live-in carers 24 hours a day with additional nursing input regularly and, of course, by his family. Michael still cannot eat or drink except for a few sips of water and is fed via a peg tube into his stomach. However, he has full use of his mind and is so pleased to be home. He had been in hospital for 16 months. We are all absolutely delighted, especially me as I had been living in Southport since August last year! Most days now he is dressed and sat up in a wheelchair, and he avidly watches the news to keep up to date.

If anyone is in the area he would really appreciate a visit. Please ring me first so that I can make sure that he is up!

Michael wants me to wish everybody a very Happy and Holy Christmas. He is looking forward to spending it with his family this year. What would I have done without Catenians? I just don't know.

Isabel Cusack
Solihull Circle

(Michael was Grand President of the Association in 1993/94)

The Aim of The Catenian Association

Sir, The most important feature of any successful enterprise is that its aim should be clearly stated and firmly maintained. The aim must be singular because multiple aims produce competition for resources and encourage deviations. The need for an aim applies to all endeavours, personal or corporate.

The Catenian movement does not have an aim, and therefore cannot maintain one. We have a Rule 1 headed 'Aims' listing some no doubt admirable objectives which might contribute to an aim, but as an aim

this 'Rule' serves no purpose; indeed it is dangerous because its incoherence opens the way for almost any activity to be introduced, however loosely related to the Catenian intention which remains undefined. If we are to survive, as we undoubtedly could do, we must define our aim and maintain it, refusing to waste energy on anything which does not clearly contribute. The aim must be neither too widely worded nor too detailed. To be useful it must be capable of attainment. And it must be singular, otherwise it is not an aim. The definition of an aim can be difficult to achieve, but it is worth the effort.

Here is my suggestion:

The heart of the Catenian movement is the Circle, the centre which Brothers support because of the benefits it provides. Every Circle has its own character and range of activities, but the concept of the Circle and all that it comprises is the essence of the Catenian movement. Catenianism is defined by the Circle; there is nothing else.

It is helpful to ensure that, whichever Circle one visits, agreed rituals and standards can be relied on. A bureaucracy is needed to organise and control the essentials. The Catenian movement supports such a bureaucracy staffed by volunteers who devote their time and energy to serving on Provincial and Grand Councils. They do essential work in sustaining the movement, but nevertheless they do not define it.

I have asked my Circle and Provincial Council to support a proposal that the existing Rule 1 of the Association be deleted and replaced by:

1. The Aim of the Catenian Association

The aim of the Catenian Association is to establish and maintain a lay environment in which men baptised and confirmed in the Catholic Church can gather together in an atmosphere of brotherly love to practise their faith, peaceably enjoy each other's company and that of their families, and support each other in times of need.

I hope this proposal may in due course be debated at Conference. Meanwhile I would appreciate any comments.

John Bishop
Cambridge Circle

Keep Up The Good Work

Sir, I was horrified by John Bishop's attack on the very existence of the Public Affairs Committee in the October "Catena".

When I was enrolled into the Association 30 years ago, and again whenever I have enrolled new members into our glorious Association, we always proclaim to be "proudly Catholic". How can we aspire to this ethos unless we speak out, and work against, the wholesale legalised murder of innocent unborn children, euphemistically called abortion, the erosion, bordering on elimination, of Christian education at our schools, the relentless attack on the indissolubility of marriage, the mockery of Christian beliefs, etc etc.

I am convinced Grand Council was working well within its remit when they created such a Committee. Grand Council's terms of reference are and always have been that we are proudly Catholic.

No wonder we read Jim Kelly's assertion in the same issue that Britain is perceived to be the worst place in 21 Western nations in which to be a child.

I say to the PAC, keep up the good work.

Joe Caruana
Monsija, Valletta and
Victoria Gozo Circles

Restructure

Sir, Whilst the purpose and principles of the Association are exemplary it is clear that the methods of achieving these ideals can be subject to continuous debate.

The method chosen by Grand Council is to create a Civil Service type structure with minimal input by Brothers. The legal "establishment" has already started to put in hand the necessary controls by Rule and Regulation to control the hinterland of the proposed Catenian Empire and will need a Head Quarter location. (Unguarded references are already being expressed about the unsuitability of the existing Provincial Headquarters and the need for a status address in London).

I am a supporter of the need for Federalism if this means the Catenian Principles can be spread anywhere in the world, as exemplified by Australia and Malta, but without the need for over structure.

Ideas Bubbling Within Him

Sir, John Bishop of Cambridge Circle is a good letter communicator and in your December 2011 edition you published another letter from him, this time on the Aim of the Catenian Association. I cannot countenance his Aim. He strives too hard to be simplistic on an analysis of an aim of complex Association. Of course we have rules and they have been honed over the years and when one tries to take a snap shot of the Association it is rather like going into a cinema when the film has started much earlier; we are all students about our great Association.

Our Association has many virtues and appeals to ten thousand Catholics. Decades ago I decided to follow a system known as LAMA in business and personal life. In essence it means Laser Analysis Management Action. The Catenian Association did an analysis in 2008; but where is the management action?

I detect John is casting around seeking to define the perimeters and parameters of our beneficial Association.

It may be helpful to us all if he did go for the jugular and spell out what the Association should be doing. Every Catenian Brother has his own ideas but to get change in this organisation the experience has been in the recent past that change has been unwelcome.

The bed rock of the Association should continue to be honest unbridled brotherly love, help the Brothers in need, and foster good relations.

I ask therefore that John drink deeper the spring of ideas bubbling within him and do a Laser Analysis and Management Action study and circulate amongst the ordinary Brothers his findings via wonderful Catena magazine for pondering and piloting the future.

Pat Tattan

Luton and London Charterhouse Circles

The Aim of the Catenian Association

Sir, I have read with interest the letter from John Bishop on page 34 of the December 2011 issue of Catena.

He is in my view correct when he states that the Association has no formal Aim and I am in general agreement with his definition of an Aim. My only comment on his draft Aim is that it is too long. An Aim should be brief and to the point. My own suggestion might well be "To establish an Association of gentlemen of the Roman Catholic faith for the strengthening of friendship, faith and family life"?

Philip Crook
Southampton Circle

Bishop2.jpg

Catena Dec 2011

Public Affairs Committee

Sir, Following my recent letter to Catena, Director Paul Malton (Province 1) has provided me with the document which describes the establishment and purpose of the PAC.

The document has two parts: one which proposes that the Association should have a new aim, and another which shows how that aim might be achieved. I am concerned here only with the first part, because if that proposal is not agreed then the second part is irrelevant.

The wording of the first part is as follows:

- a) GC recognises that there may be a need for the Catholic laity to make its voice heard about matters of public policy that are significant in the light of Catholic moral teaching or important to the interests of Catholics and believes that the Association and its members should play its part in this.
- b) Therefore GC has decided
 - i) That it will from time to time determine subjects on which the Association should have a view expressed either publicly and/or to the membership.
 - ii) That it will endeavour to keep members of the Association informed about public policies relating to such subjects.

- iii) That it will seek to make a Catholic voice heard publicly about such subjects whenever it is deemed important to do so, eg by issuing/ making press statements or by making direct personal approaches to key figures in public life.

Paragraph (a) is unexceptionable; no doubt many Catenians might share that belief. However paragraph (b) opens with the words 'GC has DECIDED...' and commits us to activities which would profoundly change the nature of our Association and for which there is no provision in our present Rules. If the Association is to have this new purpose it is for us, the membership, not for GC, to make such a decision. The membership must be asked to vote on an appropriately worded proposal in accordance with the procedure established under Rule 28.

The letters in the September 2011 Catena are interesting, but have no relevance to this main issue.

Bro Kelly is concerned to defend the work of the PAC, assuming that it has been legitimately established. I have no comment on anything he says except for the statement that 'the PAC was formed by Grand Council'. Indeed it was; it was formed to carry out new responsibilities which Grand Council had decided to undertake without reference to the membership. Bro Kelly avoids any discussion about this error, perhaps because it is unwise to try to defend the indefensible.

Bro O'Connell's letter describes all that has been done to legitimise the PAC, again starting from the premise that the 'decision' which gave rise to the Committee is a fact not to be discussed.

He invites me to be content with the revisions to the PAC Constitution, presumably on the assumption that it serves an established Catenian purpose. But the establishment of that purpose was by diktat of the small group of members serving on Grand Council at the time, rather than by the democratic decision of the membership, and the statement of that diktat was then hidden within the so-called Constitution of the very Committee formed to implement it.

It has never been referred to the membership and, indeed, over the years every effort has been made to ensure that the membership would not be consulted, perhaps for fear of the outcome. It is this original evasion which has paved the way for a defence of the PAC resting entirely on the quality of its purposes, carefully avoiding any reference to the validity of its inception.

Bro Duddington's letter showed how successful that strategy has been, and now we have a letter from Bro Caruana (December 2011 issue) which reinforces the point. Of course I entirely agree that, as individual Catholics, we must work for the values he sets out, but there is no way we can act collectively as an Association in this or any other matter unless the majority of us decide to do so.

Grand Council is mandated under Rule 3.1 'to govern the Association as required by these Rules'. Nothing in these Rules gives Grand Council a mandate to impose substantial changes without our authority. Grand Council is 'vested with powers requisite ... for the attainment of (our) aims'. There is nothing in our aims which makes us the collective lay voice of the Church.

My only concern in all the controversy is to persuade Grand Council to act within the Rules, to reconsider the basis on which the whole of this PAC edifice has been built and, if they feel it right to do so, to submit a proposal for our consideration. If the membership votes to support changes to our Catenian purpose then I will loyally accept that decision. But I cannot accept having that decision imposed on all of us by a small group of Brothers who acted years ago without any semblance of authority.

John Bishop
Cambridge Circle