Opinion



(Unsplash/Kristine Weilert)

by Dennis Coday

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My words from a recent print issue, "Let's all agree to 'live in tension,' " (NCR, Jan. 26-Feb. 8) seemed to have sparked more than the usual interest among our readers, if my inbox is any indication. Last time, I reviewed a few stories in that issue that I thought pointed to a common theme of finding a balance between the ideal and the reality. The stories I mentioned include one about the Call to Action chapter in Lincoln, Nebraska, working toward reconciliation with the local bishop, and a German bishop speculating on how to better welcome legally married gay and lesbian couples into the church community. If you've already recycled the last issue, my column has been posted to NCRonline.org.

Read this next: Let's all agree to 'live in tension'

I received several email notes and a couple of ink-on-paper letters as well. Most were really short, such as, "I wanted to commend you on your essay, 'Let's all agree to "live in tension." ' Outstanding thoughts." One email read simply "Your column: Gold Star!"

Some were more thoughtful. Here is one example:

> *I just read your editorial about "living with the tension" and referencing several instances where this is being exemplified. I just wanted to say "bravo" for you!!! Thank you for saying this. I hope it goes around the world. This is exactly the way we need to think right now, yes, and be people-focused, as [Pope] Francis is usually saying ... sometimes requiring enormous loving tact and diplomacy.*

Most of the notes I received were in the positive vein, as above. But not all. Some people wrote to express the hurt they have experienced at the hand of insensitive church officials and dehumanizing official announcements. Here's a sample from one of those:

> I cannot, as you say, "live with the tensions" any longer. As a "cradle Catholic" who went through all Catholic schools and college, worked for the Church my whole life, and am now retired, I was so affronted by the front page articles about the two bishops' conservative views that I do not

> want to receive this newspaper any more. We never seem to get anywhere with coming to terms with homosexuality, divorced people's communion, and more and more of the conservative and confining doctrine. ...
>
> I respect your ability to walk the fine line between all these tensions, and I do appreciate that the writers for NCR are all trying to live with "what is." However ... I have been hurt badly by this Church. I have grown tired of articles upon articles about priests abusing children and what happened to them. I had hoped to maybe reconcile — the Catholic Church seems somewhat like a family that you can't agree with any longer — but all I read here underlines my separation from it.

This person canceled her subscription. That was a hard letter to read, not because I lost a subscriber but because as a member of this church I see that we have failed her. And I wonder how many more are out there like this, hurting.

My vision for NCR is that it can be a refuge for the believers who don't quite fit into the square hole that is the church embodied in the institution, the buildings, the offices and formal structures. I know from other readers' letters that many do find refuge here in the NCR community. When someone doesn't, I feel have failed. And I wonder what to do.

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Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister describes this present age as an "in-between time," when one age is passing away and a new age emerging. She quotes a Zen master: "No seed ever sees the flower," and continues:

> *We are, this in-between generation, the seeds that will not see the flower. The only question is whether or not we will see ... the seeds we, too, are planting as simply the beginnings of a new future, planted in hard ground, yes, and slow growing, yes, but to be tended and believed in so that their harvest time can surely come.*

As typical with Chittister, her words don't give immediate comfort — she's very much the realist, after all — but she does offer hope. Hope is where we must dwell.

[Dennis Coday was named editor of NCR Jan. 1, 2012. He has worked for NCR since 2003.]

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