Opinion



by Michael Sean Winters

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I remember well the decision to hold NCR's first webathon. I was on the phone with our then-publisher and editor-in-chief Joe Feuerherd. Phone calls with Joe were the conversational equivalent of a double espresso: He would throw out a dozen ideas in as many minutes. That morning, we were strategizing about NCR's website, which was still pretty new, and fretting about the costs associated with it. We decided to try a webathon, and if memory serves, the fundraising goal was pulled out of thin air.

I remember one other thing about that first webathon: NCR's readers were so generous we blew past our goal by a considerable margin.

This year, the webathon has been rechristened the Spring Fund Drive, but the impulse remains the same: We need your help. Many, many people read NCR on the web, but they don't pay for it. All of our web content is free, and it always has been. We are determined to try and avoid the pay walls other sites have set up to help defray the expense of running a news website. We again turn to you, our generous readers, to help pay for the content you came to the site looking for this very day.

Like most jobs related to the Catholic Church, we journalists do not come to our vocation to get rich. Your gifts are used to make sure Joshua J. McElwee is on the papal plane, to send Heidi Schlumpf and me to the meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to afford the subscriptions to other news and news photo services, to run the server and keep the lights on at our home office.

This year, we have a new way for you to help: Become an NCR member. We have launched a membership model in the hopes of building a long-term relationship with many donors, to stabilize NCR's financial future in a fast-changing and very competitive media environment.

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Last year, I moved back to Connecticut. In 2004, I lived in Connecticut for eight months working on a campaign. There were two great local newspapers in our district that have since been bought out by chains, and they are great no more. I don't imagine that NCR would be bought by a chain, but those once-great newspapers were sold because they could no longer survive on their own. Don't let that happen to NCR.

One of the great things about being back in Connecticut is I get to bring out-of-town guests on a tour of the Mark Twain House. In the foyer of the information center they have a large picture of the great one with the quote, "a pen warmed-up in Hell." It is a phrase to inspire a columnist, no? So, if you enjoyed my blistering review of Ross Douthat's book, or my takedown last week of House Speaker Paul Ryan, or my jousts with the Francis-haters, we need you to become a member so that NCR will always be able to publish those columns written with a pen warmed-up in Hell. Thank you for your support.

[Michael Sean Winters is an NCR columnist that covers the nexus of politics and religion.]

This story appears in the **Spring Fund Drive 2018** feature series. View the full series.