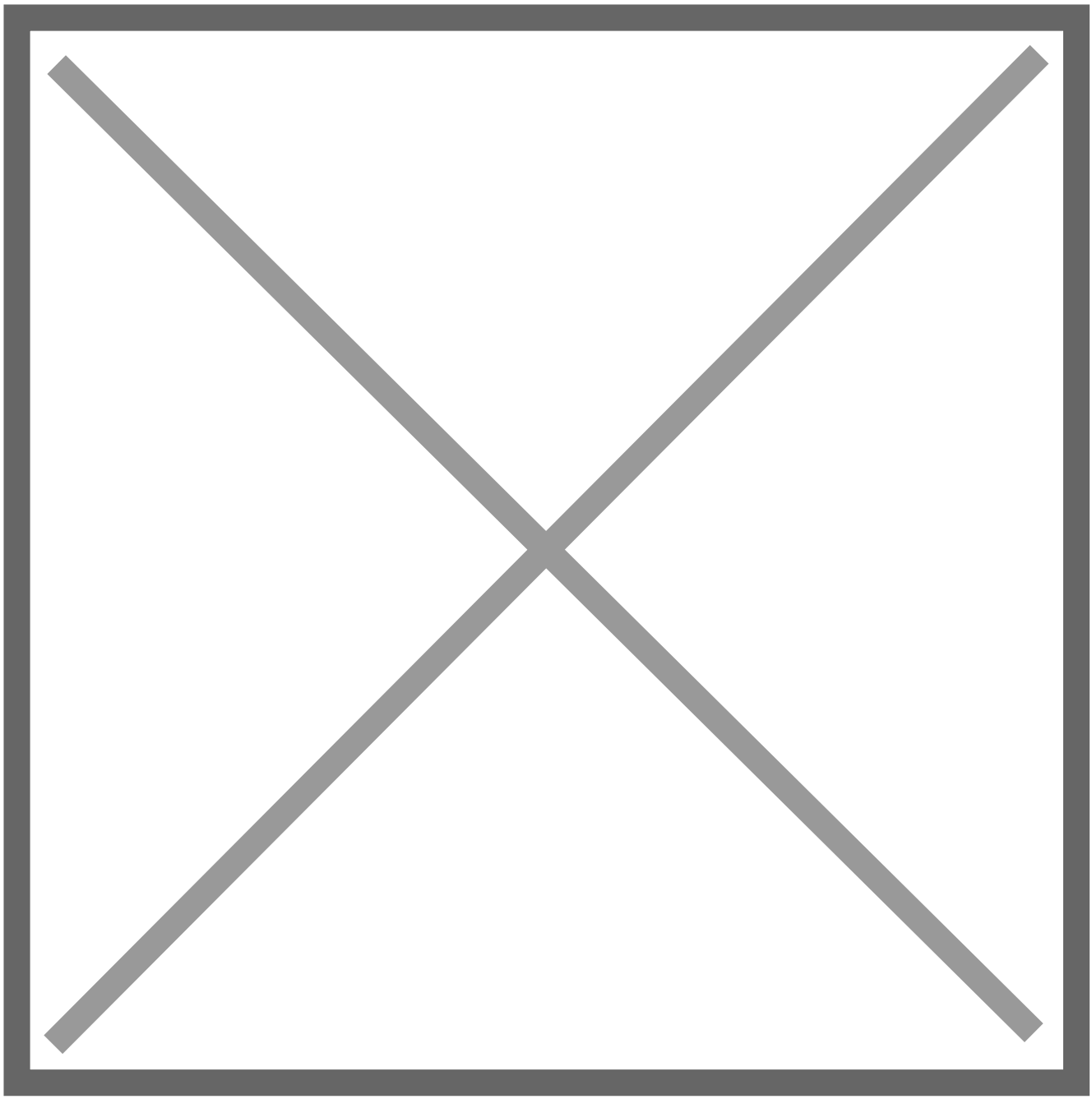
Opinion



Left: Daughter of Charity Sr. Carol Keehan, 2015 (CNS/Georgetown University/Lisa Helfert); Right: Jesuit Fr. Charles Currie, 2005 (CNS/Courtesy of Jesuit Colleges and Universities)



by Tom Roberts

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January 8, 2019
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Editor's note: *Executive editor Tom Roberts aims to help readers understand how recent news stories fit together. NCR Connections will provide guideposts and markers to help lead readers through key issues and stories. See previous posts here.*

As we turn into the new year, the church's bishops continue to be in the spotlight in the awful saga of the sex abuse crisis that promises to drag on indefinitely. It has become the church's new normal. Even those outlets and individuals in the United States who for decades attempted to deny or minimize the crisis are now on board, often agreeing that the scandal is symptomatic of deeper troubles within a clerical culture that has enjoyed undue privilege and protection from accountability for too long.

Whether the retreat that the U.S. bishops just attended in Chicago or the upcoming meeting of all the heads of bishops' conferences globally in Rome in February will make a difference is unknown. If history is guide in this saga, don't count on anything substantive to emerge quickly.

However, there is another reality within the Catholic universe that, while existing beneath the headlines of the day, is a far more compelling reason for believing

there's something in the heart of the Gospel that the world desperately needs, hierarchy or not.

Two of those examples grace these pages today. The first is the profile of Daughter of Charity Sr. Carol Keehan, who is retiring this year as president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association of the United States.

The other is the obituary of Jesuit Fr. Charles Currie, a noted leader in Catholic education who also became known for his witness to justice far from the safe corridors of the academy. He became an advocate in the U.S. for the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter who were murdered by government troops in El Salvador in 1989, helping shape a Congressional investigation into the deaths. Beyond that, Currie helped found the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, initially held in concert with annual demonstrations at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, where members of the Salvadoran military received training.

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Keehan became nationally prominent for playing a major role in helping to pass the historic Affordable Care Act in 2010. In determined negotiations with the Obama administration, she helped to assure that no federal money was allocated for abortion procedures, and she worked to carve out exceptions to the contraception mandate that most Catholic groups and institutions, except those on the most extreme right of the political/ecclesial spectrum, found acceptable.

Keehan and Currie are invaluable examples today, when Catholicism is understandably but unfortunately defined in the popular culture too often by the extreme voices in the culture wars or the rolling revelations of the inexplicable sins and crimes of child sex abuse.

Keehan and Currie, whose lives were spent in service to others, exemplify a healthy public Catholicism, one that projects Catholic wisdom and values into difficult situations without expectations that the wider culture will bend to every religious whim. It is Catholicism that is persuasive by example, not non-negotiable demands. Fr. Charles Currie, rest in peace. Sr. Carol Keehan, we hope your voice and wisdom is not entirely missing from the public square.

It is my pleasure to announce a new columnist in the NCR rotation. Fr. Daniel P. Horan, a Franciscan friar of Holy Name Province, New York, will write a column, "Faith Seeking Understanding," that will appear twice a month (every other Wednesday). Look for his first tomorrow.

Horan, who is in constant demand as a lecturer and retreat director, is assistant professor of systematic theology and spirituality at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and the author of 12 books, including the award-winning *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton: A New Look at the Spiritual Influence on his Life, Thought, and Writing* (Ave Maria Press, 2014). His latest books are titled, *Reading, Praying, Living Pope Francis's Rejoice and Be Glad* (forthcoming from Liturgical Press in 2019) and *All God's Creatures: A Theology of Creation* (Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018). For a more complete biography and more information on his work, go to danhoran.com.

On alternate Wednesdays, Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister's "From Where I Stand" column will appear. (I'll have more to say about that in another posting.)

[Tom Roberts is NCR executive editor.]

A version of this story appeared in the **Jan 25-Feb 7, 2019** print issue under the headline: Beacons of sound Catholicism.