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Opinion



by NCR Staff

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The U.S. bishops' conference held their annual spring assembly June 11-14 where they took further steps into accountability and transparency in dealing with clergy sexual abuse. All of NCR's coverage of the meeting can be found here. The following are letters to the editor regarding the U.S. bishops' conference assembly. They have been edited for length and clarity.

The bishops must be made to understand that they have zero credibility — not only in dealing with the abuse crisis, but in every other facet of church administration.

Here is one gesture that might help restore some sense of trust. Every bishop in the U.S. should tender his resignation to the pope.

Francis should consult with the local dioceses and appoint new bishops drawn from true pastors.



In several cases he might also consider an interim appointment of lay boards of overseers to administer the diocese.

I know there are some good men among the ranks of the bishops. And Francis might reappoint those few.

But without a dramatic step of affirming church, instead of clerics, the catholic church will sink into a position of irrelevancy.

E. BRUCE PITMAN

Amherst, New York

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Bishops hold fast to the doctrine that like kings of old they have a divine right to govern their dioceses. Dioceses are sole corporations. The bishop holds all the power to collect and spend monies.

The West Virginia scandal clearly demonstrates that bishops gift monies to other bishops. Unfortunately, there are no auditors who ensure that the faithful's donations are used properly.

We are not surprised that bishops live in mansions, have chauffeurs, fly first-class, wear expensive robes and suits, and act like princes of another age. How does our church reform itself? For sure the bishops won't do it.

JAMES SUGRUE

Yonkers, New York

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As one of the people from West Virginia, turning investigations over to the "one up" does not work.

Baltimore Archbishop William Lori left out the names of people who had received monetary gifts from Bishop Michael Bransfield. Only when he was caught with his pants around his knees did he acknowledge that he had received some of those payments — he kept $3,000 for two trips to West Virginia. Pretty expensive trips if you ask me.

Unfortunately, the bishops of this country think that crimes should not be reported to the civil authorities. I think most Catholics would dispute that. I sometimes believe that the only way we will get the bishops' attention is if we stop contributing to their support. I wonder what would happen if those who contributed every to local churches stopped their contributions for one month? Maybe the bishops would see that this issue of sexual abuse, financial corruption, must be turned over to the civil authorities — that is what they do best.

JAMES OFFENBERGER

Vienna, West Virginia

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In regard to the editorial "Who watches the shepherds who watch over the sheep?" it seems to me that the bishops' answer is to let the dingos watch the sheep. Or more specifically, the bishops are not doing the watching so let the archbishops screw it up even more. After all they have the experience.

And we see where that has led us. Perhaps we forget that we are the church. Too many times we speak of "the church" when in fact we mean "the hierarchy" or "the clergy." We think of the hierarchy as infallible, when it is the church that is infallible, it is the church that teaches, not the bishop. The pope does not formulate or proclaim new teachings, his role is to clarify and define the gospel of Jesus Christ when it needs to be applied to new situations. The role of the church, pope, bishops and priests is to serve. Christ was very specific about this at the Last Supper. Nowhere did he tell his apostles to rule or govern the church.

So, when the bishops shy away from lay involvement in the decision-making process and policing of the church they are acting directly against their mandate from Jesus Christ! Let's make no bones about it. They don't want to be caught with their hands in the cookie jar. They want to be able to cover up their failures. Of course they are willing to "consult" lay experts, but don't give them authority!

BILL KEANE

Leesburg, Florida

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Michael Sean Winters writes about Bishop Robert Barron and his speech at the United States bishops spring assembly on social media and evangelization of the church.

I understand that Winters' column is valuable in understanding the church and current events, however I think that he undervalues the spiritual power of focusing on how to improve the church while moderating at least some degree judgment and criticism. "Keep your eyes on the prize" and "You must be the change you wish to see in the world" are two examples to assist in all writing.

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. critiqued, criticized and even condemned injustice and falsehood in society (which the Catholic Church is a part of) yet he did so in manner that transcended political opinion and religious outlook while always

emphasizing decency, brotherhood and common ground in every aspect of life.

KEVIN PLUNKETT

Mountain View, California

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I have listened to Bishop Robert Barron. He is a good teacher, very knowledgeable about the history of the church, the many beautiful churches and works of art that have been produced in its name. He tells the stories of the saints engagingly.

However, his "pushing" manner of evangelization is uncomfortable for me. I personally find that people like to be informed, but don't like to be hectored. My "none" friends are interested in why the church does the things it does, and learning the background seems to soften their feelings about it. But when people start lecturing to others about why they must believe, whether in God or in any particular church, they turn and run, or become belligerent. I think the Holy Father is quite right. Give people what they can take in happily and let them think on it, don't close their minds by slamming the door.

Michael Sean Winters' comments are right on the mark. I don't see him as attacking Barron, but simply pointing out that a gentler, kinder approach is often much more effective. I very much appreciate all his articles, and often have written to the editors to say so. I hear from Winters a clear, honest assessment of where the church is today and where it is doing well, and where it isn't. You can't do much better than that.

LYNNE MILLER

Oakland, California

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I am a Catholic and a sinner. Many of us have benefitted from Bishop Robert Barron's courageous and timely approach to educating us on the meaning of

Catholicism and what it demands of us as a Christocentric flock. In no way do I see a conflict with our pope.

Furthermore, I have heard him defend and protect our papacy. His project is a godsend, aimed at us Catholics rather than other religions. Many of us lack catechesis and some belong to it as a tradition. His team facilitates access to important Catholic personalities such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Michelangelo, St. Francis of Assisi and many more.

Beauty is part of God's gift to us. We find beauty in sceneries as well as in great Catholic personalities.

Let's not spoil the chances of being educated on Christ.

RAFAEL ALVARADO

Houston, Texas

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