Opinion
News



by NCR Staff

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Within the past month, NCR published three editorials calling for Catholics to pay attention to the humanitarian crisis happening at our southern border. The first editorial, "Don't look away from concentration camps at the border," calls on Catholics to start calling these "centers" or "facilities" what they really are: concentration camps. The next editorial, "US bishops need to confront US president on inhumane treatment of immigrants," exhorts the U.S. bishops to stop hedging their language and openly confront the inhumane immigration policies flowing from

the Trump administration. Just a week later, a graphic image of a father and his daughter, found face down, drowned in the Rio Grande, prompted the bishops to issue a much stronger statement. Our third editorial, "Our children are dying at the border. Bishops, where are you?" laments that it took this image to move the U.S. bishops to the kind of language that begins to gather in the horror of this national moment. NCR readers had many reactions to these events. Letters to the editor are edited for length and clarity.

Your editorial, "Don't look away from concentration camps at the border," does its best to lay responsibility for the sad conditions on our southern border in President Donald Trump's lap rather that where it really belongs: on the doorstep of our feckless U.S. Congress, Democrats as well as Republicans.



While the conditions you refer to are likely worse than they've ever been, they originated years if not decades before Trump took office. So you really should think twice about applauding Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York) and other members of Congress who sit on the sidelines taking cheap, inaccurate and inflammatory shots while collecting their six-figure salaries. Her hatred for all things Trump might well mirror your own, but they're not doing anything to fix the problems.

MICHAEL W. RYAN

Milton, Massachusetts

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To anyone near west Texas: please make time to visit "Uncaged Art" at the University of Texas at El Paso, an exhibit of paintings, drawings and dioramas recovered from the Tornillo, Texas, tent city for detained migrant children.

Given the opportunity to portray something from their heritage, many children chose to depict the quetzal, a vibrant bird indigenous to Central America. Myth holds that the quetzal, if caged, will die. With no visitors permitted, and rules restricting staff from foreclosing details about the inside of the facility, this exhibit provides a rare revelation of the children's subjective experience of their incarceration, one that tempered fear with pride.

Sadly, with proposals to eliminate education and recreation in child detention camps, even such small opportunities for expression will be expunged.

MARY GIBBONS

Washington, D.C.

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Catholics are like the rest of our population. We have become inured to language that dehumanizes. What do we need to do to regain our culture?

We are being taught, by our government, to discount people who have low or no incomes, who have mental or physical illness. We are a nation of different colors, different nationalities of origin; our mixtures have made us a strong people, tolerant, accepting and appreciative of differences.

Are we willing to allow our misguided government to take this away from us? I am an old woman who hears language that reminds me of the reign of Hitler. Are we headed down the same path? Why are tolerating this?

JO BEECHER

Blue Grass, Iowa

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Catholic parishes throughout the U.S. could sign a petition demanding humane treatment of our Latino immigrants/refugees. It should come from the bishops and contain a meaningful statement that this is not about politics but about our policies and what we stand for or abdicate from by our silence.

If the bishop teaches from the perspective of the beatitudes and counsels Catholics to set aside political affiliations, and proposes a way to assist by changing policies as well as offering solutions to the immediate needs of detainees, we could be an effective voice in our country.

This is a moral crisis in our beloved country. Let go of everything that prevents us from acting as the people if God. Step up bishops, set the priorities as Jesus did. Use your power for the real life and death issues that face our brothers and sisters in Christ. Something we have the power to change in the power if the Holy Spirit, if we work together as we are called to do.

SHARON NELSEN

Sorrento, Florida

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Opinion is simply opinion, nothing more, especially in the case.

Concentration camps? What a vile statement. First and foremost, these asylum seekers (not immigrants) have come across the border of the United States illegally. Name one other country that allows this? Are these people being experimented on? Are they being physical tortured by the people that house them? Are they being forced to work? In concentration camps run by the Nazis there were no toilets. No showers. No food.

Anytime you bend the truth to support an agenda you do more harm than good. Are you Catholics? Then where is God in all of this? Where are your spiritual words of wisdom? Your support for the Holy church? By church, I mean the people. Try to advise them as Christ would, not as a spokesperson for the political left.

(Fr.) JOHN CLAYPOOL

Crestline, California

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It's so very easy to point the blame on President Donald Trump. When Congress refuses to act like adults and work out a reasonable solution, not only immigrants but Americans pay the cost, not only in money but in irreparable damage to our social order in education, health care, disease, crime.

What you countenance is not Christian love but mindless chaos. Our Lord gave us brains along with our hearts. I'm for an immigration system that protects its citizenry and provides immigration with reasonable outcomes for both Americans and immigrants.

KEN BOYER

St. Louis, Missouri

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I have never read such nonsense in all my life. Concentration camps? Ask the remaining survivors of the German concentration camps what they were really like and stop this socialist propaganda because you don't like President Donald Trump.

Hundreds of thousands of people have paid the leaders of the drug cartel millions to come into our country illegally and when you support their efforts as "immigrants" you, like the socialists in Congress, are giving aid to the cartels. In all your misguided efforts to sound like a Christian how many on the staff of the NCR have set up tents in their front yards and asked them to move in? How do you suppose they are being treated in Mexico and Guatemala?

How much more lawlessness do we have to endure so that all misguided liberals and progressives can feel good about themselves? Your article is one of the many reasons I no longer subscribe to the National Catholic Reporter.

RICHARD L. WALTERS

Phoenix, Arizona

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NCR's editorial naming the detention of immigrants as being in concentration camps is spot on. It is especially important to realize that many of these "prisoners" have broken no laws because they are legally seeking asylum in our country.

My father, James C. Purcell, must be turning over in his grave! In the 1940s, he represented Japanese Americans who were put into concentration camps by our government. He successfully argued before the United States Supreme Court that Mitsuye Endo was unlawfully kept in a "camp" without due process when the U.S. government knew she was a loyal citizen.

How sad and tragic that history seems to be repeating itself. This is not how we "make America great."

JIM PURCELL

Los Gatos, California

[Jim Purcell is NCR board chair.]

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Kudos to NCR for calling the U.S. bishops beyond discussion "to reclaim the moral authority without which their claim to leadership of the Christian community is fatally flawed."

As the bishops seek to show genuine repentance for their part in the worldwide sex abuse scandal, they might well consider the present immigrant situation at our national borders an opportune moment to exercise authentic leadership in the church.

Where the U.S. bishops stand on the immigration crisis determines the future of authentic catholic Identity and authority in the church and in the world today.

Dear bishops, you must stand, be counted and be seen, in your full clerical garb, as opposition to the world in its reliance on domination and force as the solution to crisis. Apart from your national conferences, you have the individual power to single handedly act not just speak for the church as powerful witness that strengthens the faith of people everywhere. The question is now: Will you step up to lead the way here? We pray for your courage to do so.

(Srs.) LEA HUNTER and CONSILIA KARLI, SFCC

Whitehall, Pennsylvania

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While I agree with most of the points you made in your editorial regarding the immigration crisis, I do take exception to your tone and the sole conclusions that you presented. The problem is much more nuanced than blaming "our national-bully-in-chief" and his officials "who have instigated this national disgrace."

If you expect bishops to confront the president for using immigrants as "political pawns in some grand, sick electoral scheme," then I assume you feel that they should also confront "Catholic" Nancy Pelosi and her minions for refusing to fund better facilities for those immigrant children and parents being detained. I'll await that editorial.

MICHAEL RUDDELL

Seattle, Washington

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Bravo to NCR's editorial staff for identifying the issue of response insufficiency in the Catholic bishops' statement on the treatment of immigrants at the border.

NCR challenges us, its readers, to be outraged in conscience and to both call out the mediocrity and question the motivation of the bishops' half-hearted message.

Yet, once again, our shepherds do not challenge us, the complicit Christian "sheep" whose silence gives consent to actions claimed in our name and for our national interests.

I take issue with only one statement in NCR's article. I would hope we would all go beyond only recognizing Pope Francis as exemplar of the Christian position on this and other crucial issues before our nation. While Francis reminds us of the context in talking and walking the Gospel message, it is Jesus the Christ who has set the challenge before us, the living and serving members of his body, the church:

"Love one another as I have loved you. By this will all recognize that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

MARY HINES

Timonium, Maryland

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As the editorial says, the lede is most important.

My lede is Luke 6:41:42.

The bishops know they and the church worldwide has lost its traditional moral high ground due to "the log" in Catholicism's eye of ongoing clergy sex abuse crimes, criminal cover-up and ineffective remedies.

The U.S. bishops issued a "milquetoast" statement on inhumane activity of U.S. immigration crackdown because they know how hypocritical it would be if they gave a non-ambiguous condemnation of inhumane conditions associated with the crackdown on vulnerable families and children.

The bishops know this hypocrisy could be easily countered. "Living in glass houses and throwing stones" is obvious.

The worst thing is its appropriate analogy to the clergy sex abuse situation.

M.P. ANTETOMASO

Langley, Washington

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The only time we hear the voices of the bishops is if they are speaking about abortion or justifying their own actions. Interesting to me that the child in the womb seems more important to them than the dead child in the river or in the Trump camps.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

Advertisement

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The recent news of suffering children at our borders by the administration of federal government policies creates questions of moral discretion by federal government employees.

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:37)

To ignore moral standards as legitimate government interest within the administration of law by Americans is a decision to not welcome the love of God.

There seems to exist a need for a Congressional investigation into the discretionary administration of federal government policies by the executive department. One such issue is defining obscenity in accordance with the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision, Miller vs. California, to establish moral human rights' standards within federal administration of law.

MICHAEL McGLYNN

Watervliet, New York

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I find it disgusting that our bishops, with a few exceptions, are silent about the humanitarian crisis at the border. They are so wrapped up in their concern over the abuse crisis that these other major crimes against humanity seem to have escaped their notice.

I expect to receive guidance from them, outcries in regards to our government's barbarian actions towards refugees and the position of Catholic social teaching regarding this. Where are the voices of the right to life people? They think the right to life issue is only about yet to be born babies?

I will never forsake the church, but the church seems to be forsaking me. Tell us how to help these people!

DONNA KELSCH

Sanborn, New York

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It was a sobering experience to read your editorials about the people seeking asylum in the U.S. Although I was aware of the children being separated from their families and locked up in horrible conditions, I didn't know about the people jammed into cells in numbers several times the cells' capacities.

We who are Christians have been taught to see Jesus in people who are oppressed and mistreated. So what can we do to make a difference? You mentioned the Hope Border Institute, which we could support. But what else? Will writing to our Congressional representatives help? Can our parishes sponsor some of these families? We must act, before many more people, like the father and daughter pictured in your online editorial, die.

Our pledge of allegiance ends with the words "with liberty and justice for all." Is this true? I don't believe that it is. But we Christians, we Americans, must work to make it true.

SHERYL B. ZABEL

Fairport, New York

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There are days when I am heartbroken and the NCR editorial on the border issue clarified my thoughts.

I feel the bishops, and their faithful priests, are deliberately keeping their heads in the sand, like they did with priest sexual abuse issue, instead of Christ-like listening, watching, and caring about the "unjustifiable fear and prejudice" of men, women, and children. They deliberately ignore the Gospel message that they recite and include in their homilies. Jesus did not just recite admonitions and pray for the needs of the people he met on His journey. He listened and then did something! He even turned the tables when the pharisees preached one thing and did another.

Maybe the bishops and their faithful churchgoers forget that "white" Europeans crossed into this territory, brutally took the land and lifestyles of the Native Americans and Mexicans, and self-righteously declared this to be their land. Maybe they don't hear the misguided patriotism of the white nationalists who declare that this country is for white people only. Or maybe, like the politicians, it's all about the financial donations.

JANET JOHNSON

Golden, Colorado

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