Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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NCR readers are welcome to join the conversation and send us a letter to the editor. Below is a sampling of letters received in the month of November 2019. If you want to respond to an article published in NCR, follow the steps listed at the end of this post. Letters are edited for length and clarity.

I would question the 30 years Mark Mogilka of the diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, whom you quote in your tribute to Mary Gautier and the outcomes of the ecclesiastical parish model he used in the "closing of or the joining of parishes" together debate.

The outcomes, after his 30 years of work, is that his ecclesial model of church has left the Diocese of Green Bay with expensive data sitting in a file somewhere in the basement of the chancery.

Not including "nostalgia" as a primary variable in parish planning, is notable!

Data may be interesting for some who like to hide behind numbers in planning for the future, but it's best to trust "nostalgia" over "data" because data appeals to the human brain, but "nostalgia" appeals to the human heart. It lasts longer than just one generation of the folks who will support the congregation.



Parishes founded on "nostalgia" are family oriented, parishes built on data are subject to changing statistics. It's best to trust the heart when it comes to workability, and not the brain!

When it comes to keeping small parishes alive and active, it's best not to join them to a harem of other conjoined parishes, where pastors who pastor two or three or more conjoined congregations will burnout fast, given the reality that Catholic bishops always have an assigned priest to head parishes.

(Fr) ROBERT C. GROHER

Oconto, Wisconsin

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As a victim assistance coordinator for the Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey, I had many occasions to speak with Mary Gautier while preparing the CARA survey capturing information on sexual abuse by clergy.

Mary was always cheerful and helpful and always available. I wish her well in her retirement.

MAUREEN FITZSIMMONS

Trenton, New Jersey

I was unaware of Rehumanize movement and am heartened to read of this conference. I have felt very alone as a practicing Catholic only hearing my church speak out forcefully against abortion but never embracing the rest of what I truly believe are pro-life issues.

I've agreed with the philosophy forever and admired Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's philosophy and writing, but alas have seldom found a practicing Catholic who says abortion is not pro-life nor is capital punishment. I see the Catholic Church as lacking in voice and leadership in speaking out on the many life issues. Abortion is the only one I hear about in my parish.

Thank you for this inspiration. It gives me a bit of hope. Are our Catholic bishops or any hierarchy aware of this or involved in any way?

JUANITA McKEEVER

Anoka, Minnesota

In regards to "Francis pontificate 'a place of spiritual combat,' claims papal biographer," it is such a shame that many in the present day church are so eager to judge. Pope Francis on the other hand seems more willing to accept and forgive. Each Sunday's gospel seems to reflect the pope's actions more than those who would stand in judgement and create more rules that they feel people need to live by. My mother, God bless her wisdom, always told me, "Let go and let God."

So many in the church today don't seem to understand that loving your fellow man was not just a suggestion. It is the very foundation of what Jesus came to share with us. As a person of faith, I have to believe that this too shall pass. How long, I don't know, but I do know I have to be part of the process.

STEVE FILBERT

Wickenburg, Arizona

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Reading the piece by Austen Ivereigh describing the U.S. bishop's 2018 plan as being a ploy to circumvent the Vatican, two things hit me. To begin, how clueless Ivereigh seems to be about the church in the U.S., and the need for the bishops to create at least some sense that bishops can and will be held accountable.

I have seen nothing from Rome that assures me there is any intent in the Vatican to hold bishops accountable. Francis says nice things, but he has failed to deliver on his promises (anybody remember the promised "tribunals," or the way Francis neutered the papal commission on abuse?)

Secondly, Ivereigh decries a proposal that would place in the hands of "unaccountable lay people the power to name and shame bishops even before their names had reached Rome." Does he not understand that Rome has done very little to change the perception that bishops for the most part, have long been given free passes. Ivereigh doesn't trust the laity, despite the fact that it's our children who have and likely are being abused.

The church hierarchy is currently in trouble precisely because thus far, they've shown they cannot be trusted. Freezing out the laity on this matter is not the answer. To a powerless laity, shaming may be about the only thing we CAN do to trigger action. The days of "slip your complaints under the door and we may or may not deign to look at them" are long past.

FRED KEMPF

Austin, Texas

I participated in three synods: in my diocese, in my parish and in a pastoral evaluation of an engaged couples program. They were quite the experience.

A synod is a listening session; no more no less. Final decisions are made at the top. In diocesan synods, the bishop; in the Vatican, the pope, has the last word. Everything else that is said is just opinions and recommendations.

First, a synod wants to hear as many people as possible. So, you invite those that may be vested in some way in the final result. You compile their issues as a starting point.

Second, you call a meeting where you form small groups of 10 or so individuals who can share their issues. One person takes notes and another acts as spokesperson who will relay their conclusions. This will generate a working draft of the main issues to be discussed. The synod's coordinators may summarize the issues and re-focus by categories with the assembly's consensus.

Third, small working groups are formed by category and/or language. These groups will do the hard work researching their category in order for it to move up.

At some point, a general meeting looking for consensus will decide the final categories or recommendations to be presented for decision at the top.

The core group, pastor, bishop or pope will decide which items to adopt and which to discard. But everyone had a chance to give their input. Isn't it nice to have your opinion(s) taken into account?

PETE SUAREZ

Miami, Florida

I completely agree with Mike Jordan Laskey's column regarding the National Basketball Association and China. In my case, although a fan of Mike Trout and the Los Angeles Angels and not the NBA, I echo Laskey's sentiments.

But, although both leagues play "games,", they are still a business with a bottom line. Let's not forget that. And, as in any business: NBA or amateur, the bottom line is the bottom line.

Admire the players for their skills and many may be very nice folks but if you are looking for someone to worship, you might look beyond sports icons or teams.

ROBERT HOLZLOHNER

Las Vegas, Nevada

Michael Sean Winters' column on President Donald Trump's seven deadly sins is little more than a list of Democrat talking points, largely devoid of facts related to Trump's policies and the conduct of his chief executive function.

Trump often jokes at rallies that he will hang it up after 12 more years, which he makes clear is a jab at the press and partisans like Winters who will report it as some kind of power grab. Winters takes the bait and characterizes this as proof of Trump's greed for power stating. It's a joke, get over it.

Trump's sloth is allegedly demonstratable because "none of his businesses ever made anything." Trump Tower, Trump International Hotel & Tower, Trump Palace, Trump Place, Trump World Tower, to name a few, were constructed by Trump in Manhattan. Trump made his reputation salvaging the Koch administrations botched and overbudget restoration of the Wolman rink in Central Park.

Trump "runs from responsibility when an ally loses," which somehow demonstrates lust for power? Isn't going all out for an unpopular governor of Kentucky who was down by double digits a few days prior to election day while also campaigning for the entire Republican slate (all won convincingly) more aptly described as what a lay person calls "fortitude"?

Politics and religion don't mix very well and Winters' attempt to cast Trump as the Antichrist just smacks of secular partisanship. Catholics are more concerned about the Democrat Party's universal support for abortion through the moment of birth.

ROBERT D. HERPST

Mahwah, New Jersey

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Wow! The article in NCR about President Donald Trump should be required reading for every person in Washington, D.C. Never have I seen a more specific and explicit explanation of the failure that is Trump.

Thank you, Michael Sean Winters.

JIM HACKETT

San Francisco, California

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Is it possible that the National Catholic Reporter employ a more rational, balanced writer than Michael Sean Winters? He hates Trump so much that his reasoning is reduced to demonizing. Now Trump is the devil and the incarnation of the seven deadly sins. Give me a break.

KEN BOYER

St. Louis, Missouri

***

I found your article "The seven deadly sins of Donald Trump" to be excellent and spot-on! The question arises as to why he can garner so much support from our evangelical brothers and sisters (mainly the brothers, I believe).

HANS WEICHSELBAUM

Auckland, New Zealand

This article, "Bishop McElroy: US church is adrift, synodality can renew it," rang some bells with me, and it was heartening to learn of the Amazon synod and it's precursor activities.

The Australian church is right now in the process of gathering toward a plenary council to be held next year. It is seeking directions to progress and invigorate the dwindling and battered church into a future of relevance and hope.

Our clergy have been every bit as disappointing to us in their abuse as have the those in the U.S., perhaps more so, taking into account not just cover up but high-ranking people actually involved.

Australian Catholics have taken blow after dreadful blow, each one worse than the last, and have come to the position that the whole organization needs examination and change. The church needs to be more open, more inclusive and so much less hierarchical. It needs to address not just the issues of abuse, but status of women, married priests or not, value and inclusion of laity in decision making, land care, homelessness, and all the other issues than have arisen in our society.

I hope that the plenary council in Australia is every bit as and more successful than the consultation process of the Amazon, and I hope the U.S. bishops find the courage to follow suit as San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy is suggesting.

ROSEMARY CHAMBERLAIN

Kapunda, South Australia

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San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy rightly sees our church to be in crisis, but a look at American church history suggests his proposed way to address the problem by a synod may be naive, and at present a fruitless waste of time and energy.

Back in the early 1970s, then-Archbishop John Dearden of Detroit tried a synodal approach to the then-church in crisis by a "Call to Action." After thousands of committed clergy and laity consulted together over a two-year period and finally formulated a number of recommendations, these were simply ignored and dropped by hierarchical authorities.

McElroy need not convince us laity of a need and a how to address this crisis. We know. His peers and superiors need to be converted.

EUGENE C. BEST

Hudson, Ohio

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Inspired by his listening experience at the Amazon synod, San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy reached the "reluctant conclusion that the church in the United States is now adrift on many levels" needing a "fundamental moment of renewal" which can be achieved by "synodality" with "difficult and piercing questions or searing dialogues."

Many in the American church realize we have serious problems. Not all who admit to this reality attribute being adrift to the same causes, and not everyone explains suggested causes from the same place and perspective. Many could accept McElroy's four categories as a starting point, but perhaps with different focus and implementation.

But how will this be accomplished? The church may have a chance for change if it takes women seriously as equal partners in the church. McElroy's recommendations acknowledge women's role in the church in only one paragraph.

The bishop does not specifically mention the one group of women within the church which is the most respected by American Catholics: women religious from many

congregations who are daily and directly engaged in missionary work at "field hospitals" throughout the country; co-laboring with and for the people of God; welcoming with unconditional love the many categories of those who are unwelcome in the church; and establishing harmony through dialogue and service among their constituent communities.

They fully understand "the identity of the church" as the call to be the presence of Christ in the world, without any desire for praise, prestige, power, position or perks. Yet when they have challenged the status quo in the church, they have been subjected to investigation and isolation.

Women read the signs of the times with unacknowledged wisdom, and women speak truth to power with courage and dedication. It is time for the American church to listen to the voice of women, especially of women religious and theologians, whose unique perspectives currently have no significant voice in the institutional church.

MARY HINES

Timonium, Maryland

The article "How four dioceses are actually doing something about the climate crisis " was most interesting, but concentrated on large dioceses.

In Bozeman, Montana, Resurrection Parish, a parish in the Diocese of Helena, is in the process of installing solar panels on its church. They would have been the first church in Bozeman to do, but the fundraising took longer and so a Presbyterian church was actually the first.

Only looking at the large dioceses may miss much of what is happening in the hinterlands.

JOHN KOZICKI

Bozeman, Montana

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My letter is a very marginal correction on an article, "Synodality isn't just an option, it's the only way to be church" that I fully accept. It is against the old and very common statement that "the church is not a democracy."

It is a statement that can be true if we look at the present reality, but the same can be said about every modern democracy, none of them being perfect. But the intended meaning is that something constitutive of the Catholic Church is against the full adoption of the democratic rules and this is simply not true. The historical and theoretical reasons were collected by a son of mine in *Democracy in the Christian Church: An Historical, Theological and Political Case* (Ecclesiological Investigations) by Luca Badini Confalonieri.

I think that today it is damaging for the church to picture itself as an alien. It was the conclusion of an ahistorical theology, but it was and it is not true.

GIUSEPPE BADINI CONFALONIERI

Sheffield, England

The article, "What I found in the labyrinth," prompts me to share a bit from my book, *Jesus Gardens Me*.

For a week, I was on retreat at Willka Tika Guest House — a garden paradise in the Sacred Valley of Peru, where Seven Chakra healing gardens dominate the grounds. A design called a spiral by the designer (a variation of the labyrinth) is one of the healing gardens. This garden gave me an experience I have never had previously while walking various labyrinths.

Midway through walking the spiral, I came upon a quite large rock blocking the way straight ahead. The path curved to go around the rock. At the center of the spiral, the path turned to go back in the opposite direction. On this return when I came upon the rock, there was no obstacle and I could walk directly ahead with no detour. Jesus seemed to be guiding, inspiring me to put in writing some details of how I have felt Jesus gardening me in my life.

How this gardener would inspire me ahead, I had no idea. Nevertheless, I began by making two lists. People I have taken advantage of, were on my first list. The second

was of people who have (advantaged me) positively influenced me.

DAVID JACKSON

Edinburg, Texas

Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister's essay on skepticism reminded me of two stories familiar to veterans of old-time newsrooms:

A reporter goes to survey voters on election day. He comes upon a matronly senior citizen and asks, "Did you vote today ma'am?" She replies: "Oh no sweetheart. I don't vote anymore. It only encourages them."

A reporter walks into a college journalism class to share some stories about covering a political campaign. "There is only one thing to remember if you ever cover a political campaign," he advised.

"The enemy is not conservatism. The enemy is not liberalism. The enemy is bullshit."

GENE ROMAN

Bronx, New York

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I think Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister's article is right on the money. Many citizens in the U.S. have developed a group thinking pattern that seems to follow a mantra, "If I say so, it is." This not only betrays a naiveté and childishness but also an exaggerated sense of individualism that has become toxic to the common good.

Consider the problem of global warming: if I say it does not exist, it doesn't. Would that these naysayers of global warming had to continue to live in those areas that

are hammered year after year by drought and fire or massive hurricanes. Many, who have the means, have moved to Oregon because I have noticed that there are many more license plates in our area that are from California or Florida.

One of the most dangerous effects of this type of thinking has led citizens to a place of fear and distrust as Chittister points out. Fear, in my estimation. is a hallmark of evil and those who would engender it are playing into the hands of evil — but many choose to ignore this.

In the coming months, I will remember Chittister's words and question more carefully the agendas of our political candidates as we move closer to our next year's fall elections. I will question candidates' platforms from a position of skepticism.

JERILYN E. FELTON

Tigard, Oregon

When the news broke nationally, the shock of the "irregular ordination" of 11 Episcopal women reverberated throughout the mainstream Christian denominations.

I wouldn't see a woman priest celebrating the eucharist for 15 more years, when I was 40-years-old. I well remember being very emotional throughout that Mass.

The Philadelphia 11 will go down in the history of the Christian church forever.

FRANCES ROBINSON

Albuquerque, New Mexico

"At St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Portland, unity is elusive" is an excellent article, but can we stop describing Church Militant and other groups that oppose the pope as "traditionalist"? Call them neo-Tridentine, or sectarian, or something else, but please recognize that there is nothing "traditionalist" about open antipathy to the successor of Peter.

Please read what Cardinal Robert Sarah, a liturgical traditionalist, said about loyalty to the pope in his Corriere della Sera interview.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

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Peter Feuerherd's story about the St. Francis of Assisi parish in Portland is a story I'm hearing more and more. As a slightly pre-Boomer Catholic, for whom Vatican II rang very true to the Gospel, it makes me very sad to see my contemporary Catholics now pushed aside and even blamed for the current problems of the church.

There's an irony here. The generation of Catholics who helped to implement Vatican II was involved in reviving the prophetic message of justice — an end to racism, sexism, ageism. This last -ism is the very one the pastor of St. Francis is promoting when, dismantling the parish ministries from earlier years, devaluing the contribution of older parishioners, he expressly seeks younger people to replace them. There's nothing wrong in encouraging young people, but at the expense of older ones, it's ageism, and that's unjust.

These holier-than-thou religious purists of the new wave do not seem to pay much attention to the Gospels, or they would find a Jesus who does not think and act as they do; but they might find friends among the Pharisees.

FRANCES ROSSI

Denver, Colorado

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It is especially poignant that you published this article about St. Francis Parish, in Portland, Oregon, on the 81st anniversary of the death of Virgil Michel, the Benedictine monk who worked to promote participation of the laity in the Mass.

It is important to applaud this noticing of what is really happening in the world of passionate and practicing Catholics in the U.S. Thank you. It also begs the question: how many are holding liturgies in living rooms and backyards — liturgies in which those in attendance read the eucharistic prayer together, in the absence of a priest?

It would seem that the future of practices that will carry on the faith and our core traditions, in these times of shrinking access of the precious body of Christ for the

precious body of Christ, is already yet begun.

Please continue to report what is actual. Please sanction studies that render real numbers, stories and best practices of those holding eucharistic liturgies when no priest is available. Blessings on the faithful people of St. Francis of Assisi Parish and their service to the most vulnerable, in all kinds of ways.

KATIE HENNESSY

Portland, Oregon

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