Opinion



by NCR Staff

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A recent article talked about how church membership among Catholics has declined sharply in recent decades. Many who have left since 2016 cite their coreligionists' alliance with the MAGA movement as a key factor in their decision. Following are letters to the editor responding to the story. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

What appears to be happening with the population of the Catholic Church is a reflection of our polarization generally. Since some bishops had chosen to embrace a narcissistic and second-rate businessman who, in spite of his chronic fabulism, they believed to be pro-life, those of us who saw Donald Trump's facade shake our heads and wonder where our "shepherds" were trying to lead us.

Their obsequious embrace of Trump was just one character flaw which diminished the credibility of the bishops with many of us in the pews. They failed to champion the security provided by our social safety net and instead remained quiet while Trump and his party attempted to eliminate an important health care component of that net. No one really thought they were acting as much on principle as much as political opportunism.



Currying favor with vocal benefactors who prefer not to pay higher taxes to support the wellbeing of the populace has only resulted in marginalizing a very large segment of the congregation. The bishops' sources of revenue might, in the short term, result in more contributions from conservatives but in the long run those sources will become scare as the bishops' political influence wanes.

It is unfortunate that many bishops who had failed to speak up against all the egregious failures brought about by Trump wasted no time attacking a Catholic president because he does not give them deference. The deference President Joe Biden owes anyone is to the American people and to the Constitution. Trump gave lip service to religion and his focus was entirely upon benefits for himself. Biden wants to benefit the American middle class and the working classes. Perhaps the bishops should understand that the vast majority of their sheep fall into those two

categories and are not limited only to those who think like themselves.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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I note that Mike Boyle is considering moving to an Anglo-Catholic parish. And then the writer states that he would be leaving the Catholic Church. The Episcopal Church is part of the Catholic Church — just not part of the Roman Catholic Church.

If Mike decides to move to an Anglo-Catholic parish, he will still be a full Catholic, with the same creeds, sacraments and Mass as the Roman church. In your article you use the word "Catholic" to refer only to the Roman Catholic Church as if that is the only one. The Anglican Church, Episcopal Church and the Orthodox are all parts of the Catholic Church. One day, we will all be together again as we are supposed to be.

(Fr.) RON BARNES

Kelowna, British Columbia

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Congratulations to Rebecca Bratten Weiss! She nailed it. While I think she was "spot on" regarding what she did address in her article, I believe there's another dimension she did not address — that while many millennials and those younger are no longer affiliated with an institutional church, they're still cognizant of social justice issues, and principles of the Gospel teachings, and they act and live = accordingly despite the positions of some bishops and priests.

In fact, sometimes there's a disconnect between homilies and those issues at some parishes and it is highly variable among parishes dependent upon the pastor and the tone he sets. I'm fortunate to be a member of a parish with a pastor that is very inclusive, open, forgiving and accepting. He could put some bishops to shame.

RICHARD SCHOLTZ

Redondo Beach, California

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The Republican party has been a victim of the religious right for many years but it has become more obvious with President Donald Trump as their leader.

In many parts of our country, Catholics through their bishops and clergy have hijacked the laity in their hope of hanging onto their power.

The bishops and clergy speak for the mainstream Catholics and if we want to see positive change in attitudes toward racism, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, immigration and the homeless, we must look at what is being espoused through the clergy.

However, there are places of hope. San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy has spoken out about this hijacking of our church by the Republican party and Trump and the religious right.

Many of us in San Diego are in tune with our bishop, as we support immigrants at our border and immigrant children in our convention center. There are places in this country where the message of Jesus "to love your neighbor as yourself" is present. There is a home in San Diego where Catholics hear the message of Jesus and follow it. We can continue to use our voices to spread the message given to us and to use our hearts to help others and to heal the world of hatred and bias.

JOYCE DESROCHERS

San Diego, California

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I am currently hanging on by a thread. I do not attend Mass weekly, and have had a very difficult time rationalizing why I should remain a Catholic.

The church claims to be the ultimate moral authority. I cannot accept moral absolutism from the hierarchy of a church that, among other things, failed to deal with clergy abuse for decades. As membership has declined in our diocese, the church has not sought to determine why this is happening, but has retrenched, and

in the process, embracing the MAGA talking points. Instead of reaching out, it seems they have become more exclusionary, sanctimonious, and even vindictive.

Our diocesan newspaper is a good example of this. With the many needs of a highly diverse diocese, the primary focus seems to be church doctrine and whether or not President Joe Biden should receive Eucharist.

It seems that in the current church direction, the emphasis on caring for the poor, marginalized and hurting is lost in the culture wars of self-inflicted victimization.

The church is not meeting my spiritual needs right now. We are often exhorted to "follow the light of Christ" with no explanation of what that should look like. People like myself have left, or may soon leave the church not only because it is irrelevant, but because it is antithetical to my understanding of Christ's message.

ANNETTE SIRICA

Rockville, Virginia

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