News
This illustrations shows the front pages of the Catholic Sentinel and El Centinela newspapers

This illustrations shows the front pages of the Catholic Sentinel and El Centinela newspapers of the Archdiocese of Portland, Ore. A news released issued July 21, 2022, jointly by the Archdiocese of Portland and Oregon Catholic Press, the newspapers will close Oct. 1. (CNS illustration/courtesy Oregon Catholic Press)



by Catholic News Service

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The Portland-based Catholic Sentinel and El Centinela newspapers will close Oct. 1, reflecting a national transition in Catholic communications, according to a news release issued jointly July 21 by the Archdiocese of Portland and Oregon Catholic Press.

The newspapers are the official publications of the Archdiocese of Portland but are owned by liturgical publisher OCP. The shutdown comes as a joint decision of the two entities, which are citing new directions in church media and hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual cost savings.

The Vatican began reforming its communications strategy in 2017, focusing on evangelization through a strongly digital presence. The pandemic only accelerated these changes as the faithful quickly learned to access church services online. Digital media can reach more people at a lower cost than traditional print media, the release said.

"The Catholic Sentinel and El Centinela have been integral in communicating to the faithful in western Oregon," said Portland Archbishop Alexander K. Sample.

The archbishop explained that he hopes to continue to offer an outlet for local Catholic news. He said the focus going forward will be more on evangelization and outreach and less on classic journalism.

Sample has begun producing social media videos aimed at people on the fence of faith. Those videos may be found on the archdiocese's website, www.archdpdx.org, along with news, announcements, upcoming events, statements and other communications.

"OCP wouldn't be what it is without the Catholic Sentinel, which predates the company by more than 50 years," said Wade Wisler, publisher of Oregon Catholic Press. "The original leaders of OCP, then called the Catholic Truth Society of Oregon, had the foresight to acquire the newspaper in 1928."

"That gave the society not only a publication to further its mission of apologetics and evangelization, but also presses for printing their pamphlets and, later, Mass participation booklets," he said. "That laid the foundation for OCP to become the successful music publisher it is today."

Wisler said OCP is "extremely proud of and grateful for El Centinela, the Catholic Sentinel, their many dedicated editors and writers, and the good work they've done spreading the Gospel and archiving the history of this great archdiocese for the last 152 years. We mourn the end of these award-winning publications, but we also celebrate and cherish their legacy."

Advertisement

The Sentinel, in publication since 1870, is one of the nation's oldest Catholic newspapers. It has been named top of its class in four out of the past six years in Catholic Media Association contests. El Centinela, which has content unique from the Sentinel, also is highly decorated. It celebrated 25 years in 2020.

Ed Langlois, who started as a reporter at the Sentinel in 1993 and became managing editor of both papers in 2016, said he is saddened by the decision, but understands it.

"Given the financial pressures that the pandemic brought to the archdiocese and OCP, the writing was on the wall," said Langlois.

Church attendance dropped sharply in 2020 because of the pandemic. That posed historic challenges for the archdiocese and the nonprofit music publisher, which depends largely on selling church music books to parishes.

Langlois is hopeful the archdiocese will find a vibrant way to retain local Catholic news coverage. Mater Dei Radio already has upped its coverage of local Catholic news on western Oregon. Langlois said the station is well poised to keep up the reporting tradition.

The Oregon closings are the latest in a series of Catholic media shakeups. The Archdiocese of New York will shutter its newspaper in November. The Pittsburgh and Phoenix dioceses already have taken these steps.

At a national level, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced May 4 that it would close the Washington and New York offices of Catholic News Service, which is akin to a Catholic Associated Press. The CNS Rome Bureau will continue its operations.

During the 2022 Catholic Media Conference in Portland July 4-7, Our Sunday Visitor, the Indiana-based Catholic publishing company, announced it planned to fill the void left by the CNS closures by starting a new Catholic wire service, OSV News.

An OSV news release about its new venture said the company began talks with the USCCB after the announcement of CNS's closure and "reached an agreement to acquire rights to the platform that CNS uses to produce and distribute its content," which will be on the same domain: Catholicnews.com.