Opinion
Letters to the Editor

by NCR Staff

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June 9, 2023
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Ahead of the U.S. Catholic bishops spring plenary assembly in Orlando, Florida, June 14-16, NCR staff reporter Brian Fraga reported that the bishops' agenda doesn't include discussion of the pope's ongoing process for the 2021-24 Synod of Bishops. NCR columnist Michael Sean Winters said the exclusion of "the most consequential development in ecclesiology since the close of Vatican II" is perplexing. Following are NCR reader responses to these stories with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

Both Michael Sean Winters and Brian Fraga seem concerned that discussion of synodality is not on the agenda for the U.S. bishops' meeting this month. Should we also be concerned or is this just a bit of flatulence in a windstorm? Granted, not all bishops in the U.S. were cheerleaders for the Synod on Synodality. In some cases, due to the polarization in some of the parishes in their dioceses regarding anything Francis, it was a case of "damned if you do, and damned if you don't," but I venture to say, especially here in the Northwest, that the few bishops who gave it their wholehearted endorsement and support were beyond pleased with the results. In my humble opinion, the leadership is wise to adopt a wait and see posture and postpone discussion until their November meeting, just after the synod's first big session in Rome. As for Synod enthusiasts, they know that the yeast is now in the dough and the Spirit who accompanied them in their various sessions will not abandon them going forward.

I was also heartened by Brian's description of the Encuentro Movement which reminded me of the Cursillo Movement back in the 60s — both of Hispanic origins, both spirit-filled and resonant with synodality even before we knew the true meaning of the word.

NANCY MCGUNAGLE
Kalispell, Montana



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I am one of many Catholics who is not astonished. The USCCB leadership has been consistent in its opposition to Pope Francis. But it leaves one to wonder: "What do we do when the shepherds have abandoned their flocks?"

ED MARTINEZ
Viroqua, Wisconsin

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Fraga's essay reinforces the idea that our prelates are too self-absorbed to involve the faithful in discussions of how our church moves forward in this century. He also describes their preoccupation with the Eucharistic Revival, which they believe will fill the pews. Unfortunately, the faithful look to our ecclesial leaders to present reasons to be active participants, and showing solidarity with the faithful by taking our views seriously would provide incentives for a great many to take the church seriously.

The pews will not refill when the faithful see our ecclesial leaders taking for granted the ideas and the feelings of those they prefer to lead rather than serve. Perhaps the paradigm change from exclusive leader to a shared leadership role is something they would rather not engage since they would think their own influence would wane as the laity become more involved.

CHARLES A. LEGUERN
Granger, Indiana

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While the article says it's "astonishing," it's unsurprising. To a large segment of the ordained ministries, synodality is verboten because it means surrendering clericalism. The 20th century clerical mindset isn't ready to begin living and fully participating in a 21st century world. The so-called leaders have no vision, prophetic or otherwise, to move the church ahead. This is what is happening in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church.

Prophetic reformer Pope Francis has a Spirit-led vision and it is not inconceivable there is resentment among the clergy. It's conceivable there is a cohort of clergy who, lacking their own vision of what it means to be church, simply refuse to participate. They don't know, or can't prove, Francis is incorrect so they immaturely choose not to "play the game," or worse, sabotage it! A cleric without vision is reactive because he can't be proactive. This is a reason why the church lurches from one crisis to another and will continue doing so. How then can the Catholic laity have confidence in its leadership?

MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT
Texas, United States

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Is there anything in the Code of Canon Law that prevents the USCCB's theologically progressive minority from meeting every few months and working together on projects according to a shared pastoral agenda? The times seem to call for this. If church law does not forbid it, then the handful of good shepherds left in the U.S.

should act. Why can't they meet and work together independently?

It's time for bishops who stand with Pope Francis to get creative and think outside of the box. Such bishops should start a series of ongoing dialogues with LGBTQ people and other discriminated against groups, modeled on formal ecumenical dialogue and aimed at producing documents in the ecumenical style. It's Pride Month, why not act? Lives are at stake.

Can't NCR get theologically progressive bishops together on Zoom and talk some of this out with them? For the sake of the People of God, the good shepherds need to get together and do something.

JEFFREY JONES
Hamburg, New York

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I am a cradle Catholic of 69 years. The USCCB continues to attempt to push me away from the Church — and, while I am enthusiastic for the Eucharist — their lack of synodality causes me to shrink from participating in their "Eucharistic Revival" in any evangelical way.

The Synod is the most important church activity since the Second Vatican Council and they are missing the boat — and taking all of us down with them. Very sad. Through the synod, the Holy Spirit is speaking to the universal church — and the bishops continue to turn a deaf ear to the Spirit. So sad.

It is sad that they don't really seem to care — about us, about the church or even about the Spirit. May God bless them with wisdom and revelation to WAKE UP.

PAUL JONES
Cutler Bay, Florida