Opinion
Letters to the Editor

by NCR Staff

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Last July, NCR staff reporter Brian Fraga reported that parishioners, students and alumni of Ohio State University's St. Thomas More Newman Center had called on Bishop Earl Fernandes to reconsider his decision to remove Paulists from their longtime campus ministry assignment. One year after the Paulists' removal from Ohio State, Fraga reports that the community is still 'fighting anger and grief.' Following are NCR reader responses to this story with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

"A few weeks later, the phrase 'All are welcome' — previously on the St. Thomas More Newman Center sign — had been painted over." A church where all are not welcome is a church where Christ is unwelcome and Satan is most welcome. It is a church of the antichrist.

JEFFREY JONES
Hamburg, New York



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Some concerns from former Newman Center members do not tell the whole story. For example, a student raises concerns regarding the former side chapel — used for adoration — becoming a coffee shop. What was omitted is that the number of students attending adoration has significantly grown such that adoration takes place in the main sanctuary.

The former offices are being moved to the second floor, and the creation of a student lounge allows for students to gather in an environment that is conducive to both their academic and spiritual needs. I am certain that Bishop Fernandes played no role regarding the erasure of the phrase "All are Welcome." These decisions were made by students. Under Fr. Streitenberger's first year as executive director, 20 people entered the Catholic Church via the Newman Center this Easter. This past Sunday marked the largest, most diverse and youthful congregation that I've witnessed since my first mass there in 2015. To paraphrase Fr. Streitenberger's remarks, many students are eager to make the church of today fitted for the gospel of today — a nod to Vatican II and its technicolor vision.

I will always be grateful for the Paulists in developing my faith when I began to drift from it around the end of high school. I also do not agree with every single change nor how it was gone about. Nonetheless, having been to Newman Center twice under Fr. Streitenberger, most of my initial concerns are now put to rest.

KETAN E. FERNANDES
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The story of the changes to the Newman Center at Ohio State University brought about by their local bishop is an example of why Pope Francis desires a synodal church wherein the faithful and the clergy actually share views about how the local parishes and religious communities are managed.

The management style of many bishops mirrors that of some business owners who do not feel compelled to engage their subordinates but make decisions based only upon their own instincts, content in the mistaken belief that they know all that is important. Although we can excuse a business owner, who has a fiduciary responsibility for his business, for their wish to take responsibility since it is in fact their company. The clergy may see themselves in a similar light, not responsible to anyone but themselves and reticent to reduce their own power by sharing responsibility with other clergy, let alone laity.

When this level of paternalism and condescension results in disaffected faithful, the calling of the pope to open the tent to invite all newcomers will fall upon deaf ears. People want to be taken seriously and treated as adults. When the clergy, like ineffective businessmen, fail to learn from others they limit the scope of what they know. That limited knowledge can cause a business to flounder and when that business is a parish the loss goes beyond just the numbers on a ledger, it results in fewer people in the pews.

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