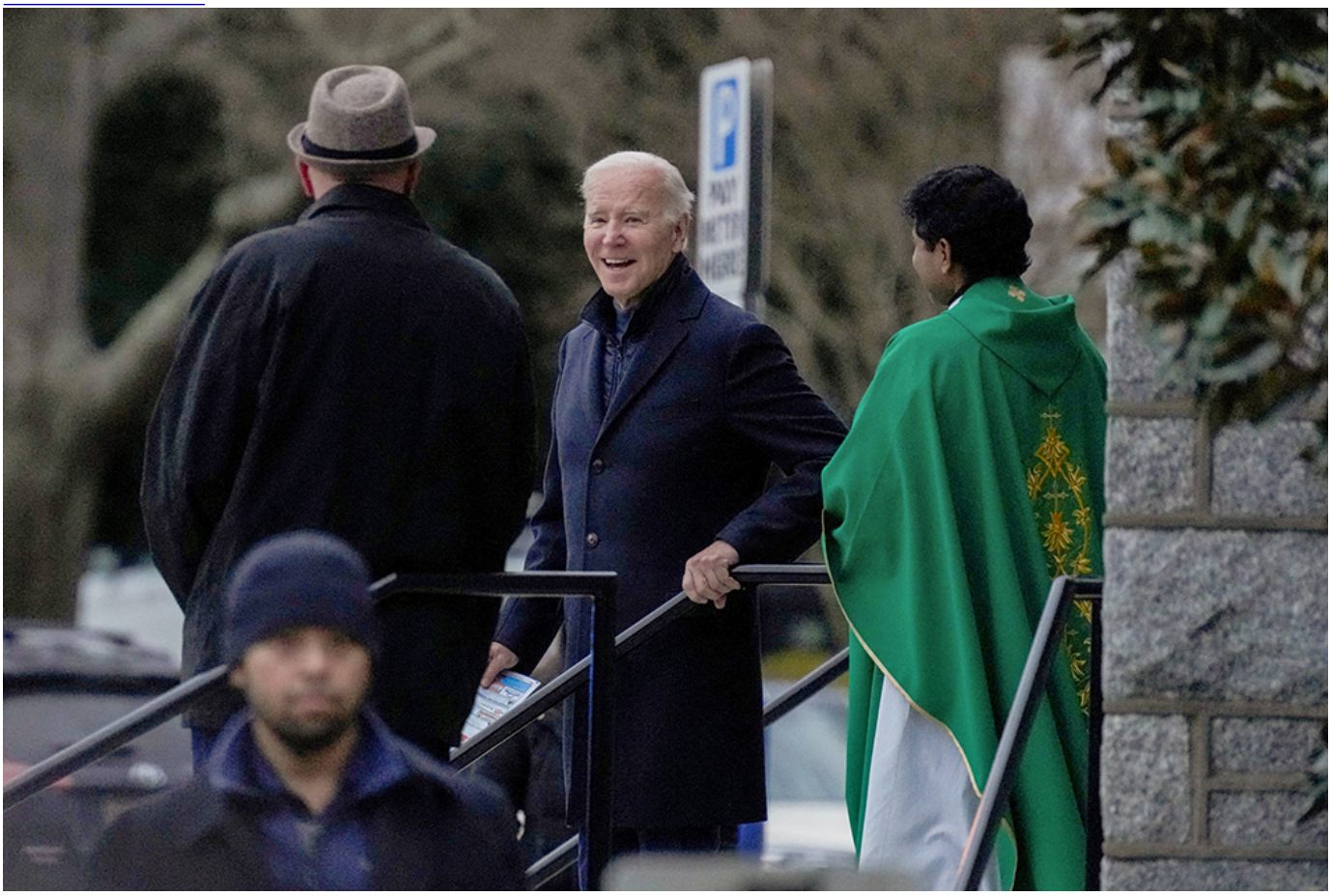
Opinion
Guest Voices



President Joe Biden smiles after attending Mass at St. Edmond Catholic Church in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, Jan. 21, 2023. (OSV News/Reuters/Ken Cedeno)

by Paul V. Garrity

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Hagiography is technically the biography of a saint. They can only be written after the person has entered eternal life. Candidates for hagiography are outstanding people who have led exemplary lives, accomplished spectacular things and overcome the egotistical temptations of the human condition. President Joe Biden may very well be a candidate for hagiography some time in the future.

As the second Catholic to become president of the United States, Biden faced far more challenges about his Catholicism than President John F. Kennedy. All JFK had to do was convince Southern Baptists that he was not going to take orders from the pope.

Biden had to withstand withering criticism from some of the Catholic faithful who were convinced that they had God's ear and Joe did not. In Christlike fashion, he never returned their volleys, kept his head down and continued to nourish his Catholic faith at Sunday Mass.

This week, Biden made the historic decision to withdraw his candidacy for a second term in the White House. Presidential historians have described his decision as one of self-sacrifice and altruism. Because presidents live in the fishbowl of modern media, there is no secret about the multiple reasons that may have brought him to this moment.

The bottom line is that he has made a decision that put his ego in second place behind everything else.

In 1972, newly elected Sen. Joe Biden lost his wife and new baby in an automobile accident. His initial inclination was to resign his elected office. Friends and confidants persuaded him to at least try to be both a father and a senator at the same time.

When he took the oath of office, he famously said that he would surrender his office if his duties as a parent overwhelmed his ability to be an effective senator. With insightful humility, he said that his constituents could get a new senator, but his kids could not get a new father.

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The process of creating legislation has often been compared to making sausage. While we may enjoy eating the final product, we may not be so enamored of the process that brings it about.

Hopefully everyone who becomes a legislator at whatever level of government is motivated by a desire to serve the common good. Beyond this, compromise can be an elusive goal because reasonable people differ on the ways in which the common good can be achieved. This is where Biden, both as a U.S. senator and commander in chief, was so successful. Despite a divided country and a hyperpartisan Congress, Biden has had significant accomplishments over the past several years.

When he retires from public life in January, he will leave behind more than 50 years of public service and a legacy of legislative achievements on a par with Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Saints are never perfect people. St. Peter denied Christ but went on to be the leader of the fledgling movement we call Christianity today. Biden probably had many things in his life that he would like to do over. If we are truthful with ourselves, we know the same is true for us all.

Saints are not perfect but learn from their mistakes, are tested by adversity in life but never waver from the values that make up their core. Biden's continual call for unity, his care for the poor, the environment and true peace in our fractured world make him an example of what public service ought to be.

History will treat Biden well. When he came into office in 2021, the economy was suffering from COVID-19, people were still dying, and the pandemic had disrupted the world so severely that its implications were being felt everywhere. He engineered an almost $2 trillion aid package that nearly halved child poverty, halted evictions, and helped create jobs that brought hope and prosperity to millions. All his other accomplishments are too numerous to list.

What history will record most of all, however, is the character of a man who faced personal tragedy on multiple occasions, who endured unjust criticism from unlikely places but never gave up on his faith, his family and his country.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.