News



Concelebrating priests pray as Pope Francis presides over Mass at the Vélodrome Stadium in Marseille, France, Sept. 23, 2023. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



by Stephanie Yeagle

View Author Profile

syeagle@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @ncrSLY

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Married priests, women deacons and possible future popes were among the most read topics in articles written by National Catholic Reporter columnists and opinion writers in 2024.

NCR's most read editorials captured a glimpse of a fraught election season and an outcome that has many NCR readers worried.

These 10 pieces were NCR's most read — not necessarily the most important — opinion articles of the year. They are listed in order by the number of site visitors who read the story, with short summaries of their contents. We posted a separate article about our most read news stories on Dec. 30.

1. The Catholic Church needs married priests now

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese argued that the decline in priestly vocations combined with the increase in Catholics worldwide has led to an obvious problem. There can be no Eucharist without priests, and the solution is married priests.

"Without the Eucharist, it seems obvious: There is no Catholic Church. It feeds us as a community of believers and transforms us into the body of Christ active in the world today. But according to Catholic theology, we cannot have the Eucharist without priests," Reese wrote.



New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, and Democratic presidential nominee and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris are pictured in a combination photo. (OSV News/Bob Roller/Reuters/Brendan Mcdermid)

2. Editorial: Cardinal Dolan's 'Al Smith dinner' disappointment is misdirected

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan was disappointed in the rejection from Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate for president, of his invitation to the annual Al Smith charity dinner. But the National Catholic Reporter's editorial staff was disappointed that Dolan did not have the courage to stand up to Donald Trump.

"The real controversy is that an event that touts its history of raising funds for society's most needy is going to host someone who is one of the culture's greatest threats to that kind of caring," we wrote. "The real outrage is that Trump, given the public nature and extent of his repulsive record, should be invited to a fundraiser for an organization, Catholic Charities, that has long worked in the trenches to save and

transform lives on society's farthest margins. It is tragic that the guest of honor this year will be someone whose personal example and policy wishes are in a collision course with the principles of Catholic social teaching."



(Unsplash/Alice Donovan Rouse)

3. Catholic students, theologians, ministers write an open letter to Pope Francis

After the publication of *Dignitas Infinita*, Pope Francis' document that addresses sex change operations, gender theory and surrogate motherhood, dozens of Catholic students, theologians and ministers wrote an open letter to the pope criticizing the document.

"We love this church, we love our Catholic faith," but "personally, professionally and ministerially, we are concerned with *Dignitas Infinita*'s statements on gender theory and sex change," they wrote. "We implore you to hear the cries of transgender, nonbinary and intersex people. As a church, we cannot love who we do not truly

know."



From left: Cardinal Pietro Parolin (CNS/KEYSTONE/EDA/POOL/Alessandro della Valle); Canadian Cardinal Gérald Lacroix (CNS/Lola Gomez); Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle (OSV News/Bob Roller)

4. A busy week for three potential future popes

In this analysis, NCR Vatican correspondent Christopher White draws attention to three potential future popes having their moment in the spotlight while Francis got some much-needed rest in the summer before the longest international trip of his papacy.

"While cardinals are forbidden from waging a campaign for the papacy, major public events or news surrounding them can't help but to raise their profiles both among fellow church leaders and ordinary Catholics alike," White wrote. "While eventual ballots will be cast in the Sistine Chapel in secret, the public scrutiny of possible candidates began long ago."



A detail of vestments decorating a statue of St. Peter, as is customary on the saint's feast day, is seen during a Mass for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul celebrated by Pope Francis in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican June 29, 2023. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

5. Anonymous Catholic cardinal argues for a next pope very unlike Francis

An unidentified Catholic cardinal authored a scathing memo in March, saying Francis has sown "confusion" in the church and arguing that the next conclave should elect a very different kind of pontiff.

"The new document begins with conciliatory language that praises Francis' outreach to the poor and marginalized, though it quickly pivots to its criticism of his style of governance and the pope's approach to fundamental questions of faith and morals," White writes in his analysis. "One detects that the author seems to want to make a broad case for a course correction in the next conclave, while attracting potentially sympathetic cardinals to come along with him."

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Pope Francis greets participants in a special audience with members of the International Union of Superiors General in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican May 12, 2016. Francis created a commission to study whether women can be deacons in the Catholic Church, but the reports were never made public. (Courtesy of L'Osservatore Romano)

6. If women cannot be deacons, we should stop ordaining men deacons

Francis expressed firm opposition to the idea of ordaining Catholic women as deacons in a U.S. television interview on May 20 with CBS' Norah O'Donnell, raising doubts that the ongoing three-year synodal process could move forward on the issue.

"Limiting the diaconate and priesthood to men is painful for many women in the church," Reese wrote in this August column, "but if we cannot ordain women as deacons, there is no reason we have to ordain men."



Pope Francis listens as he meets women participating in or assisting the Synod of Bishops in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Oct. 19, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

7. On women deacons, the Catholic Church has to remember its own history

In November, Francis issued a letter "On the Renewal of the Study of the History of the Church," stressing the importance of studying church history so that priests can better interpret the world in which we live.

But Phyllis Zagano argued that Francis himself seems to have forgotten the history of women ordained as deacons.

"He seems to have slammed shut the door to recovering the church's tradition on deacons, simultaneously enabling the international walkout of women and men from Catholicism," Zagano wrote.



(Unsplash/Channel 82)

8. New book examines conservative Catholics, and it isn't pretty

NCR columnist Michael Sean Winters reviewed Francis Maier's *True Confessions*, which provides "an insider's look at the conservative wing of the Catholic Church."

"What Maier does not tell you, but which becomes evident pretty quickly, is that the lens of his camera only takes in a small — I had almost written narrow — slice of the picture of that church in this moment," wrote Winters.



Pope Francis poses after he inaugurated the new headquarters of Scholas Occurrentes, the Vatican's foundation that works to link technology and the arts for social integration and world peace, in Rome Dec. 13, 2019. (CNS/Vatican Media)

9. How Pope Francis has changed the mission for Catholic colleges and universities

Francis' papacy has captured with great depth the value of the crossroads in which Catholic higher education finds itself, theologian Massimo Faggioli said in a keynote presentation given to the Jan. 11-13 conference at the University of San Diego on "Lighting the Way Forward: The Purpose of Catholic Higher Education in a Changing World."

"Certainly, a deeper reception of Francis' message is needed in our institutions, at all levels — faculty, administrators, alumni, and donors," Faggioli said. "This reception would help correct some misperceptions on the ecclesial and cultural challenges facing Catholic higher education in the world of today."



Republican presidential nominee former President Donald Trump waves as he walks with former first lady Melania Trump at an election night watch party at the Palm Beach Convention Center Nov. 6, 2024, in West Palm Beach, Fla. (AP/Evan Vucci)

10. Editorial: Hope in a time of darkness

Following the election of Trump as the nation's 47th president, the NCR editorial staff wrote about finding hope in a time of darkness.

"As active witnesses of justice and mercy, we will transform darkness into light and weakness into strength for ourselves and others," we wrote. "Every act of love, every gesture of kindness and healing builds the nation that, for now, seems to elude us."

Read this next: Excommunicated clergy, cutting funds to social justice initiatives: NCR's top 10 news stories of 2024