Opinion
Guest Voices



Juan Carlos Cruz Chellew, a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable People, meets with Pope Francis. (Courtesy of Juan Carlos Cruz Chellew)



by Juan Carlos Cruz Chellew

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When you love someone, it's difficult to hear detractors or the media speak as if his recovery were impossible. That's exactly how I feel about Pope Francis.

Over the years, whenever I've asked him how he handles the speculation — a small cough prompting discussions about the next pope — he always responds with his incredible sense of humor, laughing it off. And every time he leaves the hospital, he stands before the media with his characteristic resilience, saying, "Here I am."

I'm not oblivious to reality — Francis is 88, and bilateral pneumonia is no minor illness. But I remain deeply optimistic that we will soon see him back at the Vatican. I look forward to the day I can see him again, when he will likely make a joke about it all and tell me how touched he was by the countless prayers and messages of love he received.

I have reacted with anger toward people like New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, especially when the Vatican has been transparent about the pope's health, reassuring the public. Yet Dolan said on Feb. 24 at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral: "As our Holy Father Pope Francis is in very, very fragile health, and probably close to death."

NBC News' Ann Thompson said, "Dolan did not say where he got his information, but later told reporters he hoped Francis would recover."

While the Dolan remark came a day after Francis received a blood transfusion and showed slightly lower kidney function, it stood out. Coming from a prince of the church who leads the second largest U.S. archdiocese, the comment, apparently read from prepared text, easily could be misconstrued.

Not stopping there, Dolan, after some fluctuations in the pope's condition, issued a memo through his vicar general on preparing for the pope's funeral, stating: "As Jorge Mario Bergoglio nears the end of his earthly journey … " This blatant disrespect is unmistakable when he refers to Pope Francis in the same way sedevacantists do

when they refuse to acknowledge him as the pope.

Read full document:
Document
2.22.25 Msgr Joseph LaMorte memo to NY clergy.pdf

But focusing on that doesn't help. People see through it. What we need is Pope Francis back. The world needs him back.

My friends, family and so many people I know have never felt more welcome in the church than when Pope Francis proclaims that the church is for everyone: *Todos, todos, todos*! It's a message that perfectly defines him.

Francis has reminded priests not to weaponize the sacraments, urging them to use the sacrament of reconciliation for exactly what it is — reconciliation. (I know, it seems so obvious!) He tells them to forgive, not to interrogate and reassures them that if they struggle to understand, God does.

After 2,000 years, you'd think we'd have mastered this. Yet, here we are.

Pope Francis has also taught us to respect *all* life — not just the unborn, but every life. The lives of sexually abused survivors, immigrants, prisoners, the forgotten and marginalized. Not just a single category of life, as some would have us believe, but every life matters in the eyes of God.

He has made us more human, teaching us to see *everyone* — not just a select few — as the image of God. While some want to impose a world of intolerance, Pope Francis envisions something far greater: a church that embraces, heals and welcomes.

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I recently heard a Spanish politician say something that resonated deeply with what I feel Pope Francis has done for us. It's a "live and let live" approach, a call to preach by example, and a call to embrace everyone.

The politician said — and I paraphrase — the right to divorce doesn't force anyone to get divorced. The right to same-sex marriage doesn't compel anyone to marry someone of the same sex. Recognizing the rights of the trans community doesn't

mean you must be trans. Providing health care to the vulnerable is not an act of charity — it is justice. And so on.

Yet, those who claim to care so deeply about the heartbeat of an unborn child often show little concern for the living conditions of an abandoned child arriving on a boat or hidden in a truck. They insist on persecuting immigrants who have committed no crime. They side with those who claim to respect life — yet only when it suits them. They deny health care to the most vulnerable while preaching morality.

In doing so, they reveal their true faith — not in God, but in their selfish interests. Their hearts are made of stone, and their hypocrisy is undeniable. I could go on.

That is why we need Pope Francis. Catholics and people of good will appreciate what Pope Francis is doing in the world.

With gratitude I say: We need more of it.

This story appears in the **Pope Francis' health crisis** feature series. View the full series.