Opinion
Letters to the Editor



by NCR Staff

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Following are NCR reader responses to recent news articles, opinion columns and theological essays with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

New Ways Ministry's statement

New Ways Ministry's press statement on the election of Pope Leo XIV included the following sentence: "Pope Francis opened the door to a new approach to LGBTQ+

people; Pope Leo must now guide the church through that door." Michael Sean Winters complains that employing the word "must" is a "strange choice of verb when speaking about someone who has just been elected supreme pontiff" (NCR, May 16, 2025).

The Merriam-Webster dictionary includes several definitions of the word "must" as an auxiliary verb. Some of those definitions are: "be commanded or requested to; be urged to; ought by all means to." Apparently, Winters interpreted our use of "must" to be a command, not an urging or a requesting word, as was intended. The respectful tone of our statement provides a context for interpreting this word along the lines of a "hoped for necessity," another definition of "must."

Winters also mentioned that in welcoming the pope, we expressed "concerns about previous statements he had made." Those statements were derogatory towards LGBTQ+ people, and were already being discussed in the media in the first hour after the new pope was announced. Not to mention them or express concerns about them would have been neglecting our ministerial responsibilities and ignoring a public truth.

Winters asks, "Is it expecting too much of a group with the word 'ministry' in its title to voice some joy at the election of a new pope without qualification?" We believe that any ministry with a responsibility to a particular group can indeed express joy and, at the same time, voice its hopes.

FRANCIS DEBERNARDO
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St. Isidore's Catholic Virtual School ruling

Had St. Isidore's prevailed at the Supreme Court the barrier between state and religion would have been irreparably broken (NCR, May 22, 2025). The confluence of direct public funding in the mission of religious education would be a recipe for state dictates of religious content or the acquiescence of the state to supporting any religious doctrine even that which violates federal civil rights law.

Private education must be seen as ancillary to public education. The private schools help relieve overcrowding and possibly allow for teaching of subjects which the public schools might not choose to provide. Similarly, public education needs to be comprehensive but overcrowding would make the teacher to student ratio likely unwieldy depending upon the demographics of the school district. It must be the decision of the parents which educational experience would be most effective for their child and if the state wants to subsidize private education it must be at the discretion of the parents.

When the wall of separation of church and state is breached religions are never the beneficiaries in the long term. There is a growing attitude in our culture that one religion is paramount and all others secondary. That contradicts our culture of pluralism and tolerance which is a foundational part of our laws, regardless of aberrations over our history wherein some religious groups were discriminated against. If the state funds religious schools it will by default show favoritism and that can only exacerbate the growing feelings among some religious minorities that they are of second class status.

CHARLES LE GUERN
Granger, Indiana

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Remembering Francis, embracing Leo

As we prepare to move forward with Pope Leo XIV who, in his first homilies, promises a Christ-centered papacy and one that encourages a personal relationship with the

Lord, we join NCR in its final salute to Francis who was such a blessing to Catholic-Christians throughout the world and especially to those on the margins (NCR, April 21, 2025). As one of many clergy abuse survivors and advocates who are grateful for how admirably he advanced their cause, I'd like to add an observation that, aside from a few human frailties RE: his tardy reactions to the magnitude of the scandals as well as his understandable reactions to the heat he took from conservative factions, there is nothing Francis said or did during his papacy that Jesus, himself, would not have said or done. May he rest in peace! We will be truly blessed if Pope Leo XIV is half the man Francis was.

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