News



Vice President JD Vance speaks before swearing in Secretary of State Marco Rubio, right, in the Vice Presidential Ceremonial Office in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building on the White House campus Jan. 21 in Washington. (AP/Evan Vucci)



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JD Vance, Charlie Kirk, Pope Leo XIV and Pope Francis were some of the figures that NCR's columnists and contributors opined about in 2025.

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 website visitors who read the story, with short summaries of their contents. We posted a separate article about our most read news stories on Dec. 29.

1. JD Vance is wrong: Jesus doesn't ask us to rank our love for others, published Feb. 1, 2025

In a viral Fox News interview, the vice president suggested that it is more Christian to prioritize your family over a stranger, but "Jesus wanted us to demolish the categories that keep us from seeing each other as worthy of love in the first place," suggests NCR contributor Kat Armas.

"No, I won't deny the complexities of immigration," Armas writes. "But framing love as something calculated and conditional misses the heart of it entirely. Of course, we do not neglect our families. Of course, we invest in our local communities. In fact, this is how we enact the deepest change — by voting, by fighting, by pushing back against systems in place that refuse to protect the most vulnerable among us."

2. Cardinal Dolan calls the late Charlie Kirk 'a modern-day St. Paul.' I'm not making this up., published Sept. 19, 2025

After the shooting death of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, a close ally of President Donald Trump, on Sept. 10, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan joined the Catholic right's quest to lionize Kirk as a Christian martyr, points out NCR digital editor John Grosso.



New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan joins the assembly in reciting the Nicene Creed during an ecumenical prayer service for peace in the world in honor of Mary, Mother of God, at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Cathedral in the Brooklyn Heights section of Brooklyn, New York, May 20, 2025. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

"The Catholic right's insatiable need to spiritually gaslight us into accepting Kirk as a model of perfect Christianity has destroyed our ability as a nation to look upon this tragedy with the nuance it deserves," writes Grosso. "Critical thinking and analysis be damned. Our discourse has been poisoned with a false dichotomy: You must endorse Kirk's cause for sainthood or you are fired from your job, silenced and kicked out of civil society."

3. Prevost is new pope, an American cardinal committed to the reforms Pope Francis began, published May 8, 2025

Augustinian Cardinal Robert Prevost was the least American among the American cardinals, having spent most of his ministry in Peru and Rome, writes NCR columnist

Michael Sean Winters.

"Who knows how Pope Leo XIV will play on the world stage. For now we can only state, but state with certainty, that the cardinals have chosen someone committed to the reforms Pope Francis began," Winters says. "The new pope will chart his own path, to be sure, but we know the direction in which he is headed."



Pope Leo XIV speaks to Turkey's Catholic bishops, priests, religious, deacons and pastoral workers at the Latin-rite Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Istanbul Nov 29, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

4. Pope Leo XIV's distinctiveness begins to show, published Dec. 3, 2025

Pope Leo XIV's first foreign trip to Turkey and Lebanon evidenced profound echoes of his predecessor, Pope Francis, says Winters, but Leo is not the same as Francis.

"What we are seeing now is that Leo is to Francis as Paul was to John: committed to the same program, but more cautious and a better manager, and with a softer personality. A successor, not a replacement," Winters writes.

5. While refuting JD Vance's hillbilly theology, Pope Francis chastises US bishops, published Feb. 13, 2025

As the Trump administration began implementing its policy on mass deportations, the U.S. bishops' conference and too many of its members were appallingly silent and unprepared to take protective action. Pope Francis, though, was not afraid to give the bishops the language they have been unable or unwilling to articulate.



Pope Francis holds his spring meeting with the officers of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops April 18, 2024, at the Vatican. Seated from left are: Fr. Michael J.K. Fuller, the conference's general secretary; Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, vice president; Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, president and head of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services; and Fr. Paul B.R. Hartmann, associate general secretary. (CNS/Vatican Media)

"The letter grew out of the pope's profound understanding of what ails the church in the United States: its sectarian quality, its susceptibility to ideological ferment, and its complicity in the culture wars," writes Winters.

6. What a new survey of US Catholic priests does, and does not, tell us, published Oct. 24, 2025

The 2025 National Study of Catholic Priests conducted by the Catholic Project at the Catholic University of America is an important window into the nation's changing presbyterate. Authored by Brandon Vaidyanathan, Stephen Cranney, Stephen P. White, and Sara Perla, the survey received responses from 1,164 priests.

"The findings largely confirm the narrative that older clergy are far more liberal, in both politics and theology, than the younger clergy," Winters writes.



Priests participate in the fifth annual Napa Institute-sponsored Eucharistic procession through the Midtown Manhattan section of New York City Oct. 14, 2025. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

7. Early signs about where Pope Leo will lead the church, published June 6, 2025

A month after Pope Leo XIV's election, people looked into his discrete decisions, such as his choice of clothing as "tea leaves" into his pontificate.

"In seeking to discern any direction in the new papacy, it is smarter to highlight things he has said in this first month that offer an inkling as to how he views his ministry," Winters points out.

8. New Vatican document calls Catholics to move forward together for synodality, published July 9, 2025

The Vatican released a new document July 7, "Pathways for the Implementation Phase of the Synod," which aims to guide the church in the next few years as it digests the works of the twin synods on synodality.



Pope Leo XIV addresses the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod during a meeting at the Vatican on June 26, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

"To those who fret that synodality will upend the hierarchic structure of the church, the new document makes clear that synodality promotes co-responsibility within that structure, not apart from it," Winters writes.

9. Ignore Cardinal Dolan's disrespect. We need Pope Francis., March 12, 2025

In the midst of Pope Francis' serious illness of bilateral pneumonia, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan reassured the public by saying 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."

That comment and others angered NCR contributor Juan Carlos Cruz Chellew.

"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," Cruz writes.

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10. Pope Francis reveals some secrets — and keeps many others — in new memoir, published Feb. 8, 2025

In his newly released memoir, *Hope*, the story of the world that made Jorge Mario Bergoglio — and, by extension, the world leader we know as Pope Francis — is a story finally told in his own words.

"*Hope* is a book that should be taught in every class on political science, business and theology," writes reviewer Jason Berry. "Francis raises a challenge to all believers of the common good."