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Revising the U.S. bishops' agenda for their upcoming meeting

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NCR Today

USCCB Summer 2014

I just finished reading the *NCR* report on the upcoming meeting of U.S. bishops in New Orleans, scheduled for Wednesday through Friday.

I am glad they will continue to grapple with the ongoing issue of sex abuse and search for ways to reach out to typhoon victims. I assume the conversations on the family will include a discussion of divorced and remarried people being able to receive Communion, since this is part of the upcoming Synod of Bishops in Rome and Pope Francis is clearly interested in making this change.

But as I read the agenda, a lot is missing. Not surprisingly, I have some suggestions that do not appear in the pre-meeting report.

If the bishops are going to discuss family issues, which women are speaking or being consulted? Last I checked, women are 50 percent of heterosexual marriages. And those who bear children might have a lot to say about that "contraception mandate" in the Affordable Care Act. Many would not agree with the bishops' position on this.

And speaking of the family, I wonder if the bishops will reveal the results of the questionnaire sent to Catholics in many dioceses in preparation for the synod. It's not clear at this point.

It's time to discuss -- and condemn -- the firings of teachers in Catholic schools who refuse to sign "loyalty oaths" that prohibit them from championing in any way the rights of LGBT people or from engaging in same-sex marriages if they are gay themselves. Many people are horrified at the treatment

these teachers have received. In fact, it's time that the bishops recognize that the issue of same-sex marriage is becoming essentially settled in U.S. civil law. Have they not heard the train leaving the station?

Where are other pressing national problems on their agenda? Items like climate change and curbing fossil fuel emissions? Meeting in New Orleans should remind them of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, thought to be linked to climate change. These issues are so critically important they should be on the agenda of every meeting.

The report says the bishops will discuss the economy and will hear a talk on evangelization and poverty. I hope this will deal directly with the problem of economic inequality, the unfairness built into our current economic structures. Pope Francis would be delighted to hear such an emphasis, I suspect.

And what about a married clergy? Pope Francis has not ruled it out, noting it is simply church practice, not doctrine. And he clearly wants to hear plans from the bishops of the world. Have the U.S. bishops noticed the priest shortage lately? If so, where is the discussion of this idea? (Of course, any discussion should include women priests as well, but one can't expect too much of the bishops. If they move at all, it's one baby step at a time.)

Finally, I wonder if any of them have read Jimmy Carter's new book, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power*. If the bishops are really serious about the future of the church, this should be required reading for all of them.

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