

DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE

A uniquely global institution, the Catholic Church appears in the press and on the evening news. Unfortunately controversy usually brings the church to the fore. Some curialists repeatedly criticize Pope Francis and the American bishops often disagree with each other. Fundamental teachings as contained in papal encyclicals are poorly known. The *Catholic Virginian* provides solid coverage of our diocese but its too often vitriolic letters to the editor turn off many readers. It is not clear what the Catholic Church wants to say to our world.

The digital age is, for the church as for the wider society, a curse and a blessing. More information is available than ever before but is unequally available and unfiltered. Young people live on social media but the church too rarely reaches them through those media. Older people are often less comfortable with digital resources. As a few examples: Many people like the Flocknotes but some people are not on-line and the messages only reach those who are registered. The website is valuable for those who view it. The bulletin is fine for those who get one at mass or who view it on the website. There are worthwhile Catholic resources available on-line, for example Bishop Barron, Richard Rohr, EWTN, the Dynamic Catholic, plus podcasts and YouTubes. Catholic speakers for the local St. Anselm Society deserve wider publicity. The parish could prepare a robust list of resources for wide distribution.

Dialogue and collaboration are difficult. Many regret that “Pro Life” just pertains to abortion and not to the life of the poor, the immigrant, the incarcerated, the victims of war, or the single mother, as a few examples. The horrible divisions in contemporary society are plainly evident in the church. Town Halls would be welcome. More adult education on Catholic faith and tradition as well as on how the faith applies to the present world would be helpful. Many hope the Synod process will continue locally as well as in Rome.

Within the church there are no structures for dialogue and discussion. The hierarchical structure itself forecloses discussion. Clericalism carves a divide between clergy and laity. Are the laity still and only expected to “Pray, Pay, and Obey”?

Charlottesville’s Catholic parishes could collaborate more. Within Incarnation the Directory should be updated frequently and should include cell numbers and email addresses. A digital directory could be attached to the website. Put clergy and staff emails in the bulletin. Parish events need wider and more frequent publicity.

Steps have been taken to reach across divides. PACEM, IMPACT, the Food Pantry, begging at supermarkets (now vanished), Casa Alma, and St. Vincent de Paul cross social, racial, and denominational chasms. So too the Haiti Ministry (now not much in evidence).

Incarnation's testing and vaccination effort was widely and warmly noticed. The Healing Ministry deserves a new emphasis.

Above all, it is universally felt that Incarnation's long-standing reputation for Social Justice has been severely compromised by the absence of a staff person responsible for justice ministries.