

# **Editorial: The closing of CNS is a sign and product of our times**

There is ongoing debate within the Church about what makes for necessary and effective Catholic media. Is it content that inspires and evangelizes – that forms readers in the Faith and equips and encourages them to share what they have learned with others? Is it content that informs Catholics about the news of the day, helping readers understand how their faith illuminates a particular event or issue?

Or is it both – a blend of formative and informative content that both educates Catholics and helps them view current events through the lens of faith and Church teaching? For 110 years, Our Sunday Visitor has embraced this more expansive view of Catholic media, forming and informing readers in the Faith, both inspiring and enlightening. It's a big job – an honest-to-goodness vocation – and one that has shifted in tone and approach over the decades depending on the particular needs of the time.

As we near the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, our current era is fraught with challenges for people of faith. In so many ways, our society is adrift. Families are broken. The very definition of truth has been lost. Trust in the institutional Church has been sorely damaged. Fewer people are attending Mass, getting married in the Church, having children and baptizing those they do have. Faith is seen as an expendable accessory rather than a deep, abiding way of life – a relationship with our Creator.

Good Catholic media is one way of counteracting these challenges, of trying to bring clarity and perspective through the eyes of the Church. Unfortunately, Catholic media suffers

from the same fracturing and ideological leanings found in secular media. It is harder than ever to find balanced voices of clarity and truth to share the Gospel message with a world so in need of it.

That's why [the announcement](#) on May 4 that the U.S. bishops will be shutting down their 100-year-old news service at the end of this year is so painful. Our Sunday Visitor's founder, Archbishop John Francis Noll, played a significant role in Catholic News Service's launch back in 1920. At the time, the bishops needed a voice and a platform, and the National Catholic Welfare Council, as the USCCB was called then, provided both. For more than a century, CNS's domestic bureau has been the media voice of the national Church, serving as its record-keeper and providing mostly balanced and trustworthy coverage of both Church and secular news. CNS provided a communications service that directly reached the People of God in the pew via their diocesan newspapers.

With the dissolution of CNS, the national Church loses a valuable source of information on issues that affect every Catholic, such as respect for life, immigration, education, culture, racism, government and politics, community violence and Church initiatives, institutions and documents – the list goes on. And it loses an indispensable source of catechesis – so important especially to those who, in recent decades, may not have received robust or effective formation.

Like all of us who work in the fast-paced and sometimes unforgiving arena of media, Catholic News Service's efforts haven't always been perfect. But trustworthy, balanced, orthodox Catholic media is essential for the Church's mission today. CNS's demise has created a worrisome and potentially dangerous vacuum.

The shuttering of CNS is a sign and a product of our times. Financial pressures within the Church are making it harder for dioceses to support services like CNS, even if they might wish

to. While technology has empowered diocesan communications departments to create websites and use social media and email to share information directly with their parishioners, individual dioceses cannot match the comprehensive coverage of the American Church that CNS has provided over the past century. And, sadly, other media that have a particular agenda or ideology are seen as more attractive to like-minded members of the faithful (and even of the clergy).

CNS is not the first Catholic news organization to meet the chopping block. Numerous diocesan newspapers have died off or transitioned to different formats of communication in recent years. The loss of CNS' content will assuredly hasten the transition or demise of many more. How will this affect the People of God? Who will inform them? Who will form them? What will it look like in the coming years, when fewer and fewer voices are left to speak on behalf of the Church?

In his message for the 2022 World Communications Day, which the Church celebrates May 29, Pope Francis wrote of the growing "mistrust" of media that has caused "an 'infodemic,' within which the world of information is increasingly struggling to be credible." Sadly, the closing of Catholic News Service will eliminate one of the Church's most credible news outlets at a time when the world sorely needs the faithful to be better formed – and more informed.

*Our Sunday Visitor Editorial Board: Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott P. Richert, Scott Warden, York Young*