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by NCR Staff

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It is a controversial tradition, but six U.S. presidents have spoken at the University of Notre Dame's commencement exercises, and a total of nine presidents have received honorary degrees. Now, less than three months away from the 2021 commencement, a group aimed to "protect" the university's Catholic identity has launched a "Don't Invite Biden" campaign, while others are making their case that [inviting the nation's second Catholic president is essential to the university's mission](#), setting up another likely showdown. Following are letters to the editor on the topic. They have been edited for length and clarity.

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I believe if President Joe Biden should be invited to speak at the 2021 commencement at the University of Notre Dame, he should turn them down. His invitation alone would itself prove divisive not just among the actual Notre Dame community but within the larger community, both Catholic and not. Turning them down would show he is sincere about avoiding such divisiveness.



There is no better opportunity for the Republicans, and some bishops who support them, to use the excuse of a Biden invitation to further divide the Catholic population. We are already polarized thanks to the rhetoric from some members of the U.S. bishops' conference and that should not be further exacerbated by a re-enactment of the debacle which ensued with Bishop John D'Arcy in 2009.

At that point, President Barack Obama's support for abortion was just an excuse embraced by many people within and without the Catholic community to marginalize our first African American president. It was also a means to disable his political agenda which came to a head with the Tea Party movement which ostensibly was based on government expansion via the Affordable Care Act, but really was a shield for virulent racism. It is unfortunate that D'Arcy entered that fray at the very beginning of Obama's first term and took the entire diocese with him.

There are many Catholic universities in this country if Biden is amenable to addressing such an audience. There are also many secular institutions which would be honored to have our president as their commencement guest and speaker. Biden wishes to bring us together. He can begin by shunning an environment which only promises to further divide us.

## **CHARLES A. LE GUERN**

### **Granger, Indiana**

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A great university includes cutting edge research. Concerning the abortion controversy, let University of Notre Dame's scholars set themselves a threefold task:

1. How many of Donald Trump's partners obtained abortions and who paid for them? The researchers should obtain his tax returns.
2. Does the "safe, legal, and rare" policy of Bill Clinton actually result in fewer abortions than the right-to-birth-but-after-that-you're-on-your-own minimizing of the safety net sought by the Republican Party? The declining birth rate during the frightening pandemic may provide a clue.
3. Do falsehoods spread about issues such as Black Lives Matter on EWTN and other self-proclaimed Catholic media undermine the gospel? The researchers should investigate how propaganda against "socialism" is undermining the communitarian ethic of our church.

During this Lent, we all might meditate on a couple things.

The message in Graham Greene's great novel, *The Power and the Glory*, which depicts how the sacraments are valid even from the hands of a bad priest. Shilling for the cruel Republican social-Darwinist agenda is bad. Yet, do not let a few bullying bishops sour us on our church.

A statement by the doctrinally conservative and liturgically traditionalist, but socially conscious late Bishop Kenneth Povish of Lansing, Michigan: "You cannot be a single issue voter, because then, they've got you."

## **CONRAD L. DONAKOWSKI**

### **Lansing, Michigan**

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Should the University of Notre Dame invite President Joe Biden because "the sick need a physician" and Biden can find healing by accepting their invitation, thanking them for it, stating that he is the elected president of the whole United States and his job is to defend the constitution.

Should Biden go to Notre Dame because "the sick need a physician" and he, in his humility, may remind us that he is not pro-abortion, he is pro-choice, and further, his personal choice is respect for all life, born and unborn.

Does the Catholic Church know how to prevent unwanted pregnancies? Does the church believe that a woman should have no say over whether the sexual act of love ought to result in pregnancy, regardless of circumstances?

Perhaps this is the time to talk, respectfully, about all pro-life matters: health care, prenatal care, maternity leave, family planning, education about family planning that works, and empathy and support for mothers. We all need to calm down, listen respectfully to each other and welcome our Lord's whispers in the silences between the words.

**MAUREEN FORD**

**Highland Beach, Florida**

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