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Column changes coming

by John L. Allen Jr.

All Things Catholic

Time Is Running Out! *NCR* is moving its e-mail lists to a new user-authenticated system. To continue to receive e-mail alerts for this column, you must re-subscribe before Oct. 12. Follow this link: **Sign-up Page**. The new system will help you and us control spam.

For the last five years, I've referred to "The Word from Rome," and now "All Things Catholic," as a "column," largely because it was the best word at hand for a regular piece of journalistic commentary. As regular readers know, however, it's never really been a column in the traditional sense, meaning a short reflection on a single theme. It's more like a mini-newsletter, usually featuring several unrelated points - some news, much context and analysis, a few bits of color and insider detail.

One implication is that every week I end up sitting on news items or chunks of analysis until Friday rolls around, by which point, in at least some cases, their relevance has been diminished. Moreover, the column can be unwieldy due to its length and the unrelated nature of the material it contains.

Over the next few weeks, "All Things Catholic" will evolve thanks to some technological leaps forward at the home office.

By now, most of you have already subscribed to "All Things Catholic" in its new format in the NCR Cafe, which allows readers to react to the column and to discuss the issues it raises. (Of course, there's no obligation to do so, and those who just want to read the damn thing still have that option).

The new format, however, is the tip of the iceberg. In fairly short order, there will be an entirely new

"John Allen" page on the NCR Cafe which will contain three distinct elements:

- Daily filings Monday through Friday, and more often when big news breaks, to help put Catholic stories in context in real time;
- The regular weekly "All Things Catholic" column, which will more closely resemble a traditional column, tightly written and focused on a single idea;
- Podcasts drawn from my lectures, interviews, media appearances, and other sources.

The daily feature, I hope, will be helpful, because in my experience the problem with most media coverage of the Catholic church is not so much text as context. It's no trick to churn out 500 words on whatever's happening today, but reliable accounts of why it happened, what it means, what the back-story is, and what its consequences might be are usually in much shorter supply. That's what "All Things Catholic" was always intended to provide, and now we'll be able to do so more quickly and flexibly.

My suggestion is that when it's ready, readers bookmark the **johnallen.ncrcafe.org** page and check in once a day to see what's new. Also, if you haven't yet done so, re-register for the "All Things Catholic" column, in order to get the standard e-mail alert each Friday letting you know it's ready. Existing readers must re-register before Oct. 12.

The daily filings will make no pretense of being comprehensive; I'm not trying to hold myself out as a one-man news agency. This is also not another Catholic blog, filled with my personal ruminations, which is quite possibly the last thing the world needs. Instead, the filings are a way to be timelier in delivering the information, background and color that readers expect, while retooling the column to focus on the most important stories or ideas of the week.

All this should debut in two or three weeks' time.

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