

How to submit letter to the editor (Reader's Write)

Letters to the editor provide the most direct, official feedback to a newspaper by its readers. Catholic newspapers struggle with getting the same volume of letters that seems to overflow the mailboxes of secular newspapers, although no one seems to know why. Catholic readers tend to be more educated and are more likely to share a core set of values than readers of secular press.

By publishing this piece, it is our hope to encourage a response – positive, negative or something in between – from the dedicated readers of the *Idaho Catholic Register*.

Rule 1: If it didn't appear in the *ICR*, it didn't happen.

Of course, this is an exaggeration. However, the point is that dialogue occurs when two parties share the same information and vocabulary. Many important events occur outside the Catholic sphere (although, many would suggest, that nothing exists outside God's sphere of interest) and therefore aren't published in the *ICR*. Lest you think this limits what can be addressed in the *ICR*, we would suggest that in a church 2,000 years young with roots in the beginning of humanity – with the plethora of stories from throughout the state, nation and world – there's no lack of subjects on which to write.

Rule 2: Play nice.

The point of dialogue is to exchange ideas among people occupying inherently different places. Though some may think we publish heresy, the *ICR* is a primary teaching tool for the Bishop of Boise, and the teaching represented on its pages aims to create a better understanding of the role God plays in our lives. Sometimes, it can be controversial. However, like the newspaper, we expect all submissions to be civil.

Rule 3: Mission Impossible: 250 words.

Writers of letters to the editor have a very simple task: say what you want to say and get out. It's not a dissertation or a courtroom brief; it's an opinion. Items longer than this may be submitted, but will have the bejeebers cut out of them. That's another axiom: letters will be cut for content or space. The goal, however, is to ensure that the intent of the letter writer is maintained.

Rule 4: Harmony, good; hooting, OK; *ad hominem*, bad.

Agreement and praise is nice. Criticism and disagreement is allowed. Personal attacks will not be printed. As a former justice in a state Supreme Court once wrote: "It's fine to disagree, but let's not be disagreeable about it."

Rule 5: Nowhere to hide.

If you wrote it and you mean it, you must sign it. Anonymous letters will summarily be discarded. Please include a daytime phone number so our staff can call and verify that the person signing the letter is the one who actually wrote it.

Rule 6: It's been said before, and before that, and before that.

Occasionally, an issue will arise that will create a flood of letters. As a policy, newspapers print a representation of the disparate views, usually those written most crisply and clearly. Also, it's unusual that letters on one particular subject will appear over the course of several issues. It's usually one and done.

Rule 7: It happened when?

Most letters will have a point of reference that reflects a particular story in a particular issue. (i.e., "In the Legislative Update in the April 3 edition..."). Please include that reference in the letter, so readers have a perspective on your point of view.

Rule 8: Letters to other newspapers will not be accepted.

If you submit a letter to the editor for the *ICR* and your local newspaper, it will only run in the *ICR* if the other publication has not yet run it. To avoid being scratched, we suggest that you rewrite your letter to the *ICR* to include a Catholic perspective.

Rule 9: Give it time.

Letters to the editor are among the quickest items in the newspaper to be published. However, sometimes there are issues that require further research and can delay publication. If it has been several issues, and you have not seen your letter, please call or e-mail us (mbrown@rcdb.org) for an explanation.

Rule 10: Once a month.

Letter writers will not be allowed to have submissions printed in successive issues.