

CNN is wrong about the archbishop's residence

I have a brilliant idea. Let's sell the White House to help pay off the debt. It's valued at more than \$300 million and that would make a significant contribution. The Obamas could move into a nice townhouse, probably in the \$300,000 range, within commuting distance of Washington, D.C.

I suppose some complications would arise from this plan. For security purposes, they would probably have to buy the surrounding houses or even the whole block. The president's entourage would likely back up traffic as he is commuting downtown every day. They would also have to purchase new office space for his personal staff, and a large hall for hosting foreign dignitaries and holding functions. It also would be a shame to sell the White House to a private citizen because of its historical significance as the house and its artifacts should belong to the people of this country.

On further thought, my brilliant idea is pretty stupid. It would not even be a significant contribution, since it's only worth .000000017 of the national debt. I am glad I did not write about this idea, and I'm really glad I did not send it to CNN to be published. Daniel Burke is not so fortunate.

In a recent article, he blasted the archbishops for not following the example of Pope Francis in living in a more humble setting. I completely agree with Burke's main point. It would be great if our church leaders chose to live in simple houses close to the people. Moreover, a few bishops have done great harm to the church by their extravagant spending, most famously German Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst.

In Burke's article, Archbishop William Lori is mentioned because his residence is valued at \$1.24 million. In this case, Burke fails to make some important distinctions. The archbishop's house was not purchased by Archbishop Lori; it first served as the archbishop's residence in 1832. In other words, Archbishop Lori paid nothing for it. It's a free building for the church. It would, however, cost money if the spiritual shepherd of the Archdiocese of Baltimore wanted to buy a smaller, more humble residence.



Archbishop Lori's residence. (Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)

Second, it is not just a home for the archbishop. The article states that the rector of the Basilica and secretary of the archbishop also live there. It also has work spaces for them, meeting rooms, a place for receptions and a chapel. It is a functional

building for ordinary Catholics to use in addition to the archbishop. If you want to meet the rector to plan a wedding in the Basilica, that's where you'll go. If there's a small reception after a Mass at the Basilica, that's where you'll have it.

According to the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the basilica deed prohibits the sale of the residence. Even if it could be sold, it's a historical building with limited appeal outside of the church. Moreover, it is attached to the Basilica. Think of all the expensive renovations to separate the house from the church. It would make zero economic sense to sell it and buy another property.

Lastly, the building has a deep spiritual legacy. It was the cradle of Catholicism in the United States. According to the current rector, "In this house the Bishops of the United States met to commission the writing of the Baltimore Catechism, opened the Catholic School System and established the Catholic University of America. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the chapel and through the years the Archbishops of Baltimore have welcomed guests to the chapel including Blessed John Paul II and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta."

Think of all the saints who have come through its doors and prayed in that house. Its history is too rich to give it away.

Of all of the church leaders cited in the CNN article, guess who lives in the most expensive residence? Surprise, it's Pope Francis. Of course, Burke misses this point. His "residence" cost \$20 million to build in the 1990s. However, it is a massive dormitory with over a 100 rooms; clearly it's not used just for him. Citing straight numbers without an explanation, you see, can be confusing.

As I said, I am glad the press is holding the church accountable. I am grateful that they have uncovered bishops who have spent money donated by the people for expensive and unfulfilling projects. However, I do not approve of sloppy journalism that makes generalizations about the archbishops of the United States, completely ignoring the nuances of the matter. Burke seems more intent on insulting Catholics than holding bishops accountable.

I believe that Archbishop Lori's residence is free, highly-functional and a home with a unique spiritual legacy. As a local Catholic who makes a weekly financial contribution to the church, I am pleased that he has access to it, and I would protest any movement that tries to pressure him to vacate it.

This blog was updated with new information Aug. 8 at 6:18 p.m.