



# Focus

FutureChurch

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**SUMMER/FALL 2016 / VOL. XIX NO.1**

## From the Director’s Desk

### Pesky Women, Troublemakers, and Dreamers

He [Jesus] said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” (Lk 18:2-5)

When I think of all that is being accomplished in terms of gender justice in the Catholic Church these days, I think of the many “pesky” Catholics who cared enough to be a “bother”. In the interminably slow grind toward systemic change in the institutional Church, those with authority sometimes fit Luke’s description of the judge perfectly. There are people who care little for anything other than preserving their corner on power. Yet, Luke reminds us that even those vested with authority—especially those who close themselves off, will not have the last word. Those who are vulnerable, without institutional power—the “pesky” widows—will come calling—causing trouble, wearing down the



comfortable and disrupting systems that no longer bring life.

On May 12, 2016, in response to questions from the “pesky” women of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), Pope Francis agreed to set up a commission to study the restoration of women deacons. And in short order by any Vatican standard, on August 2nd he announced that the commission would be composed of six women and six men, including world renowned expert, Phyllis Zagano. Good news for Catholics who are eager to see women deacons restored, Zagano is another “pesky” woman whose appointment is a sign that Francis is willing to listen, learn and explore the possibilities beyond the previous conclusions of a small group of high level naysayers within the Vatican.

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## Special Edition!

### SIGNPOSTS FOR REFORM: REMEMBERING BEGINNINGS, CELEBRATING MILESTONES AND EQUIPPING OURSELVES FOR THE FUTURE

In this special edition we highlight 2016 milestones in the Catholic Church—advances made after decades of education and advocacy by FutureChurch supporters.

The elevation of the memorial of St. Mary of Magdala to a feast day and the creation of a commission by Pope Francis to look at the question of women deacons inspired us to look back at our roots and recall those nascent efforts by FutureChurch members to recover lost stories, heal old wounds and advocate for change in the Church we love.



Sr. Carmen Sammut and Pope Francis—CNS photo

Catholics received more good news on June 3, 2016, when the Congregation for Divine Worship issued a new decree at the behest of Pope Francis, raising the celebration of St. Mary Magdalene from a memorial to a feast day. That decree established her as an equal among her peers – the apostles. The news was another sign that the patriarchal norms that have governed our Church no longer suffice as a way forward. Elated Catholics around the world celebrated with a renewed sense of hope that true equality in the Catholic Church is achievable.

Pope Francis deserves credit for his decision to create a commission to study women deacons and for his efforts to officially reboot the Church's understanding of Mary of Magdala, but honestly, he is reaping the wisdom, witness and work of many Catholic women and men who, long before his election were surfacing a new consciousness for women's equality. They untangled the true history of women leaders like Mary of Magdala from the destructive images and tales that delegitimized their authority, reminded us of how many women feel called to be deacons, and prepared the ground for a life-sustaining future when women can lead and govern as equals alongside their brothers in the Church.

So, today, I, along with thousands of Catholics around the world, celebrate what Pope Francis has done to create a more incisive female presence in the Church. But more than that, I celebrate the vision and pioneering work of women like Sr. Chris Schenk, Phyllis Zagano, Marie Graf and the earliest dreamers, prophets and laborers who cared enough to be a "bother" and who laid the foundation for these noteworthy developments. They dreamed new dreams, healed old wounds and tenaciously carried forward the vision, even when it was lonely, so that the Church might be whole, holy and more fully equipped to carry out the work of the Gospel.

DEBORAH ROSE-MILAVEC  
Executive Director

# Focus

on FutureChurch

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# From Defamation to Feast Day FutureChurch's Campaign to Reclaim the True Mary of Magdala



On June 10, 2016, the Vatican announced that Pope Francis elevated the July 22nd observance of Mary of Magdala from a memorial to

a liturgical feast. FutureChurch, which has initiated several projects to restore St. Mary of Magdala to her rightful place as the “Apostle to the Apostles” over the last 19 years, immediately released a statement joining Catholics around the world in applauding the change, which places Mary of Magdala’s feast on par with those of the male apostles. “Twenty years ago FutureChurch first initiated our ongoing project to restore St. Mary of Magdala to her rightful place as the ‘Apostle to the Apostles,’ and leaders of the Church now recognize her for her role as the primary witness to the Resurrection and a key figure in our salvation history with equal standing to her male counterparts,” said FutureChurch Executive Director, Deborah Rose-Milavec. (Read FutureChurch’s full statement at <https://futurechurch.org/feast>.)

The decree announcing the change, which was issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, calls the entire Church “to reflect in a more profound way on the dignity of Woman” and says that Mary of Magdala can serve as “a paradigm of the ministry of women in the Church.”<sup>i</sup>

In a letter accompanying the decree, Congregation Secretary Archbishop Arthur Roche writes, “St. Mary Magdalene is an example of true and authentic evangelization, that is, an evangelizer who proclaims the joyful central message of Easter.” He also recalls that St. Thomas Aquinas gave Mary of Magdala the title “apostle of the apostles” because she was commissioned by Jesus to go and tell the apostles the good news of his resurrection. He concludes, “Therefore it is right that the liturgical celebration of this woman should have the same level of festivity given to the apostles in the General Roman Calendar, and that the special mission of this woman be highlighted, as an example and model to every woman in the Church.”<sup>ii</sup>

The change and abundant accolades may come as a surprise to many Western Christians who have been wrongly taught throughout their lives that Mary of Magdala was a public sinner and/or repentant prostitute despite all scriptural evidence to the contrary. Modern biblical scholarship has shown that Mary of Magdala was a woman of means who supported Jesus’ Galilean ministry, an important and faithful disciple who remained near Jesus through his crucifixion. Chosen by Jesus to be the first to witness and

proclaim his Resurrection, she was an important leader and evangelist in the early Christian community.

The centuries-long effort to discredit Mary of Magdala began in 4th century when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, prompting the Church to move away from the inclusive practices of Jesus, St. Paul, and the earliest Christian communities and embrace the patriarchal norms of the Roman Empire. As knowledge of Jesus’ many women disciples and women leaders in the early Christian community began to fade from historical memory, Mary of Magdala’s history was combined with at least two other women (Mary of Bethany and the anonymous woman of Luke 7:36-50) resulting in what scholars today call the “composite Mary.” Pope St. Gregory I first officially propagated this fallacy during a homily he delivered in around 591:

She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. What did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? It is clear, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts. What she therefore displayed more scandalously, she was now offering to God in a more praiseworthy manner. She had coveted with earthly eyes, but now through penitence these are consumed with tears. She displayed her hair to set off her face, but now her hair dries her tears. She had spoken proud things with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord’s feet, she now planted her mouth on the Redeemer’s feet. For every delight, therefore, she had had in herself, she now immolated herself. She turned the mass of her crimes to virtues, in order to serve God entirely in penance.<sup>iii</sup>

And so St. Mary of Magdala’s reputation was hijacked and her true role hidden from Western Christians for fourteen centuries. It should be noted that the Eastern Church never accepted this “composite Mary” but honored her throughout history as the Apostle to the Apostles.

Interestingly enough, this elevation to the rank of feast isn’t the first change made to the annual celebration of Mary of Magdala in recent history. The post-conciliar reform of the General Roman Calendar in 1969 brought changes to the July 22nd memorial in what seems to have been a first—if quiet and ineffective—attempt to reject the “composite Mary” of Pope St. Gregory I.

“No change has been made in the title of today’s memorial, but it concerns only Saint Mary Magdalene, to whom Christ appeared after his resurrection. It is not about the sister of Saint Martha, nor about the sinful woman whose sins the Lord forgave<sup>iv</sup>...it will make mention neither

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of Mary of Bethany nor of the sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50, but only of Mary Magdalene, the first person to whom Christ appeared after his resurrection.”<sup>v</sup>

The Gospel reading for the day changed from the story of the sinful woman of Luke to John 20:1-2, 11-18, which recalls Jesus’ first appearance to Mary of Magdala and his subsequent commissioning of her to go and tell the other apostles. Mary of Bethany’s memorial was moved to July 29th.

Still, centuries of bad exegesis and false history, preaching, art and story-telling were not erased from the Western Christian imagination by the quiet changes and a few notes in the revised General Roman Calendar. And so the false reputation—and the systemic misogyny it represented—lived on.

As a young organization, FutureChurch would take up St. Mary of Magdala’s cause with Co-founder Christine Schenk leading. In 1997, FutureChurch launched its international campaign to restore St. Mary of Magdala to her rightful place as apostle to the apostles.

Twenty-three celebrations were held that first year. Sponsors were asked to invite a biblical expert to trace Mary’s true story as presented in scripture. The presentations were followed by a prayer service at which women presided, preached and encouraged attendees to reflect on their own encounters with—and witness to—the risen Christ. And with each passing year the movement grew.

In 2016, FutureChurch received information from more than 300 individuals and communities around the world who were planning on hosting a celebration. (Read more about this year’s celebrations on page 22.)

As the movement grew, creativity abounded. Certainly there were many great speakers. There were also musical celebrations, liturgical dance programs, dramatic reenactments of women leaders in the Church, and countless other variations on the original structure – all of them celebrating the true Mary of Magdala.

Since initiating the world-wide celebrations, FutureChurch has taken additional steps to educate Catholics—including members of the hierarchy – on the true role of Mary of Magdala.

- In 2014, FutureChurch launched its “Gospel Restoration Project” to help Catholics advocate for a proclamation of the full Resurrection account of John’s Gospel on Easter Sunday, which currently omits the Resurrected Jesus’ appearance to and commissioning of Mary of Magdala in verses 10 through 18 of chapter 20.
- In August 2014, FutureChurch launched a petition demanding the Legionaries of Christ in Israel stop exploiting Mary of Magdala for the purposes of raising funds for their new project, the Magdala Center. In their

literature to potential funders, they compared Mary of Magdala to their disgraced founder, Fr. Marcial Maciel Delgollado. Catholics everywhere signed the petition and, in short order, the Director of the project removed the defamatory literature and apologized.

- In July 2015, FutureChurch launched a petition and letter writing campaign (#ReclaimMagdala) to address the misrepresentation of Mary of Magdala in the *Prayer of Mercy* written for the Jubilee Year of Mercy. That petition was delivered in Rome to the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization by Executive Director Deborah Rose-Milavec and FutureChurch intern, Luke Hansen, SJ.
- Today, much of FutureChurch’s print and online material about Mary of Magdala features a relief *St. Mary of Magdala Proclaiming the Resurrection* by Margaret Beaudette, SC, which was commissioned by FutureChurch Trustee and long-time Mary of Magdala advocate, Rita Houlihan.

While no single person, organization, campaign, effort or event can claim all the credit for the the elevation, FutureChurch supporters and members certainly played a critical role through their participation in the organization’s nineteen-year effort. Sister Christine Schenk notes:

“It’s not often that working to be the change we long to see actually happens in one’s own lifetime. I am extraordinarily grateful for the providence of God, and for the powerful Holy Spirit energy at work in literally tens of thousands women and men over the past 19 years. This would not have happened without them.”<sup>vi</sup>

While the most recent change is an important milestone in the history of the Church and in FutureChurch’s effort to restore Mary of Magdala to her rightful place, there is still much work to be done to create equality among genders in Catholic Church. FutureChurch will continue to point out injustice in the Church, to stand up for women’s ministry and leadership, to educate, to empower, and to tell the true story of Mary of Magdala, and to lift up the witnesses of women throughout the centuries who spread the Good News. (Read more about what changes come with this elevation to the feast day on page 5.)

<sup>i</sup>Decree: the celebration of St. Mary Magdalene raised to a feast in the General Roman Calendar June 10, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup>“Mary Magdalene, Apostle of the Apostles.” *Vatican.va*. 10 June 2016. Web. 16 Aug. 2016.

<sup>iii</sup>Carroll, James. “Who Was Mary Magdalene?” *Smithsonian.com*. June 2006. Web. 16 Aug. 2016.

<sup>iv</sup>*Calendarium Romanum* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1969), p. 131

<sup>v</sup>Ibid, p. 98

<sup>vi</sup>Schenk, Christine, CSJ. FutureChurch’s 2016 Mary of Magdala Celebration. Cleveland, Ohio. 27 July 2016.

# Chris Schenk reflects on her decades of work advocating for Mary of Magdala



Flashback: 1989-class at St. Mary Seminary in Fr. George Smiga's class on the New Testament. I was stunned to discover there is no evidence whatsoever that St. Mary of Magdala was a prostitute but ample evidence in all four

Gospels that she was the first witness to the Resurrection. But who knew? No one! And I vowed then to let people know about her faith-filled leadership if ever I could.

Enter God's inscrutable providence. In 1997, as director at FutureChurch, I was at last able to fulfill my vow by launching FutureChurch's international campaign to restore St. Mary of Magdala to her rightful place as the apostle to the apostles.

We asked our supporters to sponsor special celebrations on or around July 22 at which a biblical expert would trace Mary's unparalleled fidelity in accompanying Jesus through crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. This would be followed by a prayer service at which a woman would preside, preach and encourage attendees to reflect on their own encounters with, and witness to, the risen Christ.

Our first Cleveland celebration attracted 200 people to a local parish where Fr. Smiga himself spoke. A friend encouraged about eight women from her 12-step group to attend. To my surprise, they wept unrestrainedly throughout the beautiful prayer service created and led by pastoral minister, Laurel Jurecki, who was clothed in a white alb.

It dawned on me that we were touching something very deep within the Catholic female psyche. A long-buried wound was slowly being brought to the Spirit's healing light.

Annual celebrations of St. Mary of Magdala exploded after that, going from 23 that first year, to 150 the following year to between 250 to 400 celebrations worldwide in each of the last 17 years. Every summer, thousands of women and men helped correct an egregious injustice done to a great woman leader in our church. And every summer, more women wept as wounds of unconscious misogyny were healed by the Spirit's gentle touch.

And now, just two months ago the Vatican actually changed St Mary of Magdala's memorial to one on par with all of the other apostles.

It's not often that working to be the change we long to see actually happens in one's own lifetime. I am

extraordinarily grateful for the providence of God, and for the powerful Holy Spirit energy at work in literally tens of thousands women and men over the past 19 years. This would not have happened without them.

Margaret Mead is quite correct when she says: "Never doubt that a small number of people can change the world. They're the only ones who ever have." But we have a long way to go before women's ministry is in on par with men's ministry in the Catholic Church. Sadly, misogyny is alive and well and coming to a poll booth near you.

This is where the Holy Spirit comes in to do her thing—but she needs our help. So I ask you to pay attention to the Spirit's call within you. Where can you make a difference? Where can you sow seeds for a future you may never see, but one that won't happen at all if you don't begin now.

I long for a Catholic church in which all of our daughters and sons are proud to raise their families. Come Holy Spirit, Renew the face of our church so we may at last proclaim a God in whose image both women and men are made. Amen.

## A Proper Feast: Why elevating the memorial of Mary of Magdala matters

On July 22nd of this year, for the first time ever, the Church celebrated the Feast day of St. Mary of Magdala. Yet, some Catholics may not immediately see why celebrating Mary of Magdala with a feast day makes a difference. Still others may wonder whether or not this is actually a change, "haven't we been celebrating the feast day of St. Mary of Magdala these last many years?" they might ask.

So why does it matter? Because of hierarchy. Now, many of us would like to move away from the hierarchical model of thinking, being, and doing Church. Yet, in much of the institutional Church, hierarchy is the only way of thinking, being, and doing Church. Elevating the celebration of St. Mary of Magdala places her in a new category in the Communion of Saints, a category she shares with only a handful of saints of the most significance in the life and history of the Church. This promotion also brings new liturgical benefits to her celebration that make it more likely that Catholics will learn who Mary of Magdala really was. And so this change,

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does make a difference, particularly in an institutional Church that thinks hierarchically and liturgically.

### The Hierarchy of Feast Days

It's important to know that while Catholics refer to almost any special day in the liturgical calendar as a "feast day," there are actually three separate ranks of what we call "feast" days. A hierarchy.

Solemnities are at the top of the hierarchy. These are the celebrations of greatest importance for the Church. Solemnities include important moments in our faith such as Christmas, Easter, The Ascension, and Pentecost. Solemnities also mark key mysteries of our faith and major titles for Jesus like Trinity Sunday, The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and Christ the King Sunday. Few individual saints are celebrated universally with Solemnities<sup>1</sup>, though All Saints Day is a Solemnity. Those saints who are celebrated with a solemnity are Mary the mother of Jesus and her husband Joseph, John the Baptist, and Sts. Peter and Paul.

Feasts are the second rank of celebration. Feasts generally celebrate titles for and some events in the life of Jesus, such as The Baptism of the Lord, The Transfiguration, the

Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Feasts are also used to honor many major Marian celebrations and saints of major and universal importance: the evangelists, the apostles, and now Mary of Magdala.

Memorials—the third and final rank—are also the most numerous on the calendar. The memorial most often celebrates a saint (prior to the change, Mary of Magdala had been celebrated with a memorial) and most saints are celebrated with a memorial. Though, some aspects of Jesus or Mary are celebrated with a memorial: the Holy Name of Jesus or the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Memorials are separated into two types: obligatory<sup>ii</sup> and optional. If Mass is being celebrated on a day with an obligatory memorial it must be observed, while optional memorials need not be celebrated. Mary of Magdala's feast had been an obligatory memorial.

### Why Rank Them?

Such a structure serves practical purposes in a Church that thinks both hierarchically and liturgically. For a Church that thinks hierarchically, this structure helps sort out which mysteries, events, titles, and people are of more importance in the life of the Church and therefore take precedence over others. This can be especially helpful when a date on the calendar gets "double booked." Those commemorations with a higher ranking take precedent over lower ranking commemorations should they land on the same date.

For a Church that thinks liturgically, this structure helps to determine how much "pomp and circumstance" goes into a celebration. Generally, in the institutional Church's liturgical imagination, more is better. And so the higher the rank, the more elements in the celebration.

A Solemnity looks much like a Sunday Mass and some Solemnities have a

vigil Mass the night before. There are three proper readings, which interrupt the flow of the daily readings that is previously set in the liturgical calendar. Both the Creed and Gloria—even during Advent and Lent—are recited. They have prayers throughout the Mass that are specific to them. And at the beginning of the liturgy of the Eucharist there is a preface that is recited by the presider leading up to the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy) that is specific to that Solemnity.

The typical feast does not have a vigil Mass the night before. Feasts usually have prayers that are proper to them including a preface, a Gloria, and have two proper readings. Feasts of the Lord that land on a Sunday in Ordinary Time or at Christmas are treated a little bit differently and usually have more elements.

Memorials are a simpler affair and usually have a proper opening prayer and may have proper readings. However, the readings of the day may be used, and the lectionary recommends against interrupting the cycle of daily readings with readings for memorials. Though, the proper reading for saints who are specifically mentioned in scripture—such as Mary of Magdala—are used.

### What does this mean for Mary of Magdala and for the Church?

With some estimates placing the number of saints as high as 10,000 it matters that St. Mary of Magdala is now one of only a handful of saints – male or female – who is honored with a Feast To this writer's knowledge Mary of Magdala is the only woman saint other than Mary of Nazareth to be honored this way. Feasts are an honor reserved for only the most significant and universally important saints. Celebrating Mary of Magdala with a Feast rightly places her alongside those saints: the evangelists and the apostles.

The only saints to receive the greater honor of a Solemnity are Mary of Nazareth and Joseph, Sts. Peter and Paul, and John the Baptist. Meanwhile, St. Mary of Magdala now outranks most saints including those generally viewed as some of the greats: St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Clare, St. Catherine of Siena, and even Pope St. Gregory the Great—the first pope to officially propagate the “composite Mary,” which is now rejected by scholars of history and scripture.

In terms of the liturgical elements, perhaps the most important development that comes with this elevation is the introduction of a proper preface specific to Mary of Magdala. The preface, appropriately titled, “De Apostolorum Apostola,” tells the true story of Mary of Magdala, her importance in the Jesus movement, her role in the early Church as apostle to the apostles, and her divinely ordained role in spreading the Good News of Easter:

*In the garden He appeared to Mary Magdalene,  
who loved him in life, who witnessed his death on the cross,  
who sought him as he lay in the tomb,  
who was the first to adore him when he rose from the dead,  
and whose apostolic duty was honored by the apostles,  
so that the good news of life might reach the ends of the earth.*

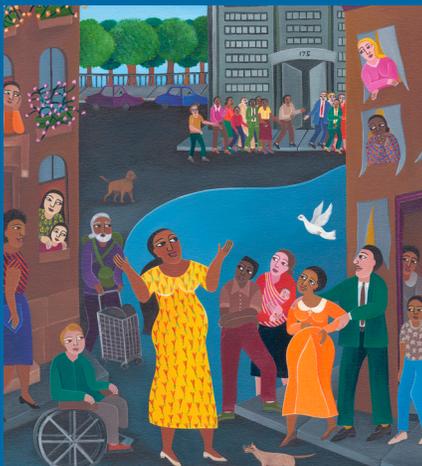
The preface was officially released in Latin along with the decree. Local bishops’ conferences have the duty of translating it into the vernacular (see a working English translation on page 25). Once approved by the Vatican, these translations will be added to the Roman Missal before its next printing. Previously, the preface in use for the July 22nd celebration of Mary of Magdala had been a generic proper of saints. When coupled with the proper readings for the day—particularly John’s Resurrection account—this new preface holds great potential for reeducating Catholics on Mary of Magdala and dispelling the centuries-long false understanding that she was a prostitute or public sinner.

In a Church that thinks hierarchically and liturgically, there are few steps that the Vatican could have taken that would have as lasting and as broad of an impact as elevating St. Mary of Magdala’s celebration to a Feast does. This elevation says something important about Mary of Magdala and asks Catholics—lay and ordained—to take notice.

There are also proper solemnities, which celebrate a saint with a solemnity only in a particular geographic place or within a particular religious community. For instance, in Ireland, St. Patrick is celebrated with a proper solemnity. In the United States, however, St. Patrick is celebrated with a memorial.

<sup>i</sup>Not to be confused with Holy days of Obligation.

## FutureChurch Convenes the First Ever Retreat for Women Discerning a Call to the Permanent Diaconate



Today many women lead parishes, serve as catechists and chaplains, and engage in other ministries in a Catholic context. In light of the Church’s mission and pastoral needs, local

Churches should be empowered to call forth women for the ordained diaconate of liturgy, the Word, and charity.

From September 16 – 18, 2016, twenty women came together for the first ever retreat for women who are discerning a call to the permanent diaconate. The retreat was led by FutureChurch staff members Deborah Rose-Milavec and Russ Petrus, with Sr. Chris Schenk serving as the Spiritual Director. One of the participants, Cindi “Sam” Bowns offered a reflection and guidance on discerning a vocation sharing key moments from her own experience.

The goal of the retreat was to create sacred space for women who are

discerning a call to the permanent diaconate. The retreat was designed to educate participants about the history and theology of the permanent diaconate, to create a generous space for prayer, quiet reflection, and discernment, and to engender greater awareness in the church through education and advocacy about restoring the female diaconate today.

The following week, three of the participants offered their stories and answered questions at a press event organized by FutureChurch. Cindi “Sam” Bowns spoke of her own journey saying, “Discerning becoming a deacon came to me while attending Diaconal formation with my husband.

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## Mary of Magdala: A History, by Marie Graf, FutureChurch Board Chair



In those first years of our movement to celebrate St. Mary of Magdala, we were thrilled with each and every new group that participated. We were surprised when we went from celebrations in 23 cities in the first year to celebrations in 150 cities in the second year. And by the fifth

year, we counted 224 celebrations not only across the United States, but internationally: in the United Kingdom, Kenya, South Africa, El Salvador, Australia and Canada. And since then, there have been celebrations in countries around the world. We don't have a final count for this year but we know there will be well over 300 celebrations. We were shocked—but oh so pleased! We really were not sure that a yearly event would be sustainable. But we touched a deep chord—one that twitched and spasmed—one that started a movement we could not have predicted.

And the creativity put forth in these celebrations also surprised us. There were certainly great speakers. There were musical programs. There were liturgical dance programs. There were enactments of women leaders of our church. Scripts were written. Prayer services were offered. But most importantly, people—men as well as women—were engaged in the thought that there is biblical evidence of the importance of women for our church.

And that's the chord we struck. Women of faith were yearning for a reflection of themselves in church celebrations. They were hungry for role models—they were yearning for hope. And the celebration of Mary of Magdala as the Apostle to the Apostles provided that.

But we also dealt with people who were negative about our celebrations. There was a gentleman who accused me and all the FutureChurch supporters of being wiccan—of wanting to start a coven of some sort because we dared to say that Mary of Magdala was not a prostitute. We were picketed because we dared to speak out about expanding women's roles in our church—of recognizing the contributions of women in the history of our church. But we persevered—we did not give up because we knew that the chord we had struck had begun to sing a great song—and it took on a life of its own.

Press coverage was surprisingly supportive of our movement. We had people all over the country writing editorial pieces about Mary of Magdala and restoring her rightful place in our church history. And the papers ran them! Over the years, we have had coverage not only in the Catholic publications, but the secular press: the LA Times, the Dallas Morning News, Chicago Sun Times. We have had radio and television news coverage—not just here in the United States but overseas as well.

I feel validation for all the work FutureChurch and supporters have done over these years—our persistence in proclaiming her role as the Apostle to the Apostles—our powerful message that women matter in this church and the need for extended roles in our church. With the elevation of the celebration of St. Mary of Magdala to a feast day—recognition by our church of the importance of this particular woman whom God chose to proclaim the good news of the risen Lord—we now have a glimmer of hope for change that could come. And the announcement by Pope Francis of the formation of a commission to study the possibility of reinstating women deacons in the Catholic church gives us even more hope for change in the future.

We certainly were not the first to proclaim the true identity of Mary of Magdala as the Apostle to the Apostles. But I like to think that it was because of the efforts of FutureChurch that we are now celebrating the Feast Day of St. Mary of Magdala. Still, we will continue to be diligent—we take nothing for granted. But we feel the spirit moving and she is helping us build a future church for our daughters and our sons.

## AUSCP and FutureChurch Build a Bridge by Bob Bonnot

Relative to FutureChurch, the AUSCP (Association of U.S. Catholic Priests) is a novice in the work of realizing the Spirit-inspired dreams of Vatican II—a 50-year old ecumenical council unlike any in our history.

The AUSCP has been honored in recent years to have the support of FutureChurch at our assemblies. From our start in 2011, the AUSCP has intended to build Bridges to the Laity, but due to time and organizational constraints, was not able to give it the full attention we intended. This year we made that intention a formal goal that included building bridges with FutureChurch, Voice of the Faithful, and Leadership Conference of Women Religious. That goal passed at the assembly this year and our work together will be on our agenda this year and the coming year.

AUSCP's vision is to be "a priests' voice of hope and joy within our pilgrim church." We priests have a servant-leader role to the priestly-prophetic-leader role of all the baptized. Future Church has been playing those roles for more than 25 years now, with the involvement and support of some ordained. AUSCP hopes that we can enable greater collective collaboration.

Each of our AUSCP assemblies has focused on one or

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## From the Program Director's Desk



What a year it's been! Along with Catholics all over the world, FutureChurch has celebrated many important moments in the life and history of our Church. Two highlights are the elevation of the annual commemoration of St. Mary of Magdala from memorial to feast and the newest (and I should point out,

gender-balanced) commission to study women deacons. As we reflect on these important moments, we owe it to ourselves to recognize and celebrate the role that organizations like FutureChurch and its members, supporters, volunteers and staff played in bringing forth these historic moments. It is precisely because these countless scores of faithful Catholics relied on their conscience and spoke out on matters concerning the good of the Church that these moments were possible.

Commenting on the elevation of Mary of Magdala's feast day, Sister Christine Schenk remarked at our local celebration: "It's not often that working to be the change we long to see actually happens in one's own lifetime." I don't need to tell any of you who have been with FutureChurch since the beginning how true that is. Many of FutureChurch's founding members and so many members of the Church reform community were not here to celebrate these moments with us, but know they are here still.

I guess I feel lucky. I've been program director for FutureChurch just over a year now and have witnessed these significant moments with so many of you who have worked so long for them. A guy could get use that kind of success! I can only begin to fathom the amount of perseverance, work, faith, hope, love, and trust that so many of you put in over the last many years. Much work continues to be done and I feel so privileged to have the chance to add my gifts and efforts to the cause.

It's been exciting and energizing to work with Deb, the board, and so many of you in developing new programs such as our Women Deacons Retreat, the Women Witnesses of Mercy Series, the Catholic Women Preach Website (launching November 1st) and the A Church for Our Daughters campaign. Joining in this work with others has been humbling. Especially meaningful are the efforts to celebrate Mary of Magdala worldwide and restore women deacons through our new education and advocacy website ([www.catholicwomendeacons.org](http://www.catholicwomendeacons.org)).

I pray the Holy Spirit will work through me—as She has through you—for many years to come as we together we continue to follow our consciences, to speak out for the good of the Church to, take action, and to work to make the Church we love even better.

RUSS PETRUS  
Program Director

## FutureChurch Welcomes Fr. Charles Curran and Archbishop Paul-Andre Durocher to 2016 Fall Event



Fr. Charles Curran      Archbishop Paul-Andre Durocher

FutureChurch was honored to welcome Fr. Charles Curran as the keynote speaker for our Annual Fall Event held on September 22nd. He presented *The Joy of Love: The Role of Conscience* commenting on both the 2-year synod process and the final apostolic exhortation.

A popular priest, theologian and teacher in the area of Catholic Moral Theology, Fr. Curran offered four main take-aways, primarily from chapter eight of *Amoris Laetitia*:

1. Pope Francis reaffirms the notion of gradualism—the need to hold onto the full ideal of marriage and while allowing for stages of personal growth.
2. Rules are not enough. There is a difference between objective morality and subjective culpability. In the midst of specificity and complexity, the general rule might not be binding.
3. The Magisterium cannot decide everything or provide a new set of general rules canonical in nature and applicable in all cases.
4. The role of conscience is extremely important because of the complexities involved in various situations.

**Archbishop Paul-André Durocher** joined us by live stream to receive the 2016 Trivison Award. FutureChurch honored Archbishop Durocher for his leadership at the 2015 Family Synod when he made international news for his invitation to the bishops gathered to open discussion on women deacons, expand women's leadership in the Church, and to find ways to end violence against women. In his remarks, Archbishop Durocher affirmed the connection between the treatment of women in the world and the treatment of women in the Church calling for Catholics to find new ways to reduce violence against women and to open new doors for women's leadership and ministry. His remarks can be found on his blog at <http://singandwalk.blogspot.com/>.

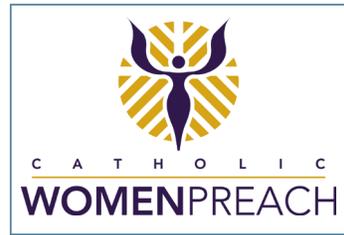
# Want to Hear What Catholic Women Have to Say?

## Catholic Women Preach is Coming this Advent!

Catholic Women Preach is an innovative project designed to address some of the most pressing challenges facing the Church today by responding to Pope Francis' call for broader and more active engagement of the baptized in the preaching mission of the Church.

Catholic Women Preach will provide a well-designed, resource rich and easily accessible website—[CatholicWomenPreach.org](http://CatholicWomenPreach.org)—where all the faithful including clergy, catechists, RCIA, parish study groups, campus ministers, retreat leaders, and others in church ministry can find:

- Challenging, inspiring and theologically sound preaching—in text and video—by highly qualified and respected Catholic women each Sunday and some holy days.
- Catholic women preachers who are diverse in age, ethnicity and nationality reflecting on Scripture from their distinct point of view.
- The women of salvation history who are too often omitted from the Sunday and weekday lectionary texts or misrepresented.
- Creative ways women can preach today.
- Resources for parishes, faith sharing groups, and individuals for incorporating Catholic Women Preach into meetings, programs, or private prayer.



Kerry Robinson, Barbara Reid, OP, Carolyn Woo and more.

Our lineup of preachers includes Jamie Phelps, OP, Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP, Nontando Hadebe, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Chris Schenk, CSJ, Marie Dennis,

This exciting project has received support from well-respected Catholics in the United States and around the world including Shawn Copeland, Richard Gaillardetz, Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Thomas Groome, Nontando Hadebe, Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP, Jim Keenan, SJ., Rev. Raymond Kemp, Paul Lakeland, Rhonda Miska, Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ, Brian Pierce, OP, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Barbara Reid, OP, Kerry Robinson, Christine Schenk, CSJ and Jude Siciliano, OP who serve on the advisory board for this project.

Throughout history, women have played a critical role in building up of the Church. Women such as Mary of Magdala, Catherine of Siena, and Dorothy Day have inspired Catholics to dream of a world where God's vision of justice and peace brings light to every darkened corner of the world. Catholic Women Preach offers an exciting new platform for women to proclaim the Good News of God's saving grace and radical love for all God's people and creation. Join when the website launches on November 1, 2016, in time for Advent!

[CatholicWomenPreach.org](http://CatholicWomenPreach.org)



**COMING NOVEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup>**  
**WITH PREACHING FOR**

[www.catholicwomenpreach.org](http://www.catholicwomenpreach.org)

@catholicwomenpreach

@CWP112716

### INSPIRED PREACHING

Video and text of challenging, inspiring and theologically sound preaching by highly qualified and respected Catholic women for each Sunday as well as holydays of obligation and select feast days

### DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Catholic women preachers who are diverse in age, ethnicity and nationality reflecting on Scripture from their distinct point of view

### PASTORAL POSSIBILITIES

Resources for all the faithful including clergy, catechists, parish study groups, campus ministers, retreat leaders, and others in church ministry

other of the Vatican II Constitutions. This year we focused, for a second time, on *Gaudium et Spes*. We live in a blessed moment when Pope Francis has reignited our hopes with his focus on the Joy of the Gospel and on Mercy. That focus is crucial in a time when our world is too full of anger and violence, sadness and despair, cynicism and disgust. Our faith and our work are



premised on the conviction that God is at work in and through us. We believe that our efforts enable the Spirit to accomplish something that makes a difference. By bridging our inspirations and energies together as Church, present and future, we enable the Spirit to do wonders beyond our imagination.

At this year's assembly, AUSCP priests pondered the challenges of environment, migration, and being Church in the World -- for it rather than against it. We acknowledged clericalism in ordained and laity. We corporately lamented the reality of child abuse by priests. We prayed for forgiveness and affirmed our hope for God's healing of the abused and their families, the wrongly accused, the abusers, our leaders and all our pilgrim church.

We addressed the reality of priestless parishes and the merging/closing of parishes, caused in large part by the worsening shortage of priests. Deb Rose-Milavec led a colloquium sharing the insights and work of FutureChurch in this area. We committed ourselves to help find a better national pastoral response.

The Bridges we hope to build have many planks with various organizations, some already identified: enabling the laity to preach, eliminating racism in our church, deepening our commitment to gospel non-violence, closing the equality gap by fighting for \$15 minimum wage, abolishing the death penalty, reducing gun violence and, working together. All that is intimidating, but by working together where possible, we can enable the Spirit to...turn our Vatican II hopes and dreams into joys. May it be so. We've only just begun.

## Gender Justice in the Church by Ann Burns



The hardest lesson I never expected to learn in college was one of worthiness. The struggle was, and in many

ways still is, a roundabout journey of discovery, during which my stubborn tendencies put forth a fair fight. And God has been patient with me, as God always is. But, with some well-placed invitations and no shortage of help, I have started to warm up to the idea that I am loved, and that I am worthy of that love. With this awareness of my own worthiness, I have also come to see the ways that my dignity as a human person, as a beloved child of God, is not always recognized or celebrated as it ought to be, particularly in my experiences as a young, Catholic woman.

My entrance into conversations of gender justice in the Church happened in the blink of an eye. The topic manifested itself organically, in my personal experience of faith and in the communities I shared faith with, but in just the last year I have been invited into the larger family of church reform organizations, and seen the concerted effort that so many incredible humans dedicate to the Church that they know and love, if not always like. It has been empowering, as a young person, and especially as a young woman, to see that others across the country and the world share my questions, my hopes, and my willingness to do something about all of it. With the encouragement of these newfound companions, I found myself asking how I could be of use.

Naming my worthiness brought with it the ability to name another truth: I

have gifts to offer, talents to bring and share with this community of faith. As I exclaimed to a friend just last year, "I am good at stuff!" Given the current organization of the Church, my ability to share these gifts is limited. My desire to invest my life in this communal Church is met with an institution that is unwilling to invest in me. Enter FutureChurch. As I learned more about church reform movements and those people and organizations advocating for equitable communities in the Church, I learned about the efforts of FutureChurch. Wanting to leverage my time and talents for the advancement of such conversations, I was invited to intern for the summer alongside their remarkable team, to learn, share life, and build community. At Future Church, I have found a place to put my energy, passion, and faith to work, a place to be celebrated for

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# Reading *The Joy of Love* with Catholics Who Live It

By Deborah Rose-Milavec



Over the past months, I had the honor of visiting with Catholics in Tulsa, St. Paul, Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse and Albany to share my insights about the Synod on the Family after closely following it in Rome in 2014 and 2015.

At each stop, I met people for whom the Joy of Love has long been a way of life. It was heartening. It was humbling.

In Tulsa, a small band of Catholics keep the dream of Vatican II alive through their educational programs and outreach. They are the faithful ones who tenaciously bring God's Word to their world.

In St. Paul, the Sisters of St. Joseph are at the epicenter of faithful and yet, prophetic educational work. Resources from Good Ground Press ([goodgroundpress.com](http://goodgroundpress.com)) break open the Word of God for Catholics of all ages integrating modern scholarship into all of their work.

In Rochester, faithful Catholics, both women and men, are preaching the Good News via a website, God's Word, Many Voices ([godswordmanyvoices.org](http://godswordmanyvoices.org)).

In Albany, at the University of St. Rose, there is an upper room, the Hubbard Interfaith Sanctuary, where Spirit-led Catholics create a sacred space for prophetic voices thus making God's dream a reality.

St. Lucy's Church in Syracuse is holy ground. When you enter, one of the first things you notice is a sign recalling all our faithful prophetic sisters and brothers who have been silenced. Upon entering, the walls are filled with large black and white photos of modern day saints and prophets from Gandhi to the Berrigan brothers to Rosa Parks. A weekday reading at Mass included an excerpt from the book, *Catholic Women Speak*. It was truly a spiritual experience.

Still, I was especially touched by a sign that stood at the entrance of the Newman Center in Buffalo. It beautifully illustrated the kind of community many Catholics and Pope Francis want. It could have rightly been the banner cry for the 2-year synod process. The sign read:

What we mean by EVERYBODY WELCOME!  
Single, twice-divorced, under 30, gay, filthy rich, black and proud, poor as dirt, can't sing, no habla inglés, married with pets, older than God, more Catholic than the Pope, workaholic, bad speller, screaming babies, three-times divorced, passive aggressive, obsessive compulsive, tourists, seekers, doubters, bleeding hearts,  
OH AND YOU!

As I read the message over and over, tears of gratitude streamed down my cheeks. This is the Church we long for. This is the message that should be/can be The Joy of Love. At that moment, I loved this wondrously messy Church more deeply than ever. Filled with saints and sinners, this is the place where the unconditional love of our God has a chance to sprout and grow.

## Gender Justice in the Church continued from page 11

all that I bring to community, and a place to walk boldly in the direction of the Church and the world that are the subjects of my most magnanimous hopes and dreams.

But what direction is that, exactly? While I only started my work with FutureChurch in the beginning of July, I have been thrown right into a research project that seeks to uncover who and how many women have dedicated their lives to work within the Church. From

the Congregations and Commissions of the Curia right on down to the most local pastoral associates, this research aims to celebrate the ways that women share their gifts for the benefit of the Catholic Church. Of course, this research will also shed light on the enormous work left to be done in the diversification of Church leadership, as only a small percentage of decision making positions across the universal Church are held by women. I hope that the website to be created from this

data, though, will serve as a place to track the progress that we, as Church, can make in the inclusion of women in tangible leadership. As we step forward together into the future of our Church, this website will offer a space of reflection and accountability, as Pope Francis' words meet their metric. Then maybe, someday, we will find that God does indeed delight, as all people have a welcomed and celebrated place at the banquet table.

# Let's Build It Together:

## A Church for Our Daughters Campaign Invites U.S. Bishops to Dialogue on Alarming Trend



On June 14, a pink wave rolled onto the shores of Huntington Beach, California where the United States Conference of Bishops was meeting for their annual spring general assembly. The wave—a witness for equality made up of about 40 activists participating in the “A Church for Our Daughter’s Campaign”—was an attempt to churn up discussion with the bishops on an alarming trend facing the Church: Women are leaving the Church at unprecedented and unsustainable rates.

The campaign is an effort sponsored by thirty Catholic organizations including FutureChurch. “A Church for Our Daughters” is a clarion call to our U.S. bishops to wake up to the reality they have created over the past several decades—a church that no longer dreams God’s dream for her people or has the courage to try,” said Deborah Rose-Milavec, executive director of FutureChurch.

The group, dressed in pink, hoped to deliver a 4,000-signature petition with 15 recommendations for

creating “a Church that is truly inclusive and alive with the gifts, spirit, and potential of all its members.” They also carried pink carnations attached to personalized invitations for dialogue to hand deliver to the bishops who had gathered at an ocean-side resort for a week of meetings and presentations.

The Church for Our Daughters Campaign was first envisioned at the November 2015 meeting of Catholics Organizations for Renewal (COR) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. “We were all concerned about the growing body of evidence being presented by Pew, CARA, and others that women—particularly young women—are leaving the Church at unprecedented rates,” says Russ Petrus, program director of FutureChurch.

Recent sociological research shows that women’s centuries-long loyalty to the Church can no longer be taken for granted, a fact that is documented in great detail in *American Catholics in Transition* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013): “Unlike their

grandmothers and mothers, Catholic women born after Vatican II seem less willing to give the institutional church the benefit of the doubt and to stay loyal to the Church and Catholicism while hoping for change.”<sup>ii</sup>

A closer look at data pertaining to the Millennial generation published in *American Catholics in Transition* (see chart) reveals that while the Millennial generation as a whole is significantly less devout than their elders, “non-Hispanic millennial women stand out for their disengagement from and indifference toward Catholicism”<sup>iii</sup>. In fact, according to socialist Sr. Patricia Wittberg, “An analysis of the General Social Surveys (GSS) from 2002-12 shows that the likelihood of exiting Catholicism altogether is greater among young adult Catholic women than it is among Catholic men their age.”<sup>iiii</sup>

The trend has touched the lives of many of the A Church for Our Daughters organizers. “As we went around the room, each of us had a personal story to share that gave spirit and flesh to the numbers: adult children who never went Mass; new parents who were discerning whether or not to raise their children Catholic, grandchildren who had never been baptized or were now being raised in other traditions; talented friends who—after years of heartache and rejection—offered their gifts and vocations elsewhere. We knew we had to do something for the Church and the people we love.”

Over the course of the two-day COR meeting, a plan was put in place. First, there needed to be a declaration of a vision for what a Church for our daughters actually look like (See the Declaration for Our Daughters on page 15). The Declaration would eventually

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serve as the basis for the petition, which can still be signed at [www.achurchforourdaughters.org](http://www.achurchforourdaughters.org). Next, two working groups would seek to bring that vision to life: an education team would develop content for a website that would educate Catholics on the issues raised by the declaration, and an action and events team would develop ways of engaging Catholics in the movement and inviting bishops to dialogue on the topic, including the witness for equality held in June. FutureChurch was represented by Deborah Rose-Milavec who served on the actions and events team and Russ Petrus who served as the chairperson for the education committee. Both were also a part of the team that helped craft *The Declaration for Our Daughters*.

The next several months saw several planning meetings as organization after organization signed on to the initiative. Tremendous energy at the grassroots level, and media interest led to the June 14th event in Huntington Beach. The campaign was covered by The National Catholic Reporter, Religion Dispatches, The Orange County Register, and TIME. (Visit [www.achurchforourdaughters.org](http://www.achurchforourdaughters.org) to see all of the coverage.)

Ultimately, the wave of pink-clad witnesses for equality crashed into the break-wall of hierarchical silence represented by resort security. Still, at the entrance of the resort, participants read the Declaration, gave several planned and impromptu witnesses, and sang religious and secular songs of equality and inclusion. "It was disappointing that we weren't able to engage with the bishops directly. But they knew we were there and they knew why we were there. They won't be able to ignore this problem for long. And in some ways, they made our point for us by not permitting us – a group that was largely women – access to the resort. Beach-goers and resort guests alike stopped and listened to our presentation, sang with us, and took information about our initiative," says Russ Petrus, who represented FutureChurch in Huntington Beach. Board member, Barbara Guerin, was also in attendance for the demonstration.

After the demonstration, the petition and a bouquet of pink carnations were delivered to the USCCB offices in Washington, D.C.

In addition to its leadership in planning and executing the campaign and witness for equality, FutureChurch incorporated the campaign into its 2016 Mary of Magdala Celebrations organizing kits and hosted two teleconferences on the topic. *Celebrating Mary of Magdala: Building a Church for Our Daughters* was used by other 300 communities of faith throughout the world in planning their Mary of Magdala celebrations. A teleconference hosted in July featured sociologist Patricia Wittberg, SC, Ph.D., who presented "Young Women in the Catholic Church." The second teleconference, on August 24th, "Millennials Speak for Themselves" featured the voices of two Catholic Millennial women, Annie Burns and Michelle Maddex. Recordings of the teleconference can be heard at [www.futurechurch.org/podcasts](http://www.futurechurch.org/podcasts).

<sup>i</sup>D'Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier. *American Catholics in Transition*. 96-97: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013

<sup>ii</sup>Ibid., 148

<sup>iii</sup>Wittberg, Patricia, S.C. "The Alienation of Millennial Catholic Women." *Vatican II Essays*. Wakeuplazarus.net, retrieved 14 Aug. 2016.

## Retreat for Women, continued from page 7

A seed had been planted in us by a women parishioner and affirmed by others in our parish, including my mentor and priest, who later had me anoint him on his deathbed in the presence of a fellow priest. Affirmation once again, came upon my husband's ordination when older parishioners (pre-Vatican II) called me Deacon as well. They thought that I had been ordained and after a while, I quit correcting them. If they could see the "deacon" in me, who was I to challenge that?

My husband and I share a complementariness to each other in ministry and ministering together is a deep joy in our marriage. We would love to see me ordained, sharing yet another deep connection. We are currently sought out by many parishioners who gravitate towards us because they see something of themselves in us. They know that on many different levels we can connect to them on their journey through life because of our own experiences.

What a gift ordaining women to the Permanent Diaconate would be to the community—when women could see the image of themselves as co-equals in sacramental grace? What a positive image that would be for men as well as women—women reflecting a deeper image of God."

CINDI "SAM" BOWNS

# declaration

## For Our Daughters Addressed to the U.S. Bishops

We are women and men, sisters and brothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers, godparents—members of the Catholic community who are deeply committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and who believe the Body of Christ must include all genders equally. Today, we call on our Church leaders to work with us to build a Church that strikes down every oppressive practice, teaching, and law that assigns women and girls to a subordinate status. We call on our leaders to create a Church that is truly inclusive and alive with the gifts, spirit, and potential of all its members.

### **A Church for our daughters is a community that**

- recognizes that all people are created in God's image and equally endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the common good.
- honors the vocations and ministries of all its members, fostering and welcoming all called to priesthood, diaconate, and liturgical leadership.
- opens its sacred sacraments to all, as nourishment and ritual without limitations based on gender or sexuality.
- celebrates the witness and contributions of our foremothers in faith – those in Scripture, those in our tradition, and those who walk with us today.
- affirms the spirit of the divine present in the gifts, needs, and dreams of all God's people.
- celebrates and promotes a spirituality that recognizes an inclusive God, beyond gender, and incorporates language that is inclusive and representative of God's feminine, masculine, and non-gendered attributes in liturgy, doctrine, and pastoral practice.
- honors women's moral agency to make decisions that impact their health and family life.
- takes a firm and proactive stand opposing all forms of exploitation and violence perpetrated against women.

- advocates for social structures that support and sustain the basic needs of women including access to clean water, clean air, adequate housing, food, security, education, the workforce, political and social engagement, and freedom of movement.

- advocates for education for all our children, but especially for our daughters around the world who face daily acts of discrimination and violence in their quest for knowledge.

- works to dismantle oppressive structures and customs that disproportionately impact women creating inequality in pay, employment opportunities, development of public policy, and property ownership.

- works to eradicate destructive forces that triply oppress women of color such as racism, religious intolerance, and unequal access to social goods.

- honors and justly compensates the contributions of women working in the Church including equal pay, equal access to job opportunities, healthcare, and paid family leave.

- seeks to be fully inclusive and representative of women and to integrate their wisdom and insights in all areas of Church life including governance, decision-making, teaching, theological reflection, and canon law.

- commits to reflect on its own participation in the oppression of women; to repent for unjust acts, systems, and teaching; and to renew structures of leadership to be more inclusive of the People of God at every level.

We pray together as a family of the faithful with the vision of a Church community that at its core upholds the full equality of all of its members.

Signed by 30 Organizations and over 4500 Signatories

# Commission on Women Deacons Offers a New Opportunity: Luke Hansen, S.J.



In the early morning hours of May 12, I awoke to an urgent Facebook message from a friend and a stunning headline from the National Catholic Reporter: “Francis to create commission to study female deacons in the Catholic Church.” We at FutureChurch might have been surprised by the news, but there is no doubt that we were well prepared for this moment.

For 26 years, FutureChurch has been telling the story of women deacons (who served for centuries) and encouraging church leaders to restore this ministry today. In the months leading up to the May 12 meeting between Pope Francis and the female leaders of religious congregations when Francis agreed to “constitute an official commission” to study the question of women deacons, FutureChurch had already laid the groundwork for this unforeseen opportunity.

**“Today women are exercising unprecedented leadership in parish, diocesan and Vatican administration, ... In what other capacities might women serve? Is the diaconate a possibility?”**

In October, FutureChurch personally delivered 8,300 signatures of support to Archbishop Paul-André Durocher who in an intervention at the Synod of Bishops called for expanded roles for women in the church, including the permanent diaconate. In March, FutureChurch launched catholicwomendeacons.org, which includes many resources for learning about the history of women deacons, discerning a vocation to the diaconate, and encouraging bishops to seriously examine this possibility. In April, FutureChurch hosted a teleconference that featured three Catholic women who are ready to serve as deacons and have experienced a call to this ministry.

These efforts are a small but significant part of a much larger movement within the church in which Catholic women are taking on expanded leadership and ministerial roles. Today women are exercising unprecedented leadership in parish, diocesan and Vatican administration, as executives and board members in Catholic schools and hospitals and charities, and as chaplains, catechists, theologians and seminary formators. (The most recent development, announced on July 11, is that Paloma Garcia Ovejero, a Spanish lay woman and veteran journalist, will serve as vice director of the Vatican Press Office.)

In what other capacities might women serve? Is the diaconate a possibility?

Some naysayers claim the Vatican already studied the question of women deacons and rendered a negative judgment. It is true that in 2002 the International Theological Commission issued a lengthy report on the historical development of the diaconate, but only two brief sections (comprising 2,660 of 42,000 total words) examined the ministry and subsequent disappearance of women deacons. This means the ITC left out reams of historical data and theological reflection on the question. Also, the ITC arrived at no definitive conclusion, instead saying that it “pertains to the ministry of discernment which the Lord established in his Church to pronounce authoritatively on this question.”

The present commission presents an unprecedented opportunity to explore the matter in greater depth and breadth, drawing from the recent scholarship of Cipriano Vagaggini, Phyllis Zagano, Gary Macy and others. In the synodal church that Pope Francis has repeatedly called for, the commission also has an opportunity to engage in a pastoral discernment involving prayer, dialogue, listening and a full assessment of missionary opportunities, pastoral needs and the gifts, charisms and actual ministry of women in the church today. The recent Synod on the family, which involved a global survey of Catholics and the encouragement of Pope Francis to bishops to speak with *parrhesia* (boldness and courage), provides a model for a pastoral discernment concerning the matter of women deacons. If this happens with great freedom and openness to the Holy Spirit, then no one knows where the winds will blow.

*Luke Hansen, S.J., as a student at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, Berkeley, Calif., served an intern with FutureChurch during the past academic year.*

# Is *Amoris Laetitia* Good News?



After the 2-year synod process with bishops from around the world reflecting on the issues families face today, on April 8, 2016, Pope Francis issued *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) translated *The Joy of Love*, his post-synodal guidance in the form of an apostolic exhortation.

The sometimes turbulent synodal process initially struck a surprisingly welcoming tone with the 2014 mid-term report, but then largely fell back into familiar territory subduing the texts that were deemed dangerous by conservative bishops. Still, there was progress notably:

- Francis's encouragement to speak freely and openly during the synod.
- His re-organization of bishops and auditors into small groups for the 2015 synod.
- The bold interventions by women auditors and bishops such as Paul Andre-Durocher.
- The unanimous proposal of the German bishops that brokered a way for communion for divorced and remarried Catholics
- The opening of the synod door to non-ordained voters with the participation of Brother Herve Janson, P.F.J. the prior general of the Little Brothers of Jesus (Foucauld).
- Francis's skill in building the consensus he needed to write AL.

Thus, given Pope Francis's desire for open dialogue and his respect for the discernment process, it is appropriate to ask: Is *The Joy of Love* good news?

It depends on whom you ask, but most Catholics were disappointed. On the one hand, many rightly hoped for greater progress in terms of the Church's welcoming, inclusive language and posture. The mid-term document raised hopes that this could happen, but those hopes were quashed with the swift pull back by conservative bishops. On the other hand, there was a fierce distancing from AL from many ultra-conservative Catholics who believed that Francis had gone too far and betrayed Catholic teaching.

## Where to Find the Good News

Decision-making processes need to be reformed so that they are truly inclusive of the laity. But given the process we have, improvements were visible. For decades, many prelates put their finger to the papal wind to determine how they viewed an issue. Going against the magisterial grain elicited a vulnerability that few wanted to risk. But Francis began coaxing his brothers toward a healthier model. He encouraged open, honest and respectful dialogue ending an era of artificially secured assent to papal prescriptions. *Amoris Laetitia* is the end product of his decisive action to prioritize the authority of bishops and to decentralize decision making.

Just as importantly, Francis skillfully found a way to bring widely divergent, geographically and culturally diverse positions into consensus. The German "miracle" that saw Cardinal Gerhard Mueller and Cardinal Walter Kasper come together for unanimous agreement on the internal forum is one example. The two-year process culminated in the 2015 *Relatio Finalis* in which all 94 paragraphs in the document passed with a majority of votes.

Finally, no one could mistake Francis's desire to bring the Church leaders out of the Benedict era of a smaller, purer Church to a big tent, messy, field hospital Church. The three most controversial paragraphs from the *Relatio Finalis* (84, 85, 86) that focused on discernment, conscience and the integration of Catholics in "irregular" unions were incorporated extensively throughout AL. Francis clearly wants pastors to do less finger wagging and to engage more fully in the messy business of loving authentically and integrating all Catholics fully into the life of the Church.

Thus, there is good news in *Amoris Laetitia*. Its message has been called "a profound shift in emphasis." Central to interpreting the document is Francis's introductory disclaimer, "I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium." Thus Francis shows his confidence that the People of God are equipped to muddle through the difficulties of life and find grace in those moments.

[A quick summary what is constructive and healing in AL includes:](#)

### 1. Love Rules over Rules

Pope Francis seeks to move all Catholics, but especially Catholic leaders, from their comfort zone where strict adherence to objective

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moral truths gives way to a more authentic and humble pastoral engagement. The framework for judging the morality of acts has been law-oriented and deductive. Francis re-prioritizes that legalistic framework in favor of relational model based on authentic respect, deep listening, trust and accompaniment.

Over and over, he implores his fellow Churchmen,—especially those who seek safety in the rules— to open themselves to this new framework saying, “The true defenders of doctrine are not those who uphold its letter, but its spirit.”

### 2. Conscience is Primary

AL creates a generous, central place for the role of conscience in Catholic life. While the teaching about the primacy of conscience has long been a part of Catholic life, it is core for deconstructing some of the walls that have been built around the altar and a key theme in AL.

### 3. The Internal Forum Expanded

Related to the role of conscience is the internal forum. AL specifies that the internal forum can be invoked on a case by case basis. While the internal forum has been around, in 1994, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger explicitly ruled it out as a pathway for the divorced and civilly remarried to return to Communion. AL opens the door where it had been closed. Throughout the document, AL clearly seeks to reset Catholic attitudes toward divorced and remarried Catholic and others who live in “irregular” unions. That reset is most clearly seen in paragraph 301 where it states, “Hence it can no longer simply be said that all those in any ‘irregular’ situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace.” Francis goes further by rejecting the notion that Catholics in second marriages should refrain from sexual intimacy and live as “brothers and sisters” as has been the requirement (See footnote 329).

Finally, footnote 351 reorients Catholic thinking about the purpose of Eucharist. It is not a tool for creating separation, but for healing and nourishment. As Francis notes, the Eucharist “is not a prize for the perfect, but powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”

### 4. Leaving Aside Words That Cast Shame

Descriptors that were in vogue at one time are dropped in AL. “Intrinsically disordered” is not used to describe LGBTQI Catholics and the term adultery is not used to describe the state of Catholics in second marriages.

## The Critics

AL contains much good news. Still, it is clear that Francis has his critics who perceive AL as a threat. The criticism comes from the usual suspects and some new ones.

In July, a group of professors and other Church officials sent a letter to Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals, and more than 200 other cardinals and patriarchs asking them to “respond to the dangers of Catholic faith and morals” in AL. The signers ask the cardinals to petition Pope Francis to “condemn the errors.”

Cardinal Raymond Burke has been using his energy in an attempt to downgrade portions of AL from a magisterial teaching to Francis’s “personal reflections.” The self-appointed monitor differentiates between, “those parts which support and give full expression to the Church’s magisterium” and those he deems as “the reflections of the Holy Father” which “are not magisterium.”\* As you will see below, Francis has gone on the offensive regarding this charge.

Archbishop Charles Chaput, one of the US prelates who attended the 2014 and 2015 Family Synod, reads AL to support his doctrinaire viewpoint. With great sophistication, his Pastoral Guidelines for Implementing Amoris Laetitia for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, skillfully weaves together passages from AL that refer to the need for mercy while citing, more vaguely, “Catholic teaching” to refute key themes of AL. For instance, Archbishop Chaput ignores Pope Francis’s clear departure from Benedict’s insistence that Catholics in second marriages that are not nullified should refrain from sexual intimacy. According to the AL footnote 329, “faithfulness is endangered and the good of the children suffer if certain expressions of intimacy” are lacking when divorced and remarried Catholics live together “as brothers and sisters.” But Chaput ignores Francis’s lead and reiterates what has been the practice—writing, “Undertaking to live as brother and sister is necessary for the divorced and civilly remarried to receive reconciliation in the sacrament of penance, which could then open the way to the Eucharist.”

Sadly, for US Catholics who long for a more inclusive Church, the archbishop was appointed by USCCB president, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, to head the ad hoc committee charged with making AL accessible and understandable. For Chaput, abiding by objective moral truths may be hard but it is the way of mercy. Separation is necessary. Shame is inevitable. The Eucharist is not nourishment but a prize.

## Francis and Allies Counter Critics

Pope Francis has been countering attempts to minimize AL or distort its message, especially onslaughts from Cardinal Raymond Burke.

Immediately after the release, Archbishop Arthur Roche, Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Cardinal Oswald Gracias and Cardinal Walter Kasper gave

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glowing reviews of AL. More recently, allies such as Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, Cardinal Walter Kasper, Rocco Buttiglione and Rodrigo Guerra López have countered frontal assaults by critics such as Cardinal Raymond Burke.

Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, the man credited with building consensus among polar opposites (C. Mueller and C. Kasper) in the German language group in order to propose the internal forum for divorced and remarried Catholics, has been at the forefront defending Pope Francis's authority and pastoral intent in AL. Defending the Pope's teaching authority against efforts to marginalize the message, he stressed, "This is an act of the magisterium." Further, rebutting interpretations of AL that strip it of its pastoral innovation, he carefully illustrates how Pope Francis's teaching is an evolution of Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*.

In Schoenborn's analysis, "John Paul II presupposes implicitly that one cannot simply say that every situation of a divorced and remarried person is the equivalent of a life in mortal sin that is separated from the communion of love between Christ and the Church. Accordingly, he was opening the door to a broader understanding, through discernment."

Schoenborn relates that to the urgency of today's societies saying, "To a greater degree than in the past, the objective situation of a person does not tell us everything about that person in relation to God and in relation to the Church. This evolution compels us to rethink what we meant when we spoke of objective situations of sin. And this implicitly entails a homogenous evolution in the understanding and in the expression of the doctrine..."

Brilliantly, Schoenborn demonstrates that in AL, Francis is simply expressing more fully what John Paul II began by "obliging us to clarify something that had remained implicit in *Familiaris Consortio*, about the link between the objectivity of a situation of sin and the life of grace in relation to God and to his Church, and—as a logical consequence—about the concrete imputability of sin."

In July, historian Rocco Buttiglione wrote an article for the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, illustrating how Francis's "creative fidelity" falls in line with the thinking of other popes.

Later in the month, Rodrigo Guerra López, a philosopher at the Center for Advanced Social Research in Queretaro, Mexico, refuted Burke's assertions at length stating, "Amoris Laetitia is a true act of pontifical teaching. It is very imprudent, in addition to being theologically incorrect, to insinuate that this apostolic exhortation is a kind of

personal opinion, almost private." Lopez also defended AL from critics, writing that the "organic development" was "an example of the hermeneutic of reform in continuity mentioned by Pope Benedict in his 2005 address to the Roman Curia, and not an example of rupture with previous teaching."

On August 23rd, Fr. Salvador Pie-Ninot, a well-known professor of ecclesiology, said AL meets all the criteria for being an example of the "ordinary magisterium" to which all members of the church should respond with "the basic attitude of sincere acceptance and practical implementation."

While *Amoris Laetitia* did not go far enough in creating a more inclusive church, it did re-orient Catholics, after a long period of Vatican II retrenchment, toward a more vibrant understanding of discernment, the primacy of conscience, the internal forum and accompaniment. It opened important new doors that ultra conservative Catholics are decrying. On the positive side, Catholics who long for a more inclusive integrated church like the Argentine bishops who recently received an affirmation from Pope Francis on their interpretation of AL, will be strengthened in their leadership. Those, like Archbishop Chaput, who headed the USCCB commission designing U.S. guidelines on AL, will largely ignore this magisterial teaching and sadly, continue to perpetuate the hurt that has plagued our church for so long and is driving away Catholics, especially younger Catholics who, rightly, no longer see the Church's teaching in this area as just or meaningful.

What Francis began more than two years ago will continue to evolve. He will continue to reinforce his message asking all Catholics, but especially those who are ordained, to recognize that life is not black and white and that "the Church needs to grow in the ability of spiritual discernment."

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<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/exclusive-cardinal-burke-says-popes-exhortation-must-be-read-critically>

[http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articoli\\_download/extra/INTERVISTA%20SCHONBORN%20INGLESE.pdf](http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articoli_download/extra/INTERVISTA%20SCHONBORN%20INGLESE.pdf)

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# FutureChurch Survey Finds Thirty-nine Percent of Female Respondents May Be Experiencing a Call to the Diaconate

## Introduction

On May 26, 2016, FutureChurch distributed an open survey via Survey Monkey to a list of just over 13,000 FutureChurch e-mail subscribers asking Catholic women to share their personal discernment regarding a call to the permanent diaconate. The survey also asked both Catholic women and men about their support for women deacons and the commission set up by Pope Francis to study the issue. Thirty (n=30) questions were directed to women and a subset of the questions (n=23) were directed to both women and men.

Four hundred and two (n=402) participants completed the survey on May 26th and May 27th. The return rate was 3%. The low return rate was due to a deliberate attempt by a blogger, well known for his un-Christian antics, to skew the data and sabotage the results. Thus, data received after May 27 was discarded. The blogger disparages women who are considering a call to the diaconate calling them "deaconettes." On May 28th, he wrote to his followers, "Most of us, however, probably don't have questions or concerns about the impact of deaconettes: I'm quite certain that it would be bad." The 402 response sampling does not represent all Catholics, but the results do highlight the voices of Catholics sincerely discerning a vocational call to the permanent diaconate and their support for women deacons in general.

## Who Took the Survey

Of the 402 respondents, the clear majority, 84% (n=337) were women, mostly from the United States, but 6% were from Canada, U.K., Australia, India, and Germany. Sixteen percent (n=65) of

respondents were male.

The vast majority of respondents (76%) indicated they were active in their parishes, including 57% as lay leaders, 14% sisters, 4% priests and 2% permanent deacons. Seventy-five percent had some education or training related to ministry, religious education, or theology up to a Ph.D. Eighty-five percent were 55 years of age or older although it is significant to note that 15% of respondents were younger Catholics from the Gen X or Millennial age group.



## Women Who Are Called To Serve as Deacons

Of 335 women who responded when asked if they were called to the diaconate, 11.64% (n=39) said they were called, with another 27.76% (n=93) indicating it was somewhat true to say they were called. Of those who explored their call (n=90), 80% percent had discussed it with family and friends, and 51% had discussed it with someone in their faith community. Seventy-nine percent (n=95) of the 120 who answered the question indicated that

if the diaconate were available to women today, it was completely true or somewhat true that they would be ready to enter a formation program.

Even though the majority of all female respondents had not personally discerned a call to the diaconate, 53% the 324 women who responded to this question said they would consider a call if asked by a priest, bishop, or someone in the community.

Some women indicated that they were called to the priesthood and not the permanent diaconate. Twelve percent of 271 women responding to this question, said that the priesthood was their vocational call, not the permanent diaconate.

## Support for Women Deacons

Of the 321 who answered this question, 93% expressed complete support for women deacons and another 6% expressed some support. When asked if ordaining women deacons would strengthen the Church in terms of pastoral care, evangelization, and liturgy, 91% agreed completely and another 8% agreed that it was somewhat true.

When prioritizing the diaconal ministries that would benefit the Church if available to women deacons, 94% indicated that preaching is a priority. Ninety-two percent indicated that presiding over baptisms, marriages, and funerals was paramount, and 90% said that proclaiming the Gospel during Mass was most important. Another 89% said that assisting during the Mass was important.

Ninety-five percent (n=305) of respondents said they knew a woman/women who would make fine deacons. Ninety-three percent (n=299) said they would encourage a woman/women to consider becoming

a deacon, and 81% (n=260) said they would recommend women to serve as deacons to their pastor or bishop.

One question directed to priests and deacons asked whether they knew women whom they would consider to make fine deacons. Of the 33 that responded, 91% indicated that they had.

These parish-oriented respondents indicated that they were willing to advocate for the restoration of women deacons. Eighty-six percent (n=277) said they would pray. Seventy-nine percent (n=254) indicated they would learn more about the history and theology of women deacons. Sixty percent (n=193) indicated they would attend workshops or days of reflections focusing on the restoration of women deacons. Fifty-two percent (n=168) indicated they would write or talk to their bishop asking him to support the restoration of women deacons, and 57% (n=183) indicated they would create opportunities in their communities for others to learn about and discuss the history, ministry, and theology of women deacons.

### The Impact on Lay Ecclesial Ministers and the work for Women's Ordination to the Priesthood

We wanted to give respondents the opportunity to voice their concerns about women deacons in light of the

ministry thousands of women have been providing as lay ecclesial ministers or in light of advocacy for women's ordination to the priesthood. Three hundred twenty-one responded to these questions.

Thirty-seven percent (n=119) said it was true or somewhat true that they were concerned or had questions about the impact of women deacons on the work of lay ecclesial ministers, 55% (n=178) indicated they did not have concerns or questions, and 7% answered "not applicable." In terms of the impact on the work for women's ordination to the priesthood, the results were similar. Thirty-nine percent (n=126) indicated it was true or somewhat true that they were concerned or had questions, 57% (n=183) said they had no concerns, and 4% answered "not applicable."

### Support for the Commission

More than 99% (n=318) of respondents knew about Pope Francis's decision to create a commission to study women deacons; 93% (n=298) strongly supported it, while another 6% (n=16) supported it somewhat. When asked to put forward the names of candidates for the commission, Phyllis Zagano topped the list with Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, and Joan Chittister, OSB, following.

[Read the full survey report at futurechurch-blog.org.](http://futurechurch-blog.org)

## FutureChurch Expands Teleconference Series

In 2016, FutureChurch expanded its teleconference series focusing on the restoration of women to the permanent diaconate and the challenge the Church faces as younger Catholics walk away in greater numbers.

In April 2016, the first teleconference, **Ready to Serve**, featured three Catholic women—Connie Walsh, Cynthia Bowns, and Natalie Terry—who are ready to serve as deacons and have experienced a call to this ministry. The teleconference was especially rich as these women shared their personal experiences, inspirations, joys and struggles with their call to ministry in the Church.

The second, **Women Deacons? Essays with Answers**, featured Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D., a preeminent scholar on the topic who has been named to serve on the commission. During the conversation, Zagano focused on the questions that the then-to-be-named commission would likely take up.

The third in the series, **Women Deacons in the Roman Church**, featured Gary Macy, Ph.D., a Church historian, who discussed women deacons and the meaning of ordination in Church history. He also discussed the reasons that women deacons disappeared in the West.

FutureChurch also tackled the challenge of the ever-

diminishing number of young Catholics in the Church, especially young Catholic women.

A teleconference hosted in July featured sociologist Patricia Wittberg, SC, Ph.D., who presented **Young Women in the Catholic Church**. She shared statistical data that indicates that, for the first time in history, the number of young women leaving the Church is now slightly higher than that of young men.

The second teleconference, on August 24th, **Millennials Speak for Themselves** featured the voices of two Catholic Millennial women, Annie Burns and Michelle Maddex and Russ Petrus, FutureChurch's Program Director. When asked what the Church could do to attract young Catholics, all three suggested that the social Gospel and community were central features that could bring Catholics back.

The FutureChurch Teleconference Series stimulates conversation around the topics Catholics care about most. Stay tuned as we continue to bring you enriching discussions and stimulating ideas.

Recordings of the teleconference can be heard at [www.futurechurch.org/podcasts](http://www.futurechurch.org/podcasts).

# What the Mary Project Means to Me by Judith Davis



The goal of FutureChurch to “rediscover Mary’s message for today” is a beacon I’ve been following for the past 30 years. Born in an era of intense Marian devotion, I grew up with pallid, perfect images of Mary in statues and paintings, along with exhortations to imitate her silence, humility, and acquiescence. As a child, I felt that Mary was a little unreal, too good to be true—and certainly someone whose perfection I could never achieve.

Later on, I thought that maybe Vatican II would bring Mary into a more accessible perspective, but although it declared her the “Mother of the Church,” it also reduced her titles and roles; edited her out of the Mass except for a mention in the Nicene Creed; and eliminated many Marian prayers. I joined the many people, who, like Charlene Spretnak, claimed to be “Missing Mary.”

My rediscovery of Mary came through my work in French medieval studies, as I read the stories told about her during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The authors of these miracle tales show her to be familiarly winsome and enormously powerful, a partner with God in the work of salvation. I also found that this Mary has a message for today: after the terms of a research grant required that I share my findings with a nonscholarly audience, I translated some of the stories, donned a medieval costume, and began telling the tales of her love and compassion, admonishment and support, demands and rewards. Protestants and Catholics, men and women, responded warmly, often emotionally, to the idea of Mary as a strong, capable, wise and affectionate mother—one who never stops looking after her children, even the most wayward.

The enthusiastic reception of those medieval miracle stories motivated me to translate others for a collection which I call “Mother Most Powerful.” Also, wondering where and when the medieval works originated, I delved

deeper into the past, finding evidence of a Marian tradition that dates back to the second century.

While researching these early traditions, I met Deb Rose-Milavec, who invited me to participate in the Mary project. It has been a privilege and a delight to collaborate with FutureChurch in preparing resources on Mary, her history in Scripture, church doctrine and tradition. Mary Christine Athans’s historical essays on Mary through the ages situate her in time and space. Jeannette Rodriguez brings Our Lady of Guadalupe into intimate and poetic focus. Elizabeth Johnson’s presentation, “Will the Real Mary Please Stand Up?” summarizes what we need most to know and acknowledge: Not only is Miriam of Nazareth the redoubtable mother of God, she is a first-century Jewish woman of faith, the “passionate, proud, enthusiastic” proclaimer of the Magnificat and the assertive disciple who told her son confidently, “They have no more wine.”

This is the Mary, whose stories I treasure. This is the reason I find such pleasure working on this project.

*Judith Davis, Ph.D. has more than 20 years as a Marian scholar and serves as the academic consultant for this series.*

## Celebrating the First Feast of St. Mary of Magdala: Building a Church for Our Daughters



FutureChurch’s 2016 organizing pack used the occasion of St. Mary of Magdala’s feast day to promote the vision and efforts of the A Church for Our Daughters Campaign, a grassroots effort organized by Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR) and supported by thirty Catholic organizations in the United States. The prayer service, composed by FutureChurch’s program director Russ Petrus, was envisioned as an intergenerational gathering:

- in thanksgiving for and celebration of Mary of Magdala and other foremothers in faith
- in solidarity with women of today
- and in hope for the next generation of Catholics.

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The prayer service suggested readings from Catholic women of different ages reflecting on women and the Church, including "It's Not All About Eve: Women in the Lectionary" by Christine Schenk and "Young Catholic Women Working in Ministry" by Rhonda Miska both of which appeared in *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table* (Paulist Press, 2015) as well as "Confessions" by Gina Messina-Dysert in *Faithfully Feminist: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Feminists on Why We Stay* (White Cloud Press, 2015). The suggested Gospel was John's account of the meeting between Jesus and Mary of Magdala on Easter morning (20: 1-18).

After a reflection on the readings from a young Catholic woman or someone who works with young people, celebrators were invited to reflect upon the needs, hopes and gifts of young Catholics in their lives and to make a commitment to build a Church for Our Daughters so that those young people might "know radical inclusion and justice, equality without qualification, and a Church institution that transforms oppression into love without bounds." Petitions were based on the vision articulated by the A Church Our Daughters Campaign in its Declaration for Our Daughters.

More than 300 celebrations were planned on or around the July 22nd Feast day. In the United States, celebrations were held in multiple cities across 33 states, in Washington, D.C., and in Puerto Rico. Forty celebrations were held outside of the United States: in Canada, Australia, Brazil, the U.K., Italy, and Mexico. While many of these celebrations used the FutureChurch theme, *Celebrating Mary of Magdala: Building a Church for Our Daughters*, several communities joining in the celebrations for the first time requested copies of earlier FutureChurch prayer services that gave a fuller introduction and account of Mary of Magdala's true story in scripture and history.

FutureChurch held its Cleveland celebration on July 27th. To celebrate the recently elevated Feast of St. Mary of Magdala, FutureChurch invited a few special guests to take part in the prayer service: those who first envisioned this international project to restore Mary of Magdala to her rightful place as Apostle to the Apostles. Laurel Jurecki, who composed and presided at the first ever FutureChurch Mary of Magdala prayer service returned to preside at the 2016 celebration.

FutureChurch co-founder Sister Christine Schenk, CSJ offered a reflection on the inspiration behind these celebrations and what they offered to the Church. Recalling the remarkable turn out and emotional response to the first celebrations, she said, "It dawned on me that we were touching something very deep within the

Catholic female psyche. A long-buried wound was slowly being brought to the Spirit's healing light." Reflecting on the recent elevation from memorial to feast she said, "It's not often that working to be the change we long to see actually happens in one's own lifetime. I am extraordinarily grateful for the providence of God, and for the powerful Holy Spirit energy at work in literally tens of thousands women and men over the past 19 years. This would not have happened without them."

Current FutureChurch board chair, Marie Graf, another pioneering Mary of Magdala celebrator offered her reflections on the highs and lows of the early days of the Mary of Magdala campaign. "But we persevered – we did not give up because we knew that the chord we had struck had begun to sing a great song – and it took on a life of its own," she said. "I feel validation for all the work we've done over these years – our persistence in proclaiming her role as the Apostle to the Apostles – our powerful message that women matter in this church and that we need extended roles in our church."

In keeping with the theme *Celebrating Mary of Magdala: Building a Church for Our Daughters*, Gina Messina Dysert offered a reflection on Mary of Magdala and how her courageous witness can serve as a model for all: "We must follow the example of Mary of Magdala - who in the face of great danger stood her ground, honored her beliefs, and did not cower to the threats of a system that attempted to hold power over her," she said.

Speaking directly to the latest effort to build a Church that is fully inclusive of women she said, "You may remember that Pope Francis said that women are the strawberries on the cake - well intentioned I am sure - but I'll tell you, Mary of Magdala is no strawberry - she baked the cake. And it is through her example that we come to find our own responsibility to continue to be courageous in working for renewal in the Church, in calling for a Church for our daughters."

Among the many who came out to celebrate on July 27 was long-time FutureChurch member and volunteer, Kathy Rossman, who said the service was a "joyful experience to celebrate St. Mary of Magdala shortly after Pope Francis elevated her memorial observance to a liturgical feast, reserved for special saints such as the apostles." She also called the Church for Our Daughters campaign "an inspiring gift to the Church."

To watch the reflections from FutureChurch's 2016 Cleveland celebration, visit our YouTube Channel by following the link on our homepage [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org).

# It Doesn't Have to End This Way: Rethinking Parish Life in the Face of the Impending Priest Shortage

Many parishes are like family. They love—they fight—they struggle to be God's people. Sometimes they take their life together for granted.

But when a parish learns it is in danger of being merged or closed, the announcement often leaves people in a state of shock, anger and sometimes despair. Even when parishioners are included in the process, the decision on parish viability or merger with another parish often seems pre-determined. In the worst cases, the bishop acts in bad faith, even crassly, and it has sometimes been clear that Church property was sold in lucrative deals to pay off bad debts to cover the costs of clergy sex abuse cases.

For years, FutureChurch has been supporting parishioners who want to preserve their parish community providing educational resources and working in partnership with Kate Kuenster, PHJC, JCD, an outstanding canon lawyer who provides guidance to parishioners in filing appeals. Although the work is demanding and the obstacles are many, she has successfully helped many parishes preserve their beloved community.

Still, the story of parish mergers and closings are now commonplace.

We've been through round one and we are on to round two. Since the numbers of priests continue to spiral downward (half of our diocesan priests will be at retirement age by 2019), the mergers and closures will continue unabated. One by one, bishops who instinctively try to sustain the one-priest, one-parish model, are slowly but surely closing down the organism for spreading the Gospel—the Body of Christ—God's heart and hands for making her love known in the world.

While many bishops are in the habit of making parish mergers and closings sound as if they are inevitable, the truth is, this kind of

accommodations is not inevitable. It doesn't have to be this way.

The cost of closing parishes is high. Not only are parish families banished from their homes, but communities—especially those that are in a state of decay already—suffer when parishes close.

We need to tell a new story in order to raise awareness about the value and worth of parishes and parish life in the service of the Gospel.

**“The closing of a parish in an already fragile community contributes to the decay and collapse of those communities.”**

The closing of a parish in an already fragile community contributes to the decay and collapse of those communities. In many places, when a parish closes, the grocery store closes or the gas station closes. People empty out in even greater numbers, the weeds grow higher and more windows are boarded up.

In Cleveland where a new round of parish mergers and closure seems to be on the horizon, FutureChurch has had the opportunity to begin working with concerned citizens to tell a more complete, more compelling story—the story of the socio-economic cost of closing parishes in our most fragile communities.

Using a system of mapping plotting where parishes have been closed over the past decades, where foreclosures have skyrocketed, where poverty is highest and where people of color live—a clear pattern emerges. The places where parishes have closed are also the places with the highest poverty rates. The places where parishes have closed are also the places with the highest foreclosure rates. The places where parishes have closed are also the places

where African Americans, Hispanics and people of color live. The places where parishes closed are the places where there are food deserts.

To be a follower of Christ means to care for our families, including our parish family. But it means more. The demands of the Gospel are clear. We are to care for those who are poor—the stranger—those who live at the margins—those who have the least access to the necessities of life. Any plan to close parishes that does not prioritize that Gospel mandate is a failure of leadership—a failure in terms of the demands of discipleship.

There are serious theological challenges that must be solved, but the mechanical closing of parishes based on an unsustainable model of one-priest-per-parish is tragic.

There are innovative and exciting models for re-imagining parish leadership and ministry. The Lobinger Model (summarized on the opposite page) is just one creative model that has its roots in the past and a sense of what is needed for the future.

There are practical challenges that must be solved. Part of our inheritance and frankly, our burden, is the legacy of buildings that have been passed down to us—some of them in need of repair. But closing parishes because we have failed to imagine new uses, new partnerships, new ways to serve people in need for the good of the Gospel—the good of the community—is irresponsible.

There are innovative and exciting models for re-imagining parish life and service.

We can begin by asking “What new partnerships can be formed in the service of our mission? How can we re-imagine our space so that care for God's people and care for the earth can be realized?”

Look no further than St. Sabina's Church in Chicago, a parish that was

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languishing. Fr. Michael L. Pflieger and the people of that parish fed on the Word of God, reimagined the space, engaged community partners and helped, not only to feed and clothe, but worked in partnership to create cottage industries and entrepreneurial opportunities to help people access job training and find meaningful work – all in the heart

of the parish. Today, they struggle together to end the racism that is death-dealing in their community. This is a parish calling for and enacting the kind of justice and peace that God has in store for her people.

Without analyzing why so many in leadership are slow to move away from the unsustainable strategy of merging and closing parishes, it is

clear that there are urgent reasons to reconsider their wooden approach and move toward creative models that are already proving to be life giving.

It is plain enough to see, when it comes to the future of the church, that future is up to us, the People of God.

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# The Lobinger Model

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Fritz Lobinger

## The Lobinger Model is an innovative model rooted in the particular needs and talents of local communities.

It addresses the theological conundrum presented by the priest shortage by expanding the role of lay leaders and ordaining them into service.

The Lobinger model was developed by Bishop Fritz Lobinger who, early on, was instrumental in developing the pastoral model of the Small Christian Communities – including a particular model of Bible study with central roles for lay leadership in liturgical services, catechesis and the social gospel. He ministered in regions of South Africa where there were few priests. He recognized the enormous faith and talents of lay people in the communities under his care and sought to empower them to carry out the fullness of sacramental life in their community. You can learn more about his model by reading his interview at <http://www.uscatholic.org/ordainelders>.

In preparation for the 3rd international meeting of priest associations and reform groups in October, Fr. Wolfgang Gamer offers his view of the Lobinger model based on his experience as a priest in South America. His model is based on the one advanced by Bishop Fritz Lobinger and the Vienna pastoral theologian Paul Zulehner of “Paul priests (originating outside the community — i.e. ordained by the bishop)” and “Corinth priests (originating within the community—recognized and chosen from within

the community).” Gamer notes that in Rom. 16 and 1 Cor. 16 the apostle Paul offers a variety of leadership roles that are exercised in Rome and Corinth.

To begin, each community opens itself to that Spirit, prayerfully reflects on its situation and sets priorities in order to live out their faith in today’s world. In order to be a community of mission, they spell out their activities under the guidelines of worship, service and witness. In this process, the community is accompanied and supported by “Paul priests” and fulltime lay people who assist in the discovery of charisms within the community.

The aim of this process is to build a team of “Corinth priests” of at least three persons. Lobinger and Zulehner speak of *virii probati* and eventually also of *feminae probatae*. Women and men, both single or married and couples, like Prisca and Aquilla in Acts, provide a robust model for missionary outreach and community leadership and ministry. From this process emerges a team of leaders, accepted and supported by all members of a community, whatever their size or number. This team may well undergo formation and will eventually be ordained for service.

[https://www.amazon.com/Like-His-Brothers-Sisters-Ordaining/dp/0824518500/ref=asap\\_bc?ie=UTF8](https://www.amazon.com/Like-His-Brothers-Sisters-Ordaining/dp/0824518500/ref=asap_bc?ie=UTF8)

# Does a papal decree matter for the inclusion of women? Yes!



On January 6, 2016, Pope Francis issued a new decree stating that women should be included in foot washing rites held on Holy Thursday. For many Catholics around the world, this was already a practice. But for others, the papal decree opened a new door for women's participation in an important rite of the Church.

On March 28, 2016, FutureChurch launched a survey asking Catholics to share their experience regarding the new decree to see what, if any, effect it had in their parish.

The survey participants numbered 620 and came from the United States (88%), Europe (6%), India (3%), Australia (2%) and with 1% marked "other."

Prior to the 2016 decree, 86% of respondents indicated that they had always included both women and men in the footwashing rite while 10% indicated that their ceremony included men only. The rest either had no footwashing ceremony or marked this question as not applicable.

Most of the 104 comments related to this question reiterated that women and men were included in the foot washing rite. Ten comments indicated that a) only males were included, b) the parish chose to eliminate the rite this year because of an expectation that only males would participate or, c) a parishioner discontinued going because of a change to male only participation.

## Here is a sampling of those comments:

We used to wash anyone's feet until our bishop banned anyone except males. Then we stopped washing anyone's feet.

Two years ago the Bishop of Madison said only men would have their feet washed. So our parish did not have the rite.

Thirty years ago our parish included women in this rite but, in the past 10-15 years it has reverted back to all men.

Our Diocese of Charlotte did not allow women to participate. It was to be 12 men lined up with the Pastor doing the washing.

My parish did wash the feet of men and women, however, our Bishop Paprocki chose not to do the foot washing ritual because he disagreed with Pope Francis' encouragement of it.

We had discontinued when we went to men only.

At my home Parish in Ontario, Canada ,we have had women and men foot washing for years but at my parish here in Florida where we are for the winter they have men only.

We had no foot washing because it didn't include women.

Only seminarians.

When the church made Holy Thursday night about the night Jesus instituted the male only ordained priesthood, I stopped going.

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Asked about changes in the foot washing rite after the 2016 decree, 7% of respondents indicated that when for the first time, women were introduced into the foot washing rite, the percentage of respondents indicating male-only foot washing rites dropped to 5%. Four (number) respondents indicated that they did not have a foot washing rite for the first time this year, conjecturing

that this may have been a way for their pastor to protest the new decree.

**A sampling of comments from this question are included below.** Some indicated there was a change creating greater inclusion of women. A few indicated that women were still excluded or newly excluded.

Our previous pastor in Orange, CA did not wash the feet of women. Our new pastor did, only after I questioned him about it two years ago. Since then he has done it.

Our parish washed the feet of women, men and children. When we got a new bishop, he demanded that only men could get their feet washed. Our pastor stopped washing feet until Francis said it is okay.

New pastor intended to have only men. After decree, he included men, women, and teenagers.

Depends on pastor and whim of bishop. This year all were included for the first time in five years and three pastors.

Our parish had opted out of foot washing from the time the local bishop had banned women until this year.

In Florida—still only men! I even wrote the priest here and told him of my wish to have women represented.

Men only. Apparently in defiance of Pope Francis.

A giant step backwards. For the past 20+ years not only have we had men and women have their feet washed, we also allowed the congregation to wash the feet. This year the congregation was allowed to wash the feet of only 12 men invited. A sad, sad turn of events with a new pastor.

Question # 3 asked if Pope Francis' s new changes and decree raised new awareness about the exclusion of women personally, in the parish or if it was a source of controversy. Fifty-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the changes Pope Francis made to the foot washing rite raised new awareness about the exclusion of women for them personally. Thirty-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that it raised new awareness about the exclusion of women in their parish community. And 7% agreed or strongly agreed the new decree and inclusive rite was a source of controversy in their parish community/

Questions # 4 and # 5 asked respondents if their pastor had addressed the new foot washing decree and inclusive rite explicitly, and if so, how did they characterize the change. Twelve percent indicated that their priest specifically addressed the new foot washing decree with most characterizing it as a positive change and only less than one percent characterizing it as a negative change.

A thoroughly scientific survey would be useful in understanding the ripple effect of Francis' changes for

women in the Church, but it is clear from this small sampling that it has made a difference. Of those who took the FutureChurch survey, 7% indicated that women were included for the first time. While media reporting was anecdotal, there were several examples of inclusive change. Two Latin Catholic Churches in Kerala, India included women for the first time, and the National Shrine in Washington DC included women in the rite for the first time.

Change at the top of the hierarchy often occurs because of pressure from below. To Francis's credit, he is responding to the need to bring women into full and complete partnership alongside their male counterparts. What comes down from the top can have a very positive effect for women at the local level. This decree is proof that even small changes can have a balancing effect in the name of gender justice.

# Voices of Faith: Opening New Doors for Women's Leadership Inside the Vatican



FutureChurch's Deborah Rose-Milavec has been active over the past three years in Voices of Faith (VOF), an international initiative focused on expanding the roles of women in the Catholic Church and highlighting the work of women engaged in some of the most difficult work in the world. The March 8th event inside the Vatican has helped open new doors for dialogue regarding the role of women within the patriarchal institution in Rome and has served to highlight the courageous leadership of women working at the margins of society.

Voices of Faith envisions a church and a world that fully recognizes and embraces the gifts, talents and leadership of women. It works to build a diverse and inclusive network of committed women of faith who fight and work for an effective and transparent church, social justice, equality, human rights, peace and environmental protection.

At the March 8th event, the Voices of Faith panel included a multi-generational group of women including Carolyn Woo, CEO and president of Catholic Relief Services; Geralyn Sheehan, director for the Peace Corps in Columbia; Petra Dankova, at the time a postulant for the Sisters of the Holy Redeemer and an international social worker with experience working with forcibly displaced persons, Nicole Perone, a graduate student from Yale Divinity School, and Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala, a high school teacher and feminist blogger in Mumbai. The panel was moderated by Fr. Tom Smolich, international director of Jesuit Refugee Services. Two questions were posed; a) Where has the Church excelled in opening opportunities for women's decision making and leadership? b) What can the Church do to create more opportunities for women in leadership?

Each woman brought her experience and perspectives to those questions, because of the diversity in geographical

locations, work history and age, it was particularly rich. All the members of the panel spoke positively of some of the advances women have pioneered in the Catholic Church. Still, they all acknowledged there is a lot of room for growth.

Geralyn Sheehan, a Vatican II Catholic, got down to practical details. She observed that "the one thing I know is, institutions never change because they should; they change when it's in their self-interest." So she asked "What is the current self-interest of the Church?" She stressed that "When I think about the global issues that our Church faces, whether it's Boko Haram, ISIS, female infanticide, genital mutilation, human trafficking, which is really sexual trafficking—we all know that the target of all of those activities are too often women and their children." For Sheehan, having more women in decision making roles is rooted in the self-interest of the Church in its Gospel mission.

Petra Dankova, a Gen X Catholic, asked, "If women's religious communities were the greenhouse of women in the Church, how can we move beyond those greenhouses so that the future of women's leadership within the Church is ensured? "

**"... women are knocking on the door of the Church ... but I also fear ... the generation of women who follow us ... will stop knocking."**

**~Carolyn Woo**

Nicole Perone, a Millennial Catholic, asked an important question that many Millennial Catholics are asking, "... Women can be president of the United States; they can be the prime minister of their countries; they can be a Fortune 500 CEO. They can succeed in any sphere. So why is the Church the last frontier on that?" She believes the Church is doing itself a disservice stressing, "It's a brain drain; it's a talent drain. So right now, if the Church wants to stop that and really utilize those gifts and talents, they just need to continue to let that wealth blossom. It's there. The seeds are planted and we just need to continue to nourish them."

Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala, another Millennial Catholic, agreed adding, "...Just because we don't follow the same rules that our parents did or we don't necessarily always go to Mass every Sunday or we choose not to go to confession, we're not Catholic enough. And then we feel as if we're denied a space within the existing structure of the Church and our voices aren't being heard. And if we don't have

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a space, how are we going to make a change? How are we going to make a difference?"

Carolyn Woo, the most senior member of the panel, started with a cautionary note. "I just want to say, women are knocking on the door of the Church. And sometimes it's wearing for the people who are suddenly on the other side of the door. Too much knocking. And I like that particular analogy because Scriptures tell us, for those who knock on the door, it will be opened to you. So I do believe in that. But I also have the fear—that is, the generation of women who follow us, not the people at this table but many, they will stop knocking. And there will come a day when there will be this silence of people not knocking, that the young people who follow us, they cannot imagine the light behind that door. They begin not to see that door at all."

Woo, who has a lifetime of expertise in the service of the Catholic Church, finished the panel discussion making five salient points.

The first one is that we do have women leaders in various positions. The issue is taking it from the exceptional and the occasional to the habitual so that it becomes part of the regular process, that there is the expectation, there is a pool of candidates, there is a sense of [inaudible] councils and advisory boards and so on. We could have that. But [we must move] from the exceptional to the habitual.

The second is that women are engaged. But I have a question: Are women engaged as family or are they engaged as guests, or are they engaged as guest workers? And I'll leave you to think through that particular analogy.

The third point is—are the voices of women...taken as a little threatening or are they thought of as enriching? And I think so much of the conversation, particularly the dominant conversations and the loudest conversations, have focused on women ordination, which is off the table. But whenever women [plead] or speak or recommend or propose, there's this skepticism and suspicion: Is this conversation leading to women ordination? Is this a slippery slope? So that everything that women want eventually is [directed] to the priesthood. When women speak, is this all leading to women's ordination? And I think that is unfortunate, because in a lot of ways we fail to hear the voices of the mothers, of the single mothers, of the lay pastoral associate..."

I think the fourth point is different popes. Not just Pope Francis, but Pope Benedict also referred to 'feminine genius.' And a lot of times that term is evoked to mean women's sensitivity, women's intuition, intuitiveness; women's ability to tend to others, to nourish, to care; women's loyalty and their steadfastness. Well, that's wonderful. In fact, it's daunting to live up to, but what about women as social critics or social activists, like Dorothy Day? What about women who are scandalous, like Dorothy Day? And Mary Magdalene and the woman at the well. What about women who are entrepreneurial, hard headed, persistent, and sometimes even defiant? Like many of the women religious who founded their congregations and sustain it, the women who follow them who went into these territories to establish what they do? What about those women? What about women who really take the spiritual works of mercy seriously, like Catherine of Siena, who wrote words urging the Pope and the political leaders to change their ways? What about those women?

So [the conversation is] about feminine genius. Is there a place for the other part—which is a bit thorny, a bit pushy?

And my fifth point is, I think the Church really does minister to women. I work with a global church; I know what the Church does. But in addition to service to women, I think we need to think about the rights of women: the right of women to own land; the right of women not to be married off in a child marriage; the right of women to education—so that we're not just ministering to them in their misfortune, but we're actually standing with them to understand how to create an environment through rights. Rights are very important ways to protect women in society.

The VOF 2016 panel discussion was another rich experience where women from diverse backgrounds and perspectives voiced their care and concern for the Church. In 2017, the Voices of Faith event and mission continues. The panel discussion will include five women from around the world with expertise in organizational leadership. We will ask "How can we create opportunities for women to lead and govern in the Church?" Join us for the live stream on March 8, 2017 at [voicesoffaith.org](http://voicesoffaith.org).

To read transcripts from past VOF events, go to <https://www.futurechurch.org/women-in-church-leadership/voices-of-faith-panel-discussions>.

# FutureChurch and the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests Will Host the Third International Conference of Priest Associations and Reform Organizations

In 2011, Fr. Helmut Schueller and the Austrian Priests' Initiative issued a "Call to Disobedience" protesting the strategy bishops were increasingly undertaking to compensate for the priest shortage. That strategy included the creation of circuit rider priests and the closure of parishes. In 2013 in an effort to strengthen the voices of Catholics around the world, Fr. Schueller, launched the inaugural meeting of international priests associations and reform organizations in Bregenz, Austria. Forty people, both lay and ordained, from Austria, Australia, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland and the United States joined together to find solutions to some of the pressing problems facing the Church including the shortage of priests, the need to expand women's ministry and leadership and the need to devise strategies for keeping parishes open.

The group met again in April 2015 in Limerick, Ireland. The geographical reach of the group was expanded to include India, Slovakia, Italy and England. At this meeting, the issue of women's secondary status in the Church emerged front and center—with particular focus on presiding at the Eucharist. It became quickly apparent, that although this group was like-minded, the issues that divide us regarding women's status in the church were painfully evident. The discussions that emerged were clarifying, stretching and ultimately rich.

The group will meet again this October in Chicago. FutureChurch and the Association of U.S. Catholics Priests will host the event. The group will again expand its geographical reach to Argentina. Various participants will share their expertise, including two priests who will discuss the Lobinger Model for parish ministry and life. The meeting will focus on the following issues:

## 1. Francis' agenda:

What aspects do we think we can support, and how might we help to push these agenda items forward?

## 2. Full participation of women in the Church:

What would this full participation look like? Can we find a common position, even a statement, on women's ordination?



## 3. Rights of the Baptized:

How do we overcome the concentration of power exclusively with the ordained and the problem of clericalism?

## 4. Priest shortage:

With the decline in numbers of priests, and the closing of parishes, we will look at emerging models of ministry, including the Lobinger Model for innovative parish leadership and ministry.

## 5. LGBT community:

How can we best show solidarity?

## 6. Bishops:

What can we do to support and encourage our bishops to follow the lead of Francis to be more welcoming, compassionate and to engage in deeper dialogue with all Catholics, including those who have been historically excluded?

FutureChurch will report on the workings of the group after the October meeting. Stay tuned!

# Members of the Commission to Study Women Deacons Strikes Gender Balance, Names Phyllis Zagano



## Commission Watch

On May 12, 2016, in an audience with the leaders of religious congregations of women, Pope Francis agreed to constitute an official commission to study the history and nature women of deacons in the Church. "It will be good for the Church to clarify this point," he said.

On August 2, 2016, the names of those on the commission were announced. To our joy, it included an equal number of women (n=6) and men (n=6). To add to our joy, Phyllis Zagano, one of the world's foremost experts on the topic, was named. Sr. Nuria Calduch-Benanges, who teaches at

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the Gregorian, is on the commission. In 2008, Sr. Nuria became fast friends with FutureChurch's Sr. Chris Schenk. Sr. Nuria was appointed as an auditor/expert at the 2008 Synod on the Word and consulted with Chris regarding the work of raising awareness among the bishops regarding the missing and misrepresented women from the Lectionary. News that Sr. Mary Melone is on the commission is also welcome. Sr. Melone has been a welcoming presence in Rome as the first Rector of a pontifical university in Rome – the Pontifical University Antonianum. She hosted a book launch for Tina Beattie and Catholic Women Speak. She also supports the Voices of Faith event inside the Vatican highlighting women's leadership on International Women's Day.

Here is the list of all the commission members. The bios are shortened versions of those composed by Anthony Ruff, OSB ([praytellig.com/index.php/author/aruff/](http://praytellig.com/index.php/author/aruff/)).

**Phyllis Zagano** who teaches at Hofstra University in New York, is well known to us here in the US as a scholar who has written and published extensively on the topic of women deacons. Most recently she edited an anthology published by Liturgical Press entitled *Women Deacons? Essays with Answers*. She will be a strong advocate for reading the history objectively in favor of women deacons.

**Sister Núria Calduch-Benages** teaches at the Gregorian University in Rome and is a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. She is Catalan. "The Bible is my passion" she says. She seems to have pastoral interests as well as impressive scholarly record as a biblical scholar and philologist.

**Francesca Cocchini**, an Italian, is a professor at the University La Sapienza and at the Patristic Institute

(the Augustinianum), in Rome. She is immersed in research on Origen and the Alexandrian tradition, but has also published books on the reception of the Pauline epistles and on Augustine.

**Sister Mary Melone, SFA**, also an Italian, is an expert in the life and thought of St. Anthony of Padua. She is rector of the Pontifical University Antonianum, an institution of the Friars Minor, in Rome — the first woman to head a Pontifical University. Journalist Inés San Martín, writing in *Crux*, observed that although she has not openly advocated for women in the diaconate, she "has long spoken of the role of women in the Church, saying it's unfair to dismiss the request for the diaconate because it might lead to female priesthood."

**Marianne Schlosser** is professor of spiritual theology at the University of Vienna and a member of the International Theological Commission. She has written about Bonaventure and Catherine of Siena. She has also written about Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus, and has a recent volume on the theology of prayer.

**Michelina Tenace**, an Italian, is professor of fundamental theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. She is an expert on Vladimir Solovyov, and teaches theological anthropology and the Christian East.

**Rev. Msgr. Piero Coda**, is dean of the University Institute Sophia, Loppiano (near Florence), and he a member of the International Theological Commission. The Institute is a work of the Focolare movement. Coda has written about Chiara Lubich and he writes about the Trinity.

**Rev. Robert Dodaro, O.S.A.**, an American, is dean of the Patristic Institute Augustinianum, in Rome. He is professor of Patrology and an expert on Augustine. He is also known

for his book on marriage: *Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church*.

**Rev. Karl-Heinz Menke**, is emeritus professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Bonn and member of the International Theological Commission. He specializes in the nineteenth century and writes about Christology.

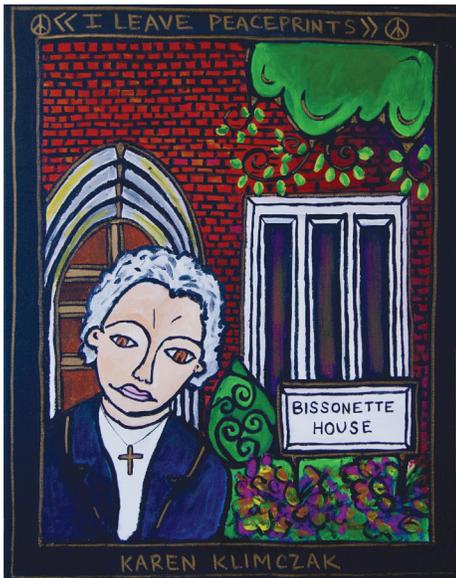
**Rev. Santiago Madrigal Terrazas, SJ**, is professor of ecclesiology at the Pontifical University Comillas, in Madrid. He specializes in ecclesiology, especially the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, reflected in the theological works of Rahner, Congar, De Lubac, and Ratzinger. He is also an authority on Ignatian spirituality.

**Rev. Aimable Musoni, SDB**, is professor of ecclesiology at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome. He is an expert on the canonization process, a consultor for the Congregation for Saints.

**Rev. Bernard Pottier SJ**, born in Liège Belgium, is professor at the Institut d'Études Théologiques in Brussels, and a member of the International Theological Commission. His published work is in the fields of philosophy and psychology, and he also has expertise in patristics (Gregory of Nyssa).

The commission will be presided over by the Mallorcan bishop and Jesuit Lluís Ladaria Ferrer, secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

# Women Witnesses of Mercy Enter into the Chaos and Reveal God's Mercy



The Jubilee Year of Mercy that Pope Francis first announced in March 2015 will come to an end this November 20th on the Solemnity of Christ the King. It will also bring to a close FutureChurch's Women Witnesses of Mercy series which has been celebrating the extraordinary witness of women throughout the year.

Announcing the Jubilee Year of Mercy in a March 2015 homily, Pope Francis said, "I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an extraordinary Jubilee that is, to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of [Jesus'] words: 'Be merciful, just as [God] is merciful (Lk 6:36).'"

Following the announcement, FutureChurch executive director Deb Rose-Milavec and I sat down to discuss how FutureChurch would celebrate the Year of Mercy with Catholics worldwide. We thought it appropriate to highlight women who do exactly what Pope Francis wants to accomplish: to "make clear" the Church's "mission of being a witness to mercy." And so I returned to a definition of mercy that I learned in graduate school from Jesuit theologian James F. Keenan. In *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, he writes, "Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of another." And so, for the next several weeks, we set out to identify contemporary Catholic women who truly give witness to mercy by entering into the chaos of our world and the most vulnerable with whom we share it.

It was a nearly impossible task. Not for a lack of women, but for an abundance of courageous women who have done and are making the Beatitudes visible in our world; women who really are showing the face of God's mercy in this world that needs it so much. How could we choose just twelve? But eventually we did decide on a list of women to profile—one woman or group of women for each month. And in November of 2015, FutureChurch announced our Women Witnesses of Mercy:

## December

Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Jean Donovan and Dorothy Kazel, martyrs who ministered to victims of civil war in El Salvador

## January

Helen Prejean who ministers to death-row inmates, their victims' families, and seeks the abolition of the death penalty

## February

Antona Ebo who was the first African-American nun to march for civil rights

## March

Simone Campbell who works with NETWORK to ensure economic justice for all

## April

Dorothy Stang who lived the message of the encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, long before it was written and was martyred in the Amazon because of her work on behalf of the environment and the poor

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## May

Dorothy Day who launched the Catholic Worker Movement

## June

Norma Pimentel who works at the southern border to uphold the dignity of immigrants

## July

Karen Klimczak, an advocate for peace and non-violence who was murdered by a resident of the home she had established for men transitioning out of prison

## August

Elizabeth Johnson, the theologian whose quest for God has revealed the importance of inclusive language in the pursuit of justice

## September

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious who continue to provide moral leadership and guidance to U.S. Catholics

## October

Jeannine Gramick who founded New Ways Ministry to minister to the LGBTQ Catholic community and work for a more inclusive Church

## November

Sister Christine Schenk, who co-founded FutureChurch to seek the changes that would allow all Catholics to participate fully in Church life and leadership

What we could not have known in the summer of 2015 as we were putting the calendar together was just how chaotic 2016 would turn out to be and just how much our world and nation would need the voices and witnesses of these women in the coming year. We could not have known, for example, how increased instances of police violence against persons of color would reveal just how desperately we need to address the racial injustices that infect our society and structures. We could not have known that deadly mass shootings throughout the country would uncover just how much we as individuals and a society need to commit ourselves to the ways of peacemaking and non-violence. We could not have known how inflammatory political rhetoric would call us to stand up for the dignity of each human person. But here were these women—these extraordinary witnesses of mercy—entering into this chaos with us, sharing their wisdom, their insight, their faith, and their example with us.

Over the course of this past year it has been my job and true honor to learn more about these women and to put together resources that reveal just how they show forth the Church's "mission of being a witness to mercy" in our world. Some of them I knew of before this project. Others

were unfamiliar to me. But each of them said and revealed new things to me, especially as I lived through this Year of Mercy and chaos. In a real way—thanks to these women—this Year of Mercy has been, as Pope Francis hoped, a journey of spiritual conversion for me. I have been inspired, made righteously angry, brought to tears. I have learned new things about the world in which I live, I have learned about myself, and I have come to know just what we human beings are capable of if we root ourselves in God's love and commit ourselves to "entering into the chaos of another" so as to be the face of God's mercy in the world.

In February, we highlighted Sister Antona Ebo, who became the first African-American nun and one of the first nuns to march for civil rights when she arrived in Selma, Alabama, on March 10, 1965. She was working as a department head at St. Mary's Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, when news of the violent attacks of Bloody Sunday spread across the country. She remembers telling her coworkers, "If I didn't have this habit on, I would be down there with those people." The next night she received a phone call her superior, who asked her if she would be part of a 50-member interfaith delegation to Selma from St. Louis. "No, I wouldn't like to go to Selma," she responded at first. "I know I do a lot of fussing but I don't feel bad enough to want to go down there and be a martyr for somebody's voting rights," she continued. But eventually Sister Antona, who lives her life by the spiritual "I'm gonna do what the Spirit says do" says "God called [her] bluff" and the next morning she was on her way to Selma. And Sister Antona, who was one of the first three African-American members of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, became a civil rights icon. And she has continued to work for racial justice since. Her witness and her willingness to "do what the Spirit says do" is instructive for all those, including me, who too often find themselves sitting on the sidelines in the fight for justice.

In June we lifted up Sister Norma Pimentel, who works on the nation's southern border to defend and uphold the dignity of immigrants. Since an initial surge in the summer of 2014, tens thousands of immigrants—many of them unaccompanied minors and young women with children—have crossed into the United States through the Rio Grande Valley. The majority are from Central America, particularly Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Fleeing horrific gang violence, trying to reunite family members, and looking for a way to make a living, they immediately surrender themselves to U.S. Border Patrol hoping that the legal system will allow them to stay. Border Patrol releases hundreds of individuals and

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families a day with bus tickets and a 'notice to appear' at an immigration hearing. "They were just being dropped off at the bus station in heartbreaking conditions," says Pimentel. Knowing there was more that could be done, in early June 2014 Sister Norma requested permission to set up a way station for immigrant families to receive the physical, spiritual, and emotional care they so desperately needed. "We welcome them with joy and care," Pimentel says. "My role and my only interest is for the person, the dignity of the human being," she adds. She has taken her message to the White House and the United Nations in addition to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission-- always focusing on the need for humanitarian aid and kindness. Sister Norma Pimentel reminds us that the people who stand next to us -- immigrant or not -- are not political issues, numbers, or statistics. They are human persons with a right to human dignity and kindness.

Sister Karen Klimczak was our July Woman Witness of Mercy. A summer of volunteer ministry with inmates elicited in her a profound sense of sympathy for people who had spent time in prison. After her experience in prison ministry, Sister Karen returned to her native Buffalo, New York, inspired to develop a ministry for men after their release from prison. In 1985, Sister Karen opened HOPE (Home of Positive Experience) House in an

old convent. She also started the PeacePrints campaign to challenge people to commit themselves to non-violence. Sister Karen was tragically murdered in 2006 on Good Friday by one of the former inmates she was trying to help. Fifteen years earlier, after having a premonition of how her life would end, Sister Karen wrote a letter to her killer. It read, in part, "Dear Brother, I don't know what the circumstances are that will lead you to hurt me or destroy my physical body....I forgive you for what you have done and I will always watch over you, help you in whatever way I can..." Sister Karen's commitment to non-violence—even when faced with her own violent end—is a challenge to a world that too often responds to violence with more violence.

The monthly series contains a biography of the women, a prayer service, connections to Catholic Social Teaching, and practical suggestions for living as a witness of mercy in the world today. FutureChurch commissioned Erie, PA artist Marcy Hall to create beautiful new paintings of each woman. The series, which continues with new releases through November, is being used regularly by many faith communities. Many others have celebrated the witness of at least one of the women. To learn more or purchase a subscription or individual packet visit [www.futurechurch.org/womenofmercy](http://www.futurechurch.org/womenofmercy).



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# Reading the Decree and New Preface for the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala

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## Preface of the Apostle of the Apostles

It is truly right and just,  
our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks,  
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,  
whose mercy is no less than His power,  
to preach the Gospel to everyone, through Christ, our Lord.  
In the garden He appeared to Mary Magdalene,  
who loved him in life, who witnessed his death on the cross,  
who sought him as he lay in the tomb,  
who was the first to adore him when he rose from the dead,  
and whose apostolic duty was honored by the apostles,  
so that the good news of life might reach the ends of the earth.  
And so Lord, with all the Angels and Saints,  
we, too, give you thanks, as in exultation we acclaim:  
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might ...

## Decree

The Church, both in the East and in the West has always regarded Saint Mary Magdalene the first witness of the Lord's resurrection and the first evangelist, and with the greatest reverence has always honoured her although in diverse ways.

Given that in our time the Church is called to reflect in a more profound way on the dignity of Woman, on the New Evangelisation and on the greatness of the Mystery of Divine Mercy, it seemed right that the example of Saint Mary Magdalene might also fittingly be proposed to the faithful. In fact this woman, known as the one who loved Christ and who was greatly loved by Christ, and was called a "witness of Divine Mercy" by Saint Gregory the Great and an "apostle of the apostles" by Saint Thomas Aquinas, can now rightly be taken by the faithful as a model of women's role in the Church.

Therefore the Supreme Pontiff Pope Francis has established that from now on the celebration of Saint Mary Magdalene should be inscribed in the General Roman Calendar with the rank of Feast rather than Memorial as is presently the case.

The new rank of celebration does not involve any change of the day on which the celebration itself takes place and, as for the liturgical texts, the following is to be observed:

The day dedicated to the celebration of Saint Mary Magdalene remains the same as it appears in the Roman Calendar, that is 22 July.

The texts to be used in the Mass and in the Divine Office remain the same as those contained in the Missal and in the Liturgy of the Hours on the day of the Feast, with the addition in the Missal of a proper Preface, attached to this Decree. It will be the responsibility of the Conferences of Bishops to translate the text of the Preface into the vernacular language so that, having received the approval of the Apostolic See, it can be used and in due time included in the next reprint of the Roman Missal.

Where, according to particular law, Saint Mary Magdalene is legitimately celebrated on a different day and as a Solemnity, this day and rank remains as before.

All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 3 June 2016, Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Robert Card. Sarah  
Prefect  
Archbishop Arthur Roche  
Archbishop Secretary

17307 Madison Avenue  
Lakewood, Ohio 44107

Return Service Requested

# Focus

## FutureChurch

### FutureChurch Calendar of Events

October 7 - 9, 2016  
Ferdinand, IN  
Women of the Church Conference

October 17 - 20, 2016  
Chicago, IL  
International Priests and Reform Groups meeting  
(FutureChurch co-host with AUSCP)

October 27, 2016  
Lima, Ohio  
Presentation on Women in the Church  
Serra Club

November 1, 2016  
Launch of CatholicWomenPreach.org

Nov 9-10, 2016  
Catholic Organizations for Renewal Semi-Annual Meeting

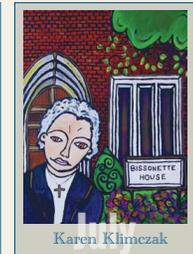
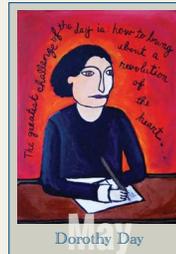
November 11 - 13, 2016  
Call To Action Conference  
Workshop: *Complementarity: How "Equal But Separate" Fails the Catholic Church*  
Prayer Service: *A Prayer for Our Daughters, A Prayer for Our Church*

Go to [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org) to learn more!

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## Women Witnesses of Mercy

Art by Marcy Hall



WOMEN WITNESSES OF MERCY  
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