



Art by Marcy Hall



# WOMEN WITNESSES OF MERCY

CELEBRATING THE EXTRAORDINARY WITNESS  
OF WOMEN DURING THE YEAR OF MERCY



Art by Marcy Hall

**“It is past time for Catholics to assume their rightful place in every aspect of church ministry and decision making”**

Sister  
Christine Schenk

## Sister Christine Schenk

### Before FutureChurch

Before joining the Cleveland Congregation of Saint Joseph, Christine Schenk confessed “that my whole life I seem to end up getting into these causes that can be edgy, and if that was a problem, we had better talk about it.”<sup>1</sup> Born in Lima, Ohio, Schenk grew up in a devout Catholic family. And she credits much of her involvement in these “edgy” causes to an experience she had in her Catholic high school:

*I went to a Catholic high school with a very progressive principal who was very social-justice oriented. Senior year, we went on a trip to teach catechism to farm workers...it ended up being a huge wake-up call about people who didn't have nearly as much as we did. We were eating the food, but the people harvesting it didn't have enough food for themselves.*

*It was a foundational moment. That kind of experience at that young an age was really germane to how I thought about social justice and what it meant to be a Catholic going forward. It eventually led me to where I am now.<sup>2</sup>*

After high school, Schenk went on to earn her undergraduate degree from Georgetown University and a master's degree in science from Boston College. After college and graduate

school, Schenk worked as an interfaith coordinator with the United Farm Workers Union in the early 1970s in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During this time, Schenk learned the community organizing skills from Cesar Chavez that would become so vital to her work as co-founder and founding executive director of FutureChurch.

While in Philadelphia, Schenk also joined the Medical Mission Sisters, an order she was with for six years. As she was discerning whether to make final vows, however, Schenk said it became clear that she wasn't ready to make a final commitment.

Upon returning to the Cleveland, Ohio area, Schenk worked as a nurse midwife, a position she held for twenty years. In 1980 she helped to organize a successful statewide coalition to expand Medicaid coverage to include pregnant, low-income women and their children.

She also became very active in her faith community, Saint Malachi, kept in touch with her Medical Missionary friends, and dated. But, she says, “it seemed like every time I was dating, I was two-timing God.” And soon, with the help of several retreats and spiritual direction, she realized that religious life “was really [her] life path.”<sup>3</sup> And so, she entered the Cleveland Congregation of Saint Joseph. She made final vows in 1993.



Sister Christine Schenk  
and Fr. Louis J. Trivison

### Co-Founding FutureChurch

In 1990, following a decision by the United States bishops to initiate the use of a ritual for Sunday worship in the absence of a priest, two Cleveland-area parishes began the work that would eventually lead to the founding of FutureChurch. The parish council of Resurrection of Our Lord Parish in Solon, a suburb of Cleveland, had passed a resolution which called on the United States bishops to look beyond substituting Communion services for Eucharistic Celebrations in priestless parishes, and to explore the more desirable options of allowing both the return of married priests to active ministry and the ordination of women. Pastor of Resurrection of Our Lord Parish and FutureChurch co-founder, Fr. Louis J. Trivison echoed the resolution saying, "I believe the shortage of priests imperils the Eucharistic life of the church...The Eucharist is more important than the gender or the married state of the celebrant of Mass."<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, the Community of St. Malachi council formed a committee to address issues of church reform, tapping Schenk, who was active in the community, to serve on the committee.

Members of the two parishes then met to discuss their concerns. A need was recognized to network with members of other parishes throughout the Cleveland Diocese around issues of Church reform because no other organization was addressing them. And in October 1990, some 33 people from 16 faith communities met at St. Malachi Center to form the FutureChurch coalition which brought members of parishes throughout the diocese together for monthly meetings. In time the coalition developed a mission statement, goals, and leadership. Schenk was named as FutureChurch's founding executive director. FutureChurch was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1993.

### The Future of Priestly Ministry

Over the next three years, Schenk reached out to Catholics in nearly

70 dioceses throughout the United States to talk about the looming priest shortage, using the data presented in the ground breaking book *Full Pews and Empty Altars: Demographics of the Priest Shortage in the United States* by Richard Shoenherr and Lawrence A. Young. Often, Schenk's presentation was the first time Catholics had heard about the clergy shortage. "We would go in with the statistics from Shoenherr-Young. The news media would go to the diocese and say, 'Is this true?' The diocese would say, 'Yes, it's true,' and then the whole story would come out. Very often it was the first public acknowledgment that the diocese made that yes, the priest shortage was real and it was happening"<sup>4</sup> says Schenk.

Under Schenk's leadership, FutureChurch developed resources for its Future of Priestly Ministry initiative, which presented creative ways of meeting the sacramental needs of Catholics beyond a male, celibate priesthood, including information about women's roles in the church, the role of women in the ministry of Jesus and St. Paul, and the suppression of women's leadership in the history of the church. Over the next several years, as word spread of the shortage and FutureChurch's efforts to renew priestly ministry, so too did FutureChurch itself, growing from 33 individuals in Cleveland to over 5,000 members and activists throughout the United States and other parts of the world.

### Women In Church Leadership

But, in 1994, Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* closed the door on the discussion of ordaining women priests. Schenk and FutureChurch adjusted, developing their second major initiative, Advancing Women in Church Leadership, which was inspired by the Benchmarks for Church Leadership Roles for Women leadership put forth by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. The initiative serves to further educate Catholics on the leadership of women in the Church's history, restore the stories

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of women in Salvation History to prominence in the Sunday readings, promote placing women in decision-making positions that are not restricted to clerics, to create opportunities for women to preach in a liturgical context, and to advocate for the restoration of the church's early practice of ordaining women to the diaconate.

### Mary of Magdala Celebrations

Through this initiative, Schenk was also able to make good on vow she made in 1989 while pursuing her master's degree in theology from St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland: "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."<sup>5</sup> In 1997, FutureChurch launched its international project to restore the memory of Mary of Magdala as the "apostle to the apostles" through celebrations held on or around July 22nd. The celebrations featured female presiders and preachers, historically and scripturally accurate portrayals of Mary of Magdala, and the full account of Jesus' resurrection in the Gospel of John, which shows that Mary was the first witness to the resurrection and was commissioned by Jesus to go and tell the other disciples.



Anointing ritual at St. Mary of Magdala prayer service held in 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Schenk recalls the impact these celebrations made on Catholic women as the number of celebrations grew exponentially one year to the next. "It dawned on me then 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."<sup>6</sup>

Schenk knows well and first hand the pain that these celebrations sought to heal. As she finished her Master's degree, while her male classmates went on to diaconal and priestly ordination, Schenk says she "got

it at a whole other level how wrong this was...It was at a much deeper level that I recognized what a violation this was of the call of the Spirit in a person." Schenk has never allowed her pain, however, to get the best of her. She says she regularly seeks to understand where her efforts to reform and renew the church come from, "I ask myself, 'Where is this coming from? Is this coming because you're mad or because it's a passion about being about that big and wide reign of God like Jesus was?'"<sup>7</sup>

In 2016, after FutureChurch had spent 19 years celebrating and telling the true story of Mary of Magdala, the Vatican raised her celebration to that of a liturgical feast -- on par with the male apostles. Reflecting on this achievement at FutureChurch's 2016 Mary of Magdala Celebration in Cleveland, Schenk said, "It's not often that working to be the change we long to see actually happens in one's own lifetime...But we have a long way to go before women's ministry is in on par with men's ministry in the Catholic Church."<sup>8</sup>

### Justice In the Church

Schenk isn't disheartened by the slow pace of change in the church, however. Nor does she become overly discouraged when she's turned away from speaking in dioceses. Instead, she finds comfort in the knowledge that both Jesus and St. Paul struggled with the religious leaders of their own time. "I console myself that Jesus was rejected by his own tradition and so was Paul. He was thrown out of all the best synagogues in the Mediterranean world...I just remind myself that it's all part of it."<sup>9</sup> And through FutureChurch's Justice in the Church initiative, Schenk has helped others who work in and for the church find justice when they encounter struggles with church authorities today.

In a response to a rash of church worker firings, Schenk built a partnership between FutureChurch, lay ministry associations, and canon lawyers to sponsor workshops to help lay ministers understand their rights and to protect themselves. FutureChurch also created materials to help lay Catholics understand their own rights and responsibilities when speaking out for the good of the Church and to learn more about the primacy of conscience throughout the church's tradition.

Later, in 2002, after being turned away from the diocese of Cleveland, a clergy sex abuse survivor approached Schenk and FutureChurch about sponsoring a healing service for victims of sexual abuse. In response, Schenk reached out to local pastoral minister, Laurel Jurecki who had helped to write the first Mary of Magdala celebrations, to create a liturgy of lament

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for the broken Body of Christ. Over 200 survivors and mourners attended the powerful liturgy. Over the next few years, hundreds of similar rituals throughout the US and abroad, gave voice to the pain and outrage that Catholics had experienced because of the clergy sex abuse crisis.

### Save Our Parish Community

In 2004, when the Archdiocese of Boston announced that it would close 65 of its parishes, Catholics once again sought ways to claim their right and responsibility to speak and act for the good of the church. Schenk and FutureChurch stood by their side, developing a fourth major initiative entitled Save Our Parish Community, designed to provide Catholics with the canonical information and tools they needed to defend their parish homes. In 2009, when parish closings came to her home diocese, Schenk said, "Too many bishops are treating parishes as if they were Starbucks franchises. It's about more than money. It's about mission to the people." She adds, "This isn't what Jesus would do."<sup>10</sup>

As of June 2015, with the help of canon lawyer Sister Kate Kuentler, and equipped with FutureChurch resources Catholics from 36 parishes in 8 dioceses successfully appealed to their bishop or the Vatican to keep their parishes open.

### The Future

In 2013, Schenk retired from her position as executive director of FutureChurch and now serves as executive director *emerita*. In October of 2013, she was honored with FutureChurch's Louis J. Trivison Award, named for Schenk's long-time friend and fellow FutureChurch co-founder, which is offered to those who exhibit outstanding leadership in advancing the FutureChurch mission and vision. In accepting the award, Schenk harkened back to her days as a nurse midwife, telling the members gathered that she saw her role at FutureChurch as a "spiritual midwifery...supporting and encouraging the energies already present in the people of God, laboring to birth the fullness of the Vatican II vision." Introducing her successor, Deborah Rose-Milavec, she said, "Just as in real life, there comes a time for midwives for change shift."<sup>11</sup>

Schenk is excited and hopeful to see the ways in which FutureChurch has grown since her retirement: "I'm

really excited about where FutureChurch is going now. I think we needed to do the next thing internationally and programmatically... And so I'm so glad that we're heading in all those places now."<sup>12</sup>

To date, Schenk has presented and been interviewed hundreds of times both domestically and internationally about the worldwide priest shortage, strategies for cultivating and maintaining vibrant parishes, women in Scripture, Jesus and women, and women officeholders in the early church. She has been interviewed by many major news sources including the PBS Newshour, World News with Diane Sawyer, CBS Sunday Morning, National Public Radio, CNN, MSNBC and Fox cable channels, and quoted in major feature stories on Mary of Magdala and women in the Bible by both *Time* and *Newsweek*. Her opinion and spirituality pieces and have been published by both secular and religious media.

She is featured alongside Sisters Jean Hughes and Simone Campbell in the film, *Radical Grace*, which follows the story of the three sisters' efforts for social justice while the Leadership Conference of Women Religious was under fire from the Vatican. The film captures moments while Schenk led a FutureChurch pilgrimage to Rome to visit sites of early architectural and artistic depictions of women in church leadership as well as her work with the NunJustice coalition through FutureChurch.

Her regular column for the *National Catholic Reporter* entitled "Simply Spirit" can be found twice a month online and at <http://ncronline.org/blogs/simple-spirit>. She is currently finishing a book that will be published by Fortress Press in 2017 entitled *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity*. For her book, Sr. Chris researched women's leadership in early Christian art and archaeology.

<sup>1,3,4,7,9</sup> Roberts, Tom. "A map to the future church" *National Catholic Reporter*. 16 July 2009. Web.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, Kristen. "Sister of St. Joseph uses voice in FutureChurch" *Timesunion*. 21 September 2012. Web.

<sup>5,6,8</sup> Schenk, Christine. Reflection for FutureChurch Mary of Magdala Celebration 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Ravitz, Jessica. "Catholic faithful face church closures" *CNN Online*. 16 25 March 2009. Web.

<sup>11</sup> Manson, Jamie. "Sr. Chris Schenk retires from FutureChurch after two decades" *National Catholic Reporter*, 10 October 2013. Web.

<sup>12</sup> FutureChurch 25th Anniversary Video, 2015.



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# Questions for Reflection & Discussion on the Witness of Sister Christine Schenk

In what ways is Sister Christine Schenk a witness of mercy for you?

Of the four initiatives undertaken by FutureChurch during Sister Christine Schenk's leadership -- The Future of Priestly Ministry, Women in Church Leadership, Save Our Parish Community, and Justice in the Church -- which one resonates more with you? Why?

Sister Christine Schenk describes annual Mary of Magdala Celebrations as an opportunity for the Spirit to heal. How do you experience the Spirit's healing? In what ways are you being called to bring the Spirit's healing into the world?

Sister Christine Schenk says she seeks to understand her motivations: "I ask myself, 'Where is this coming from? Is this coming because you're mad or because it's a passion about being about that big and wide reign of God like Jesus was?'" What do you do ensure that your way of being in the world or church is rooted in the message of Jesus?

What renewals and reforms do you think the Church can undertake to be a fuller witness of God's mercy to the world?



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“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?”

**Sister Christine Schenk**

## In Her Own Words:

Sister Christine Schenk Reflection for the Feast of Saint Mary of Magdala, 2016

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, as she is tonight, 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.



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## Questions for Reflection & Discussion

Reflecting on the first celebrations of Mary of Magdala, Sister Chris reflects, "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." Have you been a part of a Mary of Magdala celebration? If so, what was your experience like? If not, can you identify a time when a celebration or ritual brought "the Spirit's healing light" to you?

In 2016, the Vatican elevated Saint Mary of Magdala's memorial celebration to a liturgical feast day -- on par with the male Apostles. Sister Chris says, "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." Is there something that you have been working to change -- in the church or in society? Have you been able to see any change?

Sister Chris closes her reflection with a question: "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..." How is the Spirit calling you to be an agent of change in the world or church? How might you respond? Does it matter to you, whether you see the change or not?



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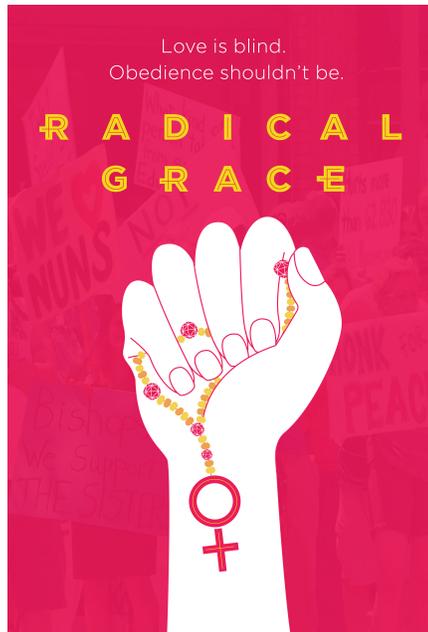
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## RADICAL GRACE Movie Discussion Guide

*When the Vatican reprimands U.S. nuns — citing their “radical feminism” — three fearless nuns risk their place in the Church to follow another higher calling: social justice. One sister takes on Church patriarchy, another finds hope in the former prisoners she counsels, and the third launches a cross-country Nuns on the Bus tour, leveraging her newfound fame to spotlight social needs.*

*Visit [radicalgracefilm.com](http://radicalgracefilm.com) for more information on the film and for information and opportunities to host screenings or purchase for personal viewing. Additional discussion guides are also available for download.*

### Questions for Reflection:

- What is radical about each of the sisters - Jean, Simone, and Chris?
- What were the moments of grace that you remember from the lives of Chris, Jean, and Simone?
- What were the graced moments of the film?
- How have you experienced Radical Grace in your life? or your ministry?
- Have you ever met anyone who practices/practiced Radical Grace in their lives?
- What role does MERCY play in the lives of Sr. Simone, Sr. Chris, and Sr. Jean?
- How did the film leave you feeling at the end?
- How are you called to practice radical Love, Mercy, and/or Grace?



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## Scripture: 1 Kings 19: 11-15

Then God said [to Elijah]: “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Eternal; I will pass by.” There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before God—but God was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but God was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but God was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound.

When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

A voice said to him, “Why are you here, Elijah?” He replied, “I have been most zealous for God, the Eternal, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant. They have destroyed your altars and murdered your prophets by the sword. I alone remain, and they seek to take my life.”

God said to him: Go back!

### Listening for the Voice of God:

*Our Scripture reading reminds us that God often speaks to us in surprising ways and in surprising places. The passage also reveals a truth that so many of us know from experience: the voice of God often asks us to “move.” Normally the movement God is calling us to make, as individuals and as institutions, is a “metanoia” – a conversion of our very way of being and doing in the world. We take a moment now to listen for God’s voice.*

**Sung Refrain:**                      *Voices that Challenge*                      D. Haas

*After a moment of quiet, sing the refrain of “Voices that Challenge” after each voice. Alternatively, you may also sing a verse of your choosing from “Open my Eyes,” which was used as the opening song.*

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### In the voice of Natalie Terry, a woman who has discerned a call to the diaconate

Bowns, Cynthia; Terry, Natalie; and Walsh, Connie. “Women Ready to Serve as Deacons.” 14 Apr. 2016. <https://www.futurechurch.org/women-deacons/podcast/april-13-2016-women-ready-to-serve-as-deacons-teleconference>

“My youth minister asked, ‘If you could be a priest, would you want to?’ Without blinking, I said yes to him, not knowing what it meant. That was a game-changing moment in my life. I started imagining it for the first time. Priesthood is in desperate need of renewal. In coming to this realization I have experienced a call to the diaconate. God is calling me to be a servant and to represent and promote the church’s call to service. The diaconate is a place for the church’s renewal. The diaconate is a moment for the whole church to recognize that women can serve in persona Christi.” **Sung Refrain**

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## **In the Voice of Andy Otto who left the Jesuits before ordination because he was called to both priesthood and married life**

2015, April 18. Should Priests Be Allowed To Marry? Busted Halo. <http://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/should-priests-be-allowed-to-marry>

“What drew me to leave religious life was a yearning for intimate and exclusive companionship. Celibate life certainly has its blessings, but for me, even close friendships could not replace the kind of love experienced in a monogamous romantic relationship. But if married priests were allowed? I’d jump at that opportunity.

What always bothered me was the inconsistency in the discipline. If marriage is allowed for Eastern Rite priests why not change it for Roman Catholics? A few years ago I met an Eastern Rite priest who said that he grew up Roman Catholic but felt called to both the priesthood and marriage so he joined the Eastern Rite. While I understood his desire, I didn’t want to leave my Roman Catholic tradition; it meant too much to me. Why did my tradition not seem to respect a dual calling?” **Sung Refrain**

## **In the Voice of Sr. Christine Schenk, who has spent much of her career advocating that women of Salvation History be more fully represented in the Lectionary.**

“It’s Not All About Eve: Women in the Lectionary” by Christine Schenk, in *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table*. Edited by the Catholic Women Speak Network. Copyright © 2015 Catholic Women Speak Network. Used with permission.

“Proclaiming Lectionary texts that exclude or distort the witness of women, particularly in a church where all priestly liturgical leadership is male, is dangerous for our daughters and our sons. Young girls can hardly avoid internalizing the notion that God must have created them less important than their brothers. If all-male liturgical leadership and Sunday Lectionary readings are subtly seeding subordination in our daughters, what is being planted in our sons?” **Sung Refrain**

## **The Voice of Catholics Working to Keep St. Thaddeus, their historically black Chicago Parish, Open**

Briscoe, Tony (2016, July 24). Parishioners hold prayer vigil in hopes of keeping Roseland church open. The Chicago Tribune. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-st-thaddeus-prayer-vigil-met-20160724-story.html>

Christina Horde: “St. Thaddeus is more than brick and mortar. It’s a safe haven. We would lose a footprint, a very important footprint.”

Elizabeth Burkhead: “It would hurt a lot of us. It would make it feel like we couldn’t go anywhere. It’s a lot of family members who will get broken up because everyone communicates through the church. And if the church isn’t here, everyone would just disperse.” **Sung Refrain**

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*\*\*Additional Voices: Given the community you have gathered, it may be appropriate and pastoral to include additional voices in this prayer service. Some additional voices include: an African American Catholic addressing racism, a divorced and remarried Catholic discussing their experience, a member LGBT community discussing their desire for acceptance and inclusion in the the church, theologians who have been silenced or forbidden to teach, victims of the sexual abuse crisis. These voices can be easily found by searching for these topics on the websites of reputable news sources, Catholic and secular.*

## **Reflection:**

*After a moment of quiet reflection, the prayer leader may preach or lead the gathered community in a shared reflection. Some questions to consider include: In whose voice do you hear the voice of God calling you or our church to move or change our way of being and doing? What might be a faithful response to that call?*

## **Prayers of Petition**

### **Response: Loving God, hear our prayer.**

LEADER: Confident that God always hears us, we now lift up our voices in prayer.

READER: For our beloved Church, that those who are in positions of authority might welcome the talents and listen to the voices of women, married men, divorced and separated persons, people of color, members of the LGBT community, and all those who seek to offer their gifts to the People of God, we pray

In gratitude for all who are gathered here; for their loving work for our Church and our community, for their dedication to work as co-creators of the vineyard here on earth, and for their constant faith, we pray

For those who feel excluded or unwelcomed in our communities, for those who turn them away, and for those seeking to join our communities, that our Wisdom Sister Sophia may create within us a spirit of hospitality and radical welcome, we pray

For women who have left the Church because they have felt excluded, exploited, and/or ignored, that they might find a spiritual home that celebrates and welcomes their gifts, we pray

For all those who are victims of violence, oppression, exploitation, slavery, starvation, homelessness, war, unemployment, addiction, incarceration, sexism, racism, or any other form of injustice, that they might know God's unconditional love and compassion, and that all would affirm and protect their innate human dignity we pray,

And for the prayers we now voice .... we pray:

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**Closing Prayer** A Church Reformer's Prayer, by Christine Schenk, CSJ

LEADER: Let us pray,

ALL: O Beloved God, when assailed by fear and discouragement, teach me to look to you:

Turn my doubt and uncertainty to faithfilled confidence.

Turn my fear and cynicism to trust and hope.

Turn my anger and resentment to forgiving kindness.

Turn my need to control to letting go in God.

Turn my belief that I'm all alone to awareness of your near and dear companionship.

Turn my fear that this is a hopeless cause into confidence in your power to save.

Turn me from compulsive activity to patient contemplation.

Gift me with new eyes to see your impossibly fresh creation arising from chaos' fearful, faithful ferment.

Turn me from my need to fill every minute, to a standing still in that empty space which confidently awaits your miracle of grace.

Most High and Glorious God, most near and dear Savior, Brother, Mother, Sister, Friend,

thank you for all the ways you love so much.

Teach me a new serenity, midst hustle and bustle of Church reform days, but first of all, let me bring you praise. AMEN.

**Closing Song Suggestions:** *All Are Welcome* (M. Haugen), *We Are Called* (D. Haas), *A Place at the Table* (L. True), *If You Believe and I Believe* (Traditional Zimbabwean, arr. John Bell),



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## Be A Witness of Mercy

resources for learning & doing

### Host a Film Screening

*Radical Grace* follows three sisters -- Christine Schenk, Simone Campbell, and Jean Hughes -- as they risk their place in the Church to follow another higher calling: social justice. Visit [radicalgracefilm.com](http://radicalgracefilm.com) for information on hosting a screening and additional resources. Also see the reflection guide provided in this resource.

### Follow Sister Chris' Blog, Simply Spirit.

Sister Chris writes a regular blog for the National Catholic Reporter online, entitled "Simply Spirit." View at <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/simply-spirit>.

### Participate in FutureChurch's efforts to advance women in church leadership and to restore women deacons.

FutureChurch is home to countless resources for Catholics who wish to advance women in church leadership and advocate for the restoration of women deacons. Visit [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org) to learn more about these initiatives, how you can get involved, and how you can support FutureChurch's work.

### Host a Mary of Magdala Celebration on or around July 22nd

Each year, FutureChurch develops a theme and resources for celebrating Mary of Magdala. Visit <https://www.futurechurch.org/women-in-church-leadership/mary-of-magdala> to view some previous themes and resources and to download this year's theme.

### Learn more about the history and present possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate.

Visit [www.catholicwomendeacons.org](http://www.catholicwomendeacons.org) to learn more about the history of women deacons, learn about women who served the early church as deacons, learn about women who today experience a call to the diaconate, and find ways to become part of a global movement to restore women deacons.