

## CELEBRATING MARY OF MAGDALA

# Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers

## Celebrating Women Preachers



St. Mary of Magdala Proclaiming the Resurrection. Margaret Beaudette, SC. 2014. Used with Permission.

Dear Friend of St. Mary of Magdala,

Enclosed is everything you need (and perhaps more) to celebrate the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala this year. In the spirit of St. Mary of Magdala, the first to proclaim the Resurrection of Jesus as the “apostle to the apostles” we celebrate, **“Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers: Celebrating Women Preachers.”**

**Celebrate the Feast Day of St. Mary of Magdala (July 22)** with the theme, “Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers: Celebrating Women Preachers.” A sample prayer service is included in this pack for your adaptation and use. More information about our theme is included in this pack.

**Celebrate Women Preachers of Scripture and History.** We have included a resource, *Prophetic Women Who Proclaimed the Word of God*, to serve as a starting point for learning about and remembering these women preachers.

**Lift Up the Voices of Women Today.** Last November, FutureChurch launched a ground-breaking website, Catholic Women Preach ([www.catholicwomenpreach.org](http://www.catholicwomenpreach.org)), that provides video and text of women preaching on the readings for every Sunday of the year and some feast days. Enclosed is a flier for advertising this exciting resource. We have also included a listing of resources where you can find women preaching.

An article on “Women and the Word” -- a project in Cleveland, OH that offers local communities the opportunity hear women preach on Scripture in a retreat-like setting -- might serve as inspiration for a similar project in your area.

**Advocate for Catholics to Hear the Voices of Women Preachers.** We have also included a sample template for an Opinion/Editorial piece that you may send to your local and diocesan newspapers.

Finally, we have included information about “DeaconChat” an initiative to help lay Catholics engage their local clergy in a discussion about the need for women deacons in the Roman Church.

If we can be of any help to you as you plan your Mary of Magdala Celebration, please do not hesitate to be in touch by email to [russ@futurechurch.org](mailto:russ@futurechurch.org) or by calling 216.228.0869.

Sincerely,

Russ Petrus  
Program Director

Deb Rose-Milavec  
Executive Director

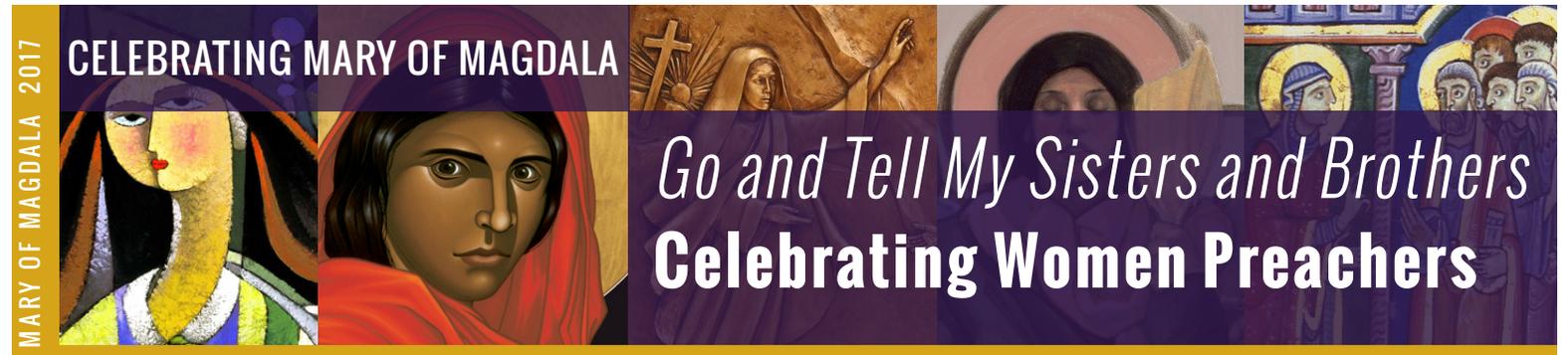
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# Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers Celebrating Women Preachers

**I have seen the Lord!**

*Mary of Magdala*

**Cry out with a  
hundred thousand  
voices! It is silence  
that kills the world!**

*Catherine of Siena*

## ABOUT OUR THEME

### Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers: Celebrating Women Preachers

Women have been called to interpret and proclaim the word of God in every age.

Mary of Magdala is rightfully understood to be the “apostle to the apostles”, a prominent early Christian woman leader whose prophetic proclamations helped foster the Jesus movement and later Christian communities as they emerged in all their diversity.

In short, Mary of Magdala preached the Good News.

On June 3, 2016, Pope Francis raised her July 22 memorial to a feast day and commending her as *Apostolorum Apostola* in a decree.

As we celebrate the first anniversary of that momentous decree raising her status to that of the other apostles, we recognize that retrieving and celebrating the historical memory of Mary of Magdala as a proclaimer and preacher of the Good News is critical to the life of the Church. Contemporary believers – women - can see themselves clearly in the Gospel stories and in early Church history as preachers, ministers, and leaders.

Still, our celebration of women preachers goes beyond Mary of Magdala. Women

exercised their prophetic voice and proclaimed God’s word before Mary of Magdala and certainly after her.

For instance, Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron who first appears in Exodus, is the first woman to bear the title prophet.

Huldah, a seventh century BCE prophet, helped institute reforms under King Josiah eradicating all non-Yahwistic forms of worship and consolidating worship, practice, and customs within the monotheism that we practice to this day.

In the context of early Christian history, women were leaders and proclaimers. Lydia who established the first European housechurch, Phoebe who was named a deacon and sent to Rome with a letter from Paul to proclaim the Good News to the community there, and the Samaritan woman who converted her whole community on the power of her word come to mind.

In medieval Christianity, the Beguines, a lay women’s religious movement with no founder, no central rule, and no single, prescribed way of life, went out into the world to proclaim the Gospel in a world that had been corrupted by the materialism of the day. But even more important was the flowering of

**It is important to understand the vocation of a prophet. Prophets are not fortunetellers. They are vessels of communication between God and the people.**

**They are keenly attuned both to God's longing for well-being for all of creation and to the cries of the people.**

**They have a two-pronged mission: to denounce wrongdoing and injustices that prevent the full flourishing of God's people and all creation, and to announce the way toward a fuller realization of God's reign.**

*Barbara Reid, O.P.*

theological writings in the vernacular across Europe during the 13th century, an activity the Beguines took up with fervor because of the pope's support of them. But later they received criticism over their intellectual and theological activity which became the focus of mounting suspicion by churchmen. In June 1310 the Beguine Marguerite Porete was burned at the stake for disseminating her work *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Her heresy trial focused on the fact that she had spoken in the vernacular of matters too profound for the laity to understand.

In the fourteenth century CE in a world and church torn by indifference, violence and scandal, Catherine of Siena famously admonished Catholic leaders to speak up in the name of the Gospel. She warned, "Cry out with a hundred thousand voices. It is silence that kills the world!"

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), an American suffragist, recognized that whenever women tried to make inroads into politics, education, or the work world, the Bible was quoted to argue that such advances were against the Word of God. Thus, she compiled, *The Woman's Bible*, in which she and seven other women commented on every text of the Bible that concerned women. Indeed, Elizabeth Cady Stanton proclaimed the Good News.

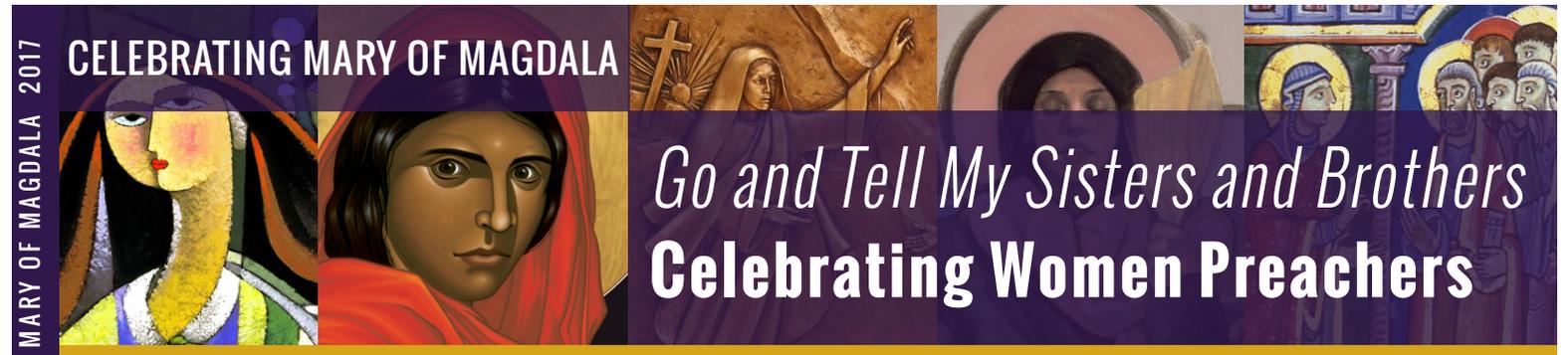
Two other notable preachers were Angelina (1792-1873) and Sarah (1805-79) Grimke, daughters of a Quaker slaveholding family in South Carolina, who became ardent abolitionists and outspoken advocates for women's rights.

In the 21st century, we too see a world torn apart by indifference to the needs of the most vulnerable and violence of

**...we need women (and men) with the courage, vision, and prophetic voices to speak truth with love to the sufferings and injustices of our day.**

every sort as the gap between the rich and poor widens and the privileges of the few are prioritized over the common good for all God's people, creatures, and the earth. We also experience a church fraught with internal scandals and sin most clearly seen in the number of cases of clergy sexual abuse and the coverup. Sexism, racism, homophobia and other sinful practices enforce the status quo in terms of authority.

Thus, we need women (and men) with the courage, vision, and prophetic voices to speak truth with love to the sufferings and injustices of our day.



# *Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers* Celebrating Women Preachers

## RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS

Regardless of how you celebrate, consider having the following resources (included in this packet) available for your participants.

1. Mary of Magdala Brochure
2. Women in the Ministry of St. Paul
3. Fliers with information about [www.catholicwomenpreach.org](http://www.catholicwomenpreach.org)
4. Template for writing an opinion or editorial piece.
5. Resources for Women's Preaching

Find more resources at [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org)

## OPTIONS FOR CELEBRATING THE FEAST OF SAINT MARY OF MAGDALA THIS YEAR

### Liturgical Celebration Only

- We invite you to use or adapt the enclosed prayer service.
- We encourage you to personally invite and include young Catholic women (your daughters, granddaughters, nieces, Goddaughters, etc.) in your celebration. Some suggestions include: inviting them assist with the planning, leading the music, to read the readings, offer their reflections on the Church at the time for preaching, or reading the petitions.

### Liturgical Celebration & Presentation

- See suggestions for the celebration above (Celebration only).
- Consider inviting a local Scripture scholar or Church historian to discuss the role that women played in proclaiming the gospel in Scripture and throughout history.
- Consider inviting someone with expertise in preaching or canon law to present on the ways in which women and all lay people can participate in the preaching ministry of the Church.

### Celebration and Discussion Session

- Host a discussion session that invites participants to consider ways that the local parish or congregation can incorporate women's voices into the preaching mission of their community. The article on "Women & the Word" as well as "Creative Ways to Preach in Your Community" could be helpful ways to start the discussion.
- As a group, decide upon one or two ways you would like to see women's voices included in the preaching mission of the local community. Then decide upon a way to approach your pastor or local bishop to have a discussion.
- We suggest that you plan to host the discussion/listening session after the celebration for a few reasons:
  1. The celebration – particularly the preaching – may help facilitate your listening session by raising some issues the women in attendance may want to address or by raising questions they had not necessarily considered in the past.
  2. By hosting the listening session following the celebration you have more flexibility when it comes to timing so that the listening session feels neither rushed nor drawn out.

# THE FEAST OF SAINT MARY OF MAGDALA

## Celebrating Women Preachers

### July 2017

#### INTRODUCTORY RITES

##### Suggested Opening Songs:

*A Place at the Table* music by Lori True, text by Shirley Erena Murray

© 1998, Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, Il, 60188; 2001, GIA Publications, Inc.

*All are Welcome* by Marty Haugen (Verses 1, 2 and 5)

© 1994, GIA Publications, Inc.

*You Are Called to Tell the Story* by Ruth Duck

© 1992, GIA Publications, Inc.

##### Sign of the Cross and Sign of Peace

LEADER: (*while making the sign of the Cross*):

The grace of Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

**ALL: And also with you**

LEADER: Let us welcome one another with a sign of peace.

##### Opening Prayer:

LEADER: Let us pray.

God of light and life,

You are the source of all that is good in our lives.

We give you thanks for Jesus, the Word made flesh,

Who sent women to tell the Gospel: St. Mary of Magdala, Martha, Mary, the Samaritan woman, and so many others.

We give you thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit,

That bold Wisdom-Spirit who impels us today

to proclaim your good news

of peace and justice in our homes, communities, and our world.

We ask your blessings on our gathering here.

In Jesus' name we pray.

**ALL: AMEN**

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

### A Chorus of Voices

*This set of readings presents some of the women of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures who proclaim the word of God. Please feel free to adapt to suit your community and your allotted time frame.*

*Consider inviting multiple women from your community to proclaim the individual readings.*

### Sung Response

*A response is sung once by the cantor and then repeated by the congregation before the readings begin. Then, the sung response is repeated again after each reading.*

#### Suggested Songs (refrain only):

*You Are the Voice* by David Haas  
© 1987, GIA Publications, Inc.

*Your Words Are Spirit and Life* by Bernadette Farrell  
© 1993, OCP. \*Consider replacing "LORD" with "God"

**Reader:** A Reading from the Book of Exodus (15:20)

Then the prophet Miriam took a tambourine in her hand and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to our God who has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider are cast into the sea."

### Sung Response

**Reader:** A Reading from the Book of Judges (4:4-5; 14, 16 shortened and adapted.)

Deborah, a woman, a female prophet, a fiery women, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim and the Israelites went up to her for judgment....Deborah said to Barak, "Get up!...Does God not go before you?" So the entire army of Sisera fell...not a single one remained.

### Sung Response

**Reader:** A Reading from Second Chronicles (34:22-28 shortened and adapted)

So Hilkiah and those whom the king had sent went to the woman-prophet Huldah...she was living in Jerusalem in the Mishneh and they consulted her. She declared to them, "So says the God of Israel: 'I will indeed bring calamity upon this place and upon its inhabitants...because they have abandoned me and have offered incense to other gods...' But as to the king of Judah...So says the God of Israel...' because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God...and you have torn your clothes and wept before me,...I have also heard you. For my part you shall be gathered to your graces in peace, your eyes shall not see all the calamity I will bring upon this place..."

### Sung Response

**Reader:** A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (1:39-45)

During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother the Messiah would come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by God would be fulfilled."

### Sung Response

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**Reader:** A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (1:39-45)

Mary said:

“My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,  
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.  
For you have looked with favor  
upon your lowly servant,  
and from this day forward  
all generations will call me blessed.  
For you, the Almighty have done great things for me,  
and holy is your name.

Your mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear you.  
You have shown the strength of your arm;  
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;  
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places.  
You have filled the hungry with good things, while the rich you have sent away empty.  
You have come to the aid of Israel your servant, mindful of your mercy – the promise you made to our  
ancestors—to Sarah and Abraham and their descendants forever.”

### **Sung Response**

**Reader:** A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke (2:36-38 Adapted by Meriam Therese Winter, MMS. )  
Anna, Phanuel’s daughter, of the tribe and traditions of Asher, a devout, dedicated woman, a prophet able to see and interpret the silent, veiled revelation of God’s mysterious ways, was seventy years a wife and the rest of her life a widow. She remained now in the Temple, serving her God day and night through ritual fasts and prayer. She was eighty-four years young when she saw the Child with his mother. Praising God for this blessing, she spoke of the Child to all concerned about Israel’s liberation, and from that day, she preached the miracle made flesh, Whom her own eyes had seen.

### **Sung Response**

**Reader:** A Reading from the Gospel according to John (4: 28, 29, 39-42)

The Samaritan woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, “Come and see someone who told me everything I have done! Could this be the Messiah?” At that everyone set out from town to meet Jesus.

Many Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus on the strength of the woman’s testimony -- that “he told me everything I ever did.” The result was that, when these Samaritans came to Jesus, they begged him to stay with them awhile. So Jesus stayed there two days, and through his own spoken word many more came to faith. They told the woman, “No longer does our faith depend on your story. We’ve heard for ourselves, and we know that this really is the savior of the world.”

### **Sung Response**

*Allow for a brief moment of silent reflection before beginning the Gospel Acclamation*

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**Gospel Acclamation:**

*Alleluia! Raise the Gospel* Text by Owen Alstott, Music by Bernadette Farrell  
© 2002, OCP.

**Gospel Proclamation: (John 20: 1-18)**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Some Preaching Themes:**

- Our role -- modeled on Mary of Magdala and other women preachers -- in the preaching ministry of the Church
- Mary of Magdala as the “apostle to the apostles”
- Mary of Magdala as the culmination of a series of woman proclaiming the Good News
- The need to recover the voices of women in the preaching ministry of the Church

**Questions for Shared Reflection:**

- What was it like to hear the story of Mary of Magdala’s commissioning to “go and tell” against the backdrop of other women who proclaimed the word of God?
- What is Jesus asking you to “go and tell”? What truth are you being called to speak -- either in word or deed? How have/will you respond?

**Optional Sung Reflection:**

*Women of the Church* by Carey Landry  
© 2005, GIA Publications, Inc.

## LITANY OF WOMEN AND BLESSING

### Litany of Women of the Word:

LEADER: In a few moments, recognizing that we are all gifted and called to share in some way in the preaching mission of the Church, we will call upon the Holy Spirit to empower us for this ministry.

And so, we call upon a cloud of witnesses, a chorus of voices of women who have served as proclaimers of the word of God to stand and pray with us.

### ALL RESPOND: Pray with us

*As an option, a different reader may be assigned to each set names. Additionally, if time permits, consider allowing time for members of the congregation to name other women (e.g. "With whom else shall we join?")*

**Reader:** Let us join our voices with the voices of the women prophets and preachers of the Hebrew Scriptures. May our voices joined with theirs bring about a covenant of justice and peace:

Miriam, prophet and leader among the Israelites ... pray with us  
Deborah, the judge ... pray with us  
Huldah, the prophet ... pray with us

Let us join our voices with the women of the Gospels who proclaimed the good news. May our voices joined with theirs bring about a Church which embraces the inclusive ministry of Jesus:

Mary, mother of Jesus ... pray with us  
Anna, the Temple prophet ... pray with us  
The Samaritan woman, evangelizer ... pray with us  
Mary of Magdala, apostle to the apostles... pray with us

We join our voices with the women who were leaders and proclaimers in the early Church. May our voices joined with theirs bring about a church where women's leadership is valued and understood as necessary.

Phoebe, the deacon ... pray with us  
Prisca, the missionary ... pray with us  
Lydia, leader of the first house-church in Europe ... pray with us  
Junia, esteemed by Paul as "outstanding among the apostles" ... pray with us

We join our voices with the women preachers of the Middle Ages. May our voices joined with theirs bring about a church of compassionate understanding:

Catherine of Siena, speaker of truth to power ... pray with us  
Hildegard of Bingen, mystic, abbess, and preacher ... pray with us  
Rose of Viterbo, mystic and preacher of penance ... pray with us

We join our voices with the women preachers and martyrs of recent history. May our voices joined with theirs bring about a poor church for the poor.

Dorothy Day, journalist, activist, and founder of the Catholic Worker Movement ... pray with us  
Thea Bowman, evangelist and Servant of God ... pray with us  
Dorothy Stang, martyr of the Amazon ... pray with us

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**Blessing:**

*after a brief moment of quiet reflection*

LEADER: We now call upon the Holy Spirit, that she may bless and strengthen us as we claim our own role in the preaching mission of the Church and join our voices with the voices of so many women preachers, prophets, and proclaimers of the word.

*Some instruction may be necessary. Depending upon your space and upon the size of your congregation, participants may partner with the person to either side of them, form small groups, or extend their hands in blessing over the entire congregation -- perhaps in a circle -- as the following blessing is read.*

Blessing our foreheads, we invoke the Spirit of Wisdom, that we may always seek to more fully understand the Word of God.

Blessing our eyes, we invoke the Spirit of Right Judgment that we might rightly see and denounce the forces of darkness in our midst and proclaim the light of Christ.

Blessing our ears, we invoke the Spirit of Understanding, we we may hear and proclaim the truths she speaks to us and to our Church.

Blessing our lips, we invoke the Spirit of Knowledge that we might always speak the truth about our experience;

Blessing our throats, we invoke the Spirit of Courage that we may never fail to lift up our voices even when others attempt to silence us.

Blessing our hands and feet, we invoke the Spirit of Reverence, that our entire being might preach the gospel.

Blessing each other, we invoke the Spirit of Wonder and Awe that we recognize the Word of God that dwells within each of us and share this Word with the Church and the world.

LEADER: We make this prayer in Jesus' name,

ALL: AMEN.

**Our Father/Mother:**

*all pray together in a way that is familiar to the community gathered*

### Closing Prayer:

LEADER: Let us pray:

O God, you are the source of all love and life.

we give you thanks for the women of faith

who have gone before us,

these valiant women who heard the call

to “go tell” and did so in their own unique ways.

We give you thanks for Jesus, who is the Christ,

The Anointed One,

whose bold women friends came with myrrh and ointment

and whom he sent forth with the good news

that he was risen from the dead!

Make us strong today, make us just as bold that we may join this chorus of voices.

We pray this in Jesus’ name,

**ALL: AMEN.**

### Dismissal:

LEADER: Empowered by the Spirit, inspired by the valiant women of our past, we go forth now to be proclaimers of the Word and witnesses to the ends of the earth

We do not go alone...

*making a Sign of the Cross*

For we go within the love of the Creator in whose image we are made,

and of the Eternal Word who speaks to us today,

And of the Holy Spirit who gifts and empowers us,

**ALL: Amen.**

LEADER: May the peace of Christ be with you all.

**ALL: And also with you.**

LEADER: Let us go now to love and serve our God.

**ALL: Thanks be to God.**

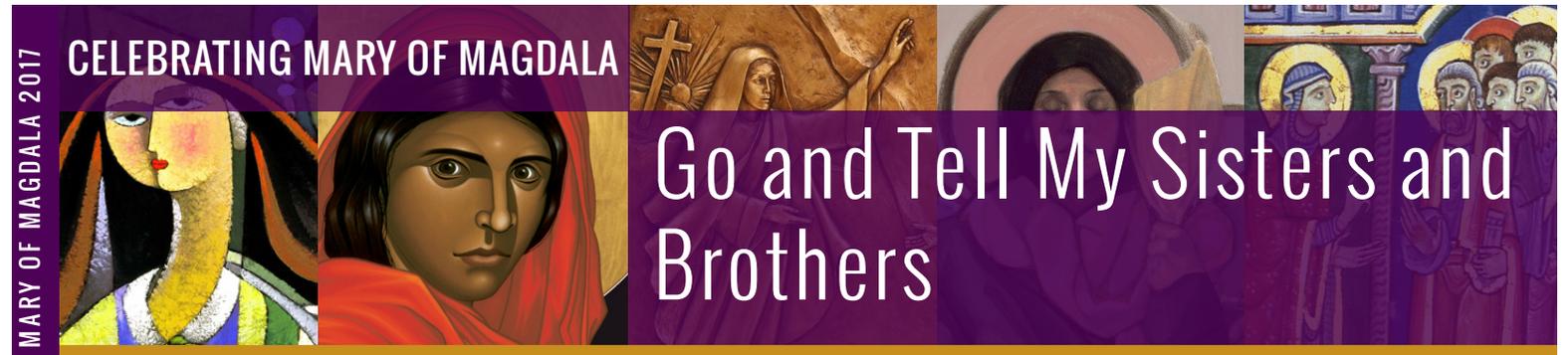
### Suggested Closing Songs:

*We Are Sent into the World* by Ricky Manalo, CSP

© 2006, OCP.

*God Has Chosen Me* by Bernadette Farrell

© 1990, OCP.



# Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers

This selection of women preachers spans both the Hebrew and Christian testaments. They are only a few voices from the great chorus of women who have changed the world with their powerful witness and proclamations of God's Word. Read and reflect on their lives and let their courage and witness inspire you to proclaim God's Word today.

## PROPHETIC WOMEN WHO PROCLAIMED THE WORD OF GOD

### Hebrew Scriptures

#### Miriam (Exodus 15: 1-31)

Miriam is the sister of Moses and Aaron, and she is the first woman ever to bear the title of prophet. Thus she became the archetype of the female prophetic tradition.

Miriam with Aaron challenge the prophetic authority of Moses. She asks, "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (Num 12:2). She understands leadership to embrace diverse voices, female and male.

But the price of speaking out is severe. Though God rebukes both Miriam and Aaron, only Miriam suffers punishment and is stricken with scales. Miriam is a condemned woman, a warning for generations to come (see Deut 24:8-9). After her punishment, she disappears altogether from the narrative until the announcement of her death and burial at Kadesh (Num 20:1).

Negative as well as positive traditions about Miriam testify to her prominence, power, and prestige in early Israel. She participates with Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelite community during the exodus and the wanderings. Her role in saving her baby brother and in celebrating the crossing of the sea highlights her concern for her people. And her people respond.

Despite the instructions of God and Moses, the people refuse to continue the march in the wilderness until the diseased Miriam is restored (Num 12:15). Three references to them at her death further underscore their loyalty to her.

Unlike most women in the Bible, Miriam is never called wife or mother. And while it appears that she led the women during the historic celebration

and Moses led the men, some biblical scholars have shown through historical and literary studies that she did not lead just the women in dance and celebration but the entire community of men and women.

Miriam's song belongs to a corpus of women's traditions that include the long Songs of Deborah (Judg 5:1-31) and Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10).

Sources: Phyllis Tribble at <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/miriam-bible>

#### Deborah (Judges 4:1-7; 5:1-31)

According to the Hebrew story, God gave the Jews into the hands of the King of Canaan as a consequence of idol worship. The Jews were persecuted for twenty years under the King's general's rule, Sisera.

Deborah, identified as a respected judge and a prophet, is in fact, the only female judge, and the only judge to be called a prophet in the Hebrew bible. She clearly speaks for God and is a decisive figure in the defeat of Sisera and the Caananites. Deborah prophesies a victory, but her general Barak will not get the glory. Instead Deborah forewarns that "the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hand of a woman" (4:9). As the Caananites are defeated by Barak's warriors, Sisera flees seeking refuge from an Kenite woman named Jael. It is Jael who slays him.

The Song of Deborah recounts the bravery of Jael in killing Sisera, the vicious oppressor of the Jewish people. The two women are celebrated as champions for the poor in the Song of Deborah.

#### Huldah (2 Kings 22)

Huldah was arguably the most respected and influential prophet during the reign of King Josiah (640 - 609 BCE).

Josiah became king of Israel when he was just eight years old. Described as Israel's last good king, he reigned for thirty-one years during a final period of peace before the Babylonian exile.

About halfway through his reign, the long-lost Book of the Law was discovered as repairs were made in the temple. Upon hearing the words of the scroll read aloud, Josiah tore his robes in repentance and summoned the prophet, Huldah – a woman.

Speaking to male authorities at the highest levels, Huldah speaks for God. She first confirms the scroll's authenticity and then tells Josiah that the disobedience of Israel will indeed lead to its destruction – even though this will not happen until after Josiah's death.

Thus, Huldah not only interpreted but also authorized the document that would later become the Torah. Further, she authorized a key turning point in the movement away from non-Yahwistic cultic worship to monotheistic worship of the one God.

Many biblical scholars believe that prophecy was a role open to women on an equal basis with men. Huldah was a recognized authority able to speak in the name of YHWH.

## Christian Scriptures

### Mary of Magdala

According to Sandra Schneiders, the Mary Magdalene material found in the John's Gospel is the strongest indicator we have of at least one early Christian community's highest regard for women's authority and leadership.

Historically, the first appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene has been consistently trivialized as a "private," that is, unofficial event without ecclesial significance. The only grounds for such a position, which is clearly contrary to the evidence of the text, is the longstanding and unjustified assumption that all of the early Christian communities shared the Jewish proscription of testimony given by women. As we saw in regard to the Samaritan woman passage, John's community regarded the apostolic testimony of women as valid, effective, and approved by Jesus.

The only conclusion that an unbiased interpretation of the Mary Magdalene episode in John 20 can yield is that, according to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus did appear to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning, and that appearance was the first appearance as Christ. He assigns no individual appearance at all to Peter.

That the theological significance of this first appearance to Mary Magdalene is the same as that intended by Paul and Luke in assigning the first witness to Peter, namely, that it identifies the "apostle to the apostles" in the respective traditions, will be clearer once we have examined Jesus' commission to Mary. The commission that Jesus gives to Mary is, "Go to my brothers and sisters and say to them: I ascend to my Father and [who is now] your Father, to my God and [who is now]

your God" (20:17). This is the first time in the Fourth Gospel that Jesus refers to his disciples as sisters and brothers and the message entrusted to Mary is precisely that Jesus' Father is now truly Father of the disciples and thus that they are now truly the sisters and brothers of Jesus.

In John's community, the woman Mary of Magdala was regarded as the primary witness to the paschal mystery, the guarantee of the apostolic tradition. Her claim to apostleship is equal in every respect to both Peter's and Paul's, and we know more about her exercise of her vocation than we do about most of the members of the Twelve. Unlike Peter, she was not unfaithful to Jesus during the passion, and, unlike Paul, she never persecuted Christ in his members. But, like both, she saw the risen Lord, received directly from him the commission to preach the Gospel, and carried out that commission faithfully and effectively.

Source: Sandra Schneiders, *Encountering and Proclaiming the Risen Jesus* in **The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women**, Edited by Elizabeth A. Johnson, Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books (2016).

### Phoebe

Phoebe is identified in Paul's letter to the Romans (16:1) by her ecclesial status, not her relationship to a male. Phoebe is a *diakonos*, the same title given to charismatic preachers in Corinth (although she was a supporter of Paul and not his critic). Phoebe was a preacher and leader of the Church in Cenchraea. Identified by Paul as a co-worker, she had obvious authority.

The last chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans opens with a strong commendation of Phoebe -- his endorsement of her ministry as the deacon of the church in Cenchraea, one of the two ports for the bustling city of Corinth. Situated just south of the isthmus that connects the Peloponnesian peninsula to mainland Greece, Corinth had many merchants and travelers passing through, which provided much opportunity for evangelization. The Acts of the Apostles (18:11) notes that Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth. From Paul's own letters, we know that he made at least one more trip there and that this was one of his most beloved, also most challenging, communities. Paul's esteem for Phoebe comes through strongly in the two short verses in which he commends her to the community in Rome. It is likely that she is the carrier of the letter, and she may have been the one who read it aloud to the various house churches in Rome. Paul may even have discussed its contents with her so that she could respond to any questions that arose from it.

It is notable that Phoebe is the only person in the New Testament who is named with a ministerial title. It is important to remember that ordination rituals did not yet exist, and the ministerial roles in Paul's days were still quite fluid. There were no job descriptions for deacons.

The distinction between diakonia of the word and diakonia of

the table is often made but scholars point out that it does not hold up. In Acts, Stephen, who was chosen for table ministry, is engaged in eloquent debate (Acts 6:8-15) and then delivers a lengthy speech (7:2-53). Similarly, Philip goes from place to place proclaiming the word (Acts 8:4, 40) and interprets a text from Isaiah for the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-39). He becomes known as “Philip the evangelist” (Acts 21:8), and no mention is made of his service at table.

Other diaconal ministries include financial and apostolic ministry.

Phoebe could have been engaged in any or all of these diaconal ministries. As leader of the church at Cenchræe, she likely broke open the word for the community by catechizing, preaching, and teaching. She may have presided over the eucharistic table and likely used her financial resources for the support of the community. Serving as ambassador of Paul to Rome, her ministry could also be regarded as apostolic (apostolos means “one sent”).

Source: Barbara E. Reid, *Wisdom’s Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretations of the Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, Mich. William B. Eerdmann’s Publishing (2016).

### **Junia**

*Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was (Rom 16:7).*

For centuries, the patriarchal overlay of biblical interpretation led to Junia being identified as a man. But modern biblical scholarship has revealed that blind spot. Junia, a woman, was an apostle -- in Christ before Paul was in Christ -- and had been imprisoned along with Paul.

A striking witness within the Greek tradition of interpretation to the fact that Junia was identified in the early Church as a woman is the work of John Chrysostom. He comments on Rom 16:7 with the words: “It is certainly a great thing to be an apostle; but to be outstanding among the apostles—think what praise that is!”

In the Liturgikon, the missal of the Byzantine Church, Junia is honored to this day in the Menologion as an apostle, together with fifty-six male apostles and the two “like to the apostles,” Mary Magdalene and Thecla.

For the Latin-speaking regions we should mention especially the commentaries on Romans by Ambrosiaster (4th c.) and Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345-410), who as a matter of course read the feminine names Junia or Julia and counted this woman among the apostles.

### **Prisca (Rom 16:3-4)**

The early Christian missionary movement was spread by traveling missionaries and organized in local house churches. Prisca along with her husband Aquila, were traveling missionaries.

Paul sends greetings to Prisca, along with her husband, Aquila, whom he calls “coworkers in Christ Jesus.” The term synergos (“coworker”) is one that Paul uses frequently of those who minister with him. Sometimes he speaks of being coworkers with God (1 Cor 3:9; 1 Thess 3:2), at other times he refers to “my coworkers” (Rom 16:21; 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25; Phlm 24). How Paul and Prisca and Aquila became coworkers Paul does not say.

Acts 18 tells of how this Jewish couple had recently come to Corinth from Italy because of Claudius’s edict ordering all Jews to leave Rome. Paul sought them out because they shared the same trade: tentmaking and leatherworking. Paul’s bonds to Prisca and Aquila deepen during his lengthy, eighteen-month stay in Corinth, and when he leaves, they accompany him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). There they remain, likely becoming the founders of the Christian community in Ephesus, while Paul continues on to Caesarea. He returns to Ephesus some time later (Acts 19) and spends approximately two and a half years there.

One story about Prisca and Aquila’s ministry is recounted in Acts 18:24-27, where they confront an eloquent preacher, Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria. “He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately” (18:25-26). It is notable that Prisca is named before her husband, both in Acts 18:18, 26 and in Paul’s greeting in Romans 16:3 (see also 2 Tim 4:19). This breach of custom may indicate that Prisca was of a higher social status than Aquila or that she was the more influential of the two in the ministry. Paul remarks on how important they are not only to him, but to all the churches of the Gentiles. They are leaders of a house church, which Paul also mentions at the conclusion of his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:19).

Source: Barbara E. Reid, *Wisdom’s Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretations of the Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, Mich. William B. Eerdmann’s Publishing (2016).

### **Lydia**

The development of the church made possible new roles for women, some with leadership responsibilities. For example, women functioned as missionaries and ministers, and the hospitality which they offered in their homes made possible the development of house churches as an early environment for the church at a time when the structure of table fellowship celebrated in the Spirit of Jesus Christ was in its earliest stages of formation.

The author of Acts, Luke, appears to take special care to demonstrate to his audience that where the Gospel went, women, often prominent, were some of the first, foremost, and most faithful converts to the Christian faith, and that their conversion led to their assuming new roles in the service of the Gospel. Women are attested in scripture serving the early

communities of believers through responsibilities that normally would not have been available to them. Luke stresses the viability of women performing various tasks of ministry for the community. These household missionary leaders may represent part of Luke's own analysis of how the phenomenon of house churches came into being. After all, as Paul himself preached to the Galatians, in the new religion, "There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). When the work of the Holy Spirit is discerned and faithfully described, both men and women are called to action.

Acts 16:14-15, 40 gives us details about Lydia, Paul's first European convert to Jesus, who offered Paul hospitality in her home. Scripture relates that when Lydia was converted, her entire household was baptized and that her home became the first meeting place for European Christians.

Lydia was a business woman who traded in valuable, dyed garments. The fact that Scripture mentions no husband or father indicates the high prominence of this woman. Since first-century Greek and Roman women were almost always under the legal guardianship of a husband or father, Lydia may well have been a wealthy widow or only daughter who inherited her parents' estate. Thus, she became the head of her own household.

The Book of Acts says that Lydia's entire household was baptized upon her conversion to Christ. This follows the custom of ancient Roman families where household gods were believed to protect and help the family and its enterprises. Thus, it was the duty of members of these households, relatives, slaves, and their families to worship the gods adopted by the head of the household.

Roman households were often large since almost all businesses were home-based before the industrial age. Those who worked for Lydia in her business, and possibly others engaging in the trade who belonged to the dye makers guild, would have been among her converts. By virtue of her position as head of household, Lydia had the opportunity and responsibility to lead all of its members to faith.

Paul and Silas established their gospel mission headquarters in Lydia's house and no doubt preached there regularly. After their release from prison, Scripture tells us that they returned to Lydia's home. This was the first housechurch planted on European soil, and its leader was a woman.

Source: <https://godstowomen.org/pastors.htm>  
The Lord Opened her Heart: Lydia as a Example of Early Christian Ministry By V.K. McCarty at file:///Users/executivedirector/Downloads/The\_Lord\_Opened\_her\_Heart\_Lydia\_as\_an\_E.pdf

### Mary of Nazareth

Mary, the mother of Jesus, has traditionally been held up, especially in Catholic circles, as the model for women. A

traditional reading of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38) sees her as wholly passive, submissive, and compliant to God's will.

The image of Mary as a sweetly submissive maiden has been used to reinforce subordination of women and to fuel male projections about the "ideal woman." At times, Mary has been regarded as almost divine, as she is thought to embody all the female characteristics of the godhead, which find little expression in the predominantly male images of God.

Mary appears only briefly in the Gospels, but in Luke she plays a very significant role. Mary is a powerful prophet who voices God's dream for well-being for all creation.

Biblical scholars recognize that the Annunciation to Mary is very similar in form to other annunciations of birth stories in the Bible such as Ishmael, Isaac, Samson, and John the Baptist -- stories that contain the appearance of an angel, fear and a message from God, objection from the hearer, and a sign from God.

But the Annunciation to Mary also fits another form, that of a prophetic call story. The elements are similar to those of an annunciation of birth story, but the scene has an additional purpose.

Like the prophets of old, Mary's encounter with God's messenger comes in the midst of everyday life. Moses, for example, was tending the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro, when God's angel appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a burning bush (Exod 3:1-12). Likewise, Amos was a simple herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees when God took him from following his flock and called him to prophesy to Israel (Amos 7:14-15). So too, Mary was an ordinary Galilean girl in the midst of making wedding plans when God's messenger appeared to her.

Mary is frightened but open. She receives God's assurance that the Holy Spirit will empower her and that her child will not be called illegitimate, but "holy" and "Son of God." A further sign to her is that her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who has been barren, is also with child, "for nothing is impossible with God" (1:37). Trusting that God is faithful, Mary assents to the call.

### *Mary's Proclamation*

Mary then lifts her voice to sing out a vision of what the world would be like if God's desire for well-being for all were fulfilled. She follows in the footsteps of other female prophets-Miriam, Hannah, Judith, and Deborah-who proclaimed God's victorious power in song and dance. Prophets not only declare oracles, but they also engage in "intercessory prayer, dancing, drumming, singing, giving and interpreting laws, delivering oracles on behalf of YHWH (sometimes in ecstasy, sometimes demonstratively), resolving disputes, working wonders, mustering troops and fighting battles, archiving their oracles in writing, and experiencing visions."

The parallels between Mary's song and the songs of Miriam

(Exod 15:1-21), Judith (Jdt 16:1-16), and Deborah (Jdg 5:1-31) make it impossible to miss the subversive nature of the Magnificat.

And Mary said,  
“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
so His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” (Luke 1:46-55)

Mary’s prophetic work involves not only giving birth to the one who will claim the throne of his ancestor David and who will rule forever (1:32-33), but also proclaiming what this rule of God will be like (1:46-55).

Source: Barbara E. Reid, *Wisdom’s Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretations of the Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, Mich. William B. Eerdmann’s Publishing (2016).

### **Other leaders of housechurches and missionary co-workers who proclaimed**

In several other instances in the Pauline letters and in Acts of the Apostles, women are named as leaders of house churches: Nympha (Col 4:15), Lydia (Acts 16:14, 40), and Mary, the mother of John Mark, in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). Although there is no record of what this ministry entailed or how these women became leaders, they likely had financial resources and ministerial gifts that they placed voluntarily at the service of the community. Or they may have been invited or elected to lead the community. It is not known what their specific jobs were, but they most likely coordinated the care for the community’s spiritual and pastoral needs, liturgical celebrations, theological education, and missionary outreach.

In addition to Prisca, Paul greets four other female coworkers in Romans 16: Mary (v. 6), Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis (v. 12). In these instances, Paul uses the term *kopiosas* (“laborers,” v. 12) and the verb *ekopiasen* (“worked,” w. 6, 12), rather than *synergos* (“coworker”). Paul uses this same verb to speak of his own intense apostolic work (1 Cor 15:10; Gal 4:11). Nothing more is known of these women or their ministries, only that Mary is especially hardworking (v. 6), as is beloved Persis (v. 12). As coworkers and laborers, they no

doubt held positions of authority in the community, since Paul urged the Corinthians to “be subject to every coworker and laborer” (1 Cor 16:16).

Two other coworkers named in another of Paul’s letters are Euodia and Syntyche, who Paul says “have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Phil 4:3). Paul urges them “to be of the same mind in the Lord” (v. 2). He counts them among his coworkers who have been working at his side.

They may have been a missionary team, like Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2), Prisca and Aquila (Acts 16:3), or Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7). If this is the case, Paul urges them not to let their dispute end their partnership. Alternatively, Euodia and Syntyche may have been leaders of separate house churches in Philippi. Their conflict may have involved differences of opinion about a theological matter or a liturgical or pastoral practice. Whatever the case, one thing is clear: they are prominent leaders, and their dispute has affected the whole community.

Source: Barbara E. Reid, *Wisdom’s Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretations of the Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, Mich. William B. Eerdmann’s Publishing (2016).

### **Your sons and daughters shall prophesy: women prophets in the Christian Testament**

There are women who are explicitly called prophets in the New Testament. Anna in Luke 2, the four daughters of Philip in Acts 21:9-10, the women prophets of Corinth, and the woman prophet in Revelations.

If we go back in history, female prophets and scribes helped shape the Isaiah tradition so important to early Christianity. Episcopal priest Wilda Gafney’s book *Daughters of Miriam* uncovers the all-but-unknown fact that in ancient Israel, prophetic schools and scribal guilds were composed of both women and men. These gender-balanced groups created the prophetic writings attributed to Isaiah and many other prophetic figures. Gafney’s doctoral study of ancient prophecy and its technical vocabulary is credited with beginning a new chapter in gender and biblical studies.

Since the New Testament cites or alludes to the Book of Isaiah more than 300 times, it is not an exaggeration to say that the foundational motifs of Christianity emerge from the prophetic ministries of both women and men. For example, St. Paul quotes Isaiah more than any other Old Testament source, and Jesus reads Isaiah 61 as he inaugurates his own mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:17-22).

Unfortunately, the names of nearly all female prophets in

both the Hebrew and Christian traditions have been lost to us. Scholars believe women were far more widespread in all ancient societies than surviving writings indicate. Only four named women are identified as prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and No'adiah. However, unnamed female prophets probably numbered in the tens of thousands.

As in English, the masculine plural in biblical Hebrew can signify only men or both men and women, making it difficult to discern the presence of women in the biblical record. This is compounded by the androcentric bias that plagues all historical writings, and their interpretations, even to the present day. A good example is found in Ezra 2:55 and Nehemiah 7:57, which describe a scribal guild returning to Israel after the Babylonian exile. The texts name guild members as the descendents/disciples of one Hassophereth (literally, the female scribe) who lived in the time of Solomon. Only priests ranked higher than scribes in Solomon's hierarchy.

This female scribe was the second-highest-ranking person in Solomon's court. Her guild, which was probably composed of both men and women, would continue for at least the next 500 years. Yet she would be confined to oblivion because interpreters inexplicably transliterated Hassophereth phonetically, as a proper name, rather than attending to the gender-specific nature of the participle sopereth. Gafney notes: "Sopereth is the feminine singular qal participle of s-ph-r: 'to write,' literally, 'she who writes' or 'female scribe.'" Gafney attributes this to gender bias after evaluating 270 other feminine singular qal participles in the Hebrew bible that were translated appropriately and not transliterated.

Prophets are those people who proclaim messages from God for the good of God's people. All had in common the ability to preach with power in times of religious crisis. Their proclamations were often preceded by the prophetic formula: "So says YHWH." Such phrases resonate still today in the Catholic Mass, when at the conclusion of each Scripture reading the lector or priest proclaims, "This is the Word of the Lord."

The prophet's principal concern was not the future, but the present historical situation and its challenge to the faith of God's people.

The historical Isaiah of Jerusalem saw clearly the impending destruction of Israel and was concerned to help his people simultaneously prepare and persevere despite virtual annihilation. First Isaiah (1-39) tells us that he conceived two children with an unnamed female prophet (Isaiah 8:1). The children were given prophetic names, "Swiftly savaged, rapidly ravaged" and "A remnant will return," as portents of what would befall Israel. The female prophet and her children became part of a remnant community along with Isaiah and his disciples. From this, a "school of Isaiah" would emerge that ministered to the exiled and finally returned people of Israel for at least the next two centuries.

Second Isaiah (40-55) was created during the latter part of the Babylonian exile (circa 539), most probably by a group of male and female prophets, scribes and editors from the school of Isaiah. Third Isaiah was created after Cyrus, the king of Persia, defeated the Babylonians and permitted the exiled Hebrews to return to their homeland.

Both Second and Third Isaiah are notable for their use of maternal imagery for God and for Jerusalem. Second Isaiah likens God to a woman in labor, a nursing mother and a mother comforting her children (Isaiah 42:14; Isaiah 45:10, 49:15; Isaiah 66:13). In Isaiah 51, Sarah is named alongside Abraham as a progenitor of Israel. Third Isaiah emphasizes a gentle God of maternal care. In Isaiah 66, we read: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her ... that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast ... As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you."

The take-home message the Isaiah prophets brought to their suffering people was that God would never abandon them but, like a mother, would accompany and console even in the midst of persecution and exile.

Small wonder then that Jesus' Jewish community so loved to read from Isaiah at synagogue prayer. Jesus himself would follow in the footsteps of a long line of Hebrew prophets, both female and male, embodying a new "Word of the Lord," pointing to the holiness and compassion of God in his challenge to unjust religious and civil structures.

Given the importance of prophetic writings to Jesus and to Israel, it is easy to see why prophecy was paramount in the early Jesus movement. Prophetic female leaders played important roles alongside their brothers in guiding and building those early communities. The church historian, Eusebius, credits Philip's four prophetic daughters (Acts 21:9,10) for the apostolic origins of the provincial churches of Asia Minor. According to St. Paul, prophets are second only to apostles in the exercise of spiritual leadership. He carefully instructs the female prophets at Corinth to cover their heads while prophesying, probably to differentiate their ministry from non-Christian cults (1 Corinthians 11,12). He did not tell them to stop preaching and prophesying the word of God at worship.

It is good news for our contemporary church to recognize the gender balance at the very heart of our Catholic tradition. God's Holy Spirit, at work throughout history in both women and men, brings forth liberation, compassion, and justice to a waiting world.

As Jesus' disciples, we too are called to witness with our lives what his mother Mary, in the line of Miriam, first proclaimed: "God's mercy is from generation to generation ... who has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts ... and lifted up the lowly ... according to the promise [God] made to our ancestors, to Abraham and Sarah to their descendants forever" (Luke 1:46-55).

Source: FutureChurch's Advent Resource written by Sr. Christine Schenk

### The Samaritan woman

John 4 begins with an encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman and ends with her proclaiming the Good News to her whole village who believes her "on the strength of her word."

At the well, Jesus and the Samaritan woman have a lengthy dialogue where it is revealed that she has had five husbands and is currently with a man who is not her husband. Thus we seemingly have another story of women's promiscuous behavior.

This common read, however, misses the symbolism within the story. Barbara Reid suggests that the five husbands are symbols of the five Assyrian gods being worshiped by the Samaritans. Catholic feminist biblical scholar Sandra Schneiders, points out that this is a "type story," along the lines of that of Abraham's servant and Rebecca, or Jacob and Rachel, who also meet at wells. "The pattern or paradigm is the story recounting the meeting of future spouses who then play a central role in salvation history." (187) Jesus is the "true Bridegroom" who "comes to claim Samaria as an integral part of the New Israel" (187) This is an important context for making sense of the story.

The long discussion about water is a theological one according to Schneiders. Jesus knows about her husbands and she acknowledges that he is a prophet and the Messiah.

The discussion about the five husbands is a core part of the conversation. And the husbands, she proposes, are actually symbolic. A common way to talk about Israel's less than faithful relationship to God is with the use of the language of idolatry as adultery, as a betrayal of the covenant. This language would make sense in reference to the situation of Samaria: "Samaria's infidelity to the Mosaic covenant was symbolized by its acceptance, after the return of the remnants of the northern tribes from Assyrian captivity, of the worship of the false gods of five foreign tribes. Samaria's Yahwism was tainted by false worship and therefore even the 'husband' she now has (a reference to her relationship with the God of the Covenant) was not really her husband in the full integrity of the covenantal relationship." (190)

This puts the whole conversation in a different context. "Jesus' revelation to the woman, who symbolizes Samaria, of her infidelity is not a display of preternatural knowledge that convinces the woman of Jesus' power (and thus her helplessness before him), embarrassing her into a diversionary tactic in an effort to escape moral exposure." (191) Rather, he is speaking against false worship—a classic prophetic move. Her response, that she perceives him to be a prophet, thus makes perfect sense, and her ongoing questions can be seen in that vein. Schneiders points out that the depth of this dialogue is striking, and unique in John. Notably, the woman "is a genuine theological dialogue partner gradually experiencing Jesus' self-revelation even as she reveals herself to him." (191)

### Apostolic Proclamations

The woman leaves her water jar, and goes to tell people about her experience with Jesus. "Like the apostle-disciples in the synoptic gospels whose leaving of nets, boats, parents, or tax stall symbolized their abandonment of ordinary life to follow Jesus and become apostles, this woman abandons her daily concerns and goes off to evangelize the town." (192) She functions in an apostolic role. Schneiders proposes that the author of the fourth gospel is likely familiar with women functioning in such roles, and here seeking to legitimize this.

Schneider notes, "The reader cannot fail to be affected by the fact that the recipient of Jesus' universal invitation to inclusion is a woman, universal representative of the despised and excluded 'other' not only in ancient Israel but throughout history and all over the world. Not only is she included, but she is engaged with respect, even asked for a gift (water) that she might receive a greater gift (living water). Her legitimate inquiries, even her objections, are met and responded to with integrity. And even more strikingly, she is made an active participant in the establishment of the universalist reign of the Savior of the world." (196-7)

Source: Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999)

Barbara E. Reid, *Wisdom's Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretations of the Scriptures*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmann's Publishing, 2016.

<http://www.the-exponent.com/the-woman-at-the-well/>

## Middle Ages

### Catherine of Siena

In the fourteen century a woman named Catherine of Siena preached the Good News speaking truth to power in the midst of the tribulations of her time. Her church was torn by internal divisions and scandals and the world was fueled by violence and war with too many leaders indifferent to the needs of those most vulnerable. In response to those evils, she proclaimed the Gospel. Her most famous exhortation to the Catholic bishops of her day was, "Cry out with a hundred thousand voices. It is silence that kills the world!"

Catherine set about public preaching in response to a divine command to go into the world and save souls. Hugely influential in the church and society of her day, she was outspoken regarding the Crusades, civil war, and the Avignon papacy. She convinced Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome, and worked to end divisions in the church until her death at the age of 33. She was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970.

To understand what Catherine faced and what fueled her passion, it is helpful to know what was occurring in her world. Born in Siena in 1347, her country was plagued with disease, war and famine. The bubonic plague had hit Italy the year before she was born and large portions of the population died across Italy and Europe. Shortly thereafter, the banks in Italy

went bankrupt plunging the state into economic depression. Rivalry, riots and destruction broke out. Through Catherine's lifetime, England and France waged the Hundred Years War. The Italian states warred against each other and the papacy. The church was in a period of internal decline with many members abandoning the faith due to the corruption, wealth and decadence they saw in the clergy.

Catherine was influenced by Dominican spirituality and joined an order that followed their rule.

In 1377 Catherine, convinced that she was called to preach peace and conversion, engaged in a preaching mission throughout the Sienese countryside. She was part of a larger movement of reformers -- women and men -- who preached in that era.

Catherine's involvement in politics, peacemaking and preaching was extraordinary. She also exercised considerable public and ecclesial influence through her letters at a time when women were forbidden official channels of communication.

It is clear from her writings that her sense of authority was grounded in her holiness and her participation in the life of the divine being -- a God who she described as "mad with love."

Source: Mary Catherine Hilkert. *Speaking with Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today*: Akron, Ohio: Sisters of St. Dominic, 2008.

### **Hildegard of Bingen**

Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1179) was born in present day Germany, the tenth child of a medieval knight and his lady. She was called to her vocation through visions from God commencing in her early youth. Some say that she had her first visionary experience before she was five. Eventually her visions directed her to write down what she had received. Her writing came to the attention of Pope Eugenius, who read what she had done and commanded her to finish the work. Using the Pope's authority, she skillfully expanded it to preaching and, in 1160, Hildegard began preaching publicly in Trier, and other cities along the Main River, a tributary to the Rhine.

Hildegard's position as abbess gave her preaching authority, but it was limited to preaching to her cloistered nuns. In 1160, however, Hildegard emerged even further into public life, embarking on a series of preaching tours. During her second tour, she took the highly unusual step (for a woman) of preaching in public at Trier, followed by public preaching at Metz and Krauftal. On her third tour, undertaken sometime before 1163, she went north to Cologne and Werden; her fourth, in 1170, took her south to Zwiefalten.

A woman preaching publicly in the Middle Ages is evidence enough of heroic virtue. What drove Hildegard to preach in public? Her motivation was to obey God's commands, and in doing so, she became so transformative because her preaching expressed a need to instigate church reform.

Hildegard expressed her religious passion through an intense commitment to reform, virtue, and compassion for others. She saw herself as continuing the works of the prophets in proclaiming the truths that God wished humanity to know. It is doubtful that the clergy of the day welcomed many of those truths. She preached to clergy in Cologne, showing Hildegard as a transformative preacher of heroic proportions:

*Oh, my dear sons, who feed my flocks ... I have placed you like the sun, and other luminaries, that you may give light to men through the fire of teaching ... But you are prostrate and do not sustain the Church. You flee to the cavern of your delight and, because of the tedium of riches and the avarice of other vanities, you do not fill those under you, nor allow them to seek teaching from you.*

It took more than 800 years for the church to formally canonize Hildegard of Bingen. Her elevation by Pope Benedict XVI was announced May 1, 2012 at the Vatican. The 12th-century German Benedictine abbess and mystic has been venerated for centuries by Christians, but the delay in her official recognition could have had something to do with her very unorthodox kind of sanctity.

At a time when two ecumenical councils were dissolving the marriages of all priests and cutting adrift their wives and children, Hildegard was proclaiming the special dignity of women in her speeches, books and music. She was, in fact, so far ahead of her time that she was neither understood nor taken seriously by the hierarchy, thereby avoiding for most of her life sanction or investigation. Here are a few of her positions on scripture and theology.

There exists in the inner being of God an almost erotic balance of feminine and masculine, which is mirrored in the complementary relationship of men and women.

Since Jesus took his body from a woman, it is woman rather than man who best represents the humanity of the Son of God.

Contrary to St. Augustine's position, sexual pleasure is not the result of sin, should not be equated with guilt and would have been present in Paradise before the Fall.

In opposition to church belief at the time, menstruation does not render a woman unclean, but the shedding of blood in war certainly renders a soldier unclean.

During her life, Hildegard founded two monasteries, authored books on theology, ecology, natural science, medicine, and gardening. She wrote hundreds of hymns and songs, which are still in the top 100 at Amazon.com. She corresponded with the political leaders of the day, traveling up and down the Rhine, and even threatened German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa for daring to impinge on the freedom of the church.

In a sense, St. Hildegard of Bingen could be considered a 12th-century combination of Joan Chittister, Hilary Clinton, and Joan Baez.

Late in life, she did run afoul of church authority. A man who had been excommunicated for involvement in revolutionary activity died, and she gave permission for his burial in the abbey cemetery. With the local bishop absent, the canons of the church demanded Hildegard exhume the body from consecrated ground. She refused, claiming she knew the man's sins had been forgiven. So the canons authorized civil authorities to dig up the body. On the evening before their arrival, Hildegard, vested in her attire as abbess, went to the grave, blessed it, and then, with the help of her nuns, removed all the cemetery markers and stones, so the plot of the excommunicated man could not be identified. The irate canons placed the abbey under interdict; Mass, sacraments and the singing of the divine office were forbidden on its premises. Still, she would not yield. Church authorities finally lifted the interdict after Hildegard reminded them that those who prevent God's praises in this life will, in their own afterlife, go to "the place of no music."

Source: Robert McClory, *Hildegard of Bingen No Ordinary Saint* at <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/hildegard-bingen-no-ordinary-saint>

Bill Smith, *Transformative Preachers: Hildegard of Bingen and Jean Marie Baptiste Vianney* at <http://www.hprweb.com/2012/11/transformative-preachers-hildegard-of-bingen-and-jean-marie-baptiste-vianney/>

### Rose of Viterbo

Rose was a teenage laywoman in Italy who had gained a reputation for holiness as she walked through the streets of Viterbo carrying a cross and exhorting large crowds of followers to live virtuously. She was born around 1233 and died in 1252, before she turned twenty. Her life and her reputation for sanctity show there was a role for women's public apostolates in late medieval Europe. Rose did not receive a license from ecclesiastical authorities to preach, nor do any proscriptions written portray her as limiting her teaching and preaching to groups of women in private settings. Instead, the case for her sanctity included her public announcement of the Word of God—an activity officially regulated by conciliar legislation on preaching.

Rose stands within a small but significant tradition of women who preached without ecclesiastical censure in the medieval period. The majority of these preaching women were nuns or clearly affiliated lay members of an order. Rose represents a different case: never allowed to enter the convent, Rose took a habit and wore a cord but was not clearly affiliated with a tertiary order or religious community. As a charismatic, independent street preacher, Rose of Viterbo earned a reputation for saintliness. This reputation rested in large part on her public apostolate.

Source: *Proclaiming Sanctity through Proscribed Acts: The Case of Rose of Viterbo* by Darleen Pryds in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia*, Edited by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker: Berkley and Los Angeles,

California, University of California Press, 1998.

## Ecumenical

### Sojourner Truth

*How came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part? But the women are coming up blessed by God and few of the men are coming up with them. But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between a hawk an' a buzzard.* --Sojourner Truth, addressing the 1851 Ohio Women's Convention, as recorded by Marius Robinson, secretary

Sojourner Truth was born in 1797 as Isabella, a Dutch-speaking slave in rural New York. Separated from her family at age nine, she was sold several times before ending up on the farm of John and Sally Dumont. As was the case for most slaves in the rural North, Isabella lived isolated from other African Americans, and she suffered from physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her masters. Inspired by her conversations with God, which she held alone in the woods, Isabella walked to freedom in 1826. Although tempted to return to Dumont's farm, she was struck by a vision of Jesus, during which she felt "baptized in the Holy Spirit," and she gained the strength and confidence to resist her former master. In this experience, Isabella was like countless African Americans who called on the supernatural for the power to survive injustice and oppression.

In 1828, Isabella moved to New York City and soon thereafter became a preacher in the "perfectionist," or pentecostal tradition. Her faith and preaching brought her into contact with abolitionists and women's rights crusaders, and Truth became a powerful speaker on both subjects. She traveled extensively as a lecturer, particularly after the publication of *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, which detailed her suffering as a slave. Her speeches were not political, but were based on her unique interpretation—as a woman and a former slave—of the Bible.

With the start of the Civil War, Truth became increasingly political in her work. She advocated for the inclusion of blacks in the Union Army, and, once they were permitted to join, volunteered by bringing them food and clothes. She became increasingly involved in the issue of women's suffrage, but broke with leaders Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton when Stanton stated that she would not support the black vote if women were not also granted the right. Truth also fought for land to resettle freed slaves, and she saw the 1879 Exodus to Kansas as part of God's divine plan. Truth's famous "Ar'n't I a Woman?" speech, delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention, is a perfect example of how, as Nell Painter puts it, "at a time when most Americans thought of slaves as male and women as white, Truth embodied a fact that still bears repeating: Among blacks are women; among the women, there are blacks."

“...the force that brought her from the soul murder of slavery into the authority of public advocacy was the power of the Holy Spirit. Her ability to call upon a supernatural power gave her a resource claimed by millions of black women and by disempowered people the world over. Without doubt, it was Truth’s religious faith that transformed her from Isabella, domestic servant, into Sojourner Truth, a hero for three centuries at least.” --Nell Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*

Source: This by Faith at [http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/sojourner\\_truth.html](http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/sojourner_truth.html)

### **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**

More than a century ago Elizabeth Cady Stanton bore a striking resemblance to an Old Testament prophet crying in the wilderness.

Born on November 12, 1815, in Johnstown, New York, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an abolitionist and leading figure of the early women’s movement. An eloquent writer, her *Declaration of Sentiments* was a revolutionary call for women’s rights across a variety of spectrums. Stanton was the president of the National Woman Suffrage Association for 20 years and worked closely with Susan B. Anthony.

Religious revivalism spread throughout the U.S. during the first half of the 19th century and The Second Great Awakening reached a fever pitch during the 1830s, especially in New England. Charles Grandison Finney was one of the most prominent revivalist preachers during this period. In 1831 Elizabeth Cady attended a six-week revival conducted by Finney. His preaching about sin, the devil and damnation frightened her so much that she became ill and left school for a brief time to recuperate at home and ultimately rejected Finney’s understanding of God.

Elizabeth did not wish to discard religious faith altogether. She felt a great affinity for the teachings of Jesus Christ and respected the people whose religious beliefs drew them to many reform causes. Instead she regarded the emancipation of women to be a step toward bringing a corrupt, superstitious church back to its true origins. In “*The Elevation of Womanhood*” she wrote:

*To change the position of woman in dogmatic theology, where she is represented as the central figure in Paradise Lost...is to revolutionize the system; hence all who believe in progress within the Church should hail the present movement for woman’s emancipation, as that brings us to the next onward step in the new religion.*

Throughout her life Elizabeth Cady Stanton searched unsuccessfully for a religion in which men and women were seen as equals. She grew more radical in her opposition to organized religion as she grew older. As she neared her 80th birthday she launched a project to reinterpret and critique

biblical texts and recruited a small committee of women to work on it. The first volume of *The Woman’s Bible* was published in 1895. Many people in the woman suffrage movement reacted negatively to the book out of fear it would diminish the ranks of their supporters. All the controversy made the book a best-seller.

Today *The Woman’s Bible* would not provoke such an intense response because many of its critiques now are widely accepted. More than a century ago Elizabeth Cady Stanton bore a striking resemblance to an Old Testament prophet crying in the wilderness, an irony she would undoubtedly appreciate.

Source: <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/people/elizabeth-cady-stanton.html>

### **Elizabeth Hooton**

Elizabeth Hooton was George Fox’s first convert (in 1647) to Quakerism in 1647. And she was the first woman to become a Quaker preacher. She was close to fifty years old at the time. In fact, it was the power of Hooton’s words that persuaded Fox that God anointed women for ministry as well as men. Within a few years, she had become one of his itinerant preachers. Elizabeth testified that she felt a “call” from God to preach. She left her family and began to urge repentance across England.

In 1651, she was imprisoned in Derby for ‘reproving a priest’, and in 1652 she was jailed for 16 months in York for preaching in the church at Rotherham.

In 1661, at the age of sixty, Hooton made her first trip to New England with her friend Joan Brocksop. Quakers in New England were suffering severe persecution. Not long before, four Quakers had been hanged in Boston. Though the death penalty had since been revoked by King Charles II, other punishments had been devised for Quaker “blasphemers”, of which the harshest was the ‘Cart and Tail Law’ – those condemned were stripped to the waist, tied behind a cart and dragged from town to town, where they were whipped with the knotted rope.

Having reached Boston by small boat and overland, Hooton and Brocksop attempted to visit Friends imprisoned there, but were waylaid and taken before Governor Endicott. After they had been imprisoned for days without food, put in the stocks and beaten in three towns, they were taken out into the wilderness and left. The two women survived by following wolf tracks through the snow till they found a settlement.

Having made their way to Rhode Island and thence to Barbados, the two women returned to England. Once there, Hooton petitioned the King to stop the persecution of Quakers in Massachusetts Bay Colony. Following him to where he played tennis, she refused to kneel in his presence, but walked beside him like an equal. She must have won the King’s respect, because he gave her a document authorizing her to buy land in Massachusetts and use it to make a safe haven for Quakers in the colony. Hooton returned to Massachusetts accompanied by

her daughter Elizabeth.

However, the royal seal on the letter proved no protection. Once again, she was repeatedly stripped, beaten and left in the wilderness by the authorities in Boston and Cambridge.

In 1665/6, Hooton returned to England. She clearly had no taste for a quiet life, though, as shortly after, she was imprisoned again in Lincoln for disturbing a congregation.

In 1672, George Fox planned a trip to Jamaica, his first and only voyage to the New World. Although she was now 71, she was determined to accompany him. Fox fell ill on the voyage and Hooton nursed him, probably ensuring his survival. However, within one week of their arrival, she herself fell suddenly ill and died the next day. Fox wrote of her death, "Elizabeth Hooton, a woman of great age, who had travelled much in Truth's service, and suffered much for it, departed this life. She was well the day before she died, and departed in peace, like a lamb, bearing testimony to Truth at her departure."

Source: <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1601-1700/elizabeth-hooton-1st-woman-preacher-11630150.html>  
<http://www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/223/Elizabeth-Hooton>

## Modern Day

### **Sr. Thea Bowman**

Sr. Thea Bowman (1937 - 1990) was a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration who was born in the small rural town of Canton in Central Mississippi. Her grandfather was a slave, her father was a physician, and her mother was a teacher. In 1965, Sr. Bowman received a B.A. in English, Speech and Drama from Viterbo College in La Crosse, Wisconsin. In 1969, she received an M.A. in English and in 1972, a Ph.D. in English Language, Literature, and Linguistics; both degrees from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Over the years of her ministry, she made more than 100 public appearances each year, giving lectures, recitals, short courses, workshops, and conference presentations, spreading the message that people are gifted, that Black is beautiful, and that cross-cultural collaboration enriches both education and living.

Sister Thea deservedly received her Doctor of Religion from Boston College in 1989. The following is a citation of a speech conferring her distinctions at the 1989 Boston College Commencement Ceremony.

She was praised as a charismatic evangelist calling Black Catholics to their rightful place and to the expression of their culture within the church, advocate and consultant for intercultural awareness for the Diocese of Jackson; scholar of English Language and literature expert in the Renaissance and the works of William Faulkner; master teacher whose

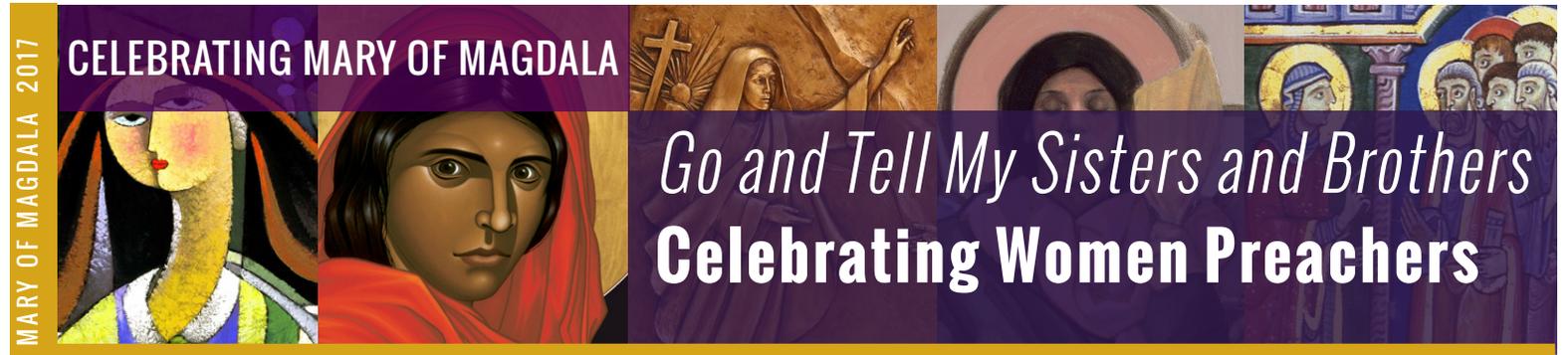
methodology, rich in Black Community's traditional ways of learning and doing, profoundly touches rural Mississippi school children, university students, and world-wide lecture or concert audiences alike.

In the glory of your ministry we witness the Franciscan ideal of joy rendered more radiant by a woman of lively, living faith, truly Black and authentically Catholic. To your lifetime of building the Kingdom of God, preaching the Good News in the language of your people, and reclaiming the virtues and values that are your inheritance, Boston College says an approving "Amen!" and proudly declares you Doctor of Religion.

Source: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/ahana/about/history/bowman.html>

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# *Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers* Celebrating Women Preachers

## SAMPLE OPINION OR EDITORIAL PIECE

*Adapt this letter to your voice and your own local circumstances. We have included commentary on Catholic Women Preach, but you may have a similar project or opportunity that you would like to promote.*

When Mary Magdalene announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” (John 20:18), she was the first of many followers of Jesus to witness to His presence among us, the first to proclaim that He is alive and still with us, the first to bring the message of life to a community immersed in death. Not to Peter, not to James, not even to his Beloved disciple, but to her-- the one who waited in darkness-- came the first announcement that would change the world forever. Mary Magdalene was the first preacher of the Word of life, the Word that brings joy and hope and awareness of the God among us, the God who saves us from death.

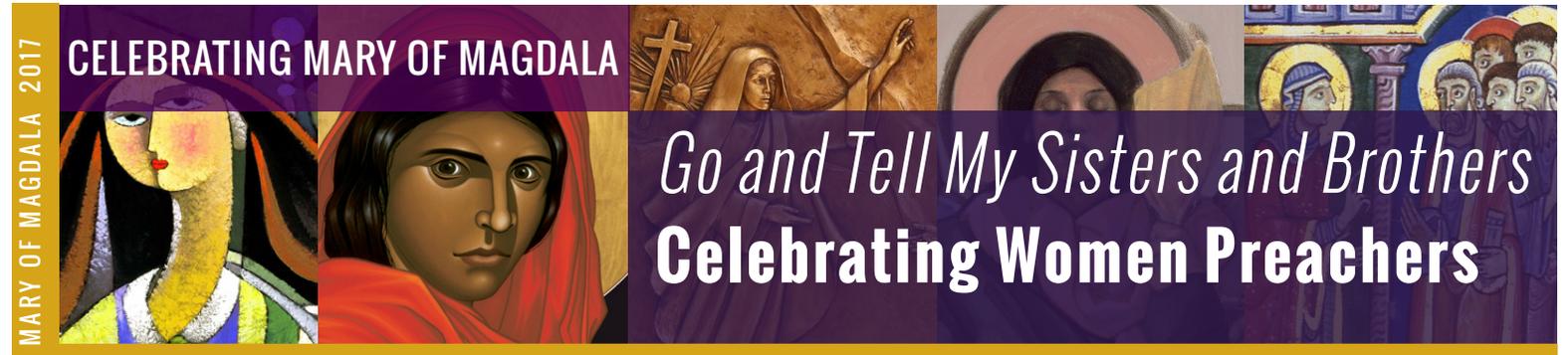
The Good News announced by this woman is the beginning of all preaching: it is she who first testified that she had seen the Lord. For centuries women have experienced the call to witness to the presence of the Risen Lord. For centuries women-- who were with the apostles at the coming of the Spirit--have shared in the mission of the Church that began at Pentecost.

Today, women --as well as men-- are called to witness to the presence of the Lord, to testify to their fidelity and love of Christ, to announce the good news of salvation. Baptism and mission are gifts to men and women alike. All of the baptized are called to witness to the world their belief that He has risen, that He is still with us. The voices of both men and women believers must be heard because the Gospel is given to all of us and speaks to all of us. Men, as well as women, must hear the testimony of women because the experience of women is the experience of half the human race. From that experience women can and must speak of God. Like Mary Magdalene, they are called to testify.

Catholic Women Preach [[catholicwomenpreach.org](http://catholicwomenpreach.org)] is a new way to extend the preaching mission of women baptized into the Body of Christ and called to spread the Gospel of Christ. The mission of Catholic Women Preach is to bring the voices of women to the work of the Church in a new way, to reveal the depths of faith that urge women from around the world to witness to their love of God by announcing the Word of God. To hear the preaching of women is an opportunity to hear new voices and to experience a new understanding of the Word. Christian believers --and non-believers-- whose experience of preaching may have been limited to another forum may experience in the testimony of these women the ever-new and ever-life-giving power of the Good News.

Women as well as men are called to announce—in public as well as in private—that they have seen the Lord. How else can the Word be spread? How else can the Risen Lord be a word of salvation to the poor and dispossessed? How else can the presence of the Risen Lord among us be a familiar presence, an all-embracing presence, a presence that includes the weak and the lost and the undervalued in our midst?

All Christians are called, like Mary Magdalene, to proclaim: “I have seen the Lord.” Catholic Women Preach is testimony to the vision of women and the power of their witness.

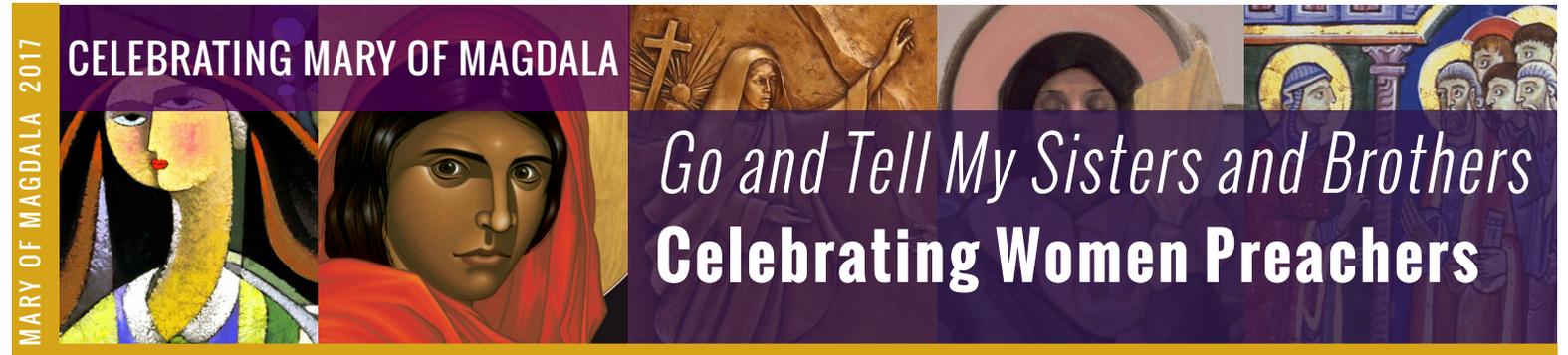


# Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers Celebrating Women Preachers

## CREATIVE WAYS TO PREACH IN YOUR COMMUNITY

While allowed by Canon Law, lay preaching is welcomed to varying degrees in different dioceses. This list of “creative ways” offers just a few of the many unique ways to incorporate the preaching of lay people -- and therefore women -- into your community’s experience.

- 1. Publish reflections on the Sunday’s readings in the parish bulletin.** Many lay ecclesial ministers are well-equipped to offer a written reflection on the Sunday’s readings in the parish bulletin.
- 2. Email recorded (video or audio) reflections to your parish email list.** Much like publishing a reflection in your bulletin, but this way tone of voice, emphasis, and other important elements of preaching come across to the listener.
- 3. Invite those who are active in or lead a particular ministry to offer a “pitch” to get involved from the pulpit.** If scheduled on an appropriate Sunday, this “pitch” could incorporate a reflection on the readings and how they connect with the particular ministry, essentially becoming an opportunity to preach. For example, the director of religious education could “pitch” religious education on Catechetical Sunday or the person who coordinates bereavement ministry could “pitch” on the Fifth Sunday of Lent (raising of Lazarus). The “pitch” could take place wherever your parish normally makes announcements.
- 4. Offer lay-led Scripture studies based on the lectionary.** Offered seasonally, or throughout the year, a Scripture study that is lectionary-based can incorporate some elements of preaching in addition to elements of education. Use the opportunity to teach about the particular passages of Scripture but also reflect upon them as a whole, how they speak to the world today, and offer questions for reflection and discussion.
- 5. Invite the priest or deacon to include the voices of lay people in their homilies.** This can be done in a number of ways. The priest or deacon might actually invite a lay person (or if it’s the deacon, his wife) to join them as they preach -- to expound upon or offer their own experience to a particular part of the homily. Clergy may also set up a system for gathering perspective of lay people on upcoming readings to incorporate into their homilies either online or in person.
- 6. Incorporate lay preaching as a part of follow-up after a parish mission trip or service project or as part of an informational meeting for an upcoming trip or project** Ask several participants of the trip or service project to prepare a reflection on a gospel speaking from their experience of service or justice work. Open these sessions to your entire community.
- 7. Invite lay people - especially women - to offer parish missions or revival during Lent or Advent.** These retreat-like experiences are an excellent way for your community to hear the voices of women reflect Scripture, especially at a time of the year when they are looking to participate in an offering that enhances their spiritual life.
- 8. Encourage your pastor to ask the local bishop for permission to allow a lay person or women to offer a reflection at Sunday Mass.** Canon Law lists the “demonstrated expertise or experience” of a lay person as one reason why it might be advantageous to offer preaching. By seeking permission from the local bishop to have lay people and women preach for a particular, pastors and parishioners are informing the bishop that Catholics want and need to hear these perspectives.
- 9. Offer a weekly opportunity for members to come together to listen the reflection at [catholicwomenpreach.org](http://catholicwomenpreach.org) and reflect on the readings and the reflection together.** Most of the work is already done for you! Consider offering one or two questions based on the preaching for that week to discuss as a group.



# *Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers* **Celebrating Women Preachers**

## DECREE

### Elevating the Celebration of Mary of Magdala to the Rank of Feast

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.

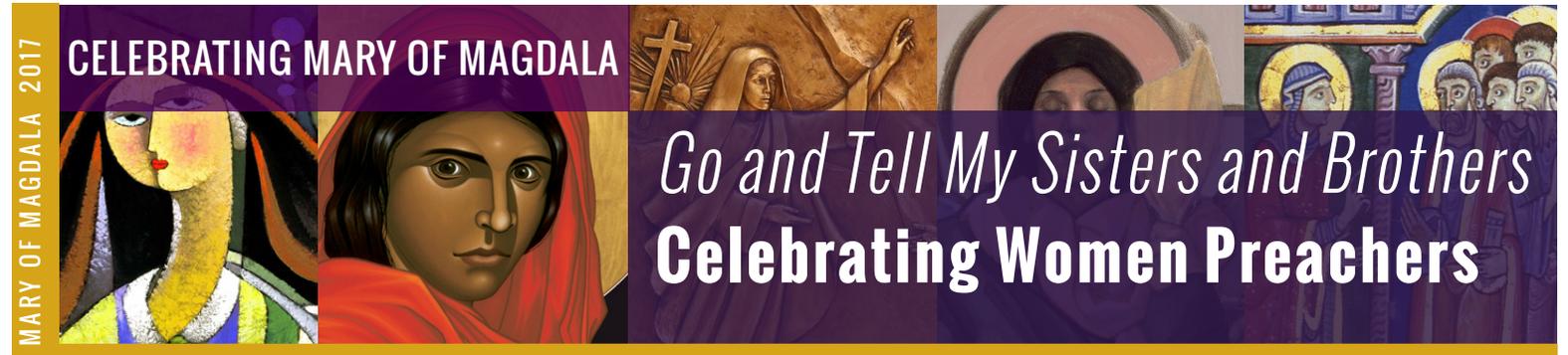
Therefore the Supreme Pontiff Pope Francis has established that from now on the celebration of Saint Mary Magdalene should be inscribed in the General Roman Calendar with the rank of Feast rather than Memorial as is presently the case. The new rank of celebration does not involve any change of the day on which the celebration itself takes place and, as for the liturgical texts, the following is to be observed:

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



# *Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers* Celebrating Women Preachers

## SOURCES FOR WOMEN'S PREACHING

### ONLINE

**Catholic Women Preach** presents video and text of women preaching on the Scriptures for each Sunday and some feast days. Reflections are posted approximately two weeks ahead of time.  
[www.catholicwomenpreach.org](http://www.catholicwomenpreach.org)

**theWord** is a service of the Order of Preachers, offering audible daily reflections on the Christian scriptures. Preachers are drawn from the entire worldwide Dominican family—priests, brothers, sisters and lay people.  
[www.word.op.org](http://www.word.op.org)

**God's Word, Many Voices** God's Word, Many Voices is a website which makes available reflections on Scripture. Members of the faithful of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester provide these reflections, as well as associated resources.  
[www.godswordmanyvoices.org](http://www.godswordmanyvoices.org)

**Women & the Word** homily archive at  
[www.sabbathretreats.org](http://www.sabbathretreats.org)

### Books

**Abiding Word: Sunday Reflections by Barbara E. Reid, OP.** Years A, B, and C published individually by Liturgical Press (Collegeville, MN). Barbara Reid takes the Sunday experience to every day with accessible weekly meditations on the Lectionary readings of the year. This collection of articles, which includes Scripture readings for Sundays and solemnities followed by reflections, allows readers to meditate on the connection between the sacred text and their daily lives.

**The Word for Every Season by Dianne Bergant, CSA.** Years A, B, and C published individually by Paulist Press (New York). Barbara Reid takes the Sunday experience to every day with accessible weekly meditations on the Lectionary readings of the year. This collection of articles, which includes Scripture readings for Sundays and solemnities followed by reflections, allows readers to meditate on the connection between the sacred text and their daily lives.



C A T H O L I C  
**WOMENPREACH**



**INSPIRED**PREACHING

Catholic Women Preach presents both video and text of qualified and theologically-informed women preaching on the Lectionary Readings for Sundays, Holy Days, and select weekdays.

**DIVERSE**PERSPECTIVES

Catholic Women Preach brings the voices of Catholic women - diverse in age, race, and culture - from around the world to the proclamation of the Gospel.

**PASTORAL**POSSIBILITIES

Catholic Women Preach is a resource for everyone: priests and deacons, those engaged in lay preaching in all its expressions, catechists, pastoral ministers, and anyone engaged in the work of the Gospel.

**[WWW.CATHOLICWOMENPREACH.ORG](http://WWW.CATHOLICWOMENPREACH.ORG)**



[FACEBOOK.COM/CATHOLICWOMENPREACH](https://www.facebook.com/CATHOLICWOMENPREACH)



[@CWP112716](https://twitter.com/CWP112716)

# LAY PREACHING BY WHOSE AUTHORITY?

by Elissa Rinere, CP

**E**xcept for a period of time at the beginning of the church, and a few exceptions in the course of two thousand years, preaching has been consistently off-limits to the non-ordained. However, this consistent exclusion has never been quietly accepted or even readily observed. So it is understandable, in these days of so much change in the Church, that the question of authorization for lay preaching is still being discussed.

In this article, “preaching” means speaking on religious themes publicly in churches or oratories, at liturgical or non-liturgical events. We are not concerned with street preaching or other forms of evangelization that might be carried out by individuals in the public forum.

The format will be to review, in broad strokes, practices surrounding preaching through the history of the Church, but to focus more closely on legislation and other documents issued since Vatican II that refer to lay preaching specifically. Finally, we will draw some conclusions about the current state of authorization for lay preaching, both liturgical and non-liturgical, based on the history presented.

*continued on page 26*

**Lay Preaching** *continued from page 25*

### **The early church**

In the early centuries of the church, the community was unified and charismatic. Preachers preached because they received a gift from the Spirit, which was then recognized by the community, accepted, and exercised for the benefit of all. The authorization to preach came from the Spirit of God and from the community.

As we know, charismatic preaching disappeared as the church became more complex, widespread, doctrinal, and sharply divided into clergy and laity. Authorization from charism and the community was too unpredictable to fit into the developing system. This lack of acceptance of the charismatic reached its zenith in 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council condemned as heretics any and all who dared preach without proper authorization. In other words, the very act of unauthorized preaching itself was declared heretical. From that point on, until the twentieth century, preaching in all its forms was the domain of bishops, priests, and some others in minor or major orders. Motivation for this severe limitation was two-fold. First, the hierarchy was concerned that correct doctrine be preached to the people. Second, preaching was too powerful a tool, especially for adult catechesis, to be haphazardly regulated.

### **Later history**

Through the next several centuries after 1215, concern for the content and effectiveness of preaching seldom waned. For instance, the Council of Trent established the seminary system to ensure an educated clergy, and also mandated the first universal catechism to serve as a doctrinal guide in the preparation of sermons. The council also established “canonical mission,” a deputation from a diocesan bishop to teach doctrine publicly, as the only recognized authorization for preaching. The canonical mission linked preaching to the teaching office of the hierarchy.



Many of these requirements from Trent found their way into the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the Church's first codified law. The canons described two forms of preaching: sermons at Mass and instructional conferences delivered outside Mass, often on Sunday afternoons. Sermons could take two forms: a moral exhortation based on scripture or an instruction on some point of doctrine. In addition to using catechisms as guides for doctrine, priests were to follow diocesan courses of study, usually four or five years in duration, which systematically covered topics such as Mass, the sacraments, the Creed, precepts of the Church, Mary, and the saints. Authorization for preaching remained the canonical mission.

It must be kept in mind that at this point in the life of the Church, the beginning of the twentieth century, there was no real connection between liturgical preaching and the scriptures read at Mass. Familiar as it is to us today, there was no mention of “The Liturgy of the Word” as a distinct part of the eucharistic celebration, nor was there talk of the power of the word in the community. With few exceptions,

the readings were read quietly in Latin, not proclaimed. Mass was the private prayer of the priest, and the people present were not taken into account in the course of the celebration. Pastors of parishes were obliged to preach at the principal Sunday Mass, usually the high Mass. However, the length of the service or some other circumstance—excessive summer heat was commonly cited—was sufficient reason to omit the sermon.

### **The liturgical renewal**

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Vatican II on developments surrounding lay preaching. The council's most pervasive teaching in this area was that all the baptized share in the priesthood of Christ, including his prophetic or teaching function. Once the continuation of Christ's mission was linked to baptism, not solely to orders, the barriers to lay preaching no longer stood on a strong foundation.

A second influence from Vatican II was the new emphasis placed on the importance of scripture in the life of the Church. In several articles the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* made

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proclamation of the word integral to all liturgical celebrations (CSL, 7), and the homily a lesson drawn from the word proclaimed (CSL, 24). The homily, obligatory on Sundays and holy days, was defined by its content: the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of Christian life as explained from the text of scripture over the course of the liturgical year (CSL, 52).

Following Vatican II there were two interesting developments in the area of lay preaching. In the first, the Congregation for Divine Worship published the *Directory with Masses for Children* (DMC) (November 1, 1973) which permitted laity, with the consent of the local pastor, to speak to children following the Gospel if the priest found it difficult to speak to them (DMC, 24). This document is still in force.

In the second development, the bishops of West Germany requested authorization to give a canonical mission to qualified laity, thereby allowing them to preach and, when necessary, to give homilies. This was approved by the Congregation for the Clergy on November 20, 1973, for a period of four years (see International Committee on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy, 1963–1969: Conciliar, Curial, and Papal texts [DOL]*, 344).

The framers of the 1983 Code of Canon Law had at their disposal not only the Council documents, but these subsequent documents as well.

#### **The 1983 Code of Canon Law**

Amazement is an appropriate response to the canons on preaching in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. For the most part, they are located in the newly formulated third book of the Code, *The Church's Teaching Function*. Preaching is presented as one aspect of the ministry of the word, the other aspect being catechetical instruction. Both preaching and catechetical instruction have the same purpose and foundation: to set forth the mystery of Christ faithfully and completely, based on scripture, tradition, liturgy, magisterium,

and the life of the Church (canon 760). Most important for this study, the prohibition against lay preaching in churches, so strongly stated in the 1917 Code, is mitigated.

Canon 766 states clearly that laity can be permitted to preach in churches or oratories, according to the norms determined by episcopal conferences. Unfortunately, this leap forward possesses a certain illusory quality. The sources, earlier documents from which the canons are drawn, are all indicated in annotated versions of the Code. A primary source for canon 766 is the instruction *Inter Oecumenici*, article 37, which states that qualified lay persons may conduct Bible services when sufficient clergy are not available (see *DOL*, 329). Strangely, the sources for canon 766 do not refer to any documents of Vatican II on baptism or the sharing of the prophetic office of Christ by all the baptized. Thus, one may conclude that for all its appearance of progress, canon 766 is not so much theological as it is utilitarian.

Sources indicated for canon 767, on the homily, contain several conciliar

and post-conciliar documents on the content of the homily, its importance, frequency, relationship to the liturgy, and its reservation to the priest or deacon. Here we can conclude that the canon has significant theological foundation based both in orders and liturgy, but it has no connection to baptism.

#### **The years following the 1983 Code**

The 1983 Code was not the end of developments in lay preaching. Since its publication several documents have been issued to supplement the canons in one way or another. The first of these supplements was an authentic interpretation issued in response to a fairly technical question about canon 767 on the homily. Ordinarily, bishops are free to dispense, or excuse, from observance of disciplinary laws (canon 87). Some bishops took canon 767, which defined the homily by speaker, as a point of discipline, dispensed from it, and allowed laity to preach homilies. The question, directed in May 1987 to the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, asked if such dispensations were legitimate. The one-word response was "Negative." Even without providing an explanation of how the dispensing authority of bishops could be limited in this way, the interpretation slowed the use of lay preachers in many places.

In 1988 the Congregation for Divine Worship issued the well-known *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*. As part of the Liturgy of the Word, according to article 43, there is to be an explanation of the readings or a time of silent reflection. Deacons may give homilies, but lay leaders are to read something prepared by the absent pastor, unless the episcopal conference makes other arrangements.

In response to the *Directory*, the U.S. Conference of Bishops (*Gathered in Steadfast Faith*, 1991) determined that individual bishops are free to allow prop-

*continued on page 28*

## Lay Preaching *continued from page 27*

erly trained laity to explain the word of God at these Sunday celebrations "and at other specified occasions" (55ff). This means that in the United States each bishop in his own diocese decides if a lay person may preach in his or her own words when the Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest is used.

A few years later, more universal legislation arrived on the scene in the form of an instruction on collaboration between clergy and laity (Congregation for the Clergy, et al., *Ecclesia de mysterio*, August 15, 1997). The document sounded a note of caution, if not alarm, at perceived confusion concerning the proper role of the priest arising from ever-increasing ministerial activities undertaken by laity.

The instruction is significant for two reasons. First, in a very rare show of cooperation, it was issued by eight Roman congregations. Second, its form of approval (*in forma specifica*) by Pope John Paul II raised it to the status of legislation. Ordinarily, an instruction is an explanation of existing law and does not have the force of law itself.

The instruction repeated canon 766 of the 1983 Code that laity are able to be admitted to preach, but then went on to clarify that for lay people there is no right to preach, nor is there a faculty to preach, as is enjoyed by the ordained (article 2,3). Rather, lay preaching is always to be regarded as an exception permitted only under certain circumstances, and by way of supplying for a lack of clergy. Lay preaching, the article concludes, cannot be regarded as "an ordinary occurrence nor as an authentic promotion of the laity." That is, lay preaching, lacking a theological foundation, is merely utilitarian. Further, bishops are not free to dispense from this because the regulation "touches upon the closely connected functions of teaching and sanctifying" (article 3,1).

On a positive note, the instruction



does acknowledge that laity can provide "instruction or testimony" at eucharistic liturgies if this is opportune, as long as these forms of preaching cannot be confused with a homily. Then, in a curious bit of wording, the instruction clearly states that laity can be authorized to preach homilies at non-eucharistic celebrations (article 3,4).

At this point, one can safely conclude that lay preaching is permissible under certain circumstances, but not really encouraged. The connection between preaching homilies and the teaching office appears to be one rationale for excluding laity from homilies at the Eucharist. Another is a fear that people will become confused about the proper role of the priest. In light of this, serious discussion is called for about why preaching is so firmly rooted in orders but only tenuously rooted in baptism, especially in light of conciliar teaching on baptism.

In 2001, after several years of discus-

sion and debate, the USCCB finally promulgated a complementary norm for canon 766, as had been mandated in 1983 when the Code was published. This national legislation is, in general, a broad application of the canon. It permits laity to give conferences and instructions in churches and oratories when this is for the spiritual advantage of the people. It also respects the right of each bishop to determine practice in his own diocese. The decree includes suggestions to guide a bishop in his decision to authorize lay preachers or not: a lack of clergy, language requirements, or "a demonstrated expertise or experience of the lay faithful concerned."

This last phrase of the decree departs from an approach of utility, and recaptures the legitimacy of charism in the "merely" baptized. However, then the decree addresses the question of preaching at eucharistic celebrations. Acknowledging that homilies are given only by clergy, the decree stipulates that

any lay person who preaches at a eucharistic celebration must not do so “at the moment reserved to the homily.” By inference, of course, any properly authorized layperson may certainly preach after the readings at a non-eucharistic liturgy.

As already mentioned, the 1983 Code left the question of who authorizes lay preachers to episcopal conferences. This complementary legislation assigns the task of authorizing lay preachers to the diocesan bishop. In keeping with canonical principles, a bishop may determine this himself for each individual, or he may delegate the task to one or several other persons. Bishops may apply the national legislation broadly if they wish, using gifted lay preachers freely in their dioceses, while always acknowledging the unique relationship of the homily at the Eucharist to the ordained; or they may choose to apply the legislation narrowly, or not at all.

At this juncture, with so many options available, the history of authorization for lay preaching could conclude, but there is one more document to consider.

In 2004 the Church received yet another instruction that had something to say on lay preaching (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Redemptionis sacramentum*, March 25, 2004). Unlike the instruction mentioned earlier that was given legislative status by Pope John Paul II, this one remains a non-legislative document that implements but does not supersede already existing law. Except for the brouhaha over the use of flacons at Mass, the document has not generally been given more authority than is its due.

This is a very good thing,

since the instruction’s directives on lay preaching are, in a word, chilling. In a tone far more restrictive than the Code or our national norms, *Redemptionis sacramentum* directs all “instruction or witness” provided by laity be placed outside Mass entirely. If, for a serious reason, the preaching is within the Mass, it is placed after the post-Communion prayer (74). Canon 766 is cited in the instruction, but incorrectly. Where the canon states “Lay people may preach in church or oratories . . .”, the instruction cites the canon as saying “Lay people may preach outside Mass in churches or oratories . . . (161).” Canon 766 does not contain the words “outside Mass.” Lastly, where the 1997 instruction deferred to episcopal conferences for the determination of circumstances within which lay preaching is permitted, this document narrows the

field to a scarcity of priests or the needs of a specific community (161). Because an instruction cannot—or at least should not—override existing legislation, the USCCB norm on lay preaching remains in place.

## Conclusion

Finally, we arrive at the end of the history—but not the end of the story. Lay preaching has traveled a marvelous path through the second millennium from being a form of heresy to being accepted lay activity, albeit only in certain circumstances. Several conclusions can be drawn just from the history. First, preaching is very powerful, especially in adult catechesis. If this were not so, the Church would not have such a convoluted history of trying to regulate preachers and the content of preaching. Second, liturgical preaching has undergone a significant transformation since Vatican II, even though its basic purpose, adult catechesis, has remained unchanged. Previously, liturgical preaching was sermons on various points of doctrine, often in keeping with a diocesan course of study. Now liturgical preaching, the homily, is a living commentary on the sacred texts and an integral part of the liturgical action (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002*, 29). Finally, authorization for laity to preach in any setting has evolved from charism, to nothing for several centuries, to canonical mission in order to supply for missing clergy, to authorization in order to supply for clergy, and also authorization in recognition of expertise.

With all this as our history, we go forward, but with several questions still in development.

*continued on page 30*





**Lay Preaching** *continued from page 29*

One reason often cited for the inappropriateness of lay preaching, especially in liturgical settings, is that the preaching of the gospel is the first duty of the ordained. In fact, preaching the gospel is the first duty of the baptized. How can it be that a properly prepared and authorized lay person is a preacher primarily by way of exception, unless one accepts the notion that orders in some way supersedes not only baptism, but also the legitimacy of charism in the “merely” baptized? Perhaps we still have some distance to travel before arriving in that happy territory where baptism and orders complement and collaborate, rather than compete.

The argument is also put forward that the unity of the liturgical action requires that the presider give the homily. However, this argument cannot stand when deacons and other clergy routinely preach at eucharistic celebrations when they do not preside.

It is sometimes advocated that current legislation is sufficiently inclusive and further development is unnecessary. After all, the bishops of the United States are free to allow laity to preach in any liturgical setting as long as the restriction of “not at the moment reserved to the homily” is observed at Eucharist. This is true, but it leads us to the “placement puzzle.” If lay preaching at the Eucharist cannot follow the Gospel, where does it belong? If relegated to after the post-Communion prayer, as suggested in *Redemptionis sacramentum*, we are left to wonder why properly authorized lay preaching cannot be part of the Liturgy of the Word. This question brings us back, I think, to the need for a more complementary relationship between baptism and orders. Some have addressed the “placement puzzle” by having laity preach before or after the general intercessions, which are not at the moment reserved to the homily, but still part of the Liturgy of the Word (see *GIRM* 2002, 69).

An ancient canonical principle states that custom is the best interpreter of the law (canon 27); that is, actions indicate acceptance, or not, of law. Even if legislation limits or discourages a particular practice, it will flourish if its inherent value for the Church overshadows the limitations imposed. Authorized lay preachers will be increasingly accepted if they are effective, bringing the gospel to life in the hearts of those who hear them. In general, there should be a healthy reluctance in all of us to oppose that which brings the gospel to life in our hearts. P



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*articles on lay ministry, religious life, and other aspects of canon law.*

# Q & A with Jamie Phelps, sharing the gift of preaching

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 [globalsistersreport.org/blog/q/spirituality/q-jamie-phelps-sharing-gift-preaching-43776](https://globalsistersreport.org/blog/q/spirituality/q-jamie-phelps-sharing-gift-preaching-43776)

by Dawn Araujo-Hawkins

Last month, [FutureChurch](#) launched [Catholic Women Preach](#), a project aimed at highlighting the voices of Catholic women preachers around the world. Dominican Sr. Jamie Phelps, a theologian and social worker who [kicked off](#) the project's Advent series, talked to *Global Sisters Report* about the importance of women theologians for the church and the world.

## **GSR: How did you get involved with Catholic Women Preach?**

*Phelps:* I'm not sure where they got my name; there are about eight people who might have given my name in [laughing]. However, one of my doctoral classmates, Dominican Sr. Cathy Hilbert — a professor of theology in Notre Dame's department of theology and a member of the Catholic Women Preach advisory board — called me and gave me the number to call them. A number of the Catholic Women Preach advisory board have been my colleagues and associates in several Catholic theological conferences.

## **What initially drew you to preaching?**

We Dominican women have claimed our charism of preaching from the Dominican Order — and that's been nurtured by both the men and the women — so we do a lot of preaching within our Dominican networks. And that's because the Second Vatican Council told us, as religious, to look back at our charisms.

## **Have you ever received any backlash to your preaching?**

No, because I never ask anybody to preach. If they ask me to preach, then I say yes. What I said to God was, 'Look, if you give me the gift of preaching and you want me to preach, make it happen.' [Laughs] I've been asked to preach by Cardinals Joseph Bernardin and Francis George of Chicago and by Bishop Alfred Hughes of New Orleans. I have been called to preach by several Catholic organizations, like Catholic Women Preach. So that's how I approach it. If people ask me, I will do it. And I have a great deal of fun when I am doing it, particularly if I'm doing it in a live audience.

## **Catholic Women Preach seeks to highlight the perspectives of Catholic women. How important is it to you that Catholic womanist perspectives in particular be heard? Why?**

First, God's creation of women was not accidental, but essential to God's plan for all creation. Genesis 1:27 reads, 'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'

Second, in creating humankind, God gave us intelligence and free will and gifted us with a variety of gifts to be used for the common good. God gifts and calls persons from every race, gender, class, nationality, etc. Preaching is both a gift and a calling to be used for the common good. I have been given the gift and exercise it when parish priests, dioceses or Catholic groups call upon me to exercise the same.

As a black Catholic Dominican and theologian, I have been gifted with a specific worldview that allows me to interpret the Gospel in a way that speaks to diverse cultures and racial-ethnic groups so that the meaning of the Gospel for their lives, their city and the world becomes evident. My social identity as a doubly marginalized person in society gifts me with the perspective of oppressed and poor people. The oppressed and the poor see clearly the dynamics that sustain or threaten their lives and that of the community.

## **Why do you think women's voices have historically been omitted or suppressed in academic theology?**

Two realities — one ecclesial and one social — have historically led to the omission or suppression of women's voices in academic theology. First, theological education was originally perceived as education necessary for ordination to the priesthood. Since women have traditionally not been called to or affirmed in ministry, it was not believed that women required academic education in theology.

The second reality is the dominance of a patriarchal worldview. Both factors led to the omission of women in the field of academic theology. However, the Second Vatican Council's affirmation of the laity's co-responsibility for church mission began the research and reclaiming of the role of laity — including women in the early church and through the centuries.

**You kicked off Catholic Women Peach's Advent series. Does Advent, a season of waiting for a light in the dark, seem more poignant to you this year than in previous years? Why or why not?**

I prefer not to use the metaphor of light and darkness, as it is one which has been misused to justify white supremacy and the oppression of people of color. I prefer to use the terms 'good and evil,' 'holiness and sinfulness.'

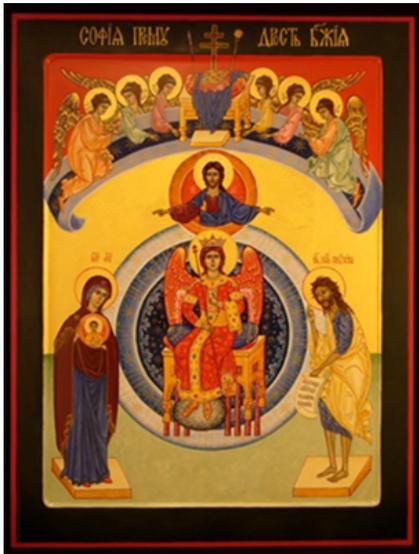
That being said, Advent is not only a liturgical season, it is a way of life. Human beings are all works in progress wherein our goodness and holiness is compromised by our temptation to live according to our self-centered sinfulness rather than God's other-centered will and love. Advent brings this reality to our consciousness and also serves as a time to affirm our commitment to live in the other-centered will of God.

Jesus' own life revealed this truth. Though Jesus was the embodiment of God's holiness and love, he took on our humanity and lived in a sinful world. He suffered death and experienced resurrection so we might embrace God's call to universal unconditional love and to eternal life in communion with God and all creatures and creation.

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# Women and the Word

*Dedicated to the Memory of Carmelite Sister Mary Lavin*



*Wisdom cries aloud in the street,  
in the open squares she raises her voice.  
--Proverbs 20:1*

## THE BACKGROUND

Almost two years ago, Fr. Lou Papes, a retired priest here in Cleveland, Ohio, was filling in for a vacationing pastor at a funeral. The homily was preached by the pastoral associate, Lisa Frey. Though her studying for a doctorate in preaching from the Aquinas Institute contributed to the structural formation of the homily, what he felt made it such a powerful funeral homily was her perspective on life, faith and death.

A few months later at the Sisters of St. Joseph, Lou heard another woman preach at the Midnight Mass at which he presided. That preacher was Sister Chris Schenk, former Executive Director of FutureChurch, whose homily was entitled "A Midwife at Bethlehem." Again, he felt the unique perspective of a woman was powerfully evident.

Several weeks later, he was asked to preside and preach at the funeral of Carmelite Sister Mary Lavin. Having recently revisited an article by Mary Catherine Hilbert on the biblical figure of Wisdom, it led him to see the life of this remarkable Carmelite as nothing short of a **homily** in the deepest sense of the word.

These three events led Lou to gather a team of remarkable women of faith who developed "Women and the Word," a preaching initiative in honor of Sister Mary Lavin which became part of Sabbath Retreats. After wide and diverse consultation, a mission statement was developed, which simply stated the purpose of Women and the Word:

***to create a welcoming and supportive environment  
for the preaching of the Sunday Scriptures from a woman's perspective.***

## THE PLAN

A series of three or four weekly preachings on the readings *for the following Sunday* is offered by women of faith in a celebration that mirrors the ritual of the Sunday Liturgy of the Word (see attachment) and concludes with a guided reflection/sharing. A common rubric (see attachment) is observed. Celebrations take place on mid-week evenings in parish churches. High schools and senior residences have a daytime schedule.

### **WHAT THIS INITIATIVE IS:**

*An opportunity for people to be exposed to the perspective a woman brings to the Word of God where they worship each Sunday.  
A preparation of the mind and heart for the proclamation of the Word at the following Sunday's Eucharist.*

### **WHAT THIS INITIATIVE IS NOT:**

*A substitute for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.  
A statement about any current ecclesial discipline.*

## THE RESULT

Wherever the women have preached in the ten series celebrated during this first year of Women and the Word, those who attend clearly affirm the charism of preaching by women of faith, a small step in the Church's acceptance of the essential role women have in the faith life of the Church. As more people directly experience women preaching, pastors and pastoral staffs are expressing interest in hosting a series in their parishes.

**For more information: [www.sabbathretreats.org](http://www.sabbathretreats.org)**

## WOMEN AND THE WORD

A preaching initiative  
of Sabbath Retreats.

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**We're on the WEB!**  
[www.sabbathretreats.org](http://www.sabbathretreats.org)

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## The Board of Women and the Word

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**LAUREL JURECKI**  
Pastoral Associate  
St. Mary Magdalene,  
Willowick, OH

**LOU PAPES**  
Retired Priest, Founder  
Director of Sabbath Retreats

## Local pastor praises women as preachers

*The following is an article written by Father Joe Fortuna, pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Church in Euclid, Ohio and published in the parish bulletin in March just prior to a four-week Lenten Series preached by Women and the Word.*

A few weeks ago I diverted from my more customary approach to delivering a homily to a form that was more akin to witness. I told the story of how growing up working in my family's funeral business was actually great preparation for being a minister of Church. I noted that I was afraid that I might disappoint my father by "not following in his shoes," but realized years later that he had actually been helping me to hear and respond to my call to be a priest.

I received a great deal of positive comment on this homily. People noted that when I speak about my family and my life experience, they often find a stronger sense of connection to me and to the message I am attempting to deliver. I responded that I try not to do that *too* much, because unless what I share has a direct connection to what the scriptures are calling us to, my witness can be a distraction rather than a help. Worst of all, it can put the focus on me rather than on the Word.

Yet it must be admitted that even when a homilist does not talk *explicitly* about his experience in family and life, he always does speak OUT OF his experience. In other words, his life experience shapes how he hears the Word of God. It sharpens his faith senses to some meanings of the Word and dulls them to others. It serves as a reservoir of images and examples that he might not have personally and directly experienced, but that he noticed and appreciated because of his life experience. And it also shapes HOW he DELIVERS the message he is proclaiming.

If all of this is true, and I believe it is, then it is worth asking if we miss something important when the only voices we hear in homilies belong to men. Are there some life and family experiences of women that sharpen their faith senses to hear some meanings of the Word that dull them to others, just as it happens for men? I believe that a case can be made that we can have a fuller and richer appreciation of the Word if we had the opportunity to hear women preachers at least occasionally.

I want to note up front that I am NOT saying that ALL women hear the Word differently from ALL men, and that ALL women preach differently from ALL men. To say this would be to deny some possibility of common experience in men and women. It would also fall into the trap of saying that ALL women experience the same thing and ALL men experience the same thing. In other words, it would deny individual differences among both women and men.

I also want to note that according to our current Catholic Church's liturgical teaching and law, a homily at Mass is *by definition* that which is proclaimed by an ordained minister after the gospel. Obviously, our Roman Catholic Church ordains only men, so the homily is restricted to men.

But PREACHING is NOT restricted to men! In fact, we need women preachers so that the full range and depth of meaning of the Word of God can be discerned and articulated over time for the good of the Church.

*Fr. Joe Fortuna, a priest of the Diocese of Cleveland, is pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Euclid, Ohio. He holds a Doctorate in Systematic Theology from the Catholic University of America, with a focus in Sacramental Theology. In addition to his parish ministry, he continues to serve as adjunct faculty of St. Mary Seminary.*

# ***A Celebration Rubric for Women and the Word***

***The celebration should start on time.***

***The preaching should be the same length as a homily at a Liturgy of the Word at a Sunday Eucharist.***

*Greeters should hand out worship aids as people arrive.*

*The preacher should be seated in the first row whenever not offering prayer or preaching.*

Welcome	At least on the first night the Pastor or member of the Pastoral Staff.
Opening Hymn	Cantor / Musician *
	<i>As the opening hymn concludes, the preacher approaches the altar, bows and turns to face the congregation. She makes the sign of the cross saying, "My brothers and sisters, we gather to hear the word of God in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" or words to that effect. A brief personal word of welcome would be appropriate, followed by the invitation to prayer: "Let us pray."</i>
Opening Prayer	Preacher <i>The preacher then returns to sit in first row.</i>
First Reading	<i>There should be a <u>period of silence</u> before the Psalm is intoned.</i>
Psalm Response	Cantor / Musician <i>A <u>period of silence</u> at the end of the psalm.</i>
Second Reading	<i>There should be a <u>period of silence</u> before the Alleluia verse is intoned.</i>
Alleluia Verse	Cantor / Musician <i>During the Alleluia verse, the preacher moves to the altar, bows and proceeds to the ambo.</i>
Gospel	Preacher
Preaching	Preacher <i>After preaching, the preacher should introduce the reflection questions printed in the worship aid and then return to her seat in the first row.</i>
Quiet Reflection	<i>Ideally, <u>an extended period of silence</u> should be observed during the reflection time.</i>
Sharing	<i>A brief sharing may be led by preacher</i>
Reflection Hymn	<i>In parishes a free will offering to cover the cost of preacher stipend and production costs is taken at this time.</i>
Closing Prayer	Preacher <i>(You may wish to use a form of "General Intercessions" for the closing prayer and conclude with the Lord's Prayer.)</i>
Closing Hymn	Cantor / Musician

**\* NOTE:** In parishes (and other institutions that may have music personnel) the expectation is that the preachers would consult with the music ministers at the parish (just as a priest might do in preparing his homily as a guest presider/preacher). The assumption is that music appropriate for the upcoming Sunday liturgy would be chosen and surely suggestions from a preacher would be welcomed. We will deal with the music/cantor situation of each non-parish venue individually.

*The goal of **Women and the Word** is  
"to create a welcoming and supportive environment  
for the preaching of the Sunday Lectionary  
from a woman's perspective."*

*-- Mission Statement*

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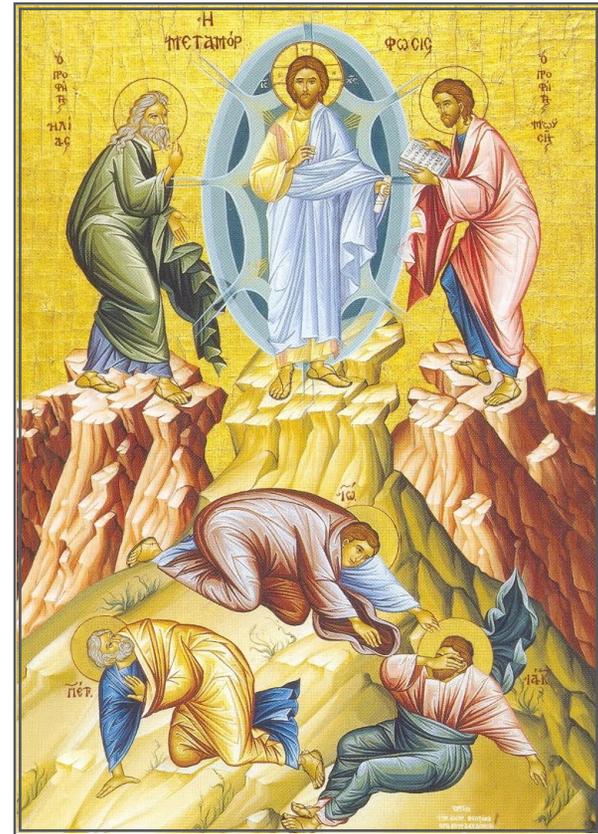


*Sister Mary Lavin, OCD (1929-2016), was an inspiration to her Carmelite community and to all who knew her and treasured both her contemplative spirit rooted in the Sacred Scriptures as well as her willing embrace of the challenges of the Second Vatican Council in the life of the Church. Her life was a homily. It is for that reason, this initiative is dedicated to her memory.*

# Women and the Word

*Sponsored by Sabbath Retreats*

*In Memory of Carmelite Sister Mary Lavin*



**Laurie Jurecki, Preaching**

**Pastoral Associate, St. Mary Magdalene**

**March 9, 2017**

**Anticipating the Second Sunday of Lent**

Our Lady of the Lake Church

# ORDER OF WORSHIP

**Laurie Jurecki, Preaching**

**Melissa Gali-Bird, Music Minister**

Welcome Fr. Joe Fortuna, Pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Parish

Opening Hymn The Glory of These Forty Days, Journeysongs #379

Opening Prayer

Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalms 33 Lord, let your mercy be on us  
as we place our trust in you.

2 Timothy 1:8b-10

Gospel Acclamation Praise and honor to you, O Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 17:1-9 Laurie Jurecki

Preaching Laurie Jurecki

Reflection/Sharing

Reflection Hymn I Will Be Your God, Journeysongs #383  
(Free Will Offering)

Closing Prayer

Closing Hymn O God, Our Help in Ages Past, Journeysongs #705

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

All of us have mountains to climb. Who are the people who you would take with you?

Eucharist is another way of seeing Jesus in a new light. How does the experience at the table change you? How do we see others in a new light?

What of what has been shared here this evening will you take with you to your Sunday celebration?"

To contact us, view preaching schedules or preaching videos visit  
[www.sabbathretreats.org](http://www.sabbathretreats.org)



## FutureChurch



### Mary of Magdala proclaims the Good News of the Resurrection

Determined and dignified, St. Mary of Magdala witnesses to what she has seen - the resurrected Jesus - the Christ.

For this, she was known as the "Apostle to the Apostles."

In this depiction, she raises her hands in a classic teaching position.

Peter and his wife are in awe of the news. Others stand near to hear the Good News.

Artist: Margaret Beaudette, SC  
2014

Commissioned by:  
Rita L. Houlihan

## Apostle to the Apostles

Mary of Magdala is perhaps the most maligned and misunderstood figure in early Christianity.

In Christian art and hagiography, Mary has been romanticized, allegorized, and mythologized beyond recognition. Since the fourth century, she has been portrayed as a prostitute and public sinner who, after encountering Jesus, repented and spent the rest of her life in private prayer and penitence. Paintings, some little more than pious pornography, reinforce the mistaken belief that sexuality, especially female sexuality, is shameful, sinful, and worthy of repentance. Yet the actual biblical account of Mary of Magdala paints a far different portrait than that of the bare-breasted reformed harlot of Renaissance art.

### Not a prostitute or public sinner, but primary witness

Nowhere in scripture is Mary of Magdala identified as a public sinner or a prostitute. Instead, scripture shows her as the primary witness to the most central events of Christian faith, named in exactly the same way (Maria e Magdalena) in each of four gospels written for diverse communities throughout the Mediterranean world. It was impossible to relate the story of the Resurrection without including "Mary, the one from Magdala."

Luke 8:1-3 tells us that Mary traveled with Jesus in the Galilean discipleship and, with Joanna and Susanna, supported his mission from her own financial resources. In the synoptic gospels, Mary leads the group of women who witness Jesus' death, burial, the empty tomb, and his Resurrection. The synoptics contrast Jesus' abandonment by the male disciples with the faithful strength of the women disciples who, led by Mary, accompany him to his death. John's gospel names the faithful strength of the women disciples who, led by Mary, accompany him to his death. John's gospel names Mary of Magdala as the first to discover the empty tomb and shows the Risen Christ sending her to announce the Good News of his Resurrection to the other disciples. This prompted early church Fathers to name her "the Apostle to the Apostles."

That the message of the Resurrection was first entrusted to women is regarded by scripture scholars as strong proof for the historicity of the Resurrection accounts. Had accounts of Jesus' Resurrection been fabricated, women would never have been chosen as witnesses, since Jewish law did



not acknowledge the testimony of women.

Early non-canonical Christian writings show faith communities growing up around Mary's ministry, where she is portrayed as understanding Jesus' message better than did Peter and the male disciples. Scholars tell us that these writings are not about the historical persons Mary and Peter but instead reflect tensions over women's roles in the early church. Prominent leaders such as Mary and Peter were evoked to justify opposing points of view. What is not disputed is the recognition of Mary of Magdala as an important woman leader in earliest Christianity.

Why are contemporary Christians uninformed about Mary's faithful discipleship and prominent leadership role in the infant church? One explanation is a common misreading of Luke's gospel which tells us that "seven demons had gone out of her." (Luke 8:1-3) To first century ears, this meant only that Mary had been cured of serious illness, not that she was sinful. According to biblical scholars such as Sr. Mary Thompson, illness was commonly attributed to the work of evil spirits, although not necessarily associated with sinfulness. The number seven symbolized that her illness was either chronic or very severe.

## Women Leaders Suppressed

In 312, when Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire, the Christian community was caught in a cultural conflict as it moved from worship in house churches where women's leadership was accepted, to worship in public places where women's leadership violated Roman social codes of honor and shame. In the fourth century, male church leaders at the Council of Laodicea suppressed women leaders because of the belief that women were created subordinate to men. During this same time period, we see the memory of Mary of Magdala changing from that of a strong female disciple and proclaimer of the Resurrection to a repentant prostitute and public sinner. Scholars such as Dr. Jane Schaberg believe this was done deliberately to discourage female leadership in the church.

As knowledge of Jesus' many women disciples faded from historical memory, their stories merged and blurred. The tender anointing of Mary of Bethany prior to Jesus' passion was linked to the woman "known to be a sinner" whose tears washed and anointed Jesus' feet at Simon's house. The anointing texts combined all of these women into one generic public sinner, "Magdalen." Misidentification of Mary as reformed public sinner achieved official standing with a powerful homily by Pope Gregory the Great (540-604).

Henceforth, Mary of Magdala became known in the west, not as the strong woman leader who accompanied Jesus through a tortuous death, first witnessed his Resurrection, and proclaimed the Risen Savior to the early church, but as a wanton woman in need of repentance and a life of hidden (and hopefully silent) penitence. Interestingly, the eastern church never identified her as a prostitute, but honored her throughout history as "the Apostle to the Apostles."

## The Da Vinci Code: Popular, but wrong on Mary of Magdala's marriage to Jesus

The 2002 publication of *The Da Vinci Code* ignited widespread controversy about the true role of Mary of Magdala. Unfortunately, Dan Brown's book, while an engaging fictional narrative, has done a disservice to the historical Mary of Magdala and other early women church leaders. Though *The Da Vinci Code* conveys a beautiful ideal of the essential unity of male and female, it is ultimately subversive to women's full and equal

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leadership in the church because it focuses on the fiction of Mary's marital status rather than the fact of her leadership in proclaiming Jesus' Resurrection.

There is no historical or biblical data to support speculation that Mary of Magdala was married to Jesus. The contention that ancient writers didn't mention their marriage and offspring for fear of Jewish persecution doesn't hold up because John's gospel and most of the apocryphal literature were written after the fall of Jerusalem, when there would have been nothing to fear from Jewish authorities. If Mary of Magdala were Jesus' wife and the mother of his child, it is highly unlikely that these texts would have omitted these important facts, especially since she is prominently portrayed in both as the primary witness to the Resurrection and a female leader who, in many ways, understood Jesus' mission better than did the male disciples.

If Jesus were married, it wasn't to Mary of Magdala, because then she would have been known as "Mary the wife of Jesus," not Mary of Magdala. Literary and social conventions in antiquity dictated that if women were mentioned (a very rare occurrence) they were nearly always named by their relationship to the patriarchal household, for example: "Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chusa" (Luke 8,1-3). Atypically, Mary of Magdala was named according to the town she was from, not by her relationship to a man. Biblical scholars believe this indicates that she was probably a wealthy independent woman not bound to the patriarchal household.

Contemporary scholarship has rightfully restored our understanding of Mary of Magdala as an important early Christian leader. Now she becomes the same inspiring role model for twenty-first century disciples. Mary of Magdala was the first to discover the empty tomb and shows the Risen Christ sending her to announce the Good News of his Resurrection to the other disciples. This prompted early church Fathers to name her "the Apostle to the Apostles."

That the message of the Resurrection was first entrusted to women is regarded by scripture scholars as strong proof for the historicity of the Resurrection accounts. Had accounts of Jesus' Resurrection been fabricated, women would never have been chosen as witnesses, since Jewish



law did not acknowledge the testimony of women.

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## Other Women Leaders

### Maria, Tryphaena, Tryphosa & Persis

Other women are mentioned by Paul in Romans 16, as he sends greetings to all those he knows at Rome. Maria in v. 6 has worked very hard; Paul uses the word he usually does for ministry. In v. 12, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and "dear Persis" are remembered, all of whom have labored in ministry. Finally, Julia is named among others in v. 15. There remain two unnamed women, the mother of Rufus in v. 13 and the sister of Nereus in v. 15. Of Rufus' mother, Paul says that she is a mother to him as well, which undoubtedly testifies to her gifts of hospitality.

### Apphia

The letter to Philemon is really addressed to three people: Philemon "beloved brother and co-worker," Apphia "our sister," and Archippos "fellow soldier," as well as to the church in their house. Soon, however, the text becomes Paul's message to Philemon over the situation with Onesimus. Is Apphia Philemon's wife or sister, or does she have a similar relationship with Archippos, or are they all related somehow? Whatever is the relationship among the three, we know that Apphia is one of the three prominent leaders of this house church.

### Nympha

There is one more name that should be mentioned here: Nympha in Col. 4:15. Though most scholars doubt that Colossians was written by Paul, still it stands within the Pauline circle of writings. Here the letter to the Colossians is to be sent also to Laodicea, a few miles away, where Nympha is named as host of a house church. Like Lydia and others at Philippi and elsewhere, she engaged in ministry that included hospitality, spiritual leadership, and other kinds of attention to the needs of the members.

### Conclusion

The record of these women reveals the intimate involvement of women in the first years of the formation of the church. They were workers alongside their male counterparts and sharers in the ministry of communicating the gospel in whatever ways possible.

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Icon of Phoebe, the deacon, named by Paul in Romans 16.

## Women in Paul's Ministry

### Introduction

In spite of the difficult passages about women in Paul's writings that can become real obstacles to a genuine appreciation of Paul, there is abundant evidence of the activity of women in various kinds of ministry in the Pauline churches. They collaborated with him and were his co-workers. Their leadership roles included hosting house churches, evangelizing, teaching, travel, and offering hospitality to visiting church members.

### Women Leaders at Philippi

#### Euodia and Syntyche

The first that we encounter are two women with Greek names, Euodia ("good fragrance") and Syntyche ("good luck") in Phil. 4:2-3. They are not getting along with each other—or possibly, they are together in a disagreement with Paul. Paul has written three previous chapters on the theme of unity, urging the recipients of the letter to take the examples of Christ and of himself by being willing to surrender certain rights and privileges in order to be one in Christ. Now he solemnly entreats these two women to be united in their thinking, and he urges a third party, not called by name, to mediate their disagreement. By way of explanation, Paul says that Euodia and Syntyche have struggled and contended alongside Paul and someone else named Clement in the work of advancing the gospel. This means that they were engaged in the work of evangelization.

#### Episkopoi and Diakonoi

The opening lines of Paul's letter to the Philippians contain a reference found nowhere else in the greetings of his letters: he and Timothy greet not only the holy ones or saints in Philippi, but add a greeting to their episkopoi and diakonoi. Certainly the Greek word episkopos, which ordinarily means overseer or manager, does not yet refer to what will later be a "bishop," though that is the word that eventually came to be used for this office. Proof that that is not yet its meaning is the fact that there are more than one in the same city; the word is in the plural. Rather, this is more likely a reference to the leaders of house churches, groupings of believers that met in private houses for worship and other means of nurturing their faith life. Since

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Philippi was a Roman military colony, it seemsto have been the first of the Christian groups to begin using such a term for its leaders.

The other group addressed in Phil. 1:1 are the diakonoi. This word, adapted later to mean "deacon," was a general word for ministers, attendants, and agents or official representatives. Here it refers to a designated group of persons who provide some kind of assistance in the community. But where do Euodia and Syntyche fit into this schema and why does Paul single them out? If we follow the flow of Paul's argument about unity, we can see that his appeal to them comes at the very end and is the climax. It is not a miscellaneous comment. The disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche (more likely than their common disagreement with Paul) is a major problem, and perhaps the major problem that Paul is facing in the Philippian church. If this is so, then these two women are not insignificant members of the church. They are likely to be among the episkopoi, that is, the hosts of groups of believers who meet in their houses, and members of a local council of leaders. Thus they are major figures in the Philippian church, persons who lead and are responsible for the life of faith there.

### **Lydia**

There is another woman character who appears in stories about Philippi, this time in Acts: Lydia. The narrative in Acts 16 describes Paul and Timothy going to the river just outside the city walls on the Sabbath, looking for a Jewish place of prayer. Instead of finding a mixed group, however, they encounter a group of women. One was a cloth merchant named Lydia who had her own household. "The Lord opened her heart" to believe. She and her household were baptized and she then provided hospitality to Paul and Timothy (Acts 16:13-15). Later, after a difficult experience in the city when they were about to leave, they went back first to the house of Lydia, where they encouraged the group that had formed there (Acts 16:40). This group was the nucleus of the Christian community in Philippi meeting in the house of Lydia, who was therefore the provider of hospitality and the natural presider at their common meals.

## **Women Prophets in Corinth**

There were nameless women, too. Some of them are mentioned in 1 Cor. 11:2-15. They are the Corinthian women prophets whose social freedom was disturbing to Paul. They claimed charismatic authority to ignore traditional behavior with regard to head covering, still an issue today in some cultures. If we only focus on the head covering problem, however, we miss the importance of what they were really doing. This reference to women who pray and prophesy fits the pattern we see elsewhere in early Christian prophecy: that women were always found among the prophets. It is the Holy Spirit who decides who has the gift. Prophecy was a gift and a ministry in the first generations of the church. The memory of these women prophets means that both men and women engaged in this service to the community and that all other references to prophets, for example, 1 Corinthians 14, refer to both women and men.

## **Women Leaders in the Letter to the Romans**

### **Phoebe**

The most important place in the Pauline writings, however, to find information about women's ministry is Romans 16. Here are eight named and two unnamed women who are remembered by Paul as part of his ministry. The first and most important is Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2). These verses are a recommendation of her to the recipients of the letter. Paul calls her by two titles: diakonos of the church of Cenchrae (one of the seaports of Corinth) and prostatis of many, including Paul.

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The title diakonos we have already seen in the opening lines of Paul's letter to the Philippians. It can be translated "minister" or "deacon," but the translation "deaconess" is not correct, since this refers to an order of diakonal women that arose in the third century. Paul uses the masculine term; the feminine had not yet evolved. The word connotes a minister, attendant, or envoy. In this case, it is the envoy function that seems dominant, because it is evident from the language that Paul uses that she is carrying his letter to Rome. She is unknown to the communities there, and Paul introduces her.

Another site in the Pauline letters that probably refers to women deacons is 1 Tim. 3:11. The majority of scholars hold that this letter is written by someone else after the time of Paul but in continuity with the Pauline legacy. Here, in the context of qualifications for diakonoi, "the women" are to be dignified, sober, and trustworthy. While it is possible that wives of male deacons are intended, the better interpretation is that women also filled this role in the church of Timothy.

The second title Paul uses for Phoebe in Romans 16 is prostatis. This reference has been much studied in recent years as we seek to understand better these women in Paul's life. It is the feminine form of the masculine prostatés. In both genders the word generally means patron or sponsor of some kind. In this patronage culture, calling someone a patron implies higher social status and power. There is an interesting parallel from Corinth at about the same time that Paul is writing his letter to the Romans from there. Another woman, Junia Theodora, was commemorated in several inscriptions by her fellow country people from Lycia (western Turkey) for her prostasia, which consisted of hospitality, patronage, and networking in Corinth for traveling Lycians. It is likely that Phoebe did the same for traveling Christians like Paul. This no doubt involved hosting a house church like Lydia, Euodia, and Syntyche in Philippi.

### **Prisca**

The second woman named in Romans 16 is Prisca, sometimes also called Priscilla. According to Acts 18:2-3, with her husband Aquila she had come from Italy to Corinth. In 1 Cor 16:19, they are hosting a house church in Asia (western Turkey, probably at Ephesus). Now, this couple with Latin names are back in Rome, again hosting a house church. They too, like Paul, were leather workers and traveled a great deal. Here we see a husband and wife who work side by side in their trade and also together in the ministry of evangelization and ongoing instruction. Later in the same chapter, the two of them together take Apollos aside and instruct him more properly in the faith (Acts 18:26). Their names also occur in 2 Tim. 4:19.

### **Junia**

Another missionary couple appears in Rom. 16:7. Andronicus and Junia, Paul's relatives or fellow country people, early converts and imprisoned at some time with Paul, are prominent among the apostles. Here again, much ink has been spilled over this reference, because it seems that both of them are called apostles. The wording suggests not that the apostles know them well, but that among the apostles, they are well known. This Junia has quite a textual history. Because the Latin name is in the accusative case in Greek, it would look the same whether a woman's or a man's name. However, there is no other known example of the male name, which would be Junias, while the female name Junia is common (some texts say Julia, which is just as common a Latin name). In early centuries, Junia was thought to be a woman. In fact, the late fourth-century preacher John Chrysostom remarks on what a wonderful woman she must have been that Paul called her an apostle. Later in the Middle Ages, it was decided that if this person was an apostle it must be a man, and Junia became Junias. Only within the last half of the twentieth century has the interpretation been reassessed and Junia once again recognized as a woman apostle. Her apostleship with her husband probably consisted in itinerant evangelization.

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# DEACONCHAT

A CONVERSATION ABOUT WOMEN DEACONS



## Begin the conversation

**Why DeaconChat?** On May 12, 2016 Pope Francis -- responding to a question posed by members of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) -- said that he would establish a commission to study the question of ordaining women deacons in the Roman Catholic Church. That commission was formally announced in August and began its work in November of 2016. As the commission undertakes its work, it is important that Catholics -- lay and ordained -- undergo their own study and discernment of the history and present possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate. Unfortunately too many Catholics -- clergy included -- are under-educated on this topic. **Our goal is to bring the ordained and the laity together in conversation to continue to learn and discern together.**

**What are we asking you to do?** We are asking you to engage a local member of the clergy (your parish priest, deacon, or your local bishop) in a conversation about women deacons.

**Download:** Download the free materials for DeaconChat at [www.CatholicWomenDeacons.org/support/deaconchat](http://www.CatholicWomenDeacons.org/support/deaconchat).

**Learn:** Begin by taking some time to educate yourself. This packet includes a Brief History of Women Deacons, biographies of women who served as deacons in the early Church, and articles by Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D. who was named by Pope Francis to serve on the study commission and by retired auxiliary Bishop Emil Wcela of Rockville Centre, NY.

**Share:** Consider sending your local clergy member a copy of Dr. Zagano's *Women Deacons Past Present and Future* which includes essays by Church historian Gary Macy, Ph.D. and Deacon William Ditewig, Ph.D. Copies can be purchased directly from the publisher, Paulist Press, at <http://www.paulistpress.com/Products/4743-4/women-deacons.aspx> or through other retailers. Please note that each bishop in the U.S. has already been sent a copy of this text. Alternatively, we also welcome you to print or make additional copies of any of the resources in this packet to send. We have also included a sample letter that you can customize to send with these materials.

**Connect:** After you have sent the materials and letter to your local clergy member, follow up by inviting them to discuss them with you. You might suggest meeting for coffee or lunch. During this conversation you might consider asking them to host an information session or educational gathering on women deacons for local Catholics. If you yourself experience a call to the diaconate, you may wish to tell your story.

**We Will Contact You with a Brief Survey** In the months ahead, we will email you a very brief survey to get your feedback about how your conversation went and what follow-up actions you and clergy were able to take together to learn and educate others about the history and present possibility of ordaining women deacons. We will also make suggestions for further actions.

Thank you for becoming a part of this important ministry!

**DeaconChat is a joint initiative of The Association of US Catholic Priests (AUSCP), FutureChurch, and Voice of the Faithful.**

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