

# MARY OF MAGDALA AND MANY OTHERS: A CELEBRATION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN

Developed by FutureChurch for the  
July 22, 2021 Feast of Saint Mary of Magdala

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# MARY OF MAGDALA AND MANY OTHERS: A CELEBRATION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN

## INTRODUCTORY RITES

**General Welcome**     *The organizer(s) offer a brief welcome to all who have gathered and introduce and thank any liturgical ministers and others who helped/ are helping with the celebration. They then ask the assembled to stand as they are able and join in the opening song.*

### Suggested Opening Songs

- ***A Place at the Table*** text by Shirley Erena Murray; music by Lori True
- ***All are Welcome*** by Marty Haugen
- ***Gather Us In*** by Marty Haugen
- ***Gather Your People*** by Bob Hurd
- ***Women of the Church*** by Carey Landry

### Sign of the Cross

Leader:     *making the Sign of the Cross*  
 We gather in the name of God, our Creator,  
 Christ, our Savior,  
 And the Holy Spirit of wisdom and power,  
**ALL:**        **Amen**

### Sign of Peace

Leader:     Let us take a moment, now, to welcome each other to this celebration  
 with a sign of peace and love.

*The leader allows a few moments for all to welcome one another and share a sign of peace before moving onto the introductory rights.*

### Introductory Remarks

Leader:     *In these or similar words...*

In every generation women have and continue to faithfully and generously respond to the call to serve God and God's holy people. They have been apostles and disciples; leaders of prayer, readers and preachers; educators and theologians; truth-tellers, prophets, martyrs, and reformers; pastoral ministers, chaplains, comforters, and counselors; altar servers, sacristans, and bread-bakers; mothers, Godmothers, and caregivers; musicians, writers and artists - offering their gifts to the mission and ministry of the Church.

Often, sharing from their own resources, receiving neither recognition nor remuneration, they are quietly making “church” happen. Sometimes they are simply taken for granted. But all too often, the dangerous memory of their ministry, leadership, and witness is covered up, hidden, diminished.

Today, however, on this Feast of Saint Mary of Magdala, we gather to let their light shine. We celebrate and give thanks for the women from our history, from our own families communities, and from around the world. We tell their stories and name their contributions. And we seek a Church that is truly enlightened and alive with the God-given gifts of each member.

And so, let us continue our prayer, calling upon Mary of Magdala, our patron, whose own light – which we recover and reclaim today – gives us hope. Our response is, **“Be with us.”**

### **Calling Upon Mary of Magdala**

Reader(s):

We know her as Mary Magdalene or Mary of Magdala. We associate this name with a town. But in Luke’s Gospel, she is “Mary, called Magdalene.” This title is similar to “Simon, called Peter.” Just as *petra* means rock in Greek, *magdala* means fortress temple, watchtower, stronghold, and elevated pulpit in Aramaic and Hebrew.

*And so we ask, Mary, Tower-Fortress-The Magdalene, R: Be with us!*

The gospels name Mary of Magdala first and foremost as one of the women who funded Jesus, allowing the good-news movement to extend from Galilee all the way to Jerusalem.

*And so we ask, Mary, Patron of the Movement, R: Be with us!*

In the gospels, Mary and other women in the movement “ministered to [Jesus].” The Greek word *diakonos* means minister.

*And so we ask, Mary, diakonos-minister, R: Be with us!*

Mary of Magdala stood with other women until the bitter end, witnessing Jesus die on the cross even after all his male companions had scattered. She, with other women, went to the tomb with myrrh and entered into the rituals of mourning and burial.

*And so we ask, Mary, pain-bearer, R: Be with us!*

In the gospels, Mary – either alone or with other women – is the first to experience the Resurrected Jesus. And she is commissioned by him to go and tell the others the good news of Resurrection.

*And so we ask, Mary, bringer of the good news of Resurrection, R: Be with us!*

The early Christian community knew Mary as an important leader - and for her role as the first proclaimer of the Resurrection they called her the “Apostle to the Apostles.”

*And so we ask, Mary, Apostle to the Apostles and evangelist, R: Be with us!*

Adapted from “Thirteen Ways of Calling Out to Mary Magdalene” developed by The Women Who Stayed, the women’s ministry at the Church of St. Francis Xavier, NYC.

**LITURGY OF THE WORD\***

*All are seated, if not already.*

*\*Please note that these readings are not the assigned lectionary readings for the day. We have selected these readings in particular for this Mary of Magdala to recognize all the faithful Catholic women who have and continue to support the mission of Jesus. The assigned readings for the day are: Sgs 3:1-4b or 2 Cor 5:14-17; Psalm Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9; and Jn 20:1-2, 11-18 (consider reading John 20:1-18 for the full story).*

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading:** Wisdom 7: 21-30

Lector: A reading from the Book of Wisdom

I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,  
for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.  
There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,  
unique, manifold, subtle,  
mobile, clear, unpolluted,  
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,  
irresistible, beneficent, humane,  
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,  
all-powerful, overseeing all,  
and penetrating through all spirits  
that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.  
For wisdom is more mobile than any motion;  
because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.  
For she is a breath of the power of God,  
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;  
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.  
For she is a reflection of eternal light,  
a spotless mirror of the working of God,  
and an image of God's goodness.  
Although she is but one, she can do all things,  
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;  
in every generation she passes into holy souls  
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;  
for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.  
She is more beautiful than the sun,  
and excels every constellation of the stars.  
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,  
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

The Word of Our God.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Gospel Acclamation**

***Alleluia! Raise the Gospel***

Bernadette Farrell

**Gospel:** Luke 8: 1-18

Leader/Preacher: A reading from the Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the reign of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for him out of their resources.

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable:

“A sower went out to sow some seed: some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

Then the disciples asked what this parable meant. Jesus said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Reign of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that

‘looking they may not perceive,  
and listening they may not understand.’

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

“No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light. Then pay attention to how you listen; for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away.”

The Good News of Our Salvation

**ALL: Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Preaching:** *In lieu of formal preaching, you may also allow for shared reflection or small group conversation depending on the size of your gathering. Some questions to consider include: What does it mean you to hear and envision that Mary and other women accompanied Jesus and funded his ministry? Does the parable of the sower take on new meaning in light of the presence of Mary and the other women, especially when you consider Jesus' crucifixion and Resurrection? How do our readings speak to contemporary women in the Church?*

## RITUAL OF NAMING

*For this ritual, you will need **one larger candle/fire** and **a candle for each woman/vignette**, placed at the center or at the front of the assembly (depending upon your space and arrangement). **Each participant should also have a smaller candle** (or battery operated votive they can quickly turn on after they have shared).*

Leader: *In these or similar words as the larger candle is lit*  
 God's Wisdom Spirit is a reflection of eternal light  
 and passes into holy souls in every generation.  
 Women throughout the ages receive that light  
 and generously respond to Christ's invitation to place it on a lampstand  
 so that all may see its glorious, radiant, revealing truth.  
 Yet, there are those who would attempt to conceal or hide this light.  
 And so, in an act of defiant hope, courage and love  
 we name them and tell their stories.

### Readings/Vignettes

Options

- Read vignettes from FutureChurch's Women Witnesses for Racial Justice Series (provided below)
- Read vignettes of contemporary Catholic women from around the globe (provided below)
- Highlight the women of your parish/community who make "church" happen
- Prepare and read about a selection of women of your own choosing

### Sung Response and Candle Lighting

*As the selected refrain is sung after each reading/vignette, the reader or another person from the assembly takes one of the smaller candles and lights it from the larger candle.*

Options:

***Women of the Church***  
***We are the Light of the World***  
***Christ Be Our Light***  
***You Shall Be My Witnesses***

Carey Landry  
 Jean Anthony Greif  
 Bernadette Farrell  
 M.T. Winter

### Sharing

*After the readings/vignettes, offer an opportunity for those assembled to share the name and contributions of a woman they would like to lift up. After participants have been given an opportunity to name the woman aloud (or in their hearts, if they are more comfortable), invite them to light their own candle. Depending upon the size of your assembly, you may consider limiting their sharing to a sentence or two...*

### Prayer

*After suitable time has been allowed for all to share and/ or light their candle...*

Leader: Eternal God, you call us to be a reflection of your divine light.  
 Today, in honor of Mary of Magdala, we name and celebrate  
 the women who have shared that light throughout the ages;  
 In hope, we name and call forth women's light still waiting to shine.  
 And we pray that, with your help, we may, in the words of Amanda Gorman,  
 "...step out of the shade, aflame and unafraid.

The new dawn blooms as we free it.  
 For there is always light,  
 if only we're brave enough to see it.  
 If only we're brave enough to be it.”  
**Amen.**

### **Sung Response**

*Participants are seated and sing through the refrain of the song chosen above two or three final times to bring the ritual to a close. Afterwards, there is a moment of quiet reflection. At this point, depending upon the timing of the sharing, you may either invite participants to extinguish their candles or to leave them lit for the concluding rites.*

## **CONCLUDING RITES**

### **Closing Prayer**

slightly adapted from “Strength of Women” in *More than Words: Prayer and Ritual for Inclusive Communities*. © 1988 by Janet Schaffran, CSJ and Pat Kozak, CDP.

Leader: Let us pray.

Loving God, we celebrate your faithfulness and love,  
 and praise you for the wonders you have worked  
 through people of faith throughout history,  
 and especially through Mary of Magdala  
 and the women we have named today.

Your light within us enables us to claim our own strength and our need,  
 and to take risks in the service of your people,  
 confident of your grace.

Continue to root us more deeply in your love  
 that any light and life that results from our efforts  
 might be reflection of your light and love.

We ask this the name of Christ Jesus,  
 Who lives with you - and in us all –  
 In the unity of the Holy Spirit  
 God forever and ever.

**ALL:** Amen

### **Suggested Closing Songs:**

- *Sing a New Church* by Delores Dufner, OSB
- *We are Many Parts* by Marty Haugen
- *You Shall Be My Witnesses* by M.T. Winter
- Or any of the songs suggested elsewhere

## Vignettes from FutureChurch's Women Witnesses for Racial Justice Series

### Anna “Madre” Bates - Founder of Our Lady of Victory in Detroit

Anna Bates would become known as “Mother” or “Madre” Bates to the community in the West Eight Mile neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. Indeed, she was a mother in various ways to so many. She had two children of her own – Hazel Marie and Keith Joseph – both of whom preceded her in death. She knew the pain known by too many black women across generations who have had their children torn from their arms and sold into slavery; whose sons are two and a half times more likely to be killed by law enforcement sworn to protect them; and who face higher rates of maternal and infant mortality than any other group in the US.

But she also gave birth to a parish community when the white Catholics in the neighborhood rejected Black Catholics and white clerics resisted her efforts. Our Lady of Victory was born in the midst of her fierce and tender love for the People of God – in a world where racism and white supremacy poisoned white Catholics and blinded them to God’s dream for a kin-dom where all are one family in the work of the Gospel.

### Sr. Antona Ebo - Civil Rights Icon

On Sunday March 7, 1965, Alabama state troopers and local police beat and bloodied civil rights activists who had begun a 50-mile march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital. Immediately following the “Bloody Sunday” attack, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. issued a call for church leaders around the country to come to Selma and to join in the struggle for civil rights.

Days later, on March 10th, Sister Antona Ebo, who had desegregated the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, boarded a chartered plane she joked had been pulled out of moth balls on her way from Saint Louis, Missouri to Selma. The March 11th cover of The New York Times featured a photo of Sister Ebo marching alongside other protesters. That photo would become an iconic image of the struggle for voting rights.

Throughout her life -- both before and after Selma -- Sister Ebo, who died in 2017, was a civil rights pioneer. She credited the Holy Spirit for guiding her throughout her life and often sang the black spiritual, “I’m Gonna Do What the Spirit Says Do.”

### Mother Mary Lange - Founder of the Oblates

Elizabeth Lange came to Baltimore as a courageous, loving, deeply spiritual woman. She was a strong, independent thinker and doer. Although she was a refugee, she was well educated and of independent means - possessing monies left to her by her father.

It did not take Elizabeth long to recognize that the children of her fellow refugees needed an education. She responded to that need in spite of being a Black woman living in a slave state before the Emancipation Proclamation, where the education of slaves was against the law. She used her



own money and home to teach Black children. Eventually, with the help of a French priest, she was able to found the Oblates of Providence so that the education of Black children could continue. The separate order became necessary in the face of the racism practiced by religious communities of women who did not accept Black women into their ranks.

Mother Mary Lange spent her life desegregating the church and giving every child in her path a chance at a good education.

### **Sr. Thea Bowman - Leader of Black Liberation**

In one of her last interviews, having lived with cancer for nearly six years, Sr. Thea Bowman said, “I don’t try to make sense of [suffering], I try to make sense of life.” Drawing inspiration and insight from African American spirituals, which were so much a part of her life and ministry, Sr. Thea lived life fully and purposefully.

A champion of incorporating African American spirituality and Black Sacred Song into the life of the Catholic Church, she challenged Catholics of all backgrounds to see their unique cultures, histories, and heritages as reason for celebration - not cause for discrimination.

During her challenging and prophetic 1989 address to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bowman said, “What does it mean to be black and Catholic? It means that I come to my church fully functioning. That doesn’t frighten you, does it? I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my Black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my tradition, my experience, my culture, my African American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the church.”

### **Amanda Gorman - National Youth Poet Laureate**

Amanda Gorman finished the poem, titled "The Hill We Climb," the night after insurrectionists sieged the Capitol building. She said, “In my poem, I’m not going to in any way gloss over what we’ve seen over the past few weeks and, dare I say, the past few years. But what I really aspire to do in the poem is to be able to use my words to envision a way in which our country can still come together and can still heal. It’s doing that in a way that is not erasing or neglecting the harsh truths I think America needs to reconcile with.”

From “The Hill We Climb”:

We are striving to forge a union with purpose,  
to compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and  
conditions of man.

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us,  
but what stands before us.

We lay down our arms  
 so we can reach out our arms to one another.  
 Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true,  
 that even as we grieved, we grew,  
 that even as we hurt, we hoped,  
 that even as we tired, we tried,  
 that we'll forever be tied together, victorious.

### **Anne Marie Becraft – founder of the Nation’s first Catholic school for black children**

Anne Marie Becraft founded the nation’s first Catholic school open to Black children in 1820. Over the next decade, she transformed her school into the first Catholic day and boarding academy for Black girls in the country. After winning support from a Jesuit priest stationed at Holy Trinity and the French-transplanted community of Visitation Sisters, her academy, Georgetown Seminary, was relocated in 1827 directly across the street from the Visitation convent and academy, where more than 80 enslaved men, women and children labored, and around the corner from Georgetown College, where more than 300 enslaved men, women and children did the same.

Becraft not only dared to establish a Black Catholic school amid the nation’s and the church’s slaveholding elite, but also routinely marched her “troop of girls, dressed uniformly ... in procession ... to devotions on the sabbath at Holy Trinity Church” in the veritable hell of D.C. slavery - an act that underscores both the subversive and emancipatory nature of Catholicism in the hands Black women and girls fighting white supremacy.

In 1831, she moved to Baltimore to join the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first African American female religious order, and became known as Sister Mary Aloysius.

Source: <https://www.aaihs.org/black-catholic-women-are-forgotten-prophets-of-american-democracy/>

### **Martha Jane Chisley Tolton**

Like so many women throughout history, Martha Jane Chisley Tolton has been remembered because she had a noteworthy son, Augustus Tolton, the first African American Catholic priest. Yet, even a cursory glance at her life gives us insight into her “out of Egypt” legacy.

As the Civil War began breaking out, Martha’s husband Peter escaped from their slaveholders in Missouri in order to join the Union Army. Martha Jane, fearing that her children would be taken from her, made her escape as well in 1861. With her three children in tow, she made the dangerous journey from Brush Creek, Missouri to Quincy, Illinois, knowing every law in the land was set against her in her quest for freedom. Having no experience with boats, she somehow managed, with a 20-month-old baby and two other children, to row across the Mississippi river and make her way to freedom.

## **Vignettes of Contemporary Women from around the Globe\***

### **Ivone Gebara**

Born in Sao Paulo in 1944, Ivone Gebara is a Brazilian philosopher, feminist theologian, and religious sister, most known for her pioneering work in liberation theology and ecofemism, exploring the theological intersections of women's and environmental justice.

No stranger to silencing, she taught at the Instituto Teologico do Recife for 16 years before it was shut down by a conservative archbishop in 1990. In 1995 the Vatican her ordered not to teach, speak, or write for two years because of an interview during which she argued that Church teaching on reproduction didn't adequately account for the plight of poor women. During that time, she was told to go to Europe for "reeducation" in Catholic teaching. During that time she earned her second Ph.D. from the university of Louvain and began writing one of her most notable works: *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*.

Today she continues to live and work in the Northeast region of Brazil, speaking from her white, educated middle class privilege, but identifying with the poorest Brazilians, who are mostly a mix of Black, white, and indigenous.

### **Nontando Hadebe**

Born into a Catholic family in Zimbabwe, Dr. Nontando Hadebe currently resides in Johannesburg, South Africa, and is transitioning from her role as Lecturer at St. Augustine College to her new position as International Coordinator for Side by Side, a faith movement for gender justice.

Having first studied law, Dr. Hadebe is a lay, woman, African theologian. Her doctoral dissertation was entitled *A Trinitarian theological response to gender challenges in the context of HIV/Aids in Southern Africa*. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Residence at Emmanuel College in Boston.

A member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, she is passionate about gender equality, Africanization and social justice – topics she regularly discussed on her weekly radio program with Radio Veritas.

As a member of the FutureChurch Board of Trustees, she has been instrumental in expanding the FutureChurch mission globally and introducing FutureChurch to the growing movement of young Catholic feminists in Africa.

### **Marie Collins**

A victim-survivor of clergy abuse herself – at the age of 13 – Marie Collins of Dublin, Ireland has become a leading advocate for justice for survivors of clergy sexual abuse, for the protection of children and vulnerable adults, and for accountability in the Roman Catholic Church.

In 2014, she was appointed by Pope Francis as an inaugural member, and one of two survivors, to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. But on March 1, 2018 she resigned, citing

the “reluctance of some members of the Vatican Curia to implement the recommendations of the Commission despite their approval by the pope.”

She is a founding trustee of the Marie Collins Foundation and the Irish support group for abuse survivors, One in Four, as well as a founding member of Aware, a depression support group in Ireland.

### **Marilyn Hatton**

Marilyn Hatton, of Canberra Australia, is a longtime campaigner for women’s rights in the Catholic Church and in society in general.

A former nurse, she has held several senior government health positions and became the Australian Capital Territory’s first Women’s Health Advisor.

Prompted by the exclusion of women from decision-making and ordained ministry in the Church, she has been a leader of the Catholic feminist movement in Australia and around the world since the 1970s. She has represented Australia on the Women’s Ordination Worldwide Network and at the International Catholic Reform Network and remains an active and pioneering member of the global Church reform movement.

### **Sr. Helen Prejean**

In 1982, Sr. Helen Prejean moved into the St. Thomas Housing Project in New Orleans to live and work with the poor. While there, she began corresponding with Patrick Sonnier, who had been sentenced to death for the murder of two teenagers. Two years later, Sr. Helen witnessed Patrick’s execution in the electric chair. In the following months, she became spiritual advisor to another death row inmate, Robert Lee Willie.

After witnessing these executions, seeking to challenge the practice by bringing it into the light, Sister Helen wrote, *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States*.

After Sister Helen’s urging, under John Paul II the catechism was revised to strengthen the church’s opposition to executions, although it allowed for a very few exceptions. And soon after meeting with Sister Helen in August of 2018, Pope Francis announced new language to the Catechism which declared the death penalty inadmissible with no exceptions.

Sister Helen continues her work, dividing her time between educating the public, campaigning against the death penalty, counseling individual death row prisoners, and working with murder victims’ family members.

### **Virginia Saldanha**

Virginia Saldanha taught religious education in her parish school in Mumbai, India for 14 years. Taking advantage of in-service training and a 4-year certificate course in theology for the laity, she soon delved deeper into Liberation and Feminist Theology.

In the decades since, she has devoted her theological and advocacy work toward the struggle for justice for women, the poor, and the marginalized – serving in several key positions in both the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and as a journalist and opinion writer.

Most recently though, she has leveraged her experience and prominence to co-found Rainbow Catholics India (a support and advocacy group for LGBT+ Catholics) immediately following the 2018 decriminalization of homosexuality and to advocate for and tell the stories of women survivors of clergy sex abuse, including religious sisters.

*\*We have selected six contemporary women from around the world (one from each inhabited continent) as a small representation of the gifts that Catholic women offer to the Church and the world. We welcome you to add other women, particularly those who may be of special importance to your community.*

## **More Resources**

For information about Mary of Magdala, visit our website

<https://reclaimmagdalene.org>

For more information about the ways women's leadership, ministry, and witness is systemically covered up, visit [www.futurechurch.org/women-erased](http://www.futurechurch.org/women-erased) for presentations, transcripts, and videos.

For past and upcoming presentations and prayer services from FutureChurch's Women Witnesses for Racial Justice project, visit <https://futurechurch.org/wwrj-videos>

To download free Women Witnesses for Racial Justice resource packets, visit <https://futurechurch.org/wwrj-downloads>.

To register to join FutureChurch's virtual celebration of Mary of Magdala, visit <https://futurechurch.org/mm21>

Art Tour: July 20 at 7pm ET

Liturgy: July 22 at 7pm ET