

# FEAST OF ST. MARY OF MAGDALA CELEBRATION

*Rethinking Women's Participation: Stories of Synodality Then and Now*

## INTRODUCTORY RITES

(\*) **Gathering Song:** (RUSS)  
*Women of the Church* by Carey Landry

**Sign of the Cross:** (KATHY)

Leader: We gather in the name and in the power of  
*(making the Sign of the Cross)*  
God, our loving Creator,  
Christ Jesus, our Savior,  
And the Holy Spirit, our gift and guide,  
All: AMEN.

**Introduction:** *Rethinking Women's Participation: Stories of Synodality Then and Now*

Leader:

This year as we mark the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala, we have been given an invitation by the *Church present* to return to a very ancient tradition of *Church past*.

Pope Francis has invited us to live as a *Synodal Church*. Much has been made, and indeed much ignored, regarding the Synod on Synodality. However, this Synod will without a doubt be one of the greatest legacies of Francis' papacy. Because Synodality is the only path forward for the Catholic Church in the 21st century.

Synodality, which is as ancient a tradition as the Church itself, is as the Pope describes, the act of "[familial] collaboration and discernment." Humbly seeking the good together. Walking together with mutual listening, free of ideology and agenda. In what the Pope calls, "productive tension. Holding disagreement and allowing it to become the link in a new process. When Jesus said: Blessed are the Peacemakers, this is surely the mission He meant."

Jesus himself sought to teach his disciples – women and men - by example the process of Synodal Listening. Expanding their minds through parables, telling them synodal stories; seeking out those specifically on the peripheries, those whose voices would most certainly have been ignored or silenced; making time and space in the busyness of his ministry to listen attentively to those whom God placed in his path.

Perhaps the greatest 'miss' in the history of Synodality was that of the courageous witness of Mary Magdalene. Three years of Jesus' intimate collaboration with his trusted 12 didn't prepare their hearts or ears to listen and

believe the witness of their sister in faith and mission. And we live with the wound of that 'miss' in our Church to this day.

Today as we honor the impact her witness continues to make - despite not having been believed or counted as an adequate witness to the pivotal moment in our salvation - we gather our prayers together for all women who continue to be ignored, discredited and not believed.

We will hear moments of encounter with Jesus in Synodality *then*. And we will hear synodal encounters from this past year in heartfelt sharing of the People of God *now*. We will also hear directly from the Vatican document from on the Synod, "Enlarge the Space of Your Tent". The real voices of people across the world, crying out for women's voices to be invited to share a seat at the table.

**Opening Prayer:      Inviting the Presence and Intercession of Mary Magdalene**

Leader:      Let us pray:  
You Mary, Watchtower over people of faith,  
Watch over us as we listen attentively  
to the voices of women, who like you,  
bearing a truthful witness to Christ's resurrection.

Appointed with a distinct purpose to preach the most important news of all time:  
Be with us now as we summon  
your courage, tenacity, faithfulness, and greatness.  
Help us return to the traditions of the early Church you helped to build.  
Help us journey in a spirit of Synodality  
toward the likeness of a Church your friend Jesus intended.  
Help us become fully adopted to the Holy Spirit,  
abiding always in the will of God  
with softened hearts and open ears.  
We make our prayers through Jesus, our brother.

**ALL:              Amen**

**LITURGY OF THE WORD**

**Leader:**      Let us listen now to the cries for women's full participation in the life of the Church, to the stories of women's synodal encounters with Jesus, and synodal witnesses of women today.

**Enlarge the Space of Your Tent      Paragraph 60                              (OLIVIA)**

Reader: A reading from Enlarge the Space of Your Tent:

The call for a conversion of the Church's culture, for the salvation of the world, is linked in concrete terms to the possibility of establishing a new culture, with new practices and structures. A critical and urgent area in this regard concerns the role of women and their vocation, rooted in our common baptismal dignity, to participate fully in the life of the Church. A growing awareness and sensitivity towards this issue is registered all over the world.

The word of the People of God, **ALL: Thanks be to God.**

**Now, A Synodal Voice:** *Listen* by Mary Oliver **(MONIKA)**

(\*) Reader: A reading from poet, Mary Oliver:

Listen  
Everyday  
I see or hear  
something  
that more or less  
kills me  
with delight,  
that leaves me  
like a needle  
in the haystack  
of light.  
It was what I was born for —  
to look, to listen,  
to lose myself  
inside this soft world —  
to instruct myself  
over and over  
in joy,  
and acclamation.

Nor am I talking  
about the exceptional,  
the fearful, the dreadful,  
the very extravagant —  
but of the ordinary,  
the common, the very drab,  
the daily presentations.

Oh, good scholar,  
I say to myself,  
how can you help  
but grow wise  
with such teachings  
as these —  
the untrimmable light  
of the world,  
the ocean's shine,  
the prayers that are made  
out of grass?

**Now, A Synodal Witness:** **Synodal Witness 1** **(ROSE)**

Reader: A reading from a Synod Listening Session Participant:

Having participated in seven synodal sessions in our parish, including one specifically on women in the church, it is clear to me that many women share frustration, anger and deep disappointment if not betrayal at our present position in the church. We have been

clearly told that our position was always thus. Jesus picked only men as his apostles and therefore women from the beginning were relegated to, at best, a second-class position, a position with no power or influence. But is this actually true?

An accurate reading of any of the Gospel would tell otherwise. Who did Christ reveal himself to first? And whom did he trust as the messengers to announce the good news to the disciples? All four of the gospel writers tell the story in almost identical ways, and in every instance women are at the core of this story. This is no accident.

So where are we now, two millennia after Jesus' time on earth? Are we seeing any significant change in the acknowledgement of women's gifts and their dedication to the faith in the church? Do we have any reason to feel hopeful that those things are changing? Can we have any hope for a more significant role in the future, or will our talents and vocations continue to be obscured and rejected?

**Instrumentum Laboris** Section B2 a

**(OLIVIA)**

Reader: A reading from Instrumentum Laboris

The continental Assemblies were unanimous in calling for attention to the experience, status and role of women, notwithstanding the different perspectives present within each continent. They celebrate the faith, participation and witness of so many Lay and Consecrated women worldwide, often present as evangelists and first teachers in the ways of faith, ministering in remote places and challenging contexts, and at the "prophetic margins".

The word of the People of God, **ALL: Thanks be to God.**

**(\*) Then, A Synodal Encounter with Jesus:**

Luke 8:43-48

**(LUCY)**

Reader: A reading from the Gospel According to St. Luke

In the crowd was a woman  
who had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years,  
and had found no one who could heal her.  
She came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of his cloak,  
and immediately the bleeding stopped.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked.

When no one nearby responded, Peter said,  
"Rabbi, it's the crowd pressing around you."

But Jesus said,  
"Someone touched me. I felt power leave me."

When the woman realized that she had been noticed,  
she approached in fear and knelt before him.

She explained in front of the crowd  
why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

Jesus said to her,  
“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

The Good News of Our Salvation    **ALL: Praise to you, O Christ.**

**Now, A Synodal Witness:    Synodal Witness 2**

**(ELLIE)**

Reader:    A reading from a Synod Participant who has discerned a call to the diaconate:

I’ve felt a strong call to the vocation of Deacon since before I had language to precisely identify it. I grew up in a small Protestant church in a tiny town where no one had any secrets. The services were simple. There were readings, there were poems, there was an electric organ and guitars, there were sermons, there was standing and sitting. There was a woman in the pulpit. She loved Jesus and taught me to love Him too.

Both the altar and cross were bare. The service had a gentle flow with an apologetic timbre. The thanksgiving was polite; the praise, subdued. The best part for me was leafing through the hymnal and teaching myself to sing all four parts on the staff. Protestants sing all the verses of the hymns so I had lots of practice. Singing, like church, was not optional. Communion was rare. It was the most delectable hand-cut square of Wonderbread and the most delicious thimble of grape juice you’ve ever tasted.

But for me, the real work of evangelization happened in the kitchen. The church ladies. Those ladies were ‘Martha’s’, working tirelessly to feed, and clean, and teach, and tend. They were in charge. They were the magnetic force around which the whole operation orbited. Those ladies knew the needs of their community. They knew all the gossip, but never treated it as such. They treated it like ministry. They provided meal trains to new moms or people with sick spouses long before ‘signup genius’ streamlined the whole affair. They built the community with their rotary dial telephones, and hours and hours of loving and attentive listening. Some of those ladies were well into their 80’s, and still making hot lunches for the bereaved, slicing triangle sandwiches for vacation bible school, crafting hand-made fondant easter eggs as church fundraisers, or just pouring Tang to sassy little pains like me every Sunday morning. They were shepherds. They were holy women. I looked at those old ladies and I heard God’s voice in the depths of me saying *serve like this*. Those women were deacons. Not designated or ordained, but undeniable deacons.

When God called me to the Catholic Church in a powerful way through the Sacraments and I was confirmed as an adult through the process of RCIA, I was simultaneously experiencing the limitless horizon of my spiritual walk with Jesus and the closing of a door on my vocation. Because despite the fact that the life of the Church is fueled by the hearts and hands of women; their ministry is rarely acknowledged. There is no place for women called to public ministry in the Catholic Church. They can’t serve in the Church’s name, nor preach with her authority. There are many voices who would have me believe I’m mishearing what the Lord has asked me to do. I must be crazy, or too bold, arrogant,



May your presence give her the confidence  
to stand her ground and hold their gaze.

May she be unable to be cut down.

Let my daughter grow ever more in knowledge, wisdom and expertise.  
Because the world needs her brilliant mind. Amen

**Now, A Synodal Witness: Synodal Witness 3**

**(SVEA)**

Reader: A reading from Synod Participants who struggle with raising daughters in the  
Catholic Church:

How can I tell her that while she was baptized Priest, Prophet, and King those  
identities don't entirely apply to her?

How can I tell her that while a woman was chosen by God to be the vessel of The  
Word she cannot preach The Word?

How can I explain to her that 'complimentary' shouldn't mean 'invisible'?

How do I introduce her to a God who drew a circle of protection around a  
woman in need, not a circle attempting to keep her out?

How can I explain that while she may not see a body or face like her own on the  
Altar, that she too is the image of Jesus?

How can I invite her into conversation with Him, who will meet her at any well  
she chooses, in the darkest moments of her life, and who will see deep inside the  
potential she has for sharing the Good News?

How can I protect her from bitterness?

How can I encourage her to touch the hem of Christ's garment in prayer  
everyday, knowing her faith will heal the world?

How can I inspire her to remain in hope?

How do I explain that a woman anointed Jesus then but can't anoint now?

How can I share with her what a remarkable trailblazer Mary of Magdala was  
and how no one can erase her from her important role in history?

How can I ask her to keep telling her story?

How can I ask her to love a Church that may not love her back?

### **Sung Gospel Acclamation:**

*The reading from John below is an expansion of the assigned Gospel for the day (John 20:1-2, 11-18). It would be appropriate to highlight its place of privilege in this liturgy with a sung Gospel Acclamation.*

### **(\* ) Then, A Synodal Encounter with Jesus | Gospel**

John 20:1-18 (LUCY)

Leader: A reading from the Gospel According to John:

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple and told them,  
“They have taken the Rabbi from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”

So Peter and the other disciple went out toward to the tomb.  
They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in.

When Simon Peter arrived after, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned home.

But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been.

And they said to her, “Why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken my Rabbi, and I don’t know where they laid him.”

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”

She thought it was the gardener and said, “Please, if you carried Jesus away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!,” which means my Teacher.  
Jesus said to her, “Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to God. But go to the sisters and brothers and tell them, ‘I am going to my Abba God and your Abba God.’”

Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Teacher,” and what the savior told her.





Tell them Mary, Jesus said,  
that fear will flee my light  
that though the ground will tremble  
and despair will stalk the earth  
I hold them firmly by the hand  
through terror to new birth.

Tell them, Mary, Jesus said,  
The globe and all that's made  
is clasped to God's great bosom  
they must not be afraid  
for though they fall and die, he said,  
and the black earth wrap them tight  
they will know the warmth  
of God's healing hands  
in the early morning light.

Tell them, Mary, Jesus said,  
smelling the blossomed air,  
tell my people to rise with me  
to heal the Earth's despair.

**Then and Now**

**(KELLY)**

**Enlarge the Space of Your Tent** Paragraph 64

**(OLIVIA)**

Reader: A reading from Enlarge the Space of Your Tent:

Almost all reports raise the issue of full and equal participation of women: "The growing recognition of the importance of women in the life of the Church opens up possibilities for greater, albeit limited, participation in Church structures and decision-making spheres" (EC Brazil). However, the reports do not agree on a single or complete response to the question of the vocation, inclusion and flourishing of women in Church and society. After careful listening, many reports ask that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions: the active role of women in the governing structures of Church bodies, the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings, and a female diaconate. Much greater diversity of opinion was expressed on the subject of priestly ordination for women, which some reports call for, while others consider it a closed issue.

The word of the People of God, **ALL: Thanks be to God.**

**Prayers of the People:**

**(KATHY)**

Leader: We now invite you to share the cry of your own hearts. Please share in the chat an area where you need the Church or God to listen attentively to your experience.

*An appropriate amount of time is given for all in attendance to type their prayer, if they so desire.*

**Musical Meditation:**

**(RUSS)**

*Taize hymn O Lord, Hear My Prayer, by Jacques Berthier.*

Leader: God of Justice and Peace, **(KATHY)**  
In every generation, in every land,  
You call and anoint servants, healers, and prophets  
And send them out on a mission.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us,  
That our hearts and hands may be strengthened for our part in the work  
that lies ahead. **AMEN.**

**RITUAL**

**(\* Then and Now, An Imaginative Prayer based on Mark 14:3-9 by Kelly Meraw  
(ANNE)**

***Please Note:*** A similar anointing appears in all four gospels and may refer to the same event. Each account has variations based on the tradition the writer received and to suit the evangelist's particular community and apologetic goals. In the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke the anointing woman is unnamed. It is only in the Lukan account that she is characterized as a sinful woman. John identifies Mary – the sister of Martha and Lazarus – as the anointing woman. Over the centuries this anointing woman and Mary Magdalene have been conflated, despite no biblical text identifying her and little other supporting evidence. **We present this anointing scene as another Synodal encounter between Jesus and a woman.**

*The leader invites participants to settle into their seats, ground themselves, and take several deep breaths: to close their eyes and open their minds to the following imaginative prayer.*

What an intimate moment. She has the oil in her bag, and has to dare herself to take it out. She has felt the idea bubbling in her for days, as if prompted by something bigger than herself, but she couldn't quite see herself executing it. She is in the room with Him, surrounded by His friends. They are all watching. But, she's been in this place before. They've been in Simon's home many times and it feels like a home to all of them now. But to gather the courage to touch Him takes a boldness that isn't normally in her. But something tells her that she needs to do it. He needs her to do it. So she does. She starts by touching His head gently, ready to recoil if He sends any sign that it is an unwelcome touch. He looks at her warmly, and tells her without words, that He knows what she is about to do, He already knew. He gratefully receives the gift.

She breaks the jar. Time speeds up. The oil pours over His head. She sees His shoulders rise with inhalation. It's a breath of pleasure. Immediately the smell fills the room. It's rich and sweet. It will linger, that smell. He will smell it when He carries the cross, the oil sealing His hair to the blood on His face and somehow giving Him the strength to keep walking. On the cross the Holy wind of the Spirit will waft that smell to Him, pinned almost lifeless with His heart open to the sky, and it will remind Him of this tender, intimate moment they've shared.

But she is unaware of the length of that story, her instincts tell her this is the last time she is going to touch Him; and somehow her Lord needs this gift from her. This anointing. This sacrament, which she confers on Him. Time slows back down. It even stops. She will remember this moment forever. She will cherish it in the depths of her as the most important moment of her life. She gave something to Jesus.

His friends are suddenly saying something. She isn't paying attention because she is so consumed by Him. By his smell. By the softness of his hair in her fingertips. Somehow He feels vulnerable like a child she has been entrusted to care for. She hears Him say "Let her alone; why do you trouble her, she has done a good service for me". She looks up. On the faces of those men she sees a mosaic of emotions. One looks angry. One disapproving. One outrightly scolding. Some read sympathetic but it is difficult to receive as empathy because they are silent. One jealousy. She has no idea why. She feels helpless and ashamed. And yet, why? What has she done to elicit this response?

Jesus stays seated with her. Jesus doesn't pull away. She keeps her hands in His hair, as if they are tethered together forever now. But somehow the moment has been taken away and won't return. It's cemented in memory, but she wishes she could turn back the clock to before she was the subject of that gaze. How could a gift of self, given in love, and received in love be wrong? How could it be against anything that God would write on our hearts? If Jesus puts it there, how can we misread it? How could it make anyone angry, disapproving, scolding or jealous? How could it keep anyone silent?

There is a long pause. The room's tension remains but something has settled.

'You will not always have me.' Yes, she thinks that is what He said. She holds him tighter. She takes Him closer to her. She weaves her hands through His hair again, at a faster tempo. She is reclaiming the courage with which she made this act of faith. Losing Him reminded her of how much that gaze isn't real. His death, losing Him is the only thing that is real.

Another long pause. The ice is melting. The anger diffuses.

'Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

His words are a benediction over her. They fall on her heavier than the aroma of the oil. Even if it is a promise He can't keep, those words are balm. The memory of those faces melt into the obliterating mist of those falling words.

The jealous one, Judas, gets up and leaves. Jesus puts his damp head on her shoulder.

*Allow for a moment of quiet reflection, then gently invite participants back to the shared space.*

### CONCLUDING RITES

**Closing Prayer:** Synod Prayer, adapted for inclusive language

Leader: Let us pray, (ANNE)

**All:** We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.  
With You to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.  
Do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.  
Let us find our unity in diversity through you,  
so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth and right.  
All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time,  
in the communion of our Creator and our Liberator, forever and ever.  
Amen.

#### **Blessing**

Leader: And may God fill us with hope,  
May the peace of Christ abound in our hearts and minds,  
and may the Holy Spirit gift and guide us  
*(making Sign of the Cross)* now and forever,

**ALL:** AMEN.

#### **Dismissal:**

Leader: Our liturgy – our work - continues,  
As we go forth to seek and be the Synodal Church  
Jesus intended.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

#### **(\*) Closing Song:**

*You Shall Be My Witnesses* by Miriam Therese Winter (RUSS)

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Prayer Service Developed by Kelly Meraw for FutureChurch.

Kelly Meraw is the Director of Liturgy, Music, and Pastoral Care for St. John - St. Paul Collaborative (a thriving Catholic Collaborative of two parishes in Wellesley, Massachusetts). Kelly earned her Masters Degree from McGill University, where during her undergraduate studies she was received into the Catholic Church through the RCIA program at St. Patrick's Basilica in Montreal. Kelly brings her deep love of scripture, liturgy, music, and devotion to Church teaching and tradition to her ministry.

In her parishes she leads bible studies; organizes faith sharing circles and social justice initiatives; leads communion, wake and committal services; offers adult faith enrichment programming ;and shepherds bereavement ministries.

Kelly is also passionate about interfaith and ecumenical faith opportunities. She is the co-founder of Women of Faith in her community, where local female clergy create opportunities for interfaith communion and fellowship. Kelly was recently a panelist for Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston, where she shared about her experience in Afghan refugee resettlement and the meaningful work and impact of Catholic Charities' POWIR program (Parishes Organized to Welcome Immigrants and Refugees).

Kelly is a frequent contributor to the work of Discerning Deacons, an organization engaging Catholics in the active discernment of our Church about restoring women to the ordained diaconate.

Currently she finds the undeniable movements of the Holy Spirit and great hope in the process of living as a deeply listening Church. She is the primary facilitator for her Collaborative's Committee for Synodality, who are seeking to offer fulsome and inclusive ways to serve the Church's Synod on Synodality. On September 24th Kelly will co-host a Synodal Listening event at the Archdiocese of Boston discerning the question of Rethinking Women's Participation and the Baptismal Dignity of Women in a Synodal Church.