



NOVEMBER 14 & 16, 2023

## FutureChurch 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Fall Event

### Synodality:

Where Have We Been? Where Are We Going?

Cynthia Bailey-Manns, D.Min  
Keynote Presenter

Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D.  
Louis J. Trivison Award

Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ  
Louis J. Trivison Award

Kate McElwee  
Christine Schenk Award



Photo: Robert Choiniere

# The Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph

wish to recognize and thank

## FutureChurch

for helping us to “be Church” for the past 33 years.

We are grateful for and support your efforts around  
building a synodal church to ensure all Catholics  
have the opportunity to fully participate  
in Church life and leadership.

## Congratulations to

Kate McElwee

recipient of the Sister Christine Schenk, CSJ, Award for Young Adults

Dr. Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D. and  
Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ

recipients of the Louis J. Trivison Award



To learn more about our justice work, visit us at  
[CSJoseph.org/Social-Justice](https://CSJoseph.org/Social-Justice)



## More Content

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# Contents

<b>Event Sponsors</b>	4
<b>Board, Staff, and Volunteers</b>	6
<b>Welcome</b>	8
<b>Agenda</b>	9
<b>Keynote Speaker and Award Recipients</b>	10
<b>New Faces at FutureChurch</b>	14
<b>FutureChurch Synod Work</b>	18
<b>FutureChurch Statements</b>	22
<b>Catholic Women Preach</b>	24
<b>Racial Justice</b>	29
<b>FutureChurch on the Road</b>	35
<b>Women Erased</b>	43
<b>Reclaiming Our Bodies from the Patriarchy</b>	45
<b>Mary Magdalene</b>	46
<b>Advertisements</b>	49

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## From the Co-Directors **Deborah Rose & Russ Petrus**

Hello! And welcome to FutureChurch's 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Fall Event!

First and foremost, thank you for all you have done to support FutureChurch over the years. Without you, FutureChurch and the work we do for Vatican II reform would not exist.

We extend a special welcome to our keynote presenter, Cynthia Bailey Manns, D.Min.; and our honorees, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ; Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D.; and Kate McElwee. We are honored that you have accepted our invitations to be a part of these evenings. Thank you for the work you do for the good of the Church and all God's people.

The October Assembly of the Synod on Synodality is complete and the final synthesis report, upon which 54 women voted, is out. We celebrate the years and decades of faith-filled advocacy that has prepared the way for this historic moment! At the same time we acknowledge that there are indeed roadblocks along the way to a truly synodal Church. We have a lot to do! And together, we will help to clear a path toward a Church where all the People of God - lay and ordained, women and men, young and old - discern, dream, and decide together!

We look forward to continuing along this path with all of you helping to bring about the changes needed to build a radically inclusive Church that is alive with the gifts, talents, and faith of all its members.

In gratitude & hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Rose".

Deborah Rose

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Russ Petrus".

Russ Petrus

# Agenda

## Tuesday

November 14, 2023

**Meet the Speaker Gathering**

**Welcome & Opening Prayer**

**Offered by**

Russ Petrus & Deborah Rose  
Olivia Hastie

**2023 Fr. Louis J. Trivison Award**

**Introduction**

**Acceptance of Award**

Marie Graf  
Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ

**Keynote Presentation**

**Introduction**

**Presentation**

Sr. Anita Baird, DHM  
Dr. Cynthia Bailey Manns, D.Min.

**Thank You & Closing Prayer**

**Offered by**

Rita Houlihan

## Thursday

November 16, 2023

**Welcome & Opening Prayer**

**Offered by**

Russ Petrus & Martha Ligas

**2023 Christine Schenk Award for Young Catholic Leaders**

**Introduction**

**Acceptance of Award**

Deborah Rose &  
Sr. Christine Schenk, CSJ  
Kate McElwee

**2023 Fr. Louis J. Trivison Award**

**Introduction**

**Acceptance of Award**

Vickey McBride  
Dr. Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D.

**Thank You & Closing Prayer**

**Offered by**

Yunuen Trujillo



## Keynote Presenter

### **Cynthia Bailey Manns, D.Min.**

FutureChurch warmly welcomes Dr. Cynthia Bailey Manns, one of 10 non-bishop voting delegates chosen by Pope Francis to represent the North American region at the first general assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality in October 2023.

Dr. Manns is the director of adult learning at Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Community—a community whose vision is to be a visible, progressive Catholic Community, compassionate and welcoming to all. She holds a D.Min. in Spiritual Direction from the Graduate Theological Foundation in Florida, and has served as professional faculty in St. Catherine University's Theology Department, as the coordinator of the Spiritual Director Certificate Program, and as co-director of the Thriving Congregations Coordination Program funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.

She has also served as adjunct faculty at St. Mary's University of Minnesota and Drew Theological School, teaching courses in human development, spirituality, spiritual formation, soul care for lay and ordained leaders, and sacred activism. She is a contributor to the anthology, *Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color* (2014), and she is an experienced soul companion, supervisor, and retreat leader.

She lives with her family in Bloomington, Minnesota.



*Named for FutureChurch co-founder, Fr. Louis Trivison, this award is given to a Roman Catholic who exhibits outstanding leadership in advancing FutureChurch's Vatican II mission or vision in one or more areas of teaching, administration, research, publication, advocacy, and pastoral care.*

## 2023 Louis J. Trivison Award

### **Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ**

Nathalie Becquart is a Xaviere sister, Missionary of Christ-Jesus, a French Ignatian-inspired order. She graduated from the HEC School of Management, Paris in 1992, with a Master's in Entrepreneurship, and she obtained a double canonical Baccalaureate degree in Philosophy and Theology in 2006 from the "Centre Sèvres-Facultés Jésuites de Paris," supplemented by training in Sociology at the EHESS (2004-2006). In 2019-2020 she specialized in Ecclesiology, doing research on Synodality at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. For 25 years, she was involved in youth ministry and served as Director of the National Service for the Evangelization of Youth and Vocations of the French Bishops' Conference from 2012 to 2018. She took part in the Synod on Youth as an observer in 2018, and became consultor to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in May 2019. On February 6, 2021, she was appointed by Pope Francis as Undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops as well as a member of the Dicastery for Communication in December 2021. A renowned lecturer and speaker, she is the author of numerous publications on synodality and synods, young people and youth ministry, vocations and religious life, the Church and mission.



## 2023 Louis J. Trivison Award

### **Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D.**

*Named for FutureChurch co-founder, Fr. Louis Trivison, this award is given to a Roman Catholic who exhibits outstanding leadership in advancing FutureChurch's Vatican II mission or vision in one or more areas of teaching, administration, research, publication, advocacy, and pastoral care.*

Dr. Phyllis Zagano is an internationally acclaimed Catholic scholar who has lectured throughout the United States, and in Canada, Europe, and Australia. Her many awards include the 2014 Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice from The Paulist Center Community in Boston for "her prolific body of work that has constantly echoed the cry of the poorest of our society for dignity and for justice both inside and outside the church....specifically the dignity of all women." Her groundbreaking work on women in the diaconate led to her appointment to the Pontifical Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women in 2016. She has taught at Fordham, Boston, and Yale Universities, and currently holds a research appointment at Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York.


Her most recent book is *Just Church: Catholic Social Teaching, Synodality, and Women* (Paulist Press, 2023).

## 2023 Christine Schenk Award for Young Leaders

### **Kate McElwee**

Kate McElwee currently serves as the Executive Director of the Women's Ordination Conference, where she has worked since 2011. Founded in 1975, the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) is the oldest and largest organization working to ordain women as deacons, priests, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church. A feminist voice for women in the Roman Catholic Church, WOC is a grassroots-driven movement that promotes activism, dialogue, and prayerful witness to call for women's full equality in the Church.

Kate graduated from Mount Holyoke College earning a degree in Religion and later earned an M.A. in International Human Rights Law from SOAS (London). Kate also serves on the Leadership Circle of Women's Ordination Worldwide. She is a respected activist and advocate for gender equity in the Catholic Church and her work is frequently featured in international media outlets, including the BBC, AP, The New Yorker, and the National Catholic Reporter. After living in Rome for eight years, she and her husband now reside in Washington, DC.



*Named for FutureChurch  
co-founder, Sr. Christine  
Schenk, CSJ, this award is given  
to a young Roman Catholic  
whose research, writing,  
advocacy, or ministry exhibits  
outstanding leadership in  
promoting justice in the church  
and whose efforts will inspire  
and foster a new generation of  
reformers and activists.*

# New Faces at FutureChurch!

Over the last year, recognizing the tremendous growth of our programming and reach, Russ and Deb - along with the FutureChurch Board - have brought on five new team members. Two young women have joined the staff as part-time employees and two women and one man have joined as contractors. We are blessed to have them on the team!



In July, FutureChurch welcomed **Olivia Hastie**, who joined the staff as Program Associate! In her role, Olivia is helping to expand and sustain our online presentations and reform advocacy campaigns. Over the summer, Olivia split her time between FutureChurch and her L'Arche community. And during this fall semester, she is splitting her time between her pursuing her Master of Theological Studies at Harvard and her work for FutureChurch.

Of note, Olivia is developing a wonderful series of presentations that will begin in the new year, entitled ["Made in the Image and Likeness of God: Reclaiming Our Bodies from the Patriarchy"](#). The series will feature the voices of up-and-coming Catholic theologians who are doing revolutionary work on embodiment and will certainly be a highlight of the winter! Olivia is also developing a space for young, progressive Catholic graduate students and those who have recently begun teaching or ministering. She hopes the space will be one where the future of the Church can gather, pray, learn, and support one another in

their common pursuit of a Church and world that better reflects God's vision for all of us.

We are blessed to have Olivia add her gifts and passion to our cause! Introducing herself to the FutureChurch community, Olivia writes:

*Joining the team at FutureChurch feels like a dream because it synthesizes and renews my deep love for God, for the Catholic Church, and my embodied desire for justice. My passions center at the intersection of gender and the human body. As a plus-size woman pursuing a career within Catholic theology, I am painfully aware of the hurdles in my way.*

*In my work and life, I hope to cultivate space that examines how the world views body size, body types, appearances, and food choices as a means of determining a person's (specifically women/trans/non-binary bodies) embodied morality. Rooted in the imago dei, I think we can all agree that for God it doesn't matter - human beings are human beings, loved unconditionally and fully regardless of who they are or how they appear.*

*In her song "August" Taylor Swift sings about "living for the hope of it all." And in this time of renewal, change, and synodality, I truly am "living for the hope of it all" and look forward to embodying the hope for a more loving, open, and welcoming Church.*

*Thank you for your already warm welcome to this wonderful space!*



In September, we welcomed **Martha Ligas** who joined the FutureChurch staff as Communications Coordinator. Over the last couple of months, Martha has taken on an increasing role in promoting the FutureChurch vision and mission through our weekly bulletin, our Catholic Women Preach emails, and our social media accounts. Martha was also instrumental in developing [our response to the dangerous policy regarding LGBTQ+ students in the Diocese of Cleveland](#).

Martha earned BAs in Psychology and Sociology from Loyola Chicago in 2013, an MA in Theology and Ministry from Boston College in 2016, and a Certification in Spiritual Direction from the Ignatian Spirituality Institute of John Carroll University in 2021.

In addition to her work with FutureChurch, Martha splits her time between serving the Community of St. Peter in Cleveland as their Pastoral Minister, teaching Theology at Notre Dame College in South Euclid, OH, and pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree from Fordham University.

Martha was also recently featured in a *National Catholic Reporter* article entitled ["The Catholic diaspora: Independent communities as the church's 'research lab.'"](#)

Introducing herself to the FutureChurch community, Martha writes:

*I was drawn to FutureChurch because it is a community that celebrates the diversity of the kingdom of God. As not only a female, but a queer female, and not only a queer female, but a queer female steeped in a catholic identity with a call to serve, it's easy to be drawn to spaces that affirm all of the pieces of who I am.*

*FutureChurch is a beacon of hope for all those who find themselves striving to find the balance between religion and faith, tradition and revelation, justice and joy. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to play just a small part in carving out space for us all, and join a community bursting with theological imagination.*

*As your Communications Coordinator, I will be supporting mailings, social media, and email correspondence, and all the lovely and unexpected surprises that will surely arise along the way. I'm grateful for this new path in my journey, and am looking forward to connecting with you!*



Sign up to receive our weekly email bulletin:  
<https://futurechurch.org/newsletter-sign-up/>



In August, **Ariell Watson Simon** began as a contractor to write, coordinate and host FutureChurch's weekly online Liturgies of the Word and faith sharing opportunities.

Ariell is a healthcare chaplain and is currently serving as Chaplain at Valley Hope Boonville, a residential addiction treatment center in central Missouri. Prior to this appointment was Director of Pastoral Care and Mission at Holy Cross Wellness & Rehabilitation in South Bend, IN, where she provided care to residents, families, and staff in both a nursing care facility and a rehabilitation facility and oversaw a robust weekly schedule of diverse services in two chapels. She is a member of the Association of Professional Chaplains and is currently applying for board certification.

Ariell entered the Catholic Church in 2011 as an undergraduate student at Loyola University Maryland, where she earned a B.A. in comparative culture & literature studies and global studies. After graduation, she served the Loyola University community as a program assistant for the Center for Community Service and Justice, coordinating retreats and service immersion programs while also developing and presenting a number of interactive workshops promoting awareness of justice issues. She later enrolled at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, earning her Master of Divinity in 2018, and completed her

clinical pastoral education in Philadelphia, PA and Chicago, IL.

[She began writing for New Ways Ministry's Bondings 2.0 daily LGBTQ+ news blog in 2022.](#)

Of her work with FutureChurch, Ariell writes:

*Like many Catholics, I experienced COVID shut-downs as a unique opportunity to reimagine liturgical community in an online format, with increased opportunities for reflective engagement, lay leadership, and gender inclusivity. These online liturgies are a gift that we carry forward from that challenging time. I feel privileged to have a role in stewarding this tight-knit online community as it continues to witness to what we can be, as Church, for one another.*

FutureChurch hosts an online Liturgy of the Word and Faith Sharing most Sundays of the year at 7pm ET. These community-led liturgies are an opportunity to gather with like-minded Catholics to sing together, to pray with expansive images of God, to reflect on inclusive translations of Scripture, and to hear preaching from Catholic Women Preach. Each week, participants gather into small groups for about 25 minutes of conversation about the readings and preaching and to discuss how faith impacts, inspires, and transforms our lives. ALL ARE WELCOME!

Visit <https://futurechurch.org/liturgies> to register. Weekly reminders with links to the scriptures and prompts for conversation are sent on Sunday afternoons.



Toward the beginning of 2023, **Tess Gallagher Clancy and Ben Stegbauer** – became the “dynamic duo” who work on The Just Word, which features the voices of young, social-justice oriented Catholics as they reflect on the weekly scriptures, offer insights from Catholic Social Teaching, offer contemplative exercises, and lift up witnesses who embody the values of Catholic Social Teaching.

Tess and Ben began working on the Just Word just as we began the public roll out of the project after a months-long initial visioning phase spearheaded by our 2019 Christine Schenk Award recipient, Karen Gargamelli-McCreight.

The two first met in divinity school at Union Theological Seminary and their passion for social justice and Catholic Social Teaching brought them to The Just Word.

Ben is originally from Cincinnati, OH (which he likes to say is the greatest city in the world) and attended Xavier University, where he majored in Theology. After Xavier, Ben did a year of service through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Scranton, PA at the Saint Joseph’s Center, a ministry of the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary that provides services to individuals and families who have special needs. Ben had also previously worked as a direct support professional to people with developmental disabilities during

college. After JVC, Ben enrolled at Union, where he was “Minister of Fun” and chair of the Eco-Justice Caucus. He graduated in 2022 to a Master of Arts in Theology. Ben currently lives in New York City at the Catholic Worker.

Tess was born and raised in western Montana on Salish land, in an Irish American family. The valedictorian of her high school graduating class, Tess then attended the University of Montana where she majored in history, focusing on Latin American and United States revolutionary history. She then enrolled at Union where she pursued a Master of Divinity and concentrated in social ethics, graduating in 2022. Over time Tess has been actively engaged in a number of advocacy efforts including climate justice and LGBTQ+ justice. She has all been actively involved with the Catholic Worker, Call To Action, and Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice/ Poor People’s Campaign.

Their passion for social justice and belief in Catholic Social Teaching’s potential for transforming the world shines through in their work as they recruit social-justice-minded Catholics to write commentaries for the Just Word, edit entries, write entries themselves, and help spread the word about the project on social media.

Tess and Ben have already begun to recruit writers for Year B, which begins this Advent.

Visit <https://futurechurch.org/lectionary> to view the Just Word entries each week.



## **FutureChurch Responds to Synthesis**

Synod Synthesis Offers Signs of Hope for New Inclusive Processes in the Church; An Urgent Call for Women's Inclusion in Governance and Ministry; Delivers a Blow to LGBTQ+ Catholics and Allies

With the stated goal of restructuring the way discernment and decision making is taken up in the Church, the Synod on Synodality advanced a new model. The Final Synthesis also offers signs of authentic progress for women in the Church but failed miserably to capture the growing consensus among Catholics in the lead up to the October meeting regarding justice and inclusion for LGBTQ+ Catholics.

Photo: Sheila Pires

continued on next page...

## **The Current Potential and Limits of the Synodal Structure on Display**

Synodality has tremendous transforming potential for the Church. As a continuation of the Second Vatican Council, it holds promise for renewing the structures, ministries, teachings, liturgy, and practices of the church to better serve the demands of the Gospel for our time. This is all the more true as synodality leads us to a healthier focus on meeting the needs of the local church.

And while synodality holds promise, signs of its current limitations were on full display at the October meeting. While the local, diocesan, national, and continental listening phases reflected promising expressions of the *sensus fidelium* and the best of what it means to be Catholic, the outsized presence of bishops at the synod had a tragic cooling effect on what the Holy Spirit seemed to be saying through the experience, faith, and love of God's people.

## **The Abysmal Failure of the synthesis document on LGBTQ+ inclusion and justice**

In terms of LGBTQ+ justice and inclusion, the document was a crushing blow to a church that desperately needs to be more pastoral and welcoming to our LGBTQ+ family. The document's vague and non-committal language was particularly devastating given the Pope's pre-synod remarks on blessing gay relationships; his public meetings with Sr. Jeannine Gramick of New Ways Ministry and Marianne Duddy Burke of DignityUSA; the shattering stories of LGBTQ+ youth who committed suicide that were told in the Synod hall; not to mention, the appointment of James Martin SJ, a high profile advocate for LGBTQ+ Catholics, as a delegate.

## **The Urgent Call for Women in Governance and Ministry**

First and foremost, the fact that 54 women were co-equal voting members of the Synod was not only historic, their presence brought life-giving energy to lifting up women and other excluded populations in the Church and in the world. Sadly, the compassion, hunger for justice, and resilient faith of the women of the synod was

not fully reflected in the document. And while the synthesis contained indicators of progress, the intense energy and hunger for women's leadership, authority, and ministry that was on display in earlier consensus documents was muted.

Still, there were many proposals in the synthesis that will advance women's roles and ministry in the Church as they are developed over the next year.

Part II, Section 9 of the synthesis describes the need for inclusive language that more fully lifts up women's faith and includes a richer set of images, words, and narratives that recall their apostleship, discipleship, and early ministries as they innovated and shaped the Tradition. As many Catholics are already aware, the current Lectionary omits or distorts many of the stories of our foremothers in faith from both the First and Second Testaments. Exposing Catholics to this lopsided set of narratives reinforces patriarchal authority muting the synodal Spirit found throughout much of our history. Because of the damage it has caused, FutureChurch will continue its work recovering these stories of our 'hidden sisters' through our Catholic Women Preach platform and FutureChurch advocacy and resources.

Another proposal in Section 9 uses the word "urgent" to describe the need to open more doors to women's ministry and authority in decision making bodies. The proposal for studying ordination for women to the diaconate is a continuation of the rather striking progress made on this issue since it was first mentioned at a synod by a single prelate, Archbishop Paul-Andre Durocher, at the 2015 Synod on the Family. In 2019, the notion was further advanced when a great number of women and prelates, especially from the Amazon region, argued convincingly that ordination for women should be conferred since women were already acting as deacons in those remote regions.

Part II, Section 8 speaks of expanding lay preaching as part of the Ministry of the Word. The language is somewhat convoluted, and it



is not entirely clear if this preaching would take place in the Liturgy or outside of it. None the less, lay preaching is up for discussion and study and we will continue our grassroots effort to make this a reality.

The synthesis continues to try to break the stranglehold of centralized authority by placing emphasis on meeting the needs of the local church. That is very important for all regions, but it is especially hopeful when looking at regions like the Amazon and Germany where local bishops are ready to move forward on issues that had very little chance of gaining traction in prior decades.

Finally, FutureChurch congratulates the women who participated and voted in the Synod. They created sacred space as they prophetically embraced and encouraged new paths for women's ministry and authority and the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people and other marginalized peoples.

## Prophetic Pioneers of Faith

We are also profoundly grateful for those who made this historical year possible. Women having the vote would have not been possible without people like Sr. Sally Hodgdon, CSJ, Kate McElwee, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, the Benedictine nuns from Fahr Monastery near Basel, Switzerland and so many more who worked at the grassroots level and behind the scenes to open this door for women in the Church.

Our Church will never be the same - as women religious who have practiced synodality and offered ministry to the most despised for centuries, as well as lay women who embody justice, empathy, and radical love in their ministries, advance the Gospel within a church that has been blinded by patriarchy and clericalism — constricting the flow of God's radical love in our lives.

For the faith, love, and tenacity of women in our Church, we are forever grateful.

# More Synod Coverage



## **FutureChurch Video Tribute to the Women of The Synod**

For the first time in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, women participated as co-equals with their ordained brothers and voted at the Synod. This is a moment that will forever change the Church as it opens itself to the richness of women's faith, courage, and love. May their work and memory live on!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAfoJENIM-8>



## **SynodWatch Daily Blog**

FutureChurch Co-Director, Deborah Rose kept a close watch on the October 2023 Assembly of the Synod. Read her reports on the Synod from her unique perspective on matters and issues of most importance to FutureChurch members and friends.

<https://futurechurch.org/synod-watch>



## **A Look at the Working Document**

FutureChurch hosted three sessions with guest experts to review the working document in the weeks leading up to the October Assembly. Watch these conversations for insights about the working document and how it helped to shape the conversations.

<https://futurechurch.org/working-document>



## **FutureChurch Synod Resources and Presentations**

FutureChurch has been engaged with the Synod since the very beginning - urging bishops to hold listening sessions, holding our own listening sessions, reviewing and analyzing official documents, and offering presentations from guest experts. View all of our resources on our website!

<https://futurechurch.org/synodality>

# Breaking the Stained Glass Ceiling

FutureChurch Applauds Inclusion of Lay Women and Men in Synod Voting



Votes for Catholic Women icon designed by Sarah Holst for Women's Ordination Conference

**April 26, 2023:** FutureChurch welcomes Pope Francis' decision to open the vote to Catholic women and to significantly expand participation and voting at the upcoming October Synod in Rome to include lay women and men. Previous Synods have involved a small group of Catholic women and men as auditors who had input but no voting privileges. But this change opens the doors to lay women and men to participate and vote alongside episcopal members.

"This momentous change will redefine how authority works in the Church, moving beyond the solitary reliance on the episcopacy to include the deliberative voices of Catholic women and all the baptized," said Deborah Rose, Co-Director of FutureChurch.

"The inclusion of lay women and lay men as deliberators and voters in this critically important decision-making body holds the promise for urgent and necessary changes in the way the Church engages those members who have been excluded and the world."

"At FutureChurch, we recognize that this critical structural change could not have occurred without the devotion and commitment of thousands of reform-minded Catholics who have spent their entire lives working for justice and inclusion within the institution," said Russ Petrus, Co-Director of FutureChurch. "Catholics across the country and around the world have tirelessly led the work of reform, justice, and inclusion by signing petitions, writing letters, meeting with bishops and priests, engaging in actions, and offering faithful witness to the Gospel for our times."

Over the past several years, FutureChurch has joined Women's Ordination Conference and other reform organizations in a campaign to open the vote at the Synod to Catholic women, called the "Votes for Catholic Women."

"While reform is often slow going and painful, today we can celebrate a visible sign of progress and structural reform in the Church which will, in turn, help us make progress on opening ordination to all who are called and other important issues of inclusion and justice within the Catholic Church," said Todd Ray, Chair of the Board for FutureChurch.



To read more statements from FutureChurch, visit:

<https://futurechurch.org/press-releases/>

And subscribe to our emails to be notified when FutureChurch speaks out on breaking news in the Church.

# Diocese of Cleveland Policy Puts LGBTQ+ Youth At Risk

FutureChurch responds to new policy regarding LGBTQ+ persons in schools and parishes

**To the LGBTQ+ community, and particularly LGBTQ+ youth:** Know that you are a beloved child of God and an equal member of the Body of Christ. Like our Creator, FutureChurch affirms and celebrates you and the gifts and diversity you have to offer our world and our Church. We are blessed by you, and we stand with you as together we seek a Church that finally and truly welcomes you just as God created you.

On September 1, 2023, the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland issued a Parish and School Policy on Issues of Sexuality and Gender Identity. FutureChurch, headquartered in Cleveland, is disturbed by the dangerous policy, which contradicts expert advice, puts LGBTQ+ youth at increased risk of harm, and co-opts teachers and administrators into oppressing the very students they are called to nurture.

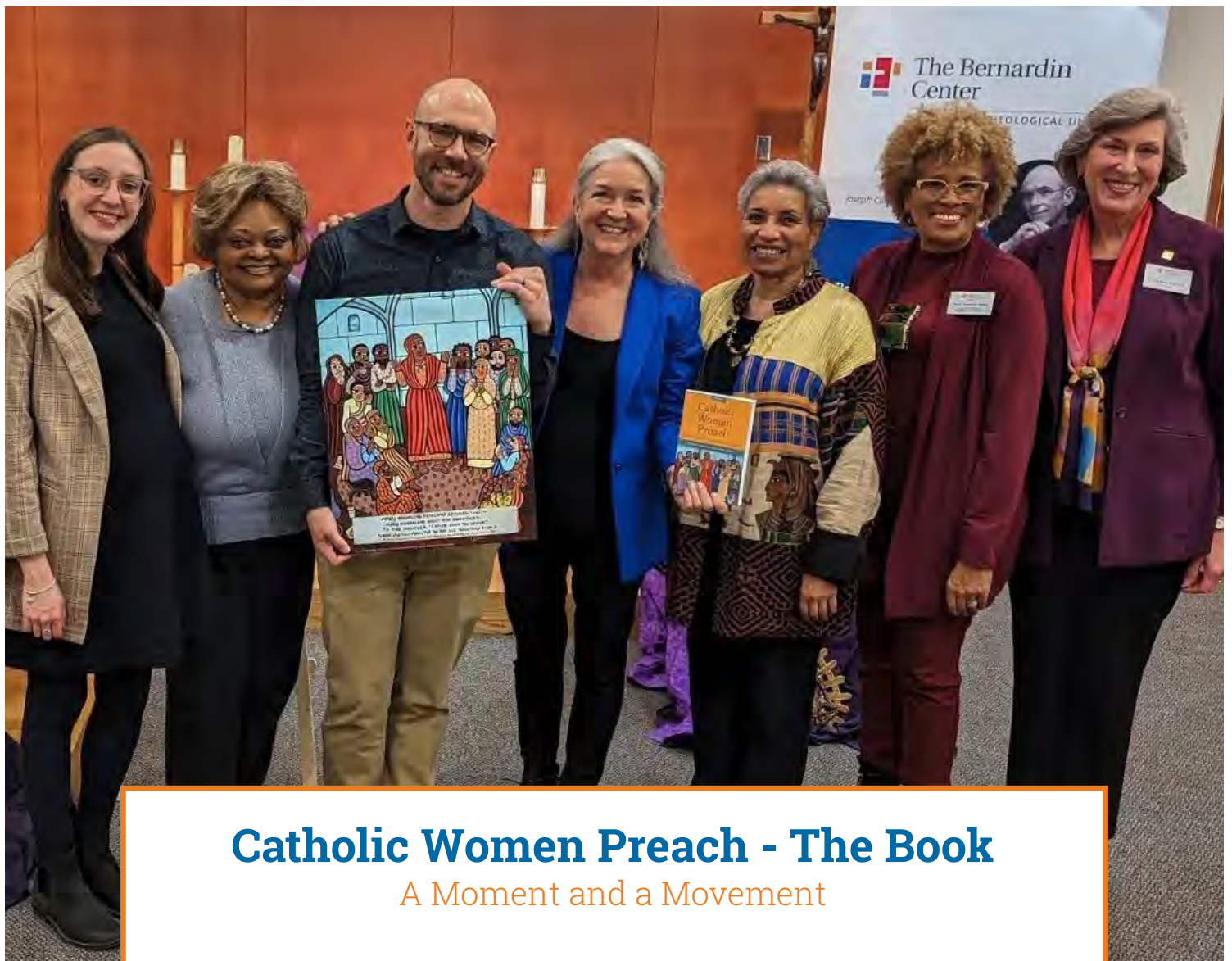
"The document acknowledges both the reality and the complexity of gender dysphoria, but the policies contained in it immediately seek to erase that reality rather than honestly and openly engage with it," said Russ Petrus, Co-Director of FutureChurch.

The directives within the policy directly contradict the advice and best practices offered by medical and psychological experts as well as the lived experience of the LGBTQ+ community. "Sadly, it is clear that the Diocese of Cleveland didn't just fail to consult medical doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, school counselors, and other experts in the field— including LGBTQ+ young people themselves; they went out of their way to ignore them entirely," Petrus added.

"This policy was written out of ignorance and fear, not in the spirit of synodality, which Pope Francis himself has set as the future of the Church," said Deborah Rose, Co-Director of FutureChurch. "At a time when the global Church is inviting the input, wisdom, faith, and experience of all God's people, the Diocese is putting conditions on who is and isn't welcome. In no uncertain terms, this policy tells our LGBTQ+ siblings they are only welcome as long as they're willing to suppress and deny the truth of their experience," she continued.

"The bottom line is that the Diocese has failed these young people. This policy puts LGBTQ+ youth – a population that is already more susceptible to bullying, stigmatization, and death by suicide – at a greater risk of harm, by further ostracizing them from their school community and their Church and by pulling support systems out from underneath them," concluded Petrus.

To the LGBTQ+ community, and particularly LGBTQ+ youth, FutureChurch offers this message: Know that you are a beloved child of God and an equal member of the Body of Christ. Like our Creator, FutureChurch affirms and celebrates you and the gifts and diversity you have to offer our world and our Church. We are blessed by you, and we stand with you as together we seek a Church that finally and truly welcomes you just as God created you.



## Catholic Women Preach - The Book

### A Moment and a Movement

The rules of the Church may officially bar them from offering a homily at Mass, but Catholic women can and do preach! Moreover, their preaching contributes profoundly to the common life of all the People of God - laity and ordained alike. And with the publication of the three-volume series *Catholic Women Preach: Raising Voices, Renewing the Church* it is easier than ever for all the faithful to access, lift up, and celebrate women's wisdom and witness!

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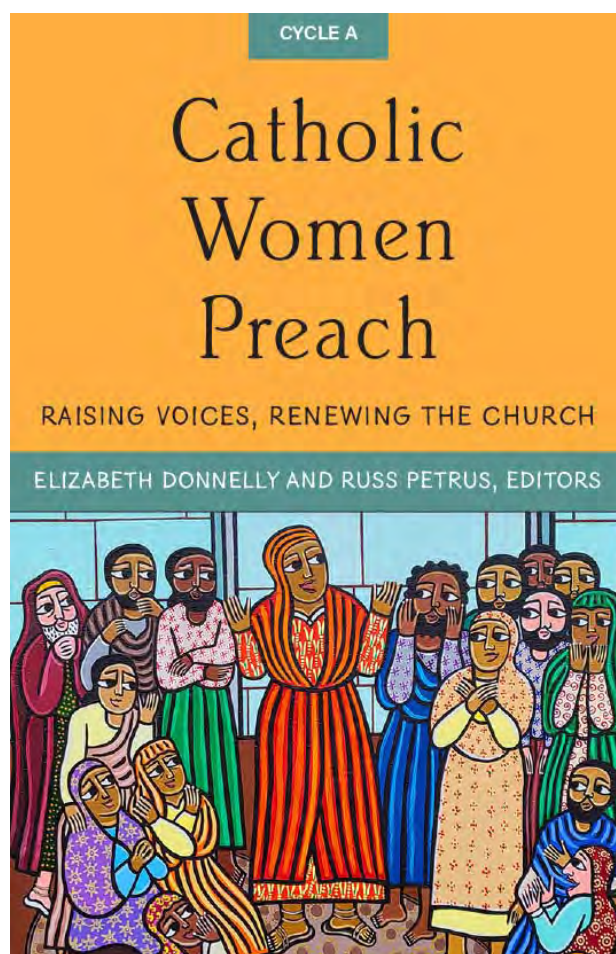
Published by Orbis Books, the first two of three volumes are now available - the third and final volume will be published in the Fall of 2024. This is an important milestone not only for Catholic Women Preach, but in the history of our Church. By bearing witness to the contributions and giftedness of Catholic women, Catholic Women Preach is advancing the conversation with and about women at every level of the Church.

The Year A volume, published in 2022, received awards for best book on Liturgy from both the Association of Catholic Publishers and the Catholic Media Association. Awarding the book 2nd place in Liturgy, the Catholic Media Association noted:

*"Catholic Women Preach is one of the more inspiring collection of homilies available today. Based on the deep spirituality and insights of the various women authors, the homilies are solidly based on the scriptures and offer refreshing and engaging insights for homilists and listeners. The feminine perspective has long been absent in the preached word, and its inclusion in this work offers a long overdue and pastorally necessary resource for the liturgical life of the Church."*

The volume opens with an empowering foreword by Sr. Barbara Reid, OP, one of the world's leading scholars in feminist interpretation of the Scriptures, and an introduction by co-editors, Elizabeth Donnelly and Russ Petrus. Other contributors include womanist and Black Catholic theologian, M. Shawn Copeland; Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipient, Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS; African lay theologian, Nontando Hadebe; author and speaker, Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB; and executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, Sr. Norma Pimentel, MJ.

Together, the sixty-four contributors represent an extraordinary diversity. Week in and week out, these extraordinarily gifted women have helped us mourn, celebrate, confront, and find hope in our lived realities. They have been there, challenging and inspiring us when migrant families were being separated at the border, through the worst of the COVID pandemic, and as we continue to reckon with and struggle against white supremacy and racist violence.



Cover Art by Laura James

FutureChurch hosted a [virtual book launch](#) on October 25, 2022 to celebrate the momentous step in amplifying and centering women's voices in the Catholic Church. The launch event featured Sr. Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ, an authority on the role of women in the early Church; Virginia Saldanha, a theologian-activist and journalist in India; Kerry Alys Robinson, founding executive director and partner for global and national initiatives at Leadership Roundtable; and Sr. Nicole Trahan, FMI, national director of vocations for the Marianist Sisters.

Catholic Theologian Union in Chicago hosted an [in-person launch event](#) on December 7th with Sr. Barbara Reid, OP heading the evenings' activities. Dr. Kimberly Lymore offered the opening prayer, Dr. C. Vanessa White proclaimed her powerful preaching for the Solemnity of Pentecost and Krista Chinchilla-Patzke reflected on what Catholic Women Preach means to her as a young woman living and ministering in the Church.



Kayla August preaches at Boston College's "Catholic Women DO Prech: Making our Voices Heard"

Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry hosted a launch celebration, entitled "Catholic Women DO Preach: Making Our Voices Heard" on February 2, 2023. The celebration opened with a standing-room only [candlemas prayer service](#) for the Feast of the Presentation. In her preaching for the celebration, Kayla August, a Catholic Women Preach contributor and doctoral student at Boston College, noted that the prophet Anna (Lk 2:36-38) - while essential to the story - is made optional in the lectionary, making the connection that too many people in our Church and world are left out, silenced, left behind. But is no one is optional in God's eyes, she maintained. We are all a part of God's story, we are all essential in the unfolding Reign of God. Our stories matter, our voices matter.

Following the prayer service, a distinguished panel of Catherine M. Mooney; Jacqueline Regan; Damian Torres-Botello, S.J. and M. Shawn Copeland offered historical, theological, and pastoral perspectives on the value of women's voices in the church. Mooney, Regan, and

Copeland have all preached for the website and are all included in the Year A volume. In fact, of the 64 contributors to the volume, at least 13 have ties to Boston College, either as alumnae or faculty members.

Rita Houlihan, a FutureChurch board member, Catholic Women Preach steering committee member, and CWP contributor, organized [a launch event at her parish](#), Church of the Ascension in New York City. The event featured a presentation by Sr. Donna Ciangio, OP - Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Newark, NJ. The audience was also delighted by a special appearance by New York-based artist, Laura James, whose beautiful art graces the cover of each of the volumes.



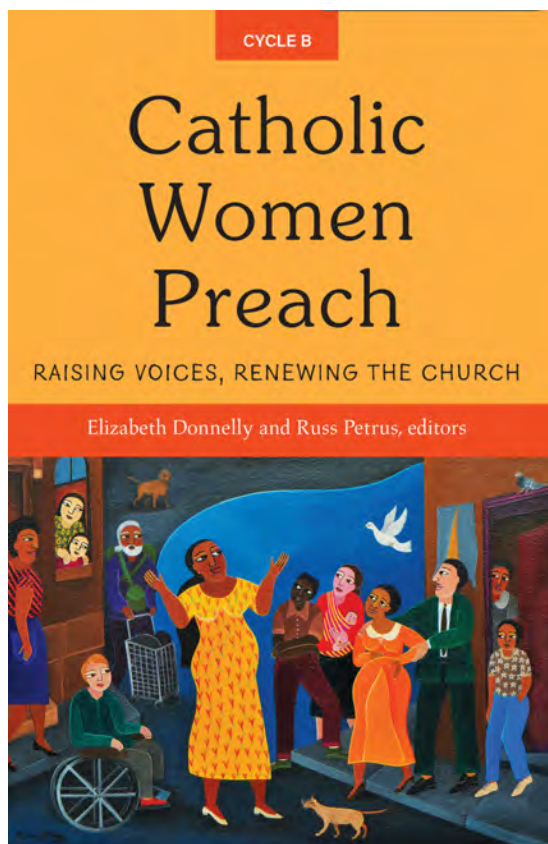
**Purchase your copy of Year A at**

<https://orbisbooks.com/products/catholic-women-preach-raising-voices-renewing-the-church-cycle-a>

**Royalties benefit Catholic Women Preach**

# Celebrating Catholic Women Preach Year B

A Reflection by Russ Petrus



In early October, I opened the mailbox to find my first advance copy of *Catholic Women Preach: Raising Voices, Renewing the Year – Cycle B*. And when I finally removed the volume from its cardboard packaging and held it in my hand, a smile graced my face as I was filled with a deep sense of gratitude and admiration for everyone who played a part in making the book a reality.

I gave thanks for Laura James, whose beautiful artwork *Mary – Magnificat* depicts Mary proclaiming her prophetic Magnificat hymn (Lk 1: 46-55) about the inbreaking Reign of God in a diverse, modern, urban setting.

Reflecting on Mary's inspired words, I thanked God for each of the 66 contributors. These women truly serve as modern-day "Marys" raising up all the justice issues in our time: immigration, the environment, racial justice, economic justice, LGBTQ+ inclusion, gender equality. Their own inspired words proclaim God's goodness and justice and call us to action.

I gave thanks for Cecilia González-Andrieu, Professor of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University, whose forward brought everything from the cover art and texts, to our history and current realities, and everyone from contributor to reader together:

*"Art is a celebration of the act of transformation. How what alone may have its limitations—one color, one shape, one brushstroke, one note, one instrument, one voice—when brought together with others becomes a new and miraculous creation. This book is just such a work of art. Insights, experiences and stories from Catholic women all over the globe, are woven together here for the first time. From India, to California, Kenya to Brazil, Belgium to the Philippines, and so many other places that we might run out of pins on a map, we have come. We have been called by a common love of our Sacred Scriptures and by the communities with and for whom we do our work. In each of our street corners we have tried to make community with those earliest Christians, our beloved ancestors, as they reach through time to us. As women, we often come tired, discouraged, overworked, underpaid and forced to the margins. But we come at a new time, a time that is no longer about waiting, but about doing."*

I gave thanks for Betty Anne Donnelly, with whom I'm honored to be listed as co-editor. I gave thanks Kelly Sankowski, who communicated with each of the contributors, collecting their updated biographies and incorporating revisions to their texts. And for Robert Ellsberg and the entire team at Orbis Books, who are committed to publishing life-giving, liberating theology.

We'll soon to be scheduling a virtual launch event for this latest volume, so please keep your eyes open for that. I look forward to celebrating with you! And visit [www.orbisbooks.com](http://www.orbisbooks.com) to purchase your copy!

# Catholic Women Preach Centers Women of Color for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter

In 2023, Catholic Women Preach once again intentionally centered the voices of women of color during Lent, Holy Week, and on Easter Sunday – the most sacred time in the Liturgical year. It is a privilege and honor to lift up these under-represented voices who offer challenging and invigorating reflections on the Scriptures. Moreover, these reflections were the basis for a Lenten course for lay and ordained offered by Crossroads – the continuing education program for the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College. [Visit our YouTube Page](#) to view the entire collection of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter preaching.



Preaching for Ash Wednesday, Rose Lue offers a reflection on living our Lenten practices from our heart:

*"May what we do, and say, come from this greater capacity for life and love that is found in the heart, where God resides deep within us. May it give witness to our true communion with God, with one another, and with all of creation."*



Preaching for the Third Sunday of Lent, Valerie D. Lewis-Mosley reflects on seeing each other as Christ sees us:

*"Where the world makes us invisible – we are made visible again in Christ! This is the faith we are initiated into at the well of Baptism... We are called to lead others out of a place of invisibility and into the light."*



Preaching for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, JoAnn Melina Lopez reflects on our call to journey to the tomb and co-create new life:

*"The truth is that here and now, Jesus is on the way to the tombs of the ones he calls beloved, and he is asking us if we know the way and if we will go with him."*



Preaching for Good Friday, Sr. Melinda Adrienne Pellerin, ssj offers a reflection on love that costs everything:

*"The African American Spiritual's lyrics, composed by the enslaved: 'Were You There, when they crucified my Lord?' We place ourselves there. We remember, and we tremble because we have been saved. Transformative love costs everything to save us!"*



## Women Witnesses for Racial Justice

FutureChurch's Women Witnesses for Racial Justice is aimed at bringing Catholics together in community to learn, pray, and take action for racial and reparative justice in the Church and in the world. The project focuses on racial justice through the lens of Black Catholic Women who have powerfully shaped Catholic tradition in ways that challenged racist structures and broke down racial barriers.

Over the past several years we have released a number of educational resources focused on our Black Catholic Foremothers in Faith, hosted guest lecturers, and offered a variety of prayer services to bring to mind all the suffering associated with racial injustice, but also the need to work together to create God's own dream - a Church and world free of white supremacy and racism.

In May, Professor Emily Clark of Tulane University joined FutureChurch to discuss the lives of Black Catholic women such as Venerable Henriette Delille in the context of late 18th century and early 19th century life in New Orleans. She offered background on the many unique features of life in New Orleans. The region's development under French and Spanish rule brought the enslavement and transport of African people, Code Noir, color labels such as quadroon, the creolization of culture and religion. Dr. Clark explored the history and discussed how free women of color such as Henriette Delille, Juliette Gaudin, and Josephine Charles were able to found the second successful religious community of Black Catholic women, the Sisters of the Holy Family, in the United States.

In March, Nikki M. Taylor, Ph.D. of Howard University joined FutureChurch to talk about her book *Driven Toward Madness: The Fugitive Slave Margaret Garner and Tragedy on the Ohio*. In her presentation, Dr. Taylor shared the story of Margaret Garner and the trauma that the enslaved women experienced causing her to kill one of her children. Margaret Garner was the focus of Toni Morrison's book (and the subsequent movie) , *Beloved*.

In February, Celebrating Black History Month, FutureChurch offered a showing of *Going Home Like a Shooting Star: Thea Bowman's Journey to Sainthood*. Sister Anita Baird, DHM offered remarks

and reflections about her own experience and relationship with Servant of God, Sr. Thea Bowman.

FutureChurch has also released a number of new educational resources exploring the lives of Black Catholic Women including Mother Mathilda Beasley, Martha Jane Chisley Tolton, Servant of God Sr. Thea Bowman, Mother Mary Lange, Mother Anna Bates, with more resources coming soon!



Nikki M. Taylor, Ph.D.

Our CARA study (listed in this booklet) is part of this work as we take a serious and first-time look at the way classism and racism has played out in the closing of Catholic parishes serving Catholics of Color.

Our pilgrimage, "Walking in the Footsteps of Our Foremothers in Faith" is also part of this series. Led by Dr. Kim Harris, pilgrims will journey to Atlanta, Montgomery, Birmingham, Selma, and New Orleans exploring iconic Civil Rights sites and learning about the work of our Black Catholic Foremothers in Faith.

### Learn More about This Project



To learn more about this project, to view recordings of past presentations, and to download free resources, visit our website:

<https://futurechurch.org/wicl/women-witnesses-for-racial-justice/>



## **Following in the Footsteps of our Black Catholic Foremothers in Faith**

*An Invitation from Russ Petrus*

I've had the true privilege of accompanying two FutureChurch pilgrimages as spiritual director. To Rome and Naples in 2019 and to Greece in 2020.

The most lasting gift of each of these powerful experiences has been my strengthened sense of connection with the Communion of Saints – that great cloud of witnesses, living and deceased, with whom we journey toward holiness.

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Walking the catacombs of Rome, we saw the most famous and important frescoes depicting women in leadership and ministry in the Church's earliest days. Scattered around us were the oil lamps, tools, decorations, and mementos left behind by early Roman Christians. These frescoes, artifacts, and remnants were all reminders of the real people who were really there, walking these same catacombs, remembering and honoring these same people who were painted on the walls, celebrating the Resurrected Christ we celebrate today.

In Greece, I remember the invigorating experience of dipping my feet in the river at Philippi where Lydia was baptized. And standing on the shores of Cenchreae taking in the sunshine and breeze - the ruins of the port from which Phoebe the Deacon likely set out to deliver the letter to the Roman calling on us to remember her from just beneath the surface of the crystal-clear water. I remember dancing and singing among the vibrant yellow mustard plants in Corinth despite the fear that gripped us as COVID began to spread throughout the globe.

Through all these glimpses into the past, I couldn't help but reflect on the companions I was with in the present - the fears and difficulties they had overcome, their reasons for making these pilgrimages, their hopes...their faith. And it was powerful as I re-membered the Body of Christ to contemplate the possibilities and potential for the future of the Church. It was as if time stopped and I was standing in sacred connection with past, present, and future.

And so, I'm looking forward to May 2024, when FutureChurch will once again go on pilgrimage. This time, we will stay in the United States and follow in the footsteps of our Black foremothers in faith. We'll visit important Civil Rights landmarks like the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the site of Bloody Sunday; the 16th Street Baptist Church, where four young girls were killed in a racially motivated bombing during the Civil Rights movement; and the Rosa Parks Museum on the former site of the old Empire Theatre where Mrs. Parks made her courageous and historic stand in 1955. Not ancient, of course, these sites are no less sacred



than the catacombs of Rome or the ruins in Greece. They stand as tangible reminders of the past, calling to us in the present to work for a better future.

We'll remember and celebrate the faith and witness of women like Sr. Antona Ebo, Venerable Henriette DeLille, and Servant of God Thea Bowman. Like Lydia and Phoebe, their stories are all too often forgotten, neglected, edited, erased. Perhaps because they call the Church to more - to become whole, to become one, to become catholic, to become holy.

Joining us will be **Dr. Kim Harris**, Assistant Professor of African American Religious Thought and Practice at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Dr. Harris - an eminently gifted preacher, singer, and storyteller will bless us as our Education and Spiritual Director. She will bring these sites and these women to vivid life for us, making them present to us as they accompany us on our journey. **Kayla August**, a Ph.D. student at Boston College, who has nurtured her God-given gift for preaching, will break open scripture for us during the pilgrimage as well. A rising advocate for women and lay people in the Church, Kayla is sure to inspire our minds, hearts, and bodies.

I hope you'll consider joining us for this powerful experience. Your presence would be a blessing to us too!

Visit <https://futurechurch.org/pilgrimage> for all of the details and to register.

# Walking the Way

Following in the Footsteps  
of Our Black Catholic Foremothers in Faith

**A FutureChurch Pilgrimage**  
*with*



**Dr. Kim R. Harris**  
*Education & Spirituality Director*



**Kayla August**  
*Special Guest Preacher*

**May 2 - 7, 2024**

Atlanta • Birmingham • Montgomery  
Selma • New Orleans

**Visit Historic  
Civil Rights Landmarks!**

**Learn about our  
Catholic Foremothers in Faith!**

**Be Enriched by Black Catholic  
Spirituality and Heritage!**

**Registration Deadline Extended!**

**December 15, 2023**

For details and to register visit

**<https://futurechurch.org/pilgrimage>**

*A limited number of scholarships are available.  
Contact [debrose@futurechurch.org](mailto:debrose@futurechurch.org) to learn more.*



3909 Rocky River Drive  
Cleveland, OH 44111

<https://futurechurch.org>  
(216) 228-0869 ext. 0

# The Closing of Black Catholic Parishes

First-of-its-kind study looking at socio-economic data in eleven dioceses



St Adalbert/Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church is the oldest African-American Parish in Cleveland, OH. The parish Celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2022.

Two years ago, FutureChurch with the help of many supporters, engaged Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) to conduct a first-of-its-kind study looking at socio-economic data in eleven dioceses to see how racial and economic factors bear on the closing of Catholic Parishes, especially those serving Catholics of Color and those living in regions where there are higher levels of poverty. The full 800-page study, "Ecclesial and Socioeconomic Statistics for Eleven Dioceses between 1970 and 2020" will be released in January 2024 with analyses by a variety of scholars and experts in the field.

An initial analysis was conducted by Mark Newman, PhD, from the University of Edinburgh who has written numerous books and articles including *Desegregating Dixie: The Catholic Church in the South and Desegregation, 1945-1992* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018).

He writes:

*These findings and the report's detailed evidence suggest that overall poverty and race, whether consciously or not, were significant factors in parish closures, which tended to occur in areas that were less white and had greater poverty and unemployment than areas that retained, expanded or gained parishes. The report's evidence suggests that dioceses were more likely to close parishes located in areas with higher levels of poverty and/or with higher levels of African Americans in the general population. Poverty was often more and significantly correlated with parish closures than unemployment, although not in all dioceses.*

*There was a notable trend of parish closures in poorer and increasingly African American cities*

and opening of parishes in white suburban, commuter belt areas and nearby counties in the 1970s and to a lesser extent in the 1980s and thereafter. As white Catholics participated in white flight away from cities and as these cities' often non-Catholic African American populations increased, dioceses responded by opening new parishes that followed white Catholic migration and closing parishes in areas whites had left. Whites who left the cities tended to be more prosperous than African Americans who moved into them and who had fewer economic opportunities because of the effects of racial discrimination and declining industries.

During the 1970s and 1980s (and subsequent decades), there was a marked trend of fewer priests, parish closures, and correspondingly larger parishes in most dioceses. Parish closures, largely in cities, and parish openings in suburbs and nearby counties could be presented as a response to serving Catholics where most lived and to a need to distribute a declining number of priests to areas with the greatest number of Catholics. The closure of parishes in more urban and African American areas might also have in part reflected a desire to integrate churches pursued by the one-sided mechanism of closing black parishes and expecting African Americans to attend white parishes that had previously largely excluded them. However, the tendency to close parishes in largely and increasingly poor and African Americans areas, and to open them in largely white and more prosperous areas to which whites were increasingly migrating from cities suggests a marked racial and class bias, whether conscious or unconscious. Insofar as closed city parishes had, or if they had continued might have, offered social outreach programs that served the poor and unemployed, their closure diminished social capital and efforts to alleviate poverty and its effects.

White migration to suburbs and counties near cities occurred across the entire period of the study. In later decades, more and more African American also moved away from cities to suburbs and to nearby or surrounding counties. However, they tended, although not exclusively, to move to different locations from whites and to areas that were less prosperous and presumably more affordable, with lower rents and house prices. Catholic churches were much less likely to follow their migration than that of whites. However, the report does not provide racial statistics for Catholics, only the general population, making any conclusions about racial motivation in closing and opening parishes suggestive rather than certain.

Across the eleven dioceses, there was a large and rapid expansion in the number of Hispanics/Latinos in the 2000s and 2010s, and, in some cases, also in the immediately preceding decades. Much of the increase was probably the result of immigration. To a significant extent, Hispanics/Latinos located to cities at the same time as more African Americans left them, but the data cannot answer whether there was a causal effect between the two phenomena. Hispanics/Latinos also located to some of the suburban areas to which African Americans had relocated from cities.

The comparatively recent upsurge in the Hispanic/Latino population in the eleven dioceses makes analysis of longer-term trends problematic. In some dioceses, there was a correlation between parish closures and the Hispanic/Latino population, but in other dioceses there was less or no significant correlation.

FutureChurch believes this research will be an extraordinary contribution to Catholic anti-racism work and our Save Our Parish initiative. We have engaged the help of a number of researchers, sociologists, and theologians who are mining the data for insights and recommendations. Stay tuned for more information, articles, and presentations in the new year!



## Catholic Women Preach Reaches New Audience at LA Religious Ed Congress

Russ Petrus reflects on his time in Los Angeles

I leaned over to my neighboring exhibitor, Elise, and said, "that one interaction makes the long days of preparation, the chaotic air travel, the jetlag, the hours of standing on these concrete floors all worth it." As my eyes watered, Elise responded, "It changed something for her... her relationship with the Church, perhaps even her life..."

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A young woman – still in high school – had been walking up and down the exhibition hall by herself when she came upon our booth. I watched as she stopped - almost in disbelief - forming the words silently on her lips as she read “Catholic Women Preach,” ... Soon her eyes lit up – no longer in disbelief, but in hope – and she stepped in closer to learn more. We had a moving conversation during which she told me about her increasing frustration over the lack of women’s representation and leadership in the Catholic Church, how she longed to see herself reflected in our liturgy and leadership. I showed her the website, the biographies of the all the extraordinary women, and how to navigate the search tool. Catholic Women Preach, it seems, was just the kind of resource she longed for and her excitement was palpable she took out her phone, scanned the QR code to save the site to her home screen and subscribed to the podcast. I gave her a free copy of the Year A book as well as a CWP backpack and pen and she thanked me and continued on her journey – only to return later with family and friends to share her joy with them.

Last February, I had the pleasure of teaming with Betty Anne Donnelly to exhibit Catholic Women Preach at the LA Religious Education Congress in Anaheim, California. Betty Anne helped to launch Catholic Women Preach back in 2016, serves as preacher coordinator, and is co-editor of the Orbis series with me. It was our first time there as exhibitors and to be honest I didn’t know what what kind of welcome we’d receive. But it turned out to be a weekend of blessed encounters just like the one I described above.

We were visited by long-time friends like Orbis Publisher, Robert Ellsberg; Women Deacons expert, Phyllis Zagano; Discerning Deacons Co-Director, Ellie Hidalgo; Catholic Mobilizing Network executive director Krisanne Vaillancourt-Murphy; and Loyola Marymount Professor, Cecilia González-Andrieu, to name a few.

We also made many new friends – teachers who told us about how they use Catholic Women Preach in their classrooms; committed women who lead their parish women’s groups and are looking for new ways to engage and gather; and one young adult minister who gathers a group in



her parish to view the CWP video for the week and discuss before they go to Mass together. We also had the opportunity to introduce ourselves and CWP to hundreds of folks who had not yet heard of the project.

I also had the great blessing of meeting – for the first time in person – many FutureChurch members, supporters, and friends, whom I’ve only before seen on our various liturgies and zoom presentations - friends like Daryl and Sr. Marilyn.

Over the course of the weekend, we gave away hundreds of CWP backpacks, pens, and postcards. My heart was particularly filled with joy and hope each time a young girl came to the table to ask for a backpack and proceed to put it on with pride and continue to walk through the exhibit hall, sharing the good news that Catholic women – of all ages - DO preach!

Lately, much of my work for FutureChurch and Catholic Women Preach happens behind a computer screen with headphones on. While our Zoom presentations and liturgies offer great opportunities to be in communion and relationship with folks from all over the world, there’s nothing quite like sharing physical space with like-minded people and I am immensely grateful for and renewed by all these graced encounters I had in Los Angeles.



LCWR  
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

**Deborah**  
Deborah Rose  
FutureChurch

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## **The Prophetic Power of Faith-filled Women**

Deborah Rose reflects on her time at the 2023 LCWR Assembly

As I attended the annual gathering of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in Dallas, Texas this past week, I was reminded of prophetic power of faith-filled women. Courageous and tough-minded, the women of LCWR serve as CEOs, CFOs, presidents, and more - building and guiding communities, organizations, and institutions to carry out the work of the Gospel in our broken world.

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While Wall Street erects and sustains institutions for profit, these women of the Good News build and sustain structures that serve those who are left behind, disdained, and excluded from the social, religious, political, and economic goods of our society. They are, without a doubt, Christ's heart and hands in this world.

Yet, surprisingly, not everyone has been pleased with the work of LCWR over the years. Like all good prophets, LCWR members have challenged the hard hearted and even called the bishops to task when they have acted unjustly. Most of the time though, it is not their words, but their simple ministry to those who are spurned that riles up the holier-than-thou class. Their prophetic vision for ministry to LGBTQ+ people and for women's full participation in the Church and world left some bishops crying foul over their "radical feminist themes." And their public support for governmental healthcare for all in 2008 drew such ire that certain bishops sought to silence them. In 2009 and 2012, churchmen, under Pope Benedict XVI, investigated and cracked down on the nuns.

It was at the 2012 LCWR gathering, that a woman of extraordinary faith and vision, Sr. Pat Farrell, OSF, spoke to a hurting, wounded church. Her words flew far beyond LCWR participants to thousands of Catholics who had been saddened and angered by the accusations and the actions of the Pope's men.

In that painful moment with the doctrinal assessment looming, Farrell was faithful and fearless. Looking for the deeper meaning of the hurtful events she told us there was no "reason to be fearful of the cataclysmic movements of change swirling around us. We only need to recognize the movement, step into the flow, and be carried by it. Indeed, all creation is groaning in one great act of giving birth. The Spirit of God still hovers over the chaos."

Throughout my days at LCWR, I reflected often on the caliber of these Jesus-like "troublemakers." I had the opportunity to talk with congregational leaders Sr. Anita Baird, DHM, and Sr. Terry Rickard, OP, both preachers for Catholic Women Preach, and was reminded again of why they are so beloved and respected by Catholics everywhere.



Deb with FutureChurch board member Sr. Anita Baird

I bumped into Sr. Sally Hodgdon, CSJ, who currently serves as the General Superior of Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry. In 2018, Hodgdon was on the leadership team for International Union of Superiors General and participated in the Synod on Young People as a non-voting member. Disturbed by the blatant sexism on display when it came to voting rights for male and female religious superiors, she was instrumental in planting seeds for change. As we talked, we rejoiced in the fact that our "Votes for Catholic Women" campaign resulted in women voting for the first time at a Synod this year!

Each speaker, Sr. Rebecca Ann Gemma, OP, Sr. Barbara Reid, OP, and Sr. Jung Eun Sophia Park, SNJM, inspired me to open my heart and mind more courageously to God's call to be radical in my love for the least among us.

And although I was only able to view the 2023 Outstanding Leadership Awardee, Sr. Donna Markham's witness via video, Sr. Markham's words rang with the same faithfulness and fearlessness as Sr. Pat Farrell's in 2012. Another prophetic visionary



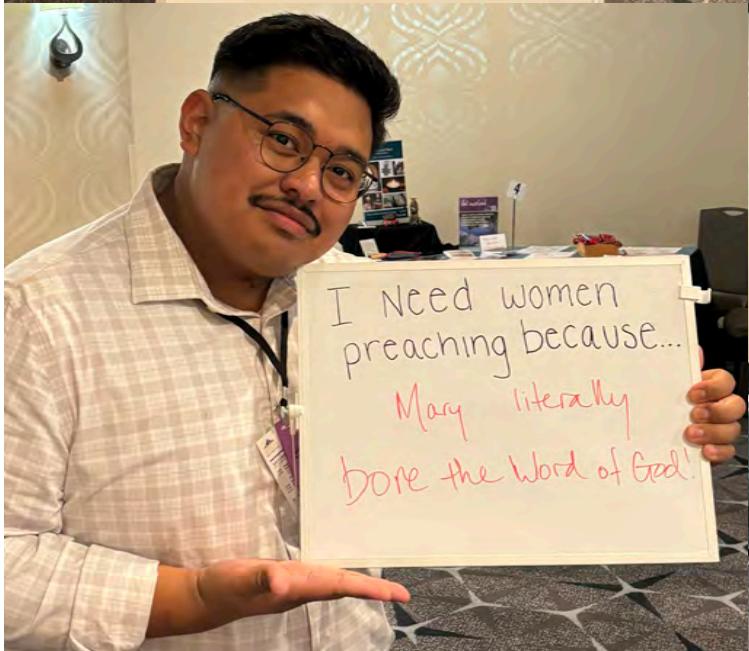
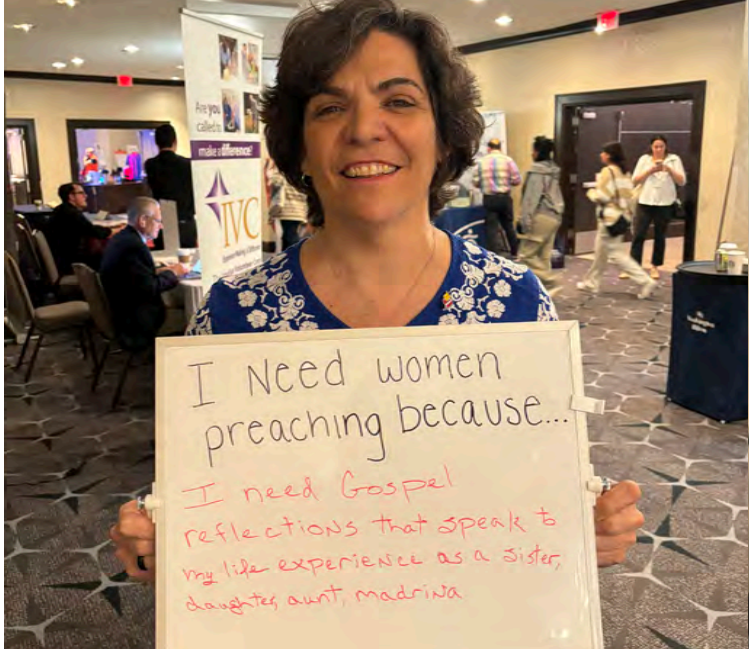
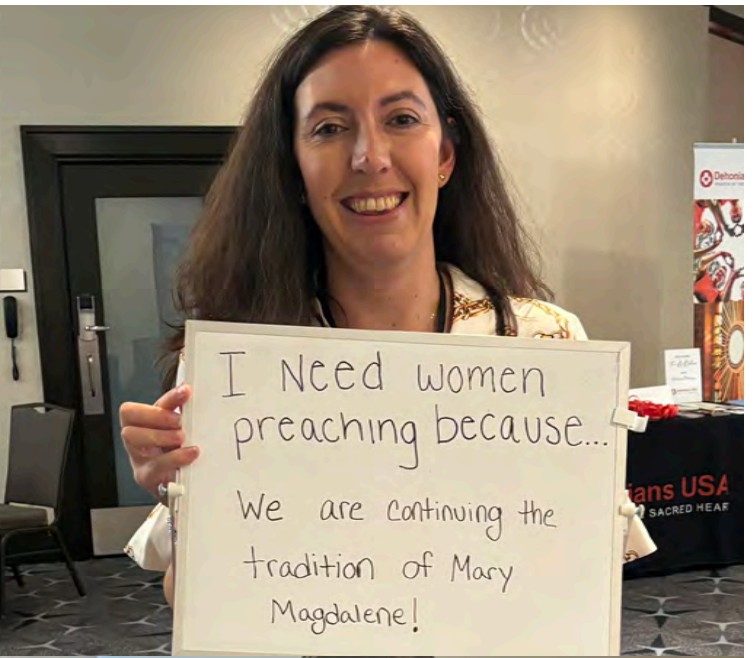
We live in a  
world where  
living, breathing  
prophets and  
giants live and  
work among us.

in our church, the former director of Catholic Charities, USA, Sr. Donna Markham, OP, knows what it is like to be the target of ire of a different kind.

Sr. Markham faced down angry congresspeople who claimed Catholic Charities was breaking the law with their humanitarian efforts at the border. When the COVID epidemic was taking millions of lives including the lives of immigrants and humanitarian workers, she reached out to religious sisters who, despite the dangers, came to the border by the hundreds to carry out the mission. When faced with an epidemic, hostility and threats from politicians, Sr. Markham remained resolute in her determination to continue the work. From a lifetime of doing God's work, she told those who gathered:

*"...I am no longer afraid of what may become of me in speaking truth or doing what I know to be right. I know you understand this and live it with me. We will allow absolutely nothing to prevent us from reaching out in compassion. This is the gift and the hope I believe we women religious leaders offer to our broken, angry world today."*

We live in a world where living, breathing prophets and giants live and work among us. When we are disappointed with the bland leadership of male leaders, we can turn to our true teachers, the religious sisters who have faced down hostility, indifference, and hatred and have taught us, by example, how to love in the midst of darkness. I, for one, want to follow their lead as faithfully as I can.



# I Need Women Preaching Because...

Olivia Hastie on her experience at the Ignatian Family Teach-in for Justice



At the end of October, Russ and I, along with Betty Anne Donnelly went to Washington DC for the Ignatian Family Teach-In to promote and share about Catholic Women Preach. With us, we brought a white board that had the prompt: "I need women preaching because..." As people walked by, I noticed their pause, and while some immediately had answers, others took their time promising they would come back and write their answers the next day.

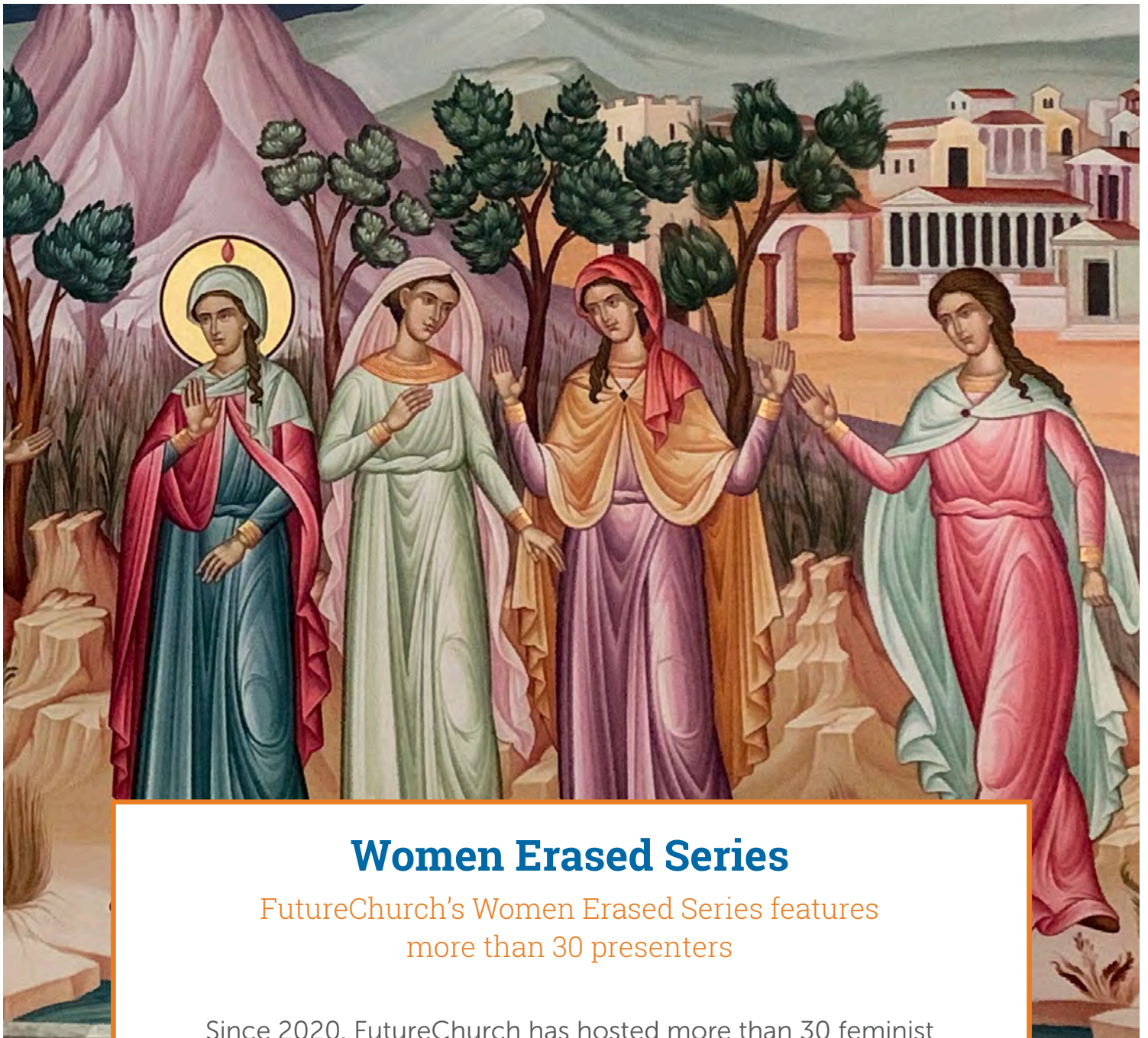
These answers captured in the photos on the previous page ranged a variety from "I need women preaching because women are awesome" to "I need women preaching because Mary literally gave birth to the Word of God." Women are so deeply embedded and necessary within the Catholic tradition but are so often forgotten.

Perhaps the most hopeful and joyous part of the weekend was seeing young women's eyes light up as they passed our booth. They would cheer and clap: "YES!! Women should preach. Women need to preach!!" Others would seek us out to let us know they watch every week eagerly awaiting the preacher's insights on the lectionary. My personal favorite interaction were with young women who

shared how much they need to hear women's voices reflected in Church. For them, it's not simply a want, it's a need.

While in DC, I was able to attend a gathering with Fr. Bryan Massingale who shared some of the layers of his work on racial justice. He reminded the attendees (in the context of LGBTQ+ kids), "if you love someone, you will protect them. If you love someone, you will stand up for them." I think this framework transcends a single issue and reminds us all that loving our sisters means protecting them and standing up for them. That women's voices must be raised in the Catholic Church both to foster equality and to invoke a love-centered justice.

I need women preaching because there is beauty in our lived experiences and our insights about the world. I need women preaching because there are daughters, sisters, and mothers who need to believe that the Catholic Church wants their voice. I need women preaching because women are worthy of love and celebration. I need women preaching because women are people too- with diverse and poignant stories and Gospel insights to tell and share.



## Women Erased Series

FutureChurch's Women Erased Series features more than 30 presenters

Since 2020, FutureChurch has hosted more than 30 feminist scholars, writers, and activists in our [Women Erased series](#). Our guests help uncover the many ways women's leadership, witness, and ministries have been erased from our Church's liturgical texts, historical record and memory, and communities. These sessions, featuring leading Scripture scholars and Church historians, not only name and explore the history, but also put forth resources for correcting the record and telling the true story of women's central role in shaping and spreading Christianity from its beginnings to today.

continued on next page...

In February, in response to an interview during which Pope Francis reaffirmed the church's embrace of complementarity's constructs for organizing ecclesial life, [FutureChurch hosted Professor Mary Anne Case](#) whose research focuses on the historical development of Complementarity and the Marian and Petrine principles. Professor Case offers an overview of the history, timeline, as well as the nuances of papal thought on the topic.



Professor Mary Anne Case

On March 8 - International Women's Day- we hosted a special screening of the BBC documentary ["The Women Fighting to be Priests" with special guest Father Anne Tropeano](#). Father Anne, one of the subjects of the documentary was ordained on October 16, 2021 in Albuquerque, NM through the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests and is now an independent Roman Catholic priest. She joined us to set the context for the film and to take viewer questions following the screening.

In April, we were joined by professors [Joan Taylor and Helen Bond who offered a look into the lives of Jesus' female disciples](#) based on their exciting new book, *Women Remembered: Jesus' Female Disciples* (2022). While many of the women in Christian Scriptures have been dismissed, stereotyped, or misrepresented, Professor Taylor and Professor Bond present some of the latest findings and recover the stories of the women who have helped shape our faith.

In June, [Teresa Calpino, Ph.D. presented her research on women who led and ministered in The Acts of the Apostles](#), with a particular focus on Tabitha and Lydia. In her presentation,

Dr. Calpino showed how these women have routinely been ignored by scholars or mentioned only in praising the male apostle associated with their story, thus being obscured.

In July, Yale Divinity School [Professor Teresa Berger, Ph.D. offered insights into the liturgical roles women played in early Christianity](#), the history of women's liturgical ministries, and the development of the calendar of saints and the uneven ways we have come to formally venerate women within the Christian tradition.

In September, [Shannon K. Evans, spirituality and culture editor at the National Catholic Reporter, reflected on the origins of her new powerful book of prayers, Feminist Prayers for My Daughter](#). She also shared a few prayers with us, and answered questions from the audience.

Our "Women Erased" series continues on Saturday, December 2, 2023 as we welcome award winning author and speaker, Kathy Coffey, who will lead an afternoon of reflection to begin Advent. ["Gospel Women of Advent - Seekers and Prophets"](#) will invite participants to use an ancient Midrash technique, to imagine the lives of women in the infancy narratives. These women will invite us to see the scriptures differently, with possibilities beyond the familiar. We'll explore their stories through presentation, meditation and discussion. All will be interwoven with Advent themes: admitting need, embracing what comes, raising expectations and celebrating.



To view all of the videos from our Women Erased series or to sign up for future events, visit:

<https://futurechurch.org/wicl/women-erased/>.

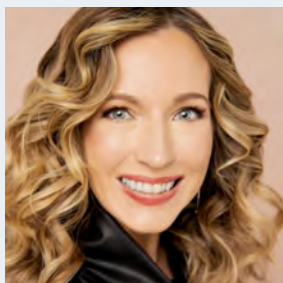
# Made in God's Image and Likeness: Reclaiming our Bodies from the Patriarchy

FutureChurch Winter/Spring 2024 Series to explore emerging, liberating feminist and queer theology

Patriarchy, beyond misogyny, is not necessarily simply the hatred or disdain men feel toward women, but is characterized by the structural ownership cisgender white men exert over non-male and non-conforming bodies. Beginning this winter, FutureChurch will host a series of talks centered on reclaiming the body from patriarchal control. This series and its topics range from reproductive and sexual justice, discussion of eating disorders and body image, as well as racial and queer justice.

Our speakers will present on their varying scholarly interests and the ways in which they intersect with the work of FutureChurch and the need for a broader theological emphasis on the body's experience within a structurally violent Church.

Additional presenters and topics are in the works. We are looking forward to hosting these important conversations and hope you will join us! Visit <https://futurechurch.org/wicl/respect-women> to learn more and register.



On **January 23**, Tricia Bruce will speak on [How Everyday Americans \(Don't\) Talk About Abortion](#), sharing her research which exposes the limitations of available labels, assumptions, and boundaries separating

Americans' moral and legal views. Dr. Bruce's study forges pathways beyond polarization, making room for greater complexity, ambiguity, understanding, and cross-cutting collaborations.



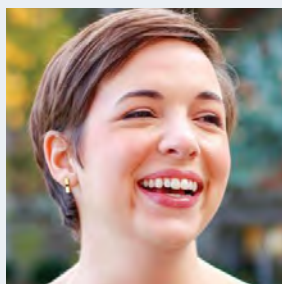
On **February 29**, Jessica Coblentz will speak about her article ["Catholic Fasting Literature in a Context of Body Hatred: A Feminist Critique,"](#) which argues that the social conditions of misogynistic body hatred

and the culture of fasting during Lent perpetuates disordered eating. Dr. Coblentz is associate professor of religious studies and gender and women's studies at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, IN.



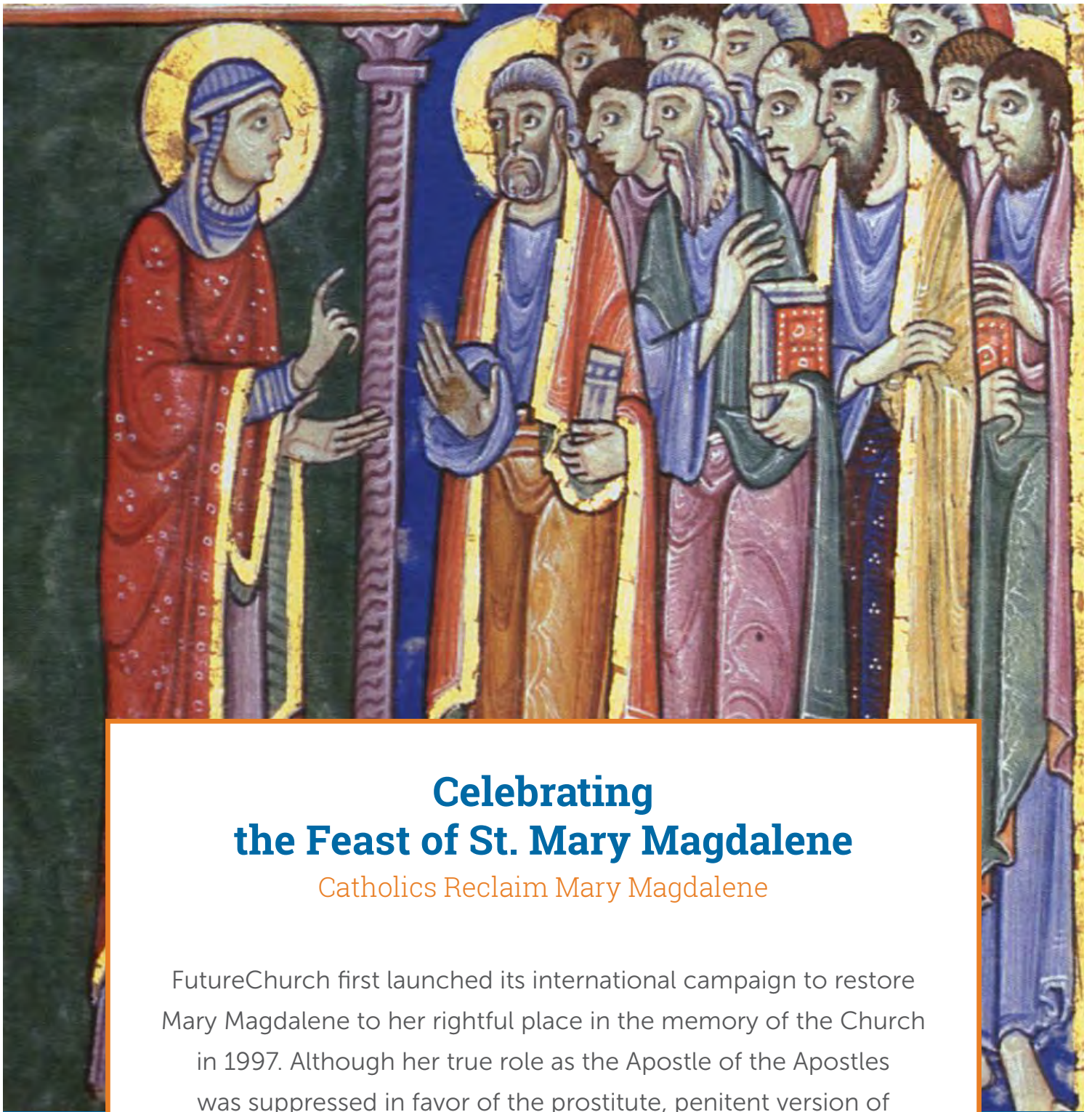
On **February 20**, Craig Ford will present ["Co-Creating Beauty: Queer Bodies and Queer Loves Beyond the Anathemas,"](#) exploring how our roles as co-creators with God allows for new ways to understand the

truth revealed by sexuality and gender identity beyond the boundaries of heteronormativity. Dr. Ford is assistant professor of theology and religious studies at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin.



On **March 28**, Megan McCabe will speak on her work on sexual justice and social sin in the United States with a special emphasis on [consent in the context of the Assumption.](#) Her current research

develops an understanding of "cultures of sin," specifically in the context of an examination of the problem of the cultural foundation of sexual violence. Dr. McCabe is an assistant professor of religious studies at Gonzaga University.



## **Celebrating the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene**

*Catholics Reclaim Mary Magdalene*

FutureChurch first launched its international campaign to restore Mary Magdalene to her rightful place in the memory of the Church in 1997. Although her true role as the Apostle of the Apostles was suppressed in favor of the prostitute, penitent version of Mary Magdalene, she is finally receiving widespread honor and recognition with the 2016 decree raising her memorial to a feast day alongside St. Peter and St. Paul. But more can be done.

continued on next page...

FutureChurch launched its international campaign to restore Mary Magdalene to her rightful place as apostle of the apostles 26 years ago under the leadership of Christine Schenk, CSJ.

The idea was as simple as it was revolutionary. Supporters would sponsor Mary Magdalene celebrations on or around July 22. A biblical expert would trace Mary's faithfulness in accompanying Jesus through crucifixion, death, and burial and her privileged place as first witness and proclaimer of the resurrection. Following the lecture, women would preside and preach at a prayer service, empowering the congregation to reflect on their own encounters with, and witness to, the risen Christ. Celebrations exploded in those early years and soon reached 400+ throughout the world and continues to grow.

In the hearts and minds of those who gathered and learned her true story, Mary Magdalene was restored to her rightful place as the apostle of the apostles. And she soon became and remains an international source and symbol of hope for restoring all women to their rightful place in the life, ministry, and governance of the Church.

Speaking to FutureChurch's legacy in reclaiming Mary Magdalene at Boston College's Annual Mary Magdalene Celebration in 2013, renowned New Testament scholar, Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM said:

*"Much of the recent resurgence of interest in Mary Magdalene in the Church at large is due to the efforts of an organization called FutureChurch... One of its most successful and popular efforts has been its Mary of Magdala Project, a multi-pronged effort to educate people about St. Mary Magdalene, to tell her story, to dispel unfounded myths about her sinfulness, to spotlight her role as an apostle and first witness to the Resurrection in the New Testament, and to promote celebrations of her feast such as the one that we are holding today. FutureChurch in the practical sphere and Mary Magdalene research in the academic sphere have combined to make Mary Magdalene a virtual cottage industry in the contemporary Church... I mention this powerful grassroots movement because it embodies what*

*is probably the primary reason for the massive interest in Mary Magdalene that has arisen since Vatican II, namely the potential leverage of Mary Magdalene in the argument for full equality for women in the Catholic Church."*

We are proud to carry on that legacy as every summer, thousands of women and men help correct an egregious injustice done to a great woman leader in our church.

This year, FutureChurch offered a number of different opportunities to join in our mission reclaiming Mary Magdalene for ourselves, for our Church, and for our world.

Throughout the month of July, supporters were invited to contribute to Catholic Women Preach in honor of a "Mary Magdalene" in their own life. FutureChurch also sent special "Magdalene Monday" emails, highlighting powerful preaching and programming on Mary Magdalene throughout the years.



Professor Joan Taylor

On July 18, [Professor Joan Taylor of King's College in London offered an overview of the way Mary Magdalene is portrayed in film.](#) Through her presentation, Dr. Taylor presented several "archetypes" of Mary Magdalene that various depictions fall into and the toppled myths that characterize those depictions and corrected the record about the scriptural and historical Mary Magdalene.

On July 20, FutureChurch hosted our annual liturgical celebration entitled, ["Rethinking Women's Participation - Stories of Synodality Then and Now."](#)



Kelly Meraw preaches for our 2023 Mary Magdalene Celebration

The liturgy was developed by Meraw, Director of Liturgy, Music, and Pastoral Care for St. John - St. Paul Collaborative in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Reflecting the spirit of synodality, Kelly shared leadership with Kathy Maher, Olivia Hastie, Monika Hyatt, Rose Lue, Lucy Reiger, Eleanor Mears, Svea Fraser, and Anne Mears. FutureChurch co-director, Russ Petrus, provided music for the celebration.

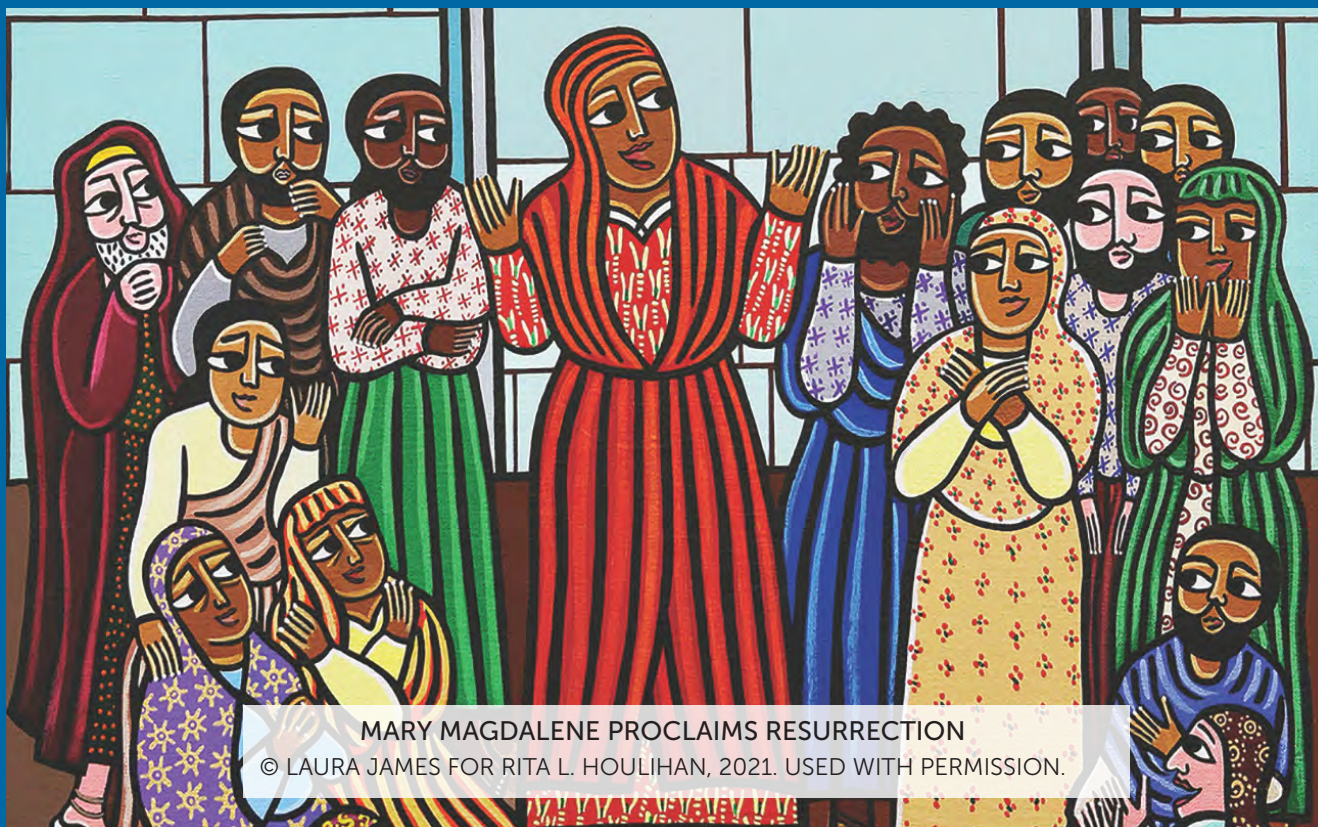
Throughout the prayer service, as we recovered Mary's witness and honored the impact it continues to make, we gathered together our prayers for all women who continue to be ignored, discredited, and disbelieved.

The voices of Catholics around the world calling for greater equality for women in the Church in "Enlarge the Space of Our Tent" and additional insights from the *Instrumentum Laboris* - or working document - for the synod guided us through our prayer service as we reflected on Jesus' synodal encounters with women during his earthly ministry, then, and the synodal encounters in the heartfelt sharing of the People of God, today.



To learn more about our efforts to "Reclaim Magdalene" go to:

<https://futurechurch.org/wicl/mary-of-magdala/>



Take Action: Sign Our Petition

## Tell the Whole Story About Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday

Easter is the most sacred of all Sundays in the Church year. Yet, when Catholics gather for Mass on Easter Sunday, they do not hear the full story of the Resurrection. They do not hear the inspiring story of Mary Magdalene's witness of the Risen Christ or Christ's commission to Mary Magdalene to proclaim the Resurrection to the other disciples. Even though Pope Francis raised her memorial to a feast day in 2016 and affirmed her role as the Apostle of the Apostles, her story is cut short on the holiest day of the year.

Please join us in calling on the global Church to tell the full story of Mary Magdalene's apostolic witness to the Resurrection every Easter so that all Catholics can be inspired by the Good News of her faith, courage, and ministry.

[Read and Sign at <https://futurechurch.org/petition>](https://futurechurch.org/petition)

READ & SIGN



# In gratitude for your work toward a more just world!

The Ignatian Solidarity Network (ISN) is a national organization that networks, educates, and forms advocates for social justice animated by the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the witness of the Jesuit martyrs of El Salvador and their companions.

Learn more: [ignatiansolidarity.net](http://ignatiansolidarity.net)



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**Women's Ordination Conference**  
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promotes activism, dialogue, and  
prayerful witness to call for women's  
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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of  
human rights and social justice.

The perspective is shifting.

The Synod is prioritizing critical dialogue about the role of  
women in the church.

May we be empowered in this movement and advance our  
community toward greater gender equality and social justice.

To join our active ministry, please get in touch with  
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SCAN ME!



Congratulations to FutureChurch and all the honorees—we are proud to be working alongside you to achieve equality in our church!



## New Ways Ministry

Honors and Thanks

**Cynthia Bailey Manns, D. Min.**  
**Sister Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ**  
**Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D.**  
**Kate McElwee**

for their dedicated and effective work  
towards transforming our church  
into a discipleship of equals

*Keep in touch with how Catholics are building a more inclusive church for LGBTQ+ people*

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

Phone: 301-277-5674 Email: [info@NewWaysMinistry.org](mailto:info@NewWaysMinistry.org)

*FutureChurch,  
Thank you for engaging at the  
intersection of faith and public life!*



## **InterReligious Task Force on Central America**

Join with us to bolster the international solidarity movement—standing with marginalized and vulnerable communities in Latin America, at our border, in immigration detention facilities, in county jails and state prisons, and on the streets of Cleveland.

All people—everywhere—deserve dignity, care, and safe communities.

## **SOLIDARITY**

Our liberation is bound together



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# Amplifying voices of Catholic sisters around the world



## GLOBAL SISTERS REPORT

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Congratulations to 2023 Award Honorees

Sr. Nathalie Becquart, XMCJ,  
Phyllis Zagano, Ph.D., and Kate McElwee  
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# STAY CONNECTED ALL YEAR



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FutureChurch's home on the world wide web. Register for events, explore our resources, and join our latest efforts.



**[www.youtube.com/futurechurch1](http://www.youtube.com/futurechurch1)**

FutureChurch's comprehensive video archive. Like and subscribe to our YouTube page to get alerts whenever we post a new video.



**<https://futurechurch.org/shop>**

FutureChurch's online store with posters and cards.



**[www.futurechurch.news](http://www.futurechurch.news)**

Get the latest news and our unique perspective - at home and abroad - at FutureChurch's news site.



**@FutureChurch**

Like FutureChurch on Facebook, connect with other FutureChurch members and supporters, and get real-time commentary on breaking news.



**@FutureChurchUSA**

Follow FutureChurch on twitter, learn about breaking news, and get our live reactions from events and programs that FutureChurch is at and a part of.

## Other FutureChurch Sites

**[www.catholicwomendeacons.org](http://www.catholicwomendeacons.org)**

dedicated to restoring women deacons

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

video and text of women preaching on the weekly scriptures

**[www.reclaimmagdalene.org](http://www.reclaimmagdalene.org)**

dedicated to telling the true story of Mary of Magdala



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