



FutureChurch 36th Annual Fall Event

Catholics for the Common Good: What Is Ours To Do?

Daryl Grigsby, Gabriel Lara, Angela Howard McParland,
and Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.
Keynote Panel

Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez
Fr. Louis J. Trivison Award

Mollie Clark, AnnaMarie Pacione
and Lauryn Sweeney
Christine Schenk Award
for Young Catholic Leaders

OCTOBER 22 & 27, 2026

Thank you, FutureChurch

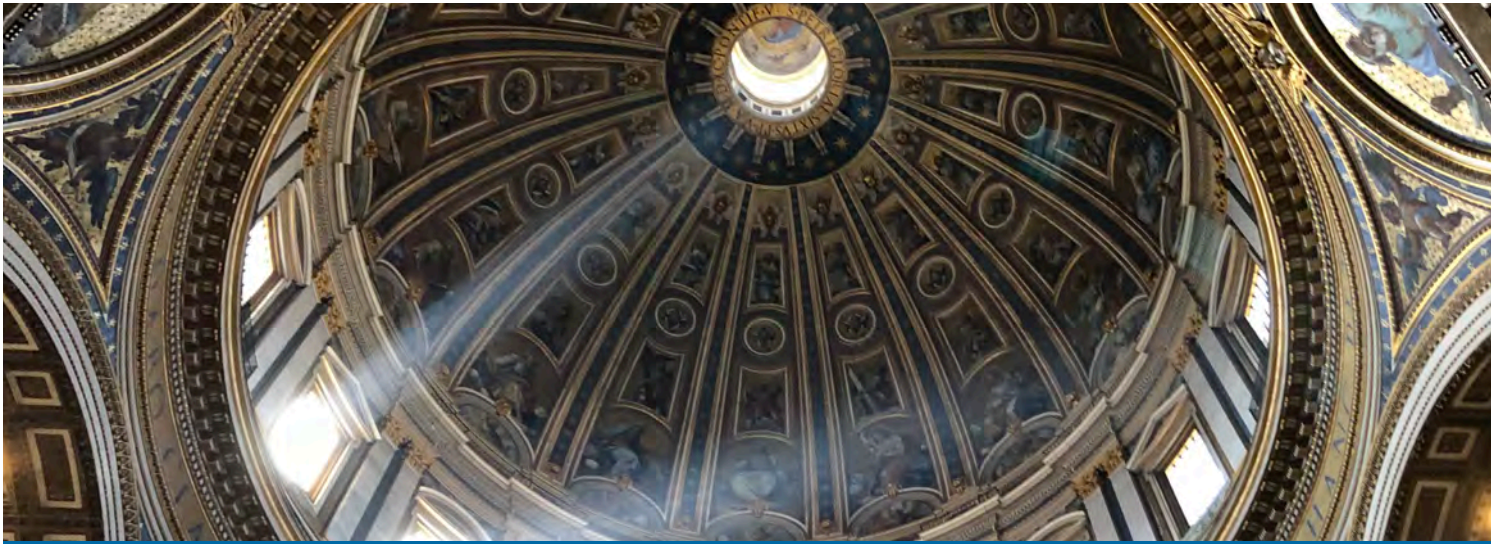
for 36 years of working to build a synodal church
to ensure all Catholics have the opportunity to fully
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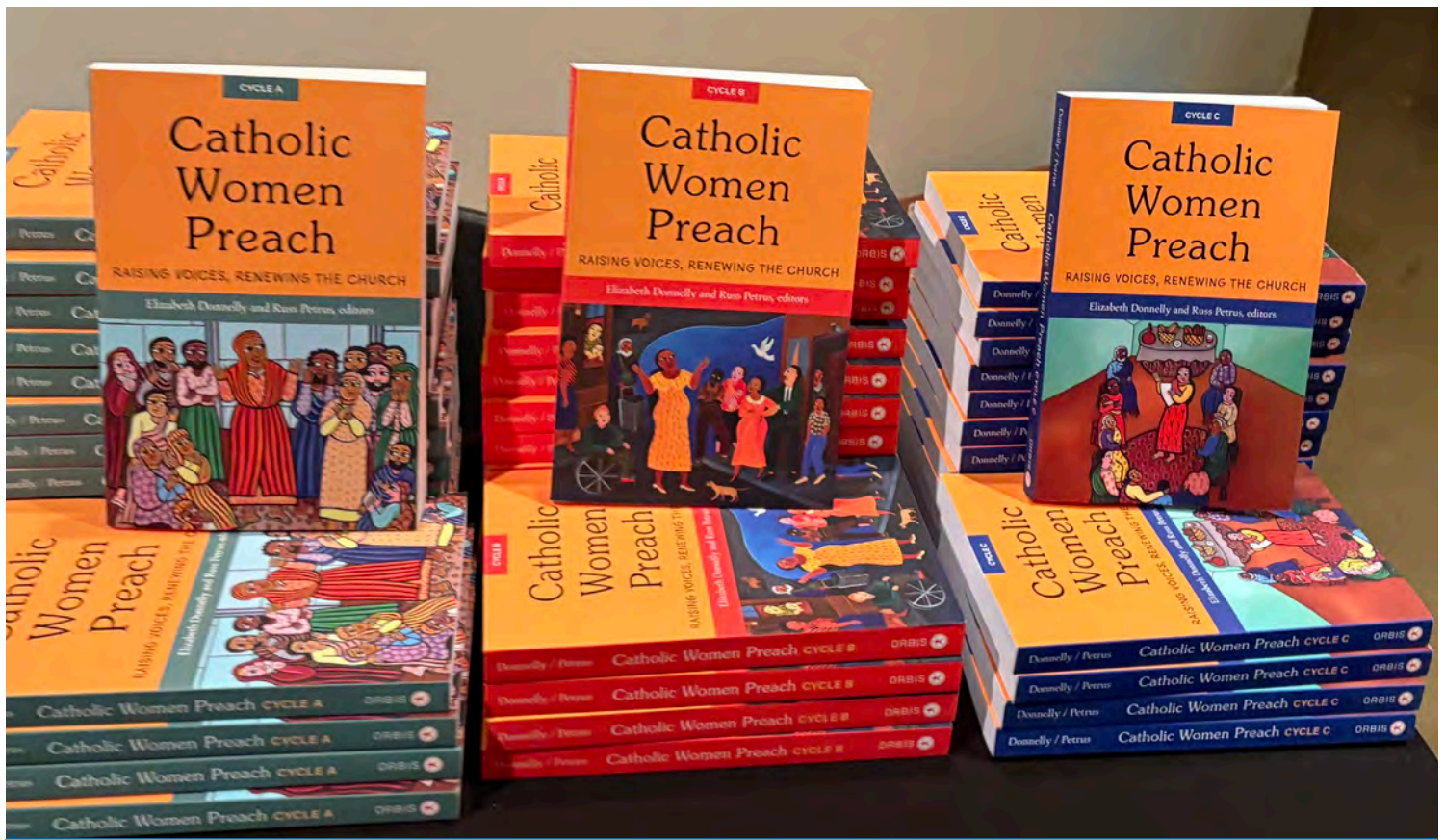
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Photo: FutureChurch staff and several board members gathered in Cleveland for our July 2026 meeting and retreat.



Catholic Women Preach



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On behalf of the FutureChurch board and staff, welcome to our 36th Annual Fall Event: *Catholics for the Common Good: What Is Ours To Do?*

We extend a special welcome to our keynote panelists, Daryl Grigsby, Gabriel Lara, Angela Howard McParland, and Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.; and to our honorees, Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez, Mollie Clark, AnnaMarie Pacione, and Lauryn Sweeney. Thank you for being here and for all you do for God's people.

Last year, we celebrated 35 years of FutureChurch. It was a joyful season of gratitude for the visionaries who began this work and for the countless people of faith who have carried it forward. It was also energizing. Looking at what has been accomplished, we carry on with a deeper understanding and passion for what is still *ours to do*.

That question is the heart of this year's gathering. In a wounded and divided world, what is the Gospel asking of us? How do we, as the baptized, answer the call to build a Church and a society where every person's dignity is honored and the common good is more and more a reality?

This year we mark another important milestone - ten silence-shattering years of Catholic Women Preach. Week after week, women have preached the Good News. They have shown us all what the Church has been missing and what it can become when the People of God hear the whole Gospel, proclaimed by the whole Church. We are grateful to every preacher, every viewer and reader, and every supporter who helped turn this bold idea into a movement that is changing the Church.

There is still much work to be done, but it is not ours to do alone. As members of the Body of Christ, we each bring different gifts, and our Church and world need every one of them. Guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we step forward together in faith, with courage, and out of love.

Thank you for being part of this FutureChurch community, for keeping hope alive, and for asking, with us, "What is ours to do?"

In gratitude and hope,

Russ Petrus
Executive Director

Agenda

Thursday

October 22, 2026

Meet the Speaker Gathering with Daryl Grigsby

Welcome & Opening Prayer

Offered by

Russ Petrus

Angela Nevitt Meyer

Keynote Panel

Moderator

Daryl Grigsby

Panelists

Gabriel Lara, Angela Howard McParland,
and Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.

Question & Answer

Closing Prayer

Offered by

Rita Houlihan

Tuesday

October 27, 2026

Welcome & Opening Prayer

Offered by

Victoria McBride

2026 Christine Schenk Award for Young Catholic Leaders

Presentation

Martha Ligas

Acceptance

Mollie Clark, AnnaMarie Pacione,
and Lauryn Sweeney

2026 Fr. Louis J. Trivison Award

Introduction

Russ Petrus

Acceptance of Award

Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez

Question & Answer

Moderator

Olivia Hastie

Closing Prayer

Offered by

Marie Graf

Keynote Panel

**Daryl Grigsby, Gabriel Lara, Angela Howard McParland,
and Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.**



Daryl Grigsby (moderator) is an author and commentator on contemporary Catholic issues. He is the author of *Catholics for the Common Good: An Eternal Offering* and *In Their Footsteps: Inspirational Reflections on Black History for Every Day of the Year* and is a frequent contributor to National Catholic Reporter and Black Catholic Messenger. A retired public works director, he also holds a Master's Degree in Theology and Pastoral Studies from Seattle University and is a graduate of the Sabbatical Renewal Program at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University.

Gabriel Lara is the Senior Membership Animator and Formator and a co-founder of the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership (CSPL). Gabriel is a faith-driven grassroots community organizer and trainer with over 15 years of experience mobilizing the skills, energy, and vision of community members impacted by injustice. He was born and raised in Guanajuato, Mexico, and has lived in Chicago for over 25 years.

Angela Howard McParland has been a member of the Justice Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas since 2021, working on both state and federal issues of gun violence, immigration, poverty and economics, racism, and climate, among others. She is a co-founder of Nuns Against Gun Violence and a proud member of cohort 5 of Mercy Global's Emerging Leaders Fellowship. She earned a Master of Divinity at Vanderbilt Divinity School as well as a certificate in Religion, Gender, and Sexuality.

Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., was ordained as the third Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky in May 2015. He currently serves as the Bishop President of Pax Christi USA and Episcopal Moderator for the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. Bishop Stowe earned a Master of Divinity and a Licentiate in Church History from the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, CA.



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.

FutureChurch is honored to present the 2026 Fr. Louis J. Trivison Award to Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez in recognition of her founding leadership of the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership, whose Eucharistic processions in Chicago drew national attention and moved the U.S. Bishops to speak out against the inhumane treatment of migrants in detention, and for her unwavering commitment to justice both in the world and within the Church.

2026 Fr. Louis J. Trivison Award

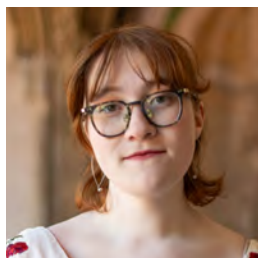
Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez

Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez is a proud first-generation Mexican-American from the La Villita neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. She is a co-founder and Director of Training and Formation at the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership (CSPL), a Catholic and Christian-rooted community organizing coalition that advances community transformation through spirituality and grassroots organizing. She holds a Master of Arts in Christian Spirituality from Fordham University, with a concentration in Spiritual Direction.

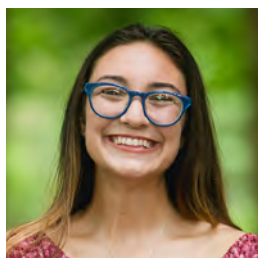
A writer, speaker, and formator, Joanna explores the intersections of spirituality, theology, organizing, and the historical Jesus. Her essays, reflections, and articles have appeared in a variety of Catholic and social justice publications, including Give Us This Day and the Center for Action and Contemplation. She has also preached three times for Catholic Women Preach – most recently for the 2026 Feast of St. Mary Magdalene.

2026 Christine Schenk Award for Young Catholic Leaders

Mollie Clark, AnnaMarie Pacione, and Lauryn Sweeney



Mollie Clark is a graduate of Fordham University, where she studied Theology and Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies with a concentration in American Catholic Studies. Mollie is particularly passionate about the academic study of feminist and queer theologies, advocacy for the ordination of people of all genders, and the implementation of inclusive, intersectional, and expansive liturgical practices. She will spend the next year as a Jesuit Volunteer with Catholic Charities' Nutritional Development Services agency in Philadelphia, PA.



AnnaMarie Pacione received her B.A. in Humanitarian Studies and Theology, including a concentration in American Catholic Studies from Fordham University this spring. During her summers she lived in community at St. Joseph's Catholic Worker in NYC and Annunciation House, a house of hospitality for refugees in El Paso, Texas. This fall, she began a year of service as a Jesuit Volunteer in Los Angeles, California as a Community Organizing Intern at UNITE HERE Local 11, which represents hospitality workers fighting for more just working and living conditions.



Lauryn Sweeney is a middle school Religion and History teacher at St. Anthony Catholic School in Robstown, Texas. She is an ACE Teaching Fellow at the University of Notre Dame, where she is pursuing a Master of Education while teaching. Her academic interests lie at the intersection of Catholic education, theology, and religious education curriculum, with particular attention to Catholic social teaching and gender in the classroom. Lauryn graduated from Fordham University with majors in International Political Economy and Theology and a concentration in American Catholic Studies.

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.

FutureChurch is filled with joy to present the 2026 Christine Schenk Award to Mollie Clark, AnnaMarie Pacione, and Lauryn Sweeney in recognition of their founding and stewardship of the "Catholic Women Speak" conference at Fordham University, which has reached over 250 individuals since 2024, and for ensuring its future by recruiting and forming the next generation of student leaders to carry the work forward.

Prayers

Night One - October 22, 2026

Opening Prayer

God of mercy and of justice,
we gather tonight from many places,
with many gifts, and many questions.

We carry the weight of a wounded world:
the suffering we cannot ignore,
the divisions that wear us down,
the violence and war that break our hearts,
and the cruelty and oppression
that diminish your children.

Awaken us to the lives of our neighbors.
Draw us close to their stories and their struggles.
Strengthen us in the courage that comes only
from you.

Bless our panelists, Daryl, Angela, Bishop John,
and Gabriel.

May their words and witness stir us, steady us,
and send us out.

As we listen, Spirit of God,
help us discern what is ours to do
and to remember that we do not do it alone.

Make us a people who do justice, love kindness,
and move humbly with you,
for the common good of all.

We ask this in the name of Jesus,
who came that all might have life. **Amen.**

FutureChurch Staff

Closing Prayer

May God bless you with discontent with easy
answers, half-truths, superficial relationships, so
that you will live from deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice,
oppression, abuse, and exploitation of people,
so that you will work for justice, equality, and
peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those
who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and
war, so that you will reach out your hand to
comfort them and to change their pain to joy.

May God bless you with the foolishness to think
you can make a difference in this world, so that
you will do the things which others tell you
cannot be done.

If you have the courage to accept these
blessings, then God will also bless you with:

happiness—because you will know that you
have made life better for others

inner peace—because you will have worked
to secure an outer peace for others

laughter—because your heart will be light

faithful friends—because they will recognize
your worth as a person.

These blessings are yours—not for the asking,
but for the giving—from One who wants to be
your companion, our God, who lives and reigns,
forever and ever. **Amen.**

Ruth Fox, OSB

Prayers

Night Two - October 27, 2026

Opening Prayer

We give you thanks, O God,
that in every generation
you raise up saints, prophets, and truth tellers.

They call us, as Church and as society,
to conversation and reconciliation,
to conversion and restoration.

You have given their witness and words power,
power to move us:

from self-interest to the common good,
from inequality to equal dignity,
from exclusion to belonging,
from despair to hope,
from fear to courage,
from death to new life.

Make us attentive to the challenges they pose
and the dreams they dare.

Help us discern what is ours to do,
the gifts we bring and the obstacles in our way.

And open our hearts and imaginations
to love a new Church, a new world, into being.

We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

FutureChurch Staff

Closing Prayer

God of all the saints,
we thank you for this night,
and for the great cloud of witnesses,
the famous and the forgotten,
those we have loved and those we never met:
those who carried this work before us,
those who carry it with us now,
and those who will carry it forward in the future.

You have made us one Body in Christ,
many members, many gifts, one Spirit.
Tonight you have shown us what
that Body can do when it is faithful, creative,
courageous, and bold in love.

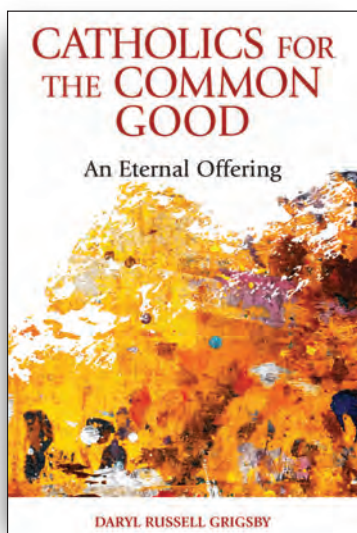
Keep alive in us the prophetic fire
you have kindled here.
Send us out with the stories we have heard
and the question we have carried:
What is ours to do?

Give us courage to answer it
in our parishes and faith communities,
our neighborhoods, and our public life.

Give us one another for the long work.
And make us people of the common good,
who cherish and defend
the dignity of every person
until your justice and peace reign
on earth as in heaven.

We ask this in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

FutureChurch Staff



216 pages 5 3/8 x 8
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In addition to authoring books, **Daryl Russell Grigsby, MA**, has published articles in the *National Catholic Reporter* and *Black Catholic Messenger*. Daryl is on the Board of Directors for Leadership Foundations, which resolves critical urban challenges around the world.

CATHOLICS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

An Eternal Offering

Daryl Russell Grigsby

Thirty-six portraits of contemporary Catholics show how they have lived the Eucharistic Prayer, "Lord, make of us an eternal offering to you," in their commitment to the common good and to human flourishing.

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"Daryl Grigsby has written an inspiring book about inspiring people. As you turn the pages, you will join that great procession of people who have lived their lives for others. Prepare to be blessed."

—**THOMAS P. BONACCI, CP**, The Interfaith Peace Project

"A second grader once described a saint as 'Someone the light shines through!' In Daryl Grigsby's engaging and inspiring portraits of contemporary men and women saints, the light does indeed shine through!"

—**JOANN HEINRITZ, CSJ**, spiritual director and presenter, the Renewal Program, Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University

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In its 35th year, FutureChurch continued to reimagine a more inclusive church

by Martha Ligas,
Director of Community Engagement

This year FutureChurch and I both turned 35. This significant milestone evoked deep, vocational questions in both my own heart and in the heart of our organization. What led us to this space of church reform? Whom do we serve? What more could we be doing to create a more inclusive church?

continues on next page...

For me, the answers to the first two questions came quickly. Buoyed by my justice-driven conviction that there is no place for bigotry within the church, I was led to the work of church reform after graduating with a Masters in Theology and Ministry. Learning more about the pain and the ostracization that far too many people have experienced in ecclesial spaces, I learned that the church has a long way to go to become the radically welcoming and forgiving community of kin-dom co-creators it first set out to be. To that end, in the last 10 years I have been inspired to serve those who find themselves on the margins of Church, whether by choice or by necessity.



Imagine my joy, then, in finding an organization with a mission and purpose that so parallels my own vocational call. I know that I am not the only one who shares this joy. FutureChurch has stoked the embers of many with a fiery passion for church reform by being a consistent and joyful presence in the movement. And by doing so, it has been helping me to actively live into that third discernment question of the moment: what more could we be doing to create a more inclusive church?

One of the reasons that I am so drawn to the work of FutureChurch is because this is a community that is not afraid to reimagine. The creative and courageous work of reimagining allows us to fully enter into the question of "what is ours to do" without fear of where that answer may lead us. There can be trepidation in trying something new and veering from the way that things have always been done. But here in this FutureChurch community, we are gently and persistently probed by the Spirit to discern how we can create

liturgical, theological, and pastoral Church spaces that are more inclusive, more welcoming, and even healing for those who have been hurt by clericalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, or the like. Jesus came to build the kin-dom, and we are called to co-create. How are we being invited to do so today?

In our 35th year, both FutureChurch and I are continuing to press on in this work in the hopes of creating communities of faith where all are welcome and all belong. To this end, this year we have leaned even further into the theme of reimagining. Through programs such as The Spirit Still Speaks: New Voices for Reform and Beyond the Blue Veil: Contemporary Marian Art and projects such as the Pentecost Project, we have gone forth earnestly to amplify and support individuals and communities who are choosing to embody the Church they long to see. Continue reading to learn more about each of these programs and projects, and how you can participate in future reimagining initiatives.

35th Anniversary Kickoff: Keeping the Questions Big

In September 2025, long-time friends and supporters gathered in Cleveland to launch FutureChurch's 35th Anniversary year. It was the first of several celebrations to celebrate the history and embrace the future of FutureChurch. Founding members, former board members, women religious, and enthusiastic supporters came together to honor the lasting impact FutureChurch has had.

Then Board Chair Marie Graf thanked those in the room who have been there since the very beginning. She lifted up our founding parishes, led by Fr. Louis Trivison and Sr. Christine Schenk, and supported by the Congregation of Saint Joseph, whose visionary leadership allowed Sr. Chris to become our first executive director. Current executive director Russ Petrus then traced our history from our early focus on the priest shortage to the expanding initiatives that have catalyzed systemic change. Olivia Hastie and I shared reflections on what it means to be Catholic as members of a younger generation, naming both

the challenge of committing to a flawed Church and the rewards of advocating for change.

Our keynote speaker, Tom Roberts of the *National Catholic Reporter*, challenged us to ask bigger questions. Roberts reminded us that the Church can change in big ways, and that we should resist reducing God to something that fits our own biases. He also found hope in small communities that revitalize institutions from the bottom up, naming the Pentecost Project as a shining example. His advice for our work was “don’t throw it all away... Expand on it.” Or, as he put it in his closing, “Let’s keep the questions big and let’s not stop asking them.”

The Spirit Still Speaks: New Voices for Reform

In Fall of 2025 FutureChurch hosted [a panel of young adult church reformers](#). Moderated by author Shannon Evans, the panel included contemporary monastic Katie Gordon, writer and advocate Maxwell Kuzma, educator and podcast host Medene J.R. Presley, and faith-based community organizer and immigration attorney Yunuen Trujillo. Together the four panelists shared stories and insights from their own ministries, each expressing their hopes for a more just and inclusive church.

Katie kicked off the program by sharing her interests in monasticism and the work she has done with Nuns and Nones. Referencing Matthew 9:17, she shined a light on the futility of pouring new wine into old wineskins. She used this metaphor to speak of “new wineskin Catholics,” or the idea that we are called to reimagine what communities of belonging look like today. Katie then passed the mic over to Maxwell, who spent some time reflecting on his journey as a trans Catholic. Maxwell discussed the role of personal discernment and intergenerational solidarity so that all may show up fully and unapologetically as their true, authentic selves. This “showing up,” he claimed, makes the church richer.

After Maxwell, Medene shared a bit about his conversion from the Afro-Pentecost tradition to Catholicism. In his sharing, Medene implored the church to reach out to communities it has hurt



From top left, clockwise: Katie Gordon, Medene Presley, Yunuen Trujillo, Shannon Evans, Maxwell Kuzma

and alienated, claiming that— more than simply documenting issues— the Church must move towards true reconciliation and healing. And last but not least, speaking from her perspective as a Latina and member of the LGBTQ+ community, Yunuen addressed the need for progressive Catholics to open their minds to intersectionality and inclusivity as a way to confront the pervasiveness of white Christian nationalism.

Together, each of the four panelists provided us with a hope-filled dream of a more just and inclusive church. Through their diverse lenses and ministries, each brought a unique perspective through their sharing, but one common strand of thought was consistent throughout: the Spirit is still very much alive, and She is urging us to join her in making all things new.



The Church as Field Hospital: An Evening in Anaheim, California

On February 19, about 50 FutureChurch members and supporters from around the country gathered in Anaheim, many of them in town for the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress, for an evening with Dr. Cecilia González-Andrieu, professor of Theology and Human Rights at Loyola Marymount University.

Drawing on Pope Francis' image of the Church as a field hospital, Cecilia invited us into a theological process to imagine how the Church might realign its priorities to stand with those who are suffering, especially migrants, asylum seekers, and immigrant families facing unprecedented danger and uncertainty. She brought along protest posters created by her students, offering a vivid reminder of the creativity and courage that can inspire our work moving forward. Table conversations and group sharing were woven throughout, allowing participants to share hopes and practical commitments for accompanying and advocating alongside the most vulnerable.

The evening closed with a powerful prayer service during which salt was used to melt ice. The ice represented oppression, resistance to change, and hardness of heart, and watching it give way to the salt offered a hopeful image of what is possible when we act together.

Each participant went home with a small sachet of salt, a reminder that we are the salt of the earth and of the active role we are called to play in the world.

Beyond the Blue Veil: Contemporary Marian Art

In May of this year [FutureChurch celebrated the month of Mary, the Mother of God](#), by inviting our community to reimagine how we see her. Our guides on this journey were two young artists—Gracie Morbitzer of The Modern Saints and Dani M. Jiménez of And Her Saints. Both Gracie and Dani use their creative gifts to depict religious figures in new and contemporary ways—breaking open old ideas and typecasts in order to reimagine something different.



Gracie Morbitzer with one image of Mary from the Modern Saints project.

From her simple studio in Columbus, OH, Gracie has painted hundreds of images of the saints of old— but in bold and new ways. Her hope is to create religious art that mirrors real people—people with different skin tones and expressions. She portrays the saints in a 21st century style in order to make them relatable to us here and now. During the program, Gracie shared a dozen different images she has painted of Mary— each one depicting Mary as different races and with differing qualities, highlighting the various ways that diverse people relate to the Mother of God.

After we heard from Gracie, the mic was passed to Dani M. Jiménez, a young artist based in San José, Costa Rica. In a similar way, Dani felt called to create religious images that highlight diversity, and to make art both for God and for those who feel abandoned by God. To that end, her work is relatable and diverse. Like Gracie, Dani shared images of Mary that she has created that break free from stereotypes and pre-conceived notions.



Dani M. Jiménez with one image of Mary from the And Her Saints project.

Together, Gracie and Dani shared their processes and their art, and in doing so inspired each of us to reimagine, reconsider, or build upon the images of Mary that we had held prior. If you are interested in viewing more of Gracie and Dani's work, you can visit <https://www.themodernsaints.com/> and/or <https://andhersaints.com/>.

The Pentecost Project

FutureChurch began building the [Pentecost Project](#) in May 2024 as a way to amplify and celebrate creative ways that communities are choosing to live their Gospel values. From intentional living communities, to independent worship spaces, to organizations that are re-envisioning what it means to serve, these trailblazing communities featured in the Project serve as witnesses to the creative and persistent work of the Spirit among us. They are not afraid to reimagine how best to be Church, and their bold witness has much to teach us all about faithful Gospel living. This year the following five communities were added to the Project, bringing it to a total of 19 communities: Dorothea Project, Wheaton Franciscans Invitational Church Circle, Spirit of Grace Community, Brownsburg Inclusive Catholic Community, and Friends of St. Brigid at Old St. Patrick's Church.

As the Pentecost Project continues to flourish, FutureChurch hopes to find new ways to both learn from and support these communities of faith. If you belong to or are aware of a community that would be a great feature, please don't hesitate to reach out and share the good news!



Awake to the Spirit:

Celebrating 10 Years of Catholic Women Preach

The story of Catholic Women Preach begins with two groups of faith-filled people, working separately, who were each asking the same questions: why were women's voices so rarely heard from the pulpit and what to do about it?

continues on next page...

In 2011, Betty Anne Donnelly was serving on the Women's Advisory Committee of the Woodstock Theological Center in Washington, DC. The committee's members, lay women and men, vowed religious, and priests, believed that the silence of women's voices was impoverishing the whole Church. Their response was to film Betty Anne and three other women preaching on the Sunday readings of Advent in the Copley Crypt Chapel at Georgetown University. Two years later, on a sleepless night in 2013, Betty Anne wondered what it would look like to scale it up: a website where gifted Catholic women from around the world preached on the readings for every Sunday and many feast days.

Meanwhile, FutureChurch was moving in the same direction. Since 2001, many of our Mary Magdalene Celebrations had included "Unheard Homilies," a space for women to reflect publicly on the Word of God at a time when lay preaching, though permitted under Canon Law, was being stifled in much of the Church. When we posted those homilies online, the response encouraged our board to consider building a full online platform for women's preaching.

In 2015, then FutureChurch executive director Deborah Rose met Betty Anne, and the two efforts became one. A steering committee of Jocelyn Collen, Sr. Diana Culbertson, OP, and Rita Houlihan, joined Deborah and Betty Anne, and guided the development of the platform. Russ Petrus, program director at the time, helped bring it to life with his web development skills. After a year of work, Catholic Women Preach launched on All Saints Day in November 2016 with preaching for Advent.

Ten years later, the numbers still astonish us. Since launch, 480 women have preached 616 reflections. Our website has been viewed more than 2.55 million times. Our videos have drawn more than 765,000 views and over 3.6 million minutes of people experiencing Catholic women preach. Our podcast has passed 189,000 downloads. And 60% of our nearly 3,000 Instagram followers are under 45, which tells us that younger Catholics are hungry for these voices.

But numbers are only part of the story. As the platform has grown, we have asked whose voices are still missing, and we have made room for

them on purpose. Every year since 2021, we have centered Women of Color throughout [Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Sunday](#), the holiest time of the Church year. Through our partnership with Boston College's Clough School of Theology and Ministry, those reflections have become the basis of a Lenten continuing education course, carrying the preaching of Women of Color into the work of forming ministers and lay leaders. In [June 2025](#), we celebrated Pride Month for the first time by centering LGBTQ+ women and the response was so positive that we did it again in [2026](#). During Advent 2025, in solidarity with our immigrant siblings, [we featured Latina women, migrant women, and women who accompany migrants](#), many preaching in both English and Spanish. We also wrote to every U.S. bishop to thank them for their pastoral message on immigration and to urge them to keep speaking boldly in defense of human dignity.

These sermons were never meant to stay on a screen. Our three-volume series with Orbis Books, *Catholic Women Preach: Raising Voices, Renewing the Church*, carries our preachers into classrooms, parishes, prayer groups, and women's groups. All three volumes have been recognized by professional associations, and the second volume, Year B, won First Place in Books on Liturgy from the Catholic Media Association.

Behind all of it stand the many people who have made Catholic Women Preach possible: our distinguished advisory board, our supporters, and the hundreds of women who answered the call to preach.

We mark our tenth anniversary on November 1, the feast of All Saints and the very anniversary of the website's launch, with a Virtual All Saints Day Preaching Slam. **Kayla August, Ann Garrido, Cecilia González-Andrieu, and Kerry Alys Robinson** will preach within a Liturgy of the Word, each lifting up a woman saint of her choosing. It feels right that a movement built on the courage of women should celebrate with a communion of saints of women, and we hope you will join us.



For more information and to register the All Saints Day Preaching Slam visit <https://futurechurch.org/cwp-all-saints>

An Advent Wake-Up Call

Catholic Women Preach Advent-Christmas Series on Migration



CARMEN RAMOS

December 7, 2025 | Second Sunday of Advent

Last Advent, Catholic Women Preach centered the voices of Latina women, migrant women, and women who minister to and advocate for migrants, inviting them to preach on the Sunday and feast day readings. Migrant families across the country were living in fear, the US bishops had issued a special message on immigration, and Pope Leo XIV was defending the dignity of migrants. We welcomed those words. But statements alone are never enough. Words must be carried forward through action, ministry, advocacy, and the telling of migrants' stories, and that last piece is where we believed Catholic Women Preach could help.

The series opened on the First Sunday of Advent with **Angélica Nohemi Quiñónez**, director of University Ministry at the University of San Francisco. Reading Isaiah's vision of nations streaming toward God as a political, social, and spiritual transformation, she said, Advent does not ask "Are you comfortable?" but "Are you awake?"

Carmen Ramos, director of Renovación at Marian University in Indianapolis, followed on the Second Sunday of Advent. Beginning by tracing her own family tree, she then turned to Isaiah's stump

of Jesse. That lineage includes the immigrant Ruth. And while the tree has been "cut off" by criminalization and deportation, its divine root cannot be severed. "Even as we lament, we organize hope," she preached.

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, **Yolanda Chávez** preached from her experience as a migrant woman working with other migrant women in Los Angeles. In those women she saw "many Marys," whose "yes"es in the face of so many "no"s are strength and faith, and whose courage "became theology" for her.

For the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, **Dr. Nichole M. Flores**, director of the Catholic studies program at the University of Virginia, offered a poem-reflection built on the refrain: *She is everywhere*. Guadalupe hangs from a rearview mirror, stands beside the altar, and appears at gas stations, borders, and detention centers, proclaiming that the Word is made flesh.

On Gaudete Sunday, **Carmen Nanko-Fernández**, professor of Hispanic theology and ministry at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, recalled

"Heed your dreams, like Joseph did. Be a prophetic dreamer. Trust the vision God plants in you, and dare to act on it, with courage, tenderness, and fire."

Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez

interpreting for Stevie Wonder at a "Housing Now!" rally. He asked her how to sign "I love you," then signed it to a group of Deaf students from Gallaudet University. In the joy that followed, she glimpsed the in-breaking of God's reign. "Barriers to communication fell, obstacles to relationships collapsed," she said.

Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez, co-founder and director of training and formation at the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership, preached for the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Noting that God uses dreams to alter history, she asked us to imagine what might have happened had Joseph not heeded his dream, and connected this to immigrant families whose dreams are being cut short today. She described Chicago Catholics who dreamed an action into reality with a Eucharistic procession and a People's Mass outside a detention center, and urged us to "heed your dreams."

On Christmas Day, **Cecilia González-Andrieu**, professor of theology and human rights at Loyola Marymount University, asked what it means to have Christian faith. People who say they have left the Church, she observed, are often expressing care. The answer comes from the attending to the most vulnerable, who still trust that God "restores" and "redeems," and from a God who dwells most perfectly in those who need us. "Where are our mangers?" she asked. "To go to them, protect them, accompany them is to give our Christian faith meaning and to make our God present," she concluded.

On November 21, FutureChurch sent a letter to every US bishop inviting them to listen to these women, to share their preaching with priests and pastoral leaders, and to keep raising their voices for migrants. The series also drew attention in Catholic press as a practical answer to the Synod's question of how liturgical preaching might be reimagined in a "synodal key."

Hearing from these women who know what it means to long, to hope, and to keep moving forward in faith helps us live Advent and Christmas in new and real ways. As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of Catholic Women Preach, we are grateful that their voices are among those that are calling the Church to radical solidarity with the most vulnerable in our midst.



View the whole series on the CWP YouTube Page by **clicking here**.

Proclaiming Resurrection Hope in a Wounded World:

Chicago Preaching Slam Celebrating Mary Magdalene



On April 26, 2026, about 65 people gathered at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago for a preaching slam celebrating Mary Magdalene, part of FutureChurch's 35th Anniversary celebration. We came to hear four women preach on the Easter Gospel and to be sent, as Mary was, to proclaim resurrection in a world that often feels heavy with violence, division, and uncertainty.

The day was a natural way to celebrate the anniversary. For decades, FutureChurch has worked to reclaim Mary Magdalene as "Apostle to the Apostles," the first witness and preacher of the Resurrection.

After a word of welcome, thanks to our CTU hosts, and an opening song, FutureChurch's Executive Director Russ Petrus handed the gathering over to our presider, **Tiffany Swann-Covington**. Tiffany is a leader at Our Lady of Africa parish, an events fellow with the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership, and junior class chaplain and sacristan at St. Ignatius High School. Three times in her opening remarks, she raised her hand, and the room answered together: "We have seen the Lord." By the time the preaching began, we were no longer an audience. We were a community of witnesses.

Krista Chinchilla-Patzke, Pastoral Ministry Associate at Old St. Patrick's Church, where she works with the liturgy team, baptism ministry, and immigrant and refugee ministry, drew on the stories of the families she accompanies. She walked through the shocking requests that arrive at her door: help with groceries because ICE is in the neighborhood, support while a work authorization renewal drags on for nearly a year. Mary's grief at the tomb, she suggested, is the grief of those who see Jesus crucified again in the suffering of migrants. Her challenge: "When we witness the suffering of the innocent, let us turn our shock into action."

Pau Delgadillo, a 2025 graduate of CTU with a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies and founder of Pau's Lighthouse, which offers services related to social justice and ministry work, lingered on Mary's weeping outside the tomb. Drawing on an Ignatian language of desolation and consolation, Pau described how loss narrows our vision until immigration becomes a policy debate and the climate crisis becomes a set of numbers. Mary's recognition, when Jesus calls her name, doesn't erase grief. It restores relationship. Resurrection happens, Pau said, "not in the absence of grief, but in the refusal to let grief have the final word."

"You can be overlooked and still chosen.

You can be dismissed and still commissioned.

You can be misnamed and still carry the truth."

C. Vanessa White, D.Min.

Kimberly Lymore, D.Min., Pastoral Associate at The Faith Community of St. Sabina, Convener of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, and Director of the Augustus Tolton Pastoral Ministry Program at CTU, compared the distortion of Mary Magdalene's story to a game of broken telephone. A strong disciple and first witness of the resurrection became, over centuries, a woman in need of repentance. Yet God chose her. Kimberly named what we learn from Mary: God knows us by name, and we must stay close to Jesus even when we cannot trace God's plan. Then she issued a challenge to women's organizations: stop defaulting to a priest or deacon for your retreats and days of reflection. "Get a woman. There are plenty out there willing to tell their story."

C. Vanessa White, D.Min., Associate Professor of Spirituality and Ministry at CTU and Director of the Certificate in Black Theology and Ministry, borrowed from the freedom song "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around" to paint Mary as the apostle to the apostles: healed, a financial supporter of Jesus' ministry, present at the cross, commissioned to proclaim, and then defamed. Her words were a gift to anyone who has been dismissed: "You can be overlooked and still chosen. You can be dismissed and still commissioned. You can be misnamed and still carry the truth."

The afternoon also included a migrant ministry highlight from Celine Woznica and Margaret Rudnik, who invited us to imagine how we might live out the call to justice and compassion in our own communities.

At their tables, participants shared what stayed with them, where they had glimpsed hope, and what it might mean to be a preacher of the resurrection that week, in their own context. That question is the heart of what Catholic Women Preach and FutureChurch hope to nurture. Mary Magdalene did not wait for permission, and she did not have all the answers. She told what she had seen.

We are grateful to Catholic Theological Union, the Bernardin Center, and especially Steven Millies and Peter Cunningham for their hospitality, and to every preacher, minister, and participant who helped make this beautiful experience happen.



View a video of the Chicago Preaching Slam
<https://futurechurch.org/chicago-preaching-slam>

Martha, Mary, and Welcoming Christ:

A Boston Preaching Slam



On Sunday, September 20, we kicked off our celebration of ten years of Catholic Women Preach with a dynamic preaching slam at St. Joseph Spiritual Ministries in the Boston area. **Calista Robledo, Kelly Meraw, Crista Carrick Mahoney, and Lynn Cooper** offered thoughtful homilies on the Gospel story of Martha and Mary, inviting us to encounter these familiar women with fresh eyes.

Together, they urged us to move beyond the binary of “be like Mary and less like Martha” and to recognize something of ourselves in both sisters. They invited us into stillness and encouraged us to find joy in the hustle and bustle of getting things done. They called us to embrace the courage to slay dragons, to feel empowered to cry out, “Do you not see me, Jesus?” and to rest in the peace of God calling us by name. Each preacher left us with questions to ponder about how God knows us, loves us, understands us, and meets us where we are. Hearing four women reflect on the same Gospel reminded us how much we gain when we make room for more voices.

In addition to this Spirit-filled preaching, **Julia D’Agostino** led a prayer service centered on recognizing the value of each of our voices. Gathered in the crowded, cozy chapel, we were invited to affirm one another as preachers and teachers, each with something meaningful to offer. It was an invitation to consider where we, too, might be called to speak: in our communities,

in our relationships, and in the everyday work of living our faith.

Dr. Catherine Mooney proclaimed a litany of women: saints, prophets, teachers, ministers, and activists. It was one of the most compelling moments of our gathering. Cathy’s expertise and passion helped us appreciate the courage of women who speak truth to power in our Church and world. Their witness reminds us that the women preaching today belong to a long history of faithful, courageous women whose voices have shaped our tradition. FutureChurch intern **Laura d’Herete** and **Dunstan Rodriguez, SJ** (both in their second year at the Clough School of Theology and Ministry) led us in music, filling the chapel from floor to rafters with our shared affirmation: all are welcome, and all voices matter.

We concluded with wine, cheese, and time to socialize. And perhaps most importantly, our celebration left us feeling like friends. There was something deeply hopeful about beginning this anniversary celebration together, listening closely to one another and finding connection in our shared faith. Our Boston celebration invited us to imagine how much more is possible when women’s voices are heard, trusted, celebrated, and prioritized.



To read preaching texts, visit
<https://futurechurch.org/boston-preaching-slam/>



CATHOLIC
WOMENPREACH

www.catholicwomenpreach.org



All Saints Day Virtual Preaching Slam

Celebrating 10 Silence-Shattering Years

with:

Kayla August, Ann Garrido,
Cecilia González-Andrieu,
and Kerry Alys Robinson

Sunday, November 1, 2026

7:00pm ET | via Zoom



Scan QR Code

or visit <https://futurechurch.org/cwp-all-saints>
for more details and registration

FREE! Donations welcome!



Easter Joy as Resistance

Celebrating the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb in the dark. She doesn't arrive transformed. She arrives weeping, disoriented, and searching. That detail shaped the way we gathered on July 22, her feast day, to celebrate our patron saint.

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For decades, [FutureChurch has worked to reclaim Mary Magdalene](#), not as the penitent sinner of centuries of slander, but as *Apostola Apostolorum*, the first witness to the Risen Christ and the first to proclaim the good news of Resurrection. [Each year we create a prayer service](#) for her feast and offer it freely, and each year we are grateful that communities around the globe use our resources to gather in her name.

The 2026 theme, [Easter Joy as Resistance](#), felt especially urgent now in a moment of fear, division, violence, and silenced voices - not only in the United States, but all around the world.

The FutureChurch community in Northeast Ohio packed the chapel of the Congregation of Saint Joseph in Cleveland, with many more around the globe joining by livestream.

We began the way Mary did, with grief. Before any song, co-presiders Martha Ligas and Lisa Frey led us in a Litany of Lament, naming the violence that wounds our world, the divisions that fracture our communities, the systems that deny dignity and belonging, the silencing of voices, and the exhaustion of those who labor for justice. After each, we answered, "We bring this to the tomb and to our God." We did not rush past the darkness.

Only then did the music begin. A volunteer choir organized by Victoria McBride helped lead us in joyful song, as flowers and greenery, candles, a vessel of oil, and an icon of Mary Magdalene were processed to the altar.

The Liturgy of the Word opened with Isaiah 61, the passage Jesus claims in Luke's Gospel, which promises good news to the poor and the oil of gladness in place of tears. Then came four voices on joy from people often told it is not theirs to claim: a Latina immigrant journalist on migrant joy, a Catholic trans woman on Christ's love and acceptance, a Smithsonian reflection on Black joy as survival and defiance, and an Episcopal priest asking what joy is for in a frightening world. Each described joy not as escape or denial, but as a refusal to disappear. After each reading, additional symbols representing each community were brought forward and placed on our expanding altar.

Then we heard John 20:1-18, the full Resurrection account - and, importantly, Mary's name spoken in the garden.

Our guest preacher, Dr. Nontando Hadebe, an internationally esteemed feminist theologian, traveled from South Africa to be with us, and she left us with many important insights. Two deserve special mention.



The first was about joy. The testimonies we had just heard came from people whose humanity is too often dismissed, people for whom joy would seem impossible, and yet they had found it in Christ. That joy, she said, is the contradiction to the news that surrounds us, a sign that what we see is not the end. At the cross it looked like the end, too, but we are a resurrection people, and life, not death, has the final word.

The second was about Mary Magdalene herself. For nearly two thousand years her story has been manipulated and her name slandered. Yet, our remedy carries a risk as well: raising her so high that she seems unreachable to, say, a mother worried about her toddler. Dr. Hadebe credited years of FutureChurch's annual themes with keeping Mary relatable, so that every woman can see herself in Mary's story. Mary Magdalene is one of us, she said,



inviting each of us to tell our own story of meeting the living Christ.

We then entered a ritual of anointing with oil, as each person heard, “You are called by name. Let your joy be resistance.” A call and response followed, in which we raised our fists and named Black joy, queer joy, women’s joy, migrant joy, and the joy of the earth as resistance. The sending forth carried the same charge. Mary was entrusted and sent, and so are we. “Do not wait to be authorized,” we heard. “The Risen Christ has already called your name.”

After the closing song, we stayed for something new: the unveiling of the Spirit of Pentecost Award. Board Chair Victoria McBride explained that the Board of Trustees established it for our 35th anniversary to honor a long-term, mutual partnership that has sustained our mission. It will be given only occasionally, when the Board discerns a relationship that has borne lasting fruit.

The first recipients were easy to name: Sisters Jeanne Cmolik, Kathy Thomas, and Marie Gillich, the leadership team of the Congregation of St. Joseph at our founding, who offered generous support, trust, and wisdom when FutureChurch

was little more than a bold idea. Our founding executive director, Sister Christine Schenk, CSJ, shared a story from those early days, and Vickey presented an original painting by Nancy Cote to the Congregation of St. Joseph in gratitude, a sign of the Spirit’s movement in our shared work.

It was fitting that on the night we honored a woman who was sent, we also honored the women who helped send us.



To view the recording of this celebration, visit:

<https://futurechurch.org/2026-mary-magdalene-celebration/>

The Time is Now:

Letting Mary Magdalene Preach the Resurrection on Easter Sunday

Every Easter Sunday, Catholic churches overflow. Faithful regulars and once-a-year visitors crowd the pews to hear the heart of our faith proclaimed: Christ is risen. Yet in most parishes, the Gospel stops just before the Risen Christ appears.

The Lectionary assigns John 20:1–9 for Easter Sunday: the empty tomb, the two disciples racing to it, the burial cloths left behind. The reading ends there. The nine verses that follow are left out. In them, Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by name, entrusts her with the news of his Resurrection, and sends her to tell the others. Those verses are read on Easter Tuesday, when most pews sit empty. So the overwhelming majority of Catholics never hear the first words spoken by the Risen Christ, or the first person he sent to proclaim them.

This past Easter, as we have every Easter, FutureChurch set out to change that. But this time, we had the final document of the Synod on Synodality on our side.



From Rome to the Parish

In October 2024, during the final session of the Synod on Synodality, [FutureChurch staff and volunteers visited the Dicastery for Divine Worship](#). There they delivered nearly 5,000 signatures asking that Mary Magdalene's full story be told on Easter Sunday. The official who received them could hardly believe the passage was omitted at all. Because it is read later in Easter week, he had assumed it was part of the Easter Sunday Gospel.

Weeks later, the [Synod's Final Document named Mary Magdalene explicitly](#). Paragraph 60 states: "One woman, Mary Magdalene, was entrusted with the first proclamation of the Resurrection... It is important that the Scripture passages that relate these stories find adequate space inside liturgical lectionaries."

The Synod didn't say what "adequate space" should look like. FutureChurch saw an invitation. What better place to begin than Easter Sunday morning, and what simpler way than reading nine more verses? As FutureChurch's Martha Ligas put it, this "doesn't change the story. It expands the story."

Equipping the People of God

Through [The Time Is Now](#), FutureChurch invited Catholics to ask their pastors and pastoral leaders to proclaim all of John 20:1–18 on Easter Sunday. This would put the Synod into practice in their own parishes. To support them, FutureChurch created a free resource, [Let Mary Magdalene Preach the Resurrection](#). It includes:

- practical and theological reasons to read the full Gospel
- tips for approaching a pastor
- a sample letter
- thoughtful responses to common concerns ("It will make Mass too long." It adds about two minutes.)
- alternatives for parishes not yet ready to make the change
- the Gospel formatted for proclamation
- a Mary Magdalene fact sheet, Catholic Women Preach homilies, and suggestions for further reading

The resource also noted that the Church has already done this. In 1992, Rome approved an expanded Lectionary for Canada that includes all of John 20:1–18 on Easter Sunday.



Martha Ligas and Olivia Hastie led a launch call to send advocates out with courage. Olivia arrived a few minutes late, coming straight from her own parish council meeting, where she had just raised the project.

Longtime advocate Rita Houlihan shared what she had learned from years of making this request in her own parish. She offered participants a striking reframe: when we cut these verses, we silence not only Mary Magdalene but the Risen Jesus himself. Easter Sunday is the one day above all others when the Church should hear him speak.

Many Voices, One Proclamation

To bring the Gospel to life, FutureChurch released a series of videos during the final weeks of Lent. In them, women from around the world proclaimed the omitted verses, John 20:10–18, in their own languages. On Holy Saturday, FutureChurch released [a composite video, edited by our friend Maxwell Kuzma, weaving these voices into a single multilingual proclamation of the full Resurrection account](#). It was a vivid reminder that Mary Magdalene’s witness belongs to the whole Church, in every language and every place.

Easter Morning

About 200 people downloaded the resource and joined the launch call. After Easter, reports began coming in about parishes and communities

proclaiming the full Gospel account for the first time.

At Saint Joan of Arc in Minneapolis, the community not only heard the full account for the first time but also heard Dr. Cynthia Bailey Manns join her pastor in proclaiming the Gospel and preaching on Easter Sunday. Dr. Bailey Manns was a delegate to the Synod on Synodality and received FutureChurch’s 2025 Louis Trivison Award.

Participants told us what it meant to them:

“Suddenly Mary Magdalene took her rightful place in the Church’s Easter morning celebration. It felt like she was standing next to [the pastor] smiling and nodding as he read about her encounter with the risen Lord. It was like she just stepped out of obscurity into daylight. Finally!”

“I cannot imagine going back to reading the shortened version ever again.”

The Time Is Still Now

FutureChurch will take up The Time Is Now again for Easter 2027. Will your parish be next? Join us in 2027 and start the conversation with your pastor early. Like Mary Magdalene, we have seen the Lord, and we cannot keep it to ourselves.



Art: Detail "Mary Magdalene Proclaims Resurrection." © 2021, Laura James for Rita L. Houlihan/FutureChurch.

FutureChurch's Mary Magdalene Circle

Build a Legacy. Advance Justice. Ensure the Future.

The Mary Magdalene Circle was established to honor and recognize individuals who include FutureChurch in their estate plans. Inspired by Mary Magdalene — the first witness to the Resurrection and a steadfast proclaimer of the Good News — members of this circle share a ***bold commitment to a Church that is fully alive with the gifts, voices, and vocations of all its members.***

By making a planned gift—whether through a bequest, life insurance policy, charitable trust, donor-advised fund, or appreciated securities—***you create a meaningful and enduring legacy.*** Your generosity provides essential support to FutureChurch's long-term sustainability, enabling us to build our endowment and ***continue our shared mission and transformative programs for generations to come.***

A planned gift to FutureChurch is more than a financial decision—it's ***a powerful statement of your values.*** It ensures your passion for justice, equality, and a fully inclusive Church continues to make an impact well beyond your lifetime. In some cases, planned gifts may also offer tax advantages, providing benefits for you and your loved ones today while investing in the Church of tomorrow.

Will you join us? By becoming a member of the Mary Magdalene Circle, you become a visionary—someone whose legacy will ***echo the bold, enduring witness of Mary Magdalene herself!*** ***Sample bequest language and legal information is available upon request.*** Contact Russ Petrus, executive director, by email at russ@futurechurch.org or by phone at 216-228-0869 x2.



Contact:

Russ Petrus, Executive Director
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Advent 2025 Liturgies Awaken to the Cosmic Christ

Our Sunday-night community discovers Christ born in all and through all

When the Covid-19 pandemic closed church doors in 2020, the FutureChurch community found a new way to pray together. What began as a response to lockdowns has become a lasting part of our life: on most Sunday evenings at 7pm, people from across the country and around the world gather on Zoom for an Online Liturgy of the Word and Faith Sharing.

The liturgies are coordinated by Ariell Watson Simon and led by lay members of our community. Each week, we pray together, listen to the Sunday readings, and watch a reflection from Catholic Women Preach. Then we move into small breakout groups to talk about how the Word is speaking to our lives. For many participants, these conversations have become a place of real companionship. It is a place where women's voices are heard proclaiming the Gospel, and where every person's insight is welcomed.

In Advent 2025, the online liturgies invited participants into the mystery of the Cosmic, or Universal, Christ. Drawing on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Ilia Delio, and Richard Rohr, the series explored how the Christ present from the beginning of creation continues to be revealed in our evolving universe and in each of us.

The series opened on the Solemnity of Christ the King, which we celebrated as "Christ of the Universe." Ariell reminded us that the feast was instituted a century ago, in 1925, amid rising nationalism and fascism, to recall that Christ leads not from a throne but from within, as the animating force of all that is. Advent, she suggested, is not only about remembering or waiting, but about awakening.

Over the following weeks, members of our community each led us in prayer and shared how the Cosmic Christ shapes their spirituality:

Rosemary Marusak, a chemist, described how Teilhard helped her find God in atoms and in all things. **Carrie Roach** reflected on transformation and the joy of embracing change. **Pat Pickett** led us in Visio Divina using a painting by a child in her ministry with neurodiverse children, accompanied

by harp music from community member **Sonja Grace**. The next week, Sonja invited us to ask where the Cosmic Christ is being born today. Her answers ranged from mothers giving birth in the tents of Gaza to people living on the streets of our cities.

Original opening prayers, written for each Sunday, wove these themes into our worship. The remarks and prayers from the series are available at futurechurch.org/advent-2025-cosmic-christ.

All are welcome to join us on Sunday nights. Come pray, listen, and share. Together we discover again that Christ is born in all and through all.

*The incarnation is not only
the birth of one baby one
time in Bethlehem. Christ is
born in all, and through all.
Our Advent journey is not
simply about remembering,
not simply about waiting. It
is about awakening! Waking
up to the presence of Christ
in our midst, and clearing the
path for Christ's presence
to grow among us, until it
reaches its fullness in God's
kin-dom of peace and justice.*

Ariell Watson Simon



Join us on Sunday Nights!
<https://futurechurch.org/online-liturgy>

Praying with “The Shepherd Within”:

A Three-Part Journey Through Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection



During the 2025–2026 liturgical year, FutureChurch welcomed Father Anne to lead three evenings of prayer drawn from her book, *The Shepherd Within*. Her book explores the hidden spiritual principles that govern life. It looks at how institutions often obstruct the ways God wants to move through us, and how God responds by bringing forth fullness of life anyway. Over Advent, Lent, and Easter, Father Anne invited participants to pray with those principles rather than simply learn about them.

Each evening followed the same rhythm: three movements, pairing a short reflection from Father Anne with ten minutes of guided silent personal prayer. “This is your time to be with God,” she reminded participants. “You don’t have to perform or strive or earn anything.”

Night One (Advent 2025): The Incarnation Principle

The series opened with Father Anne’s bedrock idea. At the core of God’s nature is a drive to incarnate, to become “perceptible, encounterable, receivable” in the material world. Jesus reveals not only God but also humanity: when we are in alignment with God, we too become pathways for God’s presence. This is what she calls the “Jesus principle,” the shepherd within. Participants reflected on their own core gifts. Father Anne described these gifts not as objects God handed over but as God’s own Spirit flowing through them into the world.

Night Two (Lent 2026): The Crucifixion Principle

“In Advent, God ministered to us,” Father Anne said. “Tonight, we minister to God.” Lent turned toward

the cost of humanity’s obstruction. Put simply, the crucifixion is human resistance to the incarnation. That resistance is especially visible in powerful institutions whose policies act like dams against the river of God’s Spirit. Father Anne named its victims, from cobalt miners in the Democratic Republic of Congo to immigrants in detention. She insisted that their anguish is not something God watches from afar; it is God’s own anguish. “God does not crucify. God is crucified.” Participants were invited to sit with God in that grief and listen for new invitations.

Night Three (Easter 2026): The Resurrection Principle

The series closed with good news: no human power can permanently stop God’s inbreaking. The resurrection reveals “the unstoppable of the incarnation.” Father Anne described two ways God overcomes obstruction. The first is the navigational path, where the Spirit flows around barriers, as in Minneapolis neighbors who delivered food to families hiding from ICE. The second is the path of disruption, where people take up the cross of Christ to dismantle the source of crucifixion itself. She pointed to independent journalists and justice movements as examples. Each of us, she said, is invited into the sacred and collective work of overcoming.

Pray the Series Yourself

The retreat remains open to everyone. Videos of all three sessions are available at futurechurch.org/shepherd-within-series, along with reflection guides for each movement. The sessions can be prayed back-to-back or at whatever pace suits you, regardless of the liturgical season. While the book isn’t required, we highly recommend it as a companion that will deepen your reflection. You can learn more and order *The Shepherd Within* at shepherdwithin.com.

As Father Anne put it in closing: “When we feel tempted to despair, let us remember to grow still and turn to the shepherd within.”

Cultivating Resilience in 2026:

Drinking from Wisdom Wells of Our Neighbors' Traditions



As part of FutureChurch's 2026 Lenten programming, we welcomed Lynn Cooper for ["Cultivating Resilience in 2026: Drinking from Wisdom Wells of Our Neighbors' Traditions."](#) In the face of violence, injustice, and uncertainty, Lynn invited us to consider the spiritual practices that help us remain grounded and engaged. Her reflections encouraged us to ask what sustains our commitment to a more just world, and what we might discover by listening closely to the wisdom of our neighbors. The opening prayer gave voice to the connection between our spiritual lives and our work for justice. "This Lent, we fast not to shrink but to awaken," we prayed, asking God to nurture our activist spirit and help us become "brave enough to love the world into change." These words offered a starting point for reflecting on the inner life that sustains our outward commitments.

Lynn brought to this conversation her experience as Associate Director of the University Chaplaincy and Catholic Chaplain at Tufts University, where interfaith friendship is central to her ministry. Her work with students, faculty, and staff, along with her book, [*Embracing Our Time: The Sacrament of Interfaith Friendship*](#), reflects a commitment to learning through relationships across religious traditions.

Throughout her talk, Lynn drew together the diary of Etty Hillesum, a Jewish woman documenting life under Nazi occupation; poems from early Buddhist women; and a contemporary devotional rooted in resistance theology. These distinct voices opened possibilities for thinking about suffering, freedom, and the practices that help us remain attentive to life. Listening across traditions invites us to approach our neighbors with humility and curiosity, recognizing that their stories and spiritual insights have something meaningful to teach us.

Through these sources, Lynn explored the power of inner life, storytelling, and attentiveness as practices of resistance. She encouraged us to notice beauty and joy even amid suffering, and to consider how those moments help sustain our capacity to act. Lynn also invited us to understand our own lives as "sacred texts." This offered an opportunity to consider how our experiences, relationships, and memories might become sources of wisdom. We might ask: What do our stories reveal about what we love? Where have we encountered hope? What helps us remain open to the world when its suffering feels overwhelming? Such reflection can help us recognize the resources already present in our lives and the places where we need support.

Lessons from the Catholic(ish) Queer Community

Pride Panel Reflects on Living One's Truth



James Reding moderates the panel.

For Pride Month 2026, FutureChurch welcomed a panel of LGBTQ+ Catholic(ish) voices for ["Living Your Truth: Lessons from the Catholic\(ish\) Queer Community."](#) Together, our panelists reflected on faith, identity, and belonging, sharing what it means to live authentically as queer and Catholic in 2026. Their stories invited us to consider how church spaces can become a place where LGBTQ+ people experience welcome, build community, and share the gifts of their lives.

The term "Catholic(ish)" was an intentional part of this invitation. Each person has a distinct relationship with Catholicism and the institution, shaped by their own experiences, convictions, and communities. Making room for that complexity allows us to honor the many ways people remain connected to, wrestle with, or step away from the Church. It also asks us to listen without deciding in advance what someone else's faith or belonging should look like. James Reding, co-host of [God Talk with Medene and James](#), moderated a conversation featuring Emma Cieslik, founder of the [Queer and Catholic Oral History Project](#); Ellen Euclid, a leader in the [Northeast Ohio Dignity Chapter](#); and Mark Guevarra, co-editor of [Cornerstones: Sacred Stories of LGBTQ+ Employees in Catholic Institutions](#). They were joined by Kathryn Muensterman, a PhD student in Systematic Theology at the University of Notre Dame, and Michael Sennett, a trans Catholic man and pastoral ministry student at Fordham University.

Drawing on their experiences, our panelists explored what coming out means today and how queer and liberation theology can help us imagine a more just Church. Their reflections connected theological questions with the realities of people's lives: the desire to belong, the cost of living openly, and the work of creating communities where people can bring their whole selves. The personal stories shared throughout the conversation gave these questions particular weight. We heard about being fired for living openly, housing LGBTQ+ refugees, finding permission through the Gospel to live authentically, and building communities of genuine welcome. These accounts invited us to reflect on the harm LGBTQ+ Catholics have experienced and the ongoing work of justice. They also offered examples of people making space for one another through acts of care, hospitality, and solidarity.

Our panelists also considered the power of visibility and representation, especially for younger generations searching for ancestors they can claim. There is something deeply meaningful about discovering that others have asked similar questions, navigated difficult relationships with the Church, and found ways to live faithfully and freely. Preserving and sharing these stories offers younger queer Catholics a richer sense of the people and communities who have come before them.



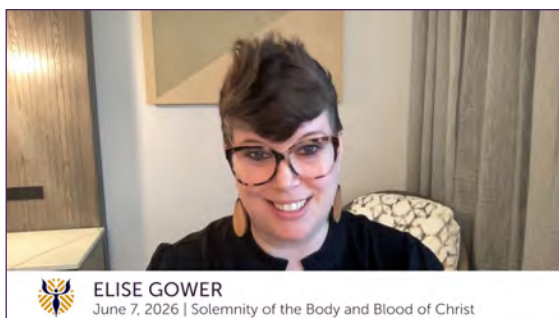
To view the video of this panel conversation and previous pride events, visit:

<https://futurechurch.org/pride>

Preaching with Pride

Catholic Women Preach Features Women from the LGBTQ+ Community in June

In June 2025, for the first time, Catholic Women Preach featured homilies by women from the LGBTQ+ community. The response was so warm that we did it again this June. These preachers are doubly marginalized in our Church, first as women and then as LGBTQ+ people. Yet they bring wisdom the whole Church needs.



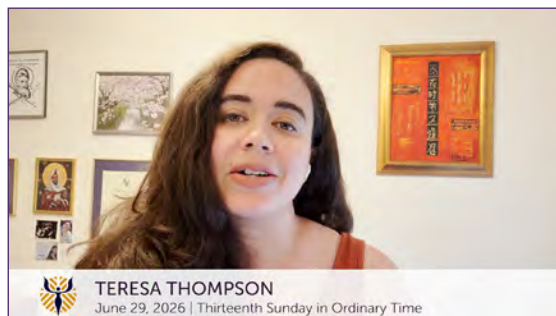
Elise Gower opened the series on the [Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ](#) with a story of caregiving. She and her partner spent nearly two years as primary caregivers for her partner's father, who had not been at ease with their queer life. Living under one roof made their relationship "visible and undeniable" every day, and tending his body became a kind of Eucharist. In the end, he witnessed that their bodies and their love are God's creation. Elise's invitation to her queer community is to see their own lives the same way and to ask what it means "to be a sanctuary for your own Divine belonging."



Rachelle Simon, who directs a United Way in rural Missouri, [preached on the cost of service](#). Drawing on her work with hundreds of neighbors in need, she named the burnout that comes with caring. She found three remedies in Jesus' own example: let yourself feel compassion, build a team, and receive God's love before you try to give it away. Her conclusion was that service becomes "the overflow of a grateful heart" rather than an obligation.



Nicolete Burbach, a theologian whose work centers on trans life and the Church, [asked who gets left out of the Gospel's consolations](#). She turned to the sparrows in Matthew 10, whom the text uses to show our worth while leaving them to fall. Her answer was to name today's sparrows, including racialized minorities, immigrants, and trans people. Her message was one of comfort. "Even when others do not see you in the Gospel's consolations," she said, "God still sees you."



Teresa Thompson closed the series on Pride Sunday by asking [what it means to be a holy nation](#). She challenged Christian nationalism and the "false security of patriarchy," and called her hearers to share meals with marginalized communities and to treat them as equals. Teresa also honored the resilience of her community, which has survived efforts to "kill us, erase us, convert us, or defang us," and prayed that all might build a nation "where all – all, all – can thrive."

Together, the four homilies show how much the Church gains when it listens to those it has too often overlooked. Watch or read all four at catholicwomenpreach.org.

FutureChurch in the News

A Trusted Voice for Catholics and People of Good Will

Over the past year, journalists and editors covering the Catholic Church turned to FutureChurch for comment. When the Vatican spoke about women's roles, when the Church's most-read publications asked who should preach, and when national outlets wanted a Catholic perspective on our country's future, FutureChurch voices were part of the conversation. Here is a look back at some of the moments when our work, and the people who carry it forward, made the news.

Holding Church Leaders Accountable

FutureChurch responded publicly to two Vatican statements about women's leadership in the church.

On December 4, 2025, the Vatican released the findings of its latest commission on women deacons. The commission concluded that, for now, women cannot be admitted to the diaconate as a degree of Holy Orders. [We called this conclusion "a disappointing failure of courage, synodality, and pastoral leadership."](#) The commission set aside decades of scholarship showing that women were ordained as deacons in the early Church. It also dismissed the written submissions it received after the Synod as unrepresentative of the People of God. We reminded Church leaders that FutureChurch, with the Women's Ordination Conference and the Association of US Catholic Priests, had asked them to consider the full body of evidence. And because the commission admitted that the question remains unresolved, we observed that "the Holy Spirit is not finished with this issue."

In March 2026, Synod Study Group 5 released its final report on the participation of women in the life and leadership of the Church. [We welcomed its affirmation of women's gifts.](#) We especially welcomed its insistence that women's participation is a right rooted in baptism, not a "concession" granted by the hierarchy, and its attention to Mary Magdalene as a sign of the role women were always meant to play. We also named what was missing: a more courageous engagement with ordination and with the patriarchal structures that continue to limit women's full participation.

Making the Case for Women's Preaching

In its May 2026 issue, *Commonweal* published Heidi Schlumpf's ["The Case for Lay Preaching,"](#) which told the story of Catholic Women Preach, noted CWP's remarkable reach, and its commitment to diverse voices.

Betty Anne Donnelly and Russ Petrus, co-editors of the CWP book series and collaborators on the website, framed women's preaching as a justice issue connected to the wider work of Church reform. Betty Anne argued that if the Church will not open the diaconate to women, it must bring more laypeople into preaching at Eucharist.

Russ said that women's preaching is valuable in its own right, adding that hearing women preach "can only amplify the calls for women to be ordained."

Fifty Years of Faithful Persistence



In May 2026, the *Toledo Blade* covered the Women's Ordination Conference's 50th anniversary gathering in Detroit and [quoted FutureChurch co-founder Sr. Christine Schenk, CSJ, extensively.](#) Restating the conviction at the heart of FutureChurch's work, Sr. Chris said that "women have an equal right to have their call to priestly ministry discerned" just as men do.

FutureChurch was well represented throughout the weekend. Sr. Chris moderated a panel on strategies

drawn from successful reforms of other institutions. Russ Petrus and Ann Marie Nocella attended on behalf of the staff. Additionally, Martha Ligas served on the liturgy committee for the conference and co-led one of the prayer services. Board members Leslye Colvin and Angela Nevitt Meyer spoke as panelists; and board member Dr. Nontando Hadebe preached at the Sunday liturgy. Former board member Natalia Imperatori-Lee also delivered a keynote presentation.

Mary Magdalene, Seen Anew

In June, the [*National Catholic Reporter* featured “Stations of the Resurrection,”](#) an exhibit conceived by board member Rita Houlihan and displayed this spring at the Cornelia Connelly Center, a tuition-free Catholic school for girls on Manhattan’s Lower East Side.

Rita commissioned Brooklyn artist Laura James to paint the full arc of John 20 from Mary Magdalene’s point of view. In James’s vibrant images, Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the disciples appear as people of color. The article also noted Rita’s longtime advocacy for proclaiming the full story of Mary Magdalene’s Easter encounter on Easter Sunday through FutureChurch. We have been proud to help share James’s work with communities across the country. The school’s executive director described the exhibit’s effect on her students simply: “It has helped our students to see themselves.”

A Catholic Voice in the Public Square

FutureChurch’s voice also reached beyond Church affairs. When [*HuffPost* reported on Catholic reactions to Vice President JD Vance’s public comments about Pope Leo XIV](#) this spring, it gave Russ the final word. Russ acknowledged the frustration many Catholics felt over the remarks, but said that what he heard most often from FutureChurch members was pride and gratitude for Pope Leo. During the 2025 conclave, FutureChurch had invited members to share their hopes for the next pope. Again and again they asked for a strong voice for social justice and a courageous defender of the most vulnerable. Many, Russ said, now experience Pope Leo’s witness as an answer to those prayers.

He also noted the work still ahead: helping Catholics

understand the richness of the Church’s social teaching, often called its “best kept secret.” Russ said that when we get it right, Catholicism calls us to hold together human dignity, concern for the poor and vulnerable, peace through justice, and “a willingness to listen and grow.”

In July, the *National Catholic Reporter* asked Catholic leaders a single question for the nation’s 250th anniversary: [*“What is your hope for America at 250?”*](#) FutureChurch voices appeared alongside many notable voices, including two former Speakers of the House, Cardinal Blase Cupich, and Sr. Simone Campbell, past executive director of NETWORK Lobby.

Board member Yunuen Trujillo called for an honest reckoning with racism, xenophobia, and inequality. She named LGBTQ Catholics, immigrants, women, and the poor as those most targeted today, and she urged Catholics to reject the false idol of white Christian nationalism.

Russ offered the closing reflection. He wrote that you can learn a great deal about any institution by looking at who has a seat at the table. He named the immigrant, the woman told to wait her turn, the LGBTQ+ sibling too long scapegoated, and the person of color still owed a debt. He prayed that we become a country that notices who is missing and “slides over to make more room at the table.”

More Room at the Table

That image ties together everything in these pages. Whether we are responding to the Vatican, telling the story of women preachers, commissioning or promoting art that helps women see themselves in the Gospel, or speaking to the nation’s future, FutureChurch keeps asking the same question: who is missing, and how do we make room? We are grateful to the journalists who keep asking for our perspective, and to the members and supporters whose commitment gives that perspective its weight.

Russ Petrus on “God Talk with Medene and James”

Bible Study with Friends Explores the Role of Women in the Gospel of John



On Ash Wednesday 2026, FutureChurch Executive Director Russ Petrus joined hosts Medene Presley and James Reding for an episode of [God Talk with Medene and James](#), recorded for the podcast's third season, “Bible Study with Friends.” The three recorded in Los Angeles, where Russ was exhibiting for Catholic Women Preach at the LA Religious Education Congress, and the episode aired in April. Together they read and discussed John 11, the raising of Lazarus.

Russ chose the passage partly because John rarely gets its own hearing in the Sunday lectionary, but primarily because John gives women remarkable prominence. In John's gospel, it is Martha, not Peter, who makes the fullest confession of faith: “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God...” Russ also noted that John never uses the word “apostle” and prefers the image of the vine and the branches, in which every disciple is rooted equally in Christ.

At the heart of the conversation were Jesus' two commands to the onlookers at the tomb: take away the stone, and unbind him and let him go. “How do we love each other?” Russ asked. “We go to each other's tombs.” He pointed to Catholics in Chicago who led Eucharistic processions to immigration detention centers, and to a gesture as small as a text message to a struggling friend.

The episode then turned to a more poignant question: whom has the Church not only left bound, but bound up itself? For Russ, the answer includes women who experience an authentic call

to ordained ministry but cannot respond faithfully in the Roman Catholic Church. The barrier is not scripture but the misogyny that has been read into it. As Russ noted, “Jesus ordains no one.”

Medene enthusiastically took up that thread with a simple question: what would the Church be without women? “The Church would be nowhere without women,” Russ answered, adding that women religious stood the Church up in the United States. James knows that legacy firsthand. He works for a women's congregation that opened the first orphanages, hospitals and schools in the western United States. Yet the Church that has long relied on women to build its institutions and minister to its people has denied them a voice in its decision making.

Russ closed by honoring two women who showed him what it means to be a Christian. The first was Sue Fischer, a campus minister at Canisius College who helped him launch a retreat for LGBTQ students in 2004 and kept it going for years. The second was Lucy Rieger, a tireless advocate for Mary Magdalene. In the final months of her life, Lucy traveled with FutureChurch to Rome during the October 2024 Synod Assembly to press for Mary Magdalene's restoration to the Easter Sunday gospel. She died that November. Her lesson, Russ said, is that regardless of whether you will see it completed “you do the work anyway, so that the next people can pick it up.”

Listen to the full episode, “What if resurrection means listening to women in the Church?”, on [Spotify](#) or [YouTube](#). For further reading on John, Russ recommends Sandra Schneiders's *Written That You May Believe*.

Russ will return to God Talk for Season 4, “Stories of the Saints.” There he will lift up another woman who has been an important witness along his faith journey, one who helped him claim a more authentic and liberating ministry. Who is she? Tune in when the episode airs later this fall to find out.



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www.catholicwomenpreach.org



All Saints Day Virtual Preaching Slam

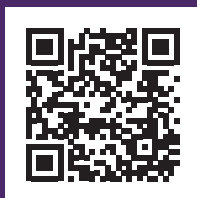
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What Are We Waiting For?

Preparing Mind, Body, and Soul this Advent



Thursday, December 3, 2026

8:00 PM ET

VIA ZOOM



futurechurch.org/advent-2026

Join FutureChurch for an evening of contemplative practice led by Laurie Cassidy to prepare mind, body, and soul for God's coming.

Advent is a season that reveals the sacredness of waiting. But waiting is hard. In a world of suffering and oppression, is it really okay to wait?

The lectionary proclaims a God who comes into history reordering relationships, so that it is safe for a lamb to lie down with a lion and swords are beaten into plowshares. Is this a romantic ideal, or do these scriptural images prepare us for our hearts' deepest longings?

This mini retreat, guided by Laurie Cassidy, invites us to reflect on what it means to wait for God during Advent 2026, and to explore ways of waiting that enable us to participate in God's coming. Through guided contemplative practices and simple tools for calming the nervous system, we will learn to wait with presence rather than anxiety, and to stay open to God's coming no matter what is happening around us. Register at <https://futurechurch.org/advent-2026>.

Laurie Cassidy, Ph.D., is a theologian, spiritual director, and anti-racist activist. She currently teaches in the Christian Spirituality Program at Creighton University. Her activism is rooted in contemplative practice and her research, teaching and writing explore the political and cultural impact of Christian mysticism in personal and social transformation. Her books include *Desire, Darkness and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse* (2022) edited with M. Shawn Copeland and most recently *Praying for Freedom: Racism and Ignatian Spirituality in America* (2024).

FutureChurch seeks to empower Catholics to participate fully in the life and leadership of the Church. Through education, advocacy, and grassroots engagement, FutureChurch works to create a more inclusive and Spirit-led Church where all people — especially those historically excluded — are welcomed, valued, and celebrated.

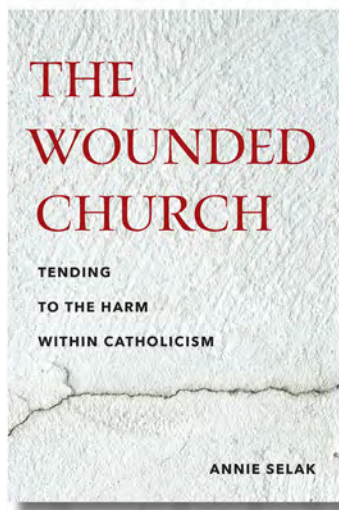


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Tending to the Wounded Church

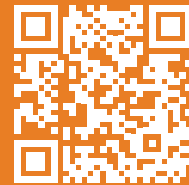
with Annie Selak and Flora x. Tang



Tuesday, January 26, 2027

8:00 PM ET

VIA ZOOM



futurechurch.org/wounded-church

Join FutureChurch as we welcome Annie Selak and Flora x. Tang for this important and timely conversation

Many of us love a Church that has also hurt us, or that we've watched hurt others. We often don't know what to do with that pain or how to heal it.

Join FutureChurch for an important conversation with two gifted theologians, Annie Selak, Ph.D. and Flora x. Tang, Ph.D. They will help us name the harm done by the Church to the Church, and then help us think through what comes next.

Dr. Selak's new book, *The Wounded Church: Tending to the Harm within Catholicism*, argues that the Church must honestly confront its own injuries if it is to credibly be the Church. She offers a powerful image to guide us: the resurrected body of Christ. It is scarred, but no longer bleeding. It is wounded, but transformed. That image gives us a way to grieve honestly without giving up on hope, and to hold accountability and healing together.

This will be a real conversation, not a lecture. We will make room for the many ways people experience harm and you are invited to bring your whole self – and your questions, doubts, and hopes – to this discussion. Register at <https://futurechurch.org/wounded-church>.

Come to be challenged, consoled, and accompanied. Together we can begin to imagine a Church whose wounds are honored, whose harms are addressed, and whose future is still being made.

FutureChurch seeks to empower Catholics to participate fully in the life and leadership of the Church. Through education, advocacy, and grassroots engagement, FutureChurch works to create a more inclusive and Spirit-led Church where all people – especially those historically excluded – are welcomed, valued, and celebrated.



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Pax Christi USA is deeply grateful for
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*May we all embrace the Spirit-led courage necessary
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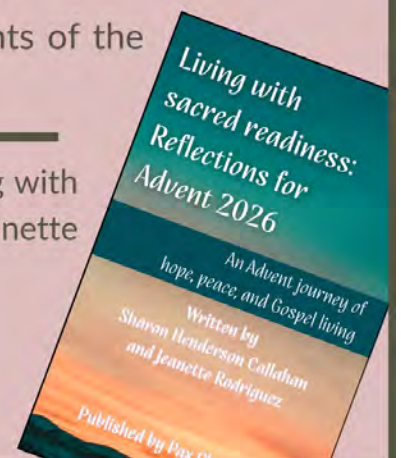
CONGRATULATIONS to

Joanna Arellano-Gonzalez, recipient of the Louis J. Trivison Award

Mollie Clark, AnnaMarie Pacione, and Lauryn Sweeney, recipients of the
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Rodriguez, who also co-wrote *Women Called to Catholic Priesthood:
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Pax Christi USA, the Catholic peace movement, www.paxchristiusa.org





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We honor and thank

Joanna Arellano Gonzalez
Mollie Clark
AnnaMarie Pacione
Lauryn Sweeney

for their outstanding work for
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On behalf of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, congratulations to 2026 Louis J. Trivison Award recipient **JOANNA ARELLANO GONZALEZ** and 2026 Christine Schenk Award for Young Catholic Leaders recipients **MOLLIE CLARK, ANNAMARIE PACIONE, AND LAURYN SWEENEY**. Thank you for your commitment to a more just world!

Ignatian Solidarity Network is a lay-led, faith-based non-profit organization, a national leader co-laboring with the Jesuit and broader Catholic network to advance a vision of the world in which the dignity of all God's creation is upheld. Learn more: ignatiansolidarity.net

PODCAST

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Queer Catholic conversations
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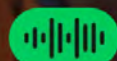
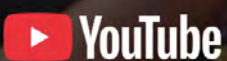


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