

Articles of Interest
9 January 2022

Remembering Desmond Tutu, a fearless truth-teller who preached nonviolence and forgiveness

3 January 2022
by [Patricia Lefevere](#)



Mourners pay their respects to the late Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu outside St. George's Anglican Cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa. The Nobel Peace Prize-winning Anglican cleric whose good humor, inspiring message and conscientious work for civil and human rights made him a revered leader during the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, died Dec. 26 at age 90. (CNS/Reuters/Mike Hutchings)

"God rest ye merry, gentleman," the Christian world, the South African world, the human rights world, and the justice and peace world could all intone while farewelling one of the world's moral giants.

Desmond Tutu, retired Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa and Nobel Peace Prize laureate died Dec. 26 [at age 90](#) at a care facility in his home city, Cape Town. He had been struggling with prostate cancer and infections associated with its treatments some 20 years and sought health care in the U.S. as well as in London and South Africa.

Decades ago, he had defied the South African apartheid government's ban on Black people using the country's beaches by [leading a group of protesters](#) along Cape Town's Atlantic shore with several of them carrying signs asking "Whose beach is this?" Others marched with the answer: "These are God's beaches."

This was one of the stories Tutu shared with this reporter in response to a question about how does one protest peacefully in the midst of violent opposition. The interview took place in early August 1983 on the campus of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, where the World Council of Churches was holding its Sixth World Assembly.

Tutu, who was to be a keynote speaker, was forbidden to travel to the meeting by South African authorities. After all, he had directed the WCC's controversial Programme to Combat Racism in the mid-1970s before becoming general secretary in 1978 of the South African Council of Churches, regarded as one of the most powerful opponents of the racist regime.

When news of Tutu's banning spread via the global press, Pretoria loosened its restraints, [allowing Tutu to come to Vancouver](#) for 72 hours. He arrived shortly after midnight on an August night. I was one of a thousand or more assembly-goers who stayed up to welcome him under the vast WCC tent.

Tutu assured his late-night well-wishers that he would have but two things to say before sending them to bed. The first was an extended thank you to all — Christians from six continents representing more than 300 churches — for their prayers. Tutu said that during interrogations and while under house arrest, "I have been physically buoyed by your prayers." Some of us watching and listening sensed that he was levitating as he made this declaration.

I, for one, was surprised by his stature. He looked to be no more than 5 feet, 5 inches tall and appeared to be standing on his tiptoes — as if to extend the hand of thanks to the hundreds sitting and standing in the tent. For years while living in Britain and Belgium, I had heard him often on the BBC's Radio 4 program. His high-pitched, sonorous and at times prophetic voice convinced me he was at least 6 feet tall.

The voice rang out once more, cradling the Vancouver audience with its proclamation: "If God be for us ..." Every person in the crowd shouted: "Who can be against us?" and then filed to their campus dormitory rooms.

The short bishop sat down with me two days later for an extensive interview but not before asking: "Do you always interview with frozen veg on your foot?" Between Tutu's possible levitation and our meeting, I had fallen, damaged my ankle and was limping.

"Only bishops," I assured him, replacing one bag of frozen peas with another. The serious talk began only after an acceleration of laughter for which the petite cleric was famous. Much of our talk concerned nonviolence and the need to reduce military outlays and strive toward disarmament during what I recall Tutu calling "this obscene arms race."



Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town shows solidarity with Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban in a 1985 photo. Hurley was charged with revealing atrocities committed by the apartheid regime in what is now Namibia, but the charges were dropped before the trial could begin.
(CNS/Courtesy of the Denis Hurley Centre, Durban, South Africa)

I asked what gave him hope amid so much violence and repression in his homeland. His answer again surprised me. He mentioned the portraits of Black baseball legend Jackie Robinson on the covers of Life and Time magazines in the late 1940s. Born in 1931, Tutu was a teenager in secondary school when he first read these articles. They told him anything was possible, "it just might take a long time," he said.

In 1984 the Nobel committee awarded Tutu its peace prize, [citing his courage and commitment in standing up to racism](#) and being a voice for justice and inclusion. White South African critics were not impressed, seeing the award as an act of foreign influence in their nation.

Ten years after Vancouver, I talked to Tutu again at the WCC's Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where he addressed the forum, which included a large group of young theologians.

Raised a Methodist and later converting to Anglicanism, Tutu believed Christian unity was never optional. Rather, it was indispensable for the salvation of God's world. "It is one of the most wonderful things to belong to the Church of God," he said with a gleam in his eyes and a smile that seemed to be reaching up from the depth of his soul.

In 2008, he would tell an ecumenical gathering at the WCC headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland: "We can be prosperous only together. We can survive only together. We can be human only together." He believed that God calls all persons to fellowship, to togetherness, without destroying their cultural identity or distinctiveness.

He often credited his calling to the priesthood to a white South African priest who was a hospital chaplain when Tutu was confined for months with tuberculosis at age 14. At one time he contemplated becoming a doctor, but felt he was not smart enough, he told this reporter. Later he became a teacher, like his father, before going to seminary in South Africa, being ordained in 1961 and then getting a Master of Divinity at King's College in London in the mid-1960s.

He believed that God calls all persons to fellowship, to togetherness, without destroying their cultural identity or distinctiveness.

While gaining global recognition for his fight against apartheid, Tutu was also a severe critic of the ANC (African National Congress) government that came to power after the apartheid regime ended. He railed against the corruption and lavish lifestyles of some of the party's leaders while keeping his own eyes and voice focused on the millions of South Africans who lived in "dehumanizing poverty," lacking electricity,

clean water and sanitation. He challenged government leaders to deliver the "new dawn" they had promised to all South Africans.

In April 1994 Tutu joyfully danced around the ballot box as voters elected Nelson Mandela the nation's first Black president. Tutu and Mandela knew each other over a half century and Tutu had worked with both the governments of P.W. Botha and F.W. de Klerk. for Mandela's release from 27 years in prison

Early in his presidency, Mandela asked Tutu to head the new government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, assigned to investigate the worse abuses of human rights committed during apartheid. Who can forget how, after months of hearing stories by victims of violence and confessions by perpetrators of these crimes, Tutu lowered his head and publicly wept, his back shaking with sobs? Composing himself he sat upright and asked how it was possible for human beings to treat other human beings in such a manner.

Over the years Tutu spared no nation that he felt was violating human rights. His condemnations extended to the Soviets for their invasion of Afghanistan, the Americans for their support of the Contras in Nicaragua and their invasion of Iraq, the Israelis for their massacre in Lebanon and for discrimination against Palestinians, and even the ruling multi-racial ANC-led government under Jacob Zuma. The latter he accused of corruption and cronyism with China when it thrice refused, at trade partner China's behest, to issue a visa to the Dalai Lama. Later he would rail against alleged crimes committed by Zuma, which helped lead to Zuma's resignation.



Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu addresses the Catholic Charities USA conference in Rochester, N.Y., in 1999. (CNS/Catholic Courier/Mike Mergen)

Infamous for his off-the-clerical-cuff remarks and bold accusations, Tutu always believed in the power of forgiveness and in the role of mediation in conflicts. He traveled extensively, trying to resolve disputes in Cyprus, Darfur, Kenya, Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Sierra Leone.

He also became a strong campaigner on behalf of human rights for the LGBTQ community and for an end to violence toward Planet Earth.

His gift for preaching was often accompanied by his leaving the pulpit — as I watched him do at a large downtown church in Johannesburg in January 1994 — then descending into the congregation. Putting those assembled at ease with his lively walk, he lifted the hands and arms of the bemused onlookers.

Both Catholics and Anglicans might take comfort in the fact that Tutu died on Dec. 26, this year's Feast of the Holy Family. He had often spoken out against the homestead policies of the apartheid regime that removed men from their families, sending them to work in mines, fields and factories far from their families, a policy that led to sexual and other abuses.

Tutu and his wife of 66 years renewed their marriage vows in 2015, on their 60th anniversary. His wife Nomalizo Leah survives him, as do his four children and seven grandchildren. Once when interviewing Leah in New York, I asked if I could take her photo.

"Just a minute," she responded, reaching into her briefcase. I expected her to get out a hair brush or lipstick. Instead, she removed a large license plate that read: "Don't mess with my Tutu."

The world did not — at least not for long.



Patricia Lefevere is a longtime NCR contributor.

Monday, 3 January 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation
Week One: Nothing Stands Alone

A Mutually Loving Gaze

Our Daily Meditations theme this year reflects the reality that nothing stands alone. Father Richard describes the intimate relationship we experience when we allow ourselves to be loved, seen, and “gazed upon” by God:

I believe that we do not have real access to *who we fully are* except in God. Only when we rest in God can we find the safety, the spaciousness, and the scary freedom to be *who we are, all that we are, and much more* than we think we are, “warts and all.” (Make sure you need to be forgiven for something or you will never know this!) It’s only when we find ourselves in God, and live and see through God’s eyes that “everything belongs.” All other systems exclude, expel, punish, and protect to find identity for their members in some kind of ideological perfection or separate superiority. Most think “the contaminating element” must be searched out, isolated, and often punished. This wasted effort keeps us

from the centrally important task of love and union.

To have naked interface with the Ultimate Other is to know one’s self in one’s truest and deepest being. When we allow ourselves to be perfectly received, totally gazed upon by the One who knows everything and receives everything, we are indestructible.

If we can learn how to receive the perfect gaze of the Other, and to be mirrored by the Other, then the voices of the human crowd, even negative ones, have little power to hurt us. Best of all, as Meister Eckhart (1260–1327) has been quoted, “The eye with which you will look back at God will be the same eye with which God first looked at you.” [1]

Standing humbly before God’s gaze not only unites the psyche but it does the very thing that I know when I teach contemplative prayer. It unifies desire. It frees us from what Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) called the “vertigo of the imagination.” [2] It’s the whirlpool of imagination, looking here, there, and everywhere. Standing before *one, accepting God* literally allows us to be composed and gathered in one place. We *can* be in one place; we *can* be here, now. We can stop always looking over there for tomorrow’s happiness. As the apostle Paul wrote, “now is the favorable time, today is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

We see that Paul understands this in a most beautiful paragraph from his Second Letter to the Corinthians. He says, “We with our unveiled faces will gradually reflect like mirrors the brightness of the Lord. All will grow brighter and brighter as we are gradually turned into the image that we reflect” (3:18). That’s it!

It doesn't have to do with being perfect. It has to do with being in relationship, holding onto union as tightly as God holds onto us, staying in there. The one who knows all and receives all, as a mirror does, has no trouble forgiving all. It's not a matter of being correct, but of being connected.

Story From Our Community

How can I have compassion for another if I cannot have compassion for myself? How can I feel empathy for another if I cannot feel empathy for myself? The common denominator of inclusiveness, of a sense of shared humanity and of our human solidarity, is that to be human is first and foremost to be a person on the way.

—Brad M.

Prayer For Our Community

God, Lord of all creation, lover of life and of everything, please help us to love in our very small way what You love infinitely and everywhere. We thank You that we can offer just this one prayer and that will be more than enough, because in reality every thing and every one is connected, and nothing stands alone. To pray for one part is really to pray for the whole, and so we do. Help us each day to stand for love, for healing, for the good, for the diverse unity of the Body of Christ and all creation, because we know this is what You desire: as Jesus prayed, that all may be one. We offer our prayer together with all the holy names of God, we offer our prayer together with Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Monday Starter: Sisters lead discussions on upcoming synod on synodality

3 January 2022
by [Dan Stockman](#)



Dominican Sr. Maureen Sullivan speaks during a previous presentation with FutureChurch, in June 2021. (NCR screenshot/YouTube/Future Church)

Monday Starter

FutureChurch, the Catholic Reform organization, is offering a four-part series examining the synod on synodality.

Dominican Sr. Maureen Sullivan will use the four video sessions to examine Vatican II, the synod, and the future of the Catholic Church. FutureChurch calls the upcoming synod most important gathering in the recent history of the church and the most promising since the Second Vatican Council.

"Vatican II produced a charter for the Church to move from the rigid, hierarchical model espoused by Pius IX at Vatican I (1869-70) to the collegial, 'communio' model that emerged under John XXIII," the announcement for the series says. "Pope Francis has invested enormous energy in moving the church back on course with his emphasis on Vatican II. The 2023 Synod is the culmination of his efforts offering the promise of an authentically synodal church where women, and men, both lay and ordained, led by the Spirit, guide and shape the direction of the church."

The sessions are at 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time on Feb. 2, Feb. 9, Feb. 16 and Feb. 23.

The series will examine a number of Vatican II documents to understand how Vatican II serves as the foundation for the 2023 synod. The series is free, but you must register.

UISG gathers testimonies

Also preparing for the synod is the International Union of Superiors General, whose 2022 Plenary Assembly is focused on the two-year process.

For this assembly, the UISG is using a three-phase process, with online meetings in March and April, a meeting in Rome in May, and an online meeting in July.

As part of the process, the organization has been soliciting testimonies from sisters around the world, including two American sisters who are members of Giving Voice, Felician Sr. Grace Marie del Priore, and Dubuque Franciscan Sr. Sarah Kohles. You can read all the testimonies, which center on the plenary's theme of embracing vulnerability on the synodal journey, here.

And, of course, there is much more about the synod at Global Sisters Report: This

month's The Life is focused on the synod, and you can find all of the coverage by both GSR and National Catholic Reporter on our Synod on Synodality page.

Catholic Sisters Week coming up

Also coming up quickly is Catholic Sisters Week, which always begins March 8, International Women's Day.

This year's "challenge theme" is *Laudato Si'* — events do not have to be related to "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home," but can be for those wanting to cover two topics with one event. Organizers note that while events can be in-person or virtual, going virtual allows for creativity, such as Zoom conversations and conferences, Instagram takeovers, livestream events on Facebook, virtual tours, book discussions, interviews and photo galleries.

Religious workers caught in immigration backlog

A backlog in cases at U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services has prompted Catholic Legal Immigration Network to issue a brief outlining policy recommendations to prevent religious workers from being removed from service.

Due to systemic issues and delays at the federal agency, immigrant religious workers — many of whom are sisters — have been forced to stop working or even leave the country while they wait for their paperwork to be processed.

"U.S. religious organizations who employ foreign-born workers are seriously understaffed due to processing delays and faulty USCIS policies," Elnora Bassey said in a statement. Bassey, who co-authored the brief, is a policy advocate and former

religious immigration attorney at CLINIC. "Losing religious workers — who teach, visit the sick and shut in, officiate weddings and funerals, or provide support where needed — is simply damaging to American communities, especially during the pandemic."

Co-author Megan Turngren, federal advocacy liaison and former religious immigration attorney at CLINIC, said in the statement the agency needs to focus on immigrant religious workers.

"Churches are having to cancel or alter their hours for services, confession and community activities. Hospitals are without chaplains. Schools are missing teachers. Short-staffed community centers are stretched thin as they try to serve the most vulnerable," Turngren wrote. "These are essential jobs and essential workers, and USCIS should change course immediately to treat them as such."



Dan Stockman

Dan Stockman is national correspondent for Global Sisters Report. His email address is dstockman@ncronline.org. Follow him on [Twitter](#) or on [Facebook](#).

Dublin archbishop: 'Radical change is coming in the church'

3 January 2022

by [Sarah Mac Donald, Catholic News Service](#)

[Parish Theology](#)



Dublin Archbishop Dermot Farrell receives his pallium from Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, papal nuncio, center, at St. Mary's Pro Cathedral in Dublin Aug. 7, 2021. (CNS photo/courtesy John McElroy)

DUBLIN — After a year at the head of the Archdiocese of Dublin, Archbishop Dermot Farrell said, "Radical change is coming in the church," which will see a renewal of energy and new forms of ministry.

"With a powerful commitment from clergy and lay faithful, across the full range of the life and ministry of parish communities, we are going to experience a renewal of energy and the adoption of new forms of outreach and ministry," the 67-year-old archbishop

told Catholic News Service. He also said he believes change is already happening in the church's structures all over the Western world.

"Pope Francis is offering us a way of being church, the synodal pathway, of walking together more closely and being a church that is hope-filled, despite many challenges."

The leader of the largest Irish diocese, with more than 1 million Catholics and 207 parishes, invited the faithful to "walk this journey together with me — and walk it with hope: a hope that frees us to undertake radical change, a hope that inspires us to be ambitious and a hope encourages us to be brave."

In November, the archdiocese published its "Building Hope Task Force Report," a strategic plan for pastoral renewal amid major challenges such as a collapse in revenue and priest numbers.

"As a diocese, we need to take stock of how well we are prepared to serve the mission of the church," the archbishop said. "Of course, we confront immense challenges. Certain forms of church life may be dying out. Once we accept this, it does not mean resignation or powerlessness, but new responsibilities for the mission."

He stressed that there is "no pre-packaged plan to address the reality in which we find ourselves."

Of the 312 priests who currently hold parish appointments in the Archdiocese of Dublin, 139 are over 70 years of age, and 116 of the 312 priests are on loan to the archdiocese. There are currently just two students in formation for priesthood. In 2016, the last year for which data are available, 1.1 million of Dublin's population of 1.57 million identified as Catholic.

The "Building Hope Task Force Report" talks about reimagining diocesan and parish structures and argues that hope inspires people to be ambitious and undertake radical change.

"We are not helpless in the face of the future," Archbishop Farrell said. "The changes that will occur we will do together as a diocese. Our parish structures need to be fit for purpose into the future. Renewal needs to be rooted in reflection, prayer and conversion, if it is to inspire and support a living faith."

He described his first year as archbishop as "a hope-filled time" because of the archdiocese's renewal journey, Pope Francis' announcement of the synodal way, and because "we believe that our church is already being changed according to the plan of God."

"We need to open up a new chapter in the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Change is never easy, and there will be conflicts, disagreements and tensions. These matters will not be resolved by argument or weight of numbers."

He said the two most important communities in handing on the faith were the family and the parish. "My years of experience at parish and diocesan level underpin the value of family. There is a huge role for re-evangelization in our parishes, especially among young people and families."

As to the many alienated from the church due to abuse scandals and disillusionment with church leadership, he said: "We have to be able as a church to atone and to ensure that nothing we ever do stands in the way of a relationship that an individual person of faith has with God. As archbishop of Dublin, I am here to play my part in healing

the hurts of the past and to constantly reach out and welcome people."



Sarah Mac Donald

Sarah Mac Donald is a freelance journalist based in Dublin.

Tuesday, 4 January 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week One: Nothing Stands Alone It Can't Be Carried Alone

Father Richard teaches that we are transformed by our suffering—not by bearing it apart and alone, but by recognizing our universal connectedness with each other and God:

I am no masochist, and I surely have no martyr complex, but I do believe that the only way out of deep sadness is to go *with it and through it*. Sometimes I wonder if this is what we priests mean when we lift up bread and wine at the Eucharist or communion and say, "Through him, and with him, and in him." I wonder if the only way to spiritually hold suffering—and not let it destroy us—is to recognize that we cannot do it alone. When I try to heroically do it alone, I slip into distractions, denials, and pretending—and *I do not learn suffering's softening lessons*. But when I can find a shared meaning for something, especially if it allows me to love God and others in the same action, God can get me

through it. I begin to trust the ambiguous process of life.

When we carry our small suffering in solidarity with the one universal longing of all humanity, it helps keep us from self-pity or self-preoccupation. We know that we are all in this together, and it is just as hard for everybody else. *Almost all people are carrying a great and secret hurt, even when they don't know it.* When we can make the shift to realize this, it softens the space around our overly defended hearts. It makes it hard to be cruel to anyone. Shared struggle somehow makes us one—in a way that easy comfort and entertainment never can.

Some mystics even go so far as to say that individual suffering doesn't exist at all—and that there is only one suffering, it is all the same, and it is all the suffering of God. The image of Jesus on the cross somehow communicates that to the willing soul. A Crucified God is the dramatic symbol of *the one suffering* that God fully enters into *with us*—much more than just *for us*, as we were mostly trained to think.

If suffering, even unjust suffering (and all suffering is unjust on some level), is part of one Great Mystery, then I am willing—and even happy, sometimes—to carry my little portion. But I must trust that it is somehow helping someone or something, and that it matters in the great scheme of things. Etty Hillesum (1914–1943), a young Jewish woman who died at Auschwitz, truly believed her suffering was also the suffering of God. She even expressed a deep desire to "help God" carry some of it. [1] Such freedom and such generosity of spirit are almost unimaginable to me. Colossians 1:24 offers a similarly daring statement in the New Testament. What creates such larger-than-life people? Their altruism is hard to understand by almost any psychological

definition of the human person. I believe such people have built their lives on the reality of union with God, Reality, or What Finally Is.

On New Year's, pope says a mature faith is realistic, but hope-filled

3 January 2022

by [Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service](#)

[Theology
Vatican](#)



Young people dressed as the Magi are pictured after attending Pope Francis' celebration of Mass on the feast of Mary, Mother of God, at the Vatican Jan. 1, 2022. (CNS photo/Romano Siciliani, pool)

VATICAN CITY — As Catholics begin a new year contemplating the motherhood of Mary, they should be inspired not to let problems weaken their faith or prevent them from helping others grow, Pope Francis said.

"In her heart, in her prayer," he said, Mary "binds together the beautiful

things and the unpleasant things," and learns to discern God's plan in them.

Pope Francis celebrated Mass Jan. 1, the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and World Peace Day, in St. Peter's Basilica and then led the recitation of the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square with thousands of people, including dozens who held signs with the names of countries at war.

In his homily at the Mass, Pope Francis pleaded for an end to violence against women.

"Enough," he said. "To hurt a woman is to insult God, who from a woman took on our humanity."

And, in his Angelus address, Pope Francis insisted peace is a gift from God that requires human action.

"We can truly build peace only if we have peace in our hearts, only if we receive it from the prince of peace," he said. "But peace is also our commitment: it asks us to take the first step, it demands concrete actions. It is built by being attentive to the least, by promoting justice, with the courage to forgive, thus extinguishing the fire of hatred."

Peace also requires "a positive outlook as well, one that always sees, in the church as well as in society, not the evil that divides us, but the good that unites us," the pope said. "Getting depressed or complaining is useless. We need to roll up our sleeves to build peace."

Pope Francis said he could not look at Mary holding the baby Jesus in her arms without thinking of "young mothers and their children fleeing wars and famine or waiting in refugee camps. And there are many of them."

"Contemplating Mary who lays Jesus in the manger, making him available to everyone, let's remember that the world can change, and everyone's life can improve only if we make ourselves available to others, without expecting them to begin," he said. "If we become artisans of fraternity, we will be able to mend the threads of a world torn apart by war and violence."

In his homily earlier at the Mass, Pope Francis asked people to consider what it must have been like for Mary, who had been told by the angel that her son would be great, to give birth in an animals' stall and to lay her baby in a manger instead of a cradle.

"His poverty is good news for everyone, especially the marginalized, the rejected and those who do not count in the eyes of the world," the pope said. "For that is how God comes: not on a fast track and lacking even a cradle! That is what is beautiful about seeing him there, laid in a manger."

But for Mary, a mother, it must have been painful to see her son in such poverty, the pope said.

Pope Francis contrasted the amazement and enthusiasm of the shepherds with the quiet, pensive reaction of Mary.

"The shepherds tell everyone about what they had seen," he said. "The story told by the shepherds, and their own amazement, remind us of the beginnings of faith, when everything seems easy and straightforward."

"Mary's pensiveness, on the other hand, is the expression of a mature, adult faith," he said. Hers is "not a newborn faith, but a faith that now gives birth. For spiritual fruitfulness is born of trials and testing."

Mary "gives God to the world" in a dark stable in Bethlehem, he said. "Others, before the scandal of the manger, might feel deeply troubled. She does not: she keeps those things, pondering them in her heart."

And through faith, he said, "in her mother's heart, Mary comes to realize that the glory of the Most High appears in humility; she welcomes the plan of salvation whereby God must lie in a manger. She sees the divine child frail and shivering, and she accepts the wondrous divine interplay between grandeur and littleness."

Mary, like most mothers, knew how "to hold together the various threads of life," the glorious and the worrisome, the pope said. "We need such people, capable of weaving the threads of communion in place of the barbed wire of conflict and division."

Departing from his prepared text, Pope Francis said the church itself is "mother and woman," and while women could and should have greater positions in the church, they are "secondary" to the role all Catholic women have of giving life, including figuratively, and in combining "dreams and aspirations with concrete reality, without drifting into abstraction and sterile pragmatism."

"At the beginning of the New Year," he said, "let us place ourselves under the protection of this woman, the mother of God, who is also our mother. May she help us to keep and ponder all things, unafraid of trials and with the joyful certainty that the Lord is faithful and can transform every cross into a resurrection."

Christmas: A season of homecoming

4 January 2022
by Rosemary Wanyoike

Spirituality



Children in Nairobi, Kenya, ride on a makeshift train Dec. 25, 2019, during Christmas celebrations. (CNS/Reuters/Njeri Mwangi)

The Christmas season is characterized by movement. If I were to rename it, I would call it "a season of homecoming." At the time of the Annunciation, when Mary was given the message by the angel Gabriel and became aware of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy, we are told that Mary ran into the hill country to a town in Judah and stayed with her cousin for three months and then went home ([Luke 1:39, 56](#)).

Before the birth of Christ, there was a census and people were called to gather in various places ([Luke 2:1](#)). So, consciously or unconsciously, the birth of Christ brings us energy to move from our comfort zones and look for others. It is one moment in the year that the longing for communion is

conspicuously felt. It gives us the desire to be with our loved ones, some of whom we may not have seen for a while.

I grew up in a rural area, and we had relatives living in the city. At that time, Nairobi was the only city in Kenya. Christmas was one season that we were almost certain that our aunts and cousins would come home; every Christmas we looked forward to it. I remember my aunt who worked and lived in the city with her three children — she had made it a practice to come home for Christmas. This brought a lot of joy to my family and a sense of oneness.

Coming home was not enough; a lot of energy also went into preparing meals, and some families who were able got new outfits for that day.

This solemnity has always fascinated me because — though it is only for a day — the preparations begin very early. Some of the shops will put up decorations as early as August! Christmas carols will also begin to be played on the radios and televisions just as early. I remember how on Christmas Day, besides the special meals, we also used to dance, and the joy was immeasurable.

As you might expect, people won't go to see their relatives empty-handed. This season is one where generosity is explicitly demonstrated. People buy gifts for relatives and friends. The host will be purchasing the type of food they think their loved ones will enjoy eating.



Chapatis are prepared in Nairobi, Kenya.
(Wikimedia Commons/GioRan)

When I was growing up, there was a dish we call *chapati* (a kind of pancake made from wheat but harder than the ordinary pancake). It was the "in thing" and characterized the celebration. At that time, it was an expensive meal. Christmas Day for most families was one of the days that people ate the nicest meals.

As an adult, I have not observed much change; the desire for communion has continued to heighten, especially with increasing urbanization. I continue to attest to the goodness that comes with Christmas. There is a joy that cannot be concealed.

I remember that when I was a student nurse, away from home, we had a tradition for Christmas Eve, when the students went around the wards singing Christmas carols and handing gifts to the patients. Before that, we would have been practicing the Christmas songs for hours. It was awesome and this meant so much to me. I learned to think of others, to share what I have with others and be kind to them.

Christmas experience gives me a feeling of what Peter the apostle must have felt at the moment of transfiguration when he said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters — one

for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" ([Matthew 17:4](#)). We all long for happiness and to connect with others; Christmas gives us a glimpse of what this would look like.

It is a time to transform the face of the earth. Where divisions can cease, hope is restored and God with us — Emmanuel — becomes real. While this is a deep desire of many hearts, sometimes this joy of Christmas seems to fade as soon as it comes. Currently, we are experiencing a lot of family breakups and many people feel justified that the situation is the way it is.

This even escalated as COVID-19 pandemic hit our world. The situation in a way makes it appear like the world has come to an end. Loss of livelihood and interruption of social networks seem to have given way to despair and anger such that spouse turns against spouse, child against parent and sibling against sibling. Hearts are broken and life continues as if business is as usual. This takes away the gains made toward making a heaven down here on earth.

Joy is a treasure that no one wishes to lose, so it is sad that anyone lets the joy of Christmas just go like that. It is like the prodigal son coming home and enjoying the unconditional love of the father, and then going back to the old way of life. The love experienced needs to bear fruit that will last.

As we celebrate this Christmas, let us not treat it as a usual event that comes once a year. Many long to have joy and peace in their life, without finding it. When we experience the joy of Christmas let us look at ways of sustaining it. When people are happy, they are enthusiastic about what they are doing, and life is looked at through a lens of joy and is radiated to others.

One may ask: How do we sustain this joy of Christmas? As people who share with Mary

in her joy of Incarnation, let us become people of Visitation. This implies that we move out of our comfort zones and go out to share in the joy of others. We mourn with those who are mourning, remain cognizant of those who need our assistance and be there with them as Mary did with Elizabeth.

Most important of all is that we remain constantly seeking ways to deepen our relationship with God, who will fuel our lives and keep us energized. Here we are being called to be people of prayer. We are to pray not as a duty, but taking up a disposition of contemplation where we can see God in all things and at every moment.

As I advance in age, I realize that one of our setbacks in sustaining the spirit of homecoming is failure to recognize what God is doing in our life. Yet we are told in the song that "great things happen when God mixes with us." I relate this to the idea of counting our blessings. If we do so, then the veil of pessimism that falls over us when we count the losses is removed and we are able to be our brother's and our sister's keeper — since all of us are blessed in diverse ways.

In this way, the commonly used phrase "our richness is in our diversity" will make sense and find a home in us. Come home soon!



Rosemary Wanyoike

Rosemary Wanyoike was trained as a nurse before joining the Sisters of Mercy in Kenya. She has worked in Turkana, Kenya, and in Zambia, where she worked with

people with HIV/AIDS. After her perpetual profession in 2008, she attended a formation program in Ireland and now directs her community's formation program in Kenya.

Four ways the church can get ready for a post-Roe world

4 January 2022

by M.T. Dávila



A woman in Houston looks at a picture of her ultrasound at Houston Women's Reproductive Services Oct. 1, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)

The U.S. Supreme Court's oral arguments on the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case has many across the nation predicting that this will be the decision that undoes *Roe v. Wade* as well as the 1992 decision in Casey v. Planned Parenthood, effectively returning the abortion question to each state legislature. The Dobbs case seeks to uphold a Mississippi law that bans abortions after 15 weeks of gestation. Were the Supreme Court to uphold the constitutionality of the Mississippi law, it would undo key provisions of the *Roe* and *Casey* decisions,

rendering federal protection of abortion rights moot.

Though a decision on *Dobbs* is not expected until [summer 2022](#), many states whose legislators are majority Republican are already readying themselves to push legislation that will ban abortion altogether or in almost all cases. Less evident is whether states with majority Democrat legislators are ready to ensconce their states' abortion rights into state law, as [Massachusetts has already done](#).

Of particular concern is the preparedness of the Catholic Church in the United States for a post-*Roe* world. During the most [recent meeting of the U.S. bishops' conference](#), only days prior to the SCOTUS discussion on *Dobbs*, various members of the leadership of the U.S. church offered their vision for the months to come. Overall, their proposals were comprehensive, mindful of the dignity of women and young mothers, understanding that overturning *Roe* only sends the issue back to the states, and that the states' responses would be varied, developing over time.



A pro-life advocate is seen near the U.S. Supreme Court Dec. 1, 2021. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

The bishops interviewed emphasized that the mission of the church to "[surround mothers with love](#)" goes to the heart of the matter because it seeks to provide women with real alternatives to abortion through various forms of concrete support, rather than focus on the legal battles. It was heartening to hear the bishops talk about these efforts as necessary at a national level and in every parish.

[Walking with Moms in Need](#), a program from the outgoing chair of the bishops' Pro-Life Committee, Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kansas, urges the completion at each parish of an [inventory](#) that locates available community resources and services. The data should then be assessed and gaps identified so that each parish can respond accordingly to their local needs in ways that will directly impact the lives of women who will see themselves affected by the legal developments from this decision.

For the California Catholic Conference, for example, preparing for a post-*Roe* world would include, on the public level, prioritizing budget funding to provide support to poor families and pregnant women. Such efforts might include child tax credits, extended paid family leave, initiatives to build generational wealth, and secure housing, jobs and benefits. Echoing Walking with Moms in Need, local parishes, often a point of contact with a woman or a family seeking help, are encouraged to address practical issues by providing meals, child care and a listening presence.

What is proclaimed from the national leadership of the church doesn't always make its way to the parish level. The [inconsistency](#) across dioceses in managing the initial phase of gathering input from the faithful for the synod serves as an example. Any national project to support

women and families as articulated by Naumann's program is largely dependent on individual parishes carrying out a central strategy to respond to local needs, which may well increase in a post-*Roe* context.

We cannot hold to absolute boundaries when discrete collaboration around certain projects for the common good — especially as it concerns women in crisis pregnancies and throughout their challenges as mothers — is a possibility.

While "surrounding mothers with love" is certainly essential to addressing crisis pregnancies, there are a number of national-level advocacy efforts the church can and must engage in that will impact the lives of women much more effectively:

First, advocating for universal health care/Medicare for all. This ought to be the easiest piece of this proposal, seeing as [Catholic social teaching considers health care a human right](#). This incredibly partisan issue becomes controversial among Catholics when the church perceives its right to religious exemptions violated when proposals for universal care include procedures and forms of treatment that the church considers contrary to the divine plan, human dignity and the common good. Yet providing universal care to mothers and young families is one of the most important contributions we could be making to improve the prospects for a woman in a crisis pregnancy. But so far, the church has spent more energy and resources resisting the birth control mandate and trying to legislate a broadening of religious exemptions than it has spent advocating for robust and consistent health care for all.

Second, building collaborative bonds across various actors with diverse and sometimes opposing viewpoints. Many agencies, movements and

activists share the church's concern for the welfare of women and children, families (especially migrant and refugee families), the environment, racial justice and other challenges to human dignity. Some church leaders refuse to sit at the table with groups that might hold viewpoints that directly oppose church teaching, fearful of creating scandal, ambiguity or confusion about these teachings. We cannot hold to these absolute boundaries when discrete collaboration around certain projects for the common good — especially as it concerns women in crisis pregnancies and throughout their challenges as mothers — is a possibility. We must be willing to call the pro-choice advocate our friend and ally as we both seek to improve the prospects for women everywhere. Pope Francis highlights these kinds of conversations and collaborations for the common good in [Fratelli Tutti](#) as part of what makes the political project a unique form of Christian love.

Third, allowing for adoptions by same-sex couples and single parents. While the law has sided with religious organizations wanting to claim religious exemption from having to entertain adoption requests by same-sex couples and single persons, such a move does a great disservice to all kinds of families. Adoption remains one of the pillars of the U.S. church's pro-life strategy. But these are rarely simple or trouble-free transactions. Expanding the category of suitable potential adoptive parents willing to commit to the well-being of a child and understanding the complications of the process, at the moment and in the years to come, can only serve to ensure that more crisis pregnancies end up as completed births with children raised in nurturing families.

Fourth, revising the theology of the body and gender essentialism. We find ourselves at a turning point with respect to gender

norms and cultural expectations, and how these may or may not accurately reflect the experience of people regarding sexuality, gender expression and family life. Gender essentialism that lays the reproductive burden almost entirely on women fails to understand the development of female identity in recent history. We can no longer cling to the essentialist claim that women's nature is primarily maternal as a key argument to proclaim every pregnancy a blessing, and therefore welcome and wanted. Crisis pregnancies happen. Not every pregnancy is a blessing, even as we proclaim that every human deserves the right to life. Clinging to gender essentialism has stunted the church's ability to understand this reality and hinders the building of a theology of the family and an ethic of birth control that more accurately reflects the self-understanding of people who have the ability to reproduce.

These four proposals might strike some as toeing the gray areas of Catholic morality on sex, gender, health care and the family. I believe, however, that in these gray areas we draw much closer to those who will, and in fact have always been, most impacted by the procreative process: women, girls, children.

The church must get ready for a post-*Roe* world, declaring solidarity with those who bear the physical burden of reproduction and gestation, and boldly engaging national and international alliances that may have been considered impossible before now. A careful consideration of the common good requires such preparation and reorientation.



M.T. Dávila

María Teresa (MT) Dávila is associate professor of practice, religious and theological studies at Merrimack College, North Andover, Massachusetts.

What stories about the Catholic Church will we be following in 2022?

5 January 2022

by Michael Sean Winters

Vatican



People walk near St. Peter's Square on a foggy day ahead of Pope Francis' celebration of Mass marking the feast of Mary, Mother of God, at the Vatican Jan. 1, 2022. (CNS/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)

Predictions are a fraught business, to be sure, but having looked back at 2021 last

week, and specifically the divergence between the direction Pope Francis is taking and that chosen by the U.S. bishops' conference, we can expect that divergence to be the principal story in 2022. Will it grow? And if so, how will it grow? Or will the U.S. bishops at long last demonstrate an interest in following the lead of the Holy Father?

In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis wrote:

As I was writing this letter, the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.

These are not the words of a typical older man, settling in to cement his legacy. They are the words of the most disruptive 85-year-old in the history of the papacy. It seems that in 2022, Francis will put the pedal to the metal.

At long last, the expected reform of the Vatican Curia's constitution will be promulgated at some point this year. Less important than any particular provision is the extensive consultation that went into its preparation. That work has already helped bring about a change in the relationship between the Roman Curia and the universal church: Bishops on their *ad limina* visits were accustomed to getting yelled at by the curial officials, and now the visiting bishops report a more sympathetic reception.

If personnel is policy, we can expect the pope to continue with the appointment of new leaders to key dicasteries. The appointment of a new prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is not expected until the summer. Cardinal Kevin Farrell will reach 75 this year, but his mind is as sharp as a tack and he may stay on a few more years as prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi will turn 80 this year and so a new president for the Pontifical Council for Culture will be named. (I am available! LOL!)

The most important change, long overdue, is at the Congregation for Bishops. The process by which bishops are selected is still unnecessarily cumbersome because Cardinal Marc Ouellet has refused common-sense modifications. For example, when a *terna* (list of possible candidates) is approved and sent to the pope, one of the three candidates is selected. The other two have been vetted, so why are they not assigned to other vacant sees with similar needs? No, the whole process for the vacant sees must begin anew. That is madness.

Worse, many of the men selected to become bishops, at least in the U.S., do not exactly scream, "Wow, this is a Pope Francis guy!" More often, there is a collective "meh."

Perhaps the problem is at the nunciature. Perhaps it is in Rome. But the usual method of relying on suggestions from the current bishops, who in this country are not overwhelmingly supportive of the pope's agenda, and running the process through a congregation still led by a prelate not on board the pope's agenda either, is producing candidates who seem incapable of dynamic leadership in line with the direction indicated by Francis. Can anyone think of a bishop appointed in the past few years who, for example, has distinguished himself by

creatively implementing *Laudato Si'*? Have any dioceses moved their plant to zero emissions?



Pope Francis greets Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, during the sign of peace as he celebrates Mass marking the feast of the Epiphany in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Jan. 6, 2020. (CNS/Paul Haring)

The pope needs to appoint a new prefect of the Congregation for Bishops who supports him, but also someone who, at least in regard to the U.S. bench, will insist on candidates capable of more dynamic support for the pope's call to continue implementing the Second Vatican Council.

That really is the point, isn't it? Some bishops, clergy and laypeople thought the reception of Vatican II was completed in the pontificate of St. Pope John Paul II. The new code of canon law, the catechism, the voluminous papal teaching, all certainly aimed at implementing the council.

However, my church history mentor, the late Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, used to tell us that it takes 100 years to receive a council, not 40, so there remained work to be done when John Paul II went to his heavenly reward.

Francis was formed by the post-conciliar church of Latin America, which was home to the most pastorally and theologically fecund reception of any part of the universal church. It is clear that the approach that the

Latin American bishops have developed and that Papa Bergoglio embodies does not sit well with many U.S. and Western European conservatives.

I would like to see more reporting on the degree to which his approach does, and does not, resonate with the experience of the church in Africa and Asia. After all, the church in Latin America formed a Catholic culture through the centuries, whereas the churches of Africa and Asia are young and newly evangelized, springing from a culture not defined by Catholic sensibilities. Surely there are significant points of convergence but also divergence. Yet, we do not hear of hostility to the pope in these other parts of the world, certainly not to the degree found in the U.S.



People in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican attend the Angelus led by Pope Francis from the window of his studio overlooking the square Nov. 28, 2021. (CNS/Vatican Media)

All such issues of the relationship of the church to the culture will be at the heart of the synodal process Francis has inaugurated. That process will continue to define the rest of this papacy and, God willing, the rest of the century of reception of the council.

Regrettably, at least in this country, there seem to be as many bishops signaling a desire to return to pre-conciliar ideas. How many bishops and archbishops have

demonstrated no interest, or worse, in *Traditionis Custodes*? How many bishops have taken the bizarre step of placing a tabernacle back in the main sanctuary of their cathedrals, a configuration that made sense for the pre-conciliar liturgy, but not now? Why were seminaries teaching the Tridentine rite to students?

The bishops of the United States have three obvious opportunities in the new year to jump on board the Francis train. First, they can vigorously engage the [synodal process](#) and really listen to the people in the pews, not just to the people who write letters and whose profession is to be angry, but to the B+ Catholics who try not to miss Mass, value kindness to neighbors and generosity to strangers, understand the basics of Catholic morality. Maybe even the C+ Catholics who do miss Mass quite often but who also find themselves talking to God throughout the day, genuflect before going into a pew and worry about the commercialization of Christmas.

The second vehicle for reform by the bishops will be the decisions they will take regarding "[Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#)," the quadrennial document on voting. The current text was adopted in 2008 so it does not contain any of the magisterium of Francis or the social magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI. The prefatory notes are overlong and suffer from the same approach as the core text: a checklist mentality that may have once served the noble bureaucratic goal of forging unity among the body of bishops, but did so at the expense of the text's primary goal of instructing the faithful. No one reads the thing because it is too long.



A woman in Long Beach, California, gestures as people wait to vote in the state's gubernatorial recall election Sept. 14, 2021, outside the Museum of Latin American Art.
(CNS/Reuters/David Swanson)

The U.S. bishops should take a page, actually half of a page, from their brothers to the north. In Canada, the bishops issued a [statement](#) in advance of last September's parliamentary elections that was half of a page long. Perhaps the U.S. bishops could take a full page, maybe even two, seeing as democracy itself is being challenged and they need to stand up and defend it. But no more than two!

The deeper problem with "Faithful Citizenship," however, is that it still bears a clericalist imprint. It does not focus sufficiently on "forming consciences" but, instead, really leans in to telling laypeople how to vote. Politically active Catholics on both the left and the right still rely overmuch on statements from bishops, as if it was the bishops' responsibility to bring the Gospel into the world, when that task properly belongs to the laity.

No one document can undo ecclesial habits that have stuck with us since the days of the Catholic ghetto, when the bishop was a kind of local lord and the people in the pews were his serfs, but a new draft should move in that direction.



A bishop casts his vote during a Nov. 16, 2021, session of the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. (CNS/Bob Roller)

The third means of effectuating reform and getting on board the Holy Father's agenda will come when the bishops elect new leadership in November. Usually, the incumbent vice president of the bishops' conference moves up to the top spot, but the current VP is Archbishop Allen Vigneron of Detroit, who will be 74 when the election is held in November. That does not preclude his becoming president of the conference, but when the pope accepts a bishop's resignation, all other posts, like being an officer of the conference, lapse as well.

Team Francis is within striking distance of a majority of the conference and if they do a little organizing, they could secure either the presidency or the vice presidency — or both. They would need a centrist candidate like Archbishop Mitch Rozanski of St. Louis or Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle. Both men lost elections this past November, but the margins were close — Rozanski only lost by a single vote! If the pope appoints a dozen new bishops this year and they are all on board, the tide could turn.

Another selection will indicate how determined the bishops are to align themselves with the pope. The presidency of the Catholic University of America will

become vacant when John Garvey steps down at the end of the academic year. On his watch, the school has lurched to the right, and not to a respectable, Burkean conservative right, but to the libertarian right, with the establishment of a business school more committed to libertarian ideology than to Catholic social teaching.

It is a demanding job, and it would be impossible to appoint a liberal: The only money the school is getting is from the right, and the Catholic left is notoriously bad about funding the intellectual apostolate. A center-right Latino, preferably a priest or woman religious, would be ideal.



A street sign is seen on the campus of the Catholic University of America after a snowstorm in Washington Jan. 3, 2022. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

The pope also may introduce new dynamics in the U.S. church, not only through the appointments of new bishops but at a consistory, which seems likely in June or in the autumn. I would not expect any American to be raised to the purple, but if the pope decided to do so, he could confer a clear sense of priorities and direction by his choice. Mindful of Francis' preference for the peripheries, I would expect any new American cardinal to come from a diocese that has never had a cardinal before and probably from a border diocese as well.

As for the appointment of new bishops, Bishop Thomas Olmsted of Phoenix hits 75 this month, and he has been bishop of the

fastest-growing city in the country since 2003. Turning that diocese away from his culture-warrior approach will not be easy. It will require someone from the center and with a winning personality, as well as committed to the vision of Francis.

The Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky, which witnessed inspiring leadership in the spirit of Vatican II during the tenure of Archbishop Thomas Kelly from 1982 until his retirement in 2007, offers the pope another opportunity to make a daring appointment and bring new life to a historic archdiocese.

These are the stories, then, that will dominate in the media, but I readily admit they give a distorted perspective on the church as a whole. The great Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar reminded us that the church's most essential forces are "prayer, suffering, faithful obedience, readiness (perhaps unexploited), humility," and these will be manifest in the lives of the people in the pews as well as in the life of the pope.

The great reform of the Middle Ages began when St. Francis first kissed a leper. Whether or not the reforms of his namesake take greater hold in the United States will be a story of the activity of the Spirit, notoriously difficult to chronicle. We in the press will only report the fluttering of the leaves as the Spirit passes. But I predict 2022 will yield some big leaf-shaking events!



Michael Sean Winters

Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.

What does it mean to live a legacy?

5 January 2022
by Jaesen Evangelista

Spirituality



My family in 2006. From left: Osmundo Evangelista Jr. (my papa), holding Jenalyn Evangelista (my baby sister); Joseph Evangelista (my older brother); and Maria Ignacio (my mom), holding me. (Courtesy of Jaesen Evangelista)

Editor's note: *Notes from the Field* includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This

latest round of the series features volunteers in Orange, California; Nazareth, Kentucky; and New York City. Read more about Jaesen [here](#).

ORANGE, CALIF. — My papa battled prostate cancer for roughly a decade, and he was in complete remission when I was 15. He was fine. He was going to live for a long time and see me graduate from college, get my medical degree, get married, have children.

But one day in the summer of 2020, he noticed his lips were numb and so he went to the ER. It was supposed to be a small checkup because he was going to be fine.

That was the last time I saw him at home.

Turns out the cancer came back and moved into his spine. Within a couple of weeks, it spread throughout his bones. COVID-19, financial burdens, physical pain and medical stress were all incentives for my dad to deny further treatment. Besides, he knew this time was different. So he transferred himself to the hospice, where he died on July 20, 2020.



My papa, Dr. Osmundo Evangelista Jr. (Jaesen Evangelista)

My father was a lot of things. He was a good cook with Filipino food, but not so much when it came to other foods. He loved playing games, especially mahjong. In fact,

when he taught our family how to play, he kept us at it from 11 p.m. to 8 a.m. the next day. He was extremely emotional. I remember seeing him cry every time I came home from college for my breaks and again when I returned.

So, you can imagine the immense emptiness I felt after he died. Have you ever lost someone, and no matter how much you search in all the things you're used to, you never feel whole again?

I cooked Filipino foods just the way he did, but it never tasted the same. I played mahjong with my family, and though it was fun, we never had the energy to go for nine hours again. I remember turning around as I entered the TSA line at the airport and only seeing my mom.

It just wasn't the same. None of it was, and for many months it never really got better. I slept for days, I never went outside, I was numb in my virtual classes and, with social distancing mandates in place, it felt like I had no one to turn to. It was an intense time of loneliness, depression and grief.

But by holding papa so close to my heart, I learned something new: *Death ends life, but it does not end living.*

My papa was an amazing Filipino cook, an overeager mahjong player and an emotional father. All that is part of me, but he gave me something more: his legacy.

My father cherished his close friends and family. He always visited his co-workers, siblings, nieces and nephews. He gave everything he had to them and he made sure that they were well taken care of.

With his death, dozens of old friends contacted me virtually: high school friends, elementary school classmates, family

members that I hadn't heard from in seven years, old teachers, co-workers, people I met during volleyball tryouts in middle school, when I never made the team.

They cherished me — and I cherished them. I celebrated holidays with long-lost family. I met the kids of my old classmates. I learned that my teacher also lost their father to prostate cancer.

My father was also a strong man of faith and service. He built a church in his home province of Pangasinan, Philippines, by raising funds for bedrooms, clothing, food and classrooms. Dozens of children use the church as their home and school. To this day, it is a safe haven for the poor.

With his life's work, he inspired me to find my purpose and follow my spirituality. So, I joined the [St. Joseph Worker Program of Orange](#).



Sr. Mariquita Domingo tells me about her ministry and calling to religious life at the Regina Residence Christmas party. (Courtesy of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange)

I learned new lessons about my faith from the [Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange](#), such as the [meaning of the Camino de Santiago](#) and knowing God was always with me.

I opened my heart to living in a new community. There are five other women in my service program: Emily Michaelis serves

the elderly Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange within Regina Residence; Emma Shay teaches writing to elementary school students of [St. Joseph School](#); Nina Dorsett is a campus minister for high school girls at Rosary Academy; [Honorine Uwimana](#) is working toward her master's in public health and previously served at Regina Residence; Cindy Emenalo works with me at [Mission Hospital](#), specifically for the [Community Health Enrichment Collaborative Family Resource Center](#).



This year's St. Joseph Workers after our first trip to Newport Beach. From left: Nina Dorsett, Emma Shay, Jaesen Evangelista, Emily Michaelis and Cindy Emenalo. (Courtesy of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange)

We've cried together, laughed together, prayed together, and supported each other through our own struggles.

I immersed myself in service. Among other things, I have met the homeless people of Orange County; I learned their names and their stories. I worked with caregivers to connect them with friends and family, to find them homes, jobs and medicine, and to make sure their lives continue in the care of others.

Now a year and a half after my papa passed away, I wouldn't say I'm healed. To be honest, I still haven't cooked Filipino foods perfectly nor have I been able to play mahjong as well as he taught me.

However, in his death, papa breathed new life into me. He gave me a legacy to live, a faith to pursue, and a community of family and friends to be part of.

I never really lost my papa. His spirit is within me, and I will live in his presence wherever I go.



Jaesen Evangelista

Jaesen Evangelista is a volunteer in the St. Joseph Worker Program of Orange in Southern California.

This article appears in the [Notes from the Field](#) feature series. [View the full series.](#)

To make of our lives something beautiful

5 January 2022
by [Mary Bilderback](#)

[Spirituality](#)
[Religious Life](#)
[Environment](#)



(Beth Dempsey, RSM)

I met a young boy on the boardwalk early this summer. He wore an *O'Neill* wetsuit with rubber booties, head and face mask. He had a *Waverats* surfboard, and a bulging *Dakine* knapsack from which he dug an *iPhone 12 Pro Max*, and spoke to someone invisible.

I wondered if he felt the nip of the ocean while he was in it, and the hot sand as he strode like Poseidon out of the sea and up to the boardwalk. Did he hear the redwing blackbird singing to his lady at the top of the beach plum? Or was he contained there in his cage of lavish toys?

"Poor little rich boy" — the story concocted itself in my mind — "attending to his possessions."

When I spoke to him — with a wink — explaining that I was headed home to get my fins and catch some waves, he responded right away.

"Really?" He smiled, eyeing me and my walking stick, quizzically. Maybe he heard the redwing blackbird too. Maybe he wasn't a victim of his stuff, as I imagined. Maybe he had room for it all. What were the odds?

I wished that I had asked him about his life. If I see him again, I will. Sometimes more is

less; sometimes more is just what is given — just what some have to learn to juggle. Sometimes less is more. What's absolutely clear is that *just enough* is complicated.

A sunrise swim in the ocean meant, for us kids growing up on Long Beach Island, pulling on a wet bathing suit that hadn't had time to dry out from the day before — with rolls of sand in its seams. Then rushing over the dunes to get to the beach before the sun broke the surface of the ocean with the top of its ruby head.

We didn't know it was awe that got us out of bed and down to the edge of the sea. Actually, it was a dog, an English springer spaniel who loved the beach and the water as much as we did. His name was Gentleman George. He taught me all I ever needed to know about God.

Our parents adopted him one evening from the animal rescue shelter when they dropped off a wounded feral cat. Huge brown eyes behind the bars of his cage followed them right out the door and pulled them right back in before they got to their car.

They knew I wanted a dog, but to 7-year-old me, *dog* meant *puppy* and George was big and old. A moment of shock preceded my first love affair.

George was a teacher. All I had to do was look in his eyes to know that my small lavish world opened up onto a boundless, immeasurable realm I just didn't know how to get to. But his eyes — velvet brown shot thru with gold — were clue enough to set me seeking. The way he looked right back into me as I pulled sand burrs off his floppy, silly ears, and the way he didn't quite walk like a dog as he led the way to the beach in the morning. The way he never left me — never let me out of his sight — showed me

how to fathom eternity with curiosity and courage.

Plus, he was such an evangelist. He would drop an empty beer can at the feet of a surf fisherman, instigating an endless game of toss and fetch. An unsuspecting guy would chuck it into the surf and George would dive into the waves, swim underwater, retrieve the can and drop it at the fisherman's feet again and again, each time shaking his salty, sopping fur, flinging haloes, and rainbows — dousing his playmate. Then he'd roll in the sand with all his legs in the air, squirming, wiggling, exuding joy in every possible dimension a vertebrate mammal is able.

Why is it that we rattle off prayers that sound like someone praying, instead of tossing all our limbs and our whole hearts in the air?

No matter the temperature, we kids stayed in the water till our blue-white fingers were pruny or numb — depending on the season. We wore no second skin — just our own. And we were on our own, alone with Gentleman George. No lifeguards then. Helicopter moms hadn't been invented.

Maybe books about God are so thick because no one can say enough about plain ubiquitous immensity. A morning glory opens in a vacant lot. A fish bumps the surface of a lake. (Amen.) Falling on our knees we say all there is to say about how we are to be here. Our mere astonishment has ripples.



Three months ago, I did fall on my knees — in the convent garden. I guess you might call it an act of adoration. A thirsty pot-bound periwinkle-blue gentian caught my eye. I know better than to lean over with a full watering can. Snap — entirely predictable.

It didn't take long for my lovingly well-kept garden to become a jungle, so when a young Eagle Scout came to the convent looking for a project I suspected divine intervention — someone must've been paying attention.

But weeding or rooting out the invasive English ivy I could no longer manage was not a project worthy of a troop of Eagle Scouts. What, I wondered, did this convent (average age 75.4) have to offer a zealous band of young men? Hmm ...

The Sisters of Mercy are engaged in a six-month theological reflection on extractivism. We're reading testimonies from all sorts of people all over the planet whose lands and water have been trashed by other people — invaders who promise riches like schools, hospitals, cash — promises the intruders do not keep. Videos show open wounds where grand mountains once stood; miles of chemically fouled and wizened rivers no longer reach their seas; once-drinkable streams choked with the carcasses of poisoned fish and birds.

At the end of one exhausting session someone asked, "What's the opposite of extractivism?" Hmm ...

"How about making a vegetable garden," I asked the Scout. "Our back yard has room for some raised beds. Organic ... hmm ... biodynamic ..."

"With native pollinator-attracting plants all around the periphery and a few well-placed insect motels," he added. This Scout had a gift for the lingo.

"With space left over for a hot tub, and a bouncy house — if we think this through," I winked.

Over the winter, the Scouts will research native plants and their fungal allies; beneficial insects; and how the Lenni-Lenape peoples lived here before us.

Come spring, the Scouts will prepare the soil for planting:

Corn, two kinds of beans, three kinds of squash, and snap peas. Sweet potatoes, collard greens and ruby beets, curly kale. No matter that three of the five of us sisters don't even eat vegetables — unless they're pickled or creamed. We're happy to share the land we've been given to care for.

And we sisters are thinking about our own vowed lives — about the vows as seeds we planted decades ago to make of our lives something beautiful.

Chastity? Obedience? Service? How to explain such a strange and bountiful harvest? And poverty? What could it possibly mean to vow poverty in a world where just to breathe is rich?



Mary Bilderback

Mary Bilderback is a member of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. She has taught biology at Georgian Court University in Lakewood, New Jersey, for more than 25 years with the help of many poems. She continues to wonder how life can ever possibly hope to explain itself. She writes to pay attention.

Wednesday, 5 January 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week One: Nothing Stands Alone

Creating a People

The Body of Christ is inherently a collective reality. Father Richard emphasizes that to live the gospel, we need each other:

The Body of Christ, the spiritual family, is God's strategy. It is both medium and message. It is both beginning and end: "May they all be one . . . so that the world may believe it was you who sent me . . . that they may be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me" (John 17:21–23).

There is no other form for the Christian life except a common one. This may even be a matter of culture, if culture refers to something which is shared and passed on. In this sense, I am wondering if there is any

other kind of Christianity except "cultural Christianity," for better and for worse.

Until and unless Christ is someone happening between people, the gospel remains largely an abstraction. Until Jesus Christ is passed on personally through faithfulness and forgiveness, through bonds of union, I doubt whether he is passed on at all.

We are now paying the price for centuries in which the Church was narrowed from a full vision of peoplehood to an almost total preoccupation with private persons and their devotional needs. But history has shown that individuals who are confirmed in their individualism by the very character of our evangelism will never create church, except after the model of a service station: they will use it as a commodity like everything else. This is far cry from our "original participation" (Owen Barfield [1898–1997]) in the Body of Christ from the moment of our conception.

Certainly, we must deal with individuals. But the very nature of our lifestyle and our church teaching must say from the beginning what the goal is—the communion of saints, a shared life together as family, the trinitarian life of God, the kingdom—*here!*

The prophet Haggai criticizes the Jews after the exile for dwelling comfortably in their "paneled houses" while the common walls of the temple lie in ruins (see Haggai 1:4, 9). His prophetic call is now and forever. We still think that we can work with the world's agenda, where career and individual fulfillment are the basic building blocks of society. And we believe that we can build church from those well-educated and well-saved blocks. But God needs "living stones making a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5).

For Jesus, such teachings as forgiveness, healing, and justice are not just a spiritual test or obstacle course. They are quite simply the necessary requirements for a basic shared life. Peacemaking and reconciliation are not some kind of box seat tickets to heaven. They are the price of peoplehood. They express the truth in the heart of God, the truth that has been shared with us in the Holy Spirit, the union in Jesus the Christ who is reconciling all people to God (see 2 Corinthians 5:18–19).

Blessed are the merciful — for our sakes

6 January 2022

by [Joan Chittister](#)

[Justice](#)



A child plays with a balloon Nov. 13, 2016, in Douma, Syria. In previous years, sanctions by the United States denied industrial parts to Syria and crippled its airline industry.
(CNS/Reuters/Bassam Khabieh)

The spiritual scorecards of the last month are, at best, distressing.

The virus is still here while some of the population [refuses to get vaccinated](#) for the sake of the rest of the country [if not for themselves](#). One politician [stands](#)

[between](#) the stability of middle-class families and the education of their children. Polarization remains the name of the current American Congressional game. (Who's winning, who knows?) Democracy teeters on its edges as it twists back and forth.

So what is the Christian answer to all of that?

Let's see now:

If we're meek, we're doomed to suffer silently, right? Answer: No.

If we're poor of spirit, we're supposed to accept life as it? Answer: No.

If the circumstances of life are difficult for us, we're meant to welcome its sadness and go on anyway? Answer: No.

If a system is unjust, we're required to make the best of it? Answer: No.

Or, if people are undermining the pillars of society, we're supposed to be merciful to them and forget it's happening? Answer: "Blessed are the merciful," the fifth beatitude contends, "for they shall receive mercy."

For those for whom that fifth beatitude is seen as a kind of recess, a relief, a break from the rest of Jesus' concerns about hunger, righteousness, meekness, mourning, poverty of spirit — all of them somehow entwined with justice — hold it. Not so fast. The question is, what do we have here, a confused Jesus? A confused you? Or a bad case of holy inconsistency?

Is mercy really meant to be a mitigation of justice?

The moral problem is a serious one and, as a matter of fact, is plaguing this society at this time in its development in frightening new

forms. Ever since the United States invented one-easy-way-to-hold-the-global-village-captive to nuclear bombs, the whole question of justice has become fogged. Now what does the world do to bring evil to heel when, clearly, nuclear attacks are not an answer to global tax fraud, for instance, or underground cyberattacks, possibly?

Or even less certain, when a country's only major export is held up by international sanctions and its citizenry reduced to poverty as a result, how just is that? Syria, for instance, was denied industrial parts by the United States that crippled its airline industry. What would seem to have been a very [targeted response to civil corruption](#) created a ripple effect that touched the economy of the entire country. And the dictator that set off that silent attack is still in power, and the people are still poor.

In our own situation, the [failure of China to produce more automobile chips](#) is now affecting our own capacity to produce cars and so protect the automobile industry here, as well as raising prices for workers who can't get to work without a personal vehicle.

What happens to justice when mercy takes over has never been meant to be anarchy or destitution, or economic collapse, or regional destruction. And so?

Then the fifth beatitude, mercy, raises major political, civil and moral issues. Is mercy a function of politics at all? Is mercy a civil obligation that overrules the civil law? Is mercy a pillar of society — and who says so?

The kind of mercy we give, Jesus says, will be the kind of mercy we get when we need it. Which means that mercy is clearly not an event; mercy is a way of being in the world. It is the ability to identify with the sufferings

of another and then accompany them while they struggle with them.

Mercy is not so much some kind of quickly compassionate act for another as it is the foundation of an ongoing relationship — if not with this one particular person as it is with the many caught in the same darkness. It is not so much a commitment to law as it is coming to understand the struggles of the other.

Most of all, mercy is the beginning of a movement of the soul. To become merciful, we must first become aware of injustice and how it happens. It is beginning to see what we have failed to understand before: that the frequency of gun violence in the bowels of the city, for instance, comes from the lack of all manner of life's needs there.

The second step of mercy is a call for justice by the just, by those who have failed to see for centuries now that justice is often the most unjust system of them all. On the other hand, the percentage of minorities incarcerated for life while the wealthy had lawyers who got them deals are clear signs of our own failure to see the difference.

The third dimension of mercy lies in its commitment to compensation for the injured who have been left behind by society for generations as well as support for those whose social rank serves them well.

The fourth criteria of genuine mercy is the acceptance of those whose lives do not match our own for status and dignity, for education and ability and bright, shiny couth.

From where I stand, the polarization of the dignified and urbane from the average and the suffering is greater than ever. In the 1960s, we could hear the heartbeat of equality beating under our feet as it rose up

to claim its place one generation after another. Now over 50 years later, what we hear is the slamming of solid doors against those others we never expected to see on our side of town.

It is the Beatitudes that call us beyond ourselves to the best of ourselves. But until the leadership of the country does the same thing, it will be unconscionably too long until "mercy" becomes the icon of the land again. Let us pray.



Joan Chittister

A Benedictine Sister of Erie, Pennsylvania, Joan Chittister is a best-selling author and well-known international lecturer on topics of justice, peace, human rights, women's issues and contemporary spirituality in the church and in society.

Vatican newspaper remembers Jan. 6 siege as attack on U.S. democracy

5 January 2022
by [Cindy Wooden](#),
[Catholic News Service](#)



Tear gas is released into a crowd of demonstrators protesting the 2020 election results at the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jan. 6, 2021. (CNS photo/Shannon Stapleton, Reuters)

VATICAN CITY — The attack on the U.S. Capitol Jan. 6, 2021, "represented a direct blow to the heart of American democracy," the Vatican newspaper said.

Marking the first anniversary of the storming of the Capitol, the newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, explained to readers, "The attack on the Capitol was the degenerated development of the 'Save America March,' organized by supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump to contest the election that had decreed his defeat."

In its Page 4 article, the newspaper noted that it took three hours to secure the building after the siege began and that, when it was over, four protesters were dead, 13 were wounded and a police officer died a few days later in hospital from his injuries.

While several thousand people had attended the pro-Trump rally, the Vatican newspaper said those who laid siege to the Capitol were just a portion of the crowd, many of whom wore "far-right and white supremacist emblems."

The insurrection, which aimed to stop Congress from certifying the valid election of President Joe Biden, "represented a direct blow to the heart of American democracy, risking raising questions about its functioning and fame," the newspaper said. "Moreover, the event showed the aggressive potential of internal extremist organizations such as 'QAnon,' the 'Proud Boys' and the 'Boogaloo Bois,' which until then had never been considered terrorist groups."

Thursday, 6 January 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week One: Nothing Stands Alone A Solid Foundation

Theologian and author Kate Bowler counters our cultural desire to proclaim we are "self-made" with a reminder of our foundational communal reality.

I am self-made. Didn't anyone tell you? I brought myself into the world when I decided to be born on a bright Monday morning. Then I figured out how cells replicate to grow my own arms and legs and head to a reasonable height and size. Then I filled my own mind from kindergarten to

graduation with information I gleaned from the great works of literature. . . .

I'm joking, but sometimes it feels like the pressure we are under. An entire self-help and wellness industry made sure that we got the memo: we are supposed to articulate our lives as a solitary story of realization and progress. Work. Learn. Fix. Change. Every exciting action sounds like it is designed for an individual who needs to learn how to conquer a world of their own making.

It's hard to remember a deeper, comforting truth: we are built on a foundation not our own. We were born because two other people created a combination of biological matter. We went to schools where dozens and dozens of people crafted ideas and activities to construct categories in our minds. We learned skills honed by generations of craftspeople. We pray and worship with spiritual ideas refined by centuries of tradition. Almost nothing about us is original. *Thank God.*

It reminds me of the account of creation in Genesis. . . . God breathes oxygen into lungs in an instance of divine CPR. I love picturing that God, the only One who can create out of nothing—*ex nihilo*. God, who set the cornerstone of our lives and our faith, laid the first brick. The Master Builder whose carefully poured foundation is what we build on top of now. It certainly feels like a template for the rest of our experience.

Kate was a young mother when she was first diagnosed with Stage Four cancer:

When I was really sick and worried about dying too young, I kept trying to picture how much my son would remember. . . .

I thought about him all the time. When do children develop long-term memory? How

much am I in *there* . . . his mischievous mind, his evil laugh. Then one day, my psychologist said something wonderful. He said: "Kate, you're in there. The foundation is the part that doesn't show."

Whether it is our parents, our teachers, mentors, friends, churches, or neighbors, people have been pouring into us. We are standing on a foundation. It should come as an incredible relief. Our only job is to build on what we've been given, and, even then, even our gifts we can trace back to the creativity, generosity, and foresight of others. *Thank God we are a group project.*

Will US bishops find their voice and defend democracy?

7 January 2022
by [Michael Sean Winters](#)



An explosion caused by a police munition is seen while supporters of then-President Donald Trump gather in front of the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Leah Millis)

Yesterday was the first anniversary of the attack on the U.S. Capitol. That day, Archbishop José Gomez issued a [statement](#) condemning the violence, and

promising prayers for members of Congress, congressional staff and the police. He added:

The peaceful transition of power is one of the hallmarks of this great nation. In this troubling moment, we must recommit ourselves to the values and principles of our democracy and come together as one nation under God. I entrust all of us to the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. May she guide us in the ways of peace, and obtain for us wisdom and the grace of a true patriotism and love of country.

Like most Americans, Gomez recognized how appalling the day's events were and, given the fact that even many Republicans finally broke with the would-be despot still living in the White House at the time, you could almost hear the collective sigh of relief that the chapter of American history marked "Trump" was being closed.

Except it wasn't.

Donald Trump has made the entire Republican Party dance to his ongoing tune of downplaying the attack on the Capitol, denying the legitimacy of President Joe Biden's election and taking steps to put Trump loyalists in key election oversight posts.

Why, then, have the U.S. bishops failed to sound the sense of concern and alarm for the "values and principles of our democracy" that continue to be threatened? Surely the sanctity of the vote is above partisan politics of a kind the bishops are right to shun.

For most of American history, the story of U.S. Catholics was one of trying to prove that we were loyal citizens, confronting the charge that our religion and its precepts made it impossible for us to adhere to the norms of a democratic polity.

From colonial laws that deprived Catholics of basic rights to vote or hold office, through the 19th century's relentless nativism, up until the 1960 election when prominent Protestant pastors like Norman Vincent Peale and liberal organs like *The Nation* still doubted a Catholic could be trusted with the powers of the presidency, Catholicism was understood to be a threat to democracy.

The charge was not based in mere cotton candy. Official church teaching held that in countries where Catholics were in the majority, Catholicism should become the established religion, with other religions merely tolerated and only insofar as the Catholic majority permitted. On the other hand, if Catholics were in the minority, official church teaching held that Catholics should enjoy full liberty to practice their religion without interference from the government. This double standard was defended by the proposition that error has no rights.

The charge of Catholic anti-democratic prejudices was defeated by two events, one domestic and political, and the other in Rome and ecclesial.

First, Catholic Americans proved themselves to be good citizens, serving in local and federal government in a variety of posts, serving in the military when the country went to war, paying taxes, forming Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, attending a different church on Sunday morning and disproportionately sending our children to parochial schools, but in most respects behaving in ways little different from our Protestant and Jewish fellow citizens.

In looking back at John F. Kennedy's election, we tend to focus on his [speech](#) to the Houston Ministerial Association as the key to his overcoming Protestant prejudices. We do so in large part because the issues

entailed in figuring out how a faithful Catholic relates to politics in a pluralistic society are still with us.



President-elect John F. Kennedy shakes hands with Fr. Richard Casey, pastor of Holy Trinity Church, after attending Mass at the church prior to inauguration ceremonies in Washington Jan. 20, 1961. (CNS/Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington)

Just as important as that speech to Kennedy's electoral success was his prior heroism during World War II. The story of PT-109, crushed in two by a Japanese destroyer, and Kennedy's heroic effort to save his crewmates, made headlines around the world in 1943.

Kennedy, the child of privilege with numerous severe physical ailments, used his father's influence to get into the Navy. Compare that with the behavior of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, who used their connections to get out of serving. John Kennedy's older brother, Joe Jr., had been killed in action during the war when the explosives in a plane he was flying detonated prematurely. He had already flown 25 missions at the time of his last

flight, and had the option of returning home. Instead, Joe Jr. volunteered for the top-secret mission that took his life.

In that same Houston speech, Kennedy said:

This is the kind of America I believe in — and this is the kind I fought for in the South Pacific, and the kind my brother died for in Europe. No one suggested then that we may have a "divided loyalty," that we did "not believe in liberty," or that we belonged to a disloyal group that threatened the "freedoms for which our forefathers died."

He dared people to gainsay his patriotism, and Kennedy could point to millions of fellow Catholics who, like him, had served the country in war.

Sixty years later, when the [next Catholic](#) became president, no one asked if he could be a good American, even while many asked if he was a [good Catholic!](#)

The second nail in the coffin of the anti-Catholic canard that Catholics could not make good Americans came at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). There the 19th-century hostility to modern liberal democracy was abandoned, and the church officially recognized the value of religious liberty for all people, and voiced support for human rights and democratic norms for all societies. I recently recapitulated some of that history in my [column](#) following Biden's summit on democracy last month.

Given this history of patriotic Catholics and the development of doctrine at Vatican II, why have the bishops not been more outspoken in defending democracy?

I understand that they may not wish to go to the mat to champion more hours for early voting. But as Yuval Levin — who is no liberal — recently wrote in [The New York Times](#), there is room for bipartisan

consensus about how votes are counted and certified, how "requiring accountability and transparency and setting some boundaries on what can happen after an election" could forestall future electoral shenanigans of the kind Trump tried, and failed, to get election officials to perpetrate last time.



A boy listens to his mom receive instructions on how to vote at Ida B. Wells Middle School in Washington during the presidential election Nov. 3, 2020. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

Additionally, the U.S. bishops have long recognized the importance of the rule of law, even when the law contradicts the teachings of the church. For example, after the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage nationwide in 2015, Washington Cardinal Donald Wuerl, one of the best theologians among the bishops, issued a [statement](#) that began and ended by recognizing that the ruling was now the law of the land and should be respected as such, even while the law of the church made same-sex sacramental marriages impossible.

The bishops in many states are not viewed as possessing the moral authority their predecessors did, but you would be surprised how influential their voice can be in some state legislatures. In several red and purple states, it was the intervention of Catholic bishops and other religious leaders that frustrated efforts to enact misnamed right-to-work laws that make it harder to organize unions.

Some bishops, and some conservative donors and academics, have demonstrated a hostility to Vatican II. That may explain why [some bishops](#) are reluctant to restrict the celebration of the Tridentine rite, or why they staff their seminaries with theologians convinced that the 1950s were a golden age in the life of the church, or why they are quick to quote previous popes and so allergic to citing the incumbent pontiff.

Could it also explain their indifference to the future of democracy? Is reactionary ecclesiology a church a kissin' cousin of reactionary politics? It shouldn't be.

I hope the bishops find their voice and find it before it is too late. History is littered with people who thought they could be bystanders, only to discover they, too, were swept up in the evil they failed to denounce when there was still time.

The bishops of the United States have only to look to the theology of the Second Vatican Council and to the proud traditions of American Catholics to find the inspiration needed to confront these threats to democracy. Those who aspire to moral leadership must do all they can to ensure the tragic assault on democracy of Jan. 6, 2021, will never be allowed to repeat itself.



Michael Sean Winters

Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.

Earth: One of God's failed experiments?

God gives us every chance, but we may be blowing it

7 January 2022

by [Thomas Reese](#),
[Religion News Service](#)

[Spirituality](#)



"Earthrise" is a famous photograph of the Earth and parts of the moon's surface taken from lunar orbit by astronaut Bill Anders on Dec. 24, 1968, during the Apollo 8 mission. (Bill Anders/NASA/Creative Commons)

Could the Earth be one of the trillions of experiments God is running throughout the universe? If so, will it be a failed experiment?

Humankind's sacred Scriptures, written in prescientific times, often portray the Earth and humanity as the center of the universe. Recent scientific discoveries have suggested that this is not so. It is time to update our theological imaginations.

I spent New Year's weekend bingeing on NOVA's five-part series on astronomy, "[Universe Revealed](#)," which premiered in

October. It beautifully describes the findings of NASA's astronomical satellites, including the Hubble Space Telescope, the Chandra X-ray Observatory and the Fermi Gamma Ray Space Telescope.

We have learned that our Milky Way is one of 2 trillion known galaxies in the universe. Our galaxy alone has 200 billion stars and most of these stars appear to have planets. The probability of intelligent life somewhere in our galaxy or in another galaxy is high, given these numbers.

Why would God create such a huge universe with so many possible sources of life if he did not want thousands of species to bloom? Do we think that God has so little imagination that we are the only possibility he could come up with?



A Hubble photo shows but a small portion of one of the largest seen star-birth regions in the galaxy, the Carina Nebula. Towers of cool hydrogen laced with dust rise from the wall of the nebula. Captured here are the top of a three-light-year-tall pillar of gas and the dust that is being eaten away by the brilliant light from nearby bright stars. (Photo courtesy of NASA, ESA, and M. Livio and the Hubble 20th Anniversary Team (STScI))

This is humbling for the human species, which thinks that it is the most important thing in the universe. It means that we are just one of God's many children — and probably not the most important. We may be

in our infancy in comparison with our siblings in other parts of the universe.

Perhaps the universe is incredibly huge so that God could provide "social distance" between all his experiments so that they would not cross-contaminate.

As for us, God has granted us a very beautiful and rich planet, made from star dust. He has given us intelligence with which we have gained great power for both good and evil.

And yet he appears to have included a fail-safe in the human experiment: If we do not evolve morally, we will destroy ourselves before we can reach the stars and pollute the rest of the universe.

The human experiment can fail, and if so our failure will not be God's failure. God gives us every chance, but we can blow it. That is what we call free will. But he has other experiments running throughout the universe, and some of them will succeed.

On the other hand, we may also succeed and join our other siblings in the universe in discovering God's plan for uniting himself with the cosmos.

Pope Benedict XVI described the risen Christ as the next step in human evolution. That evolution is a spiritual consciousness that puts service above domination, puts generosity above greed and puts love above self-indulgence.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit paleontologist, had a similar vision of the universe, infused with the Spirit, evolving into the Cosmic Christ. Do we want to be part of that evolution or will we fight it?

Perhaps we do have a special place in the universe. Perhaps like Bethlehem, Earth is a backwater in the universe that has something

worth sharing. I hope so. But unless our spiritual development matches our scientific development, the human experiment will fail.



Thomas Reese

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's column for Religion News Service, "Signs of the Times," appears regularly at National Catholic Reporter.

In priests' tarnished image, French sisters see opening for bigger role for women, laypeople in church

7 January 2022
by Elisabeth Auvillain

Ministry
Religious Life



A cross is silhouetted outside a Catholic church Oct. 5 near Nantes, France.
(CNS/Reuters/Stephane Mahe)

PARIS — Following publication of the [report on sexual abuses](#) in the Catholic Church, many women religious in France — while distressed over the report's findings — have high hopes for the future. They think now is the time to start making changes in the way the church is governed — to be synodal, and more horizontal, to include more people in the process of decision making.

For five years, I've interviewed women religious in France on various topics for Global Sisters Report, including [sexual abuse](#) within the church. It's been disheartening and distressing to learn of the extent of the abuse as the recent report revealed — more than 330,000 cases of sexual abuse of minors, two-thirds by clerics, had taken place in the French church since 1950, according to the report released in October. Yet as my conversations reveal, Catholic sisters hold a unique position to help move the church forward after these devastating scandals.

"We are all very pleased to see these abuses denounced," Sr. Christiane Hourticq, a member of the Society of Helpers, told me. "But I must add that these crimes did not affect anyone's faith in God in our congregation."

Not all parishioners agree: Some confess it's impossible to go to Mass on Sunday, even if they separate their faith in God from the fact of going to church.

Religious women, who are lay people but have consecrated their life to God, are in a special position to bridge the widening gap between the clerics — all male — and lay people. As in other countries, most church activities in France are organized and led by women. They are responsible for Sunday school as well as for housekeeping of churches. A secretary, usually a woman, is in charge of the priests' agendas. Women make up about two-thirds or more of the faithful at most celebrations. At the same time, priests make all decisions.



Sr. Marie Hélène Halligon of the Congregation of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

"If a priest is not happy with the way a parish functions, he can just decide to cancel some activities without having to refer to the parish council or any authority," Sr. Marie Hélène Halligon of the Congregation of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd told me in one conversation. "Our congregations do not work that way. Decisions are made by the superior, after consulting others."

"In our congregations, the superior cannot take a decision without referring to the rest of the community," echoes Sr. Christiane.

"If the community is against it, she cannot do it. If the congregation agrees, she can decide to do it or not."

Priests and bishops make their own decisions. Sometimes, congregations have to beg them to come and say Mass. "Since we now have fewer and fewer priests, it is harder to find someone to celebrate the Eucharist," Sr. Marie Hélène said regretfully. "But what is more important? The needs of the people of God, including the ability to receive sacraments, or the powers and prerogatives of priests?"

In "Crisis in the church: clericalism in question," which Sr. Christiane wrote for a 2018 lecture she gave at a parish of Deuil-La-Barre, in the Paris region, she laid out the issues: "The problem lies with the image of the priest and the way his role is seen," she wrote. "We have started considering the priest independently of his people. A caste of clerics has been formed. This was the model designed by the council of Trent in the 16th century," against the Reformation called for by Martin Luther in Germany.

Sr. Christiane stresses the need to make a distinction: "It is not because the priest presides over the Eucharist that he presides over the community; it is because he presides the community that he presides [over] the Eucharist," she wrote.

"A lot of married men are very able and competent to preside [over] a community. They should be able to be ordained," she told me. She sees it as even more necessary now that a lot of regions in the world do not have enough priests and can only have the Eucharist every few weeks or months. Personally, she doesn't wish that women are ordained, "not as long as the figure of the priest is the one we have inherited from the Trent council."

"The Eucharist takes our life as a whole and is not only about priests," Sr. Eliane Loiseau, a Missionary of the Gospel, told me. "We need to invent [a] new way to celebrate. What we have experienced during the COVID pandemic made us progress in our communities with live celebrations where God's Word is central.

Being together while listening to God's word is a Real Presence. Be[ing] at the service of the poor is also a Real Presence, as much as sharing the bread to increase fraternity. These three dimensions of the Eucharist matter to all of us, men, women, priests. Let us work to promote small fraternal communities who live all these dimensions of the Eucharist."



Sr. Christiane Hourticq of the Soeurs Auxiliatrices des Âmes du Purgatoire (Elisabeth Auvilleau)

Sr. Christiane stresses the need to make a distinction: "It is not because the priest presides over the Eucharist that he presides over the community; it is because he presides the community that he presides [over] the Eucharist," she wrote.

"A lot of married men are very able and competent to preside [over] a community. They should be able to be ordained," she told me. She sees it as even more necessary now that a lot of regions in the world do not have enough priests and can only have the

Eucharist every few weeks or months. Personally, she doesn't wish that women are ordained, "not as long as the figure of the priest is the one we have inherited from the Trent council."

"The Eucharist takes our life as a whole and is not only about priests," Sr. Eliane Loiseau, a Missionary of the Gospel, told me. "We need to invent [a] new way to celebrate. What we have experienced during the COVID pandemic made us progress in our communities with live celebrations where God's Word is central.

Being together while listening to God's word is a Real Presence. Be[ing] at the service of the poor is also a Real Presence, as much as sharing the bread to increase fraternity. These three dimensions of the Eucharist matter to all of us, men, women, priests. Let us work to promote small fraternal communities who live all these dimensions of the Eucharist."

'If a priest is not happy with the way a parish functions, he can just decide to cancel some activities ... Our congregations do not work that way. Decisions are made by the superior, after consulting others.'

—Sr. Marie Hélène Halligon

Celebrations without a priest, and without the Eucharist, are more and more common in France. That's partly because the lack of priests has led communities to organize these liturgies of the word, but also because a lot of Catholics prefer small and simple celebrations to pompous Masses.

A group called Conférence Catholique des Baptisés Francophones was created in 2013 by Catholics who wanted the church to give a larger place to women and laypeople. It encourages prayer meetings or discussions as well as liturgies of the word and creates

connections between different communities of faithful who organize them. Their number has been steadily growing.

This trend started in regions without enough priests; it continues when the faithful are not happy with their local community. Catholic who feel ill at ease in a church that doesn't consider very highly lay people and especially women, prefer to join such a community and do not go to Mass anymore.

During one of the confinements imposed by the COVID pandemic last year, some congregations held liturgies of the word, every Sunday, without a priest. A sister, who did not want her or her congregation to be named, told me that, one Sunday morning, a priest called to offer to say Mass since he was confined in the neighborhood. The superior told him the community had made other plans for worship and declined the offer.



Sr. Christine Danel, superior general of the Xaviere Sisters or Missionaries of Jesus Christ, addressed a closing mass on Nov. 1 for a weeklong celebration of the Ignatian Family, directly after a bishop preached the homily. (Courtesy Véronique Rouquet / Xaviere Sisters)

A sister who took part in liturgies of the word during last year's confinement shared her experience in a

special edition of the Jesuit review *Christus*. "During these Sundays," Sr. Geneviève Perret wrote. "I was happily exempt from these Sunday masses where I am in the middle of a crowd, largely anonymous; where its president is often at some distance from the faithful and stands higher on a stage; where I, a woman sitting on a chair, have to hear a homily that he, a man standing, delivers and where I do not have the slightest possibility of reacting."

Sr. Geneviève, a member of the Society of Helpers, also reckons that it is important that communities are open and pray with other believers even if they do not like some celebrations very much.



Dominican Sr. Anne Lécu (Provided photo)

She concludes that this experience has reinforced her wish for a church "less clerical and more welcoming where poor people and women would have their place."

"It is high time we go back to the Gospel," agrees Sr. Eliane. "I think we should read it from the point of view of the poor at the peripheries. This is what I have done when I was in Latin America and it has guided me until today."

There have also been times when a sister was allowed to comment on the Gospel. [Sr. Anne Lécu](#), a Dominican, spoke in St. Ignace, Paris's Jesuit church, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, March 14, 2021. A gathering of the Ignatian family in Marseille on Nov. 1, 2021, also provided the opportunity for a superior general, Sr. Christine Danel of the Xaviere Sisters, or Missionaries of Jesus Christ, to preach at the end of Mass. Such gestures are now expected by parishioners, eager to see a sign that priests are ready to share some of their power. Canon law says the celebrant may ask someone to comment the readings, but this will not be called a homily.

Since it is more and more difficult to deny equal responsibilities for women, the question of ordaining also arises, despite the opposition from the Vatican.

Religious women sometimes wonder why their superior cannot celebrate the Eucharist: In 2019, the prioress of the monastery of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing, in Germany, caused a stir by calling for gender equality in the Catholic Church.

"I take for granted that a woman can also be ordained," said Sr. Ruth Schönenberger later said in a [Global Sisters Report interview](#), repeating her views, which were initially aired in the German media. "I do not understand the reasons against it. I am surprised that the presence of Christ is reduced to being a man. We have here also qualified theologians who only lack consecration — nothing else."

The image of priests in France has been very tarnished, but religious women are still well viewed. Will they take the lead in pressing for more gender equality in the church? If the church wants to retain some of its damaged credibility, it would be a good idea them to do so.



Elisabeth Auvillain

Elisabeth Auvillain is a freelance journalist based in Paris.

Friday, 7 January 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week One: Nothing Stands Alone Love Crosses Boundaries

CAC friend Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis explores how the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) reveals God's desire that no one be allowed to "stand alone" in their hour of need.

Rabbi Jesus is talking to a religious leader—a lawyer—about what it means to be faithful. Together, they review the Jewish scriptures: The way to live right is to love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself. Looking for a loophole, the lawyer wants to know who qualifies as a neighbor. Jesus answers by telling a story about a man who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead by a marauding gang. A priest and another religious man walked by and, seeing the man on the ground, they did nothing. . . . But a Samaritan—a mixed-race person considered in ancient times to be an impure enemy of the Jewish people—did not cross the street. Instead, he tended to the wounded man. . . .

The moral of Jesus's story is that the despised Samaritan is the good neighbor.

In using *this* story to answer his companion's question about the definition of *neighbor*, Rabbi Jesus was getting to what he considered to be the essential laws—love God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself. He tells the story to make the point: What you think is outside, God has put inside. The Samaritan is more inside the boundaries of what is good/pure/loving than the passersby (religious leaders no less!) who did not stop to help the bleeding, beaten man on the street. In telling this story about a hated, mixed-race Samaritan doing a good deed, Jesus is disrupting the idea of borders and boundaries. If you want to know what love looks like, Rabbi Jesus is saying, here it is: Love crosses borders and boundaries; it makes new cultural rules; it cares for the stranger. Love turns strangers into friends. Fierce love is rule-breaking, border-crossing, ferocious, and extravagant kindness that increases our tribe. . . . In any relationship, fierce love causes us to cross boundaries and borders to discover one another, to support one another, to heal one another. When we do this, when we go crazy with affection, and offer wild kindness to our neighbor across the street or across the globe, we make a new kind of space between us. We make space for discovery and curiosity, for learning and growing. We make space for sharing stories and being changed by what we share. This is the space of the *border*, of mestizaje [mixed race], of both/and. . . . We can learn to see the world not only through our own stories, through our own eyes, but also through the stories and worldview of the so-called other. . . . We simply must open our eyes, look across the room, the street, the division, the border—and reach out to that neighbor,

offering our hand, our compassion, and our heart.

Jacqui Lewis, *Fierce Love: A Bold Path to Ferocious Courage and Rule-Breaking Kindness That Can Heal the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2021), 103–104, 109–110.

2022 Daily Meditation Theme: Nothing Stands Alone

What could happen if we embraced the idea of God as relationship—with ourselves, each other, and the world?

Story From Our Community

One morning after receiving Communion, I realized this Sacrament was not my own treasured and personal connection with Christ, but that my neighbors were also my Communion. I saw that “personal holiness” is a contradiction of terms, for there is no holiness separate from others, but only in solidarity with others in Christ.

—Rosalie K

Prayer For Our Community

God, Lord of all creation, lover of life and of everything, please help us to love in our very small way what You love infinitely and everywhere. We thank You that we can offer just this one prayer and that will be more than enough, because in reality every thing and every one is connected, and nothing stands alone. To pray for one part is really to pray for the whole, and so we do. Help us each day to stand for love, for healing, for the good, for the diverse unity of the Body of Christ and all creation, because we know this is what You desire: as Jesus prayed, that all may be one. We offer our prayer together with all the holy names of God, we offer our prayer together with Christ, our Lord. Amen.