

Articles of Interest
For
9 October 2022

Sunday, 2 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty: Franciscan Mysticism

A Humble Mystery

This week's meditations explore Franciscan mysticism. Sister Ilia Delio identifies the spirituality of Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) as rooted in God's love and humility:

Did you ever have one of those days where the whole idea of God was just too much to think about? As if trying to “get a handle” on God was like trying to kiss the moon? If the mystics are right (and usually they are because they see things much differently than we do) then you were probably closer that day to God than any other day in your life. How is this possible, you ask? How can God be close to you (or you to God) when God seems so far away or not at all? . . . This is my answer to you: God is a mystery of humble love. It is a mystery that you cannot reason or try to figure out. You must simply live in the mystery. . . .

I think Francis of Assisi grasped something of the mystery of God and, in a particular way, the mystery of God's humility. Although he was simple and not well educated, he had an insight into God that I can only say was profound. Francis did not study theology. . . . He simply spent long hours in prayer, often in caves, mountains or places of solitude, places where he could distance himself from the busy everyday

world. Thomas of Celano [c. 1185–1260], the first biographer of Francis, wrote: “Where the knowledge of teachers is outside, the passion of the lover entered.” [1] What Thomas perceived is that love, not knowledge, allowed Francis to enter into the great mystery we call “God.” As he entered into this mystery he discovered two principle features of God—the overflowing goodness of God and the humility of God. . . . How did a man as simple as Francis arrive at this mystery of God? The answer is Jesus Christ. Francis came to know the God of humble love by meditating on and imitating the poor and humble Christ.

Recognizing God's loving humility, Francis mirrored the same:

As his life deepened in God, [Francis] made a constant effort to spend himself in love by giving himself to the other. He became bent over in love for every person, every creature, including tiny earthworms which he would pick up so that they would not be crushed underfoot. By following the poor and humble Christ, Francis was formed into a “brother minor.” His followers said that he became “another Christ” because, like Christ, he was humble in love. Following the footprints of Jesus, Francis found the God of humble love not among the popular and the proud, the arrogant and the rich or those who “stand out” in society but among the ordinary, the forgotten, the poor and sick and the marginalized. The God of Francis, Celano wrote, was a God “who delights to be with *the simple* and those rejected by the world.” [2]

[1] Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 2nd book, chap. 68, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol.

2, *The Founder* (New York: New City Press, 2000), 314.

[2] Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 1st book, chap. 12, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint* (New York: New City Press, 1999), 210.

Ilia Delio, *The Humility of God: A Franciscan Perspective* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), 15, 17, 19–20.

Image credit: Belinda Rain, *Water Drops on Grass* (detail), 1972, [photograph](#), California, public domain. Belinda Rain, *Nevada, Lake Tahoe California* (detail), 1972, [photograph](#), California, public domain. Belinda Rain, *Forest* (detail), 1972, [photograph](#), California, public domain. Jenna Keiper & Leslye Colvin, 2022, triptych art, United States. [Click here to enlarge image.](#)

This week's images appear in a form inspired by early Christian/Catholic triptych art: a threefold form that tells a unified story.

Image inspiration: *We look for Spirit in every stone and blade of grass, in everything. We are part of something so much larger, so much grander. God's grace abounds.*

Story From Our Community

The meditations on St. Francis have been so meaningful to me. I feel animals are my brothers and sisters. Fourteen years ago I switched to a plant-based diet for health reasons. I could not have predicted then that letting go of my old diet would put me on a spiritual journey and make space for so much love and abundance. My reverence for all animals has deepened. Is my dog more

deserving of love than a cow, chicken, or pig? All creation is sacred and I feel connected to it. My diet is abundant with beautiful plants. My life is abundant. My heart is full of love. —Sally P.

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, 3 October 2022 *The Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi*

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty: Franciscan Mysticism A Universal Connection

Father Richard Rohr writes of the cosmic scope of Franciscan mysticism:

I use the word mysticism in a very traditional and classic sense. It is not pointing to something esoteric and unavailable, though it does point to something that is only available to those

who go beyond the surface and exterior, those who *experience the inner grace and connectivity of all things*. As Jesus, Paul, and Franciscan theologian Bonaventure (1221–1274) each said in their own way, mysticism is often foolishness to the educated and obvious to the simple.

I emphasize *connectivity* because that unteachable gift is what I always see in true mystics. Mystics know and enjoy the connected core of reality that is hidden to those who do not desire it or search for it. All mystics know is that they are inside of an immense and wonderful secret, which seems to be hidden from or denied by (*but not denied to!*) most of the rest of us. Mystics look out from different eyes that see the grace *in* all things and the deep connection *between* all things.

While Franciscan mysticism overlaps with aspects of non-Christian mysticism—such as nature mysticism (panentheism), Jewish mysticism (God as “One” and thus all inclusive), Islamic Sufi mysticism (ecstasy and joy), Hindu mysticism (unitive consciousness and asceticism), and Buddhism (nonviolence and simplicity)—Franciscan mysticism has a unique place in the world through its Christocentric lens. Franciscan mysticism is about an intuition of Jesus as the Incarnate and Universal Christ. Francis discovered and so powerfully loved this mystery in Jesus that he eventually became a living image of Christ.

It was the unique person of Jesus that Francis and Clare fell in love with, precisely in his incarnate and humble state, identifying with the excluded and little ones, whom Jesus calls “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40). The bias toward the edge and the bottom has always been at the heart of Franciscan mysticism, explaining its

perennial identification with poverty and suffering.

The cosmic vision, personalized in Jesus, was an intuition that Francis and many of his followers lived and experienced, but most of them did not formulate it in theological words or academic concepts as much as in *lifestyles*. Usually they picked it up by osmosis, through the gospel and the Franciscan lineage. Followers of Francis and Clare bore “fruit that remained” and they invariably believed in original blessing much more than original sin.

Franciscan mysticism is therefore not really about Francis, but about a universal notion of the Christ and therefore of all reality. Francis pushes all of our seeing to the absolute edge by always including those whom other systems might too easily exclude—lepers, non-Christians, poor people, hated outsiders. When it loses that “edgy” position, it might be mini-mysticism, or even church mysticism, but it is never Franciscan mysticism. Francis knew that only love is big enough to handle and hold truth. Truth which is not loving, joyful, and inclusive is never the Great Truth.

Tuesday, 4 October 2022 *Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi*

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty: Franciscan Mysticism A Mystical Way of Life

Francis of Assisi's experiences of God led him to solidarity with those who suffer, whether lepers, people in poverty, or the

Crucified Christ himself. Franciscan priest and author Murray Bodo writes:

Francis experienced a profound conversion as a young man. . . . When he was on his way to fight in the Papal army [he] was told in a dream to leave his fellow soldiers and return to Assisi where it would be shown him what he was to do. He listened to the dream and returned home confused and despondent. One day, he met a leper on the road. Something impelled him to dismount his horse and not only place coins in the leper's hand, but to embrace the leper. In so doing, he was filled with indescribable sweetness. . . . In that instant he knew he had embraced Jesus Christ. He knew then what he was to do with his life: to embrace Jesus in the poor and rejected, in those who previously had repulsed him.

Shortly afterwards, praying before the crucifix in the dilapidated chapel of San Damiano outside Assisi's walls, he heard a voice from the crucifix saying, "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling into ruin." And Francis responded immediately, begging stones and rebuilding this little chapel with his own hands. As he was to learn later, it was the Catholic Church itself that he was to restore. How he was to do this he learned while attending mass one day. He heard in the Gospel that the true disciples of Christ should take no gold, or silver, or copper in their belts, no bag for their journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff (Matthew 10:9–10). He was filled with joy and said, "This is what I want; this is what I desire with all my heart." He renounced his patrimony, gave away all his possessions, and began the life of an itinerant preacher who dwelled among the lepers. Others followed, and the Franciscan way of life began.

In all of this it was Jesus whose footsteps he followed. It was Jesus who was his all. He fell in love with Christ in an intimate, almost overwhelming way. . . .

Two years before he died, [Francis] was given one of the most extraordinary of mystical experiences. He was praying on a mountain in Tuscany in preparation for the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel when suddenly he was caught up in ecstasy and saw above him a six-winged flaming Seraph angel. Four wings were outstretched and two covered the body of the Crucified Christ. Francis' response to this image was so intense that when he awoke, he bore within his own flesh the Sacred Stigmata, the wounds of the crucified Christ in his feet and hands and side. And they remained all the rest of his life as visible signs of the profound mystical life of St. Francis.

Wednesday, 5 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty: Franciscan Mysticism Loving Things in Themselves

Inspired by Franciscan philosopher-theologian John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), Father Richard teaches about loving things in and as themselves:

What does it mean when we're told we should love God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with our whole mind, and with our whole strength? The first commandment is that we should love God more than anything else. The only way I know how to love God is *to love what God*

loves; only then do we love with divine love and allow it to flow through us.

Just how does God love? Franciscan philosopher-theologian Duns Scotus said in his doctrine of “thisness” (“*haecceity*”), that we are to love things in and as themselves, to love things for what they are, not for what they do for us. That’s when we really begin to love our spouses, our children, our neighbors, and others. When we free them from our agendas, then we can truly love them without concern for what they do for us, or how they make us look, or what they can get us. We begin to love them in themselves and for themselves, as living images of God. Now that takes real work!

So why is “thisness” so good and important? Duns Scotus mirrors Jesus as the Good Shepherd leaving the ninety-nine sheep and going after the one (Luke 15:4–6). The universal incarnation of Christ always shows itself in the specific, the concrete, the particular; it refuses to let life be a mere abstraction. No one says this better than Christian Wiman: “If nature abhors a vacuum, Christ abhors a vagueness. If God is love, Christ is love for this one person, this one place, this one time-bound and time-ravaged self.” [1]

The doctrine of *haecceity* says that we come to universal meaning deeply and rightly through the concrete, the specific, and the ordinary, and not the other way around. The principle here is “go deep in any one place and we will meet all places.” When we start with big universal ideas, at the level of concepts and -isms, we too often stay there—arguing about theories, forever making more distinctions. At that level, the mind is totally in charge. It’s easier to love humanity then, but not any individual people. We defend principles of justice but can’t muster the courage to live fully just

lives ourselves. Only those who live like Francis and Clare do that.

Francis lived such “thisness” simply by looking at things and loving things in themselves and for themselves. I think this is what it means to love God. When we love things in themselves, we are looking out at the world with God’s eyes. When we look out from these eyes, we see that it’s not about us! And I promise, when we begin seeing the world this way, everything starts to give us joy. Simple things start to make us happy, and Reality begins to offer us inherent joy.

Thursday, 6 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty: Franciscan Mysticism A Web of Infinite Love

God, for Bonaventure, is not an offended monarch on a throne throwing down thunderbolts, but a “fountain fullness” that flows, overflows, and fills all things in one exclusively positive direction. God is a one-directional waterwheel of love, with no backsplash. Reality is always in process, participatory; it is love itself. —Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love*

Franciscan mystical theologian Bonaventure (1221–1274) used dynamic, creation-centered metaphors to describe God. Theologian and Franciscan sister Dawn Nothwehr summarizes:

God, as Trinity, is like a gushing fountain—that is, the source from which the river of all reality flows and to which it ultimately

returns. Again, God is like the water of an overflowing fountain, generously showering all of creation with love. Or, God is like the expansive deep oceans that are like the vast depth of God's faithful love. Like a song—where all of the notes in a carefully crafted order must be heard for the song to be known—so too, in its wide diversity, the various dynamic cosmic elements make up the interrelated cosmos. God's self-revelation is like a book: it is first "written" within the consciousness of God . . . and then becomes the book "written without" as the whole creation—all created things are the expression of the divine Artist. . . .

Then there is Bonaventure's window metaphor. Each element of creation reveals something of the Creator like the array of colored glass in a stained-glass pane, which flashes with dynamic hues as sunlight passes through it. [1]

Drawing insight from Bonaventure's metaphors for God, Ilia Delio writes that contemplation naturally leads to compassionate care for the earth:

While this Franciscan path of contemplation is desperately needed in our world today as we face massive suffering and vast ecological crises, we still live, in our western culture, with an emphasis on rationality, order and mind. Because our "I" is separated from the world around us, we struggle to be incarnational people and to see our world imbued with divine goodness. We fail to contemplate God's love poured out into creation. . . .

The Franciscan path to God calls us to gaze on the crucified Christ and to see there the humble love of God so that we may, like Francis, learn to see and love the presence of God's overflowing goodness hidden, and yet revealed, in the marvelous diversity of

creation. The one who contemplates God knows the world to be charged with the grandeur of God. Contemplation leads to a solidarity with all creation whereby all sorrows are shared in a heart of compassionate love, all tears are gathered in a womb of mercy, all pain is healed by the balm of forgiveness. The contemplative sees the threads of God's overflowing love that binds together the whole of creation in a web of infinite love. We are called to see deeply that we may love greatly. And in that great love, rejoice in the overflowing goodness of God. [2]

Friday, 7 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty: Franciscan Mysticism An Ordinary Prayer

Professor Joan Mueller, a Franciscan Sister of Joy, shares how Clare of Assisi taught her version of Franciscan prayer (1194–1253):

Often, when we think of mysticism, we conjure up images of difficult prayer techniques and workshops with meditation gurus. Prayer, we believe, is for professionals. . . . We love God, believe in God, but just don't feel that we can talk with God like the "professional pray-ers."

But, Franciscanism is a spirituality of the people. The largest order of Franciscans is made up of lay people, and both Francis and Clare chose a quasi-lay lifestyle over the monasticism of their time. Neither Francis nor Clare participated in prayer workshops, nor did they have extensive monastic

training, and yet both experienced profound union with God. What was their secret?

Although we have prayers that were written by St. Francis, it is St. Clare, in her fourth letter to St. Agnes of Prague, who explains what is meant by Franciscan prayer. In this letter, written on her deathbed, Clare teaches Agnes to make a habit of daily prayer. This daily practice of prayer, however, is not a difficult task as Clare explains it. . . .

Clare suggests that we . . . “consider the midst of Jesus’ life, his humility, his blessed poverty, the countless hardships, and the punishments that he endured for our redemption.” [1] Here Clare is asking us simply to reflect on the public life of Christ.

Medievals had a great way of doing this type of meditation. When a cathedral or local church was being frescoed, a painter would come to town and the subjects for the paintings that were being commissioned for the church’s walls and ceilings would be decided. But whom would the painter use for his artistic models? Most often, he wandered the local streets, interacted with the villagers, and decided whose faces he might portray. One day you might go to church and find yourself in a fresco listening to Jesus preach. Maybe your face would represent one of the disciples, or one of the women who cared for Jesus. Perhaps one of your children would be listening to Jesus teach. In any case, you would be placed right in the story of the gospel; your face would actually be central to the story.

This is what Clare is asking us to do. Take the gospel for the day, a gospel from mass or the liturgy of the hours, or a gospel passage from a daily devotional and imagine yourself in the midst of the story. Who would you be most comfortable portraying? What are you hearing, seeing, smelling,

tasting? Clare asks us to spend a few minutes really entering into the gospel story of Jesus’ public life and imagining what it would be like to be there. . . .

This perseverance and commitment to engaging deeply in ordinary, Christian prayer is what identifies the friar, Poor Clare nun, the Franciscan lay mystic, or the person inspired by Francis.

Synod on Synodality had its doubters, but it's proving to be balm for 'enduring wounds'

3 October 2022

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



A virtual training and listening session for the Synod on Synodality, held in February (RNS/video screen grab)

In preparation for the Synod on Synodality, which will bring the world's bishops to Rome a year from now, Pope Francis called for Catholics to meet in their parishes and dioceses to listen to one another and discern a path forward for the church.

Many of the laity in the United States were excited by the opportunity. In the past they have felt unheard by a clerical and hierarchical church. Others were confused by the process that favored discernment over putting recommendations to a vote. Still others "felt the process would be futile," that no matter what was said in the meetings, the bishops would do what they wanted; nothing would change.

Despite these reservations, the U.S. bishops reported to the Vatican, "many were surprised by a level of engagement and richness that surpassed their expectations. It was frequently noted how much agreement participants found when they listened to each other."

The bishops' report, officially the [National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023 Synod](#), released Sept. 19, [summarizes](#) 10 months of listening sessions in American parishes and dioceses. The synthesis, in the words of Bishop Daniel Flores, chair of the bishops' committee on doctrine, reports "what we as a Church have heard each other say."

Noteworthy is that many of the priorities of the U.S. bishops got little attention in the listening sessions.

The report is organized into four sections: "Enduring Wounds," "Enhancing Communion & Participation," "Ongoing Formation for Mission" and "Engaging Discernment."

In this column, I will focus on the enduring wounds reported in the synthesis.

The report acknowledges, "Many of these wounds have been inflicted not only by individual members of the Church but often by the institution itself." This is an extraordinary confession by a church that

happily acknowledges sinful members but rarely acknowledges institutional failings by the "Holy, Catholic Church."

Given top billing among the enduring wounds was the sexual abuse crisis. "The sin and crime of sexual abuse has eroded not only trust in the hierarchy and the moral integrity of the Church," the bishops said, "but also created a culture of fear that keeps people from entering into relationship with one another and thus from experiencing the sense of belonging and connectedness for which they yearn."

Despite the hierarchy's desire to move on from the abuse crisis, the laity still feel this wound.

The report points out that the sense of community in parishes has suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic and that a "large number of the faithful have not yet returned to worship." This has been the experience of other denominations as well. Whether these people will come back is still unknown.

The participants were also pained by the "divisive political ideologies present in our society." They complained that "partisan politics is infiltrating homilies and ministry," according to the report, "and this trend has created divisions and intimidation among believers."

These divisions have impacted our faith lives, even the Eucharist. Some lamented the limited access to the pre-conciliar Mass. Many felt that differences over how to celebrate the liturgy "sometimes reach the level of animosity. People on each side of the issue reported feeling judged by those who differ from them."



Synod on Synodality logo (RNS/courtesy image)

Catholics also perceived a "lack of unity among the bishops in the United States, and even of some individual bishops with the Holy Father, as a source of grave scandal." This division among the bishops is not something the bishops willingly acknowledge in public.

Besides polarization, marginalization has wounded the church as well as being a source of scandal.

Among the marginalized are those "who are made vulnerable by their lack of social and/or economic power, such as immigrant communities; ethnic minorities; those who are undocumented; the unborn and their mothers; people who are experiencing poverty, homelessness, or incarceration; those people who have disabilities or mental health issues; and people suffering from various addictions."

Included also in this group are women, whose voices are frequently marginalized in the decision-making processes of the church: "Women on parish staff said they felt underappreciated, underpaid, not supported in seeking formation, worked long hours, and lacked good role models for self-care."

Others are marginalized in the church because "circumstances in their own lives are experienced as impediments to full participation in the life of the Church." Included here are "members of the LGBTQ+ community, persons who have been divorced or those who have remarried without a declaration of nullity, as well as individuals who have civilly married but who never married in the Church."

Clearly, the people of God support the pastoral approach to these groups advocated by Francis.

The exposure of these wounds is not seen in the synthesis as a purely negative experience. Rather, "the enduring wounds caused by the clergy sexual abuse scandal, the pandemic, polarization, and marginalization have exposed a deep hunger for healing and the strong desire for communion, community, and a sense of belonging and being united."

Noteworthy is that many of the priorities of the U.S. bishops got little attention in the listening sessions.

In the synthesis, there is no mention of the religious freedom of the church being under attack, no opposition to gay marriage or gay teachers in Catholic schools, no concern about trans people in bathrooms or sports, no desire to prohibit certain people from going to Communion. The word abortion is never mentioned, although "the unborn and their mothers" are mentioned along with other marginalized groups.

Undoubtedly, these topics came up in some sessions, but not in enough numbers to make it into the synthesis.

I admit that I was among the skeptics when the synod process began, but the open discussion of the enduring wounds in the

church shows that the faithful were able to take a hard look at the church and voice their concerns. This is the first step in healing these wounds.



Thomas Reese

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

Inspired by Catholic faith, San José nonprofit promotes Latina teen mental health

3 October 2022

by [Jeannine M. Pitas](#)



Lupita Castañeda-Liles, fourth from the left, takes part in a performance of a Mexican folkloric dance group she is part of at Notre Dame High School in San José, California. (Courtesy of Monica Gomez)

When Lupita Castañeda-Liles began seventh grade at the Catholic elementary school she'd been attending her whole life, she encountered an unpleasant surprise: Some of her classmates, who previously had been her friends, started bullying her.

"She came home from school sad and crying," says her mother, María del Socorro Castañeda, a former professor at Santa Clara University and the author of the 2018 book *Our Lady of Everyday Life: La Virgen de Guadalupe and the Catholic Imagination of Mexican Women in America*.

"At Santa Clara, I'd taught classes on women's rights," she told NCR. "It was hard to watch my daughter going through this experience of bullying. We looked online for organizations dealing with teenage Latina girls and mental health. There were sites on teen mental health generally, and a few on African American girls and mental health, but we couldn't find any on Latina mental health specifically. We saw a need to fill that gap."

Today, Lupita is a 15-year-old sophomore at Notre Dame High School in San José, California, and chief inspirational officer of [Becoming Mujeres](#), an organization dedicated to the empowerment of Latina teenage girls and the people who care for them. Since starting the organization three years ago, mother and daughter have given workshops in elementary schools, high schools and colleges. Topics include self-care, overcoming imposter syndrome, and honoring one's culture.

"We begin the workshops by telling our story. It's more of a dialogue with reflection. The goal is not to come in and say, 'Let me teach you how to be mentally healthy,' but to share our stories and collectively find healing," she says.



María del Socorro Castañeda and her daughter Lupita Castañeda-Liles hold a Becoming Mujeres online workshop in 2021. (Courtesy of Monica Gomez)

When the pandemic began mere months after the organization's founding, mother and daughter shifted to online workshops in many settings, including San José State University and Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. One workshop was at Notre Dame High School in San José.

"She was great," says Monica Gomez, an alumna of the school who works in donor relations and also advises Latinas Unidas, a student group focused on Latina culture and identity. Latinas Unidas hosted a Becoming Mujeres workshop online in December 2021.

"At the time, she was only in eighth grade, but she was a teenager whom our students could see as someone like them," Gomez adds. "She shared her personal story, she and her mom building this network that might enlighten other students facing challenges like envy among classmates, racial intolerance, pressures brought on by social media, and bullying. Many teens face this, but young women of color face it more."

Gomez said teenage Latina girls must confront unique challenges due to internal cultural pressures alongside external stereotyping and discrimination.

"It's hard to manage a persona when we feel we have to modify our culture for others," Lupita told NCR. "There are multiple things about our culture we appreciate — our dance, music, singing, food, our interpersonal relations. From an outsider's perspective, people jump to conclusions, especially about our music."

Despite the challenges, Gomez sees a movement toward greater empowerment of girls in her community.

"Culturally, Latinas are told to be respectful and kind, to not speak up to elders when there is tension, but I see that changing," she said. "Our students are more empowered now. Social justice causes have helped this. Black Lives Matter raised a huge amount of awareness. As young women of color, we have to prove ourselves. We constantly have to show that there is more to us than a stereotype."

"The goal is not to come in and say, 'Let me teach you how to be mentally healthy,' but to share our stories and collectively find healing."

—Lupita Castañeda-Liles

Now that the pandemic has ebbed, the Castañedas are starting to return to in-person workshops. For Lupita, it continues to be personally healing and empowering. "Sometimes hardships do happen for a reason," she said. "I don't always have access to all the help that I need. But sometimes the reason we go through these difficulties is that we have to accommodate the way we react to different situations to avoid going through them again as an adult. As painful as it is now, regardless of how you see it, it will be beneficial in the future."

For María del Socorro, this project is rooted in her Catholic faith and upbringing.

"The roots of *Becoming Mujeres* are deeply Catholic," she said. "I have Chicana colleagues who think the only way to empowerment is by doing away with anything that has to do with the institutional church. This attitude has always caused me pain. Yes, there are ways of being Catholic that are damaging to women. I list these in my book — narratives from the women I interviewed.

"At the same time, the book is about the life-giving things that come from being Catholic: the sense of being anchored in your family and culture, of being rooted in a faith that when you need it will help you surpass life's difficulties. The important thing is to learn to way to navigate Catholicism, to find a way we can continue moving in our faith as we are seeking to carve a dignified space within the Catholic Church."

Lupita agrees with her mother. "Catholicism has negative aspects, but I recognize good aspects that motivate me to be who I am today. Religion is something I can grow from. The concept that there is something greater than us comforts me and makes me feel that the work we're doing is worthwhile."

María del Socorro recalls that when she was a teenager, she received much practical guidance from the church in the form of her parish priest, Fr. Mateo Sheedy, who urged her to apply to Santa Clara University.

"I'd migrated to the U.S. at 9 and was tracked into non-college courses, even in junior high," she explained.

"They put me in sewing, woodshop, Future Farmers of America. Latinx students didn't have the grades for college. I ended up in community college, which is great if you have mentorship. But if you don't, you can fall through the cracks easily," she said.

María del Socorro said it was Sheedy who "kept asking me when I'd be transferring to Santa Clara." She said Sheedy also provided help in convincing the school to admit her, even though her grades were lower than other students and a counselor had suggested that she consider applying to a different institution.

"Father Mateo faxed the provost, telling them I was the type of student they needed. 'You'd be crazy not to accept María Castañeda,' " she recalled.

Lupita, who hopes to study psychiatry and work in the mental health field, has always been inspired by her mother's story.

"As Latinos, we are underrepresented in many aspects but especially in academia," she said. "When I was younger, my mother was my model of success. There were no celebrities I looked up to that had the achievements I wanted. But the story made me realize that if my own mother could do it, I have no excuses."

María del Socorro urges everyone to maintain a mindset of growth.

"I tell people to shine their light big and bright," she said. "If people don't like it, they can put some shades on."

Jeannine M. Pitas

Jeannine M. Pitas is a teacher, writer, and Spanish-English literary translator living in the Pittsburgh area. She teaches literature and writing at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

Laudato Si' documentary puts a human face on climate change, director says

Pope Francis' landmark
ecology document comes
to life as documentary

'The Letter'

4 October 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)



Pope Francis meets with Arouna Kandé, a climate refugee from Senegal, in a scene from "The Letter: A Message for Our Earth," a new documentary based upon the pope's 2015 ecology encyclical "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home." (Courtesy of Laudato Si' Movement)

Pope Francis' groundbreaking teaching document on ecology, creation and climate change that he addressed to the entire world is coming to a computer, phone or smart TV screen near you.

"The Letter: A Message for Our Earth" is a new documentary about the pope's 2015 encyclical, or papal letter, "*Laudato Si'*, on

Care for Our Common Home." The film, a joint project of Off the Fence Productions (behind the Oscar-winning documentary "My Octopus Teacher") and the Laudato Si' Movement, will hold its premiere at the Vatican Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology. Beginning that evening, it will be available on YouTube free to watch.

The release of the film — previewed during the [COP26 United Nations climate summit](#) — was timed with the Vatican's [formal entry into the Paris Agreement](#). The Vatican, which collaborated on the documentary, invited church leaders, scientists and ambassadors to the Holy See to the premiere, the latter also attending a high-level meeting where Vatican officials called for increased actions on climate change.

"The environmental crisis is not an issue for Catholics alone. It affects everyone, now and future generations," Cardinal Michael Czerny, head of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said in a statement. "This film is a clarion cry to people everywhere: We have to act together, and we have to do so now."

More than four years in the making, "[The Letter](#)" follows the story of five people, each representing groups often marginalized in international environmental deliberations, on their way to Rome for a meeting with the pope to discuss *Laudato Si'* and the growing global threats of climate change and rapid biodiversity loss. They include Arouna Kandé, a climate refugee in Senegal; Cacique Dadá, an environmental defender and leader of the Maró Indigenous territory in the Brazilian Amazon; Ridhima Pandey, a youth climate activist from India; and [Greg Asner and Robin Martin](#), biologists studying coral reefs in Hawaii.



Filmmaker Nicolas Brown (Provided photo)

The film features exclusive footage from their encounter with Francis, whose words serve as a spiritual guide alongside the personal stories and scientific findings throughout the documentary. After their papal meeting, the group then travels to Assisi, the home of St. Francis, whose "Canticle of the Creatures" provided the name to the pope's encyclical.

Behind the lens capturing their stories was Nicolas Brown, an award-winning filmmaker who has made more than a dozen documentaries on climate change and the environment, including "The Serengeti Rules," National Geographic's "Pandas: The Journey Home" and "Climate Chaos" with famed naturalist Sir David Attenborough.

"Our original vision was, 'Can faith and science together somehow unite to save the planet?' And that was a real great foundation for me for starting the project and coming on board," he told EarthBeat in a wide-ranging interview ahead of "The Letter" premiere.

Brown, the writer and director, shared the vision for the film, his amazement upon reading the encyclical for the first time, and the journey that transformed *Laudato Si'* from 40,000 words on paper to a 90-

minute visual expedition into its ecological messages and the lives impacted by environmental destruction on a rapidly warming planet.

The interview below has been excerpted and edited for length and clarity.

Official Trailer for "The Letter: A Message for Our Earth"; beginning the evening of Oct. 4, the film will be available on YouTube free to watch. (YouTube Originals)

***EarthBeat*: How did you come to be a part of this film project? What drew you to this papal document as a subject for a documentary?**

Brown: The idea was to do kind of a "Before the Flood" but with the pope instead of Leonardo DiCaprio. That was the idea. And initially when I was approached, I have to say I wasn't that keen because I'm not Catholic. I'm not even that religious myself, although I suppose I call myself spiritual — and more so since making this film, by quite a bit. But I was worried that it would be like a promotional video for the Catholic Church.

Until I was approached about [the film], I hadn't even read the *Laudato Si'*. And I read it and was just so amazed that Pope Francis seems to have intuited the moment to reach a handshake toward the science community toward saving our planet.

What struck you once you did read *Laudato Si'*? And how did that start to influence the vision you had for the documentary?

When I first read the document, I have to say I was completely amazed by it. It took me completely by surprise. I was raised in the evangelical tradition myself, and it was

in a fairly conservative part of Colorado, where the tradition was somewhat hostile to science. ... And so I wasn't prepared for such an accepted role of science [in *Laudato Si'*]. That's what immediately struck me.

I think that it was the first time that slowly my prejudice started to crumble a little bit. I felt that in my bubble to some degree if someone was particularly religious, we might just write them off as someone who wouldn't be necessarily that interested in a very complicated science issue. But then to suddenly realize that at heart, protecting climate change and biodiversity loss, because of the components involved, it's a moral issue as much as a technocratic one. Now I'm of the opinion that there's no way that we in the science community could ever solve the climate issue without the help of moral leadership.

'Now I'm of the opinion that there's no way that we in the science community could ever solve the climate issue without the help of moral leadership.'
—Nicolas Brown

The other thing that immediately struck me [about the encyclical] is that there was no story, so it was going to be an impossible task to figure out how to turn it into a movie. I made a film prior to this where I had four characters who met around a science issue, it's called "The Serengeti Rules." And I thought that it might be an idea then to bring four people from different walks of life ... people who are disenfranchised in some way from the process [of decision-making around climate change]. So we came up with the idea then of the voice of the wildlife, voice of the poor, voice of the youth and voice of the Indigenous. Let's tell these stories and use the pope's megaphone that he has to air these stories, to give them the time of day to understand who they are as people so that we can start to think of the climate

change problem and the biodiversity problem less in terms of statistics and more in terms of human beings.

And so that was our aim then, that these people would no longer become statistics but would become real people, and we'd really understand some of the human dimensions of the issues facing us that I think the pope is really trying to point toward. So in a way I think we're telling *Laudato Si'* but through the eyes of the people who live it on the front lines.



Cacique Odair "Dadá" Borari is a leader of the Novo Lugar community of the Borari people, in Para, Brazil. As an environmental defender he has worked to combat illegal logging in the Amazon. (Courtesy of *Laudato Si'* Movement)

Toward the end of the film, there's a powerful moment with Arouna from Senegal. What was it like witnessing and capturing that, and what did it add to the film?

As happens with documentary, you come up with an idea and usually the idea is only half-baked and not really that great in reality. But what happens is always reality takes over.

And in the case of climate change now, I think on any given day you're going to be able to open the newspaper and find some evidence of severe climate change. And it just so happened that the day we met the

pope, some events happened to one of our characters, Arouna from Senegal, that were fairly life-changing for him. Most people are not aware that Senegal is the lowest-lying country in Africa, and therefore sea level rise is already impacting them dramatically. And there are whole communities, I've been there several times now, there's a climate refugee center there that's been in operation for four years where over 3,000 people have been displaced because of climate change already.

Arouna's story is one of those stories where we didn't anticipate it, but the fact that it happened kind of made the film. ... And it was at that point then — we stumbled upon it — but we realized that the true meeting wasn't really for them to meet the pope. The true meeting was for them to meet each other. And so the ending of the film really becomes about a union of people who were once strangers, whose stories were once strange to each other, who through a dialogue suddenly became close friends, family even, and allies for each other in the way that the world needs to come together [to respond to climate change].

And it's I think indicative of breaking down these bubbles and these barriers, which is kind of what the film is meant to be about, what I think the *Laudato Si'* is meant to be about.



Arouna Kandé, a climate refugee from Senegal, is among the main protagonists in the new documentary "The Letter: A Message for Our Earth." (Courtesy of Laudato Si' Movement)

At the beginning of "The Letter," it states Francis' message in *Laudato Si'* is even more crucial for today than when it was first issued. Why do you think that is?

I think the urgency is not going to go away, because as I said, the reality is outstripping us. It's outstripping even the science, but it's certainly outstripping the financial markets and it's outstripping the public, in that it's happening quicker than we thought. The poles are melting quicker. Oceans are rising quicker. And we're seeing the results on a daily basis now whereby people's lives are being torn asunder. And it's not just in Africa, although I would say that it's very clear that the Global South is paying a heavier price.

It's amazing to have someone as powerful as the pope speaking about this. And I'm hoping it's going to embolden a lot more people, too. The film was meant to be, in some respects, a reboot of the document.

Every atom of carbon dioxide that's going up into our upper atmosphere, it stays up there for average of 200 years. So we still have like two centuries of warming to go on

top of what we've created already. So this urgency is not going to go away for a couple of centuries. Fortunately, the church thinks in centuries.

Given that Pope Francis addressed his encyclical to all people, what was the importance of making this documentary accessible on YouTube for people to watch at no cost?

That one was a real confusion for me at first because I'm very, very used to — and I think that my whole industry is totally geared toward — awards, red carpets, festivals and making money out of making a film. And so this was a very counterintuitive approach.

This whole project, if I'm honest, is about reaching outside of that bubble [of people who are already concerned about environmental issues]. And for that, YouTube becomes this amazing powerful platform. My dream is that this film is watched in Africa, in Latin America, in churches and little communities far away from the big cinemas, and reaches people who wouldn't have otherwise been able to watch or maybe wouldn't have been interested if it weren't for the fact that the pope's in it.



Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, reads St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Creatures" in a scene from the

documentary "The Letter: A Message for Our Earth." The 1224 prayer poem provided the name of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on ecology "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home." (Courtesy of Laudato Si' Movement)

You've spoken of hope throughout our conversation. What do you hope viewers take away from this film?

I hope that people become interested and fascinated with their own spiritual dimension to which they can make decisions about the environment. [Papal preacher Cardinal Raniero] Cantalamessa has some very powerful messages toward the end of the film, where he talks about his own experience as a Franciscan, where by his owning nothing allows him to own everything in a sense. And there are messages of freedom that come with compassion and kindness that are more compelling, I think, than the capitalist argument, which is to accumulate and to buy and have and hold and possess and desire.

My greatest hope is that people understand that the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis are the greatest existential threats ever faced by humanity, and it will take a completely unified human response across the world to combat them. These are big, big, almost surreally big problems posed that will affect all future generations, not just the current ones. And from a pure philosophical point of view, to condemn all future generations to a lesser life just so that we can have some short-term comfort is incredibly morally objectionable.

So I'm hoping that people will start to look more into the moral dimensions of these issues, and *Laudato Si'* being a moral document, the pope himself being a moral leader. I think that it's recognized that science in the end is just a tool, and it's the moral behavior and conscience of

individuals, it's their ability to engender their own compassion for the other and their ability to perhaps see creation as a responsibility, not something that's to be plundered. And it's those kinds of deeper messages that I hope people will start to think about [through the film], all of which I think are really hopeful.



Brian Roewe

Brian Roewe is NCR environment correspondent. His email address is broewe@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter at [@brianroewe](https://twitter.com/brianroewe).

Florida continues with rescue efforts as Hurricane Ian heads north

3 October 2022

by [Rhina Guidos](#),
[Catholic News Service](#)



An aerial view shows homes surrounded by floodwaters in Lee County, Fla., Sept. 29, 2022,

after Hurricane Ian caused widespread destruction across the Sunshine State. (CNS photo/WPLG TV via ABC via Reuters)

***Editor's Note:** This story was updated Oct. 3 with additional reporting on Hurricane Ian.*

WASHINGTON — As authorities in Florida continued rescue efforts, and Catholic parishes and dioceses in the U.S. moved rapidly to collect aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian as U.S. President Joe Biden said it could take years to rebuild what was destroyed.

Though Ian was downgraded to a tropical storm after wrecking swaths of Florida, it regained strength and regrouped as a hurricane before heading toward South Carolina. Biden approved an emergency declaration to send federal help before it made landfall in Charleston Sept. 30. Residents of Florida and the Carolinas face a recovery estimated to cost tens of billions of dollars.

As of Oct. 2, at least 80 people were confirmed dead, and more than 1,600 people had been rescued in parts of southwest and central Florida.

The Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida, will hold a special collection at its parishes in October to help with the damage including in the neighboring Diocese of Venice and is asking for others to help at <https://www.dosp.org/disasterrelief>.

"Our hearts are moved with compassion for all those who have suffered damage and destruction due to Hurricane Ian, especially our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Venice," St. Petersburg's Bishop Gregory L. Parkes said of the diocese that suffered the brunt of the damage.

At the Vatican Oct. 2, after reciting the Angelus prayer with people in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said: "I am close to the populations of Cuba and Florida, afflicted by a violent hurricane. May the Lord receive the victims, give consolation and hope to those who suffer, and sustain the solidarity efforts."

Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, called on Catholics and all people of goodwill to pray for those who lost their lives in the Caribbean and the southeast United States due to Hurricane Ian.

He urged prayers "for the comfort of their grieving families and communities" as well as prayers for those who have lost their homes and businesses. "May they find peace and comfort in God's enduring love for us, even amid these most trying circumstances," he said.

In a statement released late Sept. 30, the archbishop also prayed the emergency responders would be kept "from harm as they seek to bring relief, comfort and healing" to storm victims.

At a news conference Sept. 30, Biden told Floridians that the federal government would do all it could to help, particularly to rescue people and other recovery efforts. By midday, at least 21 fatalities has been confirmed, and the president said Sept. 29 that authorities suspected there will be "substantial loss of life."

During the Sept. 30 news conference, he pleaded with those in the Carolinas about to face the hurricane's wrath to heed warnings. He also announced that 44,000 utility workers were working to restore electricity for the many Floridians who lost power following the hurricane. As of Oct. 2, 590,000 people were still without power in

Florida, but that figure was a significant reduction from the nearly 2 million who had no power immediately after Hurricane Ian struck.

"It's not a crisis for Florida, it's an American crisis," Biden said during the news conference.

He said the situation on the ground was "far more devastating" than initially believed and "is likely to rank among the worst in the nation's history."

The president and first lady Jill Biden were visiting Puerto Rico Oct. 3 to see the devastation [wrought by Hurricane Fiona](#), which slammed into the island a week before Ian hit Florida. The Bidens planned to visit Florida Oct. 5.

In the Diocese of Venice, Bishop Frank J. Dewane gave thanks via Twitter for those who prayed for people in the path of the hurricane.

"Damage is still being assessed, but it is clear that the devastation in the Diocese is widespread," he wrote. "There are several crews already at work throughout the Diocese, and Catholic Charities is putting their local team into action. We are grateful for all those who have helped, and continue to help, during this difficult time."

Catholic Charities USA is collecting donations at <https://ccusa.online/Ian>.

In Charleston, South Carolina, Bishop Jacques e. Fabre-Jeune offered Mass hours before the storm made landfall "for the protection of all people affected by Hurricane Ian and especially for our essential personnel working to keep us safe," the diocese said on its Facebook page.

Ian hit close to 2:30 p.m. local time Sept. 30 as at Category 1 hurricane, flooding historic

Charleston, with maximum sustained winds of 85 mph. The storm was later downgraded to a tropical storm as it hit North Carolina.

As the storm went through the Carolinas, about 850,000 people had no electricity but news reports said power was restored to more than half of them by the weekend.

Will laity be granted voice at next October's synod?

4 October, 2022

by [Christine Schenk](#)



Women's ordination advocates walk toward St. Peter's Square as part of a witness on Aug. 29. The author notes that women's issues in the church — including ordination to the diaconate and priesthood — is showing up in national synod syntheses from all over the world. (NCR photo/Christopher White)

I was pleasantly surprised that the U.S. bishops' national [synthesis](#) for the [Synod on Synodality](#) explicitly named "hot button" issues such as women's ordination, LGBTQ+ inclusion and the need for freedom to speak up on controversial issues without fear of being silenced.

Synthesis writers are to be congratulated for compiling a comprehensive, transparent [document](#) featuring input from "over 22,000 reports from individual parishes and groups." Many [other](#) important ecclesial issues are also named that I shall not address here, but the text is well worth the read.

Also worth reading are reports from the [National Association of Lay Ministry](#) and [FutureChurch](#), both of which address important issues in U.S. parish life, such as lack of financial and formational support for lay ministers, parish closings — especially in urban areas — and increased clerical discrimination against women.

I was among those who doubted that any "elephant-in-the-sanctuary" issues would be found in the final national draft. For more than 20 years, I — and many like me — were banned from church property for giving programs on women's leadership and the call to ordination. Mercy Sr. [Carmel McEnroy](#) even lost her tenured teaching position for publicly supporting women's ordination.

While I am encouraged to see more inclusive processes, there are no guarantees that any 'hot button' issues will advance as the synod phases unfold.

Other individuals and groups were banned for speaking up about [LGBTQ+ advocacy](#), the [canonical rights of Catholics](#) and their parishes in the church, and the need for bishops to be [held accountable](#) for clergy sex abuse. It was not a good time for listening — or for lay inclusion in church decision making.

So now I have a bit of whiplash. Now women's issues in the church — including ordination to the diaconate and priesthood — is showing up in national synod syntheses from all over the world. Being a

bit on the obsessive-compulsive spectrum, I spent last weekend googling every national synod synthesis I could find.

I discovered 18 national syntheses and/or media summaries — some of which included whole regions such as [Asia and the Amazon](#) and [Latin America](#). Virtually every synthesis named "women's role in the church," LGBTQ+ inclusion and the need for lay inclusion (often dubbed "co-responsibility") in church decision-making at every level of church leadership. Over 70% included women's ordination to the diaconate or priesthood as a way of including women in leadership. All of [Canada's](#) regional sessions reported "requests that women be granted access to ordained ministries."

Syntheses from [England and Wales](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [Scotland](#) and [New Zealand](#) asked for updated lectionary texts. Many syntheses asked for lay preaching and consideration of married priests. Other "big picture" themes include the need to engage young people, greater adult faith formation, poverty, racism, climate change, clericalism, and welcoming the marginalized, especially LGBTQ+ individuals and the divorced and remarried.



An LGBT choir sings outside the Pastoral Congress at the World Meeting of Families in Dublin Aug. 23, 2018. (CNS/Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne)

Virtually all national syntheses said that although participants were at first skeptical, by the end of the process they expressed great appreciation for a "synodal way of being church" and want it to continue. Great love for the church, despite all of its flaws, was universally in evidence, as was appreciation for priests and sisters, and love for the Eucharist.

Considering the massive amount of energy the Catholic people — lay and priestly alike — have put into practicing synodality, it seems clear that the synodal process has the potential to be a very big deal for our future ecclesial life. In a recent [interview](#) with America magazine, Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, agreed. Citing Pope Francis' Apostolic Constitution, *Episcopalis Communio*, Grech said, "[T]he synod is not an event celebrated once every three years but is a process: a process that has a beginning but, believe me, I don't think will have an end, even the present synod that we are celebrating."

So what happens next? By the time synod bishops meet next October, won't this promising beginning be watered down? Plus, despite these honest — grounded in the Holy Spirit—contributions, won't the final decisions (or "discernment" as Grech prefers to call it) be made only by bishops?



Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, is pictured at the

Vatican in this Oct. 7, 2019, file photo.
(CNS/IPA/Sipa USA via Reuters)

Continuing my obsessive predilection, I diligently researched who makes what decisions (discernments) from here on. Here is what I discovered:

To my surprise, [synod procedures](#) include laymen and laywomen at every phase of the process, and each phase is designed to build on the previous one. A 35-member international body — which Grech describes as "a mix" of religious and laypeople, men and women, with only two bishops," — [met Sept. 22-Oct. 2](#) in Frascati, Italy, to study the national syntheses and draft a new "Document for the Continental Stage."

This document will guide the second "continental" phase of the synod consultation. For the last two days of the Frascati meeting, roughly 15 members of the Bishops' Synod Council will join the gathering to review their draft before sending it to Pope Francis for signoff. (Members of the Synod Council were elected at the Ordinary Synod on Youth in 2018).

According to NCR Rome correspondent Christopher White, there are two North Americans in the Frascati group: U.S. theologian [Kristin Colberg](#) and Jesuit Fr. David McCallum. Colberg is on the theological commission advising the synod secretariat and an associate professor at St. John Seminary at Collegeville, Minnesota. McCallum is the executive director of the [Discerning Leadership](#) program, a collaboration between Le Moyne College and the Society of Jesus, which aims to "help support Pope Francis' vision for the reform and renewal of the Church through the process of discernment and co-creative synodality."

The final version of the continental document will be made public by the end of October. It will then be sent to the world's bishops to study before they participate in one of seven continental assemblies.



Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, Northern Ireland, leads delegates on a prayer walk at a pre-synodal assembly in the sixth-century monastic site of Clonmacnoise in Ireland June 18, 2022. (CNS/Reuters/Clodagh Kilcoyne)

The synod secretariat explicitly directs that these "should be Ecclesial Assemblies (of the entire People of God) and not only Episcopal Assemblies (of bishops only). Thus, the participants should adequately represent the variety of the People of God: bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, laymen and laywomen."

Significantly, this arrangement corresponds to the wish of the majority of the bishops' conferences consulted on the subject by the General Secretariat of the Synod.

The continental phase for North America is comprised of the U.S. and Canada. A [communiqué](#) from the U.S. bishops' conference describes regional listening sessions that will reflect on the continental document, to be held in late 2022 and early 2023. These will "inform the composition of the Continental Synthesis," which will be sent to the Synod Secretariat by March 31, 2023, the deadline for all seven continental syntheses. The seven continental documents

then become the basis for the final working document — the *Instrumentum Laboris* — for next October's synod.

While I am encouraged to see more inclusive processes, there are no guarantees that any "hot button" issues will advance as the synod phases unfold. In a [second](#) America article, Grech indicated the topic of married priests "needs more time," and while he acknowledged a "widespread" desire to consider women's roles in greater depth, his awkward phrasing did not inspire confidence: "And [with] the fact that various churches are taking this same issue seriously, I really hope and pray that in time we will manage to find what is the right vocation of women in the church."

Yet perhaps the first issue is to build an infrastructure for lay inclusion in church decision-making. It seems to me that the worldwide synodal consultations are doing just that.

It should be said that all phases of the synod are consultative (not deliberative), including the 2023 synod itself, unless the pope chooses to grant it deliberative voice (*Episcopalis Communio* 3). This being Catholicism, the pope has the final word.

Yet there can be no doubt that throughout his papacy Pope Francis has gone to great lengths to prioritize an expanded voice for the laity. Two of his apostolic constitutions, *Episcopalis Communio* and [Praedicate Evangelium](#), create pathways for synodal discernment and lay decision-making in church governance. *Praedicate Evangelium* actually [separates](#) church governance from ordination, locating it instead within a "canonical mission" received from the pope. Last July, Cardinal Marc Ouellet — who is not known for being a progressive — [said](#) the pope "can also

delegate and thus make members of God's people participants in his power of jurisdiction."

So will any laypeople be granted voice — even deliberative voice — at next October's synod? Stay tuned.



Christine Schenk

St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk, an NCR board member, served urban families for 18 years as a nurse midwife before co-founding FutureChurch, where she served for 23 years. Her book *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity* (Fortress, 2017) was awarded first place in History by the Catholic Press Association. She holds master's degrees in nursing and theology.

Pope tells Putin: Stop the war

3 October 2022

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

[Vatican World](#)



People in St. Peter's Square attend the Angelus led by Pope Francis from the window of his studio overlooking the square at the Vatican Oct. 2, 2022. The pope begged Russian President Vladimir Putin to stop the war in Ukraine and condemned Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian regions. He also called upon Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to be open to serious peace proposals. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

VATICAN CITY — With "rivers of blood and tears" still flowing in Ukraine and with the increasing threat of the use of nuclear weapons, Pope Francis begged Russian President Vladimir Putin: "Stop this spiral of violence and death."

With the situation being "so serious, devastating and threatening," the pope did not offer his customary commentary on the day's Gospel reading before reciting the Angelus prayer Oct. 2. Instead, he focused on the war and the "terrible and inconceivable wound" it is inflicting on humanity.

While constantly calling for peace and offering prayers for the victims since the war began in late February, the pope drew attention in his talk to "the serious situation that has arisen in recent days with further actions contrary to the principles of international law," a clear reference to Putin's announcement Sept. 30 that Russia was annexing four occupied territories in Ukraine.

The decision, the pope told people in St. Peter's Square, "increases the risk of nuclear escalation to the point of fears of uncontrollable and catastrophic consequences worldwide."

"My appeal is addressed first of all to the president of the Russian Federation, begging him to stop this spiral of violence and death,

also for the sake of his people," the pope said.

But "saddened by the immense suffering of the Ukrainian people as a result of the aggression suffered," Francis also appealed to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy "to be open" to any "serious peace proposals."

The pope also asked world leaders "to do everything in their power to put an end to the ongoing war, without allowing themselves to be drawn into dangerous escalations, and to promote and support initiatives for dialogue."

While remembering Ukraine's "thousands of victims," including children, the destruction and the displacement of millions of people, Francis also spoke of specifics.

"Some actions can never be justified. Never!" the pope said.

"It's distressing that the world is learning the geography of Ukraine through names like Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, Izium, Zaporizhzhia and other towns that have become places of suffering and indescribable fear," the pope said, referring to cities previously occupied by Russian troops and where mass graves were found once the areas were liberated.

"And what about the fact that humanity is once again faced with the atomic threat?" the pope asked. "It is absurd."

"How much blood still must flow before we understand that war is never a solution, only destruction?" the pope asked thousands of people gathered in the square for the midday prayer.

"In the name of God and in the name of the sense of humanity that dwells in every heart," he said, "I renew my call for an immediate ceasefire."

Francis prayed for a negotiated settlement of the conflict, one that is "not imposed by force, but agreed, just and stable."

A just solution, he said, must be "based on respect for the sacred value of human life, as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each country, and the rights of minorities and legitimate concerns."

US Catholic bishops to elect new president at November general assembly

4 October 2022

by [Catholic News Service](#)



Candidates for the upcoming 2022 U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops presidential and vice presidential elections are shown clockwise from top left: Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services; Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City; Bishop Frank J. Caggiano of Bridgeport, Conn.; Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Va.; San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone; Seattle Archbishop Paul D. Etienne; Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio; Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas; Baltimore Archbishop

William E. Lori; and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind. (CNS composite/photos by Tyler Orsburn; Archdiocese of Oklahoma City; Gregory A. Shemitz; Bob Roller; Dennis Callahan, Catholic San Francisco; Paul Haring; Bob Roller; Bob Roller; Tyler Orsburn; and Bob Roller)

WASHINGTON — During their fall general assembly in Baltimore Nov. 14-17, the U.S. bishops will elect the next president and vice president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from a slate of 10 candidates nominated by their fellow bishops.

They also will vote on chairmen-elect for six standing USCCB committees.

The president and vice president are elected to three-year terms, which begin at the conclusion of this year's general assembly. At that time, Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles and Archbishop Allen Vigneron of Detroit will complete their terms as president and vice president, respectively.

The candidates for president and vice president are, in alphabetical order:

- Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services.
- Bishop Michael Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia.
- Bishop Frank Caggiano of Bridgeport, Connecticut.
- Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City.
- Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco.
- Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle.
- Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas.
- Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio.
- Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore.

- Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana.

According to the USCCB bylaws, the president is elected first by a simple majority vote of members present and voting. The vice president is then elected from the remaining nine candidates.

In either election, if a candidate does not receive more than half of the votes cast on the first ballot, a second vote is taken. If a third round of voting is necessary, that ballot is a runoff between the two bishops who received the most votes on the second ballot.

During the meeting, the bishops also will vote for chairmen-elect of six USCCB standing committees on: Canonical Affairs and Church Governance; Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; Evangelization and Catechesis; International Justice and Peace; Protection of Children and Young People; and Religious Liberty.

The six bishops will each serve for one year as chairman-elect of their respective committee before beginning a three-year term as chairman at the conclusion of the bishops' 2023 Fall General Assembly.

The nominees are, in alphabetical order:

- Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance: Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois, and Bishop Alfred A. Schlert of Allentown, Pennsylvania.
- Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs: Bishop Joseph Bambera of Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Auxiliary Bishop Peter L. Smith of Portland, Oregon.
- Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis: Archbishop Charles Thompson of Indianapolis and Bishop William D. Byrne of Springfield, Massachusetts.

- Committee on International Justice and Peace: Archbishop Nelson Pérez of Philadelphia and Bishop Abdallah Elias Zaidan of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon.

- Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People: Bishop Barry Knestout of Richmond, Virginia, and Auxiliary Bishop Elias R. Lorenzo of Newark, New Jersey.

- Committee for Religious Liberty: Archbishop Cordileone and Bishop Rhoades.

Because the elections for USCCB president and vice president are also taking place at the general assembly, if any of the candidates for committee chairmanship are elected to fill either of those higher offices, the USCCB's Committee on Priorities and Plans will convene to nominate a new candidate for that committee.

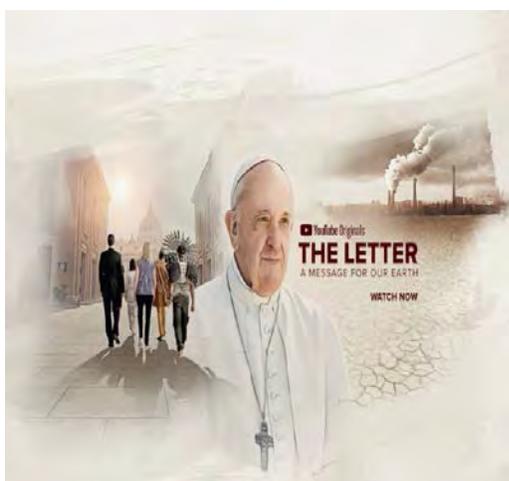
Last November, the bishops voted for chairmen-elect for five standing committees. At the end of this year's fall assembly, they will take over as chairmen of their respective committees on:

- Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations: Bishop Earl Boyea of Lansing, Michigan.
- Divine Worship: Bishop Steven Lopes, who heads the Houston-based Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter.
- Domestic Justice and Human Development: Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia.
- Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth: then-Auxiliary Bishop Robert Barron of Los Angeles, who now heads the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota.
- Migration: Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso.

Vatican marks ecology saint's feast day with film premiere, climate accords

4 October 2022

by [Carol Glatz](#),
[Catholic News Service](#)



Pope Francis and global activists are pictured in a banner for the new YouTube Originals film on the pope's encyclical, "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home." The film launched Oct. 4, feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the same day the Holy See acceded to the Paris Agreement. (CNS photo/YouTube Originals)

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican hosted the global premiere of a new documentary on the urgent need to address climate change on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the same day the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2015 Paris Agreement entered into force for the Holy See.

The two events Oct. 4 helped mark the feast of the patron saint of animals and ecology, and the namesake of Pope Francis.

The Vatican became a formal party to the U.N. convention [in July](#) and declared at the same time that it intended also to formally join the 2015 Paris Agreement.

"Both documents will enter into force for the Holy See, in the name and on behalf of the Vatican City State, on 4 October 2022, the Solemnity of St. Francis," said a joint statement by the pontifical academies of Sciences and Social Sciences and the Vatican Secretariat of State's section for relations with states.

It was the same day a new film was launched at the Vatican for the world premiere of "[The Letter: A Message For Our Earth](#)," based on Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical letter, "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home."

Presented by YouTube Originals, the film was written and directed by Emmy-winner Nicolas Brown and produced by the Oscar-winning production company "Off the Fence." It was made in partnership with the Laudato Si' Movement, the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for Communication.

In the seven years since the pope's landmark encyclical was published, "the environmental crisis of our common home has worsened drastically," Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the integral development dicastery, said at a Vatican news conference Oct. 4.

"Clearly, the great treasure of *Laudato Si'*"s wisdom needs to become far more deeply known and effectively put into practice," he said.

Czerny said that the documentary shows how "the ecological crisis is happening now."

"The time is over for speculation, skepticism and denial, and certainly for irresponsible populism. Apocalyptic floods, mega droughts, disastrous heat waves, catastrophic cyclones and hurricanes have become the new normal. They continue today. Tomorrow, they will get worse," the cardinal said.

Czerny said "The Letter" presents a new opportunity for all people, especially those on the peripheries represented by the film's main protagonists who are typically ignored in global environmental summits, to engage in a dialogue about the environmental challenges facing the planet and possible solutions to them.

"This beautiful film, heartbreaking yet hopeful, is a clarion cry to people everywhere. Wake up. Get serious. Meet. Act together. Act now," Czerny said.

At the news conference, Hoesung Lee, chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, called the day "a special day for the alliance between science and faith."

He praised the pope's letter, both the encyclical and the film, as being in dialogue with science and emphasized action was urgently needed.

"The scientific community welcomes the opportunity to engage with artists and the people of faith. Both faith and art hold a great convening power and can inspire genuine collective climate action," he said.

Lee added that he welcomed the Holy See's entry into the Paris Agreement, an action he said "injects new momentum into the global race to implement solutions to the climate crisis."

"The IPCC assessments clearly point out that climate impacts and risks are becoming

increasingly complex and more difficult to manage, and that accelerated and equitable climate action in mitigating and adapting to climate change is critical to sustainable development," he said.

"The next few years will be critical. There are ways to improve our chances of success," with international cooperation key to achieving the climate goals under the Paris Agreement, Lee said. "The stakes have never been higher, and we should be the source of the solution to this crisis."

The film "The Letter" features activists representing wildlife, Indigenous peoples, young people and the poor — the voices of those who are least listened to, but are the most impacted by the consequences of climate change, Brown said at the news conference. The film includes their meeting with Pope Francis last year to talk about their national and personal challenges and what needs to be done.

The activists included: Chief Cacique Odair "Dadá" Borari from the Amazon rainforest in Brazil; Ridhima Pandey, a 13-year-old climate activist from India; Arouna Kandé, a climate refugee from Senegal; U.S. scientists Greg Asner and Robin Martin; and Lorna Gold, president of Laudato Si' Movement.

The film is [streaming for free](https://theletterfilm.org) at theletterfilm.org and YouTube Originals. People were encouraged to host viewings on a large screen at their parish, school or local community in order to encourage dialogue and action.

During the press conference, Gold said a key message in the film is the need "to develop and rediscover the capacity to care for each other to be able to dream that we can build a society in a world where we care for each other and care for the planet."

Asked about the encyclical's "patchy" reception within the church in the seven years since its release, Czerny said that "maybe one of the enemies of *Laudato Si'* is the word green," in that categorizing the document in such a way allows people to cast it aside due to preconceived beliefs. He also challenged journalists to report more on the encyclical and the ecological crises facing the world.

"I'm very hopeful that the film will bring *Laudato Si'* into places and amongst people who haven't, as Lorna said, opened the book," the cardinal said. "But I also hope that the many different factors will come together so that we start taking this more seriously and more deeply and more universally."

[NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe contributed to this report.]

What Catholic colleges and universities can learn from Pope Francis

6 October 2022

by [Daniel P. Horan](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis uses a cane as he leaves an audience with participants attending a conference promoting educational initiatives for migrants and refugees, Sept. 29 at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Over the last two years an increasingly politicized and polarized debate has arisen around the purpose of education and what should or should not be included in the content of instruction. From history curricula that acknowledges the painful truth of Indigenous genocide and chattel slavery in America to policies and programs that recognize the diversity of experiences related to gender and sexuality, there appears to be an [ever-growing list](#) of "controversial issues" serving as third-rail topics in primary, secondary and even college-level education.

With this context in mind, I read Pope Francis' Sept. 29 [address](#) at a conference on "Initiatives in Refugee and Migrant Education," held at the Jesuit Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Although the primary focus of the conference was on supporting and educating migrants and refugees, which itself is notable given how controversial immigration policy is in the United States, the pope's remarks are also instructive for those thinking about what the purpose and goals of education are in general and in Catholic higher education in particular.

Francis lays out some key priorities for Catholic higher education, organizing his thoughts around the three areas he sees as central in the work of faculty and administrators at Catholic colleges and universities: research, teaching and social promotion.

On the topic of research, the pope notes that inquiry is needed by scholars not only for solutions for the migration and refugee

crises, but also to examine the social, political and environmental causes leading to these crises. Pointing to the many forms of political and military unrest around the globe, Francis writes: "Naturally, I am referring to the conflicts that are ravaging so many regions of our world."

He adds: "At the same time, though, I would like to point to another kind of violence, namely, the abuse of our common home. The earth has been devastated by the excessive exploitation of its resources and by decades of pollution. As a result, more and more people are forced to leave their lands, which have become uninhabitable."

Catholic institutions of higher education ought to be hubs for analyzing the "signs of the times" and interpreting them in the "light of the Gospel," as *Gaudium et Spes* says, especially when it comes to the dual crises of migration and climate change. In this way, Francis is implicitly referring to the need for a new way of thinking, what he often calls an "integral ecology" that, as *Laudato Si'* puts it, attends to both the "cry of the earth" and the "cry of the poor."

Given the contentious debates around the purpose and goals of higher education today, this message from Francis also points to the responsibility that Catholic colleges and universities have to draw from and engage with the best of scientific discovery and knowledge. He uses the global climate crisis as an illustration: "Academia — and Catholic academia in particular — is called to play a primary role in providing answers to ecological problems and challenges. Based on scientific data, you are in a position to help in guiding and informing the decisions of government leaders in support of an effective care for our common home."

But the same logic can and should be applied to other areas of academic research

and application beyond climate change. For example, Catholic institutions of higher education ought to be centers of inquiry, dialogue and instruction on cutting-edge issues, such as the deepening knowledge we have about gender and sexuality. Rather than retreat to centuries-old claims rooted in antiquated worldviews and pseudo-scientific conclusions, Catholic universities should be leaders in engaging contemporary scientific knowledge with our faith tradition to respond constructively and charitably to contemporary questions and issues.

Regarding teaching, the pope emphasizes that priority in education must be given to "the most disadvantaged." Framed again in the context of migrants and refugees, Francis suggests offering courses, modes of learning and scholarships to help migrants and refugees obtain degrees and professional qualifications.

Relatedly, Francis notes that, "Schools and universities are privileged environments not only for instruction but also for encounter and integration." This is certainly true when it comes to welcoming students from diverse social locations and geographic regions in a general sense, but it is also something worth recounting when it comes to differences in perspective and interpretation. The pope is calling for Catholic colleges and universities to be a place where the stories of migrants and refugees can be heard and honored, which highlights the church's preferential option for the poor and marginalized.

This admonition can also extend to include the voices and experiences of those who have been historically disenfranchised, especially within the church and the academy. Coincidentally, many of those communities most harmed by the contentious debates around the purpose and goals of education today are those in minoritized and vulnerable groups: people

of color, women, LGBTQ people, those of other religious traditions or none at all, in addition to the migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking the pope highlights.

Because of their mission, Catholic institutions of higher education should be places where such voices and experiences are not only "tolerated" but welcomed, prioritized and centered in the classroom and beyond. This might also extend to views, experiences and perspectives that have been traditionally viewed as "off-limits" in many Catholic contexts.

In particular, I am thinking of the manifold ways dialogue is still needed in the wake of the Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Regardless of one's views about the legal ruling, and with the church's position already clearly articulated, there are still many questions and concerns about what this decision means for our society, and our colleges and universities can be leaders in creating a constructive space for such discussions. Francis tells us that we should pursue the work of higher education "within a perspective of justice, global responsibility and communion in diversity."

Finally, Francis points to the role that Catholic colleges and universities play beyond the confines of their institutional boundaries. Using the term "social promotion," the pope highlights the responsibility these institutions have to interact "with the social context in which they happen to operate."



Pope Francis leads an audience with participants attending a conference promoting educational initiatives for migrants and refugees, Sept. 29 at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

He adds: "They can help to identify and indicate the foundations for the construction of an intercultural society, in which ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity is seen as a source of enrichment and not an obstacle for the common future."

Again, while the presenting context is the crisis of migrants and refugees today, this focus on social engagement is important because colleges and universities have long been the place to provide resources, insights and venues for constructive dialogue and education for the broader community to serve the common good.

On subjects like migration or climate change, racial justice or reproductive rights, Catholic educational institutions should not shy away and avoid disagreement, but take a bold, balanced, and thoughtful position rooted not only in the important value of academic freedom and constructive dialogue, but also in their mission precisely as Catholic institutions, which seek to pursue knowledge, truth and justice. The intellectual and practical resources of the university shouldn't be reserved for academics alone, but shared with the broader community.

Francis closed his remarks with the following reminder of what should guide our thinking and implementation of such efforts: "Every educational institution is called to be a place of welcome, protection or accompaniment, promotion and integration for all, to the exclusion of none." Now it is the responsibility of those of us in Catholic higher education to put that into practice.



Daniel P. Horan

Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan is the director of the Center for Spirituality and professor of philosophy, religious studies and theology at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. Follow him on Twitter: [@DanHoranOFM](https://twitter.com/DanHoranOFM).

Catholic Relief Services campaign aims to engage US Catholics on climate change

CRS survey shows vast majority of Americans concerned about climate, support taking action

6 October 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)



A Catholic Relief Services official walks through the aftermath of Typhoon Vamco, known locally as Ulysses, which made landfall on the Philippines on Nov. 11, 2020. Its destructive winds and intense rains triggered extensive flooding in several areas, displaced more than 100,000 people and resulted in more than 100 deaths. (Catholic Relief Services/Jomari Guillermo)

The mountainous village in northern Ethiopia where Yohannes Subagadis lives looks far different today than when his father, grandfather and ancestors farmed it for generations.

What were once beautiful landscapes of trees and grass along steep slopes dissected by rivers and streams has become a region stricken by increasing and severe droughts and floods that wash away nutrient-rich soil, and with it a critical lifeline for the agrarian community.

"When climate change meets poverty, as it has in the Horn of Africa, it is a kind of perfect storm of challenges," Subagadis, Africa coordinator for livelihoods and landscapes for Catholic Relief Services in East Africa, said during an Oct. 4 press conference launching a new CRS climate action initiative.

The Horn of Africa, among the regions most vulnerable to climate change, is heavily

reliant on farming, with 3 in 4 people living in poverty, dependent on agriculture and natural resources for their survival. The worst drought in 40 years has pushed nations like Somalia [on the brink of famine](#), with 22 million people in the region at risk. Worldwide, upward of 100 million people could be pushed into poverty by 2030 if accelerated actions to limit climate change aren't taken, according to the World Bank.

It's those real-life impacts of a warming world in Subagadis' village and elsewhere that CRS, the U.S. church's international humanitarian and development organization, aims to lift up with its "One Planet, One Family" campaign to engage U.S. Catholics more fully on the issue of climate change.



Women search to collect water in Ethiopia's Oromia state, where the in 2016 worst drought in 50 years left rivers and lakes completely dried out. A CRS project in the region works to enhance adaptation to climate change. (Catholic Relief Services/Petterik Wiggers)

The effort seeks to educate Catholics more about climate change, how it is severely impacting people today and is expected to only worsen in years to come without substantial reductions in heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions and steps to enhance resilience to a changing climate. It is part of the wider Caritas Internationalis "Together We" multiyear global campaign asking Catholics to take actions to combat

poverty and conserve nature in the spirit of integral ecology and solidarity that are key themes in Pope Francis' encyclicals [Laudato Si'](#) and [Fratelli Tutti](#).

The campaign provides prayers alongside tools and resources to lobby elected officials for more aggressive climate responses — such as increased payments for the international Green Climate Fund — as well as fundraise for communities facing floods, heat waves and droughts right now.

It is also asking dioceses to encourage people to take part, and developing resources for priests to engage conversations on climate change, as well.

"We still can do something to help our fellow human beings adapt to this changing reality," Bill O'Keefe, CRS executive vice president for mission, mobilization and advocacy, said during the Oct. 4 press conference. He said it was a "really significant day in the history of CRS."

"I'm not exaggerating when I say that everywhere [in the 110 countries] CRS works, when you talk to farmers they will tell you that the climate has changed out from under them," he said.

Agricultural techniques and crops in place for generations are less effective and reliable, he said, while rain patterns have shifted and become more irregular. That's the case in Guatemala, said Lheslye Pérez, CRS chief of party in the Central American country, where unpredictable rains have been accompanied in recent years with destructive tropical storms.

"The poorest families, the most vulnerable, are the ones paying the hardest consequences of climate change," she said. "They are the ones using less resources without basic services, but they are the ones

experiencing losing everything every time an event originated by climate change happens."

CRS teams have also observed how climate change is exacerbating hunger, migration and violence, including in Burkina Faso in Africa's Sahel region, where a political coup [broke out](#) at the end of September.

The summer of 2022 has seen a wave of extreme weather, from severe drought in East Africa, historic flooding in Pakistan, relentless heat waves and wildfires in Europe and the U.S., and massive hurricanes in the Caribbean. In many cases, scientists have said that increasing global temperatures have contributed to the intensity of such events.

With the campaign, CRS is looking to tap into what they believe are high levels of concern among U.S. Catholics and a majority of Americans about climate change both domestically and abroad, according to [results of a survey](#) it commissioned.



Silverio Mendez tends to a field in this 2019 photo in Barrio El Cedro, Chiquimula, Guatemala, part of a region known as "the dry corridor" due to extended droughts. Catholic Relief Services has worked with him and other farmers to use cover crops as a means to improve soil quality and its ability to hold moisture. (Catholic Relief Services/Julian Spath)

The survey, conducted in August among 2,009 adults by New York-based research

firm Big Village, found 81% of Americans overall were somewhat or very concerned about climate change's impact in the U.S. and 75% concerned about impacts in other countries. In both cases, Catholic concerns were even higher (85% and 78%, respectively).

Three in 4 Americans in the poll somewhat or strongly agreed that immediate actions are necessary to limit the impacts of climate change in the U.S., with 69% saying the same for other countries. More than half of U.S. adults felt the country has a responsibility to help other nations on climate change.

In both cases, concern about climate change and support for doing something about it were highest among young adults and Hispanic and Black respondents. Gen Z respondents were 12 times more likely than other generational cohorts to express fear about the impacts of climate change in open-ended responses.

Catholics were five times more likely to view climate change as a shared responsibility compared to non-Catholic respondents. In terms of what the U.S. can do, Americans in the survey listed reducing emissions and helping people adapt to climate change as their two priorities.

The survey carried a margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 percentage points.



Nery Eliezar García Martínez, 18, and Elías Esaú García Martínez, 13, observe a lettuce plant nursery in their father's farm in El Ciprés, Opatoro, Honduras. The farm diversified crops through a Catholic Relief Services-supported program to combat drought in the country. (Silverlight for Catholic Relief Services/Oscar Leiva)

Part of the CRS climate campaign aims to educate more people about the ways it is working to assist communities around the world to adapt to climate disruptions in their region and to become more resilient when storms, droughts and extreme weather arrive. Interventions include climate-smart agriculture practices, water conservation and storage, and helping families and schools grow their own food.

In Ethiopia, along with helping to provide food and water to meet pressing needs, CRS is also developing climate adaptation programs, such as an early warning system for farmers of forecasted dry spells or droughts, to allow them to prepare and adjust crops, for instance from long-cycle to short-cycle varieties.

Subagadis called the program "really lifesaving for the millions of families who rely on the land to earn a living" in the Horn of Africa, where for many "the slightest change in the weather can mean life or death."

Another facet of the CRS campaign is advocacy, where a main focus is the Green Climate Fund — a United Nations program where wealthy nations, including the U.S., pledged to commit \$100 billion annually by 2020 to developing countries to assist with climate mitigation and adaptation measures. Those pledges have fallen short and the target date has been pushed to 2023, while funds for adaptation so far (roughly \$20 billion) are half of promised levels.



Bill O'Keefe (CNS/Courtesy of Catholic Relief Services/Philip Laubner)

"There's a long way between what's being provided and what the needs are going to be," O'Keefe said.

CRS has also supported the Global Food Security Act, which was included in the House reauthorization bill and is being considered in the Senate, and succeeded in getting language around climate-smart and nature-based agriculture in the bill.

Looking toward the COP27 United Nations climate change conference, set for November in Egypt, CRS will be sending representatives and working with other Caritas chapters to advocate for world leaders to provide "loss and damage" compensation to countries already impacted by climate-fueled disasters.

The climate attitudes survey found that while more than half of Americans reported taking steps like recycling and reducing water use to lessen the impact of climate change, less than 1 in 5 said they supported an organization working on climate change or had joined a group action. Each of the actions were more common among Catholics, and especially young Catholics.

CRS officials are hoping to build off that and create new momentum through their new campaign by offering U.S. Catholics and others who have taken small steps to limit their environmental impact to generate more substantial, mass responses to climate change.

"That's really the opportunity of this campaign," O'Keefe said, "to take this passion and commitment to doing something, and helping people to take more concrete, meaningful, collective responses that will really impact the core problem."

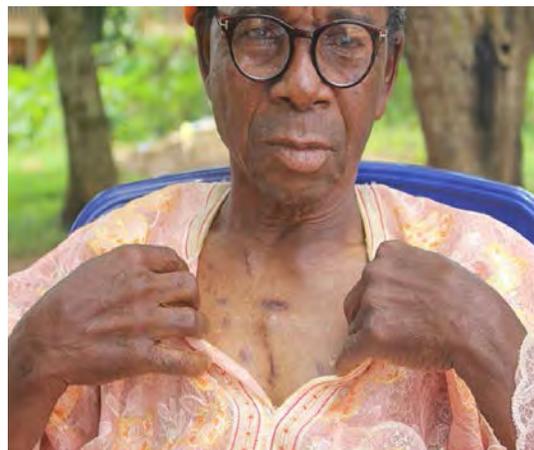


Brian Roewe

Brian Roewe is NCR environment correspondent. His email address is broewe@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter at [@brianroewe](https://twitter.com/brianroewe).

Nigerian Catholics speak of 'palpable fear' as anti-Christian violence escalates

6 October 2022
by Valentine Iwenwanne



Despite a gunshot wound to his chest, Bade Salau, 74, survived the Black Sunday attack on St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church June 5 in Owo, Ondo, Nigeria. (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

OWO, NIGERIA — St. Louis Sr. Agnes Adeluyi remembered June 5 was a particularly hot afternoon, when she and her team of nurses labored to save the survivors of the church shooting in Owo, a city in the southwestern Nigerian state of Ondo. Covered in fatal gunshot wounds, the victims called for help as they were dying, Adeluyi recalled.

After detonating an explosive outside the cathedral, four gunmen marched into St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church through the doors by the choir stands, shooting worshippers sporadically while detonating another explosive inside. Forty-one parishioners — including young children — died in the gunfire and explosions, while some were trampled to death in the stampedes attempting escape.



The interior of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo, Nigeria (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

"We have been hearing of such incidents far away in the northern region of the country, but to have it happen within our own domain was very devastating," said Adeluyi, the nurse administrator of St. Louis Catholic Hospital, adding that it was an unthinkable occurrence for Pentecost Sunday.

The southwestern region where the mass shooting happened is home to the Yoruba ethnic group, where Christians and Muslims have long coexisted peacefully. But since 2000, that peace had become elusive due to the long-running ethnic violent clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and local farmers.

St. Louis Sr. [Bukola Familade](#), who supported medical sisters at St. Louis Catholic Hospital, said the terror attack has "triggered palpable fear in us and have affected our ministries here in Owo."

"As it is now, priests can't go out in their cassocks," she said, adding that while women religious can still wear their habits, "it is dangerous for priests because they are more targeted by terrorists. ... They can be kidnapped or get killed," with news

coverage of attacks instilling fear in religious leaders.



St. Louis Sr. Bukola Familade, a teacher at St. Louis Grammar School, Owo, was among the nuns who helped medical sisters at St. Louis Catholic Hospital, Owo. (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

For more than a decade, Nigerian authorities have faced an uphill task in tackling the terrorism that has continuously placed Nigeria as one of the most terrorized countries in the world. According to International Christian Concern, Nigeria is the [biggest killing ground](#) where Christians are targeted with threats and violence. Tens of thousands have been murdered, millions displaced, and many more suffer from food, shelter and medical insecurity.

Auxiliary Bishop John Bakeni of Maiduguri in the state of Borno said terrorism and persecution of Christians have constantly been a topic of great concern for Nigerian citizens. "The attacks started in a very mild way, but as time went by, we have seen these realities been meted out on Christian communities in different parts of the country, especially in the northern part of Nigeria."

More than half of Nigeria's [217 million people](#) are Muslim, while a little less than half are Christian. In the northern part of the

country, where most of the killings take place, Islam stands as the dominant faith; Christianity claims the South, the direction where the violence is gradually shifting. (While authorities initially blamed the June attack on the Islamic State West Africa Province, in August the Nigerian Defense Ministry issued a statement that revealed that the persons connected to the Pentecost Sunday deadly attack were not associated with that group.)



St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo, Nigeria, was attacked June 5 — now known as Black Sunday — as worshippers celebrated the feast of Pentecost. (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

"There are challenges and difficulties that Christians, especially in the north, have been living with for so many years on the account that they are minorities in some communities of this region," Bakeni said. "And based on their faith, [they] have had to deal with maiming and killing of their loved ones and destruction of their properties over the years."

The growing persecution Christians in Nigeria face, he said, has become structural, such as political exclusion and preventing Christians from accessing their rightful education and social amenities, as well as the destruction of churches and marrying off daughters against the will of their parents.

All this, he said, is in addition to the increase in abductions of Catholic priests and Christian pastors, as well as the targeting of worshippers during church services.

"It is becoming palpable that the church is being targeted," Bakeni said. "There is every attempt to discourage and stop the spread of the Christian faith."

Blood at the altar

Fr. Andrew Abayomi had ended Mass and given his final blessing before sporadic gunshots began to ring out in the sky, accompanied by a deafening sound from a detonated explosive outside the church.



Fr. Andrew Abayomi was celebrating Mass when the attack took place June 5 at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Nigeria. (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

"Some brave members who ran to the altar helped me into the sacristy where some of the children and members were hiding," he told Global Sisters Report. "We then moved into the inner part where the restroom is before another explosive went off, but this time, inside the church."

Abayomi said the attack lasted about 20 minutes.

Sam Adewale, special assistant on media to the community's monarch, recalled the surprise of the event fomenting confusion in

the moment: "Before we could discover where it was happening, deaths had been recorded."

The day had become known as "[Black Sunday in Owo](#)," as disturbing footage and images of the bloodbath went viral on social media, sending shock waves that would reverberate through Nigeria's Christian community.



Bade Salau was shot in his chest and cheeks June 5 at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo, Nigeria. He attributed his survival to the scapular he wore around his neck and the rosary he had in his chest pocket. (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

Bade Salau, one of that day's survivors and the chairman of the church's Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary group, said his experience of the shooting was like a close shave with death. Adeluyi, who treated 74-year-old Salau at the hospital, said he didn't have any major complications and that his survival was mysterious.

Salau was shot in his chest and cheeks, and he attributed his survival to the scapular he wore around his neck and the rosary he had in his chest pocket.

"I saw four heavily armed men shooting at our members outside the church, but when they started shooting through the windows after the main doors had been shut, many of our members inside the church had to lay

down under the pews for safety," he told GSR. "It was a horrifying experience for me, because 10 members of my family were also caught up in the shooting."

Abel Adenawo, who was shot in the foot, said the shooting happened like a movie scene. "I didn't believe that the gunshots were really happening until I saw one of the assailants, who had a cross bag on him, throw a grenade at the main doors. That was the first explosion we had."



Abel Adenawo, a survivor of Black Sunday, took a bullet to his foot, penetrating his metatarsal bone. (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

The man later "started shooting into the church through the windows, but I was lucky to have escaped," Adenawo told Global Sisters Report.

Sunday Masses have since been moved to a temporary location to one of the church's outstations in Owo, due to the level of destruction during the shooting. Renovations are scheduled for November of this year.

Beyond persecution

According to [Open Doors](#), an international network monitoring global Christian persecution, a Christian is killed for their faith in Nigeria every two hours — roughly 13 Christians a day, or 372 a month. "In 2021, more Christians were murdered for

their faith in Nigeria than in any other country," accounting for nearly 80% of Christian deaths worldwide with more than 4,650 believers killed, the group reported.

About three weeks before the church attack in Owo, a mob of Muslim students burned Deborah Samuel to death. Samuel was a young Christian woman accused of offending Islam for complaining about the incessant spamming of her class' WhatsApp group with religious messages.

About a month after Black Sunday, members of the United States Senate described the state of religious freedom in Nigeria as abysmal, and have challenged Secretary of State Antony Blinken to designate Nigeria a country of particular concern.

Fr. Aniedi Okure, director of Dominicans for Justice and Peace and its delegate to the United Nations, said the problem Christians face in Nigeria has gone beyond persecution, which he considers an oppression that most often results in not being allowed to worship or buy land to build churches.

"What happened to our brethren in Owo is outright jihad," Okure said. "I feel strongly that the jihadist has tried everything to throw Christians into war so it would be seen as a religious war," hence the targeting of churches and priests.



Bloodstains from the June 5 mass shooting still dot the ceilings of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo, Nigeria. (GSR photo/Valentine Iwenwanne)

For instance, in Jos, a city dominated by Christians with a significant presence of the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, many Christians have been killed and some dumped into wells, with the religious rioting claiming the lives of both Christians and Muslims.

While Nigeria confronts these challenges, critics believe that attackers ride on the country's insecurity challenges — such as its inability to deal with suicide bombings, mass shootings, burning of police stations and churches, kidnapping, and policing the country's porous land borders — in order to foment trouble.

If Nigeria didn't face such security challenges, Okure said, the country would witness far fewer killings of nuns and priests.

"There are criminal elements riding on the security problems in Nigeria today," he said. "However, it is the responsibility of [President] Muhammadu Buhari's federal government to deal with this problem head-on."



Valentine Iwenwanne

Valentine Iwenwanne is a Nigeria-based freelance journalist who writes about global health, development and the environment for various publications, including The National and Vice World News.

Germany's Synodal Path continues to draw attention in Rome

6 October 2022

by Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

Accountability
Vatican
World



Charlotte Kreuter-Kirchhof, a member of the German Synodal Assembly and of the Vatican Council for the Economy, stands with Bernhard Kotsch, German ambassador

to the Holy See, after her presentation about the Synodal Path Oct. 4, 2022, at the German Embassy to the Holy See in Rome. (CNS photo/Cindy Wooden)

ROME — German Catholics involved in the Synodal Path are convinced the church must address the "systemic causes" of the clerical sexual abuse scandal and that will require change, said Charlotte Kreuter-Kirchhof, a member of the German Synodal Assembly.

And while some of the assembly's proposed changes sound radical to some people -- with the harshest critics even warning that the Synodal Path could lead to schism -- Kreuter-Kirchhof said, "We are members of the Roman Catholic Church, and we will stay members of the Roman Catholic Church."

Kreuter-Kirchhof, a professor of law and member of the Vatican Council for the Economy, spoke about the Synodal Path at a conference Oct. 4 at the German Embassy to the Holy See.

The fourth assembly of the Synodal Path was in September. The fifth and final meeting is scheduled for March.

In the wake of the clerical abuse scandal and with the release of a major study of its causes, the German bishops' conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics launched the Synodal Path in 2019. The process began with forums to discuss issues in the four areas the study identified as containing the "systemic causes" of sexual abuse and its cover-up: the exercise of power in the church; sexual morality; priestly existence; and the role of women in the church.

"Abuse has brought endless suffering to the victims," Kreuter-Kirchhof said, and "the church has lost an infinite amount of trust."

Some 360,000 people officially left the church in Germany in 2021, and the number seems set to be even higher for 2022, she said.

"The only way out is to address the systemic causes" of abuse, she said.

The German bishops are scheduled to make their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Nov. 14-19, and addressing questions and doubts about the Synodal Path is expected to be a major topic. In fact, the officers of the bishops' conference were at the Vatican in early October to finalize plans for the "ad limina," which is expected to include a joint meeting with Pope Francis and the heads of major Vatican offices to discuss the Synodal Path.

In her presentation, Kreuter-Kirchhof said, "It is important to note that this is not a process taking place only in Germany," since a similar process of prayer, discussion and discernment in preparation for the world Synod of Bishops in 2023 is bringing up many of the same concerns and hopes for change around the globe.

The four forums of the Synodal Path presented their work at meetings of the Synodal Assembly, with proposals for documents to be discussed and amended and then presented a second time for more discussion and a vote. To pass, the documents must be approved by two-thirds of the German bishops and two-thirds of the laity, priests and religious in the assembly. The recommendations in some approved texts can be adopted without approval from Rome, but others must be referred to the Vatican before implementation.

Documents approved by the assembly, meeting for the fourth time in September, included those regarding the position of women and trans people in the church, gay priests and the future national leadership structure of the Catholic Church, reported the German Catholic news agency KNA. It said all texts involving changes to church doctrine were formulated as proposals for consideration by the pope and not as independent dogmatic changes by the German church.

However, the 30-page "foundational" text on sexuality, calling for a new approach to sexual ethics by the church, failed to garner the approval of two-thirds of the bishops.

With the bishops' vote, Kreuter-Kirchhof said, "the whole Synodal Path came close to a failure," not primarily because only 61% of the bishops approved it, but because most of the bishops who voted against it "never disclosed their concerns at any point prior to the vote," whether in the drafting forum, during the discussion and amending of the first draft or in the discussion before the final vote.

"What did we learn from this crisis?" she asked. "We learned that if the bishops turn away from the people of God or if the people of God are not with the bishops, the church suffers."

"The synodal church is the place of common faith, of listening to one another, of discerning together and of common decision," she said.

The Catholic Church is a hierarchical church, and bishops legitimately have a special responsibility, but they cannot operate in a vacuum, she said. "After the crisis" at the September assembly, "synodality worked better than before once the bishops started speaking up."

People of faith should be poll workers to save democracy

7 October 2022
by [Thomas Reese](#)



A poll worker looks on as a voter casts her ballot on Election Day Nov. 3, 2020, at William S. Mount Elementary School in Stony Brook, New York. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Most Republicans believe Donald Trump won the 2020 presidential election; most Democrats think democracy is under attack by Republican attempts at voter suppression and intimidation.

Despite a comprehensive examination of problems at the polls, Republicans have been unable to come up with more than a couple dozen examples of illegal voting out of millions of votes cast. Republican candidates and their supporters nonetheless continue to talk about a stolen election. Some who are running for state office vow that they will, if elected, use their power to make sure that their presidential candidate is elected in 2024.

Meanwhile, Democrats complain that Republican state officials are doing everything possible to suppress the

Democratic vote by dropping citizens from the voting rolls for minor reasons, cutting voting hours, limiting mail-in ballots, reducing the number of voting places and ballot drop boxes and drawing voting districts using racial and partisan criteria. They say these measures disenfranchise Black voters.

The leaders of national Catholic social justice organizations, scholars at Catholic colleges and presidents of Catholic universities are warning of the twin threats of systematic efforts to undermine voting rights and Christian nationalism. In a [statement](#) released by Faith in Public Life, these Catholic leaders say that "white Christian nationalism — an ideology heretical to authentic faith — represents a clear and present danger to building a multi-faith, multiracial democracy."

And yet, there are many ministers and people of faith who also side with the Republicans in this debate. Is there anything that could bring these groups together in support of democracy?

There are at least two things that could unite these groups.

First, there is the obligation to vote.

It is a fact of political life that voter turnout in midterm elections is lower than in presidential elections, even though the midterms decide who will serve in important local, state and federal offices. Christians are obliged to be good citizens, and voting is a requirement of good citizenship. I would go so far as saying it is a sin not to vote. Faith leaders should remind their people of their obligation to vote without telling them how to vote.

Second, everyone should agree that elections should be fair. Honest and unbiased poll

workers are essential to democracy. Too few poll workers leads to long lines on Election Day, and poll workers who are partisan hacks also can undermine democracy.

Just as churches offer their facilities as polling places, religious believers should step up and become poll workers. They should do it with a firm conviction that discrimination, lying and stealing are sins in any circumstances, and making it difficult for some people to vote, stealing votes and lying about election results are especially serious sins. As poll workers, Christians are obliged to follow their values, not their partisan preferences.

It is time for believers to do their civic duty by becoming poll workers.

Since the 1920s, the League of Women Voters has been a nonpartisan, grassroots force for fair elections. Their local chapters can help anyone learn how to participate. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission also has information on how to become a poll worker.

Because of the partisan divisions over the electoral process, it is especially important this year that people of integrity participate as poll workers. It may also require people who have the courage to stand up to partisan bullying. If this year's elections are challenged, we will need people known for integrity in their communities to testify to the legitimacy of the results.

People of faith — which likely means you — should be among those people.



Thomas Reese

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

The Holy Spirit is guiding the synodal process. But how?

7 October 2022

by [Heidi Schlumpf](#)



An illustration of an empty chair and the words "Come Holy Spirit" are featured on a graphic recording wall where concepts were captured in art the Sept. 22-23 Catholic Partnership Summit in Washington. (Courtesy of Leadership Roundtable)

WASHINGTON — The Holy Spirit was the guest of honor at a recent gathering of church leaders on the topic of synodality. Literally. After one panelist suggested the practice of leaving an empty chair at meetings to symbolize room for the Holy

Spirit, the next panel featured — you guessed it — an empty chair.

And organizers of the event were attributing to the Spirit the perfect timing that saw the U.S. [national synthesis document](#) — compiled after diocesan and other synodal gatherings throughout the U.S. — released just days before the Sept. 22-23 [Catholic Partnership Summit](#) in Washington, D.C. The event was organized by Leadership Roundtable, an organization that promotes co-responsibility between ordained and lay people as a best practice for church governance.

The kickoff keynoter, Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, also mentioned the Spirit repeatedly in his provocative talk. Citing [Pope Francis](#), he reminded participants that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the synod.



An empty chair was added to the stage during the Catholic Partnership Summit in Washington. Also pictured: Krisanne Vaillancourt Murphy, right, executive director of Catholic Mobilizing

Network; Vicente Del Real, center, founder and executive director of Iskali; and John Cannon, left, founder of SENT Ventures. (Courtesy of Leadership Roundtable/Maximilian Franz Photography)

Synodality is "a dialogue process that the Holy Spirit initiates and guides," Grech said, speaking via video from Frascati, Italy, where nearly three dozen people were synthesizing national reports for the next stage of the [global synod](#). The process will culminate with an international meeting in Rome in October 2023.

We need to recognize the power of the Holy Spirit and that every member of the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit, Grech said.

Too many, including some church leaders, do not seem to trust the people of God, he said, calling such lack of trust "another form of abuse."

"The Holy Spirit must be given more breathing space," he said. "We cannot lock him in a cage."

Of course, this all sounds well and good, until you realize that those who disagree vehemently with you most likely believe they, too, are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Discerning the presence of the Spirit requires patience, listening and prayer. It can be too easy to push an agenda and "put the sticker of the Holy Spirit on it," as one later panelist said.

Toward the end of the question-and-answer with Grech, the cardinal noted that the presence of the Holy Spirit is evidenced by harmony: "Where there is division, the Holy Spirit is not present."

But a member of another summit panel, an author and expert on conflict negotiation, respectfully disagreed with the cardinal,

arguing that "conflict is where the Spirit is working."

The expert encouraged embracing conflict with a spirit of "conflict resilience," a skill that allows people to be in dialogue with those with whom they disagree and to not necessarily resolve those differences.

Grounded in genuine curiosity, such dialogue must feature a safe space for people to speak about their experiences, the expert said. Rather than promote a peaceful uniformity, dialogue actually requires people to assert themselves so they can be heard.

(The summit gathering operated under Chatham House Rule, in which information may be shared, but not the identity or affiliation of the speaker. Grech later agreed for his talk to be on the record.)

A frustration over not being heard was palpable during a panel on "The Vital Role of Women's Leadership in the Church." Although women can and do lead in many ways in the church, panelists also shared stories of real heartache about how women are treated. In the Q&A, one bishop raised concerns about the "dangerous intersection of clericalism and misogyny," especially among seminarians.

The U.S. synthesis document clearly summarizes a groundswell of concern about marginalized groups, including women and LGBTQ+ Catholics, although, as one leader in Hispanic ministry pointed out to me, the document fails to mention Latinos or Hispanics specifically, except as part of a list of "diverse ethnic and cultural communities, including immigrant communities from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other recent arrivals."

That is a disappointment, since, as one summit panelist noted of the series of [Encuentro](#) gatherings of U.S. Hispanics, those meetings were "the best school on synodality and women's leadership in the Catholic Church in the United States."

So what will the Holy Spirit's movement in the synodal process look like? Traditionally, images such as wind and fire have been used to capture the movement of the Spirit, so we should not expect things to be tame and mild.

Too often the Holy Spirit is seen as a lesser or even forgotten part of the trinity — the "two men and a bird" problem identified by feminist theologian Sandra Schneiders. But as fellow feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson reminds in her groundbreaking book [She Who Is](#), the name "Spirit" was traditionally given to the "movement of the living God that can be traced in and through experience of the world." (She also notes that the Spirit has throughout history been spoken of with feminine imagery.)

The Spirit's presence is often more noticeable in darkness than in light, she writes, noting the prevalence of "God drawing near and passing by in vivifying, sustaining, renewing, and liberating power in the midst of historical struggle."

"So profoundly is this true that whenever people speak in a generic way of God, of their experience of God or of God's doing something in the world, more often than not they are referring to the Spirit, if a triune prism be introduced," Johnson writes.

It does not seem a coincidence that Pope Francis has entrusted this process of synodality to the Holy Spirit, while encouraging an open conversation in which people share their experiences of God in their lives, in their church and in the world.

The Spirit is clearly already at work in this process. May She continue to be trusted, so that the church can be renewed to do its work in the world.



Heidi Schlumpf

Heidi Schlumpf is NCR executive editor.

Her email address

is hschlumpf@ncronline.org. Follow her on

Twitter: [@HeidiSchlumpf](https://twitter.com/HeidiSchlumpf).