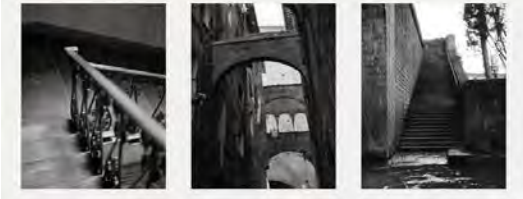


***Articles of Interest
For
16 October 2022***

Sunday, 9 October 2022

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



Week Forty-One: CAC's Eight Core Principles

**Jesus Is Our Central Reference
Point**

This week we will share the Eight Core Principles that are the foundation of the CAC's work. The First Core Principle: The teaching of Jesus is our central reference point. Father Richard Rohr writes:

Without the assurance of Jesus' teaching and example, I would not have the courage or confidence to say what I have said throughout my years of teaching. How can I trust that values like nonviolence, the path of descent, simplicity of life, forgiveness and healing, preference for the poor, and radical grace itself are as important as they are, unless Jesus also said so?

Jesus consistently stands with the excluded, the outsider, the sinner, and the poor. That is his place of freedom, his unique way of critiquing self-serving cultures, and his way of being in union with the suffering of the world—all at the same time. That is his form of universal healing. It also puts him outside any establishment thinking.

It is rather obvious that Jesus spends most of his ministry alongside the marginalized and people at the bottom of society's hierarchies. His primary social program and main form

of justice work is solidarity with suffering itself, wherever it is. Jesus stands with the demonized until the demonizing stops. This is the core meaning of his crucifixion, and why the cross is our unique agent for salvation and liberation (see 1 Corinthians 1:17–18).

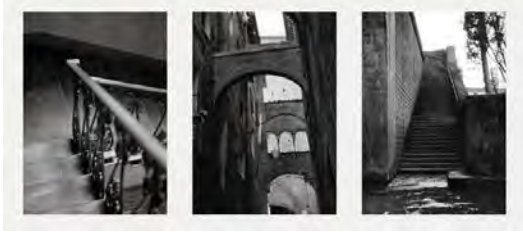
Jesus' agenda has led us at the CAC to our central emphasis on contemplation and spiritual conversion. Our work is the work of human and divine transformation. The experience of universal kinship and solidarity with God, ourselves, and the rest of the world is a grounded runway for significant peacemaking, justice work, social reform, and civil and human rights. Such work flows from a positive place, even a unitive place, where "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). We want people to bear much fruit in the world "and fruit that will endure" (John 15:5, 16).

True spiritual action (as opposed to reaction) demands our own ongoing and radical transformation. It often requires us to change sides so we can be where pain is. It even requires a new identity, as Jesus exemplified in his great self-emptying (see Philippians 2:6–8). Instead of accusing others of sin, Jesus "became sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He stood in solidarity with the problem itself, hardly ever with specific "answers" for peoples' problems. His solidarity and compassion were themselves the healing. This was his strategy and therefore it is ours. It feels like weakness, but it finally changes things in very creative, patient, and humble ways. Such solidarity is learned and expressed in two special places—*contemplation* (nondual or unitive consciousness) and specific *actions* of communion with human suffering. This is our formal name and our task, and both come from watching Jesus.

Monday, 10 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-One: CAC's Eight Core Principles

A Second Gaze

The Second Core Principle of the CAC: We need a contemplative mind in order to do compassionate action. Richard shares how contemplation has transformed his view of reality through a "second gaze":

The first gaze is seldom compassionate. It's too busy weighing and feeling itself: "How will this affect me?" or "What reaction does my self-image demand now?" or "How can I regain control of this situation?" Let's admit that we all start there. Only after God has taught us how to live "undefended" can we immediately stand with and for others, and for the moment.

It has taken me much of my life to begin to have the second gaze. By nature I have a critical mind and a demanding heart, and I am so impatient. These are both my gifts and my curses, yet it seems I cannot have one without the other. They are both good teachers. A life of solitude and silence allows them both, and invariably leads me to the second gaze. The gaze of compassion, looking out at life from the place of Divine Intimacy, is really all I have, and all I have to give, although I don't always do it.

I named my little hermitage "East of Eden" because of its significance in the life of Cain, after he killed his brother Abel. God sent Cain to this place after he had failed and sinned. Yet ironically God gave him a

loving and protective mark: "So YHWH put a mark on Cain so that no one would do him harm. He sent him to wander in the land of Nod, East of Eden" (Genesis 4:15–16). I have always felt God's mark and protection.

By my late 50s I had plenty of opportunities to see my own failures, shadow, and sin. The first gaze at myself was critical, negative, and demanding, not at all helpful to me or to others. I am convinced that such guilt and shame are never from God. They are merely protestations of the false self when shocked by its own poverty. God leads by compassion, never by condemnation. God offers us the grace to weep over our sins more than to perfectly overcome them, to humbly recognize our littleness rather than to become big. This kind of weeping and wandering keeps us both askew and awake at the same time.

My later life call is to "wander in the land of Nod," enjoying God's so-often-proven love and protection. I look back at my life, and everybody's life, the One-and-Only-Life, marked happily and gratefully with the sign of Cain. Contemplation and compassion are finally coming together. This is my second gaze. It is well worth waiting for, because only the second gaze sees fully and truthfully. It sees itself, the other, and even God with God's own compassionate eyes. True action must spring from this place. Otherwise, most of our action is merely *reaction*, and cannot bear "fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

Tuesday, 11 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-One: CAC's Eight Core Principles

The Edge of the Inside

The Third Core Principle of the CAC: The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. For a week of Daily Meditations on this principle, [see here](#).

The [Fourth Core Principle](#) of the CAC: Practical truth is more likely found at the bottom and the edges than at the top or center of most groups, institutions, and cultures. Father Richard explores the power of this prophetic position:

The edge of things is a liminal space—a holy place or, as the Celts called it, “a thin place.” Most of us have to be taught how to live there. To function on the spiritual edge of things is to learn how to move safely in and out, back and forth, across and return. It is a prophetic position, not a rebellious or antisocial one. When we are at the center of something, we easily confuse essentials with nonessentials, getting tied down by trivia, loyalty tests, and job security. Not much truth can happen there. When we live on the edge of anything, with respect and honor (and this is crucial!), we are in an auspicious and advantageous position.

In the Gospels, Jesus sends his first disciples on the road to preach to “all the nations” (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47) and to “all creation” (Mark 16:15). I’m convinced he was training them to risk leaving their own security systems and yet, paradoxically, to

be gatekeepers for them. He told them to leave their home base and connect with other worlds. This becomes even clearer in his instruction for them “not to take any baggage” (Mark 6:8) and *to submit to the hospitality and even the hostility of others* (Mark 6:10–11). Jesus says the same of himself in John’s Gospel (10:7) where he calls himself “the gate” where people “will go freely in and out” (10:9). What amazing permission! He sees himself more as a place of entrance and exit than a place of settlement.

The unique and rare position of a biblical prophet is always on the edge of the inside. The prophet is not an outsider throwing rocks or an insider comfortably defending the status quo. Instead, the prophet lives precariously with two perspectives held tightly together. In this position, one is not ensconced safely inside, nor situated so far outside as to lose compassion or understanding. Prophets must hold these perspectives in a loving and necessary creative tension. It is a unique kind of seeing and living, which will largely leave the prophet with “nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58) and easily attracting the “hatred of all”—who have invariably taken sides in opposing groups (Luke 21:16–17). The prophet speaks for God, and almost no one else, it seems.

When we are both inside and outside, we are an ultimate challenge, possible reformers, and lasting invitations to a much larger world.

Wednesday, 12 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-One: CAC's Eight Core Principles

Affirming the Big Truth

*The **Fifth Core Principle** of the CAC: We will support true authority, the ability to “author” life in others, regardless of the group. Richard grounds this principle in both Scripture and Tradition:*

St. Vincent of Lérins (died c. 450) in the year 434 was the first to define the word “catholic.” Scholars used his definition for much of the first millennium of Christianity to discern the true belief of the Church. Vincent’s in-house principle was amazingly simple and clear and yet also shocking and seemingly impossible: “In the Catholic Church itself, every care should be taken *to hold fast to what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.*” [1] That is truly and properly ‘catholic,’ as expressed by the very force and meaning of the word, which comprehends everything almost universally. In other words, if it is true, then it has to be true everywhere and all the time, or it is not true!

Most of history has been content with cultural truth, denominational truth, national truth, scientific truth, rational truth, factual truth, personal truth, etc. These are all needed and helpful, but true religion affirms the Big Truth beyond any of these limited truths. This is what makes authentic religion inherently subversive and threatening to all systems of power and control. It always says, “Yes, and!”

Such recognition of “authority” beyond our own group is structurally demanded of Christians by the fact that our Bible includes the Hebrew Bible! Inclusivity is valued from the start. Every Christian liturgy reads authoritative texts from the Torah, the Jewish Prophets, and the Wisdom Writings. We listen to Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, all of whom never knew Jesus. The implications should be clear: we have been taught by non-Christian authorities from the beginning! The door is opened and must remain open or we become insular Christians instead of catholic ones.

The pattern continues with John’s Gospel using the concept of the *Logos* (John 1:1), which was first used by Heraclitus and Greek Stoic philosophers. Paul is willing to quote non-Jewish sources and worldviews to the Athenians (Acts 17:26–29) in order to preach a more universal message. We also have centuries of reliance by many first millennium Fathers of the Church upon the “pagan” categories of Plato and Aristotle—to make their Christian points! This clear pattern with Aristotle kept Thomas Aquinas from being recognized and canonized for some time. Augustine and Bonaventure did much the same with Plato. Certainly, Catholic scientists and theologians have significant overlapping discussions today. This is our heritage: using universal wisdom to teach Christian truth.

If it is the Perennial Tradition, it will somehow keep recurring at different levels and in different forms from different voices and disciplines. In Vincent of Lérins’s daunting phrase, it will have “been believed everywhere, always, and by all,” which is still the best argument for Great Truth. No single group will ever encompass the magnificent and always mysterious Reign of God.

Thursday, 13 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-One: CAC's Eight Core Principles

Discovering the Right Questions

The *Sixth Core Principle* of the CAC: Life is about discovering the right questions more than having the right answers. *Father Richard expands on this counterintuitive wisdom:*

This principle keeps us on the path of ongoing discernment, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10). The key concept here is the contrast between the words “discovering” and “having.” A discerning and inquiring spirit will make us discoverers in touch with our hidden unconscious and the deeper truth. A glib “I have the answers” spirit makes us into protectors of clichés. Answers are wonderful when they are true and keep us on the human and spiritual path. But answers are not wonderful when they become something we hold as an ego possession, allowing us to be arrogant, falsely self-assured, and closed down individuals.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways are not your ways. . . . As high as the heavens are from the earth so are my thoughts above your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9). The depth and mystery of God leaves all of us as perpetual searchers and seekers, always novices and beginners. It is the narrow and dark way of faith. “Search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you,” says Jesus (Luke 11:9). There is something inherently valuable

about an attitude of spiritual curiosity and persistent “knocking.”

The ego is formed by contraction; the soul is formed by expansion. The ego pulls into itself by comparing, competing, and separating itself from others: “I am not like that,” it says. The soul, however, does exactly the opposite: “I am that.” (*Tat Tvam Asi*, as the Hindus say). It sees itself in God, the other, flowers and trees, animals, and even the enemy: similarity instead of separateness. It participates in the human dilemma instead of placing itself above and beyond all tensions. The long journey of transformation leads us to ask new questions about our own goodness, and where goodness really lies; to recognize our own complicity with evil, and where evil really lies. It is humiliating.

Only those led by the Spirit into ever deeper seeing, hearing, and surrendering—spiritual seekers and self-questioners—will fall into the hands of the living God. This will always be “a narrow gate and a hard road” that “only a few will walk” (Matthew 7:14).

We want to encourage those few and invite many more on a journey of seeking God. In the sixth century, St. Benedict said the only requirement for a monk’s admission is that they “truly seek God.” [1] Not security or status, not education, not roles and titles, not a portfolio of answers, but simply and humbly seeking God. Spiritual seeking will make a person be a perpetual and humble student instead of a contented careerist, a quester rather than a settler, an always impatient, yearning, and desirous lover. I will bet on such spiritual seekers any day. They are on the real and only quest.

Friday, 14 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-One: CAC's Eight Core Principles

True Religion and the True Self

The *Seventh Core Principle* of the

CAC: True religion leads us to an experience of our True Self and undermines our false self. *Father Richard teaches:*

The True Self is who you are because of divine indwelling, the Holy Spirit within you (Romans 8:9). We are all tabernacles of God, says Paul (1 Corinthians 3:16). What happened in Christ, the Anointed One, is an announcement of what is happening in all of us, too. We are children of heaven and earth, both at the same time. Much of the work of enlightenment is bringing those two identities together, just as Jesus did. Putting the human and the divine together is what it means to be “the Christ” (Colossians 1:17–20), and what it means for us to be “the new Adam and Eve”

(1 Corinthians 15:45–49). Ephesians could not make it much clearer: “You too have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit that was promised—this is the pledge of your inheritance” (1:13–14). Few Christians have ever been seriously taught about their inherent union with God and will find all kinds of self-hating reasons to deny it. Only the True Self can dare to believe the gospel’s Good News.

The false self, or smaller self, is characterized by separateness. Jewish and Christian traditions call this state of disconnectedness “sin.” When we’re separated from our deepest Being, we are in

the state of sin. When we are disconnected from our True Self in God, we look for various false and addictive ways to fill our emptiness. The small or false self is who we think we are, but our thinking does not make it so. It is our identity created through culture, education, class, race, friends, gender, clothes, and money. That’s all that Adam and Eve had once they left the Garden where they walked with God. But let’s not feel too bad for them or even guilty ourselves. It seems that we have to leave the Garden. We have to create a false self to get started; the trouble is that we take it far too seriously. It is always passing away—in stages and then all at once at death. Only the True Self is eternal. We all suffer from a terrible case of mistaken identity.

The True Self is characterized by communion and deep contentment. It’s okay, right here, right now. The True Self is the realigned self; religion’s main purpose is to lead us to experience this Self, which is who we are in God and who God is in us. It has to do with participating in a Universal Being that is beyond our being. Ultimately, our lives are not about us. We are about life! That doesn’t mean we stay in the True Self twenty-four hours a day. Life is three steps forward and two steps backward. Yet once we know the big picture, we will never be satisfied with the little picture.

The secret to healing the church is looking outward, not inward

10 October 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)



Pope Francis greets immigrants at the port in Lampedusa, Italy, July 8, 2013. There he remembered African and Middle Eastern migrants who died when their boats capsized as they were trying to reach Europe and criticized the "globalization of indifference" toward suffering migrants. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano via CPP)

Last month, I [looked](#) at the U.S. bishops' conference national synthesis of synodal reports, concluding that the process seems to have been more successful than anticipated and commending those who wrote the report for its frankness and comprehensive quality.

I also noted that one section of that report warranted greater attention, the section titled "Social Mission of the Church," and today will offer that attention. It is only one paragraph long:

The need for ongoing formation was keenly seen in the area of social mission, "not surprisingly, since our social teaching is routinely described as our church's best-kept secret, there were very few explicit mentions of Catholic social doctrine or even the issues of justice in the region. However, when we consider the component themes of Catholic social teaching and the issues addressed, these concerns did surface regularly throughout the region." Synodal consultations acknowledged that "the Church needs to help parishioners understand the connection between Catholic

social teaching and outreach beyond the borders of the parish."

There are a variety of reasons why Catholic social teaching is still such a secret. It runs counter to many of the conscious and unconscious attributes of our American psyche: the hyper-individualism; the dominance of interests and attitudes drawn from the business community; the suspicion of institutions, consumerism, etc.

It is at the peripheries that we find the secret sauce for renewing the inner life of the church.

Catholic social teaching is also poorly presented to the people in the pews. Because social ethicists have usually been those charged with explaining it, they tend to focus on the content, and not on how it relates to the rest of our faith commitments. It almost seems like it dropped out of the sky in 1891 with the publication of Pope Leo XIII's [Rerum Novarum](#). That encyclical was certainly seminal, and its focus on contemporary industrial society was new because that society was new. But the foundations of Catholic social teaching run deep in our Scriptures and tradition. Before *Rerum Novarum*, there was Genesis and Isaiah and Micah and the Gospels and Augustine and Aquinas and Bellarmine.

That small paragraph on social mission in the synod synthesis, though, was one of the few times the document points to what is a dominant theme of this pontificate and a central fact of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council: that going out to the world, especially to the peripheries, will change our ecclesiology.

"Evangelizing presupposes a desire in the church to come out of herself," Pope Francis reportedly [told](#) the meeting of cardinals

shortly before the conclave that elected him pope in 2013. "The church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents and of all misery."

Cardinal Bergoglio at that same meeting famously recalled the passage in Book of Revelation when Jesus stands at the door and knocks, and speculated that maybe he is knocking to get out. It remains the kind of provocative image that makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up every time I read it.

Catholic social teaching is one of the primary ways for the church to go out of itself. It helps organize our Christian impulse to solidarity and gives shape to the Holy Father's call for a culture of encounter. It is not, as some of his critics suggest, a reduction of the church to a kind of nongovernmental organization with a liturgy.

What they miss, and what I fear some of the synodal sessions have missed, is this: We do not go to the peripheries to evangelize. In a meaningful sense, it is the poor and the marginalized who evangelize us. It is usually they who remind us of what it means to be a Christian.

The core challenge for the Catholic Church in our time and our country is to transcend its upper-middle class moralism, and there is nothing like encountering the acute generosity of the poor, the attentiveness to grace found at an AA meeting or the joy a Special Olympian takes in participation to remind us that living the Christian life is not some "high bar." The poor and the marginalized believe Jesus when he tells us his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Most of the comments summarized by the synodal report focused on ad intra concerns: the life of the parish, the role of women in the church, relationships between the parish and the diocese, etc. This was not surprising, and these issues are all important, but U.S. Catholics have not so far succeeded in addressing them without inviting further polarization.

Pope Francis' insight is that the best way to get at some of the ad intra issues is by becoming a church that focuses on the ad extra realities. It is at the peripheries that we find the secret sauce for renewing the inner life of the church. It is among the poor of the world that we find how inadequate our ideologies are, that we discover reality is more important for the Christian than ideas. There can be no evangelization without recovering the wonder the disciples felt at the outrageous claim that is the basis for our Christian faith, that the tomb is empty and the Crucified lives. Pope Francis tells us we can recapture that wonder if we go to the peripheries.

As the synodal process develops, we need to find a way to place the ad extra focus first. Catholic social teaching is a part of that, as is shared, direct charitable service to the poor and the marginalized. The synthesis reported what they heard, and those ad intra concerns are real. The tension over liturgy or the role of women or lousy sermons or indifferent chanceries will be resolved if we listen to Jesus. That starts by going where we know we will always find him, in the homeless shelter and the nursing home and the prison.



Michael Sean Winters

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

Dream of 'synodality' is a fruit of Vatican II, Cardinal Grech writes

10 October 2022

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

[Vatican](#)



Bishops are pictured in a file photo during a Vatican II session inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. (CNS file photo)

VATICAN CITY — While the term "synodality" is not found in any of the 16 documents of the Second Vatican Council, the council's vision and definition of the church is at the heart of what synodality is, said Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops.

The "magna carta" of the 2021-2023 process of the synod "is the council's doctrine on the

church, particularly its theology of the people of God, a people whose 'condition is the dignity and freedom of the children of God, in whose heart the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple,'" he said, quoting from the council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

Grech published a message on the council and synodality Oct. 10, the day before the 60th anniversary of the opening of the council.

St. John XXIII opened the council Oct. 11, 1962. All the bishops from all over the world were invited to participate in its four sessions, which St. Paul VI concluded Dec. 8, 1965.

The current synod process with its listening sessions around the world, its prayer and discernment is focused on the theme, "For a synodal church: Communion, participation and mission."

Those three words, Grech wrote, "are eminently conciliar words. The church that we are called to dream and build is a community of women and men drawn together in communion by the one faith, our common baptism and the same Eucharist, in the image of God the Trinity: women and men who together, in the diversity of ministries and charisms received, actively participate in the establishment of the kingdom of God, with the missionary impetus of bringing to all the joyful witness of Christ, the only savior of the world."

The Synod of Bishops, the cardinal noted, was established by St. Paul VI in 1965 at the beginning of Vatican II's last session precisely "to prolong in the life and mission of the church the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, as well as to foster in the people of God the living appropriation of its teaching."

"This task is far from being completed since the reception of the conciliar magisterium is an ongoing process; in some respects it is still in its infancy," the cardinal wrote.

In the decades since the council, Grech said, "the synod has constantly placed itself at the service of the council, contributing for its part to renewing the face of the church in ever deeper fidelity to sacred Scripture and living tradition and in attentive listening to the signs of the times."

Refusal to help migrants is 'sinful, criminal,' pope says at canonization

10 October 2022

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

[Theology](#)
[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis celebrates Mass for the canonization of new Sts. Giovanni Battista Scalabrini and Artemide Zatti in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 9, 2022. (CNS photo/Guglielmo Mangiapane, Reuters)

VATICAN CITY — The refusal to help desperate migrants "is revolting, it's sinful, it's criminal," Pope Francis said as he canonized a bishop dedicated to assisting

migrants and a Salesian brother who had immigrated with his family to Argentina.

"The exclusion of migrants is criminal. It makes them die in front of us," the pope said Oct. 9, referring to the deaths of migrants and refugees crossing dangerous seas in search of freedom and a dignified life.

At the beginning of the liturgy in St. Peter's Square, Francis formally recognized the holiness of St. Giovanni Battista Scalabrini, an Italian who founded the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo to care for migrants, and St. Artemide Zatti, an Italian immigrant in Argentina who became a Salesian brother, pharmacist and nurse.

The prayers at the Mass included one for "those forced to leave their homeland," and asking God to teach people to share "his welcoming gaze toward all people" and "heal the throwaway culture of indifference."

Francis focused much of his homily on the day's Gospel reading about the 10 lepers healed by Jesus and, therefore, allowed back into society.

"When we are honest with ourselves, we realize that we are all sick at heart, all sinners in need of the Father's mercy," the pope said. "Then we stop creating divisions on the basis of merit, social position or some other superficial criterion; our interior barriers and prejudices likewise fall. In the end, we realize once more that we are brothers and sisters."

Francis asked the estimated 50,000 people at the Mass to think about whether in their families, at work and in their parishes, they are willing to walk with others and listen to them, "resisting the temptation to lock ourselves up in self-absorption and to think only of our own needs."

"To walk together -- to be 'synodal' -- is also the vocation of the church," he said. "Let us ask ourselves if we are really communities truly open and inclusive of all; if we cooperate, as priests and laity, in the service of the Gospel; and if we show ourselves welcoming, not only in words but with concrete gestures, to those both near and far, and all those buffeted by the ups and downs of life."

The pope said he is "troubled" when he sees Christians who tend to divide the world into "the good and the bad, saints and sinners; this makes them feel superior to others and exclude so many people that God wants to embrace."

Both the church and society, he said, are "still marred by many forms of inequality and marginalization."

Sts. Scalabrini and Zatti, the pope said, fought against such attitudes, dedicating their lives to the service of the poor, migrants and the sick.

"Always be inclusive," he said.

"Today, the day on which Bishop Scalabrini becomes a saint, I think of migrants. The exclusion of migrants is scandalous," he said. "Actually, the exclusion of migrants is criminal."

Some people say of the migrants and refugees, "No, we do not exclude them, we send them away," he said. But they are being sent to camps, "lagers," where "they are exploited and sold like slaves," repeating what many human rights organizations have said about camps in Libya for those caught trying to cross the Mediterranean.

"Brothers and sisters, today let us call to mind these migrants, especially those who are dying," he said. And what about "those

who are able to enter, do we welcome them as brothers and sisters, or do we exploit them? I simply pose the question," the pope added.

Another massive migration underway, particularly in Europe, involves the millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war and "forcing us to open our hearts," the pope said. "Let us not forget the beleaguered Ukraine."

"With great vision," the pope said, St. Scalabrini "looked forward to a world and a church without barriers, where no one was a foreigner."

"For his part, the Salesian Brother Artemide Zatti -- with his bicycle -- was a living example of gratitude," the pope said. "Cured of tuberculosis, he devoted his entire life to serving others, caring for the infirm with tender love."

Meeting Oct. 8 with pilgrims who came to Rome to witness St. Zatti's canonization, Francis gave a special shout out to religious brothers; a day earlier the Salesians had released portions of a letter then-Fr. Jorge Mario Bergoglio had written about his prayers and novenas to Zatti in the 1970s when he was provincial superior of the Jesuits. Thanks to those prayers, the future pope wrote, from 1978 to 1986, 23 men entered the Jesuits to become brothers after years in which the society had no new brothers.

Francis spoke to the pilgrims about the Zatti family's experience as immigrants in Argentina, but he also confirmed his devotion to St. Zatti as an intercessor for vocations to religious life as brothers.

"Brothers have a special charism that is nurtured in prayer and work. And they are good for the whole body of the congregation," the pope said. "They are

people of piety, they are cheerful, hardworking," they do not feel inferior because they are not priests but are enriched by being a brother to all.

Pope Francis marks 60th anniversary of Vatican II opening by pleading for the church to overcome polarization

11 October 2022

by [Christopher White](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope John XXIII leads the opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 11, 1962. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano)

ROME — Pope Francis on Oct. 11 marked the opening of the 60th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council — a three-year period that launched landmark reforms in the Catholic Church's relationship to the world around it and the church's own liturgy and practices — by pleading for the church to "overcome all polarization and preserve our communion."

In a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, which served as the council's chambers during the 1962-1965 meetings, Francis said the council, which was inaugurated by Pope St. John XXIII, was "one great response" to the question "Do you love me?" posed by Christ to his disciples.

"To rekindle her love for the Lord, the church, for the first time in her history, devoted a council to examining herself and reflect on her nature and mission," said Francis. "She saw herself once more as a mystery of grace generated by love; she saw herself anew as the people of God, the body of Christ, the living temple of the Holy Spirit!"

Yet while the ecumenical council revisited many areas of Catholic doctrine, reassessed its relationship with other Christian communities and religions, revised Catholic liturgy to allow for the vernacular, and reconfigured church structures to allow for greater participation of the laity, in the 60 years that have followed, it also proved to be a flashpoint among various ecclesial circles.

During the 60th anniversary Mass, Francis lamented that those changes had sometimes led to deep divisions within the church.

"How often, in the wake of the council, did Christians prefer to choose sides in the church, not realizing that they were breaking their mother's heart! How many times did they prefer to cheer on their own party rather than being servants of all? To be progressive or conservative rather than being brothers and sisters?" he asked.

"To be on the 'right' or 'left,' rather than with Jesus? To present themselves as 'guardians of the truth' or 'pioneers of innovation' rather than seeing themselves as humble and grateful children of holy mother church?" he continued. "That is not how the Lord wants

us to be. We are his sheep, his flock, and we can only be so together and as one."

While the work of the council and the years that followed radically altered the Catholic Church's relationship with the rest of the world and realigned itself with a more open posture to it, in marking its anniversary, Francis also warned against the temptation of "worldliness."

"Let us be careful: Both the 'progressivism' that lines up behind the world and the 'traditionalism' that longs for a bygone world are not evidence of love, but of infidelity," he cautioned. "They are forms of a Pelagian selfishness that puts our own tastes and plans above the love that pleases God, the simple, humble and faithful love that Jesus asked of Peter."

**"Let us be careful: Both the 'progressivism' that lines up behind the world and the 'traditionalism' that longs for a bygone world are not evidence of love, but of infidelity."
—Pope Francis**

Throughout his homily, Francis revisited many of the central themes from his own nearly decadelong papacy, especially his call for a church committed to evangelization and prioritizing the needs of the poor. "You are not here to shepherd yourselves," the pope said to the hundreds of clergy present in St. Peter's, "but others — all others — with love. And if it is fitting to show a particular concern, it should be for those whom God loves most: the poor and the outcast. The church is meant to be, as Pope John put it, 'the church of all, and particularly the church of the poor.' "

The council, the pope said, calls for a church that is "madly in love with its Lord and with all the men and women whom he loves" and

"that is rich in Jesus and poor in assets" and "a church that is free and freeing."

"A church in love with Jesus has no time for quarrels, gossip and disputes," the pope added. "May God free us from being critical and intolerant, harsh and angry! This is not a matter of style but of love. For those who love, as the Apostle Paul teaches, do everything without murmuring."

In recent years, Francis has dedicated particular [attention](#) to continued liturgical reforms in the church, arguing that they are necessary for the embrace of the reforms of the council, which he has said are "irreversible." More recently, some of the pope's top advisers have [expressed](#) concern that some of the resistance to the Francis papacy is rooted in resistance to Vatican II.

During the Mass, the pope once more reiterated his support for the reforms of Vatican II.

"How timely the council remains!" he said. "It helps us reject the temptation to enclose ourselves within the confines of our own comforts and convictions."

As the pope concluded his homily, he again issued a clarion call for church unity.

"You who desire that we be a united flock, save us from the forms of polarization that are the devil's handiwork," he said. "And we, your church, with Peter and like Peter, now say to you: 'Lord, you know everything; you know that we love you.' "



Christopher White

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Women deacons movement hopes for concrete proposals in next synod stage

13 October 2022

by [Christopher White](#)



Casey Stanton, co-director of Discerning Deacons, shares the vision for how to walk together as part of the Year of St. Phoebe, advancing a synodal church and lifting up the contributions of women. (Luisa Arumi Ortiz)

ROME — When Casey Stanton, who has spent the last year leading synod listening sessions throughout the United States, traveled to Mexico last month, she repeatedly heard the phrase "poco a poco" — or "little by little" — used to describe

how change takes place in the Catholic Church.

For Stanton, who is co-director of [Discerning Deacons](#), a project dedicated to engaging Catholics in conversations about the role of women and the diaconate, the phrase was not a lament, but rather words of encouragement and affirmation that change and renewal is possible.

Stanton had traveled to Mexico first for a [pilgrimage](#) to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but then on to the southern state of Chiapas. There, in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, she spent time understanding how people in the majority-Indigenous diocese had become fierce defenders of its native cultures and land, and along the way elevated the role of women in the church, including through diaconal teams, where couples of men and women were tasked with assuming diaconal responsibilities.

"It's the lived social gospel. It's the living out of accompaniment," she said of the experience, which she described as a laboratory for the Catholic Church living out the promises of Vatican II. "It showed the church as helping to preserve a culture rather than wipe it out."

Stanton spoke to NCR on Oct. 4 while in Rome, where she has been meeting with a number of Vatican officials engaged in the synod process and to present the group's findings after holding hundreds of listening sessions. Her visit comes at the midway point of Pope Francis' newly [revamped](#) synod process, which was launched last October with listening sessions around the globe and then comes to fulfillment with a Rome meeting in October 2023.



Pilgrims offer prayers and bless candles they bought at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, as they prepare to climb the hill at Tepeyac. Discerning Deacons held a pilgrimage to Mexico City Aug. 31-Sept. 3. (Luisa Arumi Ortiz)

For the team at Discerning Deacons, the synodal process is not a "one-and-done" experience. It is an invitation to share what Stanton describes as "good news": that the Catholic Church is eager to offer a listening ear to the desires and concerns of all of its members, not just the clergy.

That's why during the last year, according to the group's [newly released](#) synod synthesis report, Discerning Deacons' team of "synod animators" led a total of 358 synod consultations (including 188 in person, 122 virtual) that engaged some 8,819 people in over 50 dioceses around the world.

While the motivating question for the group is the role of women and the possibility of restoring women to the diaconate, Stanton says that "part of this process is to reveal where we are as a church and to foster a culture of listening" on a range of issues.

The question of the diaconate is one that has loomed large ever since Francis launched a commission [in 2016](#) to study the historical questions surrounding women deacons, which the pope [said](#) did not reach a consensus on the early status of deacons. He then formed a second one, which is ongoing,

following the 2019 Amazon synod, where the topic had been a dominant theme.

Francis has repeatedly [said](#) that the synod process cannot be viewed as a parliamentary or political process. Stanton says what she and her colleagues have tried to do over the last year is help facilitate a proper discernment.

"You can't discern what you can't talk about," she said. "We've tried to make it safe to have a conversation that we don't know the conclusion of."

After Pope John Paul II's 1994 apostolic constitution [Ordinatio Sacerdotalis](#), which said "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women," Stanton said that so much of the discussion of the role of women and any form of ordination has been considered taboo and created a culture of fear.

The synod process, she observed, has helped provide the freedom and the space for greater conversation. That includes both those in support of restoring women to the diaconate and those opposed or skeptical.

"If there is Holy Spirit-inspired hesitation, that needs to be heard," she said. "But we have to have a conversation."

What is different about synodality, she added, is that "the people in power" have "invited the conversation."

Reflecting back on embracing the "poco a poco" theory of change, Stanton recalls that it was the Second Vatican Council that restored the permanent diaconate, in which married men may be ordained as deacons for lifelong service in the church.

"The roots of the current diaconate are not in antiquity, they are in modernity," she says. "We're here asking God to help us figure out

how we're supposed to be on the earth, and I think we're supposed to keep asking that question in every generation."



Patricia Santos of St. Paul, Minnesota, Carmen Villafañe of Miami, and Philomene Peán from Boston listen to preaching during the closing liturgy at the Church of the Fifth Apparition, Santa Maria Tulpetlac, during Discerning Deacons' pilgrimage to Mexico. (Luisa Arumi Ortiz)

As the global synod process moves to its second stage, with ecclesial gatherings on every continent, synod advisers have been clear that [discussion](#) about the role of women in the church was a recurring theme from the first diocesan listening stage of the synod.

Stanton hopes that in the next stage, some concrete proposals begin to emerge. She also says that she recognizes that there may be areas of the globe that do not see the female diaconate as necessary or needed at this stage, but she hopes "we can recognize in other parts of the world this would help them further the mission of sharing good news and ministering to the people of God."

"We can actually come to consensus without uniformity," she said. "It doesn't have to be uniform."

At the same time, she says it is important to manage expectations.

Discerning Deacons intends to keep extending Pope Francis' invitation to be a listening church.

"Our mission is to be the deacons called for today that the bishop of Rome needs," said Stanton, "and we're reporting for duty."



Christopher White

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War, climate change, inflation: Multiple crises have led to a boom in global hunger

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by Chris Herlinger

Ministry
Social Justice



Scattered grain sits inside a warehouse damaged by Russian attacks in Cherkaska Lozova, outskirts of Kharkiv, eastern Ukraine, May 28. (AP photo/Bernat Armangue, File)

In the shadow of global forces, Sr. Monica Moeketsi sees, hears and feels tensions all around her.

Inflation is putting pressure on all aspects of life in her small southern African nation of Lesotho. What cost 18 loti (\$1) in February now costs three times as much. Food, soap, medical supplies — everything is affected.

And that, Moeketsi said, has led to a spike in fighting, stealing, robberies, and even killings. Families struggle to hold on to jobs. Violent incidences are up among students at their schools.

"It's very serious, these tensions that families are experiencing," said Moeketsi, a member of the [Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary](#) (Good Shepherd Sisters of Quebec) and secretary-general of the Catholic Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life in Lesotho. "I am seriously worried."

Sr. Mary Lilly Driciru sees similar problems in Uganda: high inflation affects food and fuel prices — which in some cases have doubled in just the last few weeks — and

unpredictable weather varies between drought and flooding, all at a moment when Ugandans were hoping for better times after two years of COVID-19-related lockdowns and economic downturns.

"It's hope against hope," said Driciru, who said she hears stories of despondency and stress and of people working day and night to try to stay ahead in poor areas of Uganda's capital of Kampala.



Sr. Mary Lilly Driciru of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church hosts her weekly radio show at Radio Maria Uganda on April 30. (GSR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

"Many people live on the bare minimum, and others are literally going hungry," Driciru, a member of the [Missionary Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church](#), told Global Sisters Report.

Driciru and Moeketsi, like humanitarian officials who also talked to GSR, see a perfect storm that began with the Feb. 24 start of the war in Ukraine, which rattled international economic markets and disrupted grain exports to many parts of the world, leading to [an increase in global hunger](#) that will not be easily solved in the short term.

That has particular poignancy as the global community marks [World Food Day](#) on Oct. 16.

Some things have improved in the last eight months. As part of a July [grain agreement](#), Russia has eased its blockage of grain shipments from Ukrainian ports, which lowered global food prices. In September, United Nations trade chief Rebeca Grynspan said the drop had eased some for "1.6 billion people in the world that have been facing a cost-of-living rise, especially because of the increase in food prices."

But Grynspan acknowledged that, as UN News [reported](#) in September, the price drops are not yet reflected in local domestic markets like the ones in Lesotho and Uganda. As a result, developing countries are still struggling with high food prices, inflation, and currency devaluations, the news agency reported.



A Catholic Relief Services distribution in Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda. Refugees received a startup kit including shelter tarpaulin, poles, ropes, blankets, a net, mats, a solar lamp and a kitchen set. (Courtesy of Catholic Relief Services/Jjumba Martin)

Despite the resumption of grain exports from Ukraine, the world is "heading toward the tightest grain inventories in years," the Reuters news agency [reported in September](#). One problem is that drought and poor weather "in key agricultural regions from the United States to France and China is

shrinking grain harvests and cutting inventories, heightening the risk of famine in some of the world's poorest nations."

Still, the war in Ukraine has remained the most visible symbol of the challenges for the global food supply.

Its impact "rests heavy on the continent of Africa," said Driciru, a journalist and communicator by training who serves as communications and Africa faith and justice coordinator for the [Association of Religious in Uganda](#).

While the initial grain blockage didn't directly affect countries like Uganda, it hurt the global economy in other ways, with a reduction in trade that wreaked havoc on foreign exchange, she said.

"Given the fact that Africa is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic with its negative effects of unemployment and declining business trends, the Russian war on Ukraine is yet a new blow on the African economy," she wrote recently in a reflection she shared with GSR.

"The conflict is poised to drive up already soaring food prices across the globe. Ukraine and Russia, which is under heavy economic sanctions for invading its neighbor, account for one-third of global grain exports," Driciru wrote. "The economic challenges that are bound to affect the world also affect Africa as part of the global community."



A Somali woman fills a container with water Sept. 20 at a camp for displaced people on the outskirts of Dollow, Somalia. Somalia has long known droughts, but the climate shocks are now coming more frequently, leaving less room to recover and prepare for the next. (AP photo/Jerome Delay)

Similar challenges in the Americas

Other parts of the world face similar dynamics, including the Americas.

Lola Castro, the World Food Program's regional representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, said in an interview with GSR that at the beginning of the year, there were about 8.3 million people in the region who were "severely food insecure," lacking access to a regular source of food.

Those numbers have increased by about 15% since the beginning of the year, Castro said. In all, 74 million people face moderate to severe food insecurity, which corresponds to about 40% of the population of the 11 countries and territories considered, said World Food Program spokesperson Norha Restrepo.

The inflation numbers in some countries are telling, Castro added: Colombia had 2% food inflation in 2019 and about 25% this year, she said.

"All the countries where we work also import more than they produce, or at least half and half, but we have countries that import 80% of what they consume," she said. "And obviously, although we may not in Latin America and the Caribbean be buying directly from the Black Sea, we buy indirectly, and also we buy fertilizers very much directly. So we are seeing an overall impact on the global food prices."

And while food prices have decreased in recent weeks, they have still not returned to previous levels, and many people still cannot buy the food they need, Castro said.

The challenges of global inflation are just one factor in the current economic hardships in the region, she said.

"COVID-19 brought a huge economic downturn and increase of poverty and loss of middle-class and development gains" that had been made over nearly three decades, Castro said. "While we should not forget the poorest of the poor that are the ones suffering the most, COVID brought the middle class of Latin America down to almost poverty levels in not having a cushion."

Another troubling dynamic: climate change. In the last month, two big hurricanes — Fiona and Ian — hit the Dominican Republic and Cuba, respectively. Though Ian gained strength over Florida, its effects on Cuba were considerable, Castro said.

"What happened in Cuba, in the west of Cuba, is a huge loss, also, of production that they had in tobacco, bananas, yuca, and other products," she said. "The climate crisis continues being an issue and a problem for food security in the region."



A woman passes Ukrainian servicemen patrolling an area Sept. 14 in Izium. (CNS/Reuters/Gleb Garanich)

Add the war in Ukraine, and "it's compounding crises, one after another, and the resilience of the people is eroded, basically. They cannot cope anymore. I mean, you are a family, a woman farming in the dry corridor of Honduras, and you got the [2020] Eta hurricane," she said. "On top, you got COVID-19, where you couldn't plant or couldn't move your harvest. And then you get that everything you buy is double in price."

Similar pressures exist in the United States, said Adrian Dominican Sr. Donna Markham, president of [Catholic Charities USA](#).

Economically poor people in the United States right now are as "vulnerable as people in any part of the world," Markham said in an interview with GSR. The result, she said, is that Catholic Charities' services like food pantries are being pushed to their limits, and donor fatigue is rising.

"These are difficult, challenging times," Markham said.

Adding to the current concerns in the United States are the continued trauma and grief from the pandemic, serious and often ugly

political divisions, and a housing shortage that has caused home prices to skyrocket.

Such problems affect both urban and rural areas in the United States, Markham said.

"There are great needs everywhere," she said.



People receive food donations July 13 from a food pantry outside a church in the Bronx borough of New York City. (CNS/Reuters/Shannon Stapleton)

Sisters and aid groups do their best with what they have

Unraveling all of those great needs globally could take at least two to three years, said Shaun Ferris, senior technical adviser for agriculture, livelihoods and markets for the Baltimore-based humanitarian organization [Catholic Relief Services](#).

Since there is less foreign exchange in the world since the start of the war in Ukraine, Ferris said governments are more constrained about what they can do to counter some of the challenges.

That means a larger burden on humanitarian groups to fill in gaps.



Shaun Ferris (Courtesy of Catholic Relief Services)

"The situation is very serious, and there's a need [to respond] for those in crisis," said Ferris, who is based in Nairobi, Kenya. This includes long-term assistance to farmers for the next five to 10 years and even beyond, given the challenges of drought and climate change in much of the world.

In East Africa, the lack of rain is "becoming a nail-biter every year," he said. "The effects of climate change are becoming more severe."

Action to counter climate change in affected areas is still possible to increase agricultural production in parts of Africa, Ferris said. "Africa can go a long way to feeding itself, but it needs support."

As it is now, East Africa is on the brink of a major food security crisis because of the effects of climate change, the decrease in markets because of COVID-related challenges, the war in Ukraine, and the spike in food prices, Ferris said.

"All are having a ripple effect, with multiple factors happening at once," he said.

One outcome: an overall loss of confidence, he said.

"When millions of people lose hope for the future, that's not good for any society," he said.

Moeketsi in Lesotho said religious congregations can feel frustrated in an uncertain environment in which political leaders perceived as corrupt are not doing enough to meet the current crises.

Her congregation is doing its best, though, to provide food when needed.

In Uganda, Driciru sees similar challenges and problems. She said government corruption undercuts any real hope of substantive, meaningful change.

"Taking advantage of the poor is part of the order of the day," she said of the present political climate.

The eight congregations that run schools in Lesotho are keeping the focus on helping students envision a better future — part of efforts, Moeketsi said, for the congregations "to go the extra mile."

Driciru said that is important during a period of global and local tension and uncertainty.

"It's time to be mindful of each other," she said, "just like Jesus responded to needs in his time."



Chris Herlinger

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Youth want community, safe spaces in church, council members tell pope

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by Carol Glatz,
Catholic News Service

Vatican



Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of Philadelphia takes a selfie with Pope Francis at the end of the pope's weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square Oct. 12, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

VATICAN CITY — Young people in the United States are looking for a sense of

community and a safe space in the church to express themselves freely, two representatives of Catholic youth told Pope Francis.

Olivia Marcoux, 16, of Providence, Rhode Island, and Destiny Morris, 16, of Lexington, Kentucky, gave Francis a quick snapshot of what young people want him to know during an encounter after his general audience in St. Peter's Square Oct. 12.

They were part of a delegation representing the National Youth Advisory Council, which is made up of 12 young people from different cultural backgrounds and parts of the United States. As a consultative body, the council is tasked with bringing the voices and gifts of young people into the work and ministry of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. Accompanying the group was Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of Philadelphia, the federation's episcopal adviser.

Marcoux told Catholic News Service that they told the pope how young people "want community and they want a safe space in the church and that there are barriers in society which kind of hold us back from seeking out that community in the church."

Morris told CNS they already experience pressure from their peers who do not have a strong relationship with God "and might be judgmental of our own relationship."

On top of that, she said, they can feel "judgment from the older people in the church who have been there their whole lives and (are) not accepting of new ideas and relevant ideas." In addition, there is pressure from society and "worldly" values.

Marcoux said she told the pope about the huge amount of anxiety young people experience with the "pressure in school,

pressure to perform well, and anxiety about expressing their faith and what they actually believe."

The Catholic faith has helped her and others she knows overcome that anxiety, she said.

"We have a really strong youth ministry at my church, and we really connected with our youth minister. She's been really important in helping us deal with that in recognizing our own personal struggles" in life and the faith, Marcoux said.

"We feel comfortable and safe in that safe space at church with our youth ministry," she said. "We feel safe enough to really express our own faith."

Marcoux said the pope told them to tell all young people in the United States that "we need to find more joy and that we always need to be looking for joy in our lives and in the church."

Another council member, Katey Nguyen, 17, from Fountain Valley, California, told CNS she was happy with her youth minister and the community they built, but he left for the seminary 10 months ago and there has been no replacement yet.

But, she said, she learned during her trip to Rome that young people need to "advocate for youth ministry to our bishops."

The meeting in Rome with young people from across the country was a wonderful experience of "community and togetherness I really crave," she said, especially with no youth ministry right now back home.

The members of the advisory council also met with Vatican officials to provide input on improving outreach.

Morris said they told Msgr. Lucio Adrian Ruiz, secretary of the Dicastery for

Communication, that social media should be used the way it was meant to be: as a way to directly and personally speak to everyone. So, for example, "the pope should send videos to youth directly about social issues that we might have, having pictures and videos and speaking directly to us."

Council members Justin Fannon of Boston and Tania Vergara-Gongora of Lexington gave the pope a written message, a prayer card they created and a friendship bracelet, which Vergara-Gongora tied onto his wrist. It was a braid of white, green and blue strands to represent purity, unity and wisdom, Nguyen said.

The pope will be sending his own message to young people that will be shared at the National Catholic Youth Conference in November in Long Beach, California, and online.

Ryan Bao, the federation's staff liaison to the advisory council, told CNS that the council, which was launched this summer, "takes youth as protagonists ... to help advise us on our projects, our initiatives and everything that we are doing for youth ministers and people who accompany young people in the United States."

About 30% of Catholic young people are leaving the church, the federation says on its website, nfcym.org. It said the federation seeks to "equip and strengthen leaders that accompany these young people" and help them "empower young people in their faith."

Morris said, "We, as youth, are not the future, we are very much the present and I think that's really showing in everything we are doing here right now and what the council really stands for."

Vatican II at 60: Is Pope Francis or Ross Douthat right?

14 October 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis celebrates Mass in St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 11, 2022, to mark the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Pope Francis apparently wants to put me out of a job! In his [sermon marking the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council](#), he said, "If [the Church] should fail to rejoice, she would deny her very self, for she would forget the love that begot her," he said. "Yet how many of us are unable to live the faith with joy, without grumbling and criticizing? A Church in love with Jesus has no time for quarrels, gossip and disputes. May God free us from being critical and intolerant, harsh and angry!"

Now, the Holy Father has never been a journalist, so he doesn't know that without gossip, we wouldn't know where to start tracking down a story, especially at the Vatican! As for "quarrels" and "disputes," I am reasonably conflict-averse except when

fundamental values are at issue, or when there is a bon mots waiting to be delivered, usually against a conservative critic of the pope, that is simply too delicious to pass up.

Setting aside "grumbling," which I agree should be avoided, I would point out to the Holy Father that there is criticism and then there is criticism. We are all tired of a kind of Catholic critic, found especially in the U.S., with a big chip on his or her shoulder, who insists on seeing the church through a highly myopic lens that permits no vision of anything good. These are the "prophets of doom" of which St. Pope John XXIII spoke in his opening address at the council.

Still, there is a higher form of criticism, one that engages and challenges authority, even papal authority, respectfully, in the context of affective communion always, but not afraid to ask penetrating questions or proffer inconvenient and contrary facts.

I do not mean to quibble, but the call to unity is one of several Christian vocations. And I agree entirely with the pope when, a few sentences before the passage quoted above, he said: "Yet let us be careful: both the 'progressivism' that lines up behind the world and the 'traditionalism' that longs for a bygone world are not evidence of love, but of infidelity. They are forms of a Pelagian selfishness that puts our own tastes and plans above the love that pleases God, the simple, humble and faithful love that Jesus asked of Peter." The point, I think, is that criticism should not devolve into sectarianism.

We Americans have always been especially susceptible to Pelagian feverishness, a consequence of the Calvinism of the dominant colonial culture. Our meritocratic instincts lead us to convince ourselves that we have achieved our good fortune in life,

and if we can earn our way in this life, why not in the next too?

Does progressivism "line up behind the world"? Certainly, there is a tendency on the Catholic left in this country to try and find religious rationales for attitudes and ideas with no Catholic pedigree, some of which are not reconcilable. In too many theology departments at our Catholic universities, there is more interest in non-binary sexual identity issues than in the documents of Vatican II. Inclusion should be a value, but it is not the only value, and when it is treated as such, it becomes not a value but a bulldozer.

Does traditionalism "long for a bygone world"? There is a word missing: imagined. The world for which the traditionalists pine never existed. The pre-conciliar church was the church that too often collaborated with fascism when fascism was not a verbal tic on the campaign trail but a governing style complete with concentration camps and Gestapo. In this country, the pre-conciliar church was already busting out of the ethnic Catholic ghettos that had kept Catholic identity so vibrant. By the mid-1950s, not the mid-'60s, middle-class Catholics were moving to neighborhoods no longer designated by the name of the parish church, a movement resulting as much due to the GI Bill as anything said at Vatican II. Throughout the Western world, capitalism succeeded where Marxism had failed, overwhelming religious identity with a flood of consumerist idols. Look what was done to Christmas!

The pope points the way forward. "To be on the 'right' or 'left,' rather than with Jesus? To present themselves as 'guardians of the truth' or 'pioneers of innovation' rather than seeing themselves as humble and grateful children of holy mother church?" the pope said, challenging sectarian tendencies on

both sides. "That is not how the Lord wants us to be. We are his sheep, his flock, and we can only be so together and as one."

Humility and gratitude are two of the attributes that least characterize the contemporary church, at least in the U.S. Ours is a culture of self-assertion and grievance. If we want to overcome polarization, we need to cultivate our humility and gratitude.

Ross Douthat, an opinion columnist at The New York Times, marked the anniversary of the council by saying it was a failure, albeit a necessary one, and, in any event, it can't be undone. He [writes](#): "...there is no simple path back. Not back to the style of papal authority that both John Paul II and Francis have tried to exercise — the former to restore tradition, the latter to suppress it— only to find themselves frustrated by the ungovernability of the modern church?" But in no meaningful sense can it be argued that Francis "suppresses" tradition. And does Douthat think the church was "governable" in the 18th century?

Douthat continues that there is no path back to "the kind of thick inherited Catholic cultures that still existed down to the middle of the 20th century, and whose subsequent unraveling, while inevitable to some extent, was clearly accelerated by the church's own internal iconoclasm." But there is no strict causality here, only a rightwing talking point.

Finally, Douthat worries that there is no path back to "the moral and doctrinal synthesis, stamped with the promise of infallibility and consistency that the church's conservatives have spent the last two generations insisting still exists, but that in the Francis era has proved so unstable that those same conservatives have ended up feuding with the pope himself." Is he aware of French

monarchists frustrating Pope Leo XIII's efforts to get them to accept the Third Republic? Or of universal disregard for just war theory in two world wars? Where was this consistency?

That is not only blinded by his own ideology but by his lazy acceptance of overbroad, pop-social science characterizations of divine realities. It is true that the post-conciliar era differed from what people expected or hoped. But, who would have thought in 1810, with the pope imprisoned, dioceses throughout the world left vacant, and most religious orders suppressed, that the 19th century would see an unparalleled flowering of spirituality?

Back to the Holy Father's speech. What Francis understands – and what every pope of the council starting with Papa Roncalli and including Montini, Luciani, Wojtyla and Ratzinger has understood – is that the dominant themes of the council were and are vitally necessary: a Christocentric focus, a retrieval of sound sacramental theology, pursuing ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and getting out of the defensive crouch that had been the church's stance towards the modern world. Do critics of Francis – and of the council – really think these changes were ill advised? That we would be better off if they had not been embraced at Vatican II?

Were there misfirings? Of course. For example, the renewal of liturgy was necessary, and at its center was a renewed focus on the Eucharist. No more could people recite their beads while the priest "said" Mass. But, in trying to focus on the Eucharist, we were too quick to toss overboard certain private devotions, which were a kind of spiritual architecture for many people. Now, especially because so many immigrants bring a rich devotional life with them, we are recovering that

architecture, without sacrificing the centrality of the Eucharist.

Sixty years is a long time - except in the life of the church. It takes 100 years to receive a council, my great mentor Msgr. John Tracy Ellis taught us. Francis has brought the fruits of the council that ripened in Latin America to the center of the universal church, just as Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI brought their gifts to bear on the reception of the council. Francis has also reinvigorated the post-conciliar church with fresh insights and perspectives.

The work of reception continues. The "prophets of doom" today are as tiresome as they were on the day Good Pope John opened the council. And it is the council itself that, in Francis' hands, seems young again.



[Michael Sean Winters](#)

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



**SYNOD
THE NATIONAL
SYNTHESIS**
A Reflection from the Interpath
Traditions
by Thomas P. Bonacci, C.P.

Recently, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published the National Synthesis for the 2021-2023 Synod on Synodality. The results are challenging, honest, and encouraging. Over 700,000 people participated, reflecting a broad spectrum of the Catholic population. People from many different religious traditions also participated. The National Synthesis reflects the wisdom of 22,000 reports.

The active participation of young people and those estranged from the Church makes the Synthesis a valuable instrument in our understanding of what is important to those troubled by the Institutional

Church. Synodality invites us to discernment which in turn invites us to listen to one another in a spirit of prayer, humility, and openness. The document is readily available on the USCCB website. Three areas of concern are worth exploring here for a few moments.

First, the Synthesis reveals the deep wounds caused by the sexual abuse scandals. The responses reflect disappointment, bafflement, and deep sorrow. How is such a failure possible in a Church that treasures life and human dignity? The scandal has caused many to question the Church's credibility. Many find they can no longer participate in the life of the Church. The call for honesty is strong. Amends must be a reality, and serious reflection and self-examination the order of the day.

Second, the place and dignity of women are of crucial concern, according to the Diocesan Reports and Summaries. Women's ordination issues must be addressed with openness and willingness to hear what women experience in their vocational calls. Women's participation in the Church's life is vital, as in the case of women religious. Yet, the incorporation of women into the full and complete life and structure is lacking.

Third, the Church must be a welcoming Church where people are treasured more than rituals, doctrine, and customs. Many

participants
lamented the exclusion of the LGBTQ
+ communities. In
addition, the issue of racism is of great
concern. The Synthesis offers several
important paragraphs
exploring the nature of what would
constitute a welcoming Church.

There are other areas of concern,
such as priestly formation,
participation of young
people, and the quality of the liturgical
practice of the Church. The section
on discernment invites us to
understand the ongoing
dynamic of Synodality.

Pope Francis made it abundantly clear
that synodality is not an opportunity to
complain and write a report but an
opportunity to
discern the movement of the Spirit
in the Church by listening to the entire
People of God.

The Synod on Synodality, scheduled
to meet in Rome in October 2023, will
no doubt emphasize that
synodality is the way of being
Church. A wonderful and challenging
future has begun anew as the synodal
way of being Church takes hold in our
hearts and structures. We already have
bold testimony about how the Spirit is
moving in our Church and World
today.

Blessings to all of you, Holy
Community, who continue to share
the wisdom of your discernment in
ways both humble and bold.