

**Articles of Interest
For
6 November 2022**

Sunday, October 30, 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-Four: Keeping Faith with Our Ancestors

The Continuum of Life

This week's meditations celebrate the gift of our ancestors in family and in faith. CAC faculty member Dr. Barbara Holmes writes of the broad and deep life to which her ancestors helped awaken her:

A world without ancestors is lonely. I am so grateful for the elders in my family who introduced me to the continuums in life. It matters how we understand our sojourn in this reality. If we consider our lives to be comprised of segments separated by a dash that encompasses birth and death dates, we will be inconsolable when trauma truncates our realities and delays our destinations. But, if we consider ourselves to be part of a continuum of life that does not end with death, but transitions to a life after life, our perspectives can change.

The community of the ancestors, already inhabiting the life beyond life, kept in constant contact with us. They sent messages and intervened when necessary. They prayed with me and whispered warnings. . . . Whether we call them ancestors or elders, only those women and men who led good lives in the physical realm are considered to be wise guides in the spiritual realm. In some African cultures,

they are called elders, “the old ones.” Any elder represents the entire legal and mystical authority of the lineage. For me, ancestors, living and dead elders, commanded my respect and were always present, abiding and guiding me. [1]

At the passing of his mother, Father Richard Rohr experienced a connection or “bridge” to the life after death:

I believe that one of the essential events that we must walk through is the experience of the passion and death with someone we love, with someone we are bonded to, with someone we really care about. When my mother passed over, I had no doubt that she built a bridge—I don’t know what other words to use—she built a bridge and she took some of me over with her, and she sent some of herself back. I understand now at a deeper level what Jesus meant by “unless I go, the Spirit cannot come” (John 16:7). I think the normal pattern in history is for each generation to pass over, and to build the bridges of love and trust for the next generation coming afterwards. The all-important thing, for all of us, is that we be bonded somewhere. If you have never loved, there is no bridge. . . .

When you walk through someone’s passion with them, through someone’s learning to let go, and pass over with them in a moment of death, I’m convinced it’s then and only then that you really are prepared to understand the resurrection. . . . All Jesus came to teach us, and only needed to teach us, was how to walk through the great mystery, and not be put to shame and to trust that God is on the other side of it. [2]

Monday, 31 October 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-Four: Keeping Faith with Our Ancestors

Voices of Our Female Ancestors

Author and podcaster Kat Armas shares how honoring the voices of our female ancestors enriches our faith. She calls it “abuelita theology”:

Scripture testifies to the power and influence of grandmothers among the people of God. For years I overlooked this detail because I hadn't been trained to recognize the importance or value of women in the Bible. . .

I overlooked the introduction to Paul's second letter to Timothy until one day it caught my attention, affirming my curiosity and conviction of the importance of both abuelitas and the faith of my ancestors. In this short passage, Paul says: “I'm grateful to God, whom I serve with a good conscience, *as my ancestors did*. I constantly remember you in my prayers day and night. When I remember your tears, I *as my ancestors did* long to see you so that I can be filled with happiness. I'm reminded of your authentic faith, *which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice*. I'm sure that this faith is also inside you” (2 Timothy 1:3–5, emphasis mine).

Here Paul names the power and importance of abuelita theology.

By acknowledging Timothy's faith (a faith birthed from his abuelita and his mamá), Paul honors [and] . . . acknowledges that their faith is a communal faith that takes seriously the impact of . . . the *women* who formed and shaped him. . . . I often wonder what Abuela Lois and Mama Eunice's faith looked like. How did they live it out? Were they dedicated to serving the community like Tabitha? Were they leading house churches like Lydia did or instructing leaders like Priscilla did?

Armas recounts losing sight of Christianity's communal nature, and how the communion of saints inspires her:

I internalized the hyperindividualistic view of faith and salvation. . . . I bought into the idea that my spirituality is private, that my spiritual growth has absolutely nothing to do with my community, my ancestors—the cloud of witnesses, those I knew directly and indirectly—as well as the countless number of people who have influenced me or even those I myself have influenced. . . .

The communion of saints has enriched my theological imagination, particularly when it comes to my ancestors and las madres of the faith, the women throughout history who have gone before us paving the way, building their own tables, and offering a perspective of the divine, without which our faith would be lacking. . . .

My hope is that those without power or privilege in society, many of whom hold our families together, would be highly honored by all. . . . My desire is that the stories of these women in Scripture and beyond illuminate something new in us so that when we see those on the margins living life en la lucha, in the struggle, we would be drawn to their experiences and drink from their wells

overflowing with sabiduría, wisdom, about the divine.

Tuesday, 1 November 2022 *All Saints' Day*

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-Four: Keeping Faith with Our Ancestors

Part of One Body

Father Richard connects the church's teaching on "the communion of saints" and our ancestors:

Humans throughout history have often had a strong appreciation for and connection with their ancestors. I think the collective notion of oneness is what Christians were trying to verbalize when they made a late addition to the ancient Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the communion of saints." They were offering us the idea that *the dead are at one with the living*, whether they're our direct ancestors, the saints in glory, or even the so-called souls in purgatory.

Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–2022) wrote of experiencing a tender oneness with his mother in a dream and in nature:

The day my mother died, I wrote in my journal, "A serious misfortune of my life has arrived." I suffered for more than one year after the passing away of my mother. But one night, in the highlands of Vietnam, I was sleeping in the hut of my hermitage. I dreamed of my mother. I saw myself sitting with her, and we were having a wonderful talk. She looked young and beautiful, her

hair flowing down. It was so pleasant to sit there and talk to her as if she had never died. When I woke up it was about two in the morning, and I felt very strongly that I had never lost my mother. The impression that my mother was still with me was very clear. I understood then that the idea of having lost my mother was just an idea. It was obvious in that moment that my mother is always alive in me.

I opened the door and went outside. The entire hillside was bathed in moonlight. It was a hill covered with tea plants, and my hut was set behind the temple halfway up. Walking slowly in the moonlight through the rows of tea plants, I noticed my mother was still with me. She was the moonlight caressing me as she had done so often, very tender, very sweet . . . wonderful! Each time my feet touched the earth I knew my mother was there with me. I knew this body was not mine alone but a living continuation of my mother and my father and my grandparents and great-grandparents. Of all my ancestors. These feet that I saw as "my" feet were actually "our" feet. Together my mother and I were leaving footprints in the damp soil. [1]

Father Richard continues:

The whole thing, all of life, is one, just at different stages, all of it loved corporately by God (and, one hopes, by us). Within this worldview, we are saved not by being privately perfect, but by being "part of the body," humble links in the great chain of history. This view echoes the biblical concept of a covenant love that was granted to the Jewish people as a whole and never just to one individual like Abraham, Noah, or David.

Wednesday, 2 November 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-Four: Keeping Faith with Our Ancestors

Love Beyond the Veil

At CONSPIRE 2021, Dr. Barbara Holmes shared a story of her “beyond the veil” childhood encounter with her deceased Aunt Grace. Meeting her ancestor in this unexpected way influenced her faith journey and provided comfort that she was surrounded by Divine Love:

This particular evening, I was laying on the hassock [in my grandmother’s living room] when something very strange happened. . . .

I became aware in a hypersensitive way of sound that was recognizable to me as music, but at the same time, it was more than music. It was a sound that tuned my soul and it alerted me to the fact that nothing was happening in an ordinary way. For one thing, I was no longer on the hassock. I was floating toward the ceiling in a slow and circular movement that delighted me. I mean, I should have been scared because I could see my slumped body still on the hassock, but I wasn’t afraid at all.

I was happy to the point of bursting, and to top off this sense of euphoria, my beloved, deceased Aunt Grace was there. I didn’t see her, but I knew she was nearby and her closeness to me made me even happier. As I floated toward the ceiling, I thought about calling the adults in the next room, but I had no speech. There was no sense of distress as I approached the ceiling, but I knew that if I

did nothing, I would pass through it and leave the Earth forever.

There was only a moment of conflict as I contemplated what it would mean not to be a child, what it would mean to turn to the hassock and to my supine body. I remember a farewell from my Aunt Grace, the fading of the music that was more than music, and then my speech returned. I was elated. I was breathless as I ran to the next room to report to the adults that I flew, I flew and Aunt Grace was playing with me. The mention of my deceased aunt stopped everything.

See, most families would’ve pooh-poohed my account of flying and visitations from a dead relative. But my family has roots in the Gullah culture of South Carolina on my father’s side and the Maryland eastern shore mystics on my mother’s, so they share a belief: everybody knows that the dead come back. They come back and forth to offer warnings, to bring messages from the other side. I was quizzed by the elders.

When I couldn’t come up with any deep wisdom or any important message from the other side . . . one aunt said rather pointedly, “Let us know if she comes to you again.” There it was, I had received affirmation Aunt Grace had been there and might come again. . . .

We live in a world saturated with the love and intentionality of an ever-present God, and we are not alone.

Thursday, 3 November 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-Four: Keeping Faith with Our Ancestors

Love Beyond the Veil

On The Cosmic We podcast, hosts Barbara Holmes and Donny Bryant interviewed minister and scholar Dr. Walter Fluker, who shares a transformational experience he had during an ancestral grief ritual:

Walter Fluker: We hardly know the grief of our suffering. Certainly among Black people, but it's true for all of us as you think of the Cosmic We and this universal moan [*of suffering*]. Even creation is moaning. Why shouldn't we? . . .

I was involved in a grief ritual on Cortes Island off Vancouver, British Columbia. This island, all of these people from around the world were just going through these rituals. One evening . . . during what the Dagara people called the grief ritual, where we pay our debt to the ancestors through grief, through weeping and moaning that universal moan. . . . So [my friend Malidoma Somé] said just be free, so they started playing the drum and Sobonfu [his wife] was hitting some kind of shaking instrument. I just started getting down. . . . All at once, out of nowhere, my father is there. . . . I fell to my knees and I cried. I said, "Daddy, we miss you." He had died in 1984.

I had performed a eulogy but never mourned him. I was too busy being me. I said, "Daddy, we miss you. Mama misses you, B.

misses you." I just went through the whole family. When I came to myself, all of the women had taken me to a corner in the room and they were rocking me. This Japanese woman whispers in my ears. She says, "You're only five years old." I didn't know what that meant then. It was years later [that] I discovered, when daddy left Mississippi in a hurry, he sent for us, thanks be to God. I was five years old. I was still grieving my daddy's departure.

That was one of the most healing moments in my life. He was more real than even in life real. So, I have no doubt that ancestors not only exist, but they are present for us. They come to us in moments of great need and trial, and they also celebrate life's moments with us. They want to celebrate with us. . . .

Holmes and Bryant invite listeners to give space to their own need to grieve:

Donny Bryant: I guess the question is for our listeners . . . what trauma, what healing, what hurt, what pain that we need to be healed from could benefit from the practice of our own unique grief ritual?

Barbara Holmes: Yes, and how can the organized religious institutions, the churches, the places where we assemble to finally shed some of our arrogance, how can they help us to grieve, to lament, to begin to get free? . . . What are you grieving that you don't know that you're grieving? How will you process that grief?

Friday, 4 November 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Forty-Four: Keeping Faith with Our Ancestors

Nature: Our First Ancestor

Once we know that the entire physical world around us, all of creation, is both the hiding place and the revelation place for God, this world becomes home, safe, enchanted, offering grace to any who look deeply. — Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*

Patty Krawec, an Anishinaabe and Ukrainian writer and activist, invites us to consider the land itself as our original ancestor:

I want us to consider our relationship with land. . . . To think of ourselves as a part of creation rather than apart from it. What if the land is a being in its own right? That concept is not as foreign as you might think. And what if the land and all that grows from it and on it and in it are sentient beings in their own right? . . .

When I say that the land is my ancestor, that is a scientific statement: I want to reflect again on this claim by Dr. Keolu Fox, a Kānaka Maoli anthropologist and genomic researcher. The land itself and the conditions of that land, like altitude and climate, impact our genome just as our human ancestors do. We are born on it, die on it; we come from it and return to it. The land and the waters, oceans and rivers, are part of us, relatives and ancestors in a very real way. . . .

Our emotions have a physical response. We feel sadness, and our body responds by crying. In the ancient Middle East, drought was often connected with mourning as *the land's* physical response to an emotional state. Just as a Hebrew mourner would fast and pour dust over their head and body, so, too, the land expresses her grief by fasting and covering herself in dust. “Human action has caused desolation and destruction,” Mari Joerstad writes. “Further proof of human perfidy is *their inattentiveness to the suffering of other creatures*. The earth is left with no option but to cry directly to YHWH.” [1] . . .

The land mourns, but it also responds with joy. The same prophets who describe a land fasting and covering herself with dust in response to human wrongdoing and harm also describe beautiful scenes of rejoicing and jubilation upon the return of the people. “The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom,” the prophet Isaiah says [Isaiah 35:1].

Krawec tells her readers of an ancient Anishinaabe prophecy that envisioned a choice between two paths for the future: one scorched and barren, the other green and fertile:

Remember the two paths of the Seventh Fire—one parched and blackened and the other green and lush. How we prepare now will determine what comes next: either a healing fire that brings wild strawberries and lush pathways or a charred landscape that cuts our feet. For Indigenous people, that means holding on to the knowledge of our ancestors. For the light-skinned people, that means making the right choices about how to live.

Australian archbishop: Real change takes time, which the extended synod gives us



Women embrace on the final day of the second assembly of the Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic church in Sydney July 8. (CNS/The Catholic Weekly/Giovanni Portelli)



BY MARK COLERIDGE

31 October 2022

Editor's note: This article was written before [the Oct. 27 release](#) of the Working Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod of Bishops.

One of the early surprises in the pontificate of Pope Francis was his decision to hold not one but two [synods on marriage and the family](#). The first, for the presidents of the world's bishops' conferences, was in 2014, and the second, for elected representatives of those conferences, was in 2015.

I was curious when the announcement was made, thinking that the pope's decision took its cue from the Second Vatican Council, with its four sessions where the time between sessions was a crucial period of fermentation. Clearly, the time between the two synods would also be a period of fermentation and therefore very much part of the synod process rather than just time-out.

I became more curious when, to my surprise, I was elected as one of the two Australian representatives to the second synod [in 2015](#). As part of my preparation, I studied the Second Vatican Council, especially the work of the late Jesuit Fr. [John O'Malley](#). I could see more clearly that the council was a process rather than an event, and that the two synods (or the one synod with two sessions) were also a process rather than an event.

I came to see that synodality meant not a gathering of some of the bishops some of the time but a journey of all of the church all of the time. Not many other than bishops gathered in Rome for the two synod sessions, but in the preparation for the first session and the time between the two sessions many others were part of the journey.



Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane, Australia, arrives for a session of the Synod of Bishops on the family at the Vatican Oct. 14, 2013. (CNS/Paul Haring)

The second synod session in 2015 was an extraordinary experience for many reasons. Halfway through, I couldn't see how we could achieve anything worthwhile. It seemed all over the place.

Yet by the end of the three weeks, we did produce something, which wasn't the last word but which was a real achievement that would lead to the pope's [2016 apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*](#). That experience taught me more of what discernment looked like, how it felt; it taught me to be patient and to trust the process.

That was why when in 2016 the Australian bishops decided for [a Plenary Council](#), I proposed that we opt for two sessions, taking our cue from the Second Vatican Council and the synods of 2014 and 2015.

Some questioned the wisdom of this, thinking either that one session would be enough or that we should be open to more than two sessions. But we opted for two sessions, and in retrospect that seems to have been the right decision. It gave us time for the fermentation that true discernment requires, but it also gave us, as a kind of creative pressure, a time frame within which to work.

The journey of the Plenary Council had three phases: preparation, celebration and implementation. The first phase was long and complex, not unlike what we're seeing with the global synod now. The second phase comprised the first weeklong session (delayed by a year because of COVID-19 and eventually held online), a 10-month period of fermentation, and then the second weeklong session, this time in person. The third phase began once the second session concluded, and it will continue indefinitely into the future.

The global synod seems to have adopted a similar dynamic and has also, unlike the synods of 2014 and 2015, decided that the same people will attend both sessions.

Through that journey, we have learned that the process is, in many ways, the product. The challenge was not to come up with quick-fix solutions to the church's many problems or facile answers to our many questions. The work of discernment is slower and messier than that.



Attendees wearing protective masks and maintaining social distancing take part in the Oct. 6, 2021, session of Australia's Plenary Council in Brisbane. Most of the plenary was virtual because of COVID-19 lockdown rules, but in some areas people were allowed to gather in small groups. (CNS/Courtesy of Brisbane Archdiocese)

By undertaking that work, we become different, and that was the challenge: to become a different kind of church, a listening church, a humble servant church — poor, simple, welcoming, contemplative, joyful, missionary. That was what the Spirit was doing among us, moving us into God's future in a time of diminishment and disarray in the church.

The sense that this whole journey is the work of the Holy Spirit was crucial from the beginning and remains so now. That is no less true of the global synod than it was of our Plenary Council. It's what I came to see

at the synod in 2015: that there was "something greater than Solomon here" ([Matthew 12:42](#)).

If that isn't true, then all you're left with is politics or ideology, and neither is enough to take us into the future God has in mind. Some critiques of both the Plenary Council and the global synod fail to see beyond the political and ideological. They see only Solomon.

Yet the Holy Spirit is both the great comforter and the great disrupter. In fact, the true comfort of God comes only through the disruptions of God, which means that comfort can come painfully. This was especially clear at the second session of the Plenary Council.

Halfway through the week, we reached a point of crisis. In the morning, a motion concerning the participation of women in the church [was voted down](#) in the deliberative vote, and that caused great distress for many of the members.

The negative vote brought to the surface years of frustration, grief and anger, and many members — not all of them women by any means — found this simply unacceptable. They stood in silence at the back of the hall in a gesture that wasn't political: It wasn't a protest or a demonstration.

When requested, they returned quietly to the tables for the scheduled spiritual conversation. But something had to be done to break the impasse.

At a lunchtime meeting of the bishops and the steering committee, decisions were taken to redraft the preamble of the motion, to have a second vote and to change the modus operandi on the floor of the assembly. The mood of the assembly changed through the

afternoon, largely because members felt they had been listened to, and the second vote produced a different result.

This was a turning point in the assembly and in many ways its greatest achievement. I felt sure that this was the work of the comforting and disrupting Spirit.

Two other things appear more clearly as I look back. The first is that the art of improvisation is a vital part of the work of discernment.

No matter how thorough your planning — and ours was very thorough — you don't see certain flaws until you actually start putting it into practice. You can then either stick stubbornly to what you have planned or, more humbly, agree to improvise and change tack. You can't be too attached to your plans; they may not be the same as God's.



A person in Sydney holds a memento of the Plenary Council of Australia July 4. (CNS/The Catholic Weekly/Giovanni Portelli)

A second thing is that you need the right kind of leadership at the right time. As I look back across our Plenary Council journey, I can see how at different times the Spirit raised up different leaders — not all of them ordained — to meet the needs of the moment.

Some were called to the leadership that brought the council to birth; others guided the process of preparation and the consultation it involved; others shaped the time of fermentation between the sessions; others guided us through the second session with its moment of crisis; and others again will lead us through the phase of implementation we have now begun.

I presume it will be no less true of the global synod: that the Spirit will raise up the right leaders at the right time. There is already evidence that this is happening.

When I heard that Francis had decided to extend the Synod [into 2024](#), I was pleased and a little relieved. The experience of the Second Vatican Council, the 2014 and 2015 synods and the Australian Plenary Council suggests that this is another sign of the Holy Spirit at work in this process, which seeks to change the way we are as the church at a time when we may have thought that real change was behind us.

But real change takes time, which, as the pope insists, is greater than space. To accept that time is greater than space, he says, "enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations or inevitable changes in our plans" (*Evangelii Gaudium*).

Pope: Parishes are essential places for growing in faith, community

[VATICAN](#)
[VATICAN NEWS](#)



Pope Francis greets people as he leaves an audience at the Vatican with members of the young adult section of Italy's Catholic Action, Oct. 29, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

BY CINDY WOODEN

Vatican City — 31 October 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic has weakened many parishes, but that community "in the midst of homes, in the midst of people," is still an essential place for nourishing and sharing faith, Pope Francis told Italian young adults.

The parish is "the normal environment where we learned to hear the Gospel, to know the Lord Jesus, to serve with gratuitousness, to pray in community, to share projects and initiatives, to feel part of God's holy people," the pope told leaders of the young adult section of Italian Catholic Action, a parish-based program of faith building and social outreach.

Meeting thousands of young adults Oct. 29, Francis said he knows that in most cities and towns the parish church is not the center of religious and social life like it was when he was growing up, but "for our journey of faith and growth, the parish experience was and is important, irreplaceable."

With its mix of members, the pope said, the parish is the place to experience how "in the church we are all brothers and sisters through baptism; that we are all protagonists and responsible; that we have different gifts

that are all for the good of the community; that life is vocation, following Jesus; and that faith is a gift to be given, a gift to witness."

Part of that witness, he said, is to show concretely how faith leads to charity and a desire for justice.

In the neighborhood, town and region, "our motto is not 'I don't care,' but 'I care!'" the pope said.

The "disease of not caring" can be "more dangerous than a cancer," he told the young people. "Human misery is not a fate that befalls some unfortunate people, but almost always the result of injustices that must be eradicated."

Francis urged the young people not to be frustrated or put off by the fact that in their parishes "the community dimension is a bit weak," something "which has been aggravated by the pandemic."

Learning to see each other as brothers and sisters, he said, does not begin with some parish meeting or activity, but with each person through prayer and, especially, through the Eucharist celebrated and shared in the parish.

"Fraternity in the church is founded on Christ, on his presence in us and among us," the pope said. "Thanks to him we welcome each other, bear with each other -- Christian love is built on bearing with each other -- and forgive each other."

Bishops urge Congress to be in 'radical solidarity' with mothers, children

[NEWS](#)



A single mother poses with her child in this 2016 file photo from Brazil. (CNS photo/Ricardo Moraes, Reuters)

BY CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Washington — 28 October 2022

Calling upon Congress for "radical solidarity" with mothers and babies -- both born and unborn -- four bishops advanced an ambitious legislative and policy agenda that prioritizes the well-being of families in a letter to lawmakers.

The measures proposed by the chairmen of four U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' committees detail a "vision for an authentically life-affirming society."

Dated Oct. 26, the letter explained that following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in June that reversed the court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion, there is an opportunity to "redouble efforts toward a culture of life that

respects and supports the dignity of every person at every stage."

Describing the court's decision as "extraordinary," the bishops said that the work to support families must be widened.

"We are praying and working for changes in hearts and minds, circumstances and policy, that will help everyone to treasure each and every fellow human being in a society oriented to supporting children and their parents," the letter said.

"In other words, we hope for the day when abortion is unthinkable because society has successfully reckoned with the challenges of raising children in the modern world and has decided to make the full flourishing of children and their families the highest goal, without anyone being excluded," it said.

The letter was sent to all members of Congress by Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities; San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth; and Washington Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of the Committee on Migration.

Specifically, the bishops outlined 15 measures that they said they have long supported. They include passage of the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and the PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act, extending the child tax credit, support for pregnancy resource centers, and ending marriage penalties in tax policy and social programs.

Other provisions the bishops urged Congress to act upon relate to paid family leave, child care and prekindergarten programs, nutrition, education, maternal and child

health, housing, domestic violence and family relationships, adoption support, environmental policies to ensure the health of women and children, and lifting limits on the eligibility of immigrant and mixed-status families in accessing government programs.

"There are serious cultural, social, economic and spiritual challenges that face women, families and children today. These are challenges that concern the common good," the bishops wrote.

They emphasized that children should not grow up in poverty and that parents should be able to take time away from work to care for them. They also said affordable health care for moms and children is necessary and that workplace policies should respect pregnant and nursing mothers.

The bishops are calling for affordable and high quality day care as well as an end to childhood hunger and homelessness and to toxic chemicals causing defects or cancer. They also said immigrant families need to be "treated in accord with their inviolable dignity."

"All of these goals require the cooperation of all and the exclusion of none," they added.

The letter said these goals cannot be achieved by individual efforts and will require collaborative work on the part of government leaders.

The bishops urged members of Congress "to find bipartisan solutions and ensure that these and other similar legislative proposals are given high priority."

"We hope with a particular concern that we all can agree on coming to the aid of pregnant and single parenting women in need, so that they will have the support,

comfort, and hope that they require to build their lives for the better and realize their aspirations," the bishops wrote.

Francis will preach message of 'human fraternity' in Shiite-majority Bahrain

[VATICAN](#)
[VATICAN NEWS](#)



Pope Francis walks with Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, crown prince of Bahrain, during a private audience at the Vatican in this Feb. 3, 2020, file photo. The pope's visit to Bahrain Nov. 3-6 will make him the first pope to visit the archipelago nation in the Persian Gulf. (CNS/Paul Haring)



BY CHRISTOPHER WHITE

Vatican Correspondent
Rome — 1 November 2022

When Pope Francis becomes the first pontiff to ever set foot in Bahrain during his upcoming [Nov. 3-6 visit](#) to the Persian Gulf kingdom, in many ways, it will be a journey that began not in Rome, but five years ago with his 2017 visit to Egypt.

It was there, at an international peace conference hosted by [Al-Azhar](#) — at what is considered the most authoritative theological institution in Sunni Islam — that Francis cemented his friendship with its grand imam, Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb.

A photo of the two men embracing cheek-to-cheek [went viral](#) in the Middle East as an "icon of hope." Two years later, [in February 2019](#), Francis became the first pope to travel to the Arabian Peninsula, where he and el-Tayeb signed a [document](#) on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," which has been widely heralded as a major advancement in the Catholic Church's relationship with the Muslim world.

In September, Francis was joined by el-Tayeb for a [meeting](#) of interfaith leaders in Kazakhstan that adopted the "Human Fraternity" document. Now, less than two months later, the duo will meet again at the "Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence," where Francis will offer the closing address on Nov. 4 to the estimated 200 interfaith leaders gathered in the nation's capital city of Manama.

"The fact that a simple friendship is at the heart of their major initiatives is very profound and it is a model for the rest of us," said Jordan Denari Duffner, a scholar of Muslim-Christian relations.



Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar mosque and university, embrace during an interreligious meeting at the Founder's Memorial in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in this Feb. 4, 2019, file photo. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

"Interreligious dialogue and the coexistence of diverse religious communities is built on friendship," said Duffner, who is the author of [*Finding Jesus Among Muslims: How Loving Islam Makes Me a Better Catholic*](#) and [*Islamophobia: What Christians Should Know \(and Do\) about Anti-Muslim Discrimination*](#). "Francis' friendship with the grand imam shows us what interreligious dialogue is supposed to look like."

At the heart of the "Human Fraternity" document, which the friendship between Francis and el-Tayeb birthed into existence, is a condemnation of the instrumentalization of religion for terrorism or violence and a call to work together on practical matters, such as for the care of the environment.

"It's a very practical document that outlines a good number of things where Muslims and Christians can discuss and hope to do things together," Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald told NCR.

Fitzgerald, a British expert on Muslim-Christian relations and former head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, said that while the

document has been accepted in many places, some Muslims view it as "an Egyptian document" or an "Al-Azhar document" and more of a political document, rather than a dialogue document.

Francis' strategy for expanding Muslim-Christian relations, he said, is not just through the Vatican's office responsible for interfaith work, but through the pope's "personal presence."

"That is something new," said Fitzgerald, describing the pope's willingness to attend and participate in meetings organized by other religions.

The small Kingdom of Bahrain, which will mark Francis' 39th trip outside of Italy since becoming pope in 2013, is home to 1.8 million people. An estimated 70% of the country is Muslim, about two-thirds of whom are Shiites. Francis' invite to the country comes from Bahrain's King Hamad, who is a Sunni Muslim, and who has officially [endorsed](#) the "Human Fraternity" document.

To date, most of Francis' engagement in the Muslim world has been with Sunnis, and his visit to a Shiite majority country will provide the pontiff an opportunity to further his Islamic outreach.

When the pope traveled to Iraq in 2021, there was speculation that the revered Shiite cleric, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, would sign on to the "Human Fraternity" document following his closely watched [meeting](#) with Francis, but in the end, he did not.

Now, in Bahrain, both Francis and el-Tayeb will have the opportunity to promote the document and its message to another Shiite audience, though there are already

underlying tensions that may complicate the visit.

The [U.S. State Department](#) and organizations such as [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain](#) have sharply criticized the government for its discrimination against Shiite Muslims. The Bahraini government has [denied](#) such criticisms, stating that its constitution guarantees everyone the right to freely practice its faith.

At a press conference on Oct. 28, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni declined to comment on whether the pope would directly address the discrimination concerns, including as a possible topic when he holds a meeting with the Muslim Council of Elders on Nov. 4, but emphasized the "position of the Holy See and of the pope concerning religious freedom and liberty is clear and is known."

Bruni said that both the "Human Fraternity" document and Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical [Fratelli Tutti](#) ("Brothers and Sisters All") will shape the pope's messages on the trip, adding that the latter document mentions the word "dialogue" 44 times.

While the pope's interreligious efforts may be the motivating factor for the trip, Bishop Paul Hinder — who has worked in the region for over 20 years and is the current administrator of the Catholic Church's territory that includes Bahrain — said that the visit will also help provide a booster shot of hope for the country's estimated 80,000 Catholics, served by just 20 priests.

Historically, he said, Catholics in the region "feel a bit forgotten."



A visitor takes photo in front of a welcome banner Oct. 30 at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Manama, Bahrain. The church is one of the places Pope Francis will visit during his Nov. 3-6 trip to Bahrain. (CNS/Reuters/Hamad I. Mohammed)

"But to have a second visit from the Holy Father in a three-year period is of great encouragement to them," he told NCR, referring to Francis' 2019 visit to the United Arab Emirates.

During his second day in the country, Francis will visit the newly consecrated Our Lady of Arabia Cathedral, which is now the largest Catholic cathedral in the Persian Gulf, for an ecumenical prayer service. On Nov. 5, Francis will celebrate a Mass for an estimated 20,000 attendees at the Bahrain National Stadium.

While the country has a small local population of Catholics, the vast majority of Catholics come from other countries who reside in Bahrain for work, especially those from Sri Lanka, India, the Philippines and other surrounding Middle East countries.

Hinder said that along with feeling forgotten or "spiritually starved," many of these Catholics feel insecure, "wondering whether next year will I still be here or will I have to look for another future?"

He hopes the visit will provide yet another occasion for the pope to remind Catholics and Muslims alike that all of their lives are

better improved through living alongside each other in shared friendship.

"This is not to have a mixture of religions," said Hinder, "but to have a certain basis of common action when there is the question of how to deal with important questions of the future of humanity."

"Pope Francis has a vision, and he wants it to be realized," he added.

The Vatican mentioned calls for women's ordination. Here begins the revolution?



Outside the consistory of cardinals convened by Pope Francis at the Vatican in late August, women call for greater inclusion of women at all levels of the church. (Courtesy of Women's Ordination Conference)



BY KATE MCELWEE

1 November 2022

With the Vatican's Oct. 27 [release](#) of the document to guide the next phase of Pope Francis' innovative new process for the Synod of Bishops, the Catholic Church has shown it has the capacity to listen to its people.

The 45-page synthesis of national and local listening sessions from countries around the world — known as the [Working Document for the Continental Stage](#) of the synod — presents an embodied synodality that offers a "path of recognition" for those who have felt invisible or dismissed by their church. Not to overstate the matter, but recognition — being seen and heard — is a small revolution.

Often Vatican documents have a single "women's paragraph," one section that pays lip service to one of the most pressing issues in our church. This report, however, weaves narratives from around the world throughout the document, noting the tensions women experience within the church they love, their baptismal equality, and the reality of structures and systems that prevent their full participation in the life of the church.

The Vatican's admittance that the teaching on women's ordination is not a consistently held belief among Catholics reveals a spirit of openness and accountability to the people of God.

Of course, a couple of paragraphs are of particular interest. The document calls for further discernment on the near-universal calls for women in governance and decision-making, women's preaching and "a female diaconate." The next sentence acknowledges a "diversity of opinions" on women's priestly ordination, noting some national reports called for it, while others consider it a "closed issue."

The acknowledgment of global calls for women's priestly ordination is significant for many reasons.

To start, this is a stark contrast from Francis' 2013 [comments](#) on women's ordination: "The Church has spoken and says no ... that door is closed."

Now, the church is speaking through the synodal process and saying: This is part of our discernment. The Vatican's admittance that the teaching on women's ordination is not a consistently held belief among Catholics reveals a spirit of openness and accountability to the people of God. The very fact that those challenging voices — many of which were filtered out at the local level — broke through means this call is strong and clear.

We at the [Women's Ordination Conference](#) engaged faithfully in the synod process, providing educational resources and spiritual tools, and hosting eight listening sessions ourselves, following the guidance of the synod preparatory documents. We submitted our report to the Vatican directly, and also registered as part of the so-called "Region XVI" with the U.S. bishops' conference so that our report, spanning voices beyond one diocese, could be included.

Just last week the Region XVI coordinators invited the participants of this special region to a debriefing conversation, where we met in small groups and then in a larger group with three bishops present to share our experiences of synodality. For the Women's Ordination Conference, the bar is low for what a relationship with the bishops' conference might look like, but I found this commitment to dialogue and modeling of synodality refreshing.

What I especially appreciated about the conversation among Region XVI organizations was the recognition of the value of national and global organizations, which have a unique freedom or perspective that can go beyond the boundaries of a local diocese or parish. One of the most challenging parts of being a pilgrim on the synodal path is holding and tending to the experiences of those for whom synodality did not happen locally, or more often, for those whose heartbreak is too deep.

Recognition and welcome are the first steps on a journey of recovery from a church whose current structures and policies oppress, silence and punish women.

Just two months ago, I was [detained](#) at the Vatican alongside six other women as part of a prayerful witness calling for greater inclusion of women at all levels of the church. Outside the consistory of cardinals convened by Francis in late August, we held red paper parasols with messages including "Sexism is a cardinal sin" and "Ordain women." We were not only moved out of sight of the prelates walking in, but later held at an Italian police station for some four hours, released pending a criminal investigation.

Now the Vatican is calling us to "enlarge our tent," as the document says — and naming the sins of sexism, clericalism and exclusion that we have long called the church to repent from. The contrast is jarring, yet filled with promise.

My hope is the church continues to listen to women, particularly those who have discerned calls to ordained ministry. May this "path of recognition" become the revolution of the Holy Spirit our church so desperately needs.

Time to start from scratch with US bishops' 'Faithful Citizenship' document



A girl at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City watches her mother cast her ballot during early voting Oct. 29. (CNS/Reuters/Jeenah Moon)



BY MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

2 November 2022

When the bishops gather in Baltimore for their annual plenary, one of the outstanding pieces of business will be deciding how they want to proceed with guidance for Catholics regarding politics. Will our wonderful, roomy, rich tradition of Catholic social thought be brought to bear on the text? Or will it be another trainwreck?

The current document is titled "[Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#)," and the underlying text was adopted in 2007. It

is difficult to object to the text in any particular: The section on poverty is really well done, as is the section on abortion. At the level of policy analysis, it is excellent.

The problem is that by getting into the policy weeds, it became overly long and, despite its title, minimized the role of conscience formation, especially for young people. The detailed, exhaustive iteration of policy in "Faithful Citizenship," precisely because of its detail, comes off as too paternalistic. It is like an adult at dinner cutting up the meat for their teenage child.

No particular paragraph is "wrong," but the whole suffers from a core misunderstanding: This kind of document is a good vehicle for recalling Catholic social teaching, not for teaching it in the first place.

In 2011, the bishops [reissued](#) the text with a new introductory note that included this fine sentiment: "[Faithful Citizenship] does not offer a voter's guide, scorecard of issues, or direction on how to vote. It applies Catholic moral principles to a range of important issues and warns against misguided appeals to 'conscience' to ignore fundamental moral claims, to reduce Catholic moral concerns to one or two matters, or to justify choices simply to advance partisan, ideological, or personal interests."

Well said, but the bishops frontloaded all the issues on which they disagreed with the incumbent President Barack Obama, and failed to seize the really exciting opportunity to critique American capitalism — which had imploded in 2008 — by incorporating the insights drawn from Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical [Caritas in Veritate](#).

Prioritizing which issues in a particular election, for particular offices, are most important is precisely the kind of

prudential judgment that should be left to voters.

In 2015, the bishops again punted and kept the same text, albeit with an introductory letter that was obsessed with [fighting same-sex marriage](#). Pope Francis had come to the United States and [addressed a joint session of Congress](#), and he had not felt the need to mention same-sex marriage, but the bishops were fixated on the issue.

In 2019, the bishops punted yet again, this time [adding the adjective "preeminent"](#) to describe their concern with the issue of abortion, thus minimizing the role of conscience formation even further. Prioritizing which issues in a particular election, for particular offices, are most important is precisely the kind of prudential judgment that should be left to voters.

Now, it is time for the bishops to start from scratch. Since the underlying text was written, the magisterium of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis has given us three encyclicals that have enriched and developed Catholic social teaching: *Caritas in Veritate*, "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)" and [Fratelli Tutti](#). Both popes articulate a profoundly Christocentric and biblical focus in their social teaching, with Benedict focusing on the necessity of a theology of grace and Francis retrieving the idea of integral human development.

Just as importantly, the growth of social media has changed the way the church must communicate its teaching, especially for young people. In 2007, Twitter was 1 year old. Four years ago, the bishops decided to produce some [videos](#) related to "Faithful Citizenship" but they were dull. I wonder how many people watched them.

The major problem, however, is different. The current document runs to 43 pages of

text, with an additional 10 pages of notes. No one reads it. And its exhaustive character suggests the U.S. bishops have done the heavy lifting on conscience formation. The text may claim it "does not offer a voter's guide ... or direction on how to vote" but the specificity of the text, combined with the extensive media coverage of the most outspokenly partisan bishops, belied the claim.

The Catholic bishops of England and Wales issued a [two-page statement](#) in 2017 in advance of that country's general election in 2019. The Canadian bishops kept their [statement](#) to one page. The U.S. bishops should insist on a similarly short statement for 2024.

The bishops should also craft a single, concise paragraph about the need to protect democracy. That was not on anyone's radar screen in 2007, but it is now. Catholic social teaching, originally ambivalent about democracy, developed a coherent and compelling defense of democracy, starting with the pontificate of Pius XII, a defense that our country needs to hear.

The final document should self-consciously avoid partisanship as much as possible. In this era of acute societal polarization, the most important two things the bishops can and should do are, first, remind Catholics that our values and beliefs transcend partisan divisions and, second, model the unity among themselves that they wish for the Catholic laity and for the whole society.

I do not wish to minimize the difficulty of those two tasks. But they cannot be solved by adding a new introductory text to a document from 2007. It is time for a new document, one that puts a greater emphasis on forming consciences, incorporates the key teachings of Benedict and Francis, that defends democracy and with a priority on

binding the wounds that currently divide our church and our country.

In Bahrain, Pope Francis pleads for greater commitment to human rights

Francis is first pope to visit Bahrain, where he condemned the death penalty and religious discrimination

[VATICAN](#)
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Pope Francis is greeted by Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa as he arrives Nov. 3 at the Sakhir Royal Palace, Bahrain. (AP photo/Alessandra Tarantino)



BY CHRISTOPHER WHITE

Vatican Correspondent

Awali, Bahrain — 3 November 2022

Pope Francis kicked off a [four-day visit](#) to the Kingdom of Bahrain on Nov. 3 by appealing to the country to strengthen its commitment to human rights through the

abolition of the death penalty and ending religious discrimination.

The Sunni Muslim leaders of the Persian Gulf kingdom have been [under fire](#) by leading international human rights organizations, as well as the U.S. State Department, for their treatment of the country's Shiite Muslim-majority population, which makes up some two-thirds of the inhabitants of the tiny nation.

In an address to Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and other government officials, Francis — the first pontiff to ever set foot in the kingdom — cited the country's own constitution, which forbids discrimination on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or creed.

Such commitments, said the pope, "need constantly to be put into practice, so that religious freedom will be complete and not limited to freedom of worship; that equal dignity and equal opportunities will be concretely recognized for each group and for every individual; that no forms of discrimination exist and that fundamental human rights are not violated but promoted."

In particular, the pope singled out the country's recent reliance on the death penalty. Bahrain's de-facto moratorium on capital punishment ended in 2017. Since then, six people have been [executed](#).

"I think in the first place of the right to life, of the need to guarantee that right always, including for those being punished, whose lives should not be taken," Francis said.

According to a 2021 [report](#), death sentences have skyrocketed over the last decade by over 600%, following the events of the Arab Spring in 2011, which included protests in Bahrain. Since then, the country has been

sharply criticized for its violent suppression and imprisonment of Shiite protestors, though the government has repeatedly denied such charges.

Ahead of the pope's arrival in the country, a high-ranking Vatican official told journalists on background that he expects the pope to privately ask the king to free some of the country's political prisoners at some point during the visit.

In a country where nearly half of its 1.8 million inhabitants are migrant workers who have settled in the kingdom from the Middle East, India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, Bahrain has some of the highest migration levels in the world.



Young people wave flags of the Vatican and Bahrain as they wait for Pope Francis Nov. 3 outside the Sakhir Royal Palace. The pontiff is on a four-day visit to Bahrain. (CNS/Reuters/Yara Nardi)

Francis praised the country for continually welcoming immigrants who have resettled here to pursue greater economic opportunities. But, in a place where human rights organizations have also [documented](#) wage theft and health care disparities towards migrants, the pope also warned that all Bahraini residents must be treated with equal dignity and respect.

"Let us guarantee that working conditions everywhere are safe and dignified, that they foster rather than hinder people's cultural

and spiritual growth; and that they serve to advance social cohesion, to the benefit of common life and the development of each country," said the pope.

Labor, he said, is "not only necessary for earning a livelihood: it is a right, indispensable for integral self-development and the shaping of a truly humane society."

Francis' primary reason for visiting the country is to take part in the "Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence," where on Nov. 4 he will offer a keynote address to some 200 interfaith leaders participating in the summit.

Bahrain, a country whose cities have been built on desert sands with soaring, ultramodern skyscrapers influenced by a range of cultures, Francis said, "has always been a place of encounter between different peoples."

At a time when the world is witnessing "the massive spread of indifference and mutual distrust, the burgeoning of rivalries and conflicts that we had hoped were a thing of the past, and forms of populism, extremism and imperialism that jeopardize the security of all," the pope said it was all the more important for such encounters to take place.

"In spite of progress and so many forms of social and scientific achievements, the cultural disparity between various parts of the world is growing, and destructive attitudes of conflict are preferred to beneficial opportunities for fruitful encounter," Francis said.

The pope's remarks were delivered in the opulent Sakhir Royal Palace, home of Bahrain's King Hamad, who has ruled since 1999. In 2002, Hamad was responsible for implementing a new constitution, which

declared the kingdom a constitutional monarchy.

While the pope praised the oil-rich kingdom for its history of being the first in the region to allow women the right to vote in elections and to establish schools for them to attend, he said the work of deepening its commitment to human rights must be kept in focus.

"Authentic, humane and integral development is measured above all," said the pope, by concern shown towards those on the margins, especially migrants and prisoners.

During his nearly 20 minutes of remarks, the pope also spoke about his concern for the wars raging throughout the world, including in nearby Yemen, and the need for greater international cooperation to fight climate change.

"How many trees are cut down, how many ecosystems are devastated, how many seas are polluted by our insatiable human greed, which then comes back to bite us!" the pope lamented.

"Let us work tirelessly in confronting this dramatic emergency and enact concrete and farsighted decisions inspired by concern for coming generations, before it is too late and their future is compromised!" he added, noting that he hopes next week's United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP27, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, helps unite the international community in this regard.

During the 5-hour journey from Rome to Bahrain, the pope made his customary greeting to some 60 journalists traveling with him. The pope said that due to his ongoing knee pain, he would allow journalists to greet him one-by-one as he

remained seated, rather than taking his usual walkabout through the plane cabin.

On Nov. 4, following his address to the interfaith leaders, Francis will meet with the Muslim Council of Elders, an international organization, and preside over an ecumenical prayer service at the largest Catholic cathedral in the Persian Gulf.

DO NOT HARM ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES
By Thomas P. Bonacci, C.P.
Continuing to Observe
The International Day of Peace



The massacre of thirty-six people in Uthai Sawan, Thailand, last week is more than heart-breaking. The killings included slaughtering twenty-three children between the ages of three and five.

The violence is unimaginable. People everywhere can feel their own hearts breaking at the magnitude of the destruction.

We cannot help but think of the children who have lost their lives in the unjust war of Russian President Putin against Ukraine. His acts of violence target hospitals and children. The attacks against Iranians by their own government do not spare the lives of children. In the United States, some still deny the killing of children in Sandy Hook and other places.

Our global communication abilities bring these events to our consciousness. Unfortunately, we have not yet learned to cope with the flow of such tragic information. Many are simply overwhelmed by the violence and cruelty. Some seek to limit their news consumption to preserve a sense of sanity and well-being. Yet, it is difficult not to be influenced by the tragic events touching our daily lives.

The temptation to sedate the pain is strong and understandable. There is only so much pain and suffering a person can endure. Several suggestions come to mind in coping with the tragic events unfolding in our World and lives. First, share your feelings with people willing to share their feelings with you. We need to bond with one another in times of trouble. No one needs to be alone. Second, be inspired by the responses of people who come to the aid of those injured or grieving. Think of how generous and caring people can be amidst chaos and violence. Third, honor your feelings of grief, confusion, and heartbreak. Sometimes people think their feelings are a lack of faith when, in fact, they are signs of love, care, and concern. People ultimately strive to care for one another. We must never allow violence to have the last word. Nothing ever justifies the suffering so many endure, but their courage and example can transform and encourage us as we seek to create a more just and peaceful World.

Thank you, Holy Community, for allowing your hearts to be broken. So deep and generous is your love.