

*Articles of Interest*  
*For*  
*6 February 2022*

**Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations**  
From the Center for Action and Contemplation  
Week Five: Encountering God through the Bible  
**A School of Relationship**

*Father Richard opens this week's meditations by sharing his early love of the Scriptures:*

The Bible first opened up for me in the 1960s when the Second Vatican Council said that divine revelation was not God disclosing ideas about God but God actually disclosing Godself. Scripture and religion became not mere doctrines or moralisms for me, but love-making, a mutual exchange of being and intimacy. The marvelous anthology of books and letters called the Bible is for the sake of *a love affair between God and the soul and corporately between God and history.*

We could say that the original blueprint for everything that exists is relationship. John's word for that was *Logos* (John 1:1). In other words, the first blueprint for reality was relationality. It is all of one piece. How we relate to God reveals how we eventually relate to everything else. And how we relate to the world is how we are actively relating to God, whether we know it or not (1 John 4:20). How we do anything is how we do everything!

Thus, we must read the whole Bible as a school of relationship. The Bible is slowly making humanity capable of living inside of what Charles Williams (1886–1945) called "co-inherence." [1] All creation is in the end drawn and seduced into the Great Co-

inherence. "I shall return to take you with me, so that where I am you also may be too," Jesus says (John 14:3). Salvation is giving us a face capable of receiving the dignity of the divine gaze, and then daring to think that we could gaze back.

I believe that we can only safely read Scripture—which is a dangerous book in the wrong hands—if we are somehow sharing in the divine gaze of love. A life of prayer helps us develop a third eye that can read between the lines and find the golden thread which is moving toward inclusivity, mercy, and justice. A hardened heart, a predisposition to judgment, a fear of God, any need to win or prove ourselves right will corrupt and distort the most inspired and inspiring of Scriptures—just as they pollute every human conversation and relationship. Hateful people will find hateful verses to confirm their obsession with death. Loving people will find loving verses to call them into an even greater love of life. And both kinds of verses are in the Bible!

*The late Christian author Rachel Held Evans encourages reading the Bible with a willingness to engage in the mutual process of inspiration:*

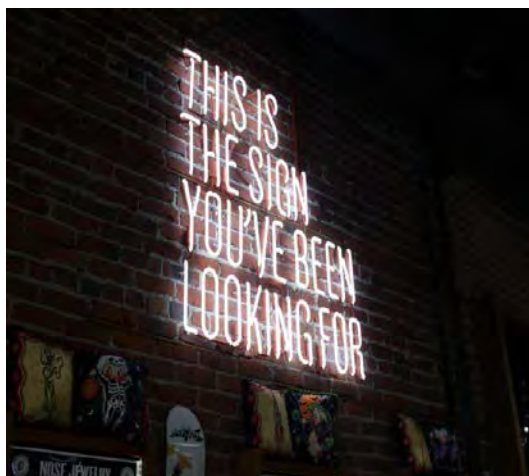
Inspiration is not about some disembodied ethereal voice dictating words or notes to a catatonic host. It's a collaborative process, a holy give-and-take, a partnership between Creator and creator. . . . God is still breathing. The Bible is both inspired and inspiring. Our job is to ready the sails and gather the embers, to discuss and debate, and like the biblical character Jacob, to wrestle with the mystery until God gives us a blessing. [2] *[I could not agree more and it saddens me that more do not see what Rachel so clearly saw. —Richard]*

# When a sign is a wink from God

29 January 2022

by [Allan LaReau](#)

## [Spirituality](#)



No one else in our group paid the sign much mind. Even to this day, I'm not sure why I noticed it. It hung over the mantle of a substantial fireplace in a California bed and breakfast. Previously broken, reassembled with a few missing pieces and prominently framed, its large letters read "This Is Your Life."

I tried to photograph it, but because of the lighting and reflection from the glass of the frame, I was disappointed with the suboptimal photo. Reflected in front of the patchwork sign was my image, obscuring the uniqueness of the sign.

The occasion for the gathering at this cozy Santa Cruz inn was the nuptials of our niece, Shannon, and her husband, Marty. It was a small wedding, with mostly family in attendance. Folks arrived over the course of Thursday and Friday, giving us time to settle in before the wedding. We'd gather in the

common room to chat, update each other's lives and toast the bride and groom. It was there the sign caught my attention.

Suspecting a story, I asked the innkeeper about his piece of art. He was happy to tell how he previously lived near Hollywood. Wandering around an alleyway behind the television studios, he spotted the pieces of the still recognizable sign in a pile of rubbish. Recalling affectionately some memories of an old radio and TV program by the same name, he gathered up the pieces, took them home, reassembled them and framed the somewhat crude work of art. It would become a focal point in his inn.

["This Is Your Life"](#) was an American reality series on network television from 1950 to 1987. In the program, the host surprised guests and then took them through a retrospective of their lives in front of an audience, including appearances by colleagues, friends and family. The show alternated life stories of entertainment personalities with tributes of "ordinary people" who had contributed in some way to their communities. Despite the sometimes-cloying tributes, the show enjoyed commercial success for that era, earning high ratings and awards.

When I expressed my mild disappointment with the photo to the host he asked with a faint smile and an interested voice if the superimposed image perhaps suggested the reality of my own "This Is Your Life" — fractured in places, repaired, blemished, but still put back together, mostly intact, and holding together in some fashion.

I didn't know anything about the owner's story, yet he left me with some thoughtful reflection to blend with pleasant memories of a fun wedding weekend celebration.

**Signs, of course, guide much of our daily lives.**

Signs, of course, guide much of our daily lives. They direct us to the correct bed and breakfast, note "no vacancy," tell us when apple cider is available, note Mass times at our parish and help in so many other ways.

On a less tangible, but deeper level, there are real personal and spiritual signs to help guide our lives. At important junctures in our lives, "signs" appear that might nudge us into a relationship, career or vocational path, religious faith tradition or a geographical location as a place to put down our roots.

The late University of Notre Dame theologian Holy Cross Fr. John Dunne shared his wisdom and insight over the years with his many students, perhaps most poignantly with my [favorite quote from one of his talks](#):

**Things are meant;  
There are signs;  
Listen to your heart;  
There is a way.**

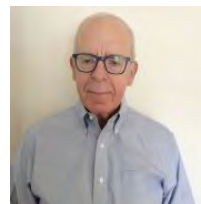
Dunne reminds us to always be attentive to events and encounters (such as weddings) in our lives and to be alert to signposts and touchstones we encounter along the way. If we then listen carefully to our heart, we will find our way in an abundant fashion on life's rich sojourn.



If we are attentive and aware, God's presence frequently manifests itself, primarily through signs from others, often those we know, other times through someone new to us. During a challenging stretch of life, a neighbor appears at the back door with a steaming pot of soup. On the anniversary of a loved one's death, a single yellow rose is left on the porch. During a time of languishing dread, a friend calls to say, "Let's go for a run." A mentor points out a job posting that she hints might be a good fit. Such encounters hold our fractured, blemished, reconfigured lives together.

Then there are events like this encounter with a sign that is a sign. A skeptic might claim mere randomness or serendipity. But Pam, a dear friend of long duration (not an "old" friend) quickly counters that that's "no question, that was a God wink!"

There might be a potential danger to think of these encounters as fatalism or predestination, but there seems to be a critical difference. I doubt that God oversees us like pieces on a vast chess board. Rather, I think he "booted up" our world and allows for wisdom to grow through humanity and signs that appear that guide us toward goodness and growth. Certain signs, of course, may connote a warning, but nearby there might well be a sign left by a Dunne messenger, with a faint but clear message: "Listen to your heart; there is a way."



Allan LaReau

Allan LaReau is a 1970 University of Notre Dame alum and a retired pediatrician in Kalamazoo, Michigan. He spends most of his time in retirement looking for signs.

# We should pray for peace in Ukraine — and avoid the moral danger of being a bystander

28 January 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)



A service member with the Ukrainian armed forces walks past combat positions near a line of separation from Russian-backed rebels near Horlivka in the Donetsk region of Ukraine Jan. 22. (CNS/Reuters/Anna Kudriavtseva)

The Holy Father called for a day of [prayer for peace](#) in Ukraine on Jan. 26. At the conclusion of his general audience that day, he voiced the hope that the prayers would reach heaven and "touch the minds and hearts of world leaders, so that dialogue may prevail and the common good be placed ahead of partisan interests."

The pope asked that we all pray the Our Father because "it is the prayer of sons and daughters to the one Father, the prayer that makes us brothers and sisters, the prayer of children who plead for reconciliation and concord."

As I write, we do not know if our prayers have been heard or if they had their desired

effect. I confess I also made my own the words of [Exodus 23:27](#) — "I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion all the people against whom you will come" — and prayed that confusion would visit Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It is important to recognize that Putin does not want peace the way we want peace, that he doesn't even mean the same thing by peace as we do. Which is why those policymakers and commentators who think the West should proactively promise not to let Ukraine join NATO, or some similar act of appeasement, as a means of forestalling conflict, misunderstand the stakes for which Putin is playing or the motives that lead him to place 100,000 troops at the Ukrainian border in the first place.

As former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul argued this week in the [The Washington Post](#):

*Not without reason, Putin believes that U.S. support for democracy abroad threatens his autocratic rule. During Putin's reign, most crises in relations with the United States have been triggered not by NATO expansion, but by democratic mobilizations — Putin calls them "color revolutions" — within countries, be it Georgia in 2003, [Ukraine in 2004](#), the Arab Spring in 2011, [Russia in 2011](#) and [Ukraine in 2014](#).*

There is no reason we cannot seek peace with an autocrat but, as McFaul points out, "U.S. leaders cannot command other societies to stop wanting democracy." Putin sees pro-democracy leaders governing in the parliament in Kyiv and he has nightmares of pro-democracy protests in the streets of Moscow.

To cite a nearby recent example, we in the West were horrified when authorities in Belarus [forced](#) a Rynair plane bound for

Vilnius, Lithuania, to land at Minsk last summer so the regime of dictator Alexander Lukashenko could arrest journalist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend. The incident caused nightmares for air traffic controllers around the world, who feared other dictators might try the same stunt. Putin no doubt slept more soundly that night, knowing a pro-democracy journalist agitating for change in a former Soviet republic was in jail.

Earlier leaders of Russia also viewed the world far differently from the way we do. Stalin, the most brutal ruler in Russian history, whose forced collectivization of farms led to mass starvation in Ukraine, became our ally in World War II. The U.S. negotiated important treaties with several Soviet leaders. Of course, when President Ronald Reagan negotiated with Mikhail Gorbachev, he did not have a major news network anchor essentially taking Gorbachev's side as Fox News' Tucker Carlson now voices support for Putin. [Kremlin TV](#) even said Carlson may have gone too far!

Russia knows that its vast reserves of oil and natural gas might be losing their value as European nations embrace sustainable forms of energy. But Europe is not there yet, and they remain very [dependent on fossil fuel](#) from Russia. That makes the mostly united front Biden has been able to coax out of NATO all the more impressive. Germany, the leading nation in the European Union, has been [reluctant](#) to take a lead in security matters similar to the one it easily takes in economic ones.

Forgive me, a son of Poland and student of history, from recognizing the German aversion to militarism as a blessing, even if it is a complicated blessing.



A believer attends a liturgy at the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ in Kyiv Jan. 26. Pope Francis appealed for an end to all war and prayed that dialogue, the common good and reconciliation would prevail. The pope made his remarks Jan. 26, the day he had set for worldwide prayers for peace in Ukraine. (CNS/Reuters/Valentyn Ogirenko)

In [Foreign Policy](#) magazine, Amy Mackinnon and Jack Detsch note that Putin is leaning so far forward, it will be hard for him to retreat, but that the prospect of enormous numbers of casualties and international isolation may yet stay his hand. They argue he may have already insulated the Russian economy from sanctions, but the oligarchs who support him do not want to be subjected to restraints on their ability to enjoy their ill-gotten gain.

They also note that sanctions can cut both ways, and it is far from clear how much the U.S. and its European allies are willing to sacrifice on behalf of the democratic regime in and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

If you read Timothy Snyder's magisterial and depressing book [Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin](#), you will know the painful history of Ukraine – and Belarus and Poland – where 14 million people were killed, some in concentration camps, many by starvation. Others were shot. Snyder approached this history by starting with the



victims, which allowed him to reach past the distorting effects of politics and ideology. But he doesn't end there.

"By definition the victims are dead, and unable to defend themselves from the use that others make of their deaths," he wrote. "It is easy to sanctify policies or identities by the deaths of the victims. It is less appealing, but morally more urgent, to understand the actions of the perpetrators. The moral danger, after all, is never that one might become a victim but that one might be a perpetrator or a bystander."

Whatever policies President Biden and other Western leaders decide to pursue, I hope they will remain mindful of Snyder's astute moral warning. I hope they will recognize the moral danger of being a bystander.

## Of Miracles and Examples

Written by Joni Hilton

Have you ever felt like you needed a miracle? In the midst of calamities global and local, shared and private, we wish we could change the world—or at least some small part of it. But big problems can make us feel small, powerless to help.

What can we do when it feels like it would take a miracle to make a difference? Perhaps the answer lies in something theologian and physician Albert Schweitzer once said: "Do something wonderful, people may imitate it."<sup>1</sup>

The fact is, ordinary people are doing wonderful things all over the world. In Argentina, volunteers are harvesting the oranges that grow on public streets to make jam for people in need in their community. In Mexico, compassionate people are delivering rice and beans to the hungry. And in England, volunteers are teaching English to immigrants, helping them prepare for

success in their new home. The example of serving others is catching on and spreading across the globe.<sup>2</sup>

What might happen if you tried doing some small, wonderful thing? There's a good chance that your kindness, your generosity of spirit, or simply your willingness to help could spread beyond the person you set out to bless—it may also touch others in your family, among your friends, and in your community. Just as a seed grows into something much bigger than itself, your act of kindness might make a difference much greater than you expected. *That* would be a miracle.

When we refuse to get entangled in an online quarrel, when we stop what we're doing and listen to someone who's anxious or distressed, when we reach out to someone who's alone, when we say something encouraging or hopeful—any act of kindness can be contagious. Even a smile and a compliment can catch on. And once people try being kind, they often feel so good, they continue it. We never really know how far-reaching each of these small acts of love can be.

God is a God of miracles. He often does intervene to bless His children. And it may be that the next miracle He has in mind will start with you. So when you find yourself thinking it would take a miracle to change the world for the better, considering *being* that miracle.

# In Pope Adrian VI, glimpses of Pope Francis' priorities 500 years ago

31 January 2022

by [Christopher White](#)

## [Vatican](#)

**ROME** — His election as pope came as a surprise to him, but once in office he was determined to rid the Roman curia of its institutional rot and put the Gospel back at the center of the Catholic Church.



This image of Pope Adrian VI appeared on the cover of the Jan. 14 program for the panel discussion "The Pope of the Low Countries: Adrian VI," sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands to the Holy See hosted at the Collegio Teutonico inside the Vatican.

Cardinals used to living lavishly were rebuked and told to embrace humility and austerity. As for his theology, he was concerned with the question of offering the Eucharist for sinners and viewed poverty as a scandal.

Sound familiar?

While this might sound like a description of Pope Francis, it's actually of Pope Adrian VI, elected 500 years ago this month.

"What unites Pope Francis and Pope Adrian is their commitment to reforming the church," said church historian Paul van Geest, "precisely in times when it is a question of the credibility of the church in carrying out its message."

Van Geest's remarks came during a Jan. 14 panel discussion "The Pope of the Low Countries: Adrian VI," sponsored by the Embassy of the Netherlands to the Holy See hosted at the Collegio Teutonico inside the Vatican.

The Netherlands ambassador to the Holy See, Caroline Weijers, told NCR that both the "person and history" of Pope Adrian VI still holds resonance half a millennium later.

"He felt he was called to serve, not to dominate," said the ambassador, noting his life offers lessons for believers and nonbelievers alike.

Pope Adrian VI is the first and only Dutchman to be elected to the papacy, and he was the last non-Italian pope for 400 years. During the 1522 conclave that elected him, he wasn't even in Rome, but was serving as a cardinal in Spain.

It took the trained theologian and canon lawyer six months to make the journey from Spain to Rome, where he was finally crowned as pope on August 31, 1522. Despite the delay, the 63-year-old wasted no time in setting about with a determined agenda at a critical moment in the papacy, just five years after Martin Luther had posted his 95 theses and effectively launched the Reformation.

"He started the reform that is still ongoing," Fr. Markus Graulich told attendees during the panel. Graulich is the undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts.

At his consistory speech to the cardinals who had elected him, Adrian VI "exhorted the cardinals to give a personal example by modesty of life," said Graulich, adding that Adrian VI was "convinced that one of the reasons for the crisis in the church was the fact that popes, bishops and priests had transgressed their obligations."

After witnessing "abuse of offices" in the church, Adrian was convinced that reform should be the "principal goal of his pontificate," Graulich said.



Pope Francis appears for the first time March 13, 2013, on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Van Geest, a professor at both Erasmus University and Tilburg University in the Netherlands, offered the comparison to Pope Francis' [Dec. 2014 Christmas greeting](#) to the Roman curia — his first as pope — where Francis ticked off 15 spiritual "diseases" in their work and attitudes.

In his memorable remarks that year, Francis spoke of rampant gossip, careerism and a lack of joy among those who work for the church — not dissimilar to how Adrian VI spoke to the curia cardinals during his first

address to them the day after he arrived in Rome to assume office.

"He rejected the gross secularity and worldliness that characterized so many contemporary churchmen," Graulich said, adding that Adrian's reform projects were geared towards "the conversion of the persons who hold an office in the church."

As for his personal style, Graulich noted that "pomp, magnificence and splendor made no appeal" to Pope Adrian.

A similar comparison: In 2013, when Pope Francis was elected, he shocked the world by appearing on the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica wearing a simple white cassock instead of the traditional red velvet mozzetta. Soon after, Francis announced he would not be residing in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, but instead, in the more humble Casa Santa Marta.

Adrian's theological writings contain a number of themes that have also dominated the nearly nine years of Francis' papacy.

According to Geest, Adrian was concerned about the "possibility of allowing notorious sinners to participate in the Eucharist and their movement to the sacrament of penance."

By comparison, the early years of Pope Francis' papacy were defined by two synods on the family, which took up the question of Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics, resulting in Francis' 2016 apostolic exhortation [Amoris laetitia](#).

In other writings, Adrian was consumed with the topic of poverty and expressed concern over the plight of refugees.

"If a rich person is in a position to improve the situation of a poor person but does not do so, [Adrian] calls this a sin," van Geest



recalled. "It is an error not to be merciful to refugees and the needy because one then does an injustice to Christ, who is mercy and truth. In fact, someone who fails to be merciful will be condemned forever."

"Poverty and the failure to combat it are uncompromisingly described as scandals," van Geest added.

When Pope Francis was elected in March 2013, Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes told Francis "don't forget the poor," which the pope [later credited](#) as his inspiration for choosing the 12th-century St. Francis of Assisi as his namesake.

Given these similarities, had Hummes been more familiar with the writings and legacy of Pope Adrian VI, van Geest believes he might have "advised Pope Francis to take the name Adrian after all."

"What unites Pope Francis and Pope Adrian is their commitment to reforming the church precisely in times when it is a question of the credibility of the church in carrying out its message.

—Paul van Geest, church historian



Christopher White

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# Knowing Black Catholic history can help end racism, professor says

31 January 2022

by [Dennis Sadowski](#),  
[Catholic News Service](#)

## Spirituality



Members of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Knights of Peter Claver pray during a Mass marking Black Catholic History Month Nov. 21, 2021, at Our Lady of Victory Church in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, N.Y. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

The history of Black Catholics and other marginalized people in the U.S. church covering more than two centuries is one worth knowing and can guide the church's response to the challenges of racism and social justice, historian Shannen Dee Williams believes.

Addressing the online opening session of the annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering Jan. 29, Williams explained that the journey of how people who are often overlooked

have influenced church history deserves more than a footnote in historical record.

The gathering convened online for the second consecutive year because of the coronavirus pandemic, addressing the theme "Justice at the Margins."

Williams, associate professor history at the University of Dayton, focused her comments on the history of Black women religious, who faced racism within the church from religious congregations and clergy. She highlighted the lives of Mother Mary Lange and Sister Thea Bowman, who have the title "Servant of God," and Venerable Henriette Delille, all of whom withstood discrimination as they carried out their call to a religious vocation.

She called on attendees to learn, as she did over the past 15 years, about the history of Black Catholics since early in the founding of the United States.

Williams confessed it was a history she knew little about until she began researching a topic during graduate studies.

Growing up and throughout her schooling, Williams admitted that she was not interested in Black Catholic history and, although she was a lifelong Catholic, she had never seen a Black woman religious.

"In fact, the only Black sister that I knew at the time was Sister Mary Clarence, the fictional character played by Whoopi Goldberg in the critically acclaimed 'Sister Act' franchise," she said.

But while searching for a topic on which to focus her graduate work, Williams came across a story about the formation of the National Black Sisters' Conference in 1968. She excitedly called her mother later in the day to discuss her discovery.

Williams recalled that her mother was unaware there were Black nuns serving the church.

In the course of her research, Williams soon learned about the rich history of Black women who endured discrimination within the church and religious congregations in their attempts to live a religious vocation. She also found stories and documents about the Black Catholic experience overall. The more she read, the more she wanted to learn more.

"One of the powerful of those myths was my belief that Black Catholics were footnotes in the story of the development of the U.S. Catholic Church, that the story of the Black Catholic community did not become significant until the 20th century, when their numbers grew significantly as African American Southerners migrated to Northern, Midwestern and Western cities and converted to Catholicism," Williams said.

Her research led to the revelation that Black Catholics are as much a part of the story of the American Catholic Church as are Europeans.

Since then, Williams said, her work has been "grounded in the fundamental belief in the transformative power and possibilities of Black historical truth-telling in the fight against racism and white supremacy."

Williams invited attendees to bring justice to the margins by undertaking a series of actions that promote racial equality. One step is to pray to end "individual and institutional racism and the toxic reality of anti-Blackness," she said.

A second action would be to "always educate ourselves" through a reading club that includes books on anti-racism and the diversity of the American Catholic Church

and inviting speakers to address Black Catholic history.

Williams suggested that events in parishes and other communities can be scheduled during Black History Month (February), Black Catholic History Month (November) as well as Women's History Month (March), Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May), Hispanic Heritage Month (September) and Native American Heritage Month (November).

Learning about the history of diverse communities will help address racism while promoting understanding and equality, Williams said.

Williams also called on Catholics to be "intentional" in supporting racial justice causes through actions such as special collections for historically Black Catholic schools and others serving marginalized people; scholarships and fellowships for descendants of enslaved and colonized people; and programs addressing mass incarceration, environmental racism and voter suppression.

"For me, the possibilities of racial justice, of reconciliation and peace are only possible through this ongoing power of Black Catholic historical truth-telling," she said.

# Prayer can guide encounters at the margins in work for justice, bishop says

31 January 2022

by [Dennis Sadowski](#),  
[Catholic News Service](#)

## Spirituality



Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, shares a smile with a Honduran girl named Cesia as he walks and prays with a group of migrants at the Lerdo International Bridge in El Paso June 27, 2019. (CNS photo/Jose Luis Gonzalez, Reuters)

For all the years Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, has spent ministering at the Mexican border with people on the move to the United States, it was a young girl, he said, who taught him about hope.

The girl, Cesia, was in Mexico at the border with her parents and siblings seeking asylum a few years ago, Bishop Seitz recalled during the online opening session of the annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering Jan. 29. They had made a dangerous 2,000-mile journey — facing multiple attempted kidnappings — to seek a better life.

The girl's aunts and uncles had been assassinated in their homeland, he said, and the family likely would have faced the same fate had they not traveled north.

Describing how he was "jammed ... in a dusty no man's land" between concrete barriers, razor wire and armed border guards under a burning sun, Bishop Seitz said he found himself holding the 9-year-old girl's hand, his anxiety growing as he looked at the border crossing just feet away.

"I felt fear and vertigo. I felt the overwhelming weight of national indifference and abstract government policy," he said. "I felt for a moment what it must be like to be on the outside looking in. I was supposed to be accompanying Cesia. This should have been a traumatic experience for her, trauma on top of trauma, but it felt like she was accompanying me."

The border, however, was closed to asylum-seekers at the time, he said. "There was no room at the inn."

Undeterred, Cesia led the way, the bishop recalled, crossing the bridge "to the border guards, and, God knows how, ultimately to safety and security for her family."

"Talk about a hope that isn't optimism or wishful thinking," Bishop Seitz said. "It is the poor who convert us."

It is such hope, rooted in prayer and belief in the resurrected Jesus and the desire for encounter of others on society's margins, he said, that guides the work of the many people in the U.S. Catholic Church working to achieve social justice — like the 800-plus attendees of the four-day social ministry event.

The gathering convened online for the second consecutive year because of the

coronavirus pandemic, addressing the theme "Justice at the Margins."

Bishop Seitz said the invitation to prayer calls for a desire "to be in communion with the living God, the Lord of history."

"And I mean real prayer. Unguarded, vulnerable prayer. The prayer of the little girl crossing the Rio Grande," he said.

In addition, he continued, there is a need "to be in real relation with the poor, away from your inboxes, your desks and your cellphones."

"It's imperative that we are starting over again and again from the ground up. We who are not poor can hardly begin to approach the depths of hope without knowing what it means for those who live on the underside of history," the bishop explained.

Pointing to Pope Francis' invitation to the church in his apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Gaudium" ("The Joy of the Gospel") to become an evangelizing community, Bishop Seitz said that encountering others leads to bridging distances by embracing human life, "touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others."

Bishop Seitz credited attendees for continuing to "show up" and "step into the breach" to serve Jesus and poor people by bringing the church's witness into the public square with "joy and confidence."

Still, he lamented, much work remains especially because the pandemic has unmasked and even worsened racial and social inequality.

He challenged the notion expressed by some observers that the world was changed by the worst health crisis in more than a century.

"But I'm afraid those sentiments are overly optimistic because too much continues to look just like it did before, and, in some cases, it is worse," he said.

He described the situation of essential workers, who have "borne the burden of our resilience, health and recovery and yet still our country will not remunerate their sacrifice with adequate labor and social protections, including legalized immigration status and a path to citizenship."

Bishop Seitz also expressed concern that widespread disregard for wearing masks and social distancing has played a role in the spread of variants of the virus that causes COVID-19. "But (the variants) are scandalously preventable, a product of global vaccine hoarding and the inability to see that we are all connected and that our futures are tied together," he said.

"So whatever was unmasked by the pandemic seems to have been made invisible again by willful ignorance," he said.

He raised questions about the response of the Catholic community and institutions that also have borne the pandemic's shocks.

"Are we more compassionate, more merciful, more sensitive to the needs of our neighbors?" Bishop Seitz asked.

"Having seen how fragile our social, economic and political life really is, are we more engaged, more committed and more convicted of the need to work for solidarity?" he continued. "Is our church more ready to take risks and stumble in service to the bruised person on the side of the road? We, too, should undertake an examination of conscience."

Tuesday, February 1st, 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation

### Week Five: Encountering God through the Bible Revelation through Relationship

*Using the book of Job as an example, Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) teacher Brian McLaren suggests that God's revelation through the Bible comes from the ongoing dialogue and relationship the Bible inspires between God and ourselves. He teaches:*

Revelation occurs *not* in the words and statements of individuals, but in the conversation among individuals and God. . . .

Revelation accumulates in the relationships, interactions, and interplay between statements. . . .

To say that the Word (the message, meaning, or revelation) of God is in the biblical text, then, does not mean that you can extract verses or statements from the text at will and call them "God's words." It means that if we enter the text together and feel the flow of its arguments, get stuck in its points of tension, and struggle with its unfolding plot in all its twists and turns, God's revelation can happen to us. We can reach the point that Job and company did at the end of the book, where, after a lot of conflicted human talk and a conspicuously long divine silence, we finally hear God's voice. . . .

As we listen and enter into the conversation ourselves, could it be that God's Word, God's speaking, God's self-revealing happens to us, sneaks up, surprises and



ambushes us, transforms us, and disarms us—rather than arms us with “truths” to use like weapons to savage other human beings? Could it be that God’s Word intends not to give us easy answers and shortcuts to confidence and authority, but rather to reduce us, again and again, to the posture of wonder, humility, rebuke, and smallness in the face of the unknown? . . .

If we want the Bible to be a constitution, it isn’t enough. It isn’t at all. Nor is it enough as a road map for successful living, as a set of blueprints for building a life, institution, or nation, or as an “owner’s manual” . . . . But as the portable library of an ongoing conversation about and with the living God, and as an entrée into that conversation so that we actually encounter and experience the living God—for that the Bible is more than enough. . . .

I hope [this approach] will try to put us in the text—in the conversation, in the story, in the current and flow, in the predicament, in the Spirit, in the community of people who keep bumping into the living God in the midst of their experiences of loving God, betraying God, losing God, and being found again by God. In this way, by placing us *in* the text, I hope this approach can help us enter and abide *in* the presence, love, and reverence of the living God all the days of our lives and in God’s mission as humble, wholehearted servants [*Richard: and friends, I might add*] day by day and moment by moment. Even now.

# Five ways Hispanic educators are breathing new life in Catholic schools

1 February 2022

by [Hosffman Ospino](#), and  
[Melodie Wyttenbach](#)

## Parish



Cristina Escobedo, seen in the background, teaches students at St. Mary Magdalen School in San Antonio. (Jesus Ramirez)

For many people in the United States, saying or hearing the words "Hispanic" and "Catholic schools" in one sentence is almost an automatic invitation to ask: How can Catholic schools "help" the Hispanic community? The question is rather common. There is no doubt that Catholic schools can do a lot for all our children, Hispanic and non-Hispanic — and historically have done much to educate millions of children in the U.S.

Yet, we must acknowledge some problematic assumptions undergirding the question. For instance, Hispanics are mainly on the receiving end of the benefits that Catholic schools offer; the education of Hispanic children in Catholic schools is an exercise of benevolence rather than a

responsibility of a community to educate its own children for the good of church and society.

Catholic schools, mostly staffed by white teachers and leaders, have a proven way of educating that effectively leads to some form of Americanization. If Hispanic families want their children to "make it" in this society, many believe enrollment of their child in Catholic schools will help them succeed.

It is time for a different type of conversation, one that focuses instead on the agency and contributions of Hispanics to Catholic schools. It is a fact that tens of thousands of Hispanic families make the commitment every year to fund — fully or partially — the education of their children in Catholic schools. Dioceses, schools and philanthropic organizations are enriched with the presence of a growing body of passionate Hispanic leaders who are constantly advocating for and educating families about the value of Catholic education.

But perhaps the most exciting expression of Hispanic agency spawning renewal in Catholic schools is the presence of nearly 14,612 Hispanic teachers and leaders serving in these institutions throughout the country (about 9% of all Catholic school educators in 2020-21).

Hispanic educators are the focus of a new national study from Boston College in which we served as the principal investigators. More than 300 Hispanic educators working in Catholic schools nationwide participated in the study via surveys, interviews and focus groups.

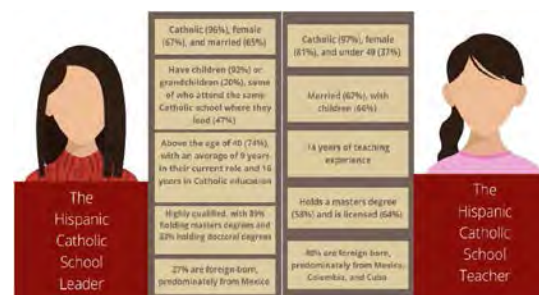
The report, "Cultivating Talent: A Summary Report of Findings From the National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the

Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools," was released Jan. 31.

This is the first study of national scope that takes an in-depth look solely at this particular sector of Catholic school educators, and we could not have chosen a better moment to do it. Catholicism in the United States is being profoundly transformed by the nearly 29.1 million Hispanics who self-identify as Catholics, together constituting about 41.6% of the 70 million Catholics in the country.

The majority of Catholics younger than 25 are Hispanic, a reminder that the present and future of Catholicism, and that of our Catholic schools, will largely depend on how we engage this population and affirm their agency.

While the presence of Hispanic families fluctuates as their children go through their schooling, Hispanic educators are a more permanent presence. On average, a Hispanic teacher has served in Catholic schools for 13 years — 17 years in the case of Hispanic school leaders. Such longevity gives these educators the distinctive opportunity to influence school practices, curriculum, pedagogies and institutional commitments.



Graphics from the report "Cultivating Talent: A Summary Report of Findings From the National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools" (Courtesy of Roche Center for Catholic Education, Boston College)

Here are five ways in which Hispanic teachers and leaders are being instruments of renewal in Catholic schools:

**Representation.** The sheer presence of Hispanic educators in Catholic schools is in itself a revolution. In the era of vowed religious and priests teaching in Catholic schools, educators of Hispanic background were rare. As the workforce became mainly lay, most of these educators were white, Euro-American, and still are (about 84%).

Yet, in recent years, the profile of the Catholic educator has been changing. In 2016, 7% of educators in Catholic schools were Hispanic. Today, 9% are — and this percentage is growing. The presence of Hispanic educators enriches the entire school community. As we observe in our report, their presence engenders a particular sense of trust among Hispanic and other minoritized students that facilitates relationships integral to academic success.

**Gente puente / Bridge builders.** Hispanic teachers in our study strongly see themselves as *gente puente* for other Hispanic families (85%), students (83%) and fellow teachers (75%). This sense of being a bridge builder is even stronger among Hispanic school leaders.

While being Hispanic creates a natural bond with students, families and colleagues who are Hispanic, bridge-building skills are not limited to working with the Hispanic population. Hispanic educators serve the entire Catholic school community, the church and even their neighborhoods as connectors, negotiators, brokers, interpreters and architects of communion.



Second-grade students at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic School in Henderson, Kentucky, help Susana Solorza, the school's Spanish teacher, fill in the day's Spanish calendar March 29, 2018. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

As *gente puente*, Hispanic educators understand the value of mentoring other educators, especially from minoritized communities. They serve as doors into a future where being a Hispanic educator in Catholic schools is no longer a novelty.

**Bilingualism.** Of the tens of millions of Catholics in the U.S. who are de facto bilingual, the majority speak English and Spanish. Bilingualism is a gift to the church and to our pluralistic society. Hispanic educators make bilingualism in Catholic schools a habitual reality that transcends the curriculum by modeling that bilingualism is a way of life that draws constantly from the cultural worlds that languages are capable of unveiling.

Bilingual educators also play an important role in accompanying students who hear and speak languages other than English at home. These educators mediate linguistic barriers, particularly with immigrant families, and help make the transition into Catholic school life a process that does not require denying their linguistic heritage or becoming someone else to fit.

Bilingual educators also are the foundation of dual-language programs such as those in the institutions associated with the Two-Way Immersion Network of Catholic Schools (TWIN- CS), sponsored by Boston College.

**Internationalization of perspectives.** At a time in which rising nationalistic sentiments and a lack of understanding of global realities [seem widespread](#), Catholic schools can play an important role providing an education that looks at the bigger picture, and Hispanic educators can be instrumental in this regard.



Teacher Claudia Raffaele, an immigrant from Argentina, is seen with a student at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon, in 2017. (CNS/Catholic Sentinel/Katie Scott)

About 40% of Hispanic teachers and 27% of Hispanic leaders in Catholic schools are immigrants, with a rich heritage from nearly every Spanish-speaking nation, mirroring the backgrounds of students and families in their communities. Their presence enriches the Catholic educational experience in the U.S. with views and experiences that have the potential of cultivating solidarity with countless communities beyond our borders.

**An expanded sense of advocacy.** Nearly all the Hispanic educators participating in the study (98%) expressed the conviction that working in Catholic schools was a way to contribute to the common good.

Many Catholic schools provide opportunities for students, educators and families to be involved in social projects, like participating in service opportunities and supporting pro-life causes. Hispanic teachers and leaders in Catholic schools broaden the vision of what is possible in terms of advocacy.

According to our study, about half (48%) of Hispanic educators actively engage in advocacy about concerns related to the Hispanic community, such as food security, access to education and immigration. About 40% also advocate for high quality education for public school students. Their advocacy reminds us of the many concerns and challenges that millions of Hispanics in the U.S. face every day.

We invite Catholics to spend some time with our report and engage in conversation with others about what you find relevant. Our hope is that when you say or hear the words "Hispanic" and "Catholic schools" in the same sentence, the first question that comes to your mind is the following: In what ways are Hispanics transforming Catholic schools in the U.S. and how can we join their efforts as we envision fresher ways of doing Catholic education in light of their experience?

**Editor's note:** *This article incorporates excerpts from the 2022 Boston College report "Cultivating Talent: A Summary Report of Findings From the National Study Examining Pathways to Increase the Presence of Hispanic Teachers and Leaders in Catholic Schools."*





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Melodie Wyttenbach

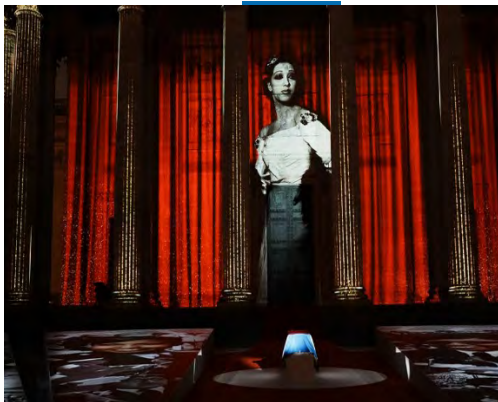
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# Josephine Baker's life asks Catholics to imagine new ways to respect all — especially Black women

1 February 2022

by [Patrick Saint-Jean](#)

[Justice](#)



An image of U.S.-born entertainer, anti-Nazi spy and civil rights activist Josephine Baker is projected on the Pantheon monument during a ceremony Nov. 30, 2021, in Paris, France, where she was symbolically inducted, becoming the first Black woman to receive France's highest honor. (AP photo/Thibault Camus, pool)

Last November, Josephine Baker, a 20th-century civil rights activist and entertainer, was the first Black woman — and the first American — to be inducted into the French Pantheon. And while her life and work has not been honored in a similar way in the United States, Americans, especially Catholics, have a lot to learn from Baker. Today, nearly 50 years after her death, Josephine has a message for us as American Catholics: Her life asks us to examine the road we've taken and challenges us to consider where we want to go in the future.

Josephine's story begins in St. Louis, Missouri, where she was born in 1906. Her childhood was not a happy one. An unwanted child, she was abused by her mother, and by the time she was only 8 years old, she was cleaning houses to help earn money to support her family. The white women whose houses she cleaned often told her not to touch their babies with her black hands. One particularly cruel white woman intentionally burned Josephine's hands in scalding water. Then, when Josephine was 11, the East St. Louis race riots robbed her of the little security she had known. Whites killed 39 Black people and left thousands more homeless, including Josephine's family.

Despite the racism and cruelty she encountered, other forces were also at work in Josephine's life. As a child, she attended her first live-theater performance, and she was immediately drawn to what she saw on the stage. Just a few years later, as a young teenager, she moved to New York City and



began performing with an all-Black dance troupe. After a few years, she drew the attention of a talent scout from Paris — and a new door opened in her life.

Josephine's career as an entertainer in Paris was an immediate success. But while the French people welcomed Josephine with open arms, the Catholic Church did not. It condemned her expressive body movements as sinful and degraded. "The old Catholic parties hounded me with a Christian hatred from station to station," Josephine [wrote](#), "city to city, one stage to another." In some communities, churches held special services intended to persuade their parishioners to stay away from Josephine's performances. One [Jesuit priest](#) preached fiercely against the immorality of Josephine Baker, describing her as "the embodiment of decadence." The Jesuit father may have been disappointed to find that his condemnation actually turned out to be a good advertisement; many of those who heard his sermon decided to go see Josephine for themselves.

Josephine knew firsthand what racial hatred looks like, and so, when the Nazis invaded France in 1940, she refused to perform for them. She went even farther, though, and became an active supporter of the Resistance, putting her own life at risk as she hid Resistance members and undertook spy missions.

After the war, she spent the rest of her life fighting racism and promoting the cause of multiculturalism. In 1963, wearing her French Resistance uniform, she attended the March on Washington with Martin Luther King Jr. "When I was a child and they burned me out of my home," [she told the crowd](#), "I was frightened and I ran away. Eventually I ran far away ... to a place called France. ... I must tell you, ladies and gentlemen, in that country I never feared. ...

I could go into any restaurant I wanted to, and I could drink water any place I wanted to, and I didn't have to go to a colored toilet either, and I have to tell you it was nice, and I got used to it, and I liked it, and I wasn't afraid anymore that someone would shout at me and say, 'N----r, go to the end of the line.' "

Josephine was also a private person who spoke seldom about her faith. We do know, from the stories her children tell, that prayer was always important to her. She put crosses in each of her children's bedrooms, and insisted they pray every night. "I believe in prayer," she said. "It's the best way we have to draw strength from heaven" (*Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, 'Race' and Nation in Early Modern Dance*, by Ramsay Burt, Page 59). In 1975, when Josephine died, she received a full Catholic burial, for she had converted to Catholicism a few years before her death.

The Greek term for conversion, *metanoia*, means to turn around, to be reoriented in how we live in our lives. As a Jesuit, I've always felt that the conversion of Ignatius of Loyola is one of the ultimate demonstrations of how God's love can transform the human life. It turned Ignatius from hedonism and selfishness to a life of service.

Although we sometimes like to think of conversion as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, it is actually an ongoing process. Ignatius' spiritual journey course-corrected not once but again and again throughout his life. Moments of spiritual learning continued on throughout his life, and each time, he had the humility to reorient himself, using Christ's love as his standard. Until the day he died, his life was a process of constant, deepening conversion as he came to understand that our lives are meant to continually lead to "the greater glory of God and the salvation of humanity."

I suspect Josephine Baker also experienced the spiritual path as a lifelong journey. Although her formal, external conversion did not occur until she was in her sixties, God had been at work in her life since the time she was a child. Unloved, forced to endure the cruelty of racism, yet she grew up with an inner freedom. "I did take the blows [of racism]," [she said](#), "but I took them with my chin up, in dignity." Josephine had seen the evil of which human beings are capable, and yet [she could say](#), "I so profoundly love and respect humanity."

As American Catholics confronting racism, figures like Josephine Baker can inspire us to continue our own conversion process. As Ignatius knew, the imagination can be a powerful tool in this lifelong journey, allowing us to see beyond the narrow horizons of our prejudices and assumptions. "The white imagination is sure something when it comes to Blacks," [Josephine once said](#), referring to the way in which whites often imagine Blacks to be dangerous and evil.

Today, her life asks us as Catholics to imagine new ways of respecting all people — especially Black women.

As we remember Josephine's joyful physicality, her comfort moving her body across the stage, can we allow God to transform our misconceptions about the human body? Can we accept her challenge to fight racism wherever we find it, creating a world of justice for all? "Surely the day will come," [said Josephine](#), "when color means nothing more than the skin tone, when religion is seen uniquely as a way to speak one's soul; ... and all ... are born free, when understanding breeds love."

May Josephine Baker's voice continue to call us to ever deeper conversion — and may this reorientation in our hearts and lives

result in greater freedom and justice for all humanity, *for the greater glory of God.*



Patrick Saint-Jean

Patrick Saint-Jean is a Jesuit Regent, a member of the Jesuit Midwest Province.

## Firebrand Texas Bishop Strickland tests limits of conservative Catholic dissent

1 February 2022

by [Jack Jenkins](#),  
[Religion News Service](#)



Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas, speaks from the floor during the 2019 general assembly of the U.S. bishops' conference. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

Bishop Joseph Strickland of the Diocese of Tyler, Texas, has become well-known for challenging advocates for abortion rights

and those who want to make the COVID-19 vaccines mandatory, justifying his positions by invoking interpretations of Catholic teaching.

But last month, he took a step that defied Catholic protocol: He challenged his fellow bishops.

In a [tweet](#) on Jan. 18, Strickland backed Fr. Anthony Buś, a priest in Chicago who had pushed back on Pope Francis' new [restrictions](#) on saying the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass — in opposition to the views of Buś' superior, Cardinal Blase Cupich, the Archbishop of Chicago.

"I've re-read Fr Buś's letter and I see nothing disrespectful in his tone or in his actual words," Strickland wrote. "It is a heartfelt cry from a priest who is hurting deeply & speaks for many, many others. He should be comforted rather than being disciplined."

Fr. John Beal, a canon lawyer and professor at The Catholic University of America, called the tweet a sharp break from church norms.

"The idea of an individual bishop in a small diocese in Texas taking a public stand contrary to the Cardinal-Archbishop of Chicago is unprecedented," Beal said, referring to Cupich. "We never did that before."

As U.S. politics have become more polarized in recent years, the Catholic Church has seen conservative Catholics become uncommonly comfortable with rebuking messages from the Vatican or their own American clergy. The most outspoken are lay Catholics, but debates sparked by Pope Francis' papacy, the 2020 presidential election and the ongoing pandemic have encouraged some clergy to draw lines in the sand as well.

But experts say that even in this atmosphere, a bishop openly challenging not only the pope's messages but his brother prelates breaks new ground.

The next day, Strickland also tweeted in support of a Vermont priest who had publicly defied his bishop by refusing to be vaccinated or submit to masking and testing and making a video to explain his position. Fr. Peter Williams, a pastor in Springfield, Vermont, described his position as that of a "patriot" and rejected Bishop Christopher Coyne's insistence that the directive was a matter of "honor and obedience."

"Please pray for this priest & so many others caught up in similar situations," Strickland [tweeted](#), including Williams' video in his tweet.

The one-two punch was enough to inspire National Catholic Reporter columnist Michael Sean Winters to call for an "apostolic visitation" of Strickland.

"If (Strickland) wants to be crazy in East Texas, who is to stop him?" Winters [wrote](#). "But commenting on how other bishops should deal with their priests? Who does that? What does he know about these situations?"

Publicly disciplining Strickland would be unusual, said Beal, describing Strickland's actions as "unseemly but not illegal" under church law.

"In our polarized world, the norms of civility and decency have just broken down," he said.

Dissent within the Catholic Church is hardly new, said Natalia Imperatori-Lee, chair of the religious studies department at Manhattan College. "Progressive Catholics have been saying for a long time that

bishops are not branch managers, and Rome is not the home office," she said.

But public dissent among clerics has triggered pushback from church authorities in the past. In the 1980s, [Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen](#), an outspoken liberal cleric, was subjected to [an apostolic visitation](#) — or [Vatican investigation](#) — by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI.

Hunthausen was forced to share authority with a newly appointed auxiliary bishop after the investigation concluded he was guilty of "weak doctrinal leadership" in several areas.

But Beal noted the inquiry was [widely seen](#) to be driven by conservative backlash, particularly to a speech Hunthausen gave denouncing the stockpiling of nuclear weapons.

Benedict's papacy also included pushback to dissent. In 2012, his last full year as pope, the Vatican investigated U.S. Catholic nuns in what was [seen as a crackdown](#) after an umbrella organization of American nuns voiced support for the Affordable Care Act in defiance of the USCCB, which opposed the legislation.

Since being elevated to bishop that same year, Strickland has cultivated his reputation as a right-wing dissident. He has a weekly podcast, "The Bishop Strickland Show," hosted by the anti-abortion website LifeSiteNews and available on Rumble, an alternative Canadian video platform popular with political and social conservatives.

Strickland has conducted interviews with Church Militant, a right-wing Catholic website whose criticism of then-Atlanta Archbishop Wilton Gregory, now a cardinal

and archbishop of Washington, was decried as [homophobic or racist](#). The site, based in Michigan, was reprimanded by the Archdiocese of Detroit in 2011.

Strickland [posed for photographs](#) with Church Militant staff last fall shortly before the group [protested](#) the USCCB's annual meeting in Baltimore. Multiple speakers at the event praised Strickland or cited him as an inspiration.

The bishop's reputation has put him in conversation with a network of right-wing activists both inside and outside of the Catholic Church. At the December 2020 "Jericho March" in the run-up to the U.S. Capitol attack, Strickland offered a prayer via video. Earlier that year, the bishop [publicly backed](#) a Wisconsin priest who insisted Catholics could not vote for Democrats, and reiterated his support when church authorities limited the cleric's ministry in 2021. Strickland [tweeted](#) that the priest was "in trouble for speaking the truth."

In October, Strickland [tweeted praise](#) for a speech delivered by actor Jim Caviezel that included criticism of Pope Francis and was delivered at a conference connected to the conspiracy theory-driven QAnon movement.

Catholics who sometimes chafed under the conservative leadership of Pope John Paul II and his successor, Benedict, are now nonplussed to see conservatives bridle under Francis. Many conservatives, they note, insisted on obedience to church authorities during the papacies of Benedict and John Paul II.

"I grew up being called a cafeteria Catholic, knowing full well that everyone is in the cafeteria," said Imperatori-Lee, referring to a common criticism of liberal Catholics as picking and choosing which Catholic

teachings to follow, as if in a cafeteria line. "But now the people who were throwing stones about cafeteria Catholicism and dissenting theologians are the ones leading the charge ... It's this incredible upside-down world."

She said conservatives appear to have embraced passionate dissent only "when they have the ability to be famous cultural warriors."

Indeed, Strickland's views on the pandemic — an emerging culture war issue — have garnered him the most attention. He has repeatedly condemned all three vaccines authorized for use in the U.S., arguing that they are "[abortion tainted](#)," because in developing the vaccines, pharmaceutical companies used cell lines believed to trace their [origins to aborted fetuses](#) from the 1970s and 1980s. (The cell lines, which are clones with a distant link to the original cells, are commonly used in medical laboratories and are not in the vaccines themselves.)

Strickland, who declined an interview request from Religion News Service, maintained his opposition [even after](#) the Vatican deemed mRNA-based vaccines "[morally acceptable](#)" in December 2020, a sentiment the [USCCB echoed](#) a short time later. Francis, who is vaccinated himself, has repeatedly campaigned for widespread vaccination, and the Pontifical Academy for Life has [directly refuted vaccine skeptics](#) on social media, saying in a tweet that "abortions have nothing to do" with the vaccines.

In addition, Strickland has contested the vaccines' safety. On a recent episode of "The Bishop Strickland Show," a host argued COVID-19 vaccines are uniquely prone to triggering adverse effects, despite ample scientific evidence attesting that such side

effects are rare. When the host asked Strickland if parents should refrain from vaccinating their children with the shots, the bishop replied: "Absolutely." He quickly added that vaccination needs to be a "free choice," but stressed parents should be "very careful" about vaccination against COVID-19.

Other bishops have expressed doubts about the vaccines. San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone has encouraged people to get vaccinated but revealed in December that he is [not vaccinated himself](#), explaining his stance by saying his immune system is strong and arguing that COVID-19 inoculations are "not really vaccines" — a falsehood.

But none has championed the cause more than Strickland, who has shifted to railing against government vaccine mandates. He [tweeted](#) in November 2021: "To encourage these vaccines is a personal choice but to force them violates basic human rights and moral standards."

Here, too, Strickland is out of step with many of his fellow American prelates. Major dioceses in [Los Angeles](#), [New York](#) and elsewhere have declared that they would not issue religious exemptions allowing Catholics to opt-out of various vaccine mandates. Bishop John Stowe of the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, [requires](#) diocesan staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19 "as a condition of their employment."

Meanwhile, the Vatican has [its own version of a vaccine mandate](#) in place and requires [members of the Swiss Guard](#) who protect the pope to get the shots.

Whether Strickland's support for dissident priests outside his diocese will trigger a response from the Vatican or his fellow



American bishops remains an open question. Beal suggested any hypothetical action may not be public, noting that "public movements against bishops are seen as unseemly" and that similar situations are often mitigated quietly.

Strickland, however, is unlikely to remain quiet. In a recent podcast, he argued that while he does not see himself as a person who seeks out conflict, he won't shy away from it.

"When there is conflict, it's usually between something that is true and something that is false," he said. "Some people are embracing the truth and some people are embracing what is not true ... In that way, conflict is necessary. We need to separate darkness from light."

"If it's a question of truth and falsehood, we need the conflict."

## American Catholics need to shed some habits to get in the synodal spirit

2 February 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

[Vatican](#)



Cardinals and bishops attend Pope Francis' celebration of a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oct. 10, 2021, to open the process that will lead up to the assembly of the world Synod of Bishops in 2023. (CNS/Reuters/Remo Casilli)

The conversations about the synodal process are telling. In discussions with friends on the Catholic left, it appears that some are approaching the synod with a clear agenda. Advocacy groups like the [Women's Ordination Conference](#) and [New Ways Ministry](#) are providing materials for their members to get involved and, to be clear, there is nothing wrong about that. In fact, the Vatican has encouraged such involvement.

I am even told that some pundits and columnists are voicing strong opinions on what the synod can or should accomplish! Heaven forbid!

Still, I have a warning: Agendas misunderstand what synodality is about. They are so thoroughly American, we take them for granted, but the phenomenon warrants some attention.

We Americans are planners and doers, and we conceive of grand projects with definite objectives. Our history is marked by the completion of such projects: the Erie Canal, the transcontinental railroad, Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic in a solo flight, sending astronauts to the moon.

It is one of the essential, problematic facts of American history, and one I confess I shall never completely understand, that the dominant intellectual and moral force in early British America, Calvinism, was so keen to defend the omnipotent sovereignty of God, yet gave birth to a culture that would prove such fertile soil for the myth of the self-made and the cult of libertarian patriotism.

Our democratic norms invite, and reward, those whose commitments to specific goals, whose tenacity and even single-mindedness, whose activism, changed the political and social landscape: Abraham Lincoln's commitment to the preservation of the Union, Teddy Roosevelt's commitment to the preservation of our great national parks, Susan B. Anthony and the suffragists overcoming all manner of obstacle, and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. challenging his fellow ministers to consider their complicity in the injustice that landed him in a Birmingham jail.

And, of course, many, probably most Americans take their cultural cues from the world of business. What's good for General Motors is good for America. And businesses require an agenda, a goal, a target, that will bring the entire organization into sync, moving in the same direction. Back when I ran a small business, I remember the owner telling me, "Remember, it is OK to make the wrong decision, just never avoid making a decision. If everyone is moving in the same direction, you can always change direction, but without a decision, you invite chaos."

There is a time and a place for religiously motivated activism to be sure, but the synod is not that time and place. The synod requires us Americans to set aside our activist, goal-oriented, project-centered sensibilities.

There is a time and a place for religiously motivated activism to be sure, but the synod is not that time and place.

In his [address](#) opening the synodal process last October, the Holy Father began by clearly articulating his understanding of what an ecclesial synod requires.

The pope said, "You have come by many different roads and from different Churches,

each bearing your own questions and hopes," thus affirming the need to engage, to share, to demonstrate parrhesia.

He continued, "I am certain the Spirit will guide us and give us the grace to move forward together, to listen to one another and to embark on a discernment of the times in which we are living, in solidarity with the struggles and aspirations of all humanity."

The Spirit will "guide" and "give," which suggests participants must be docile and receptive, the very opposite of assertive, agenda-driven and activist.

"I want to say again that the Synod is not a parliament or an opinion poll," the pope said. "The Synod is an ecclesial event and its protagonist is the Holy Spirit."

An ecclesial event will require an ecclesial language, yet how many arguments, across the ideological spectrum, instead offer sociological reasons and polling data to justify a theological conclusion?

The pope concluded that opening paragraph with this stunning statement: "If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod."

We are not being called to discern how to win an argument. We are being called to discern what the Spirit wants for the church.

Our conservative friends seem not only incapable but unwilling to embrace the synodal process. "If we're honest Christians, listening to others is not an endless process which enables us to put off forever the effort to preach Christ and Him crucified, but merely an act of love for the purpose of finding out how best to acquaint them with the Gospel and the Church," [wrote](#) Jeff Mirus, a cofounder of Christendom College, at CatholicCulture.org. "It seems to me that, far too often today, the constant insistence

on listening is used as a means of avoiding the task of telling the truth to those who are likely to tell us to shut up and get lost."

He has a point: Why listen if you have all the answers?

At the Catholic Thing, Francis Maier, former editor of the National Catholic Register, [made clear his reservations](#) about the synod, noting that the recommendations from a 2000 archdiocesan synod in Philadelphia had been almost completely ignored in the years before the arrival of his patron, Archbishop Charles Chaput, in 2011. Need anyone point out that in 2000, Pope John Paul II was still pope, and he had systematically made a mockery of synods during his tenure.

Still, Maier's language is instructive: "Steven Covey, the late, great effectiveness guru, liked to remind his readers to 'begin with the end in mind.' I suspect he purloined the idea from Ignatius Loyola. But it's still good advice."

It is also advice that is exactly contrary to the vision articulated by the Holy Father. Steven Covey or Pope Francis? Is it really a difficult choice?

So if our conservative friends are keeping the synod at arm's length, there is a real opportunity for our liberal friends to be heard. Certainly, in my lifetime, there has never been such an opportunity for the Catholic left to be heard.

I just hope we all will remember the pope's words: If the Spirit is not present, there will be no synod. We are not being called to discern how to win an argument. We are being called to discern what the Spirit wants for the church. We all need to make room for the Spirit. We all need to learn to be

docile and receptive. And it will be especially hard for us Americans.



Michael Sean Winters

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

## Unexpected lessons of service: from life unto death

2 February 2022

by Julia Gerwe

### Spirituality



Flowers from the burial of Miriam Corcoran, a Sister of Charity of Nazareth, show the beauty of and love for Sister Miriam at Nazareth's cemetery. (Courtesy of Sisters of Charity of Nazareth)

**Editor's note:** *Notes from the Field* are reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with [Catholic Volunteer Network](#), the project began in the summer of 2015. This latest round of the series features volunteers in Orange, California; Nazareth, Kentucky; and New York City. Read more about Julia [here](#).

**NAZARETH, KY.** — How do you approach the realities of dying and death? I can remember having nightmares about death as a child, about losing my family and friends and about what came next. As I've grown up, conversations about death and rituals, such as funerals, have made me anxious, unsettled and uncomfortable.

You see, my understanding of death and dying was largely informed by the culture in which I was raised. In my space within the U.S., death is commonly viewed as "the end," a tragic reality, something to run away from — in conversations, in grieving, in individually processing loss. I've lived a life so uncomfortable confronting death.

When I started my first year of service, I reminded myself daily to embrace the new experiences that lie ahead. While the focus of my work was mostly new to me, it turned out that this wasn't the only, or most, surprising facet of my life with the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. Instead, life with a community of women religious forced me to confront and respect death.

I have helped bury about 15 sisters since September 2020. At first, I was shocked to learn that the Grounds Department here is responsible for acting as pallbearers and burying deceased sisters in the cemetery on campus. I remember thinking about what an interesting job provision this was: participating in funeral services, bearing the

sisters to their resting places, burying them, and maintaining the cemetery.



The ashes of Elaine McCarron, a Sister of Charity of Nazareth, sit in the foreground of the Nazareth's cemetery ahead of her burial in October 2020. (Courtesy of Sisters of Charity of Nazareth)

Because I worked so closely with the Grounds Department, this responsibility was extended to me. Don't get me wrong, my supervisors made it clear that I did not have to participate in burials. My immediate hesitation stalled, however, upon a conversation with one of my friends in the department — Jason.

Jason explained that he gets to know and build relationships with many of the sisters he ends up burying. While often difficult, he sees burials as a final act of service that he can offer to them. Accompaniment from life into death, he said. I listened.

I have been privileged in my life to mostly avoid close contact with death and dying. Sure, I lost my Papa in high school and a beloved neighbor recently, but these griefs have been few and far between. Life and legacy live on in their own way, as my friend Jaesen so beautifully wrote in her recent [Notes from the Field](#) post.

This topic resurfaced in my mind and heart when I recently learned that my grandmother — my Memaw — is near the end of her own life. It's been a time of



processing and of grieving. Though I feel that I've grown in my understanding and comfort with death, it's still so sad. Yet I draw comfort from my time alongside the sisters as my family and I near this loss closer to home.



The cemetery for the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth endures as a peaceful and serene resting place in Nazareth, Kentucky. (Courtesy of Sisters of Charity of Nazareth)

Learning to confront death and to find peace with dying has been a unique feature of my service. Further, I experienced this in a distinct way because of the pandemic.

When the sisters couldn't host funeral Masses, they hosted "prayer services" of sorts outside. In these services, sisters talked about the lives of their deceased, sharing memories, laughs and tears. Family, friends and sisters processed to the burial site and contributed handfuls of soil and flowers once the casket was lowered into the ground. During each service, I savored the community, peace and life that passing unto death brought. Here, there is dignity in dying and a community that enriches each phase of life's journey.

When a sister passes away — at least at Nazareth — the community recalls her stories, her ministries, and often her quirks. I've learned so much about these powerful women in their passing, making me wish I'd

had more time to know them in their living. Though I often contribute to these services in only small ways — such as elevating a shovelful of dirt so sisters don't have to bend down to scoop it up, carrying flowers in the procession or simply preparing temporary grave markers — I feel the love radiating from the community of the living *every time*.

What I don't feel are the grief and (honestly) terror that I've experienced throughout my life. Granted, because of the pandemic, I didn't have the opportunity to know many of the sisters who have passed at Nazareth. I honor their losses and the pain that endures. Still, each funeral and burial has offered me the unique opportunity to know and be with sisters in the next phase of their lives. Through them, I have learned the beauty in living, and in dying.



Sisters gather for the burial of Gracy Mary Whittaker, a Sister of Charity of Nazareth who elected to have a green burial. (Courtesy of Sisters of Charity of Nazareth)

I have come to appreciate the weaving of a universe that creates us from ashes — even [stardust](#)! — and returns us to this state. What a transformative way for us to live our



relationship with nature and the Divine. I've found that some of the most beautiful burials for me have been [green burials](#), in which sisters elect to not be embalmed or rested in a casket, but instead wrapped in a shroud and buried, allowing the shrouds and their bodies to more naturally break down. Through dying, we can all breathe new life into the ecosystem that sustains us.

As I have come to appreciate the magnitude of the physical reunification of body and land, I have leaned into the connection to soul and divinity. While many regard death as the ultimate separation of body and soul, I've come to see it as a reunion to a different kind of soul – the soul of community, of Divine love, of creation. 'Soul' and 'soil' are only separated by one letter, after all, and I really believe that our body reconnecting with the land is a sort of grounding into the Divine; into the lifeblood of the universe. The sisters have helped me to see death as a transition, which can be scary, but is a journey of its own.

I won't pretend to know what comes after death, or even pretend to know what I *think* comes after death. I'm still developing my working theories on that. For now, I am content with the understanding that death isn't always something to be afraid of. I've found peace alongside a community of women devoted to each other and their faith. For this, I will always be grateful.



[Julia Gerwe](#)

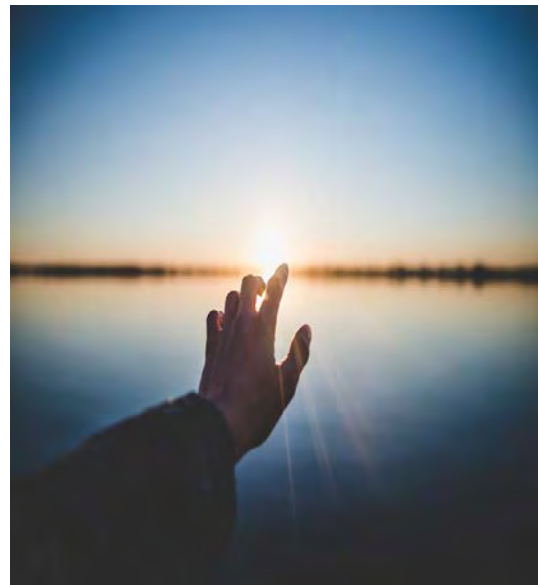
Julia Gerwe serves as ecological sustainability educational program manager with the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth.

## The finger of God in my life

2 February 2022

by [Nancy Watenga](#)

### Spirituality



(Unsplash/Marc-Olivier Jodoin)

The 21st day of January 1966 was not a day like any other. A tiny baby was born in the village of Ting'ang'a in Kiambu, Kenya. A firstborn of nine, raised and brought up in a very humble beginning. We lived from hand to mouth in a small traditional grass hut.

My Catholic parents were attending church only on Sundays then; we had no common family prayers in my home, but for reasons I can't explain I was able to join a small Christian community, read the Bible for the elderly ladies and join in rosary recitation. At the age of 7 I recall vividly that I was able to proclaim the Word on Sundays by doing the readings. In fact, the leaders had to

improvise a stool for me to stand on so the congregation could see the reader!

I was able to complete the primary level education and in 1981 happily joined the secondary school. I was an above average student, but had trouble with the school fees. During the holidays I would do informal jobs for a teacher neighbor who — I now understand — wanted to empower me to learn. She would give my pay to my parents to supplement my school fees, but there was an agreement with my parents — especially mum — that she was to give me money for newspapers for both Saturdays and Sundays. They kept their promise.

All this time I was not baptized. I attended catechism classes for three years because my mum would take me away to go for work, including during the exam time. This delayed my baptism. Meanwhile back in school I was the secretary of a Young Christian Students club. I seized every opportunity to "preach" to the school, including during school assemblies.

Nevertheless, in my second year of secondary school, He touched me! One afternoon as the students were sweeping the classrooms in preparation for the evening activities, I was with a group of young boys and girls, when suddenly I found myself at a loss. I was not following in their discussion, because something had struck my mind.

I had seen a beautiful, large flower in a nearby flower bed. I contemplated that this wonderful flower, though, will wither away shortly and lose its fresh, green, large and beautiful leaves! I continued musing that my young life can also waste away if I do not take care of it. I still recall and relive this moment like it was just yesterday; that was when I made up my mind. The best way to take care of my life is to give it back to the Creator as His servant — a Catholic sister.

That was when the long journey began, in July 1982. Remember, I was not baptized yet!



(Unsplash/Tamanna Rume)

I began attending morning Masses to plead with God to bless me with this long-coveted sacrament of baptism. I longed for it so much because our parish priest — a holy Irish and people-loving man — had taught us in Sunday school that "children who die without baptism do not see God." And I really wanted to meet God! Within a year after this, eventually I did receive the sacrament of baptism, holy Communion, and — in a year's time — confirmation. I continued to attend morning Mass in thanksgiving for the gift of faith.

Despite the fact that I was really active in the proclamation of the Word, I did not respond to the parish missionary sisters' invitation to attend seminars for the parish youth. I really don't know why. That was even in spite of the fact that one of the sisters had been my mathematics teacher in secondary school, and after secondary school the sister nurse had given me work as an untrained nurse in the parish dispensary.

I can only say it was not God's time yet and that His ways are beyond our understanding. However, an opportunity arose when the same sisters wanted to record the history

of Bishop Daniel Comboni, their father founder. Somebody must have told them to ask me to be the "voice," which I did for the sisters, recording on tape the history of the founder of the Comboni Missionary Sisters.

Another day that stands out in my memory was in September 1986 when I left home to join the sisterhood. It is a day that I will never forget. My people call God "*Ngai*," a name which means "one that shares or divides." On this particular day Ngai had shared with me His special gift of love. I do not understand fully, but from our humble home without a gate he crept in and took none other but the firstborn. This alone has kept me faithful to Him no matter what — the fact that God saw fit to trust me to respond to His love. I marvel at it!

Two years later I was in Nigeria, in West Africa, for further formation. On Nov. 16, 1991, I was espoused to Christ as an Immaculate Heart Sister and the rest is history.

In my 55 years I do celebrate my gifts of nature and of grace. Among the philosophies of life that have made sense and provided inner motivation for me are:

- I will do what is right even when the whole world says it is wrong;
- I will return love for love in spite of challenges;
- I will love what I do and will do it with passion.

Those three principles have given me an unknown drive that has caused me to defy all odds and to go for my dreams. I am not where I would like to be yet, but given my humble beginning, I must say all my achievements have been by the finger of God. There can be no better explanation.

Today I look back, and in amazement attend Mass in thanksgiving not only for the gift of faith, but for many more gifts that He has continuously showered on me abundantly. When I look back on where God found me and where He is taking me, I shed a well of joyful tears.



Nancy Watenga

Nancy Watenga is a sister living in the world as a consecrated woman for the Diocese of Nakuru, Kenya. Formerly with the Immaculate Heart Sisters of Nigeria, she studied education at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa and has been a high school deputy head for five years and a college head for seven years.

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation  
Week Five: Encountering God through the Bible

### Can We Be "Friends" with God?

*Author and scholar Diana Butler Bass describes friendship with Jesus as something that—contrary to some popular opinion—is the mark of a mature faith. Friendship with God is at the heart of the biblical story:*

The Bible tells a different story about friendship with God, especially in the Hebrew scriptures. Friendship is anything but immaturity; it is a gift of wisdom: "In every generation [wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:27). Two of Israel's greatest heroes, Abraham, the father of faith, and Moses, the liberating

prophet, are specifically called friends of God. In Isaiah 41:8, God refers to Abraham as “my friend,” a tradition that carries into the New Testament (James 2:23). Of Moses, Exodus says: “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (33:11), a very rare intimacy, for such close proximity to the divine usually meant death (33:20). . . .

The point is that friendship with God establishes the covenant—and that Israel is freed from bondage into a new family forged by friendship through the law given by Moses. Friendship with God is not a biblical side story; rather, it is central to the promises and faithfulness of being a called people, in which all are friends, companions, intimates, siblings, and beloved.

Early Christians, most of whom were Jews, knew all of this and extended the idea of divine friendship to Jesus. The New Testament vividly recounts the closeness of Jesus’s circle of friends, women and men transformed through their relationship with him. . . .

*Butler Bass understands the “Our Father” prayer of Jesus to be ultimately about our mutual friendship with God:*

Indeed, Jesus instructed his friends to pray to “Abba” (as we can assume he himself prayed), a term most often rendered as “Father” in English, but one that contains shades of meaning denoting intimacy and familiarity, including that of fraternal relations like “brother” or “companion,” and is related to the Hebrew word for “friend” (ahab), used to describe Abraham.

Thus, Jesus introduces his friends (the disciples) to his other friend (God) in the daily prayer known as the “Our Father,” perhaps the spirit of which is better captured

by “Our Father-Friend” or just “Our Friend.” This idea of “Our Friend in heaven” was a revolutionary one, as Jesus, acting as a mediator of divine companionship, collapsed the sacred distance between God and us. . . .

Friendship is contingent on love—real love: compassion, empathy, reaching out, going beyond what we imagine is possible. That is the command: love. And if we reach out in love, friendship is the result, even friendship with God. Friendship is mutual, a hand extended and another reaching back. . . . Friendship is an eternal circle, the ceaseless reaching toward one another that strengthens us and gives us joy.

## Equality protections for all Americans are overdue, but we can right this wrong

2 February 2022

by [Ana Vanegas](#)



An LGBTQ flag is seen near the White House May 18, 2021, in Washington. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)



There's a saying in El Salvador, where I grew up: "Those who kiss your children, they sweeten your mouth." It means that when people are good to our kids, we love them as if they are family. After my teenage son came out as gay, his friends became like my own children. To this day, I want to throw my arms around every single person who sees what a wonderful person he is and who loves him for his true self.

But that's not to say I didn't struggle.

After my son came out, I heavily relied on my Catholic faith and looked for guidance in the Bible. I didn't find anything that forbids true love between two people. I also turned to my parish priest for guidance. I'll always be thankful for his counsel: "I have seen many parents come in angry, thinking they've been punished by God, kicking their gay kids out of the house, only to come back years later with great remorse because they lost their child who happened to be LGBTQ. Don't be one of those parents."

In America, everyone should have the freedom to go about their daily lives without fear of harassment or discrimination. I want a future for my son where he can be truly free — where he can apply for a job, rent an apartment, go to the doctor, go into a store, eat a meal at a restaurant and never have to worry that he will be treated differently. Now is the time — and this is the Congress — to do what is right by passing clear, comprehensive and secure nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ Americans in all 50 states. Bills currently before Congress address these issues, including the [Equality Act](#) and [Fairness for All](#). If our lawmakers truly believe in freedom for all Americans, I urge them to find common ground, vote and pass this long-overdue federal legislation.



A jogger passes through a beam of sunlight in front of the U.S Capitol Jan. 18 in Washington. (CNS/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

We can all agree, and in fact most Americans do, that everybody should be able to participate in all aspects of daily life with dignity and respect. For far too many LGBTQ people, harassment and discrimination are too common. My son was constantly bullied in high school. When he went off to college, I was so proud and excited for him. But he came home after his first year with a sense of dread hanging over him. I remember the day he came out to me like it was yesterday. It was the Saturday before Mother's Day. He came to me in pain. He was sobbing, fearful that our relationship would change once he told me the truth.

As a parent, it's heart-rending to see your child in that kind of torment. I cried too, but not because I was disappointed in him. I worry about the rest of the world, and how they will treat him. I worry about the challenges he may face in life, and that I might not always be there to help him. I know he will always be the hardworking, lovable, kind person that he is, and I adore everything about him. I just hope that he does not have to suffer too much because of the opinions of others.



As a Catholic, I strongly believe in my core that God makes no mistakes. Even when the leaf of a tree falls it's because of his will. God created all of us. As people of faith — conservative and liberal alike — we're supposed to treat others as we want to be treated, be kind and help others because of our faith.

It's my job as a mother to love and support my children.

That's why I'm calling on Congress to do its job — to pass legislation that protects all Americans. Our lawmakers have a historic and generational opportunity to help protect millions of LGBTQ people. My son deserves their support. So does every LGBTQ person in this country. On behalf of all of their constituents, Congress should advance the strongest possible federal LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections.



Ana Vanegas

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As a bishop, I was  
skeptical about  
synodality. The  
Latin American  
church changed that.

3 February 2022

by Bishop Oscar Cantú



A clergyman touches an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on his vestments during Mass Nov. 21, 2021, at the opening of the Nov. 21-28 Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean, in Mexico City. After five previous historic meetings, it was the first such meeting to include laity. (CNS/Emilio Espejel)

Something dramatic happened in the development of Vatican II's document on the church, *Lumen Gentium*, in 1964. The original draft of the document, sharply criticized by the council fathers, was discarded in favor of one that placed a chapter on the people of God (Chapter 2) before a chapter on the hierarchy of the church (Chapter 3).

This move was astounding for a church that had become accustomed to a cleric-centric culture. But the change was not a novelty in the church; it was based deeply in Scripture and tradition. While maintaining and clarifying the proper and essential role of the hierarchy in the church, this shift in *Lumen Gentium* signaled a correction to the excesses of a clerical culture.

I witnessed a similar shift, not in an ecclesial document but in ecclesial practice, from Nov. 21-28, 2021, at the first Ecclesial Assembly of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean in Cuautitlán, México. The assembly — organized by the Latin American bishops' council, commonly known as CELAM — was the culmination

of several months of consultation at local, regional and national levels across 20 nations, in which [nearly 70,000 people contributed](#), either as individuals or on behalf of their communities.

I had been invited to the ecclesial assembly as one of a handful of in-person participants from the United States. (Seventy others from the U.S. participated online.) What I witnessed was not only fascinating, prayerful and engaging, it was a manifestation of the content and spirit of *Lumen Gentium*, particularly Chapter 2, "The People of God." It was an experience of ecclesial synodality at work.

I must confess that I had concerns about Pope Francis' expressed desire that synodality be implemented at every level of the church's life. In Cuautitlán, my misgivings about synodality were dispelled.

My first concern was that synodality would yield a chaotic process. In my nearly 30 years as a priest, I smile whenever someone asks me, "Father/Bishop, do you have five minutes?" "Five minutes" often becomes an extended monologue replete with complaints, diatribes and sometimes irrelevant personal stories!

I was concerned that a synodal process would open ecclesial gatherings to unwieldy, lengthy processes that lack direction. This was not the case at the ecclesial assembly in Cuautitlán, where over 1,000 people — 120 in-person assembly members, joined online by another 900 delegates — came together for a week to discuss and discern. Contributions and interventions were timed for all, bishops and laity alike, painstakingly adhering to our schedule and themes.



Worshippers pray near an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe outside the basilica with her name Nov. 21, 2021, in Mexico City, during the opening of the Nov. 21-28 Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean. After five previous historic meetings, it was the first such meeting to include laity. (CNS/Emilio Espejel)

Make no mistake, this kind of discipline takes significant preparation, oversight and energy. Engaging in a synodal process at any level will take planning and discipline. Discipline is essential for the synodal process to proceed successfully. What I witnessed in Cuautitlán was in no way chaotic; it was thoughtful, prayerful and productive.

My second concern was that the synodal process would disregard the bishops' role as authentic teachers of the faith. I was concerned that bland equality would permeate the process, such that the magisterial and pastoral voice and role of the bishops would be inappropriately diminished. I learned that we bishops need to be patient with the process and allow voices to be heard.

In this process, we can learn a great deal about the experiences of persons in various sectors of society. This listening informs more fully our pastoral decisions and actions, and provides color, stories — and, yes, credibility — to our teaching. The bishop indeed embodies his local church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Paragraph 22);

however, the full, active and conscious participation of lay, religious and clergy can be a fuller manifestation of the body of Christ. Indeed, the complete manifestation of the church occurs when a bishop gathers with his presbyterate, deacons, religious and lay faithful around the altar for the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Paragraph 41).

Likewise, when the magisterium gathers with lay women and men, young and old, consecrated women and men, priests and deacons in ecclesial assembly, the church is manifested more fully. The process of synodality, as Francis has emphasized, is [not a convention or a parliament](#). It is an expression of the church, the whole people of God, wherein the hierarchy *listens* in order to carry out more effectively its essential role of teaching, governing and sanctifying.

In Cuautitlán, I learned that synodality, with all sectors of the church represented in a discernment process of the church, need not be chaotic nor the proper role of the bishops as authentic teachers of the faith dismissed. Rather, I experienced a well-ordered, disciplined process in which the members of the hierarchy were able to listen deeply to the ideas, concerns and prayers of the laity.

And to listen particularly those on the margins: to young adults deeply concerned about the church's ability to reach young hearts and minds, to laywomen who are theologians and others who work with Afro-descendants in Latin America, to religious men and women working in various sectors of church ministry, to deacons and priests, and to one another.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was palpably at work in this process of

synodality. Not only is one privileged to engage in this process and to have a voice in the process, but by participating, one is ushered into the sacred discipline of listening to others. This process ennobles participants: those who speak, and those who listen. Finally, all participants are called to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd through the Holy Spirit at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the process.

While the synodal process requires significantly more planning, organization, effort and time than ordinary gatherings or conferences, the synodal process is more *effective*, particularly in the long-term, as considerably more persons are connected and invested in the ecclesial process, topics and decisions.

Especially in an age when baptized Catholics are disengaging from the church at an alarming rate, a synodal process that engages those on the margins can be just what the doctor ordered for a church wounded by clerical scandal and cultural secularism.



Bishop Oscar Cantú

Bishop Oscar Cantú has served as the Bishop of San Jose, California, since 2019. He is the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Subcommittee on Hispanic Affairs, and previously served as the bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico, from 2013-18.

# Philippine bishops urge church finances to disconnect from fossil fuels

Feb 3, 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)

## [Leaders](#)



Residents walk through mud in Manila, Philippines, Nov. 14, 2020, after flooding caused by Typhoon Vamco. (CNS/Reuters/Eloisa Lopez)

In one of the strongest declarations on climate change to date from the Catholic Church, the bishops of the Philippines have called for the local church to decline any donations with ties to the fossil fuel and extractive industries as part of a full-scale effort to disconnect church finances from the production of coal, oil and gas.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines delivered the directive, along with calling for church institutions to press their banks to phase out fossil fuel holdings, in a pastoral statement issued Jan. 28, the feast day of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Titled "A Call for Unity and Action amid a Climate Emergency and Planetary Crisis," the statement also outlines a plan for a national program to implement Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" — including participation in the Vatican's Laudato Si' Action Platform — and places church support behind a legislative proposal to recognize the legal rights of nature.

"The cries of the earth and the poor have only grown louder in recent years due to the economic, environmental, and social losses and damages inflicted by both crises" of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, "which were created from exploitative human activities," the Philippine bishops said in a press release.

Signed by conference president Bishop Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan, the [pastoral statement](#) laments that even as the pandemic has upended life, killed more than 5.6 million people globally and paused much economic activity, many past polluting practices have restarted.

"This is concerning as, while suffering from the impact of the pandemic, climate-vulnerable nations have also experienced intensifying calamities due to the instability of our biosphere," the bishops wrote, a reference to multiple deadly tropical storms, including [Super Typhoon Rai](#) in December, that have battered the island nation in the past decade.

Home to nearly 110 million people, the Philippines is one of the countries most at risk to the impacts of climate change, including more severe storms and storm surges, rising sea levels and ocean acidification that affects fishing. The capital of Manila is [one of the fastest-sinking cities](#) in the world.



That vulnerability, the bishops' conference said, places upon the country "the moral imperative of pursuing the most sustainable development pathway possible for the sake of current and future generations," particularly through its national elections in May.

While early on it appeared the pandemic may mark a turning point on global warming, the years 2020 and 2021 rank as the second and fifth hottest years on record, respectively. And after a small decline in 2020, [global emissions rebounded](#) nearly 5% to pre-pandemic levels in the past year.

The Philippine bishops said that despite Francis' encyclical and their [earlier ecological pastoral letter](#), in 2019, "we continue to suffer an increasingly warming world and ailing biosphere triggered by exploitative practices that benefit the wealthy few but cause poverty and hunger to many."



A worker stands on artificial sand or crushed dolomite, dumped on a portion of Manila Bay Sept. 4, 2020, as part of the Philippine government's efforts to rehabilitate and beautify the coastline. (CNS/Reuters/Eloisa Lopez)

In that 2019 pastoral letter, the Philippine bishops directed Catholic institutions to cease investments in coal-fired power plants, mining companies and other extractive projects, becoming one of at least a half

dozen national bishops' conferences so far to join the fossil fuel divestment movement.

Their latest pastoral statement pushes further.

In it, the bishops reaffirmed their support of the Paris Agreement goal of holding average global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, and to achieve that by achieving deep and rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. They urged the Philippines to peak its own emissions "much earlier," and said key to that will be rechanneling finances to "disable the coal industry" as well as ending "fossil gas," an [alternative term](#) some environmental activists use for natural gas.

In that vein, the bishops urged parishes and church organizations to review their banks' activities for social and environmental issues, and where there's financial exposure to fossil fuels, to press for the phase out of such investments. Absent a divestment policy, the bishops directed Catholic institutions to withdraw their finances from those banking centers no later than 2025.

"We are now all the more aware that many of the financial institutions in whom we place our trust have been instrumental in the rise of fossil fuels, as well as other destructive and exploitative industries like mining and logging. It is unacceptable that finances so graciously provided to us are used for such industries. Financial resources must be used solely for the Common Good, Integrity of Creation, and the Glory of our Creator," they said.

Instead, the bishops said that finances should be steered toward investments in renewable energy and ecological restoration and protection projects, and church groups should "lead by example" by adopting renewable energy and other sustainability



systems in their own facilities and communities. They also encouraged the development of education campaigns to promote divestment within congregations, schools and communities.

"We are now all the more aware that many of the financial institutions in whom we place our trust have been instrumental in the rise of fossil fuels."

— *The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines*



Argie Aguirre, a member of the River Warriors, gathers trash from the polluted Pasig River in Manila, Philippines, June 22, 2021. The River Warriors is a group of volunteers founded more than a decade ago with the sole purpose to pick up garbage in and around the river. (CNS/Reuters/Eloisa Lopez)

The bishops also asked that church organizations adopt a "non-acceptance" policy regarding donations of any kind from owners, operators and representatives of extractive industries, listing specifically coal, natural gas, mining, quarrying and logging.

In a statement, Fr. Antonio Labiao, executive secretary of Caritas Philippines, said that with the financial guidance "the Catholic Church has drawn the line. We will ensure that our due-diligence policies are in place. It is not anymore business as usual."

Christina Leaño, associate director of Laudato Si' Movement, told EarthBeat that the document's specifics make clear that the church intends "to pull the moral license from the fossil fuel industry."

She added that the bishops' proposal to deny donations from owners and operators of fossil fuel and extractive companies is a "pretty drastic" statement, especially in a country that is the [most dangerous in Asia for environmental defenders](#) that has only increased during President Rodrigo Duterte's time in office.

While other bishops' conferences have encouraged divestment, as did the bishops' final document from the 2019 Amazon synod, Leano said that none have been as explicit as what the Philippine bishops' conference has now put forward.

"They're taking it to the next level. And they're being very specific as opposed to kind of a broad statement," she said.

Explaining their directives on finances, the Philippine bishops cited the *Laudato Si'* implementation guidelines released by the Vatican in June 2020, which recommended fossil fuel divestment and reinvestment in renewable energy and sustainability initiatives.



Youth climate activists in Manila, Philippines, were among 4 million people worldwide who

participated in the Global Climate Strike in September 2019. (CNS/Courtesy of Global Catholic Climate Movement)

Since *Laudato Si'* was issued, the Catholic Church in the Philippines has been a leader in [responding to the pope's call](#) in that papal document to "protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations."

Beyond finances, the new pastoral statement builds upon that work by expanding its National Laudato Si' Program, which grew out of the 2019 pastoral letter.

The bishops' conference recommitted to creating an ecology desk within each of its 78 dioceses and archdioceses, with 15 already established, and directed bishops and religious superiors to prioritize support in their budgets for their work.

The conference also said it will institutionalize annual celebrations of the Season of Creation, in September, and Laudato Si' Week "to nourish our spirituality and awaken our identity as members of a single, sacred-Earth community called to care for our Common Home and all life in it."

The bishops' conference also lent their support to a rights of nature campaign around legislation currently in both houses of Congress. In addition, they called for government departments to involve local and Indigenous communities in all decisions around ecologically and socially hazardous projects, and for increased protections for environmental defenders and the lands they seek to protect.

The rights of nature bill, the bishops said, "can push forward a Philippine society where mining, fossil fuels, development aggression, and other forms of ecological destruction are cast away."

Leano said that for the bishops to include such language around biodiversity "and even to recognize that non-human [creatures] have rights is a huge thing."

She told EarthBeat the pastoral statement reinforces the Philippines as a leader on climate and ecological justice, and represents a call to action to the rest of the church, including in the United States.

"It's really a call to go inward and say, how are we going to respond? How are we going to respond to the climate crisis? How are we going to respond to what our brothers and sisters in the Philippines are doing?"



Brian Roewe

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Thursday, 3 February 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation

### Week Five: Encountering God through the Bible God Is Revealed in Our Lives

*Father Richard points out how the Bible is filled with stories of people encountering God—regardless of whether they got everything right or everything wrong!*

Let's state it clearly: One foundational and yet revolutionary idea of the Bible is that God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, in history, in

the concrete incarnations of life. God does not hold out for the pure, the spiritual, the right idea, or the ideal anything. Apparently, the biblical God would much rather be in relationship than merely be right in solitude! This is why Jesus stands religion on its head.

But it is also why we have to go through the seemingly laborious, boring, or even disturbing books of the Bible, such as Joshua, Judges, Kings, Chronicles, Leviticus, Numbers, and Revelation. We hear in these books about sin and war, adulteries and affairs, kings and killings, intrigues and deceits—the tragic and sad events of human life along with the ordinary and wonderful. Those books, documenting the life of real communities, of concrete and regular people, are telling us that “God comes to us disguised as our life” (a wonderful line I learned from my dear friend and colleague, Paula D’Arcy). But for most “religious” people this is actually a disappointment!

In the Bible, we see God using the very wounded lives of very ordinary people, who would never have passed the tests of later Roman canonization processes. Moses, Deborah, Elijah, Paul, and Esther were at least complicit in murdering; David was both an adulterer and a liar; there were rather neurotic prophets like Ezekiel, Obadiah, and Jeremiah; an entire history of ridiculously evil kings and warriors—yet all these are the ones God works through. They are not summarily dismissed.

God’s revelations are always concrete and specific. They are not a Platonic world of ideas and theories about which we can be right or wrong. *Revelation is not something we measure, but something or Someone we meet!* All of this is called the “mystery of incarnation.”

Our temptation now and always is *to trust in our faith tradition of trusting in God* instead of trusting in God. They are not the same thing! Often our faith is in our tradition in which we can talk about people who have trusted God in the past. That’s a sad way to avoid the experience itself, to avoid scary encounters with the living God, to avoid the ongoing Incarnation.

It’s not about becoming spiritual beings nearly as much as about becoming human beings. The biblical revelation is saying that we are already spiritual beings; we just don’t know it yet. The Bible tries to let us in on the secret, by revealing God in the ordinary. That’s why so much of the text seems so mundane, practical, specific, and, frankly, unspiritual! The principle of the Incarnation proclaims that matter and spirit have never been separate. Jesus came to tell us that these seemingly different worlds are and always have been one.

## Bomb threats against HBCUs should horrify all Catholics

4 February 2022  
by [NCR Editorial Staff](#)



The campus of Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans (CNS/Courtesy of Xavier University of Louisiana)

On the first day of Black History Month, [13 historically Black colleges and universities received bomb threats](#), including New Orleans' Xavier University.

[Xavier University of Louisiana](#), founded in 1915, is the only historically Black university in the United States that is also Catholic. This is the second bomb threat the school has received this year. These bomb threats horrify us as both Catholics and Americans.

These bomb threats are part of a longstanding pattern in America. White supremacists, from the days of Reconstruction through today, have historically used bomb threats/violence to intimidate Black Americans.

When the Ku Klux Klan was started on the morrow of the Civil War, its aim was to intimidate newly freed Black Americans so as to keep them from political and social participation, and to undermine the Reconstruction governments in the states of the former and failed Confederacy. Vigilante violence, especially lynching, was its preferred method of intimidation.

In the post-Reconstruction years, state-sanctioned violence was deployed, too, but vigilante violence was never abandoned. Sometimes, it was impossible to know where the one started and the other left off. The 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, shocked the nation, in part because the aftermath was televised. For White supremacists, the bombing was an extension of their standard operating procedures of intimidation, a difference in target but not in method.

The goal is always the same: intimidate Black women, men and children by using violence to destabilize the intimate and communal parts of their daily lives, including schools and worship spaces.

As Catholics, we are called to demonstrate our solidarity by denouncing any assault that threatens the dignity of any person. This is what it means to be a pro-life church, and it is imperative the church leaders and local church authorities condemn this violence.

If churches, schools, being with friends have all been deemed unsafe, where do Black women, men and children go to be in communion?

For those who are Black and Catholic, the assaults at Xavier and other HBCUs are also spiritual attacks. The attacks occur at a time when church leaders, [including the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, Archbishop José Gomez](#), are denouncing the Black Lives Matter movement and critical race theory, movements and theories many Catholics have found useful in learning what it means to stand against such racial violence. Our bishops need to show themselves to be shepherds to a flock that is vulnerable because it is hurting, and hurting because it is vulnerable.

[Last month](#), Gomez evoked the memory of Martin Luther King Jr., stating that Catholics must continue to "carry on his work for equality and justice."

Gomez added: "Let us continue to learn from him and imitate his example and prophetic witness."

We agree, and so we look forward to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops not only explicitly condemning this violence but also offering whatever support it can to Xavier and other schools afflicted by this.



The bishops must authentically pick up the baton of spiritual and moral and civic leadership that King carried.

Pope Francis, [when he addressed the U.S. Congress](#), cited the example of only four Americans, and one of them was King. Francis urged the country to heal the wounds of racial division that have persisted. The U.S. bishops must take up the King legacy and the challenge Francis delivered. They must urgently, and consistently, condemn any and all assaults against the Black community.

## Irish Redemptorists ask Vatican to reinstate priest barred from ministry over women's ordination

4 February 2022

by [Sarah Mac Donald](#)

[People](#)  
[Vatican](#)



The façade of the Vatican's Palace of the Holy Office, where the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is located, pictured in 2019 (NCR photo/Joshua J. McElwee)

**DUBLIN** — The Irish branch of the global Redemptorist religious order has called on the Vatican to reinstate a priest who was suspended from public ministry in 2012 primarily over his support for women's ordination.



Redemptorist Fr. Tony Flannery (Provided photo)

In a statement to NCR, the head of the Dublin province of the Redemptorists said he and his provincial council would like to see Fr. Tony Flannery — a member of the order who has been unable to minister as a priest for nearly 10 years — reinstated.

"It seems particularly disproportionate that sanctions imposed, as in the case of Fr. Flannery, for expressing theological and pastoral commentary in writing, are without time-limits," said Fr. Dan Baragry, the provincial. "This disproportionality is multiplied by reason of a present-day Church context, under the leadership of Pope Francis, which encourages theological reflection and debate."

Flannery is a popular Irish writer, retreat giver and, formerly, pastor. He was removed from public ministry in February 2012 after the Vatican's powerful Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith expressed concern over



several columns he had written for [Reality](#), a Redemptorist-run magazine in Ireland.

Writing in his blog [recently](#), Flannery said the issues he had written about in relation to priesthood, women and ministry and Catholic sexual teaching, which the congregation objected to, "are now being discussed widely and freely right around the Church, with no fear of sanctions."

Baragry echoed that view, saying: "It is striking that at all levels of the Church, Church leaders and theologians are freely expressing perspectives similar to those articulated by Fr. Flannery, for which he has apparently received a life-long penalty."

Flannery turns 75 this year, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his sanction and barring from public ministry by the joint action of the Vatican congregation and the Redemptorist headquarters in Rome.

In his blog, Flannery noted that the three main prelates at the Vatican congregation who dealt with his case are no longer involved with the office. Cardinal William Levada, the office's prefect 2005-12, died in 2019; Cardinal Gerhard Müller, the subsequent prefect, was replaced in 2017; and Archbishop Giacomo Morandi, the office's former second in command, was [recently appointed](#) as bishop of Italy's Diocese of Reggio Emilia-Guastalla.

Morandi had taken center stage in Flannery's case in 2020, [informing Redemptorist leadership in Rome](#) that the priest should not return to ministry without first signing four strict oaths of fidelity to Catholic teachings.

The document was sent to the Redemptorist superior general, Fr. Michael Brehl, a Canadian who has headed the global order since 2009.

In the correspondence to Brehl, Morandi wrote: "... the Congregation has decided that Fr. Flannery should not return to public ministry prior to submitting a signed statement regarding his positions on homosexuality, civil unions between persons of the same sex, and the admission of women to the priesthood." A fourth area related to gender theory.

'Church leaders and theologians are freely expressing perspectives similar to those articulated by Fr. Flannery, for which he has apparently received a life-long penalty.'

—Fr. Dan Baragry

In his recent blog post, Flannery said he would like an outside review of the process by which the Vatican congregation dealt with his case.

"I continue to carry a grievance that I wasn't even given the most basic of human rights in my dealing with that body," said Flannery. "That grievance was compounded by the present head of the CDF, [Cardinal] Luis Ladaria, when he claimed in reply to a question [by Joshua McElwee of the National Catholic Reporter](#), that they had tried to dialogue with me. They never did, never made any direct contact with me at all."

Baragry said he and his provincial leadership team in Ireland support Flannery's call for an outside review "and we would expect and hope that such a review would lead to his reappointment to ministry."

Baragry said the Redemptorists in Ireland have taken several initiatives in pursuit of this objective, all of which have faced various obstacles and barriers.

Asked by NCR if he supported Flannery's call for a review, Brehl responded: "It is very regrettable that this situation has

continued for so long a period. At this time, I am unable to comment further."

A noted Irish civil lawyer, Robert Dore, said the Vatican was "guilty of robbing Fr. Flannery of his lawful entitlement to fair procedures in the context of Irish civil law."

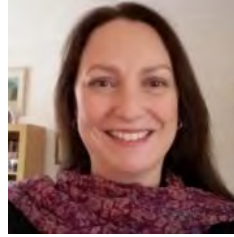
Dore, who successfully pursued a high-profile defamation case against Irish national broadcaster RTÉ for its treatment of a different Catholic priest, said Flannery had been "denied his constitutionally enshrined rights."

In an email to NCR, Flannery said he thought Brehl could choose to unilaterally lift his suspension.

"Due to the fact that the Vatican is a very different place to what it was ten years ago, and allowing that it was the Redemptorist Superior General, Fr Brehl, who suspended me from ministry, albeit under orders from the CDF, I believe that Fr. Brehl could now unilaterally lift that suspension and, in that way, right the wrong of ten years ago," said Flannery.

In his blog, Flannery argued that his request for an independent review is not too much to ask from an institution that proclaims that it stands for truth, justice and love.

"If that review took place and was done openly, then I would happily sit down with any Church authority and discuss my views and opinions," said the priest. "Let them then pass judgment on me as they see fit, and as long as I was fairly heard and respected, I hope I could accept the verdict."



Sarah Mac Donald

Sarah Mac Donald is a freelance journalist based in Dublin.

Friday, 4 February 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week Five: Encountering God through the Bible

### Reading with the Divine Presence

*Lectio divina is a contemplative way of reading and relating to Scripture and other sacred writings. The medieval monk Guigo II (d. 1188) names the four steps of this foundational contemplative practice:*

One day when I was busy working with my hands I began to think about our spiritual work, and all at once four stages in spiritual exercise came into my mind: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. These make a ladder for monks by which they are lifted up from earth to heaven. It has few rungs, yet its length is immense and wonderful, for its lower end rests upon the earth, but its top pierces the clouds and touches heavenly secrets. [1]

*James Finley has taught extensively on lectio divina and Guigo II. In the most recent season of his podcast Turning to the Mystics, he describes the intention to be present to God that underlies all lectio divina practice:*

We sit in prayer, renewing our faith that we're sitting there in God's presence all

about us and within us, closer to us than we are to ourselves. And we've come here with no other intention, but a kind of rendezvous with God, as a way to turn to God to help us to deepen our experience of God's presence in our life. That's why we're there. It's a moment of intimacy, of devotional sincerity, of deepening this union with God in prayer. [2]

*Finley explains Guigo's instructions for transformative reading:*

The power of God's words works as leaven in the heart, awakening us to a personal experience of the presence of God that Scripture reveals. Read in this way, the Scriptures are one long love letter from God. Each verse tells the story of the love that perpetually calls us to itself. . . .

The first rung of the ladder is that of reading the Scriptures as a way of seeking God. Then, in the midst of a quiet, sincere seeking, there is the graced event of coming upon words that embody that which we seek. As we read, we come upon something of God's presence in that which we are reading. And in coming upon that which we seek, we descend into the depths of our awakened heart, from which there emerge thoughts, images, and connotations that simply flow out, without being seized or grasped hold of in any way. . . .

Daily meditation practice goes best as we learn to stand firmly on the first rung of the ladder to heaven. By this I mean learning to be attentive to God's voice reverberating in a poem, a novel, the refrains of a song, a report on the evening news, or a conversation overheard in the waiting room at the doctor's office. In learning to stand firmly on the first rung of the ladder to heaven, we learn to be receptive and open to God, uttering us into existence as we wash

out a pot, or fix a broken gate, or slip off our shoes at the end of the day. [3]