

*Articles of Interest
For
13 February 2022*

Sunday, 6 February 2022

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



Week Six: We Are One and Many

We Are All Christ's Body

In this homily based on 1 Corinthians 12, Father Richard shows how the apostle Paul understood our unity in diversity through the metaphor of the Body of Christ:

Humanity consistently has to face the problem of unity and diversity. We're not very good at understanding it. That's why we continue to struggle in our society with rampant racism, along with sexism, homophobia, classism, nationalism, and more. We habitually choose our smaller groups, because we don't know how to belong to a larger group. That demands too much letting go.

The apostle Paul writes: "The body is one, although it has many parts; and all the parts of the body, though many, are still one body. And so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). Here Paul develops the doctrine

known as the Body of Christ. This isn't easy for Westerners to understand, because we are deeply trained in cultural individualism. So much so, we don't even recognize our lack. When we try to be holy without one another, it doesn't work—because only the Whole is Holy. Individually we are too small, too fragile, too broken to fully represent the Mystery of Christ.

Paul continues by emphasizing unity: "For in One Spirit, we were all baptized into One Body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons. We were all given of One Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13). In this verse, Paul tears down notions of nationalism, classes, and castes.

Then he honors diversity: "The Body is not a single part, but many" (1 Cor. 12:14). Each of us reading this meditation is a different and unique person. And yet at the same time, we are not so different and unique. The mystics go to deeper levels to realize that *we are more one than we are many*. When we can move from "I" to "we," our conversion begins. Most of us start by thinking "It's all about me!" Only generous, unconditional love can free us from this self-isolation—but for many this only comes later.

We often ask our isolated selves, "Am I perfect enough? Good enough?" Yes, you are perfect and good enough! Yet as individuals, we are too fragile, too insecure, too small, to bear the weight of glory. And also too little and weak to bear the burden of sin.

We are corporately quite stupid and sinful. I wrote a small book trying to show that Paul actually teaches a most subversive thing: *Evil is corporately agreed upon as good before individuals ever dare to do it.* [1] We all cooperate in absurd systems. When we humbly and honestly recognize this, we learn much more readily how to join hands with one another. We're trained to compare and compete; that's the nature of capitalism. The gospel undercuts that by saying, first of all, that we are one; and secondly, that each of us is a unique individual. Holding our oneness and individuality together reveals the Christian mystery: "You are all Christ's Body, and individually, you are parts of it" (1 Cor. 12:27).

Monday, 7 February 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation

Week Six: We Are One and Many

The Spirit of Ubuntu

CAC friend Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis finds inspiration in the African concept of "ubuntu," which means "I am who I am because we are who we are."

The ubuntu vision of relatedness can provide healing in the midst of our many current crises and divisions:

Even before COVID-19 showed up in our global family, we were living in what I call "hot-mess times." In our current context, race and ethnicity, caste and color, gender and sexuality, socioeconomic status and education, religion and political party have all become reasons to divide and be conquered by fear and rancor. . . . Put

simply, we are in a perilous time, and the answer to the question "Who are we to be?" will have implications for generations to come.

We have a choice to make. We can answer this question with diminished imagination, by closing ranks with our tribe and hiding from our human responsibility to heal the world. Or we can answer the question of who we are to be another way: We can answer it in the spirit of *ubuntu*. The concept comes from the Zulu phrase *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which literally means that a person is a person through other people. Another translation is, "I am who I am because we are who we are." . . . With this in mind, *who I will be* is deeply related to *who you are*. In other words, we are each impacted by the circumstances that impact those around us. What hurts you hurts me. What heals you heals me. What causes you joy causes me to rejoice, and what makes you sad also causes me to weep.

By channeling the ancient wisdom of *ubuntu*, we can engineer a badly needed love revolution to rise up out of the ashes of our current reality. . . . The empathy that grows from listening to others, from connecting with our neighbors, and from loving our neighbors as we love ourselves can define the courses of action we take. [1]

Father Richard finds a similarly unifying perspective in the spirituality of Julian of Norwich (1343–c. 1416). He writes:

The divisions, dichotomies, and dualisms of the world can only be overcome by a *unitive consciousness* at every level: personal, relational, social, political, cultural, in inter-religious dialogue, and spirituality in particular. A transformed people unite all within themselves, so they can then do the same in the world. [2]

My favorite Christian mystic, Julian of Norwich, used the Old English term “oneing” to describe what happens between God and the soul. As Julian put it, “By myself I am nothing at all; but in general *I am, I hope, in the oneing of love . . .* for it is in this oneing that the life of all people consists.” She also wrote, “The charity of God creates in us such a oneing that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another” and “In the sight of God, all humans are oned, and one person is all people.” [3]

Breaking the silence of human trafficking: Catholic sisters in Zambia speak out

7 February 2022

by Eucharía Madueke

Trafficking



Sisters from across Zambia attended a workshop in November 2021 in Makeni, Lusaka, on advocacy against human trafficking. The sisters stand with the signs they made as part of their awareness-raising efforts. (Sr. Eucharía Madueke)

Editor's note: In observance of the Feb. 8 feast day of Sr. Josephine Bakhita, the patron saint of human trafficking survivors, which is also the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, Global Sisters Report is publishing two special columns about a workshop held in Zambia by the Africa Faith and Justice Network to raise awareness among sisters about modern-day slavery and train them as advocates against it. (Read the other column here.) This is an example of efforts across the globe that sisters are undertaking to help stop human trafficking. Learn more at Talitha Kum; the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, and through Global Sisters Report's extensive coverage.

Over 62 Catholic nuns from across Zambia, representing 45 religious communities, gathered last fall in Makeni, Lusaka, at the City of Hope Retreat Center in Zambia to reflect on "Religious Vocation, Church, Society, and Prophetic Witnessing."

This workshop was part of the Africa Faith and Justice Network (or AFJN) Washington, D.C. Women's Empowerment Project, aimed at helping sisters see how their religious vocation and their faith call them to be justice advocates.

The workshop was also intended to help the sisters reflect on the importance of being the voice of those who are not often heard — and those in our societies who, as Pope Francis puts it, are often neglected and consigned to the margins of society — mobilizing the energies of these sisters for engagement in the public square, through advocacy rooted in Catholic principles and values.



– Sisters at a workshop in November learned that Zambia is both a destination and a ‘sending’ country for victims of human trafficking. (Sr. Eucharia Madueke)

The sisters gathered on Nov. 13, hearing a social analysis from the African context, the biblical foundation for advocacy, and advocacy steps and strategies. They also reflected on issues affecting Zambia — human trafficking, the environment, foreign nations including China, multinational corporations, exploitative activities, impact of investments, land acquisition, unemployment, and challenges faced by families — and ways these violate the rights and dignity of the human person created in God's image.

Our interaction with the sisters during the discussion showed that many of them were not conversant with the issue of human trafficking and are not active in the global effort to end this evil, so the empowerment workshop made human trafficking issue a major focus of the workshop. One of the sisters said that "human trafficking is real in Zambia but all along I thought it is a thing which happens in other countries, especially western countries" — evidencing a knowledge gap on human trafficking issues among the sisters.

International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking

Join others around the world on Feb. 8, the feast day of St. Josephine Bakita, the patron saint of trafficking survivors, for the International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking. This year's theme focuses on the economic imbalances that victimize women and underlies the scourge of trafficking, which you can learn more about [here](#).

The U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking is organizing the U.S. portion of the "prayer marathon" which begins around 10 a.m. EST. The livestream is available on the [UISG YouTube channel](#) and [here](#).

USCSAHT has also prepared a trafficking prevention [Toolkit 2022](#) with resources for the Feb. 8 celebrations and for ongoing efforts to end human trafficking. The kit includes information about human trafficking and how to end it; prayer and faith resources; shareable social media posts; and other resources.

For information on how migrants and refugees can be particularly vulnerable to trafficking, see the [anti-trafficking page](#) of the U.S. bishops' Justice for Immigrants website.

—*Gail DeGeorge*

The analysis of human trafficking study that was commissioned by Africa Faith and Justice Network before the workshop was presented to the sisters by a researcher; this exposed the sisters to the concept of human trafficking in general and in Zambia in particular. It opened their eyes to the evil of human trafficking and brought them up to date on the current situation of human

trafficking and the exploitation of human persons in the country.

Zambia acceded to the [Palermo Protocol](#) to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons in 2005, yet the country remains the source, transit and destination country for men, women and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation.

Just as in other parts of the world, an intricate network of actors — including transporters, border control agents, acquaintances, relatives and workers in massage parlors, casinos, brothels, employment companies and employers of domestic servants — continue to facilitate human trafficking in Zambia.

These [trafficking rings](#) exploit Zambians and people from Asia and other African countries in the mining, construction and manufacturing industries, casinos and massage parlors. Unfortunately, there was no known public government forum to educate the masses and create public awareness about human trafficking to help the masses protect themselves.

Conscious that human trafficking violates the dignity of the person and affects most aspects of Zambian society — families, children, students, domestic and migrant workers, young people searching for a better life, and young people in the hospitality industry — and saddened by the general complexity in both the government and general public, the sisters were convinced that this is the time their prophetic voice is needed in the public square to break the silence that sustains the evils of human trafficking in their society.



Sisters also worked in small groups during the workshop and prepared for their role as advocate for greater enforcement of anti-trafficking laws in Zambia and to raise awareness of the reality of trafficking in the country. (Sr. Eucharía Madueke)

This realization and conviction moved the sisters to public action to end the silence around human trafficking. During the oral evaluation of the workshop, one of the sisters stated that: "As prophetic women, [we] have a duty and obligation to speak out on issues that affect poor people in our midst because if [we] don't, then nobody else will do it."

Equipped with knowledge and advocacy skills, the sisters, as prophets, stood up in public against human trafficking. They spoke up in public against the structures and situations that perpetuate and sustain human trafficking and other forms of injustice in the world and in their country. The last day of the workshop was spent holding a public awareness campaign targeted at educating the masses on human trafficking and pushing the government to live up to their responsibility. The sisters hosted radio talk shows and panel discussions on human trafficking on popular [Radio Maria Yatsani](#) 99.3 FM and [Loyola Television Zambia](#). They also used these resources to hold press conferences on human trafficking issues.



Sisters hold a panel discussion on Loyola Television Zambia Nov. 16, 2021: from left, Sr. Astridah Banda; Sr. Elvine Msimuko; Sr. Kayula Lesa; and Sr. Sylvia Mulenga. (Sr. Eucharia Madueke)

The sisters also engaged the government, paying advocacy visits to four government ministries — immigration, home affairs, the vice president and the chief justice. They also visited the director of the international bus station in Lusaka because this bus station was identified as the continental hub and transit center for human trafficking. The sisters demanded that government efforts to combat human trafficking in the country be intensified, urging the government to enhance its efforts by mobilizing the appropriate government agencies to work collaboratively to:

- Protect the lives and dignity of the people living in the country who are objectified and exploited through human trafficking;
- Set up a mechanism to protect migrant workers within Zambian borders who are abused and exploited, as many of them have their passports and national identity documents seized by their domestic employers;
- Establish a mechanism for creating awareness accessible to the wider public, especially those in the rural

areas where many of the victims are taken;

- Create training programs for law enforcement and immigration officers and the members of the judiciary on human trafficking;
- Establish a pool of interpreters to facilitate communication with the victims of human trafficking;
- Facilitate an educational environment that promotes skills training for young people so they can be productive and self-reliant individuals who are able to contribute to the development of our society;
- Establish more places of safety for victims' protection;
- Strengthen collaboration with neighboring countries to tighten security at border points;
- Strengthen the training of police, immigration and security agencies in human trafficking.

As the sisters tasked the government to protect both Zambians and all that come through its border through trafficking, they pledged to continue to work to promote the common good as individuals and as a group, tackling this evil of human trafficking affecting their country. They pledged to organize awareness seminars in their communities and institutions under their care, to provide counseling to rescued victims, and to find ways to reintegrate victims as productive members of society.

At the end of the workshop on Nov. 17, the AFJN team was happy to see that the sisters returned home feeling empowered to address issues of injustice in their communities — especially as perpetuated by human traffickers. One of the sisters promised, "I will practically find out how

much human trafficking is going on in the [Copperbelt](#) to see how I can be a voice to the voiceless there."

We were grateful that Loyola TV promised to give the sisters another opportunity in December to continue to educate the masses on human trafficking and other issues of great concern to the sisters. And we are glad that Zambia has joined the ranks of the [other countries](#) where we have offered these workshops!



Eucharía Madueke

Eucharía Madueke is a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur from Nigeria. With an academic background in education, religion, development and public policy, she has taught on the secondary and university levels in Nigeria and the United States. She has led many workshops in Africa in grassroots organizing and advocacy centered around Catholic social teaching. She served as provincial of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Nigerian Province. Presently she is the women's empowerment project coordinator for the Africa Faith and Justice Network, a religious nonprofit organization that focuses on US-Africa relations.

Abortion debate in Nevada presages more confusion

7 February 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)



Rep. Susie Lee, D-Nev., speaks at a campaign event

In a preview of things to come, U.S. Rep. Susie Lee of Nevada and Bishop George Thomas of Las Vegas published op-eds in the Las Vegas Sun on the subject of abortion last week as likely to be misunderstood as not. The back-and-forth leads me to issue a heartfelt plea to all who plan to write on this topic: Be precise and be generous.

If, as expected, the U.S. Supreme Court overrules *Roe v. Wade* and turns the issue back to the states, we can expect pro-choice Catholic politicians and their bishops to take to their local media to debate this already fraught and complicated issue. So it is worthwhile looking at these two opposing op-eds to see how they might have been more clear and, just so, more helpful.

Rep. Lee [argued](#) that the U.S. Senate should codify *Roe*. "We don't know what this new year holds for our nation, but we do know it is crucial for us to take control and codify *Roe's* legacy before it is too late," she writes.

I am never exactly sure what anyone means when they say they want to "codify *Roe*." The essential holding in *Roe* was that women have a constitutional right to an abortion, but no statute can confer a constitutional right. Any federal legislation is likely to be challenged on federalism grounds, and that challenge would likely win.

"I voted for the Women's Health Protection Act because politics doesn't belong in the doctor's office and should have no bearing on an individual's health care decisions," Lee affirms.

That is the same argument Republicans made when opposing the Affordable Care Act, for example, falsely claiming the government would prevent people from choosing their own doctor. Call me silly, but when your political opponents use the exact same logic and language, shouldn't you question that logic and language?

What likely provoked the bishop's concern was when Lee wrote:

As a Catholic, I have a deep understanding of the moral dilemma that the choice to have an abortion presents. At the same time, the choice to become a mother is an extremely personal one, and that choice should stay between a woman, her family and her doctor. When extremists insert themselves into this decision, they refuse to recognize women's bodily autonomy, potentially put them in life-threatening circumstances, and often coerce them into having a future that they neither wanted nor prepared for.

I wouldn't say her understanding is that deep. The choice of whether or not to take an innocent human life is not that big a moral dilemma in Catholic theology. Whether in the womb or in war, Catholics believe it is wrong to take an innocent

human life — and not merely because it is one of the commandments. Everything about our Catholic, sacramental worldview invites us to be pro-life. This is not just about morals. It is about a disposition toward all of reality, a fundamental stance towards human life as a gift from God.

If Lee had said she supported the church's teaching on the inviolability of human life, but did not think that teaching could be easily legislated in a pluralistic democracy, at least not in our pluralistic democracy, that would be one thing. Legislation is complicated and the church does not teach that everything that is immoral should also be illegal, although protecting innocent human life is not so easily abandoned on behalf of other personal or social goods.

Instead, she cites her religion and then moves on to repeat libertarian talking points you would expect from Planned Parenthood. Lee's decision to bring up her religion, and then not actually wrestle with it, is disturbing because it clouds what is not very cloudy: the church's teaching against the taking of fetal life.

My colleagues are tired of hearing me say it, but it is exactly on point: In an issue as foundational as this, just because a Catholic has a thought does not mean it is a Catholic thought that has been had.

Bishop Thomas, in his [op-ed](#) was at pains to make sure people understood the congresswoman was not speaking for the church. He said Lee "articulated a position that stands in stark contrast to the hallowed moral teaching of the Catholic church."

Thomas noted that Lee never once mentioned the consequences of her stance for the unborn children who have been lost to abortion. It is this absence of any

solidarity for the unborn that is most disturbing among pro-choice advocates.

It is this absence of any solidarity for the unborn that is most disturbing among pro-choice advocates.

The bishop then invited Rep. Lee and all Catholics, not just politicians, to think again about their stance on this totemic issue. "It is my sincere hope that Catholic politicians and Catholics at large take this moment to look deeply into their own hearts, and re-examine the church's moral conviction on the inviolability and dignity of human life."

That is my sincere hope also, but as we get closer to the Supreme Court's decision, that hope is seeming more and more remote.

"If a politician from the Diocese of Las Vegas finds himself or herself at odds with the church's teaching on the sacredness of human life," Thomas continued, "I ask him or her voluntarily to refrain from the reception of Holy Communion while holding public office. I place the onus of that decision upon the individual politician's shoulders, and not on the backs of Pastors or Eucharistic Ministers."

We all should ask ourselves: Am I really in communion with the church when I hold tenaciously to a point of view that is so fundamentally at odds with not only the church's moral teaching but with the church's entire worldview?

It is not an easy question for any of us. I wonder how many conservative politicians who demonstrate indifference to the death of innocent migrants ask themselves that question before heading up to the altar to take Communion? I wonder how many people who deny climate change— which is now as much of a pressing life issue as abortion and only an obscurantist would say

otherwise — approach the Communion rail without any compunction?

Bishop Thomas' op-ed would have benefited from an addition. Bishops need to witness to the consistent ethic of life when they write about abortion — or the death penalty or war. The church, almost alone in this confusing and confused culture, is morally consistent in its defense of human life across the range of public policy issues. That fact cannot go unmentioned without the bishops looking like they are taking sides in a partisan divide.

More problematic was a related [interview](#) Bishop Thomas gave to the Sun. According to the reporter, Jessica Hill, "Thomas said he 'absolutely' believed Biden should refrain from receiving the sacrament as well."

If Thomas said that, he is wrong. No one, not even a bishop, can tell what Biden's conscience tells him.

But that is a big "if," because earlier in the same piece Hill wrote: "Thomas joins the legions of other Catholic leaders nationally who have blurred the lines in the separation of church and state in calling for Catholic lawmakers in support of abortion rights to not participate in communion."

There are no separation of church and state issues involved about the discipline of the church regarding admissibility to the sacraments. So Thomas may not have usurped the conscience of the president as the reporter suggested.

What we do know for sure is that this discussion will only intensify as we get closer to the Supreme Court's expected June decision. After that, the discussion will likely shift to all 50 state legislatures. At that point, a glaring challenge manifests itself:

After almost 50 years of prophetically witnessing to the need to see *Roe* overturned, what kind of legislation, exactly, do the bishops want? It is a more difficult, a more prosaic, challenge than some are willing to admit and it will help if the bishops are very, very precise in their language and in their analysis.



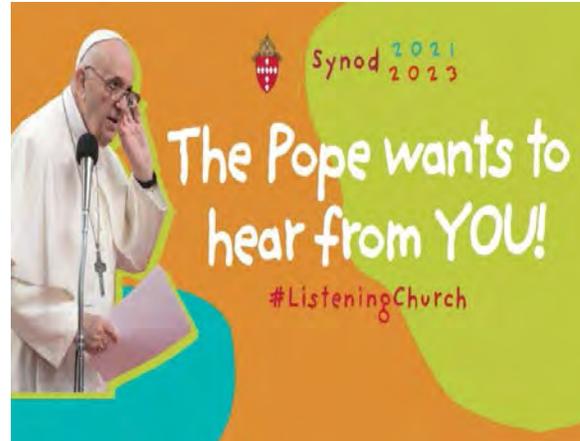
Michael Sean Winters

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

Synodal process showing good progress, some challenges, Vatican says

7 February 2022

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



This image on the website of the Diocese of Raleigh encourages Catholics in eastern North Carolina to take an online survey. (CNS photo/Diocese of Raleigh)

VATICAN CITY — The Catholic Church worldwide is showing good progress and "much joy" after the opening of the synodal process, but there also have been some "uncertainties" and challenges, said the ordinary council of the Synod of Bishops.

"There is growing awareness that the synodal conversion to which all the baptized are called is a lengthy process that will prolong itself well beyond 2023," the council said in a press release Feb. 7.

"The desire all over the world is (that) this synodal journey, which has begun at the local level," continues "so that tangible signs of synodality might increasingly be manifest as constitutive of the church," it said.

The ordinary council met in person and online Jan. 26 to discuss the progress being made on the synodal process around the world and to elaborate the criteria for the "reports" to be prepared by dioceses and bishops' conferences and submitted to the general secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, it said in a statement published Feb. 7 at [synod.va](#).

"It seems that the novelty of the synodal process has given rise to much joy and dynamism," it said. Nearly 98% of all bishops' conferences and synods of Eastern Catholic churches worldwide have appointed a person or an entire team to implement the synodal process and a large number of initiatives have been set up to promote consultation and discernment.

"Many of the faithful perceive the synodal process as a crucial moment in the church's life, as a learning process as well as an opportunity for conversion and renewal of ecclesial life. At the same time, various difficulties have also emerged," it said.

"Fears and reticence are reported among some groups of the faithful and among the clergy. There is also a certain mistrust among the laity who doubt that their contribution will really be taken into consideration," it said.

Among the challenges it noted were: a "reluctance" by some clergy; a need for formation, "especially in listening and discernment so that the synod is authentically a spiritual process and not reduced to a parliamentary debate"; a need for mutual listening based on prayer and Scripture; a need to improve the participation of young people; and the need to involve those distanced from the church.

The pandemic has also limited opportunities to meet in person, which is important for "mutual listening and communal discernment," it said. "The consultation of the people of God cannot be reduced to a mere questionnaire."

Last October, Pope Francis formally opened the process leading up to the assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2023 and bishops around the world were to open the process in their dioceses soon after. The diocesan

phase, which runs until August, will focus on listening to and consulting the people of God.

Documents and resources are available in a number of languages at www.synod.va and www.synodresources.org/.

Archbishop of Canterbury: South Sudan trip with Pope Francis may happen in coming months

7 February 2022

by [Christopher White](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis greets Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury at the conclusion of a two-day retreat for the political leaders of South Sudan, at the Vatican in this April 11, 2019, file photo. Pope Francis, Archbishop Welby, and the Rev. Jim Wallace, moderator of the Church of Scotland, marked the 10th anniversary of South Sudan's independence July 9, 2021, and again promised to visit the country when it is at peace. (CNS photo/Vatican Media via Reuters)

ROME — Pope Francis and Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby may undertake their much anticipated, but delayed joint trip to South Sudan in "the next few months" to encourage peace in a country still recovering from a bloody civil war and a humanitarian crisis.

"God willing, sometime in the next few months, perhaps year, we will go and see them in Juba, not in Rome, and see what progress can be made," [said](#) the head of the global Anglican Communion on Feb. 6, referring to South Sudan's leaders.

"That is history," said Welby of the likely trip that will mark the first time the two ecumenical leaders have traveled together in such a capacity.

Francis and Welby had sought to visit the war-torn country in 2017, although the country's violent conflict and deteriorating conditions had [foiled those plans](#).

During his Feb. 6 remarks at an arts festival in Belfast, Ireland, Welby recalled a [2019 retreat](#) at the Vatican where Francis met together with both the South Sudanese president and the country's rebel leadership.

Following an address, which Welby recalled as "utterly beautiful," Francis — in a surprise gesture — knelt down and kissed the feet of the 5-member leadership delegation from South Sudan, begging both the president and the rebel leadership not to return to civil war.

"I could see tears running down their faces," Welby recalled. "Tears were running down every face there, including the BBC cameraman."

"I won't say the war ended, but it was the turning point," he added.

In December, the Vatican's foreign minister, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, traveled to the South Sudanese capital of Juba, where he met with both the country's political and religious leaders.

While noting that "there is no perfect time for any such visit," Gallagher [said](#) there was "strong support" from local authorities for a papal trip in 2022.



Christopher White

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Germany's Synodal Assembly votes for Catholic women deacons by large majority

7 February 2022

by [Catholic News Service](#)

[Vatican](#)



Maria Boxberg, theologian and spiritual director of the Synodal Path, speaks during the third Synodal Assembly in Frankfurt, Germany, Feb. 5, 2021. (CNS photo/Julia Steinbrecht, KNA).

FRANKFURT, GERMANY — The Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany wants laypeople to be able to participate in choosing bishops and wants the church to have women deacons.

The third Synodal Assembly to bring about reforms to the Catholic Church ended Feb. 5 with the first concrete decisions of the process. Most German bishops signaled they are prepared to support far-reaching change in the Catholic Church.

For three days, nearly 230 delegates — lay and clerical — discussed reforms based on texts that had been drawn up in four working forums and reflecting theological arguments they hope to present to Rome in 2023, at the end of the Synodal Path process.

This third of five planned synodal assemblies marked the first time that the highest body of the Synodal Path adopted some fundamental texts in a second reading. The texts received approval of more than two-thirds of all delegates, in addition to the approval of more than two-thirds of the bishops.

But two years after the Synodal Path process started, the Vatican has yet to give a clear signal of support. Limburg Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops'

conference, announced that he met with Pope Francis in January and that he is in dialogue with Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops. Bishop Bätzing said a discussion group between the synod secretariat and the executive committee of the Synodal Path in Germany will be established.

The pope's representative to Germany, Archbishop Nikola Eterovic, greeted the assembly and reminded delegates Pope Francis "is the point of reference and the center of unity for more than 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide, 22.6 million of whom live in Germany." He said the pope often speaks of synodality, but warns against "parliamentarism, formalism, intellectualism and clericalism."

At the news conference after the assembly, when asked what support there is from Rome, Bishop Bätzing said, "Rome is not the world church." Bishop Bätzing made clear that he sees reforms being discussed in 2023 at Synod of Bishops on synodality, the consultation process for which has already begun.

Pope Francis has encouraged synodality, a process of discernment he describes as listening to the Holy Spirit through the word of God, prayer and adoration after listening to one another.

The German Catholic news agency KNA reported the condition of an episcopal two-thirds majority was included in the statutes of the Synodal Path at the insistence of the Vatican, to prevent things being decided there that could mean a break with church doctrine. As few as 23 episcopal "no" votes would be enough to prevent audacious demands, KNA reported. But conversely, the explicit approval of more than two-thirds of the bishops means a kind of stamp of approval that other magisterial bodies,

including those in Rome, cannot simply overlook.

Among the demands made at the three-day meeting were a new moral teaching on sex, including a reassessment of homosexuality; the opening of the priesthood to women; a relaxation of the obligation of celibacy for priests; and a change in the approach to power.

The resolutions passed by the Synodal Assembly have varying prospects of taking effect, since many of the desired changes affect practices that are subject to universal church rules and cannot simply be handled differently in Germany.

The text, "Women in sacramental ministry," says: "In the Roman Catholic Church, a process will be initiated in a transparent manner, with a commission taking the lead, which will continue the Synodal Path in Germany in a sustainable manner. A commission will be established to deal exclusively with the issue of the sacramental ministry of people of all genders. Scientific excellence and spiritual concerns in the sense of the proclamation of the Christian Gospel are to be combined with each other."

That text will be returned to the forum on women before being presented to a future assembly for final adoption.

In 2016, Pope Francis reiterated St. John Paul II's 1994 ruling that women cannot be priests. However, Pope Francis has set up a Vatican commission to study the role of women deacons in early Christianity.

As far as election of a diocesan bishop, the assembly called for a lay decision-making body that, with the cathedral chapter in a diocese, will put forward the list of potential bishop candidates to the Vatican.

The first reading of texts included discussing the rights of LGBTQ Catholics, especially in light of church labor laws. The latter can be changed to bring them in line with German anti-discriminatory labor laws and does not need approval from the Vatican. Nearly 90% of delegates approved the text on "magisterial reassessment of homosexuality."

Gregor Podschun, chairman of the Federation of German Catholic Youth, the umbrella organization of 17 Catholic youth associations, told the assembly: "The church has caused great suffering to queer people. Now we are at a point of change, and we can change that. The church can again get close to people."

At a news conference after the assembly, Irme Stetter-Karp, president of the Central Committee of German Catholics and the lay co-president of the Synodal Path, spoke of women's rights in the church: "I have experienced years in which women have made church possible locally in the community but have not been valued by our church. I am no longer willing to tolerate that — the debate about access to all offices and ministries therefore touches me personally very much."

"Human rights in the church will only be a reality when there is justice for all genders, blessings for all, participation of all in decisions that concern all," she said. She added that the Synodal Path has put changes on the agenda that have been overdue for decades.

KNA reported that Bishop Peter Kohlgraf of Mainz said he saw high expectations that something had to happen quickly, adding: "I would be a little more cautious about that, because the involvement of the universal church is always important. A lot is already

gained if the door is opened to a conversation with the universal church.

"It is perhaps a little too optimistic to expect the outcome to be the big breakthrough for the currently quite disastrous state of the church, but they are initial steps," he added.

Tuesday ,8 February 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Six: We Are One and Many

Members of One Diverse Family

A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished.

—Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*

Author and activist Mungi Ngomane follows the passion of her recently deceased grandfather, the South African bishop and human rights activist Desmond Tutu, believing that ubuntu provides a unifying and hopeful vision for our diverse world:

Ubuntu is a way of life from which we can all learn. . . . Originating from a Southern

African philosophy, it encompasses all our aspirations about how to live life well, together. We feel it when we connect with other people and share a sense of humanity; when we listen deeply and experience an emotional bond; when we treat ourselves and other people with the dignity they deserve. . . .

*I was raised in a community that taught me *ubuntu* as one of my earliest lessons. My grandfather, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, explained the essence of *ubuntu* as, “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.”*

*In my family, we were brought up to understand that a person who has *ubuntu* is one whose life is worth emulating. The bedrock of the philosophy is respect, for yourself and for others. So if you’re able to see other people, even strangers, as fully human you will never be able to treat them as disposable or without worth. . . .*

*Ubuntu teaches us to also look *outside* ourselves to find answers. It’s about seeing the bigger picture; the other side of the story. *Ubuntu* is about reaching out to our fellow men and women, through whom we might just find the comfort, contentment and sense of belonging we crave. *Ubuntu* tells us that individuals are nothing without other human beings. It encompasses everyone, regardless of race, creed or color. It embraces our differences and celebrates them. [1]*

Desmond Tutu taught that ubuntu celebrates our diverse interdependence and is related to the wholeness or peace that Jesus brings:

We find that we are placed in a delicate network of vital relationship with the Divine, with my fellow human beings and with the rest of creation. . . . We are meant

then to live as members of one family, the human family exhibiting a rich diversity of attributes and gifts in our differing cultures as members of different races and coming from different milieus—and precisely because of this diversity, made for interdependence. . . .

The peace we want is something positive and dynamic. In the Hebrew it is called *shalom* which refers to wholeness, integrity; it means well-being, physical and spiritual. It means the abundance of life which Jesus Christ promised he had brought. It all has to do with a harmonious coexistence with one's neighbors in a wholesome environment allowing persons to become more fully human. [2]

Weak response from some US bishops as priests spread vaccine misinformation

8 February 2022
by [Brian Fraga](#)

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



In this illustration photo, a disposable medical mask hangs on the side of a church pew. (CNS/The Catholic Spirit/Dave Hrbacek)

Some U.S. Catholic priests have peddled conspiracy theories about [microchips in vaccines](#) and power-hungry global cabals exploiting the coronavirus pandemic to institute a one-world government. Others have spread blatant untruths about COVID-19, telling their flocks and online audiences that the pandemic is not real, that the vaccines are immoral and could even kill them.

"There is evidence that the jab is harmful even deadly," Fr. Paul Kubista of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis wrote in his parish bulletin [last October](#).

"If you took the Coronavirus-19 'vaccine' you will probably be dead in two years," Fr. David Nix, a priest in the Archdiocese of Denver with a large social media following, [wrote on his Facebook page](#) last summer.

A few bishops have tried to stop their clergy from spreading such misinformation — most of which originates in right-wing echo chambers — but others have not made any public statements to correct the record. A handful of prelates have repeated the misinformation themselves.

"It doesn't do a church that is in a credibility crisis any favors to have these people trying to make a name for themselves by being contrarian on Twitter," said Natalia Imperatori-Lee, a religious studies professor at Manhattan College.

Imperatori-Lee told NCR that she was "more disappointed than mad" that several bishops "cannot seem to be forceful" on a public health matter that impacts the common good and the Catholic Church's imperative to protect the most vulnerable in society.



A woman holds a small bottle labeled "Vaccine COVID-19" in this illustration photo. (CNS/Reuters/Dado Ruvic)

"I just feel like we have really lost sight of that, not only with misinformation about COVID vaccines and public health mandates, but even in the inability to be forthright about it, with [the bishops] looking the other way and deciding not to get involved," she said. "It feels like a sin of omission, of failing to stand up for the vulnerable."

Other observers, including canon lawyers and public health experts, also told NCR that they think bishops could come out stronger when priests share false information about the COVID-19 pandemic from the pulpit, on their personal blogs or via social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

"One of the classical definitions of a bishop in Latin was *defensor civitatis*, which refers to one who is in charge of defending the community, especially in times of war, emergency and social political crisis. That is something that seems to me many of them have lost," said Massimo Faggioli, a theologian and church historian at Villanova University.

Faggioli suggested that the American individualistic idea of freedom has clouded some bishops' understandings of their role to defend the common good, both for Catholics and non-Catholics.

Said Faggioli: "For me, the most serious problem is that they have forgotten what it means to be a bishop in the Catholic Church, which is different than being the corporate manager in a firm that is only interested in what's good for the firm. That has been astonishing to me."



The mother of a COVID-19 patient stands at the bedside of the patient in the intensive care unit of the St. Mary Medical Center Feb. 1 in Apple Valley, California. (CNS/Reuters/Shannon Stapleton)

A deadly pandemic

As of Feb. 6, COVID-19 had killed more than 5 million people globally — with [over 900,000](#) deaths in the United States — since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic in March 2020. The coronavirus is killing Americans [at far higher rates](#) than people in other wealthy nations.

In 2020 and 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration offered emergency use authorizations for COVID-19 vaccines manufactured by Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.

Clinical trials and various studies have shown [that the vaccines help protect](#) against COVID-19 infection, and greatly reduce the odds of people becoming seriously ill to the point of hospitalization and death. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have both now received [full FDA approval](#).

"The data on these vaccines is unequivocal. They keep people alive and keep them out of the hospital. That is an unequivocal scientific fact. Any doubt that exists here is manufactured," said Dr. [Philip Landrigan](#), director of the Program for Global Public Health and the Common Good at Boston College.

Landrigan told NCR that priests put their parishioners and online supporters at risk by giving them information about the pandemic and vaccines that is not supported by science. He called on bishops to respond in those situations.

"Obviously this is a delicate issue because it pertains to governance in the church," Landrigan said. "But ultimately the bishop is the shepherd of his flock; that's why he carries the crozier. I think if a bishop realizes that one of his team is putting out information that's ultimately going to put people at risk, he has a responsibility to act and protect his flock."

Pope Francis, the Vatican, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and various state-level Catholic bishops' conferences have endorsed the vaccines, while acknowledging that some of the products made use of a decades-old fetal cell line in either production or lab testing.

Francis [has suggested](#) getting vaccinated is a moral obligation. The Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life has publicly [called out](#) those who spread "malinformation" about the vaccines, calling their efforts "pure nonsense." And the U.S. bishops have said those who claim it is immoral to take the vaccines [are offering](#) "an inaccurate portrayal of Catholic moral teaching."



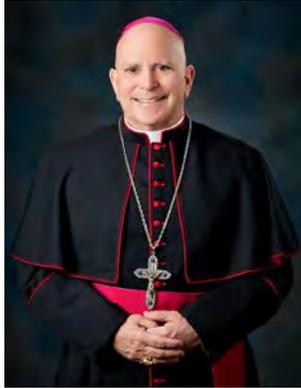
Fr. Joseph Illo, pastoral administrator of Star of the Sea Parish in San Francisco, greets parishioners after Mass July 2, 2017. (CNS/Catholic San Francisco/Valerie Schmalz)

Fringe opinions

But some priests have eschewed the scientific data and official church guidance in favor of medical and ecclesial outliers whose views are amplified in conservative media, right-wing podcasts, social media platforms and fringe far-right outlets.

"In my opinion, the vaccines hardly work, but they do not need to work. The virus is taking its natural course of becoming more easily transmitted but less virulent," Fr. Joseph Illo, a priest of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, [wrote](#) Jan. 10 on his blog.

San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, who [revealed in a news interview that he is not vaccinated](#), also incorrectly said that the COVID-19 vaccines "are not really vaccines," a common talking point in conservative media.



Denver Archbishop Samuel Aquila is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS/Courtesy of Archdiocese of Denver)

In Denver, Nix — a controversial priest who has [clashed](#) with Archbishop Samuel Aquila — has also spread misinformation about vaccines and right-wing conspiracy theories such as "[The Great Reset](#)," the idea that malevolent global elites are using the pandemic to install a new world order that will abolish private property and religion.

In December, Fr. David Nolan, a priest of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter who ministers at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Littleton, Colorado, [spread similar misinformation during a homily](#). YouTube removed video of the homily due to COVID-19 misinformation. In 2020, Nolan told parishioners to disobey orders from church and civic leaders about wearing masks at Mass, [which prompted a "review"](#) by the Denver Archdiocese and the priestly fraternity.

Aquila [is vaccinated](#). But he also signed onto a public letter in August 2021 [urging priests in Colorado to sign religious exemption letters](#) for Catholics who do not wish to be vaccinated for COVID-19, and has not publicly commented on priests in his archdiocese who spread misinformation about the pandemic and the vaccines. The Denver Archdiocese did not return a message seeking comment for this story.

A spokesman for the San Francisco Archdiocese [told the San Francisco Chronicle](#) in July 2020 — after Illo chastised parishioners who were not attending Mass for choosing "safety above sacraments" — that the archdiocese did not monitor pastors' homilies, bulletins or blog posts. The San Francisco Archdiocese also did not return a message from NCR seeking comment for this story.

Meanwhile, Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas, has misrepresented COVID-19 vaccines, which he has [described on Twitter](#) as "abortion tainted" and made possible because humans "were murdered in abortion to help produce" them. He has also tweeted [anti-vaccination](#) videos and declared that he would "rather die than benefit from anything produced by using an aborted child."



Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas, and other U.S. bishops from Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas concelebrate Mass Jan. 21, 2020, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome. The bishops were making their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican to report on the status of their dioceses to the pope and Vatican officials. (CNS/Paul Haring)

In fact, none of the COVID-19 vaccines contain aborted fetal cells. Fetal cell lines — which are [grown in a laboratory](#) based on cells collected decades ago — were used in the development and research of some of the

products. The U.S. bishops [have called](#) the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines' connection to abortion "relatively remote" and have said it is not "immoral to be vaccinated with them."

Strickland has [tweeted support](#) for a Vermont priest who disobeyed an order from his bishop to be vaccinated or to wear a mask and submit to regular testing. Strickland has also [shared missives](#) written by Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, the former Vatican ambassador to the United States who has peddled [similar misinformation](#) about the pandemic and the Great Reset conspiracy theory.

On Jan. 31, the head of Italy's military ordinariate [urged service members and police](#) in that country to ignore Viganò's call for them to disobey orders to enforce measures aimed at stemming the virus' spread.

"This is one of the effects of digital social media," Faggioli said. "Once you might have had bishops who attempted to do this, but it would have taken a letter or a newspaper article for them to get their message out."

Faggioli also suggested that "a fundamental lack of accountability" for bishops contributes to the situation where some prelates seemingly look the other way on priests who spread misinformation, or who disseminate it themselves.

"Honestly it should be up to the metropolitan bishops to say something because the Vatican cannot police the U.S. church as much as would be actually needed," he said.

In the church, metropolitans are archbishops, usually of major cities, who have some limited oversight over bishops in their ecclesiastical provinces.

Fighting misinformation

Some bishops in the United States have tried to rein in their clergy from spreading misinformation about the pandemic.

In a private letter to local priests and deacons, which NCR obtained, Bishop David Bonnar of Youngstown, Ohio, wrote on Jan. 19 that he had recently learned that some clergy were using their homilies to speak about vaccines, political ideologies and partisan agendas "at the expense of God's word." Bonnar said he would "no longer condone abuses" in that regard.

"If I am made aware that any clergy is using the pulpit to promote political opinions and denouncing current Church teaching, I will have no other recourse than to revoke their faculty to preach," Bonnar wrote.

Twice in the last two years, Archbishop Bernard Hebda of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, released [public statements](#) in response to parish priests who spread misinformation claiming COVID-19 deaths were "inflated" and that the virus was manufactured and spread on purpose. Hebda's statements included critiques from public health experts and emphasized that the pulpit was not an appropriate venue for a priest to offer his personal opinions.



Fr. James Altman, then-pastor at St. James the Less Catholic Church in La Crosse, Wisconsin, is seen in his YouTube video. In the clip he attacks Catholics who are Democrats. Bishop

William Callahan removed him as pastor July 9, 2021. (CNS/YouTube screengrab)

In La Crosse, Wisconsin, Bishop William Callahan in July 2021 [removed the controversial priest Fr. James Altman](#) from his pastor's position after Altman used online videos, parish bulletins and homilies to disseminate partisan political ideology, including misinformation about vaccines and the pandemic. Callahan restricted Altman from preaching, though that has not stopped the firebrand priest, who remains popular in ultraconservative Catholic circles, from speaking out in far-right venues.

"If you have 10,000 people following you, and they're outside the chancery and it's causing all kinds of division in the diocese, then well you got to do something. The question is what do you do?" said Robert Flummerfelt, a Las Vegas-based canon lawyer.

Flummerfelt told NCR that bishops have the canonical authority to order their priests to stop disseminating misinformation related to the pandemic. They can impose a penal precept and remove a priest's faculties to preach. But he said the country's polarized political climate — in which opinions related to the pandemic often reflect partisan loyalties — puts the bishop in a "tough spot."

"Does the bishop have the authority to impose a penal precept? Of course he does. Should he do it? He might be in a 'win the battle, lose the war' situation if he does," said Flummerfelt, who argued that imposing that kind of discipline risks causing more division.

"Because of where our country is, it just makes everything political," he said.

Imperatori-Lee, of Manhattan College, acknowledged there can be legitimate reasons for a bishop's "prudential silence," though she added that prelates are also in a position to bridge differences.

"You hear people decrying the polarization in our church and nation, but something like the common good should be a place where we can build bridges, not leave people to their own devices," she said.

"The fact that any of this has become a political statement is a sad reflection on the state of the nation, and this is where the bishops could provide an alternate example."



[Brian Fraga](#)

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What one priest learned from listening to transgender Catholics

7 February 2022

by [James F. Keenan](#)



People attend a rally in support of transgender rights in Los Angeles Oct. 20, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

After reading the Archdiocese of Milwaukee's statement, "[Catechesis and Policy on Questions Concerning Gender Theory](#)," and subsequent reports about the [reception of the policy](#), I remembered a phone call I received some 22 years ago from a psychotherapist.

I did not know the caller. He introduced himself saying that he worked with some clients who were struggling to understand what their actual gender was. These were people wondering, and in some instances, coming to terms with the possibility that their gender was different from what they were assigned at birth.

Then he told me why he was calling. A few of his clients were Catholic and several of them said they would like to talk with a priest. He mentioned it was not confession they were seeking; they just wanted to talk with a priest.

Then he added, "I am afraid that a priest could actually set them back a bit, if he decided that they shouldn't be asking the questions that they are. So, I asked many of my colleagues here in Boston for a recommendation and they each suggested you as a priest who would listen. Could I refer you to my clients who want to meet a priest?"

I answered that I was sure there were plenty of other Boston-area priests who would listen, but that I would.

I will not say anything about the conversations, not because they were confessional, which they were not, but because they were confidential. I will say, however, they were transformative for me. I never heard such narratives. More than anything, I realized how extraordinary their experiences were.

These experiences were truly profound: Imagine what it is like to face the question that their own selves were telling them they had to investigate! They knew the degree of ridicule, rejection and violence that transgender people face. Why were they asking the question, except that something inside themselves kept demanding them to do so? By accepting the question to any degree, they knew that it meant accepting the pervasive judgmentalism and shaming that few others experience in the same way. And yet, their experience was that the question they encountered (How can I accept my gender when my body seems otherwise?) wanted them to find a reconciliation within themselves.

They wanted me to understand what their lives were like.

One issue that never came up in such conversations is gender ideology. The people I met and meet today are not talking about gender ideology, but rather about how frightening and alienating their lives become as they existentially face and answer the question before them. Yet one of the hurtful things that our hierarchy and even our pope do is suggest that these matters ought to be reduced to the simple category of gender ideology. The U.S. bishops' conference even provides a list of papal and catechetical citations to teach about gender ideology.

This is quite similar to the way racists and white supremacists use "critical race theory" to attack those seeking to recognize the long-standing racist world we live in. A good offense is the best defense, they think; that's the Catholic tactic! The gender ideology flag belittles the terribly challenging world the transgender community lives in and is little more than a cheap shot at a very precarious group of people.

I suggest the tactic, instead, ought to be listening.

Listening is not just hearing words. To listen is to learn. That's why these people with whom I spoke wanted me to listen. They wanted me to learn their world.

When I think back on what I heard, I realize how difficult it was for many of them to find that sanctuary, that space to share their narrative of struggle. Significantly, the lives they lived interiorly rarely found the space, the sanctuary, they needed to feel human and accompanied. That's all I think they wanted of me.

I learned, however, they dreaded a humiliating, pervasive scolding if they tried to share their situation. That's why the rant of gender ideology is so hurtful. It just a way of saying, "We are NOT going to listen," which is exactly what the Archdiocese of Milwaukee's statement communicates.

Fortunately, more people are granting such people a sanctuary by listening. Certainly, mental health professionals are responding by accompaniment, and others are now engaged in the work of science to more professionally understand that the phenomenon of transgender self-understanding is more complex and more experientially common than was recognized in earlier decades.

Similarly, after decades of families learning to listen to family members who encountered the experience of same-sex attraction, now others are learning to listen to those family members whose self-understanding of their gender contradicts their apparent biological status.

Is the church at all interested in listening?

Recently, [Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich](#), president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, argued that the episcopacy needs to learn to listen. He added, "The Church has the image of an institution that knows everything better than others."

Learning to listen means, as Hollerich said, that the episcopacy needs to learn about humility. Maybe we can have a little humility with a person struggling with their gender self-understanding who would like to be heard and accompanied.

[Cardinal Joseph Tobin](#) of Newark, New Jersey, recently made similar comments by talking about the significance of the church looking for dialogue through the upcoming synod. He added presciently, "My favorite definition of heresy is a refusal to deal with complexity."

Church leadership might learn a lesson from science about understanding those dealing with the complexity of gender dysphoria. Scientific American recently published "[The Disturbing History of Research into Transgender Identity](#)," noting how researchers allowed their own misinformed presuppositions to infect their studies. The report makes clear that researchers were not letting their subjects tell their story.

The scientific community is only beginning to learn to listen to the transgender community.

In fact, [the process of gathering data](#) on the experience of people facing the question about their bodies and their gender is only now about 10 years old.

The church can learn from the scientific community that if it wants to accompany the people who are facing gender dysphoria, we need to learn first to listen to them.

Indeed, on Jan. 26, Pope Francis told parents of gay children not to condemn them, but to accompany them. That sounds to me like the right message.

But we need the hierarchy to hear that message, too. And that means learning humility and learning to listen, especially to those people who are being terrorized not by the question they are facing but by the moralistic deafness of the church that thinks "it knows everything better than others."



James F. Keenan

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Wednesday, February 9th, 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Six: We Are One and Many

Each a God-Carrier

The late Bishop Desmond Tutu understood our interdependence with each other as part of what it means to live in the image of God:

God has created us, upholding us in being from moment to moment, providing us with our very existence. . . . Despite everything that conspires to deny this truth, each one of us is of immense worth, of infinite value because God loved us. That is why [God] created us. Thus our value is intrinsic to who we are. It comes with the package of being human. It depends neither on extrinsic attributes such as ethnicity and skin color nor on our achievement, however that may be computed. Our worth stems from the fact that we exist only because of the divine love. . . . [Richard: As Bishop Tutu told me when I met him, "We are only the light bulbs, Richard, and our job is just to remain screwed in!"]

We are each a God-carrier, a tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, indwelt by God the holy and most blessed Trinity.

To treat one such as less than this is not just wrong. . . . It is veritably blasphemous and sacrilegious. It is as if we were to spit in the

face of God. Consequently injustice, racism, exploitation, oppression are to be opposed not as a political task but as a response to a religious, a spiritual imperative. Not to oppose these manifestations of evil would be tantamount to disobeying God.

God has created us for interdependence as God has created us in God's image—the image of a divine fellowship of the holy and blessed Trinity. . . God has created us to be different in order that we can realize our need of one another. There is an African idiom: “A person is a person through other persons.” I learn how to be human through association with other human beings. . . . [1]

Like Desmond Tutu, CAC teacher Brian McLaren sees the Trinity as offering a healing vision of the world, in which we create holy community that overturns categories of “us” and “them”:

This Trinitarian vision of God helps us imagine a relational universe of one-anotherness, community-in-unity, unity-in-community, being-in-interbeing, where benevolence toward the other is at home, and hostility toward the other is foreign, invasive, out of place. . . .

God-with-God in community leads us to envision God-with-us in community. And that vision in turn dares us to imagine God-with-them in community. And that expansive vision invites us higher still: to envision God-with-us-and-with-them in community. This approach to the Trinity need not be a litmus test used to legitimize us and delegitimize them. Instead, it can be a gift, offered to others like a poem, not an ultimatum—given not to require assent-leading-to-acceptance or dissent-leading-to-condemnation, but rather to inspire us to reverence otherliness as a theological

attribute. At that moment, Trinitarianism becomes not only a healing doctrine but a healing practice. [2]

Selection of Archbishop-designate Fabre brings US church closer to Francis' pastoral vision

9 February 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

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



Bishop Shelton Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, speaks during the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Nov. 13, 2019, in Baltimore. Pope Francis named Fabre as the new archbishop of Louisville, Kentucky; the announcement was made Feb. 8. (CNS/Bob Roller)

[Archbishop-designate Shelton Fabre's appointment](#) as the fifth archbishop and 10th bishop of the historic see of Louisville reverberates beyond what would be usual for a diocese of 180,000 Catholics. For a variety of reasons, it shows the degree to which the

hierarchy of the Catholic Church in the United States is finally, however slowly, being brought into sync with the agenda of Pope Francis.

The most significant thing about Fabre's [resume](#) is what is not there: He never had a desk job in Rome. The Francis revolution is not, as some suggest, an ideological revolution but an anti-ideology revolution. It is about appointing and promoting bishops with pastoral experience, not a network of Roman connections. Fabre served in several Baton Rouge parishes and as a chaplain at the state penitentiary before being named an auxiliary bishop in New Orleans in 2006. In 2013, he was named bishop of Houma-Thibodaux, a poor, rural diocese south of New Orleans.

Of the 13 U.S. archbishops named by Pope Francis, only four had experience working in Rome. Two of those, [Archbishop Michael Jackels](#) of Dubuque, Iowa, who once worked at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and [Archbishop Leonard Blair](#) of Hartford, Connecticut, who worked at the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See, were named in 2013, when Francis had not yet removed Cardinals Raymond Burke and Justin Rigali from the Congregation for Bishops. [Archbishop Bernard Hebda](#), named to St. Paul-Minneapolis in 2016, once worked at the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, but it was his time as Cardinal Donald Wuerl's secretary and his reputation as an excellent canonist that got him sent to Minnesota. And [Cardinal Joseph Tobin](#) once served as Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, but his tenure was cut short and he was famously transferred to Indianapolis in 2012 before being named a cardinal and promoted to Newark in 2015.

The Francis revolution is not, as some suggest, an ideological revolution but an anti-ideology revolution.

The other nine archbishops appointed by Francis — Archbishop Andrew Bellisario of Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska; Archbishop George Hartmayer of Atlanta; Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago; Archbishop Charles Thompson of Indianapolis; Archbishop Nelson Pérez of Philadelphia; Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski of St. Louis; Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico; Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle; and Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C. — none of them ever worked at a desk in Rome.

Indeed, with Pope Francis, the church's culture has shifted in the direction opposite of that found in the secular culture. If secular, cultural trends start on the coasts and work their way into the heartland, the remaking of the U.S. Catholic Church began with the appointment of Cupich to Chicago in 2014, and it is in the center of the country — St. Louis, Indianapolis, and now Louisville, Santa Fe — that the change is most evident.

Appointments to metropolitan sees made by previous popes relied heavily on Roman connections. [Cardinal Timothy Dolan](#) of New York was the rector of the North American College. [Archbishop Allen Vigneron](#) of Detroit worked in the Vatican Secretariat of State. Galveston-Houston [Cardinal Daniel DiNardo](#) worked at the Congregation for Bishops. San Francisco [Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone](#) worked at the Apostolic Signatura.

In addition to a Roman resume, these are not the names that leap to mind when you think of bishops who are enthusiastic about Pope Francis.

In addition to a commitment to pastoral ministry, it is worth noting Fabre's work leading the U.S. bishops' conference Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism as they drafted their 2018 pastoral statement "[Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love](#)." He displayed a deft skill balancing the need to be blunt about the enduring moral sin of racism with an awareness of what he could get his brother bishops to approve. Louisville has a large Black population that is still mourning the killing of Breonna Taylor, and still angry at the [failure to prosecute](#) her killers.

A commitment to the environmental vision of *Laudato Si'* has not been optional for the new archbishop. Fabre's previous Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux was wrecked by [Hurricane Ida](#) last summer. Rising sea levels put cities like Houma at great risk of serious flooding in the years to come. The [Surging Seas risk finder](#) predicts Houma has an 89% chance of having at least one severe flood over 6 feet before 2050. In his new assignment, Fabre will be able to work with one of the most interesting environmental projects in the nation, the [University of Louisville's Envirome Institute](#).

Some people forget that Louisville is such an historic see. It was [established](#) in 1808 by Pope Pius VII at the same time that the dioceses in Boston, New York and Philadelphia were created. Only Baltimore and New Orleans are older, and [New Orleans](#) was still part of the Spanish empire when it became home to the Diocese of Louisiana and the Two Floridas in 1793. Originally based in Bardstown, the first bishop, Benedict Joseph Flaget, relocated the see to Louisville in 1841, although Bardstown is still home to the [proto-Cathedral of St. Joseph](#).

The [cathedral in Louisville](#) experienced a renaissance in the 1980s and 1990s under the leadership of legendary pastor Fr. Ron Knott, Archbishop Thomas Kelly and the Cathedral Heritage Foundation, now the [Center for Interfaith Relations](#). It was not so much a renovation of the cathedral, still less a "restoration," the word preferred by traditionalists wanting to turn the clock back. It was a revitalization, fully in line with the vision of Vatican II that the church should be a sacrament in the world. They understood the primary goal was not merely repointing bricks but bringing new life to the ministries housed in the parish, serving the needs of Louisville's inner city. Under Knott's leadership, the parish community at the cathedral grew from 150 households to 1,350 households in just under 12 years, while launching a variety of ministries to the city's poor and marginalized.

This is only part of the legacy that welcomed Archbishop-designate Fabre yesterday (Feb. 8) to the beautiful city of Louisville. His selection is a hopeful sign for the Catholics and non-Catholics of that city. It is a hopeful sign for the whole church in the United States.



[Michael Sean Winters](#)

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

History will judge the church harshly for its treatment of LGBTQ persons

9 February 2022
by [Daniel P. Horan](#)

Justice



A rainbow shines over St. Peter's Square Jan. 31, 2021, at the Vatican. (AP photo/Alessandra Tarantino, File)

The church has rightful shame and remorse for some things the institution has done, views it has espoused and teachings it has taught over the centuries. These include the Crusades and its adjacent Islamophobia, justification of chattel slavery, complicity in colonialism, prohibition of religious liberty, portrayal and treatment of women, and its history of antisemitism, among others.

Over time we have come to recognize these attitudes and behaviors to be indefensible. And I believe that, in time, history will likewise judge the discrimination against and treatment of LGBTQ persons by the church and many of its members as similarly reprehensible.

Recently, a number of signs suggest my intuition is correct. Take, for example, the bold and direct statement of Luxembourg Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, who leads the pan-European Catholic bishops' conference. According to a [recent article](#), he said he considered the church's assessment of homosexuality relationships as sinful to be wrong.

Calling for a substantial reform of the church's teaching on this matter, he added, "I believe that the sociological-scientific foundation of this teaching is no longer correct."

Admittedly, Hollerich's keen sense of perspective and direct critique of this problematic church teaching represents something of a "minority view" among ecclesial leaders today. However, this is not the first time that the ostensible minority view may turn out, in the end, to prevail against some seemingly long-standing theological perspective or social convention.



LGBT activists in Washington hold a rally outside the U.S. Supreme Court in this 2019 file photo. (CNS/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)

We only have to look back over the last century to the case of the Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray who advocated for the congruency of the "American experiment" of religious liberty as a basic human right and the teaching of the church,

which at the time forbade it. Before Vatican II he was [silenced and disciplined](#) for his views. After the council, his views became the authoritative doctrine of the church as articulated in the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*.

Ironically, those who defend the discrimination against LGBTQ persons at Catholic institutions often do so with appeal to religious liberty and their right to free exercise of religion.

In addition to the development in teaching on religious liberty, I am reminded of another situation from the 16th century, that of Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas and his defense of the inherent dignity and value of the native peoples of the Western Hemisphere against a prevailing theological and civil argument that rejected the rights of Indigenous communities at the time of Spanish colonization of the so-called "New World."

The now-classic theological confrontation within the church of Spain between de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda on this topic has become known as the "Valladolid Debate" in reference to the city in which the debate took place between 1550 and 1551. At stake was the anthropological and moral status of the newly encountered Indigenous populations of the Americas.

The colonial logic of the time, informed by an Aristotelian-Thomistic anthropology advanced by Sepúlveda and others, argued for Aristotle's hypothesis that certain peoples are "[natural slaves](#)" and that it would actually be in their best interest to be enslaved because of their presumed inherent inferiority. Sepúlveda also argued that, as "heathens," the native peoples and their traditions were in violation of divinely ordained natural law, which further justified their subjugation at the hand of the

conquistadors. The case made by Sepúlveda reigned as the needed justification for the continued project of Spanish colonization. And church teaching of the time was used to justify this atrocity. Many thousands of individuals were abused and murdered as a result, both in the name of the crown and of Christ.

Representing the clear minority view of the time, de las Casas rejected the premise of "natural slaves" and inherent inferiority. Unlike Sepúlveda who had never visited the "New World," de las Casas was speaking from [lived experience and with knowledge](#) of the reality of the communities about whose identity, worth and rights were being debated in Europe. To many people, especially the civil and religious leaders in Spain, the argument was merely theoretical.

But de las Casas understood from firsthand experience what the defenders of the mistreatment of the native peoples couldn't imagine: these Indigenous women and men, whose lives and ways seemed foreign and "uncivilized" to the colonizers and continental theologians, were inherently good, deserving of equal dignity and respect, and ought to be recognized as fellow children of God. Their mistreatment, enslavement and murder could not be justified and was sinful.

Centuries later, with the moral and historical clarity that comes with time, no Christian could justify taking the position of Sepúlveda and the church of his day. It is clear that de las Casas was right and his defense justified, while the then-prevailing colonial view of the native population is recognized today as abhorrent.

I mention this historical case not because I wish to make a false equivalency between the slavery, mistreatment and murder of Indigenous peoples in the 16th century and

the discrimination and treatment of LGBTQ individuals today.

However, I do believe there are at least three points worth noting for our time and in this contemporary case. First, church teaching develops and, in fact, changes. It doesn't happen often, but teaching has and ought to change when we realize that the remote possibility of error in non-infallible teaching is discovered. The church's view on slavery and religious liberty are just two of many examples where this has been the case. And it is likely that the current institutional views on the treatment of LGBTQ individuals not only should, but will also change.

Second, it can be difficult in the actual historical moment of debate to make sense of which response is correct. We should resist maintaining the status quo merely because "that's the way it's always been." It is quite possible that the way it has been is correct and should be sustained, but it is also very likely that there is something seriously wrong that needs to change.

But the only way we will come to know the right answer in this case is by engaging in theological research and [dialogue that takes seriously](#) the [experiences](#) of LGBTQ individuals in a way analogous to the seriousness that de las Casas took the experiences of Indigenous Americans. In the meantime, all people should be free of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender at Catholic institutions and faith communities.

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Third, there is a [long and growing list](#) of women and men who have been fired from Catholic institutions because of their LGBTQ status or relationships. While it may be difficult for some people, especially those in positions of ecclesiastical power and authority, to see it now, I believe that history will judge the church harshly for the way its institutions and leaders have treated LGBTQ individuals. In time, as with the crusades and colonization and slavery, the church itself will also come to see this injustice for what it is: the overt discrimination and effective dehumanization of our sisters and brothers in Christ, fellow beloved children of God deserving of equal respect, love and protection.

British journalist Christopher Lamb recently suggested in [The Tablet of London](#) that various papal statements and [novel inclusion](#) of previously marginalized organizations and communities might signal that, "the Church is changing its approach to LGBTQ Catholics." Several [LGBTQ advocates have responded](#) to such a seemingly optimistic assessment with caution and incredulity. Where there is skepticism, it is grounded in recognizing the slowness of needed change and the deleterious consequences that follow from maintaining dehumanizing policies, practices and teachings.

The church can and must do better, and the time is now. I hope that Cardinal Hollerich's brother bishops, especially the bishop of Rome, embrace the Holy Spirit's call to do the right thing sooner rather than later. The current synodal process is one such providential opportunity to align church teaching on LGBTQ persons and

relationships with reality grounded in the best of medical and psychological research.

Not only will history judge the church's past and current treatment of LGBTQ persons, but more importantly God is judging the church too.



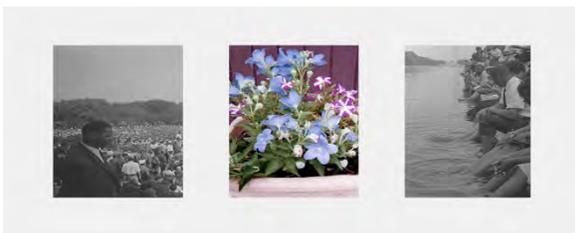
Daniel P. Horan

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Thursday, February 10th, 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Six: We Are One and Many
Divine Diversity and Oneness

During a CAC conference on the Trinity, Richard spoke about how the three-in-one God shows God's love for diversity:

God clearly loves diversity. All we need to do is look at the animal world, or the world under the sea, or each human being: who of us looks exactly alike? We are always different. Is there any evidence to show where, in all creation, that God prefers uniformity? But we consistently confuse uniformity with spiritual unity.

The mystery that we're talking about is revealed in the Trinity: the three are maintained as diverse, different and distinct, and yet they are radically "One"! The foundational philosophical problem has been called the problem of the one and the many. How can there be one and how can there be many? In the Trinity, we have the paradox at least metaphorically resolved. But most of us don't easily know how to be both diverse and united. We want to make everybody the same. And the church has become more and more an exclusionary institution, instead of a great banquet feast to which Jesus constantly invites sinners and outcasts.

The ego is much more comfortable with uniformity, people around me who look and talk like me, and don't threaten my boundaries. But in the presence of the Trinitarian God, God totally lets go of boundaries for the sake of the other. Each accepts full acceptance by the other. [1]

In an article for Sojourners, Richard writes about how understanding the Trinity can heal our tendency to "other" people who are different than ourselves:

I believe racism is often rooted in [a] distorted view of divinity; rather than reflecting the One who created all things in God's own "image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26-27), we instead make God into a mascot who, as Anne Lamott brilliantly quips, hates all the same people we do. [1] . . .

It took them [early church fathers] three centuries to make full sense out of Jesus' often-confusing language about what he named "Father," how he understood himself, and what he named the "Holy Spirit." Our common form of dualistic thinking just could not process such *three*-fold and *one*-ness evocations at the same time. . . .

The Godhead itself maintains separate identity between Three, with an absolutely unique kind of unity, which is the very shape of Divine Oneness.

God's pattern and goal has never been naïve uniformity but radical diversity (1 Corinthians 12:4–6) maintained in absolute unity by "a perfect love" that infinitely self-empties and infinitely outpours—at the same time.

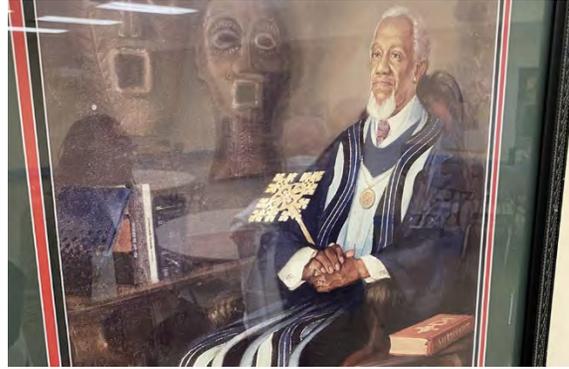
This Divine pattern is, of course, most beautifully revealed in "all the array [*pleroma*, or fullness] of creation" (Genesis 2:1). God is forever "making room" and "infilling"; this is the Way of the Flow. This is, in our finite understandings, an utterly new logic and is the foundational template for the success of the human project for those ready to embrace at the level of experience what they already confess in [their] creeds. [2]

New podcast explores the life of Fr. Clarence Joseph Rivers

10 February 2022

by [Emily Strand](#), [Eric T. Styles](#)

[Culture](#)



A painting of Fr. Clarence Joseph Rivers is pictured at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Cincinnati, where he served as associate pastor and where he began composing music. (Courtesy of Emily Strand)

The podcast "[Meet Father Rivers](#)," which premiered last August and [runs every month](#), examines the life of an inexplicably obscure figure of U.S. Catholic history: Fr. Clarence Joseph Rivers.

Rivers was the pioneer Black Catholic composer who set the American church ablaze with his 1963 album, "An American Mass Program," a solemn, soulful blend of Roman chant with Black sacred song, and the beginning of his long career in liturgical inculturation.

Born in 1931 in Selma, Alabama, Rivers was a Black Catholic priest in Cincinnati, Ohio, who broke barriers of race, culture, worship and art. He was the first African American priest to be ordained for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in 1956. He worked as an associate pastor in Cincinnati's West End, at St. Joseph Catholic Church, and it was in this space where he began composing.

During the civil rights movement, Rivers began composing, and his music combined spirituals and Gregorian chant. After having been encouraged to "do something" by Msgr. Clement Busemeyer, pastor of St. Joseph's, about the apparent disconnection

between the people in the pews and their experience of worship, Rivers began drawing influence from the previous work of Sr. Mary Elaine Gentemann and especially the widely successful "Missa Luba," a traditional, Congolese Latin Mass setting. At the National Liturgical Conference in 1964, Fr. Rivers performed his hymn "God is Love" at the first English high Mass in the U.S.

His music was better than most, not only because it was profoundly singable; it was biblical, with a more developed theology than much of the repertoire of many other early composers of Catholic service music in English. He was an engine of insight who invented new standards of Catholic worship, composing new songs when old ones no longer served — all during a period of rapid and revolutionary change in the Catholic Church.

For many Black Catholics, Rivers' work and legacy demonstrates that the African American Catholic community could find a way towards inculturation, a way that was really authentic and full. He was and remains a critical figure for the African American Catholic community in America, one who demonstrated what Black and Catholic might mean together.

In American Catholic history and theology more broadly, Fr. Rivers stands as an icon of what could be a truly integrated church. His work, including books like *The Spirit in Worship* and *Soulfull Worship*, demonstrates a person who was deeply informed and immersed in the Catholic tradition, who understood it, had grown up in it and in Black American culture. He brought those aspects of his identity with him. And at some point, Rivers discovered that these elements of who he was could live not only in the same person, but in the same ritual experience.

When we look back at his work, we can see that he sacrificed a great deal: From ministering to composing, he was a unique human being who brought so much to the table. Yet much of his legacy and music and scholarship is unknown, even to academics. His work is still largely unavailable, which makes it very difficult to keep him present to all of us. He was an eccentric person, someone who had a sense of flair that revealed a strong sensibility about human dignity. He was committed to excellence when so many others settled for mediocrity.

When Rivers referred to every fellow Christian as "his or her Grace," he was affirming their identity as "heirs to the throne of God, co-heirs with the Christ" (Romans 8:17). It had a powerful impact on everyone who met him. He had no illusions about members of the hierarchy being just as human as all of us. And he had no problem with pointing that out to them.

Rivers, who died in November 2004 on the feast of Christ the King, was an extraordinarily talented, erudite and interesting person. Through his work, he welcomed everyone and encouraged them to deepen their relationship with God. He shared his Black, Catholic identity and used it to uplift the African American Catholic experience. He believed it was a gifted theological approach, one rooted in the performing arts and capable of pushing the universal church to be better.

Fr. Clarence Joseph Rivers' work and legacy continue to challenge American Catholicism, especially at our current moment as a church and a nation.



Emily Strand

Emily Strand is author of *Mass 101: Liturgy and Life* and the blog *LiturgyAndLife.com*. She teaches religion and cultural competency at Mt. Carmel College in Ohio and serves on the National Association of Pastoral Musicians as Chair of the Forum on Communication. She co-hosts the podcasts "Potterversity" and "Meet Father Rivers."



Eric T. Styles

Eric T. Styles is rector of Carroll Hall, an undergraduate residential community at the University of Notre Dame. He writes on theology, liturgy, culture and the performing arts. Since 2013 he has also been a collaborator with Afro House, a music-driven performance art ensemble based in Baltimore. He is the co-host of the podcast "Meet Father Rivers."

Bakhita House in Boston area holds lasting legacy in work among trafficked women

10 February 2022
by Shannon Lyons

Ministry Trafficking



The former Bakhita House, in Malden, Massachusetts, was home to human trafficking survivors and the sisters from Boston congregations who helped them recover. Bakhita House closed in 2018. (Courtesy of Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Mary Jane Cavallo)

Editor's note: *St. Josephine Bakhita, for whom Bakhita House in the Boston area was named, was brutally enslaved as a child in Sudan in the late 1800s. She was taken to Italy and, after being declared free, became a Canossian sister. Canonized in 2000, her feast day is Feb. 8 and is observed around the world as an International Day of Prayer and Awareness for victims of modern-day slavery and trafficking. Read all of Global*

Sisters Report's stories on sisters' anti-trafficking advocacy.

BOSTON — When the weather is nice, Crystal Teixeira, 41, rides her bike around her neighborhood in Dorchester, Massachusetts. She said she likes to feel the fresh air in her lungs and the sunshine on her back. Some days, the memories still swarm around her, like ghosts, but she no longer lets them weigh her down. Soon, she hopes to get back into the workforce, but right now, she is working on herself. Her freedom is her essential power. Her time belongs to her and those she loves.

For much of Teixeira's life, love meant captivity. At 23, Teixeira opened her heart to a man who took her body, her mind and her dignity instead. Promising to protect her, he coerced her into selling sex to other men in the Miami area. Then, he took every dime she made, insisting he would take care of her financially. As he dragged her to clubs and bars throughout Miami, however, pressuring her into performing sexual favors and intercourse behind the doors of high-end hotel rooms, Teixeira's confidence withered away.

It wasn't until she found herself at the doorstep of a safe house run by a group of Catholic sisters that she would start to get it back.

Teixeira is one of 59 human trafficking survivors who lived in the Bakhita House, a safe house for sex and labor trafficking victims that was first located in Quincy, Massachusetts, and later, in Malden. Founded in October 2011 by the Boston Unit of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, who received prayers and financial support from 21 congregations, the Bakhita House was one of the first safe houses created specifically for human trafficking survivors in New England.



These five sisters worked and lived alongside human trafficking survivors in the Bakhita House, which was first located in Quincy, Massachusetts, and later, in Malden. From left: Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Peggy Cummings, Medical Missionaries of Mary Sr. Kay Lawlor, Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Mary Jane Cavallo, and Charity Srs. Sally McLaughlin and Carol Verville. (Shannon Lyons)

Among those who worked and lived in the house were Srs. Peggy Cummings, Mary Jane Cavallo and Maureen Marr from the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur; Srs. Carol Verville and Sally McLaughlin from the Sisters of Charity; and Sr. Kay Lawlor from the Medical Missionaries of Mary. Cummings said there were also countless volunteers and laypeople who helped keep the house running.

Working closely with the FBI, Homeland Security and Boston law enforcement, the sisters who lived in the house full time were committed to providing a home to as many victims as possible, despite there being only three bedrooms inside.

Nikki Antonucci, chief of Victim Witness Services for the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office, said that the sisters' calm demeanor made them reliable resources and colleagues.

"They were just phenomenal to work with," said Antonucci. "They always answered our

calls, whether it was a Saturday or a Sunday or 10 o'clock at night."

The birth of the Bakhita House traces back to a group of sisters who named themselves the Anti-Trafficking Coalition in 2007, setting out to research human trafficking and spread awareness through prayer vigils and educational symposiums. In doing so, these sisters were shocked to find that there were almost no safe houses for human trafficking victims in New England. To address this need, a smaller group of sisters from the coalition teamed up with members of LCWR to explore the possibility of opening a local safe house.

As their knowledge on the subject deepened, so too did their clarity; Cummings said she felt that God was asking them to take a leap.

'I got my confidence back. I mean, for someone to say that they love you and to genuinely know that they mean it — that means something.'
—Crystal Teixeira

"I thought to myself, 'Why can't we do this?' " said Cummings. "We can do this. It was just seeped in my head."

The Bakhita House was the answer to the sisters' collective prayer. Designed to be more than just a shelter, it became a home — a place to start over, a makeshift family solidified by the firm belief that every person is worthy of knowing unconditional love.

"I got my confidence back," said Teixeira. "I mean, for someone to say that they love you and to genuinely know that they mean it — that means something."

There were 3,224 reports of human trafficking in the commonwealth of Massachusetts between 2007 and 2020, with

819 of these becoming cases, according to the [Massachusetts National Human Trafficking Hotline](#).

Given this dire need, various organizations, schools, parishes and individuals in the Greater Boston area were eager to donate money and essential items to the Bakhita House.

Although shelters and victim advocacy organizations have since expanded across Massachusetts, a collaborative program between Catholic nuns, local law enforcement and human trafficking victims has yet to be replicated in the state since Bakhita House was forced to close in 2018 when the sisters were no longer able to work in the house full time, due to age and other obligations.

Nonetheless, Cummings said, the sisters continued to provide financial and emotional support to the women for years after the house closed and are still in touch with many of them today. The profound legacy of the home can be felt in these ongoing relationships and in the stories of the women who passed through.

Cavallo said that most of the victims who arrived at the safe house had hit rock bottom. They were broken in spirit — lost, hopeless and afraid. Some had been beaten. Some had been raped. Some had been told they would never be loved.

The women who walked out of the safe house, however — a month or perhaps a year later — often held their heads higher. Many of them had acquired jobs and degrees and new dreams for the future. With this came a newfound confidence and permission to trust that there was good in the world.



A nook in the living room of the Bakhita House where the sisters and women often gathered (Courtesy of Holy Union Sr. Mary Lou Simcoe)

Both Cummings and Cavallo said they called the Bakhita House a home where love heals.

Sometimes, love was as simple as setting expectations. Little by little, the women learned, or relearned, the sense of structure and skills that they had been robbed of during their trafficking experiences — how to iron their clothes, how to write a résumé, and how to manage their time so that they were present every night for dinner and home by their curfew.

They also learned to soften — to forgive, to try to forget, to separate what had happened to them from who they fundamentally were.

Each time a new survivor moved into the Bakhita House, Cummings said that they would gather with the women already living there and sing Shaina Noll's lullaby, "How Could Anyone."

"How could anyone ever tell you / You were anything less than beautiful / How could anyone ever tell you / You were less than whole," the lyric goes.

"It was always very emotional," said Cummings. "Then, when one left, we would

sing it with them. That was really powerful."

Deep wounds

Cummings said they strove to meet each woman where she was in the healing process. This sometimes meant addressing wounds that ran deep.

"My father used to hit me," Teixeira said. "I thought, 'Oh, you hit me. That means you love me. You know? 'Cause then you buy me a present later.' "

Raised in this dysfunctional environment, Teixeira said she was unable to recognize her traffickers' abuse for what it was.

Teixeira said her first trafficking experience occurred between 2003 and 2006. What started as an intimate relationship quickly morphed into a dangerous cycle of physical and psychological manipulation. If Teixeira disobeyed, he would beat her, she said. Once, when Teixeira attempted to leave, he threatened to kill her, she said.



Holy Union Sr. Maryellen Ryan holds up a "Stop Human Trafficking" sign at a January 2020 prayer vigil that took place at the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Brighton, Massachusetts, and was hosted by Boston's Anti-Trafficking Coalition. (Courtesy of Holy Union Sr. Mary Lou Simcoe)

Still, she continued to fight, at last finding freedom when he was arrested and found guilty of false imprisonment and assault.

Only three years later, however, waitressing at a strip club in South Florida, Teixeira found herself being lured into a darkness she thought she'd escaped. The second man who trafficked her presented himself as charming, promising to protect her and showering her with attention.

Then, he started offering her to other men, insisting that it would be ridiculous for her to pass up an opportunity for extra money. Teixeira said he never physically harmed her, but she still felt herself dying inside.

Finally, in 2012, she connected with Lisa Goldblatt Grace, the co-founder and co-director of My Life, My Choice, an organization that supports young victims of sexual exploitation. Through Goldblatt Grace's ongoing encouragement, Teixeira eventually mustered the courage to stand up to her trafficker, proceeding cautiously, playing into his distorted thinking.

"I'm washed up," she said. "You don't even want me. You can find someone else."

At last, he agreed and told her to go. Within three days, Teixeira was back in Boston, living with her mother. Still, Teixeira felt she needed a more stable environment in order to heal. Goldblatt Grace promptly began researching other options.

A month later, in October 2012, Teixeira became the third guest to move into the Bakhita House.

From that moment on, Teixeira said, the sisters treated her like family, filling the fridge with fresh food, helping her apply to classes at Bunker Hill Community College, providing her a quiet study space and,

eventually, helping her land a job as a supervisor at the nearby Ocean State Job Lot, where she worked for two years.



Sisters gather for a January 2013 prayer vigil for human trafficking victims in the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Brighton, Massachusetts, hosted by the Anti-Trafficking Coalition. (Courtesy of Holy Union Sr. Mary Lou Simcoe)

Still, the sisters knew they were not capable of undoing the trauma Teixeira had been through on their own. They promptly connected her, as well as most of the women who lived in the safe house, with the Freedom Clinic at Mass General Hospital, a trauma-informed health care clinic for victims of human trafficking, offering an array of medical and mental health services.

Teixeira, however, said the most memorable part of her experience living in the safe house was the fierce respect she developed for the sisters she lived alongside.

"They just had no fear in them," she said. "I never experienced anything like that in my whole life."

In Teixeira's attempt to move forward, Cummings and Cavallo said they noticed subtle changes in her demeanor.

"I remember her face softening the longer she stayed there," said Cummings. "You

know, she was a little tough when she first came, and she softened, and it was just so beautiful."

Sass and skepticism

Others were a slower burn. LaCresha Edgerly, now 38, arrived at the Bakhita House in April 2013. She said she strolled in with a raised eyebrow, unconcerned with hiding the sass and skepticism that was her trademark.

"I didn't know how it was going to go," said Edgerly. "I have a large personality, and I've kind of got an attitude."

'I've never seen people love unconditionally

the way they do. Just witnessing and

receiving that — it made me feel

differently.'

—LaCresha Edgerly

Sold into sex trafficking in Southern Florida when she was 19, Edgerly had spent a decade following other people's orders, letting them do what they wanted — to her body, to her sense of self. By the time she got to the safe house, she said she was determined to reclaim the reins on her life and didn't want to be told what to do — by anybody.

Later, however, the sisters said they had no interest in taking charge or telling anyone what to do with their life. Rather, Cummings said, their experience running the safe house was an exercise in listening — to God, to

their intuition and to what the women themselves were saying.

For Edgerly, opportunity came on the day that she strolled by a sign for Empire Beauty School in Malden. That night, at dinner, she mentioned it to the sisters; she had always wondered about being a hairdresser, she said.

"They were like, 'Well, if that's what you want to do, we're going to make sure you do it,' " said Edgerly.

Having once worked as a cosmetologist herself, during her sisterhood, Cavallo supported this goal tooth and nail, helping Edgerly apply to beauty school, get to classes on time, prepare for upcoming exams, and practice styling hair for women in the house.

On the day she graduated, the sisters surprised her with a celebratory cake.

"I didn't feel weird," said Edgerly. "It was like going home to my family."



The couch in the living room of Bakhita House where the sisters and women often gathered (Courtesy of Holy Union Sr. Mary Lou Simcoe)

It was also like coming home to herself. Making dinner for the other women in the house, combining unique flavors and working with her hands, Edgerly began to recall her youthful passion for cooking.

After six years working in salons, she is now a professional caterer.

She said she owes a lot of her progress to the sisters who stood by her side.

"I've never seen people love unconditionally the way they do," she said. "Just witnessing and receiving that — it made me feel differently."

Clashes, then laughter

The Bakhita House was a melting pot of women from different generations, cultures and walks of life. Sometimes, their diverse backgrounds and worldviews clashed. Cummings said name-calling and slammed doors were frequent occurrences. It was much like the catty bickering that happens between siblings, she said, because no matter what, at the end of the day, the women found common ground — in their shared struggles or in the primal need for laughter.

"We really did laugh a lot," said Cummings, smiling at the memory. "When you laugh with someone who is very far from your experience, there's something intimate about that."

There were also moments of serendipity.

Jane Clark — a pseudonym, as she asked not to be identified — was a labor trafficking victim forced to keep house and nanny full time in Cambridge for almost no pay. She arrived at the safe house on Easter Sunday 2013. That day, Clark, now 43, had told her traffickers she was going to Easter Mass — church was the only place they let her go alone on the weekends. What they didn't know was that after the service, Peter DiMarzio, victim witness specialist for Homeland Security, picked Clark up and took her to the safe house.



From left, Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Mary Jane Cavallo, Medical Missionaries of Mary Srs. Nina Underwood and Margaret Meyer, and a member of the public participate in a January 2019 prayer vigil honoring National Human Trafficking Prevention Month. The prayer vigil took place both inside and outside the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Brighton, Massachusetts, and was hosted by Boston's Anti-Trafficking Coalition. (Courtesy of Holy Union Sr. Mary Lou Simcoe)

Clark said she would not have connected with DiMarzio if it weren't for the help of a brave friend she met in town, who was from Clark's native country of Zimbabwe.

The Easter that Clark arrived also happened to be Cavallo's 72nd birthday. Later, the two would say that Clark was Cavallo's birthday present. Clark says this with a modest chuckle, but Cavallo says it with sincerity; for her and the other sisters, working with each victim was an opportunity to grow closer to God.

Clark said the sisters' abiding faith gave her strength.

"Sometimes, I'd just be feeling like I need someone to help me pray, and they would always help me," said Clark.

Clark's greatest prayer was answered around Christmastime in 2015, on the day her two sons came home with her from Boston Logan Airport. Today, she lives with them

in an apartment outside of Boston. In the summers, she takes them to get ice cream with Cavallo and Cummings.

Taking after their mother, the boys now call Cavallo "Grandma." The nickname is testament to the sisters' enduring ability to make the women feel loved.

Sometimes, this was as simple as noticing and honoring the women's presence — vowing to look them in the eye, every chance they could — from the moment each woman arrived at the doorstep of the Bakhita House to the last meal they shared. Like mothers gazing upon their children, the sisters wanted every woman who entered the safe house to know they were seen, through and through, and, still, they were loved — more deeply than they could ever imagine.

When offered praise on their service, the sisters simply shrug.

"It's all God's work," said Cavallo.



Shannon Lyons

Shannon Lyons is a Boston area freelance writer whose work has been published in news outlets at Boston University, Boston College, and Brigham and Women's Hospital. Her thesis toward a recent master's degree in journalism at Boston University was focused on the work of the Bakhita House.

Grant women's ordination advocates the respect of encounter

10 February 2022

by [Kate McElwee](#)



The Vatican has included Women's Ordination Conference on its website Synodresources.org, with links to the organization's synod resources for the Catholic Church's ongoing synodal process. (NCR screenshot)

A hopeless believer in dialogue, I regularly send messages to the Vatican and bishops to inform them of what the Women's Ordination Conference is up to. These messages are almost always met with silence, prayers for my confused soul, or worse, mansplaining a woman's place in the church.

So it was quite a surprise when the Vatican's synod office [replied](#) to my request to post Women's Ordination Conference synod resources on their website with a very normal confirmation that our effort, "[Let Her Voice Carry](#)," was added to their [site](#). I believe it showed courage and openness, and some garden-variety decency women don't often get shown in the Catholic Church.

That's why it was such a surprise to me when NCR columnist Michael Sean Winters took a [swipe](#) at the Women's Ordination Conference and New Ways Ministry in his column, inferring we might impose American "activist" agendas onto the synodal process. He urged us, and all synod participants, to be "docile" and "receptive" — where have we heard that before? — and to "make room for the Spirit." His suggestions were not dissimilar to those in the EWTN-owned National Catholic Register that [criticized](#) WOC as "inconsistent with an authentic Catholic spirit," for our lack of respect for the role of the bishops in synodality. Both pieces had a similar undertone: know your place.

So much for decency.

We at the Women's Ordination Conference read the synod preparatory documents and felt incredible hope. We highlighted various sections, passed quotes back and forth with our eyes wide, and concluded: This is a once in a lifetime moment.

We quickly created resources, established listening sessions and prepared talking points, as we knew many of our own members would be skeptical. I wrote to the Vatican with WOC's resources and said: "We believe in the inclusive promise of the synodal process, and are actively encouraging our members to engage locally in their parishes, or through small groups on their own. We are enthusiastic about working together to expand and enliven the synodal process for women."

This is hard work and a hard sell for many women's ordination advocates who have a well-earned distrust of Vatican charades. An institution that fails to practice gender equity, that criminalizes women's ordination, and has attempted to silence and discredit women for centuries has lost much

of its credibility when it comes to "inclusion."

Yet, the integrity and impact of the synod will depend on the radical inclusion and welcome of often marginalized voices into courageous conversations. The [Vademecum](#), or official handbook, states, "Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded."

It goes on: "We must make a special effort to listen to those we may be tempted to see as unimportant and those who force us to consider new points of view that may change our way of thinking."

I believe we are doing that work. The hope that those voices are heard is not a subversive or American agenda, but a deep prayer for the church that comes from an acute awareness that clericalism could sabotage the entire process. Our agenda is to live out the demands of the Gospel.

What isn't hard work for women's ordination advocates is synodality. We call it shared leadership, consensus-building, feminist ministry, co-responsibility, renewed priesthood, being church. So while the U.S. bishops may struggle to wrap their heads around showing up and listening, we are uniquely prepared for this moment.

I ask simply that we are granted the respect of encounter before we are dismissed. I suspect our naysayers assume our listening sessions are little women's ordination rallies, but if they attended one of our listening sessions, they might find themselves engaged in an [Examen](#), or in a small group reflecting on questions like: "What am I hearing the Holy Spirit saying to us?" or "Where is God calling the church as it journeys together?"

People attend our sessions because they do not feel welcomed or safe in their parishes, or more likely, their bishop has failed to put any meaningful process in place for the synod and they want to participate in some way. One of our community agreements is in fact to "Leave room for the Holy Spirit!" But unlike many within the U.S. bishops' conference and the Vatican, we are not afraid of what the Holy Spirit might have to say.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with a little women's ordination rally, nor are we ashamed of having a mission, a vision and values we uphold as we work for justice. Certainly we will continue our [lobby](#) for greater representation and decision-making for women within the synod itself, which the synod office has cautiously embraced after many years of resistance.

But far from a narrowly conceived "project" or political ploy, our call for equality is informed by Jesus' radical inclusion of and friendships with women. Our steadfast advocacy for the ordination of women as deacons, priests and bishops continues as we endeavor to co-create the kin-dom of God.

So while some may want to believe that women's ordination advocates are lost in the wilderness, we are very much on the journey, and if you ask me, leading the way.



Kate McElwee

Kate McElwee is the executive director of the [Women's Ordination Conference](#), a grassroots-driven movement that promotes activism, dialogue and prayerful witness to

call for women's ordination and gender equity in the Roman Catholic Church. She is married to NCR news editor Joshua McElwee.

\$5 Million in Grants to Support Affordable Housing Solutions

JORDAN SHAPIRO | POSTED ON [26 JANUARY 2022](#)

For Immediate Release: June 26, 2022

Contact: Jordan Shapiro, jshapiro@sff.org, 415.269.0172

Grants support innovative affordable housing solutions in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Partnership for the Bay's Future (PBF) is pleased to announce \$5 million in grants focused on advancing equitable housing policies. The Breakthrough Grants support eleven government entities in the Bay Area with over \$500,000 each. The grants span June 2022 – May 2024 and will focus on developing and advancing policies that preserve and produce affordable housing.

Each government entity will partner with one or more community organizations to ensure that the community voices who are often left out of the process are represented when developing local housing policies. A housing policy fellow is also embedded in each entity to provide expertise on community-driven policy and act as a catalyst to advance policy innovation.

Breakthrough Grant Awardees

- City of Antioch in partnership with Multi-Faith Action and Hope Solutions
- Bay Area Housing Finance Authority (BAHFA) in partnership with Urban Habitat, Bay Area Community Land Trust, and Unity Council
- City of Berkeley in partnership with Healthy Black Families
- Contra Costa Housing Authority in partnership with Richmond Our Power Coalition, Community Housing Development Corporation, and Richmond LAND
- City of East Palo Alto in partnership with East Palo Alto Community Alliance and Neighborhood Development Organization, Youth United for Community Action, Community Legal Services, and Preserving Affordable Housing Assets Longterm, Inc.
- City of Mountain View in partnership with Silicon Valley at Home and Housing Trust Silicon Valley
- City of Oakland in partnership with Richmond Neighborhood Housing Services
- City of Richmond in partnership with Richmond LAND
- City of San Francisco in partnership with Urban Land Institute
- City of San Jose in partnership SOMOS Mayfair
- City of South San Francisco in partnership with Housing Leadership Council

“It gives us great hope to invest in inspiring and innovative housing solutions coming from our local leaders,” said Aysha Pamukcu, Policy Fund Initiative Officer for

the Partnership for the Bay’s Future. “When we started Partnership for the Bay’s Future in 2019, it was with the belief that everyone deserves a comfortable and affordable place to live, and it’s so encouraging to see that those with the power to make change share that belief.”

The Breakthrough Grantees’ policy proposals will address the disproportionate impact the lack of affordable homes has on households of color – [60% of Black households and 55% of Latino households face rent burdens](#) (housing costs exceed 30% of income) in the Bay Area – through focusing on racial equity and economic inclusion. Proposals included equity platforms, community-led equity committees and a reparations framework. Several jurisdictions introduced home ownership opportunities through community land trusts, co-ops and Community or Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Acts (COPA/TOPA). Other visionary plans included supporting emerging BIPOC developers, leveraging unused faith-based organization land and enabling land trusts to acquire land. Find the full list of policy proposals [here](#).

Building on Success of Challenge Grants

Launched in March 2020, PBF’s first program, the Challenge Grants, was the first of its kind in the Bay Area. These grantees and partners have proven that the policy process is more effective and inclusive through collaboration. One example is the City of Berkeley, which spent 18 months developing the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, an anti-displacement policy that gives tenants options to buy the property they rent when it goes up for sale. Because they were also a part of the Partnership for the Bay’s Future, the Cities

of San Jose, East Palo Alto and Oakland were all able to learn from Berkeley and design similar policies in four months or less and will be voting on these in the next few months.

“When we were awarded a Challenge Grant, the fellow we received truly bolstered our capacity to address some of the root causes of the affordability crisis in Berkeley,” said Mayor Jesse Arreguin. “She provides critical support to our policy priorities and partnership with community organizations.”

The Breakthrough Grants is administered by the San Francisco Foundation, which also co-manages PBF along with Local Initiatives Support Corporation Bay Area (LISC). PBF is also partnering with Coro Northern California, which serves as the employer of record for the Breakthrough Grants Fellows, and Enterprise Community Partners, which serves as the housing content expert, technical assistance provider and network supporter.

Four things to look for in Francis' reform of curia

As every CEO and government official knows, reforming bureaucracies is not easy

10 February 2022

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

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis arrives for an audience for the annual exchange of Christmas greetings with members of the Roman Curia in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on Dec. 23, 2021. (RNS/Courtesy of Vatican Media)

Ever since he was elected pope, Pope Francis has been trying to reform the Vatican Curia, the bureaucracy that is supposed to help the pope in his ministry to the universal church. He has had only limited success — not surprisingly, since every pope since the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s has also tried and made little headway.

That's not to say Francis' predecessors failed completely. The curia is less Italian and more international today than before Vatican II. Heads of major offices must now submit their resignations when they turn 75, rather than staying until they die.

Pope Benedict XVI streamlined the expulsion of abusive priests, while Francis has begun holding bishops accountable for protecting children in their diocese.

Francis ended the persecution of progressive theologians and writers that was common under Popes John Paul II and Benedict. He has also strengthened the synod of bishops as a consultative body.

Francis has especially focused on the culture of the Vatican. He understands that structural change will accomplish little if the

people inhabiting those structures do not change. He frequently condemns clericalism and calls for a more listening church. As a result, cardinals have put away their bejeweled crosses and silk. Diocesan bishops report that curia officials are more willing to listen to them than in previous papacies.

But Francis has still not issued the long-promised constitution for the reformed curia, provisionally titled *Praedicate Evangelium* ("Preach the Gospel"), despite Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican top official, saying that it is basically finished. The last constitution for the curia was "[Pastor Bonus](#)" (Good Pastor), promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1988.

What should we look for in this new constitution?



An exterior view of the offices of the Vatican bank in Vatican City, Jan. 28, 2014. (AP/Domenico Stinellis)

Financial reform

Since every organization needs money to operate, the first thing to look at is how the new constitution deals with finances.

The Vatican has a long and embarrassing history of financial scandals, but financial reforms begun under Benedict and

continuing under Francis mean that the Vatican Bank is now run well. But other parts of the Vatican still experience scandal and are in need of reform.

Financial regulators need to have the authority to hold everyone, including cardinals, accountable for their actions or inactions. Contracts, investments and budgets should also be properly reviewed according to contemporary accounting standards. Other questions include how suspected financial crimes will be investigated and whether there is adequate transparency. Will the financial control offices be adequately staffed with competent people?

Worker flexibility

Besides finances, the most important part of any organization is its employees. How the new constitution deals with HR, human resources, will be critical.

The church traditionally does a very bad job with HR, not only in the Vatican but all the way down to parishes. HR is not just about hiring and firing. It also includes recruiting, vetting, hiring, training, supervising, paying, retraining, promoting and retiring or firing employees. The Vatican does none of this well.

The Vatican also needs to keep up with changing technologies. For decades, Vatican communications operated through a newspaper, a publishing house for Vatican documents and a shortwave radio network. These forms of communication are not relevant today. Today it needs websites, video, podcasts, apps and social media.

Workers with new skills are needed for these and future technologies. The typesetters, printers, radio technicians and others whose skills have become obsolete

would be let go or retrained in most industries. But firing someone in Italy, let alone the Vatican, is very difficult.

It is not that the Vatican has difficulty hiring and retaining employees. Vatican employees may complain, but practically no one ever quits for a job outside the Vatican. The problem is getting the most out of the employees it has.



A view of St. Peter's Square, Vatican City and Rome from the top of Michelangelo's dome in St. Peter's Basilica. (Wikimedia Commons/Sandexx/CC BY-SA 3.0)

Management team

An equally intractable staffing problem is the management team that works directly with the pope. This includes all the cardinals and bishops working in the Vatican as well as some laypersons heading offices. The Vatican Curia will never be truly reformed as long as the top positions must be filled by cardinals and bishops.

Most of the top officials in the Vatican get no training in management in seminary. In dealing with employees, they often fall into paternalistic or authoritarian practices. Their eyes glaze over when looking at a budget or a spreadsheet. They need ongoing training to handle these issues.

Popes also need more freedom to pick their teams. Officials appointed under a previous pope are not always flexible enough to get on board with the new pope's priorities. All new CEOs need a management team that is loyal to them and their goals. They also don't always get the right mix the first time and therefore need to replace people who don't work out.

All of this is very difficult to do when the management team is made up of cardinals and bishops, who are still treated like princes and nobles, no matter what Francis says. To remove a cardinal or bishop from a curia job, you have to find him another job in the Vatican or make him head of an archdiocese in his home country.

For years after his election, Francis kept in the curia cardinals and others who are not fully committed to his policies. A big mistake was keeping Cardinal Marc Ouellet appointed by Pope Benedict as head of the Congregation for Bishops, the office responsible for appointing bishops around the world. He needed someone in that job who would more aggressively seek out episcopal candidates who would actively implement Francis' vision for the church.

Having bishops working in the Vatican is theologically problematic since a bishop without a diocese is like a shepherd without sheep. Vatican officials need to see themselves as staff to the pope as head of the college of bishops and not as part of the hierarchy.



In this Jan. 31, 2021, file photo, people are reflected on a puddle as they walk in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

Only a beginning

Finally, it is important that the constitution not be seen as definitive. Everyone needs to recognize that the curia, like the church, is "*semper reformanda*" — always in need of reform.

Too much time and too many hopes have been placed on perfecting this new constitution, as if it was going to guide the church for decades. Bureaucracies must constantly change to reflect new environments and goals as well as the needs of the person at the top, and the new constitution should be treated as simply a photograph of a moment in time, not a statue for the Vatican Museum.

No single reform will magically improve the curia. Additional reforms will be needed in the future, and they should be easy to do.



Thomas Reese

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's column for Religion News Service, "Signs of the

Times," appears regularly at National Catholic Reporter.



Housing Matters NEWSLETTER

Healing the effects of poverty and homelessness by providing permanent housing solutions and vital support services to highly vulnerable families and individuals.



Left: Volunteers at Los Medanos village serving food during Holiday Party 2019. Right: Volunteers at Garden Park Apartments furnishing a unit for a new family.

St. Ignatius of Antioch has supported Hope Solutions for over a decade. For the vibrant Catholic Christian Community located in Antioch, “worshipping as a community is central to [their] spiritual lives.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch has partnered with Hope Solutions, *formerly Contra Costa Interfaith Housing*, in different ways. We are grateful for the St. Ignatius of Antioch community for the many ways they have supported our clients hosting the annual End of the Year BBQ and Holiday parties at Los Medanos Village. Brian McCoy has coordinated with Hope Solutions to bring celebration at the end of the school year to the children at Los Medanos Village. What started as a sandwich lunch for the kids grew into a full-blown BBQ over the years. For the past two years, due to COVID, St. Ignatius of Antioch has not been able to host

the traditional BBQ, but made sure that the kids at Los Medanos Village are properly celebrated by providing goodie bags with fun treats and incentives.

Most recently, St. Ignatius of Antioch partnered with Hope Solutions to furnish a unit at Garden Park Apartments for a new resident. The community came together to provide the necessary furnishings and housewares for a new family. Brian McCoy along with John Gonzalez, Kathleen Maasberg, Stephen Rojek, and Jose Perez staged the unit for the new family. Thanks to this wonderful team, the family of two, moved into their new furnished home.

Hope Solutions is grateful for the continuous partnership with St. Ignatius of Antioch. We hope for many more fun-filled activities.

Friday, 11 February 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Six: We Are One and Many

The Experience of God Unites Us

CAC teacher Barbara Holmes recounts her visit to Fellowship Church, a visionary, multi-racial church co-founded in 1944 by Howard Thurman and his wife Sue Bailey Thurman. This faith community is a lived example of how diversity can be honored

and held together by a shared experience of God:

On Russian Hill in San Francisco, in the midst of a densely populated neighborhood, is the building that was the site of . . . the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples (or Fellowship Church). There, the mystic and contemplative Howard Thurman and his wife, Sue Bailey, began an interfaith worship experience. In the fall of 2002, I journeyed to this place. It was a pilgrimage of sorts. . . .

Here, contemplative practices are given priority. Time is devoted to a guided meditation, which is an element of congregational life that is unusual in black worship. But then, this is not *black* worship—this is just worship. . . .

It was odd and wonderful at the end of the service to watch the embraces and connections across chasms of race, gender, and social devastation. In my pew, an elderly African American gentleman extended a hand to an Anglo male sitting in the seat next to me. No matter what the older man did, the younger man would not shake his hand. Instead of turning away to end the embarrassing situation, the older gentleman kept asking, “Why not?” with his hand insistently extended. “I can’t,” the younger mumbled nervously . . . “I can’t because my hand sweats too much.” The older man patted him on the back and began to walk away, but thought better of it and returned to embrace the young man. How wonderful, I thought. When had I been in a predominantly Anglo or black congregation where the people were so different that this kind of thing could occur? [1]

Howard Thurman (1900–1981) writes about the conviction that shared worship and

*encounter with divine presence could unite
diverse people:*

Sue and I knew that all our accumulated experiences of the past had given us two crucial gifts for this undertaking: a profound conviction that meaningful and creative experiences between peoples can be more compelling than all the ideas, concepts, faiths, fears, ideologies, and prejudices that divide them; and absolute faith that if such experiences can be multiplied and sustained over a time interval of sufficient duration *any* barrier that separates one person from another can be undermined and eliminated. We were sure that the ground of such meaningful experiences could be provided by the widest possible associations around common interest and common concerns. . . . One basic discovery was constantly surfacing—meaningful experiences of unity among peoples were more compelling than all that divided and separated. The sense of Presence was being manifest which in time would bring one to his or her own altar stairs leading each in his [or her] own way like Jacob's ladder from earth to heaven. [2]