

**Articles of Interest
For
4 September 2022**

Sunday, 28 August 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Five: The Parables of Jesus

The Weeds and the Wheat

This week's Daily Meditations focus on Jesus' parables as teachings intended for our spiritual transformation. In this homily, Father Richard Rohr describes how Jesus' parable of the weeds and wheat offers insight into becoming compassionate, "both-and" people instead of "either-or" people. [Click here to read the Gospel passage](#) (Matthew 13:24–30).

This Gospel is not only extremely insightful, it's also very realistic and compassionate. With injustices and crises in every part of the world, many of us are asking ultimate questions about good and evil. "Where do the weeds come from? Where does evil originate? Why do people do such harmful things?" I ask this about a dozen times every day. This world doesn't make sense. How can people be so malicious, so unkind, so uncaring? It's like we don't know how to care anymore, as though we don't know how to access our own hearts, our own souls, and our own spirits.

For those of us who grew up as Christians, we may have heard this parable when we were younger. We may have been told to pull out the imperfect weeds and get rid of our faults. But since we really couldn't get

rid of them, we covered them up and pretended we didn't have them. And that just doesn't work.

Yet Jesus shows us an absolute realism. He says something that was never said to me when I was a young person: "Let the weeds and the wheat both grow together." Wow! That's risky. I can't pretend to logically understand it, although I know it allows me to be compassionate with myself. After all, I'm also a field of weeds and wheat, just like you are, and just like everything is. Everything is a mixed bag, a combination of good and bad. We are not all weeds, but we are not all wheat, either. We have to learn, even now, to accept and forgive this mixed bag of reality in ourselves and in everybody else. If we don't, we normally become very angry people. Our world is filled with a lot of angry people because they cannot accept their own weeds.

To accept this teaching doesn't mean we can say, "It's okay to be selfish, violent, and evil." It simply means that we have some realism about ourselves and each other. We have to name the weed as a weed. We can't just pretend it's all wheat, all good, because it isn't. We're not perfect. Our countries are not perfect. The Church is not perfect. The project of learning how to love—which is our only life project—is quite simply learning to accept this. If you really love anybody, and I hope you all do, then you have learned to accept a person despite, and sometimes even because of, their faults.

What love means is to say, "I know your faults, I see your weeds, and I care for you anyway." Only God's heart, only the mind of Christ in us, really and fully knows how to do that.

This week's images by Carrie Grace Littauer and Claudia Retter appear in a form

inspired by early Christian/Catholic triptych art: a threefold form that tells a unified story.

Image inspiration: *Parables require us to take a second look. These images make us pause and wonder, “what is that, really?” Perhaps it’s my own shadow, responding from the subconscious with knee-jerk reactions and judgments.*

Story From Our Community

I’m a Quaker and I love the description of worship as a “listening prayer.” When I stayed with some friends in Belarus, I noticed they answer the telephone not by giving their number or name, but by saying “I am listening” and then wait to hear the speaker. It’s a wonderful metaphor for prayer.

—Diana L.

Prayer For Our Community

God, Lord of all creation, lover of life and of everything, please help us to love in our very small way what You love infinitely and everywhere. We thank You that we can offer just this one prayer and that will be more than enough, because in reality every thing and every one is connected, and nothing stands alone. To pray for one part is really to pray for the whole, and so we do. Help us each day to stand for love, for healing, for the good, for the diverse unity of the Body of Christ and all creation, because we know this is what You desire: as Jesus prayed, that all may be one. We offer our prayer together with all the holy names of God, we offer our prayer together with Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, 30 August 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Five: The Parables of Jesus

A Sheep Lost and Found

In this 1951 sermon, theologian and mystic Howard Thurman (1900–1981) reflects on Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep, starting with the sheep’s perspective. [Click here to read the Gospel passage](#) (Luke 15:4–7).

A sheep was enjoying his grass . . . and then when he started feeling chilly, he didn’t recall, but the only thing that he remembers is that suddenly he became aware that he was cold, and there was a throwback in his mind, and he realized that he had been cold for some time. But, the grass was good. Then he looked around, and he discovered that he was alone. That everybody had gone. That is, that all the sheep had gone. And he began crying aloud.

And then the shepherd, who had many sheep, missed him when he got back to the fold, and he left his ninety and nine . . . to try to find this sheep that was lost. And Jesus says, “God is like that.” Nothing heavy and theological about that. Very little that is dogmatic, technically, about it. Just that here is a shepherd who loves his sheep, and one of the sheep in doing the most natural thing in the world—and that is to eat the grass—did it with such enthusiasm and over a time interval of such duration that he didn’t know when the shepherd called, and he was lost.

And why was he lost? He was lost because he was out of touch . . . with the group that

sustained him, the group that fed him, that gave him a sense that he counted. That's all. And as soon as he was out there alone, he said, "I'm just here by myself. Nothing but me in all of this? And I want to feel that I count with the others." There's a certain warmth in that. There's a certain something that is creative and redemptive about the sense of community, about the fellowship.

Thurman speaks of the pain of being separated from our communities:

Insulation is something that is spiritual; . . . there's something inside of me that pulls up . . . the drawbridge. . . . Sometimes I do it because I'm afraid; sometimes I do it because I'm clumsy and awkward, and I don't quite know how to establish a relationship or relationships with my fellows that can float my spirit to them and bring their spirit to me. . . .

Now, Jesus says that God is like the shepherd, seeking always to find those who are out of community with their fellows, and when they have found it, when they have found their community with their fellows, then all the world seems to fit back into place, and life takes on a new meaning. . . . The lost sheep. The searching shepherd. And the cry of anguish of the sheep was the voice of identification that the shepherd heard. That is how God is, if we let him.

Wednesday, 31 August 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Five: The Parables of Jesus

Heaven Is a Great Party

In this homily, Father Richard considers the parable of the wedding feast and points out how few of us seem even to desire to attend God's banquet. [Click here to read the Gospel passage](#) (Matthew 22:1–10).

God has always had a very hard time giving away God: No one wants seems to want this gift. We'd rather have religion, and laws, and commandments, and obligations, and duties. I'm sure many of us attend church out of duty, but gathering with the Body of Christ is supposed to be a wedding feast. Do you know how many times in the four Gospels eternal life is described as a banquet, a feast, a party, a wedding, the marriage feast of the Lamb? There are fifteen different, direct allusions to eternal life being a great, big party.

Do you know how many parables there are about eternal life being a courtroom or a judgment scene? One. Matthew 25. And that's good. We need Matthew 25 because it makes it very clear that the ultimate issue is about how we care for the poor and marginalized. But we forget this good news of Jesus, sending a message out to the highways and the byways, inviting everybody who's willing to come to the banquet. It's that simple!

Jesus goes out of his way to mention the good and the bad alike. We don't like that

either. We only want the good people to be there at the banquet, assuming, of course, that we're the good people. Did you ever see the irony of that? Don't you realize that every religion thinks that they are the ones that God likes? And we end up gathering at the party with that smug certitude; but when we do, it resembles something that very often isn't much like a party. I don't want to offend anybody, but sometimes only half of us even sing when we're at church; half of us don't even pick up the hymnals. I'm not trying to be cruel, but let's just be honest and admit that many of us aren't excited to be at church. For many of us, the Body of Christ is not a party.

Instead, we often believe that heaven is a giant courtroom scene. The good people win, the bad people lose, and almost everybody is bad except our group. That won't work! It gives no joy and no hope to the world. It tells people they're on the right side when sometimes they're very unloving people who don't care about the poor or the marginalized at all. And the statistics prove that Christians are no better than anybody else, in fact, very often—I'm sorry to say it—we're worse.

Do we want to be a part of the wedding feast to which all are invited? The only people who don't get in on the party are those who don't want to come—so I guess we have to ask ourselves, “Do we want to come?”

Thursday, 1 September 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Five: The Parables of Jesus

The Sower's Generosity

Author and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor considers her usual response to the parable of the Sower scattering seed on different types of ground. [Click here to read the Gospel passage](#) (Matthew 18–23).

I started worrying about what kind of ground I was on with God. I started worrying about how many birds were in my field, how many rocks, how many thorns. I started worrying about how I could clean them all up, how I could turn myself into a well-tilled, well-weeded, well-fertilized field for the sowing of God's word. I started worrying about how the odds were three to one against me—those are the odds in the parable, after all—and I began thinking about how I could beat the odds . . . by cleaning up my act.

That is my usual response to this parable. I hear it as a challenge to be different, as a call to improve my life, so that if the same parable were ever told about me it would have a happier ending, with all of the seed falling on rich, fertile soil. But there is something wrong with that reading of the parable, because if that is what it is about, then it should be called the parable of the different kinds of ground.

Taylor asks whether our familiar interpretation may miss the more dramatic message of God's radical grace:

Instead, it has been known for centuries as the parable of the Sower, which means there is a chance, just a chance, that we have got it all backwards. We hear the story and think it is a story about us, but what if we are wrong? What if it is not about us at all but about the sower? What if it is not about our own successes and failures and birds and rocks and thorns but about the extravagance of a sower who does not seem to be fazed by

such concerns, who flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon, who feeds the birds, whistles at the rocks, picks his way through the thorns, shouts hallelujah at the good soil and just keeps on sowing, confident that there is enough seed to go around, that there is plenty, and that when the harvest comes at last it will fill every barn in the neighborhood to the rafters? If this is really the parable of the Sower and not the parable of the different kinds of ground, then it begins to sound quite new. The focus is not on us and our shortfalls but on the generosity of our maker, the prolific sower who does not obsess about the condition of the fields, who is not stingy with the seed but who casts it everywhere, on good soil and bad, who is not cautious or judgmental or even very practical, but who seems willing to keep reaching into his seed bag for all eternity, covering the whole creation with the fertile seed of his truth.

Friday, 2 September 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Five: The Parables of Jesus

Everything Is a Gift

Father Richard preaches about Jesus' invitation to undeserved mercy, a worldview at odds with our entire economic system. [Click here to read the Gospel passage](#) (Matthew 20:1–16).

Another familiar parable is the story of laborers who arrive at the last hour and get paid as much as the ones that began work at the first hour. Let's be honest: None of us who are "worker-bees" appreciate this story. All of us would think that if we bore the

burden of the day's heat working than we would deserve more than someone else. Yet this passage makes it clear that the landowner promised them what was fair, they agreed to the deal, and he gave them the usual wage.

We call this reaction a sense of entitlement. Many Americans have it, especially if we grew up rather comfortable. When we grow up comfortable, we think we *deserve*. We think we have a special right. We would be offended if we didn't get our bonus or our raise. We all think we deserve just a bit *more*; this really creates a high degree of unhappiness and anger in our society. Of course, Jesus always turns everything on its head, ending with the punch line: "Those that you think are the last might well be first" (Matthew 20:16). We'd better be ready to be surprised. The way most of us measure things—especially if we are privileged and comfortable—demonstrates that we might in fact not love God at all, but just ourselves.

There's only one way to get us out of this meritocracy and entitlement. Once in our lives we have to experience undeserved love at a deep, gut level. Where we didn't merit it, we weren't worthy of it; in fact we were unworthy of it, and we got it anyway. That's called mercy. Only the experience of divine mercy breaks down this entire way of counting. And that's what we do—we're all *counters*. We are! We think to ourselves, "You gave this much, so you deserve this much."

Every such expectation is a resentment waiting to happen. When we expect, we're soon going to resent it when we don't get what we think we deserve. So, what the Gospel says is "Stop expecting!" Entitlement is lethal for the soul. *Everything is a gift*—one hundred percent pure gift. The reason any of us woke up this morning had very little to do with us and everything to do

with God. All twenty-four hours today are total gift. And so, the only real prayer is to say “Thank you!” and to keep saying it. When our prayer is constantly “Thank you,” and we know we deserve nothing, and that everything is a gift, we stop counting. Only when we stop counting and figuring out what we deserve, will we move from the world of merit into the wonderful world of grace. And in the world of grace, everything is free.

Rome consistory showed Pope Francis' vision is taking root

29 August 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

[Vatican](#)



New South Korean Cardinal Lazarus You Heung-sik, prefect of the Dicastery for Clergy, greets guests at a reception after a consistory for the creation of 20 new cardinals at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

ROME — The Barque of Peter is currently floating along several currents.

Pope Francis' pontificate has brought about a renewed focus on pastoral theology, bringing the insights of the post-conciliar church in Latin America to the center of the

universal church. It has placed concern for the environment at the heart of the church's social teachings, and reoriented the work of the Roman Curia, as embodied in the apostolic constitution [Praedicate Evangelium](#). It has emphasized the church as the bearer of God's tenderness, rather than as a bastion of doctrinal clarity. And, perhaps most importantly, it has revived synodality as a means of church governance.

All of these have one thing in common: They are made necessary not only by the collapse of modern, post-modern, and post-post-modern cultural critiques or by the spiritual rot of clericalism, as exposed by the clergy sex abuse crisis. A functional rationale for these new approaches -- one that was on full display [at the consistory on Aug. 27](#) -- is the globalization of the Catholic Church.

In the United States, we have been focusing understandably on the elevation of our own Cardinal Robert McElroy. At the consistory, the new cardinal who went up to Pope Francis to receive his red hat immediately before McElroy was Cardinal Filipe Neri António Sebastião do Rosário Ferrão, the Archbishop of Goa and Damão in India. Immediately following McElroy was Cardinal Virgilio do Carmo da Silva, the Archbishop of Dili in East Timor. Dili has a cardinal, but Milan and Venice do not. It is remarkable.

In [his interview](#) with NCR's Christopher White, McElroy acknowledged that American Catholics are not always good at globalization. He admitted U.S. church leaders "tend not to see ourselves as part of a global community very often."

After the formal event creating the new cardinals on Aug. 27, pilgrims from across the world had a chance to come meet the prelates in person. The most identifiable

contingent was from the Diocese of Ekwulobia in Nigeria. The pilgrims who had come to celebrate the elevation of their bishop, Cardinal Peter Ebere Okpaleke, were all dressed in clothes made from a special red fabric for the event, which featured the image of the new cardinal on the front, and the flags of Nigeria and the Vatican on the back. In addition to the shared fabric design, these pilgrims had a shared exuberance, breaking into shouts and songs at and after the ceremony. Later, a percussion band from Ebere filled the piazza in front of the Holy Office with joyful drumbeats.



New Nigerian Cardinal Peter Ebere Okpaleke of Ekwulobia is pictured with guests at a reception after a consistory for the creation of 20 new cardinals at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Francis acknowledged this globalization in his address to the new cardinals. "Dear brothers and sisters, let us once more contemplate Jesus," the pope said. "He alone knows the secret of this lowly grandeur, this unassuming power, this universal vision ever attentive to the particulars." Globalization should never become homogenization.

Globalization is also not the same thing as multiculturalism. The vision is universal, built around a shared relationship with the

Lord and a common inheritance of apostolic tradition. The objective is a shared communion, evident in the easy way the new cardinals mingled amongst themselves and with the other cardinals who had come for the ceremony.

This globalization is evident everywhere. The consistory was held in St. Peter's Basilica. After the ceremony, Vatican press officials corralled us journalists and brought us to the opposite side of the basilica via the stairs down to the crypt. In the twinkling of an eye, we were rushing past the *confessio* that holds the bones of St. Peter. There was no time to stop and take a photo of this most holy of sites in Rome. I thought to myself: There is a metaphor here. The work goes on, but it can never stray from its apostolic foundation which is also the goal of the work: Joining ourselves to the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord.

The conservative critics of the Holy Father can sense that this globalization is changing the church, and doing so in ways that will make it harder and harder for them to maintain the always strange, and sometimes farcical, idea that what the Vatican and universal church really need is a healthy dose of Americanism. Do you remember George Weigel's [bizarre suggestion](#) that English become the working language of the Vatican?

Or, Napa Institute founder Tim Busch's vision of a new version of Catholic social teaching anchored in his libertarian ideas? "We can be the teaching pulpit for the American church, but also the teaching pulpit for the Vatican and for the global church," Busch [told a 2017 Catholic University gathering](#). "We can be that. And we will be that going forward, especially on the issues and topics of business."

Alas, for them, Francis, is firmly in control and shows no signs of slowing down. The globalization to which he is committed is not baptized Pax Americana. Instead it is rooted in synodality, which is why the critics are now so keen to attack [the global process for the 2021-23 Synod of Bishops](#). They do not fear it will fail. They fear it will succeed. Every curial official with whom I have met has spoken about the synodal process and how it is bringing new vigor to the life of the church.

Watching the cardinals and pilgrims from around the world join in easy camaraderie and poignant prayer in Rome, it was clear as day that Francis' vision is taking root.



[Michael Sean Winters](#)

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

Women's ordination advocates detained outside of Vatican meeting

29 August 2022

by [Christopher White](#)



Women's ordination advocates pose outside St. Peter's Square as part of a witness on Aug. 29. (NCR photo/Christopher White)

ROME — As 197 Catholic cardinals, patriarchs and priests entered the Vatican on Aug. 29 for a closed-door, two-day meeting on the church's governance, women's ordination advocates gathered outside to protest the absence of women at the event — only to then be removed from the premises and later detained by Italian authorities. "We hoped our witness would provoke an awakening of their consciences that there are sisters who are outside who are not included in these conversations," organizer Kate McElwee told NCR after being released by the Italian police responsible for the security of St. Peter's Square.

Now, according to McElwee, Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW), the umbrella group that organized the event, is officially "under investigation" for its action.

The women's ordination advocates, outfitted in red outfits and carrying red parasols, had gathered near the Vatican just before 8 a.m., prior to the 9 a.m. start of the closely watched Vatican summit.



Women's ordination advocates walk towards St. Peter's Square as part of a witness on Aug. 29. (NCR photo/Christopher White)

A group of seven women hailing from the United States, the United Kingdom and Poland then marched down Rome's Via della Conciliazione, the iconic street leading into St. Peter's Square, before making its way to the piazza outside the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

There — near the primary entrance to the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, where Pope Francis has convened the College of Cardinals for the Aug. 29-30 meeting — the advocates opened their parasols, which displayed reform slogans such as: "Ordain women," "Sexism is a cardinal sin" and "It's reigning men."

As prelates trickled in for the meeting, some smiled and said hello; others took leaflets, as the advocates asked them to "pray for your sisters outside."

Francis has called the meeting of the world's cardinals to discuss *Praedicate Evangelium*, the apostolic constitution [he released in March](#) to reorganize the Vatican's central bureaucracy. While the document explicitly allows women to serve as leaders of Vatican departments for the first time, McElwee said she thought it was an injustice that no women were invited inside for the two days of meetings.

"We wanted our witness to stir that awareness in our brothers in Christ who are in the room," said McElwee, who is the executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference. (McElwee is also the spouse of NCR news editor Joshua McElwee.)

Instead, nearly 20 minutes after the advocates began their protest, they were approached by Italian police who asked them to close their umbrellas and then soon thereafter corralled them to a nearby holding area for an hour, with the passports and phones confiscated, until being taken to a nearby police station.

There, they were held for another three hours. After signing what McElwee described as "scores and scores" of documents agreeing to comply with an investigation, the seven women were released, with their umbrellas and materials held as evidence.

The Rome office of Italy's national police force did not immediately return a request for comment on the advocates' witness.

The Aug. 29 march marked the third action in support of women's ordination to take place at the Vatican in recent days, as many of the church's leaders are gathered in Rome.



Women's ordination advocates witness outside the entrance to the Vatican's Paul VI Hall on Aug. 29. At left, Kate McElwee, the executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference, approaches a cardinal entering the consistory meeting with Pope Francis. (NCR photo/Christopher White)

On Aug. 26, on the eve of Francis creating 20 new Catholic cardinals, the women [gathered](#) in front of St. Peter's Basilica under the night sky with an illuminated "Ordain Women" banner.

During the Aug. 27 [ceremony](#) at the Vatican for the formal creation of the new cardinals, advocates passed out small postcards with facts and figures on the Catholic hierarchy.

"At that time, there were 226 cardinals representing supposedly 1.36 billion Catholics involved," said McElwee. "And yet there are zero women involved."

She continued: "There are zero women in this meeting. There are zero women cardinals joining the College of Cardinals and zero women who will be eligible to elect the next pope."



[Christopher White](#)

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In first Mass as cardinal, McElroy extols virtue of Christian humility

29 August 2022

by [Christopher White](#)

[Vatican](#)



New Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego leaves after celebrating a Mass of thanksgiving at St. Patrick's Church, official home of the U.S. Catholic community in Rome, Aug. 28, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

ROME — Cardinal Robert McElroy used his first homily after receiving a red hat from Pope Francis to emphasize that humility is one of the chief challenges and callings of the Christian life.

Christian humility requires taking "account of the rights and lives of others as much as we do ourselves," said McElroy at a Mass of Thanksgiving on Aug. 28.

On Aug. 27, McElroy — who has served as bishop of San Diego, California since 2015 — was [elevated](#) to the rank of cardinal at a Vatican ceremony, where the pope created 20 new cardinals. Francis encouraged the new cardinals to exercise an "an unassuming power" with ministries marked by the virtues of "meekness, fidelity, closeness and tenderness."

During a Mass at St. Patrick's Church, a parish for Americans living in Rome, the latest American prelate to be named a cardinal by Francis reflected on the 2010 French film "Of Gods and Men," which recounts the story of Cistercian monks in Algeria [who were martyred after being kidnapped](#) by right-wing Islamic extremists in 1996.

The monks of the Trappist monastery had lived peacefully with the surrounding Muslim community for over six decades, but the start of the Algerian Civil War prompted the government to advise them in 1995 to consider leaving for their own safety.

McElroy recounted how some of the monks desired to return to their native France, but eventually discerned that they "should stay and be one with the people" they had served for so long.

Humility, said the new cardinal, "is not putting ourselves down" and "not presenting ourselves as less than we are."

True Christian humility, he said, is "putting aside the pretenses and facades we often have to try to look better to others than we are" and "challenging them and facing the

impulse all of us have to place our own interests ahead of others."

As the struggle of the monks illustrated, McElroy noted that this is "hard to do in practice" but that "the Gospel challenges us to do precisely this."

Nearly 200 pilgrims, mostly from California, attended the Mass, which was concelebrated by American cardinals Blase Cupich, Roger Mahony, Daniel DiNardo, Wilton Gregory, Edwin O'Brien and Joseph Tobin, along with nearly two dozen U.S. bishops, priests and seminarians.



New Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego greets people after celebrating a Mass of thanksgiving at St. Patrick's Church, official home of the U.S. Catholic community in Rome, Aug. 28, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Ahead of McElroy's elevation to the College of Cardinals, Fr. Bernardo Lara told NCR that having the first ever history of a cardinal from his home diocese of San Diego served as a "wake-up call" for all of the diocese's priests.

"If Pope Francis himself is aware of San Diego and the trials that our people experience, and if he, the pope, is actively helping us, all the more we should be rolling up our sleeves and working," he said.

Lara, who is 33 and has lived in the San Diego-Tijuana, Mexico area his entire life, said the region "carries the story of so many people: the dreams, the hopes, the joys and the tears and frustrations of a great number of people who have come through this area or at least have thought about coming, either to visit, to shop, to go to an amusement park or to start a new life searching for a better future."

"These are people's stories that are often forgotten or just consciously ignored but these are also stories that the church never forgets, and this move by Pope Francis is a clear sign of that," he added.

"By having a cardinal in San Diego," said Lara, "Pope Francis is putting the dreams, hopes and challenges of so many people back into the spotlight once again for both Catholics and non Catholics alike."

Brigette Browning, executive secretary-treasurer of the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, also praised the naming of McElroy as a cardinal, describing him as an "amazing advocate for workers."

"We have been so inspired by Pope Francis and his passion for fighting for workers. Having Bishop McElroy elevated is a strong message that the church is an ally in our quest for social justice," she told NCR. "Both Pope Francis and Bishop McElroy have been transformational and at a time when immigrant workers in particular are facing such hardships.

"It is like a beacon of hope," said Browning.

Prior to returning home to California, McElroy will join cardinals from around the globe to participate in [two days of meetings](#) on Aug. 29-30 to discuss the Vatican's [new apostolic](#)

[constitution](#), *Praedicate Evangelium*, which reorganized the Roman curia, the Vatican's central bureaucracy.



[Christopher White](#)

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I attended a global meeting of Jesuit educators. Here's what I learned about our global responsibility as Catholics.

30 August 2022

by [Channing Lee](#)



Global Citizenship Fellows met virtually for nine months, then in person at the International Association of Jesuit Universities 2022 Assembly Aug. 3-6 at Boston College. The

cohort included 31 students from 19 institutions in 16 countries. (Channing Lee)

Amid division within U.S. political, social and religious life — including in the U.S. Catholic Church — it's easy to limit our Catholic experiences to what happens locally.

Yet, as I learned from a group of representatives from Jesuit colleges and universities this summer, an alternative vision of what it means to be Catholic is shaped by the responsibility of global citizenship.

At the beginning of August, hundreds of representatives from six regions around the world gathered at Boston College to attend the [International Association of Jesuit Universities, or IAJU, 2022 assembly](#). University presidents, provosts and other higher education leaders —including many Jesuits, of course — convened to share ideas on improving Jesuit education for students around the world. The [regional associations](#) that comprise IAJU include groups from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America.

Tasked with the [mission](#) to "promote the development of a more just and humane world for the greater honor and glory of God" through higher education, the conference's programming included presentations, breakout discussion groups and an [international film contest](#).

As a Jesuit university student, I participated as a member of the IAJU's inaugural [Global Citizenship Fellows Program](#) cohort, among the only students in attendance. The fellowship program, spearheaded by the [Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs](#) at my own Georgetown University, boasted participation from 31

students from 19 institutions in 16 different countries.

As young people, we embraced our duty to share such a global outlook with our peers at home and formulated plans for how we could take direct action at our home institutions.

For the nine months leading up to the conference, we [students](#) had been meeting virtually to discuss topics ranging from global governance to poverty and inequality to climate change, in hopes of answering Pope Francis' call for a culture of encounter. Attendance at the August assembly served as the cornerstone of the program, bringing us together to discuss and experience what it truly means to be global citizens.

While I was excited to finally meet my peers in person, I was not prepared to be equally inspired by the rich programming of the conference itself. After all, the assembly aimed to enrich the capacities of those who worked in Jesuit higher education; I was merely a student. Yet the network of Jesuit universities spans the entire globe, connecting educators based on a shared faith, mission and world vision. As a result, the conference was an effective vehicle for promoting unity, reminding all participants that their Catholic identity is a global one.

At a pre-assembly workshop, Francisco Urrutia, executive secretary of the Association of Universities Entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Latin America, or AUSJAL, led a workshop called "Democracy Under Threat." Researchers from AUSJAL's Democracy Observatory Project presented their most recent [report](#) on

the decline of democracy in Latin America, citing the widening gap between what democracy promised and what democracy delivered.

In a reaction panel, Jesuit Fr. Matthew Carnes, associate professor and director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Georgetown, identified how people are grappling with "*desencanto*" — disenchantment — with democracy and their role in such a system. Michelle Bachelet, former president of Chile and current High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations, acknowledged the possible need for a new social contract.

As a student of international politics, I eagerly soaked up this new research. But why did this discussion matter at a conference for Catholic educators?

In a moving speech that brought tears to my eyes, Sophia Opatska of Ukrainian Catholic University connected these dots for me. "A free society is a moral achievement," she said, reflecting on democracy under assault in her now war-torn country. "It can't be achieved only for some but must be achieved for all and forever. It's a moral victory expected for all of us at all times." She received a standing ovation.



The task force on Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees at the International Association of

Jesuit Universities 2022 Assembly at Boston College (Channing Lee)

The remainder of the conference supported this notion that Catholics have a moral responsibility to support their neighbors around the world. A panel on "Solidarity with Migrants and Refugees" affirmed the responsibility of Jesuit universities to not only stand in solidarity with those fleeing from unfathomable conditions but also take direct action to serve those who have been misplaced, especially by leveraging its global network.

Similarly, the working group on Economic and Environmental Justice shared how Jesuit institutions could become "Laudato Si' universities" by adopting Pope Francis' [7-Year Journey Toward Integral Ecology](#) and incorporating sustainability in everything from curricula to building maintenance. These presentations made me feel proud to attend a Jesuit university that is so humbly conscious of its place in the world.

Of course, my experience attending the conference was enriched by the cohort of Global Citizenship Fellows who traveled thousands of miles to reach the United States. In addition to organized discussions, we engaged in seemingly endless informal educational and cultural exchanges over meals and fun activities. Within just a few days, I learned about the flailing banking system in Lebanon, Spain's position on Catalonia's bid for independence, and the state of social, political and economic development in Nigeria. I also tried matcha Kit Kats from Japan and hot sauce from Belize.

Despite our diverse backgrounds, we bonded over a shared love for American pop songs and, more importantly, the consensus that global citizenship necessitated an appreciation for those who are different, as

well as a recognition that our humanity makes us the same.

Despite the multitude of languages we spoke, we held hands while reciting the Lord's Prayer at Mass, physically affirming our shared beliefs and values. As young people, we embraced our duty to share such a global outlook with our peers at home and formulated plans for how we could take direct action at our home institutions.

If there's one lesson I learned about my Catholic identity at the conference, it's that a global faith identity bears a global responsibility. Whether it be at the macro level — promoting democratic values, facilitating interfaith dialogue and caring for our common home — or the micro level — exchanging perspectives with peers, adopting a broader lens for viewing worldwide challenges, and offering prayers for those fleeing violence and war — Catholics have an inherent interest in supporting the prosperity and livelihood of all of God's children, regardless of their nationality or country of origin. Not only do Catholics belong to a global community, but belonging to a global community also enriches what it means to be Catholic.

Unfortunately, some Catholics in the U.S. [criticize](#) Jesuits for being too "liberal" with their interpretation of Catholic theology — and too often overlook their global citizenship. For example, rather than working with President Joe Biden to advance crucial economic, environmental and social justice goals, the [U.S. bishops](#) have expended much of their energy calling for him to be barred from Communion. Some have even gone so far as to [call for the resignation](#) of Pope Francis, a Jesuit and advocate for the poor and vulnerable.

This unhealthy mixture of domestic politics and personal faith threatens the fabric of our religion's global nature. Though Catholic social thought calls on us to participate fully in society, including politically, it also emphasizes the value of solidarity among the one human family. As Jesuit Fr. Arturo Sosa, the superior general, proclaimed in his [address](#) at the assembly, it is crucial to be "collaborators in the mission of Christ" in order to live out the Jesuit value of "for and with others."

Indeed, it is in Jesus' footsteps we follow, as Catholics and as global citizens.



Channing Lee

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'We are part of a living nature': Parallels in pope's, Indigenous views of humanity's relationship with creation

30 August 2022

by [Barbara Fraser](#)



A leader of the Celia Xakriaba peoples walks along the banks of the Xingu River in Brazil's Xingu Indigenous Park Jan. 15, 2020. One Indigenous leader urged the church to stop seeing nature as something to be protected, without considering the struggles of the people who live there. (CNS/Reuters/Ricardo Moraes)

PUERTO MALDONADO, PERU

— Sitting in a boat on Lake Sandoval, in the middle of the Amazonian forest in Peru, with the sun setting to the west and the moon rising in the east, Yésica Patiachi saw two macaws circling overhead and felt they were her grandparents, greeting her.

"My grandfather always said his spirit would turn into a macaw," said Patiachi, 35, an Arakbut (also spelled "Harakbut") Indigenous woman. "I said they were my grandfather and grandmother," she said of the birds. "It made me sad, but also content."

Patiachi was one of the people who [addressed Pope Francis](#) during his visit to Peru's Amazonian Madre de Dios region in January 2018. Before thousands of Indigenous people from at least five Amazonian countries, she told the pope of the difficulties her people faced in a region known for its biologically diverse forests but devastated by wildcat gold mining.

"We ask that you defend us!" Patiachi said.



Pope Francis greets people of the Amazon in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, Jan. 19, 2018. Francis asked his audience to hold fast to their traditional practices and to teach the bishops and other church workers. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Francis, in turn, asked his audience to hold fast to their traditional practices and to teach the bishops and other church workers.

"I consider it essential to begin creating institutional expressions of respect, recognition and dialogue with the native peoples, acknowledging and recovering their native cultures, languages, traditions, rights and spirituality," [the pope told those gathered in Puerto Maldonado](#).

"Help your bishops, and help your men and women missionaries, to be one with you, and in this way, by an inclusive dialogue, to shape a Church with an Amazonian face, a Church with a native face," he added, as he announced that a [Synod for the Amazon](#) would be held at the Vatican the following year.

The synod — generally, a worldwide meeting of Catholic bishops — and the papal exhortation that followed it, titled [Querida Amazonia](#), were milestones in the [development of Francis' understanding](#) of both ecological and Indigenous issues, which are also reflected in his 2015 encyclical "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)."

Patiachi and two other Indigenous women who took part in the October 2019 Synod for the Amazon say there is significant convergence between Francis' view of the relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world and their Indigenous understanding, based on their people's worldview, or cosmivision. Nevertheless, they see areas in which work remains to be done.



Fr. Dario Bossi, provincial superior of the Comboni Missionaries in Brazil, Patiachi Taylor and Leah Rose Casimero leave the final session of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 26, 2019. (CNS/Paul Haring)

'My people's conception of the world is that we are not the only beings that live here.'
—Patiachi Taylor

Sitting by a fire one chilly evening in June, near the Madre de Dios River not far from where she first met Francis, Patiachi gave a group of students from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru a chance to "listen to the voice of creation," as Francis and other Christian leaders have encouraged as the theme of this year's Season of Creation.

Alternating between her native language and Spanish, she told a creation story of her people, recounting how a huge tree had sheltered humans and other animals when the Earth was a molten mass, and how a bird became a human being and stole fire from

the devil, who cursed it and turned it permanently into a macaw.

"My people's conception of the world is that we are not the only beings that live here," Patiachi later told EarthBeat. "Although it's true that we have the human appearance, there are other beings. Sometimes we can see them with our physical eyes, sometimes we only have communication through dreams or other manifestations. We are part of a living nature. That's what my grandparents have taught me."

She added, "The forest is alive. There are beings there. It is the home of so many ancestors who live there."



Children jump from a rickety bridge into a river near Anapu, Brazil, March 14, 2019. (CNS/Paul Jeffrey)

In "*Laudato Si'*," Francis emphasizes the relationship among people and the ecosystems where they live, but he still gives humans a privileged place. For Amazonian Indigenous peoples, however, the distinction is less clear.

When her grandmother prepared a monkey that had been hunted for food, Patiachi said, the older woman told her that the monkey was once a person, and in the spirit world it was still a person. Hunters must treat animals with respect, and in return, the animals, which recognize them as relatives, provide food.

"They are human beings," Patiachi said. "They have other clothes, but they are Arakbut."

But despite that different way of understanding the relationship between humans and the world around them, a key part of Francis' message resonates deeply, said Patiachi, who was recently named a vice president of REPAM, the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network: "We are part of nature. No one has the authority to dominate it."



Patricia Gualinga, an indigenous rights defender from Ecuador, speaks at a news conference to discuss the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 17, 2019. Also pictured is Leah Rose Casimero, an indigenous representative from Guyana. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Patricia Gualinga, a Kichwa leader from the community of Sarayaku, in Amazonian Ecuador, and the first Indigenous representative to the [Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon](#) that was formed after the 2019 Vatican synod, agreed.

"There's a great deal of convergence" between her people's understanding of the world and Francis' view, she said, "in the sense of valuing nature as part of our life, as a very important part of our habitat."

Francis' writings say clearly that "we must care for the common home, defending nature, defending rights, and not exploiting

but defending God's creation," she added. "The way the church as an institution must accompany Indigenous peoples in the defense of their rights, in the defense of the Amazon, in the defense of nature — those are very important points of convergence."

The call to accompany Indigenous people who are fighting to protect their territories was a constant theme at the Amazon synod.

Latin America is [one of the most dangerous places](#) for defenders of land and territory, with at least 58 Indigenous people murdered between 2016 and 2021 for defending their rights, according to figures from 11 human rights groups. In 2020, Colombia led the world in murders of Indigenous and non-Indigenous defenders of the environment and Indigenous territories, according to the nonprofit watchdog Global Witness.

A [new report](#) by the Brazilian bishops' Indigenous Missionary Council [documents an increase in 2021 in land grabs and other violence](#) involving Indigenous communities in that country, including 176 murders and 148 suicides.



Miners use high-pressure hoses to blast away soil in order to sluice it for gold in Puerto Maldonado, Peru, in March 2006. A new report documents an increase in violence and land grabs in 2021. (CNS/Xavier Arbex)

Gualinga cautions that there is a divergence from the Indigenous worldview "when

missionaries or vicariates or dioceses focus only on evangelization, on saving souls," and "see the practices of Indigenous peoples as something that isn't good, and do not see the presence of God in the life of Indigenous peoples."

She added, "It's necessary to overcome that barrier and see the presence of God more broadly in Indigenous peoples, the presence of God in their struggle, in their work, in their defense."

The church must also avoid placing humans apart from the natural world, seeing nature as something to be protected, without considering the struggles of the people who live there, Gualinga said. "That would be incomplete, and there wouldn't be the strength to struggle," she added.

Tania Ávila, a Quechua theologian from Cochabamba, Bolivia, questions the constant references to "the poor" in documents like *Laudato Si'* and *Querida Amazonia*.

"It would be different if it were 'those impoverished by colonial extractivism' or 'those impoverished by the extractivism of transnational companies,' but no, here the poor person is the one who is responsible," Ávila said.

"It's a little contradictory, because [Francis] says we have to learn from [Indigenous] cosmovisions, from their way of conceiving the world, but Indigenous peoples haven't been asked if they feel poor. And when they are asked, many times representatives, especially women, say no," she added. "Yes, there is economic poverty, economic precariousness, but there's not a rethinking of what poverty means."

The call for Catholics to make a "preferential option for the poor" implies that the church is rich, while others are poor,

Ávila said. "When you exercise power over the other, you can make an option for the other, because you are placing yourself above them."

Instead of a preferential option *for* the poor, Ávila would like to see the church make a preferential option *with* the poor.

The church prioritizes "the evangelization of the poor ... but there aren't pastoral plans for evangelizing the rich. There aren't pastoral plans for evangelizing those who have political and economic decision-making power," Ávila said. "Why not use all that energy to evangelize the rich, those who have positions of power, those who can do something to change structures?"

Documents like *Laudato Si'* and *Querida Amazonia* lay the foundation, Gualinga said, but added, "There's still much work to be done."

"An effort has been made to move forward, but we know these things have to be applied on the ground, and more progress is needed," she said.



Barbara Fraser

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Lay Vatican leadership reportedly key topic at pope's meeting with world's cardinals

30 August 2022

by [Christopher White](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis gives the homily during a Mass with new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica Aug. 30 at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

ROME — While an official communique at the end of Pope Francis' Aug. 29-30 meeting with the world's Catholic cardinals only said that participants "freely discussed many aspects," participants told NCR that discussions centered around the extent to which lay individuals can be granted authority in church governance, term limits for Vatican officials, and the city-state's finances.

While the gathering took place behind closed doors, participants from four different continents said in interviews that much of the meeting took place in small group discussions, similar to the format used at Vatican meetings of the Synod of Bishops.

That and other information was confirmed to NCR by at least two sources who attended the meeting.

The formal list of participants, which was also obtained by NCR, included 197 listed participants, including cardinals, patriarchs and officials from the Vatican's Secretariat of State.

Participants were divided into a total of 12 language groups (four in English, four in Italian, two in French and two in Spanish), with U.S. cardinals Timothy Dolan of New York and Wilton Gregory of Washington serving as spokespersons for two of the English-language groups.

According to the accounts of those interviewed, the pope encouraged all participants to speak from the heart.

Francis said that the Vatican's [new apostolic constitution](#), *Praedicate Evangelium*, which reorganized the Vatican's central bureaucracy, was the result of discussions with the various Vatican offices. Leading the process was the pope's [Council of Cardinals](#), which was first created by Francis in 2013 and has met about quarterly since then, with many of the reforms being implemented gradually over the last nine years.

At the outset of the meeting, Francis told the cardinals to speak from the heart as they discussed the new constitution, which officially took effect on June 5.

One major change of the new constitution is to explicitly state that "any member of the faithful" can lead most Vatican offices. The previous constitution, Pope John Paul II's 1988 document *Pastor Bonus*, [stated](#) that the major Vatican offices were to be headed by a "cardinal prefect or the presiding archbishop."

Participants at the cardinals' meeting noted that a substantial amount of time was dedicated to this change, including discussion about specifically which Vatican offices might be led by a layperson.

The noted Jesuit canonist and [newly created](#) Cardinal Gianfranco Ghirlanda had previously [told reporters](#) following the release of the new constitution that the "power of governance in the church does not come from the Sacrament of [Holy] Orders," meaning ordination, but instead, from "canonical mission."

In July, Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet published a reflection in the Vatican's daily newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, which examined historical precedents for separating jurisdiction, or authority within the church, from the sacrament of Holy Orders.

"What founds the inseparable unity of the power of order and jurisdiction is the figure of the Successor of Peter as head of the college of bishops, who holds in communion with them the highest unity of the power of order and jurisdiction and who can consequently apply its effects across the board in sacramental spheres as in juridical or administrative spheres," Ouellet wrote at the time. "He can also delegate and thus make members of God's people participants in his power of jurisdiction."

According to participants, these writings and comments from Ghirlanda and Ouellet reportedly served as the basis for much of the follow-up discussions on the role of the laity during the meeting.

Questions were also reportedly raised during the proceedings about the constitution's requirement that the heads of each Vatican dicastery are to serve five-year terms, renewable only once.

While some attendees questioned whether an individual would be able to adequately grasp the inner workings of their Vatican office and execute their mandate in such a limited period, others reportedly noted that this was necessary to help keep in check any clerical or careerist mentalities. Others reportedly also advocated for limits in order to encourage global dioceses to not be hesitant in sending priests to serve at the Vatican, out of a fear that they would never return home.

During the second day of meetings, a brief discussion was reportedly held on the ongoing process for the 2021-23 Synod of Bishops and Francis' [emphasis](#) on church governance through synodality, which prioritizes greater listening, dialogue and the participation of the laity.

While some participants reportedly argued that the theological concept of synodality has not been sufficiently developed, other bishops defended it as having roots that can be traced to the early church and, more recently, to the 1962-65 Second Vatican Council.

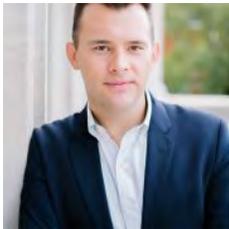
Francis himself reportedly intervened in this discussion to say that the practice of synodality is not a novelty in the life of the church.

Widespread acclaim was also said to have been offered for efforts to clean up the Vatican's finances. Earlier this month, the Vatican [made its](#) financial statements public, and, earlier this summer, published [new guidelines](#) for all financial investments.

Following the conclusion of the two days of meetings — which marks the first time since 2015 that Francis has convened the College of Cardinals — the pope presided over a Mass with nearly 200 of the college's 226 members in St. Peter's Basilica.

During the Mass, which included the 20 new cardinals [created](#) by Francis on Aug. 27, Francis warned against what he described as the temptation to think of themselves as possessing "eminent positions in [the] hierarchy" and viewing their roles in a "worldly" fashion.

To be a minister of the church, Francis said during his homily, is to "wonder before God's plan" and to be in service of the church's mission "wherever and however the Holy Spirit may choose."



Christopher White

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Cardinal McElroy's elevation has 'enormous significance' for US church

31 August 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

[Vatican](#)



New Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego accepts offertory gifts from his sister, Kathy Schreiner, and brother, Walter McElroy, as he celebrates a Mass of thanksgiving at St. Patrick's Church, official home of the U.S. Catholic community, Aug. 28 in Rome. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

As you can imagine, I am not often speechless. But when I finally reached the end of the receiving line at the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See's residence to greet Cardinal Robert McElroy on Aug. 26, I couldn't find the words. It has been three months since the news of his elevation to the cardinalate arrived — three months for it to sink in — and I was still not sure what to say.

Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, knew what to say. "Ecstatic" was how he described what so many Catholics were feeling at this moment. Wester spoke at a dinner for McElroy's family and friends after the Mass of thanksgiving on Aug. 28. In discussions with pilgrims from San Diego, friends of McElroy's from San Francisco or from college and seminary, and his brother bishops, "ecstatic" was the exact word.

For progressive Catholics, McElroy has been one of a handful of bishops who would go the extra mile, make [statements of support for gay Catholics](#), push back against conservative efforts [to hijack church teaching for political ends](#) and participate [in conferences on climate change](#). The

Catholics whose hearts have been warmed and encouraged by McElroy's leadership for many years were among those "ecstatic" at the appointment.

For Catholic intellectual leaders, "ecstatic" was the right word too. "It is something of a truism that theologians and bishops live in different bubbles," Jesuit Fr. Mark Massa, director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College, told me. "The person who was best able to burst those bubbles was John Courtney Murray. Well before Vatican II, Murray saw the complexities and the promise of being a faithful Catholic in America. Most intellectuals I talk to, are delighted that McElroy is now a cardinal because he did serious intellectual work on Murray at the beginning of his ecclesiastical career."

Massa added, "McElroy has the intellectual firepower that can use Murray's insights in a pastoral way."

Cathleen Kaveny, who teaches both law and theology at Boston College, agreed. "Most people think there is a sharp divide between the intellectual life and the pastoral life. Cardinal McElroy is living proof that this is not necessarily the case," Kaveny told me. "He takes his great knowledge and applies it to the particularities of the situations that are before him, situations of great spiritual and material need. So, he shows that, at their best, Catholic moral theology and Catholic social teaching are not words delivered from an indifferent above, but spring from the loving heart of the church."



Cardinals Robert McElroy and Sean O'Malley speak during a reception hosted by the U.S. embassy to the Holy See on Aug. 26. (Courtesy of Paulist Sr. Rose Pacatte)

McElroy, however, is not a man who lives in his head. In his remarks at the celebratory dinner, Wester detailed the key relationships in McElroy's life as he only he could, having known the new cardinal since his youth. Wester summed up those influences: "Love nurtured in the family, care of neighbor in the parish, brotherhood of the priesthood in the Sulpicians, gathering of people in San Francisco, resilient, ever adapting, bold and approachable theology prompted by the Holy Spirit and championed by three stellar archbishops: these are integral parts of the legacy bequeathed to Cardinal McElroy."

At the consistory on Aug. 27, it was remarkable to see cardinals mixing together so easily. They come from different places and from different generations. They have a wide variety of personalities, some being introverts, others extroverts. They have all sorts of interesting connections with one

another. For example, McElroy was a delegate to the 2019 synod on the Amazon, and the only other U.S. delegate was Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley. But there is a prior connection too: McElroy was once the priest secretary to San Francisco's Archbishop John Quinn. O'Malley told NCR that in 1979, when Quinn was the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, he represented the U.S. hierarchy at the meeting of Latin American bishops in Puebla, Mexico. Quinn did not speak Spanish and needed a translator. Who was it? O'Malley.

What does McElroy's elevation mean for the wider Catholic community?

Technically, becoming a cardinal does not give a person an ounce more authority. Apart from the right to vote for a new pope, nothing about McElroy's daily duties as bishop of San Diego will change. The color of the buttons and sash on his cassock will change, but the first time I had ever seen McElroy in a cassock was at the embassy reception, so the change in attire will not be much noticed.

Beyond the attire, however, McElroy's becoming a cardinal has enormous significance. It means his interviews, his interventions at the U.S. bishops' conference meetings, his sermons, all will be more widely and carefully scrutinized. To be sure, McElroy's intellectual firepower and gift for dialogue have given prominence to his interventions for many years. Now they will be accorded more prominence, inside the church and in the mainstream media, because they will be coming from a cardinal, someone whom the pope himself chose for this most exclusive honor.

McElroy has articulated the teaching of the church in ways that some traditionalists abhor, but his arguments were always grounded in our Catholic teaching, not in

some bizarre, Americanist interpretation of that teaching. This is one of the outstanding challenges facing the English-speaking wing of the Catholic Church in the United States, to rescue it from the misinterpretations and misrepresentations of Catholic teaching that have been foisted on the laity for the past 40 years. No one has better summarized those distortions than Italian theologian Massimo Borghesi, whose book, *Catholic Discordance: Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*, I reviewed [here](#) and [here](#).

Shepherding a diocese along the border has also disposed McElroy to help address the issue of pastoral care for Latinos. Something deep inside the Christian imagination is stirred by living on the border, something spiritual but also something with profound political consequences. Theologians Victor Carmona and Robert Heimburger addressed some of these issues in their essay at the Journal of Moral Theology, "[The Border, Brexit and the Church: US Roman Catholic and Church of England Bishops' Teaching on Migration, 2015-2019.](#)"

It is vital that the church in the United States help Latino and other migrant communities retain their spirituality in the face of aggressive invitations to assimilate to the sterile, consumerist culture that is all around them the minute they arrive in the U.S. McElroy is well placed to help with this outstanding pastoral task.

It is given to none of us to see into the future, but I can say this. I cannot think of an event in the life of the U.S. church that has stirred as much hope as the McElroy appointment to the College of Cardinals, in part because it was considered improbable, in part because of McElroy's unique gifts.

It is remarkable to me that the Holy Father is so well informed that he was able to make

this choice. The pope has pointed the way forward for the U.S. church with this appointment and the future is looking brighter today than it has in a long, long time.



[Michael Sean Winters](#)

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

Why Christian nationalism is unchristian

31 August 2022

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



In this Jan. 6, 2021, file photo, a man holds a Bible as Trump supporters gather outside the Capitol in Washington. The Christian imagery and rhetoric on view during the Capitol insurrection are sparking renewed debate about the societal effects of melding Christian faith with an exclusionary breed of nationalism. (RNS/AP photo/John Minchillo)

When I was young boy in the 1950s, cowboy movies were popular. It was easy to

tell the good guys from the bad guys because, in the movies, the good guys wore white hats and rode white horses, and the bad guys wore black hats and rode dark horses.

Sadly, in real life, too many of us want to divide people into the good guys and the bad guys. The good guys are our friends and neighbors, the bad guys are anyone who is of a different nationality, creed, color or political party. The good guys are members of our church, the bad guys are not. Fellow believers go to heaven, everyone else goes to hell.

In the Hebrew Scriptures we find that the people of Israel also saw the world as divided into good guys and bad guys. The people of Israel were the good guys because they had a special covenant with God, and they often felt that this excluded everyone else from contact with God.

Some books of the Old Testament, like Ruth and Jonah, challenged that view. One of the authors of Isaiah, known by Scripture scholars as Trito-Isaiah, reminds the people of Israel that God calls all people. Trito-Isaiah has the Lord say, "I come to gather nations of every language; they shall come and see my glory."

This same theme is picked up in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus tells us that "people will come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of heaven."

God's salvific will is universal; it extends to all people. Every person on earth is offered God's love and grace. To the extent that they respond, they will be enveloped in God's love. To the extent they say yes to God, they will be united with God. This can happen without baptism. It can even happen when a

person leads a loving life without recognizing God's love in their life.

This is what the Catholic Church affirmed at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Ecumenism is all about recognizing that God can speak to all people, even those outside the Catholic Church and even those outside of Christianity.

The Gospels ask us to look beyond the borders of our community, beyond the borders of our neighborhoods and beyond the borders of our nation. A Christian must see all people as brothers and sisters capable of hearing God's Spirit. We can learn to hear the Lord better by listening to and respecting one another. This is what ecumenical and interreligious dialogue is all about.



A migrant mother and children ride a freight train on their journey north, on June 24, 2019, in Palenque, Chiapas state, Mexico. Mexico deployed 6,500 National Guard members in the southern part of the country, plus another 15,000 soldiers along its northern border in a bid to reduce the number of migrants traveling through its territory to reach the U.S. (RNS/AP photo/Marco Ugarte)

Today, many Americans embrace Christian nationalism, arguing that the founders of our republic were Christians and they meant us to be a Christian nation. While it is historically true that most of our founding fathers were Christians, it is also true that they wanted a secular government, free of

religion. They had seen how uniting politics and religion in Europe led to religious persecutions and wars. These wars and persecutions led many to flee Europe for America. The founders wanted a government that would treat people of all faiths equally.

For John Adams, that meant even allowing the Jesuits asylum.

"I do not like the reappearance of the Jesuits," he wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1816. "Shall we not have regular swarms of them here, in as many disguises as only a king of the gypsies can assume, dressed as printers, publishers, writers and schoolmasters? If ever there was a body of men who merited damnation on earth and in Hell, it is this society of Loyola's. Nevertheless, we are compelled by our system of religious toleration to offer them an asylum."

Christian nationalism is also wrong theologically. True, as Christians we should love our country, but Jesus tells us that we must love everyone as our brothers and sisters, even those of other creeds. This includes our fellow citizens and those of other nations.

We cannot ignore the poverty, hunger and sickness that afflict people outside our country. We cannot ignore violations of human rights and the rights of workers that provide us with cheap goods from abroad. We cannot ignore global warming because we have air conditioning. We cannot ignore exploitation of the environment because it is not in our neighborhood.

As Christians we cannot turn our backs on refugees from Haiti, Africa, Mexico and Central America. All are our brothers and sisters.

We can love our country, while recognizing that we, like the people of Israel in the Old Testament, are a sinful people in need of God's forgiveness and grace. Loving our country is not incompatible with recognizing the sin of slavery, the genocide against Native peoples and our role in global warming.

As Christians we are called to confess our sins, do penance and amend our lives. A true Christian nationalism would be capable of confessing our sins and committing ourselves to do better.



Thomas Reese

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

With floods and fires raging, Season of Creation invites Christians to listen to nature's cries

1 September 2022
by [Brian Roewe](#)



People wade in floodwaters outside their home, following heavy rains during the monsoon season in Sohbatpur district of Pakistan, Aug. 28. Experts say about one-third of the country is under water. (CNS/Reuters/Amer Hussain)

With the 2022 Season of Creation carrying the theme of "Listen to the Voice of Creation," it was only natural for the Missionary Society of St. Columban to relaunch its podcast on biodiversity loss.

The six-episode season follows the 2019 debut of the ["Jubilee for the Earth: Biodiversity and Our Sacred Story" podcast](#), and looks at the threats facing ecosystems and species through a multitude of lenses: spirituality, Indigenous and youth perspectives, and how conserving nature intersects with climate change and advocacy for the common good.

"We noticed that was not being talked about within the church," said Wesley Cocozello, host and producer of the podcast and communications manager for the Columbans' U.S.-based justice, peace and integrity of creation team. "We are talking more and more about climate change, but that kind of holistic approach to creation that takes into account not just the climate but ecosystems and non-human animals was something that we felt was missing and wanted to bring into the conversation."



Floodwaters are seen in Jackson, Ky., July 28. Torrential rains fell late July 27 and into the next day in southeastern Kentucky, causing massive flooding that destroyed hundreds of homes and wiped out entire communities. (CNS/Diocese of Lexington/Edward Bauer)

Listening to overlooked or unheard voices across nature is a central element for this year's [Season of Creation](#), an annual period of Christian observance to pray and care for God's creation. The season began Sept. 1, the World Day of Prayer for Creation, and concludes Oct. 4, the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology.

This year's theme, "Listen to the Voice of Creation," was selected by an ecumenical steering committee that includes the World Council of Churches, *Laudato Si'* Movement, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The committee also designated the "burning bush" from the Book of Exodus as the logo for this year's season — representing how extreme heat, wildfires and other impacts of climate change are devastating communities and ecosystems, and serving as a symbol to hear God speaking through creation as Moses did when he encountered the burning bush.

At his general audience Aug. 31, Pope Francis expressed hope this year's Season of Creation theme would "foster in everyone a concrete commitment to care for our common home."

"At the mercy of our consumerist excesses, our sister Mother Earth groans and begs us to stop our abuse and her destruction," the pope said.

In his 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home," Francis said that ecological destruction is inseparable from questions of justice, urging all people to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

The summer preceding this Season of Creation has been filled with both.

[Massive flooding in Pakistan](#) during monsoon season has drawn comparisons to biblical times, with as much as one-third of the country submerged underwater, more than 1,000 people dead since June and millions more displaced from their homes, and large stretches of roads, buildings, bridges and farmlands destroyed by the raging waters. Pakistan, the world's fifth-most [populous country](#) where nearly 40% of its 220 million people live in [poverty](#), regularly ranks among the countries most vulnerable to climate change despite contributing less than 1% of global greenhouse gas [emissions](#).

"We want to showcase this to the developed world in particular. The quality of life that people in the West are enjoying today, someone is paying the price in the developing world," Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan's minister for planning and development, told reporters, [including at The Washington Post](#), of the floods.

Major floods also wreaked havoc and upended lives in China and the U.S. — in eastern Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, California's Death Valley and near Yosemite National Park in Montana, which also faced major wildfires. As global temperatures rise, warmer air can hold more moisture, making extreme rainfall and flooding more common.



The Juba River, pictured April 12, on the border between Somalia and Ethiopia, is normally an important source of water and is bustling with people and livestock. Due to the ongoing drought it has dried up, leaving communities without a vital water lifeline. (CNS/Trócaire/Miriam Donohoe)

At the same time, scorching heatwaves stretched across many parts of the Northern Hemisphere, setting all-time temperature records in places like London, and [exacerbating major wildfires across the globe](#), in South Korea, Algeria, Russia, Portugal, Spain and other parts of Europe. Droughts have dried up rivers and farmlands across the global map, and in the Horn of Africa the worst drought in 40 years has [pushed food supplies to the brink](#) and [raised the risk of famine](#), with [global hunger exacerbated further by the war in Ukraine](#).

"If we learn how to listen, we can hear in the voice of creation a kind of dissonance," Francis said in his message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, [which was issued in July](#). "On the

one hand, we can hear a sweet song in praise of our beloved Creator; on the other, an anguished plea, lamenting our mistreatment of this our common home."



Pope Francis signs documents alongside Vincenzo Buonomo, rector of Rome's Pontifical Lateran University, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, at the university Oct. 7, 2021. The event was to launch a new chair supported by UNESCO "On Futures of Education for Sustainability" and a new program of studies in "Care of our common home and safeguarding creation." (CNS/Vatican Media)

The pope said that the "sweet song of creation," which invites people to practice an ecological spirituality attentive to God's presence in the natural world, is "tragically" accompanied by "a chorus of cries of anguish" — from the earth, the poor and Indigenous and young people.

"Listening to these anguished cries, we must repent and modify our lifestyles and destructive systems" with the planet reaching "a breaking point," Francis said.

A virtual event was to open the Season of Creation Sept. 1, featuring Metropolitan Job of Pisidia of the Eastern Orthodox Church; the Rev. Dave Bookless, an Anglican minister and director of theology for the Christian environmental movement A Rocha International; and Salesian Sr. Alessandra

Smerilli, secretary of the Vatican's integral human development dicastery.



Josephite Sr. Mary Lou Buser of Brentwood, New York, blesses Ellie, a Goldendoodle, during a prayer service marking the Season of Creation at the Sisters of St. Joseph motherhouse Oct. 3, 2021. (CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Other Season of Creation events focus on tree plantings, trash cleanups, community gardens, nature walks and rosary prayer services. In addition, the Vatican's integral human development dicastery plans to use the season to encourage more Catholic institutions to join the 4,000-plus that have enrolled in its [Laudato Si' Action Platform initiative](#) to implement the pope's encyclical more fully in the global church. Enrollment for the first cohort group closes Oct. 4.

Opening Masses were scheduled in numerous Catholic dioceses, including the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, the Archdiocese of Manila, Philippines; the Diocese of Bogor in West Java; and the Johannesburg Archdiocese in South Africa. The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India hosted an online prayer service, while interfaith prayer services were also planned in New England and the Italian city of Bergamo.

Numerous activities during the Season of Creation also focus on two upcoming United

Nations summits: COP27 on climate change, in Egypt in November, and COP15 on biodiversity in Canada in December. In his Season of Creation messages, Francis outlined the Catholic Church's priorities for both high-level international environmental meetings and asked for prayers for successful outcomes.

A 15-day climate pilgrimage in mid-September will lead people of faith from Nairobi's Kibera neighborhood, one of the largest slums in Africa, to Mount Kilimanjaro, where glaciers are rapidly melting, in an effort to raise awareness of social and environmental injustices facing Africans ahead of the COP27 climate conference.

The Columbans, an accredited NGO observer to the COP15 U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, were motivated to restart their podcast, which is available on their [website](#) and all podcast platforms, to raise awareness not just about degraded and destroyed ecosystems but how church teaching can help explain what's happening and empower people to make a difference, Cocozello told EarthBeat.

Although climate change can feel like an insurmountable global challenge, every person can address threats to biodiversity in their own backyard, whether restoring wildlife habitats or organizing to protect local watersheds and forests, he said.

"As *Laudato Si'* says, everybody has a special place in nature that means a lot to them. ... So hopefully, the podcast can empower people, or prod people, to say, 'OK, I already care about this and my faith can enrich that relationship and also can help me advocate for its protection,' " Cocozello said.

The Columban official added it was notable the Season of Creation is focusing on listening at the same time the synod on synodality has opened a global listening process within the Catholic Church. For Cocozello, who grew up on Cape Cod hearing relatives talk about fishing not being as good as it used to be, he hears from creation today not just cries of environmental destruction wrought by climate change and human activities, but also an invitation to co-collaborate with ecosystems and non-human creatures to make the planet better for all.

"What I am hearing is that invitation not only to listen to the suffering, but also to listen to the invitation to work together and build something beautiful together."



Brian Roewe

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Synod official expresses confidence in Germany's Synodal Path

1 September 2022

by [Catholic News Service](#)



Pope Francis leads a meeting with representatives of bishops' conferences from around the world at the Vatican Oct. 9, 2021. Also pictured is Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

FREIBURG, GERMANY — Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, said he continues to have confidence in the Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany.

"Perhaps the communication on the reform project could have been better," Grech said in an interview with Anna Mertens, editor of the German Catholic news agency KNA, published Aug. 29. But he said he trusted the German bishops "that they know what they are doing."

The cardinal was critical of other bishops for issuing open letters criticizing the German church's Synodal Path. "Fraternal correction and dialogue" were something very positive, he said, but a "public denunciation" was not helpful and only led to further polarization.

The cardinal's remarks were contained in "Universal Church in Motion: Synodal Paths," a special publication of the Freiburg-based publishing house Verlag-Herder. It contained essays on the synodal process in several European countries as well as essays by theologians such as Rafael Luciani of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, who also teaches in Venezuela and

serves as theological adviser to the Latin American bishops' council; Medical Mission Sister Birgit Weiler, who teaches at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru; Christina Kheng, who teaches pastoral theology and leadership at the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila, Philippines; and Thomas Söding, vice president of the Central Committee of German Catholics. U.S. Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, a prominent speaker and author, also contributed to the booklet.

In a question-and-answer piece titled, "We cannot not be synodal," Grech said he tried to follow the process in Germany, but it was "one thing to follow what is published and another thing to follow what is really going on."

The cardinal said he could not comment specifically on Germany's Synodal Path or Australia's Plenary Council.

"We have to respect the local churches," he said. He also said he had the impression that some of the subjects being discussed in Germany were being discussed in other countries, and he thought the synodal process was "on the right track."

"The main goal of this process is to find God's will and better understand it," he told KNA. "And 2020 is not 1020, nor is it 2000. So, we have to be faithful to God. At the same time, we have to find the right answers for the people today."

The German bishops' conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics launched the Synodal Path in 2019 in the wake of Germany's clerical abuse scandal. The process includes forums in which questions are discussed and assemblies at which people from the forums report back and proposals are discussed and voted on. Some texts not only must receive approval

of more than two-thirds of all delegates, clerical and lay, but also must have the approval of more than two-thirds of the bishops.

The fourth plenary assembly is scheduled Sept. 8-10 in Frankfurt. Approximately 230 delegates will discuss 14 papers, reported KNA. These include texts on church sexual morality, the role of priests, the participation of women and the mandatory celibacy of Catholic priests.

The Synodal Path is due to end with a fifth plenary assembly in Frankfurt in March.

The process has led to growing discord in recent months, with bishops in other countries openly criticizing reforms being discussed and some commentators talking of a German schism.

But in an introduction to "Universal Church in Motion," the presidents of the Synodal Path said Catholics in Germany have no intention of dissociating themselves from the universal church.

Irme Stetter-Karp, president of the Central Committee of German Catholics, and Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops' conference, noted that Catholics in other countries were discussing similar issues.

"We, as Catholics in Germany, are not alone in these concerns; the universal church is in transition," they wrote. "But this gives us courage and hope for genuine change in a church that credibly proclaims the Good News and is sincerely concerned for the people, the 'hearers of the Word.'"

People must choose: Help grow garden of life or desert of death, pope says

31 August 2022

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

Vatican



Pope Francis autographs the cast of a boy during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Aug. 31, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

VATICAN CITY — God created every human being to be free to choose how to live in this world, Pope Francis said.

And those choices "will have a consequence, for you, for others and for the world; you can make the earth a magnificent garden or you can make it a desert of death," he said.

God is always there to help guide people in making the right choice, and this requires discernment, that is, a special "reflection of the mind, of the heart, that we have to do before making a decision," the pope said.

The pope made his remarks during his weekly general audience in the Vatican's

Paul VI audience hall Aug. 31. He began a new series of talks on discernment after wrapping up a lengthy series on old age.

The topic of discernment is essential, he said, because everyone is faced with having to make decisions in life.

"According to the Bible, we do not find, set before us pre-packaged, the life we are to live. No! We have to decide it all the time," according to whatever situation comes one's way, he said.

"God invites us to evaluate and choose; he created us free and wants us to exercise our freedom," Francis said. God is always by one's side and "he is always willing to advise us, to encourage us, to welcome us."

But God never imposes his will, the pope said. "Why? Because he wants to be loved and not feared. And also, God wants children, not slaves: free children. And love can only be lived in freedom."

Francis said God gives humanity this precise instruction: "If you want to live, if you want to enjoy life, remember that you are a creature, that you are not the criterion of good and evil, and that the choices you make will have a consequence."

"The Lord gives the mission, you have to do this and that; and every person, the step he or she takes, must discern which decision to make," he added.

"Discernment is demanding but indispensable for living. It requires that I know myself, that I know what is good for me here and now. Above all, it

requires a filial relationship with God" who will guide people, he said.

It takes intelligence, skill and the will to make a good choice, he said. Sometimes sacrifice is required for this discernment to become effective.

When discernment points to a decision that is "good" and "correct, there is an encounter between God's will and our will," he said, and this gives rise to "a very special joy."

"It is the joy of those who have found the Lord," he said. "Perhaps along the way you have to suffer a bit of uncertainty, thinking, seeking, but in the end the right decision blesses you with joy."

"To learn to live one must learn to love, and for this it is necessary to discern" and choose what would be "a sign of greater love, of greater maturity in love," he said.

When greeting visitors at the end of the main audience talk, the pope greeted people from Poland, recalling how Sept. 1 was the anniversary of the start of World War II, "which marked the Polish nation so painfully." Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 led Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany.

"And today we are living the Third" World War, he said.

"May the memory of past experiences urge you to cultivate peace in yourselves, in your families, in social and international life," he said, asking people pray "in a special way for the Ukrainian people."

The pope also noted that the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation would be celebrated Sept. 1 and would launch "the Season of Creation," which ends Oct. 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

"May this year's theme, 'Listen to the Voice of Creation,' foster in everyone a concrete commitment to care for our common home," he said.

"At the mercy of our consumerist excesses, our sister Mother Earth groans and begs us to stop our abuse and her destruction," he said.

He asked people to pray that the upcoming U.N. gatherings on climate and biodiversity "unite the human family in decisively addressing the twin crises of climate and biodiversity loss."

The pope referred specifically to the upcoming U.N. Climate Change Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, Nov. 7-18, and the Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal in December.

Pope: Correct view of tradition nurtures beauty, grandeur of the liturgy

1 September 2022

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

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



Pope Francis meets with members of Italy's Association of Professors of Liturgy in the Clementine Hall at the Vatican Sept. 1, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

VATICAN CITY — The liturgy must be nurtured with care and never be neglected or abused, Pope Francis said.

"The liturgy is Christ's work and the church's, and as such, it is a living body," he told members of Italy's Association of Professors of Liturgy.

The liturgy "is not a monument made of marble or bronze, it's not a museum piece. The liturgy is alive like a plant, and it must be nurtured with care" and never be "neglected or mistreated," he said.

The pope made his remarks during an audience at the Vatican Sept. 1 with members of the association, which was founded 50 years ago to promote the study and teaching of liturgy at seminaries, departments of theology and other educational institutions.

Francis underlined the importance of progress being rooted in a true sense of tradition.

"Progress in the understanding of, and even in the celebration of, the liturgy must also be rooted in tradition, which always advances in the way the Lord wants," he said. Like with a tree, growth comes from the roots --

from tradition, which is "the assurance of the future."

However, the pope warned there are "many who say, 'According to tradition ...,' when talking about the liturgy, and "at most they will be traditionalists."

There is a "worldly spirit" of going backward that is "disguised as tradition" and is "fashionable today," he said.

This "backwardism," he said, "is a temptation in the life of the church that leads you to worldly restorationism, disguised as liturgy and theology."

According to the New Testament's Letter to the Hebrews, "We are not among those who draw back," he said. All Christians are called to "go forward, according to the line that tradition gives you. To go backward is to go against the truth and also against the Spirit."

The association, which was founded after the Second Vatican Council to help promote the reception in Italy of the council's teachings on the liturgy, continues to assist the church in this "season" of liturgical reform, the pope said.

This ongoing process "requires time and care, passionate and patient care; it requires spiritual intelligence and pastoral intelligence; it requires formation for a celebratory wisdom that cannot be improvised and must be continually refined," he said.

Their work as experts, researchers and professors requires "synodal" dialogue with others in the fields of theology and the humanities, and with the people of God, who always need the formation and growth that helps their own understanding see "what comes from God and what really leads to

him, even in the realm of the liturgy," the pope said.

"We need more than ever today an exalted vision of the liturgy, so that it is not reduced to rambling about rubrical detail" or liturgical rules, he said.

The liturgy must not be "worldly" nor must it turn its back on the world with "worldly exclusivity," he said.

The liturgy must make "people raise their eyes to heaven, to feel that the mystery of Christ dwells in the world and life" and, at the same time, it must be a liturgy for the good of humanity, with its "feet on the ground" and not removed from people's lives, he said.

The liturgy should be "serious (and) close to the people," he said. "The two things together: turning our gaze to the Lord without turning our backs on the world."

The liturgy is not a worldly festivity, nor should it feel "gloomy" or funereal, he said. It is filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, he said, and it celebrates "the beauty and grandeur of the mystery of God, who gives himself to us."

'Crushed' by 2 papacies, John Paul I's death eclipsed life

1 September 2022

by [Frances D'Emilio](#)
[Associated Press](#)

[Vatican](#)



In this Saturday, Aug. 26, 1978 file photo, Pope John Paul I smiles as he appears at the central lodge of St. Peter's Basilica at The Vatican soon after his election. On Sunday, Sept. 4, 2022, Pope Francis will beatify John Paul I, the last formal step before on the path to possible sainthood. (AP Photo, File)

VATICAN CITY — The moment that the black wall telephone rang early on the morning of Sept. 29, 1978, in Stefania Falasca's Rome apartment is imprinted in her mind. Then 15, Falasca remembers her father answering and hearing the voice of her uncle, a priest who worked at the Vatican, coming through the receiver: "The pope is dead!"

"But he's already dead!" Falasca recalled her bewildered father exclaiming.

Like countless others around the globe, her father struggled to comprehend how 65-year-old John Paul I, elected as pontiff barely a month earlier — on Aug. 26, 1978 — could be dead, and confusedly first thought of Pope Paul VI, who had died in early August at age 80.

John Paul I, born Albino Luciani, is widely remembered more for his sudden, mystery-dogged death than for his life. Falasca, an Italian journalist for a Catholic publication, has toiled for more than a decade to change that and to convince the Vatican that he deserves to be a saint for how he lived his

faith, as a priest, bishop, cardinal and, so briefly, as pontiff.

On September 4, Pope Francis will beatify John Paul I, the last formal step before possible sainthood.

Formal efforts aimed at beatification can begin five years after a pontiff dies. For John Paul II, that rule was waived a few weeks after his death in 2005, in response to cries of “sainthood immediately!” rising up from the faithful during his funeral.

But it took 25 years for the beatification process for John Paul I to begin.

John Paul I “was a figure crushed between two pontificates,” Falasca said, speaking down the block from St. Peter's Square. She was referring to his successor, John Paul II, one of history's longest-reigning popes, and his predecessor, Paul VI, whose 15-year papacy saw him preside over Vatican Council II with its modernizing reforms. Both have been made saints.

In Luciani's case, “no historian was interested in the pope. Like he was passing briefly through time, forgotten,” Falasca said.

But writers seeing a best-selling who-done-it were interested.

The abrupt demise of Luciani, whose body was found in his bedroom of the Apostolic Palace and who was dubbed the “smiling pope” for his cheerful countenance, spawned instant suspicions.

In the first hours after his death, the Vatican offered differing versions, first saying that a male secretary found him, then admitting that the pontiff was found lifeless by the nuns who bring his morning coffee.

“They could have immediately said that it was the nuns and it wouldn't have sparked any doubts, on the contrary, it would have given more guarantees,” Falasca said. One nun, Sister Vincenza, was well known to Luciani's family.

The nuns later recounted they were told by the Vatican not to say they found him out of concerns it would seem improper for a woman to enter the pope's bedroom.

At the same time, a monster financial scandal was growing involving an Italian bank that had links to the Vatican's own bank. There were murky ties between a U.S. born prelate, now deceased, who was chairman of the Vatican bank and an Italian financier, dubbed “God's Banker,” whose body in 1982 was found hanging under a London bridge in what was ruled a homicide.

Was Luciani about to crack down on officials linked to the Holy See's secretive finances? Was he planning to root out corruption in Vatican bureaucracy?

“In God's Name: An Investigation into the Murder of Pope John Paul I,” a 1984 book by David A. Yallop, sold millions of copies. The Vatican concluded that Luciani was felled by a heart attack, after suffering chest pains he played down just before going to bed his last night. But Yallop, noting that no autopsy was performed, concluded he was poisoned by plotters connected to a secret Masonic lodge with links to the Vatican and its bank.

In 1987, another British journalist, John Cornwell, came to the Vatican to research claims of apparitions of the Virgin Mary in what was then Yugoslavia. Instead, a Vatican bishop asked him to write the “truth” of John Paul I's death and promised

him access to the pope's doctor, his embalmers and others.

Writing his own best-seller, "A Thief in the Night," Cornwell concluded that Luciani had "died of neglect."

"In the very heart of the Vatican, this was neglect that was psychological," Cornwell said in a phone interview from the English countryside. "They put too much work on him without proper help. They didn't look properly after his health."

"In other words, they had no respect for him, they thought he was a derisory pope, they said he was like Peter Sellers," Cornwell said, referring to the English comic actor who often played bumbling roles.

Cornwell said some people were disappointed he found no evidence of murder, including one bishop. "I came across people inside the Vatican who were convinced" there was a conspiracy to eliminate Luciani.

Falasca says John Paul I "is not being beatified because he was pope."

"He lived with exemplary method, faith, hope, charity," she said. "He's a model for everyone, precisely because he had borne witness to the essential virtues."

John Paul I also broke molds, referring to himself as "I" in papal speeches, instead of the more impersonal traditional "we."

"He was like a light breeze sweeping away centuries" of formalities, Falasca said. "His choice of being colloquial was a theological choice."

She marveled that among his most cherished books was secular literature —by Mark Twain, Willa Cather and G.K. Chesterton, a

British author famed for his character of a sleuthing priest.

For a Catholic to be beatified, the pope must approve a miracle attributed to prayerful intercession. In Luciani's case, that miracle was the medically unexplained recovery in 2011 of an 11-year-old girl hospitalized in Buenos Aires with brain inflammation and septic shock.

Her parents pleaded with a priest from a nearby parish to come. As he rushed to her bedside, the Rev. Juan Jose' Dabusti wondered to whom he should pray for her to live. Inspiration struck. He prayed to John Paul I.

But why invoke the name of a largely forgotten pontiff? Falasca said Dabusti told her that when he was 15, he heard the newly elected John Paul I speak and decided to become a priest himself, because Luciani was "very simple and very happy."

The Shia LaBeouf conversion interview: A portrait of masculine aggression

2 September 2022

by [Madison Chastain](#)



Actor Shia LaBeouf speaks with Bishop Robert Barron of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, during "Bishop Barron Presents." (YouTube screenshot/Bishop Robert Barron)

The hour-and-a-half conversation between actor Shia LaBeouf and Bishop Robert Barron of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, lasts only seven minutes before the tension surrounding the Latin Mass comes up.

While the motive of the interview is primarily to discuss LaBeouf's portrayal of the titular saint in the forthcoming [feature film "Padre Pio"](#), the major revelation of the dialogue is LaBeouf's conversion to Catholicism, which is first brought to light through the discussion of, essentially, the role of the secret within the sacred as it pertains to differences between the Catholic liturgy's ordinary and extraordinary forms.

LaBeouf's own words praising the Latin Mass are, for lack of understanding Latin: "I can't argue the word, because I don't know what the word means, so I'm just left with this feeling." Barron himself brings up that a secondary purpose of incense at Mass is that it obscures the action in the sanctuary.

I understand the modern human impulse toward the obfuscated to achieve spiritual enrichment. We are constantly on display, thanks to the surveillance and pressures to perform by social media. We have access to a wealth of information at any second thanks to the internet in our pockets, on our phones. There is very little we couldn't know if we wanted to. Of course, we then find the unknowable, the secret, interesting and enriching.



Actor Shia LaBeouf gestures during an interview with Bishop Robert Barron. (YouTube screenshot/Bishop Robert Barron)

All the same, the digital expanse of public knowledge and performance has brought to light the dark underbelly of countless institutions, from Hollywood to the church. This is the core of the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. Such were the things being obfuscated: bigotry, sexism, racism.

"You can't argue the words, so you're left with a feeling" is itself a concept that requires accurate assumptions, the absence of which can lead to cultural appropriation and manipulation. It calls to mind conversations around consent. Words are important. If the option exists for a willing participant to fully understand what is being said around and to them, that should be the preference. Now, if a performance is situated in a cultural context that is best reflected in the culture's native language, then by all means, use the native language! Is Latin the global church's native language? Is Catholicism a culture?

LaBeouf also says, before his conversion, he did not initially feel compelled to have a relationship with Jesus because he only knew the "soft, fragile, all-loving, all-listening but no ferocity ... meek" Jesus (Barron immediately offers the word "feminized"), and it was only when LaBeouf encountered what he considered to be

"masculine" — "cape, dipped in blood, sword" — that Jesus felt "appealing."

We should be concerned about anyone who finds the Gospel most compelling in its violence or who is put off by the femininity of Jesus. If we are to understand Jesus as the savior of all, we must embrace his full divinity that has no gender, and we must confidently identify the goodness of both the masculine and feminine in the incarnation.

Throughout the interview, LaBeouf cites a number of tropes and returns to them often: cowboys, cavemen and gangsters. He repeatedly expresses gratitude for the men who accompanied him and "masculinized" his journey, "the hero's journey."

LaBeouf also discloses the heart of this pull to the masculine: He is drawn to those who treat him in a fatherly or grandfatherly way, and he is lonesome for friends. He finds all of these things in the Catholic world.

As a person also in relationship with the Capuchin Franciscans, I also find it unsurprising that their community is balm to his wounds. One member of the very same Capuchin community who met and accompanied LaBeouf during the production of the film is presiding over my wedding in just a few weeks. I have dined at the same table as LaBeouf — albeit at different times — and my non-Catholic fiancé and I were both warmly welcomed and invited to share our very different experiences of faith. LaBeouf says it himself: He was looking for "safety," and found it at the Capuchin table.

At the time of his initial engagement with Catholicism, LaBeouf's mother wasn't speaking to him and his career was flatlining. LaBeouf shares about experiencing suicidal ideation and total lack of hope. Once he embraces the Gospel, he feels God calling him to let go of his

egotistical striving for power. He finds the safety he was looking for in "non-transactional" relationships where he isn't expected to do anything besides contemplate how best to use his gifts for others. It is a beautiful narrative of acceptance.

And yet still, the concerns about the attractiveness of Catholic violence and secrecy cannot be downplayed, as they directly relate to [LaBeouf's troubled past](#). LaBeouf minimally addresses the accusations made against him in the last few years, referring to them only as "the news." Barron never asks.



Bishop Robert Barron speaks with Shia LaBeouf during "Bishop Barron Presents." (YouTube screenshot/Bishop Robert Barron)

Quietly underscoring the narrative arc of LaBeouf's conversion story is the opportunity for penance in the sacrament of reconciliation. Much online discourse around the criticism of LaBeouf's conversion story and lack of direct accountability for his past violence is rooted in the assertion that whether or not a person sinned is between them and God. Here we have returned to the dangers of secrecy within the sacred, the concerns about the seal of confession when violence of any kind is involved, the questions about authentic accountability.

At the tail end of the interview, it is Padre Pio's "toughness" within the confessional

that plays a crucial role in LaBeouf's connecting with the character once filming of the movie begins. LaBeouf offhandedly shares a story about Pio sending away a woman whose ankles were showing, a story that [seems to have been included in the film](#). (Be advised, the clip contains adult language.) Against the backdrop of LaBeouf's own transgressions, this story is revealing. *How might the woman have felt?*

The experiences of those in the orbit of aggressive men are so often eclipsed by "the hero's journey" of conversion and redemption. In his [piece on the LaBeouf interview for the Black Catholic Messenger](#), Gunnar B. Gundersen upends this narrative by centering and amplifying the faith of LaBeouf's ex-girlfriend, FKA twigs, and her place in this story. Gundersen holds Barron accountable for this erasure:

Shia LaBeouf did not decide on his own to give himself this platform to share his imperfect faith journey. Bishop Barron ... decided to amplify LaBeouf's voice and provide him a place of prominence in FKA twigs' Church — a home that is supposed to be for all, including Black women.

As Barron and LaBeouf chuckle about Pio wrestling with the devil and coming away with broken bones and a bloody nose, the backdrop of the entire conversation is still, clearly, masculine aggression. A physical devil need not be present for destructive men to enact their rage on their surroundings. Could we fairly interpret "wrestling with the devil" as wrestling with one's own violent tendencies?

The parallels draw themselves between the performed and the performer. The lack of clarity that swirls around Hollywood rumors like a cloud of incense so too swirls around the inner lives of the saints. On the one hand, this interview is an impressive story

about the transformation made possible by engaging with the saints and the dire need of all people for non-transactional, inclusive community. This interview is also a powerful man accused of mistreating people sitting across from another powerful man [accused of mistreating people](#) situated within a system that enables powerful men to mistreat people.

Barron says, at the conclusion of the interview, that "the Bible is much more interesting than my experience" and encourages us to envision our own lives swept up into the story of the Bible. Even with historical context, we cannot insert ourselves into historical stories and not have our lived experience intrinsically shape our imagining.

This is, perhaps, the crux of LaBeouf's time as Padre Pio. We can have as much historical context as possible about Pio, and it is still Shia LaBeouf — with all his wrongs — making sense of a story around his own experience. Having not yet seen the movie, I look forward to seeing how the parallels play out.

Having no means or desire to ever become privy to the inner machinations of another human person's relationship to Christ, I have no way of truly knowing Shia LaBeouf's process of reconciliation. Far greater than the opportunities for conversion this may inspire are the opportunities to pray from a place of hope for the earnestness of interior conversion and for trustworthy outward displays of changed behavior. Worrying about LaBeouf's soul any further is probably, as in Padre Pio's [own overcirculated quote](#), "useless."



[Madison Chastain](#)

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A woman without a church learns 'everything belongs' at Richard Rohr's Living School

2 September 2022
by [Cathleen Falsani](#)

[Spirituality](#)



A screen capture from the recording of Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr delivering his final remarks to and blessing for the 2022 cohort of the Living School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, July 30 (Courtesy of Cathleen Falsani)

The night before my mother's funeral in October 2019, I submitted my application to the Living School, a two-year program

created by Franciscan Fr. [Richard Rohr](#) at his Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to study Christian mysticism and other wisdom traditions, ancient and contemporary.

Three months later, I received word of my acceptance into the Living School's 2022 cohort, and six weeks after that, COVID-19 arrived, changing all our plans and the world as we knew it.

What an awful time to open a new chapter in my ongoing spiritual education, studying the "perennial tradition" of Christian contemplation and mysticism, I thought more than a few times over the last two years.

Yes, the timing was awful, *and* it also was perfect.

That last bit is part of the hard-won wisdom I was able to cultivate during my tenure as member at the Living School, which is, in the very best of ways, sort of like a finishing school for middle-aged mystics (and those aspiring to be). Learning nondualistic thinking — in this case that the timing could be awful and also perfect simultaneously, not just either-or — is one of the foundational principles of contemplative spirituality.

Only a few times in my half-century of life have I been blessed with the awareness of something coming full circle, to see and understand the spiritual growth that has taken me from there to here.

A cradle Catholic whose parents left the church for the Wild West of evangelical Protestantism not long after I'd made my first Communion, I had spent 15 of my 20 years of formal education in faith-based institutions, including private Christian prep school, an evangelical Christian college and

the United Methodist seminary where I earned a master's degree in theological studies.

Add to that the 20 or so years as a journalist covering religion for mainstream media, during which I essentially went to church for a living, my religious education was robust long before I'd heard of Rohr or his school. But as I approached my 50s — entering what Rohr calls the "second half of life" — it also began to feel incomplete.

I yearned for something deeper that would connect my faith to a sustainable contemplative practice and with a wisdom tradition that is both ancient and dynamic. I also sought a new clarity of vocational and personal purpose as I entered what the writer Annie Lamott calls the "third-third" of life. I want to be useful, a good steward of my gifts and experiences, in the ["called and gifted for the Third Millennium"](#) sense of things.

It was around this time two things happened: Someone pressed a copy of Rohr's [Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life](#) into my hands and then an editor at Religion News Service, for which I occasionally write, asked me to travel to Albuquerque in early 2019 to interview Rohr for a long profile in advance of the release of what he expected to be his final "big" book, [The Universal Christ](#). Between *Falling Upward* and my [conversation](#) with the Franciscan friar himself, I experienced an almost ineffable draw toward both the Living School and the Catholic spirituality of my childhood, something Rohr describes as feeling spiritually "homesick."

"We are both sent and drawn by the same Force, which is precisely what Christians mean when they say the Cosmic Christ is both alpha and omega," Rohr writes in *Falling Upward*. "There is an inherent

and desirous dissatisfaction that both sends and draws us forward, and it comes from our original and radical union with God. What appears to be past, and future is in fact the same home, the same call, and the same God."

Our paths are never a straight line, they are spirals, Rohr says. Mine has certainly been that. Taken away from the Roman Catholicism of my Italian and Irish ancestors when I was in grade school, my family of origin landed, of all places, among the Southern Baptists (in southern Connecticut), where I learned a lot about grace and ice cream socials. That led to a long sojourn among American evangelicals (an extremely mixed bag), before I sauntered toward Canterbury and the Episcopal Church with its smells, bells and liturgy in my early 20s.

Since then, I have, to borrow a phrase from an Irish friend, been "as comfortable and uncomfortable" inside a Catholic cathedral as in any other church, without any set spiritual home. Always spiritually oriented with the things of faith central to my life, I remain a woman without a church.



Writer Cathleen Falsani and Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr during the weeklong symposium in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in late July (Courtesy of Cathleen Falsani)

Rohr even had a good word for my situation. "At last, one has lived long enough to see that 'everything belongs' — even the sad, absurd, and futile parts," he wrote in *Falling Upward*. "In the second half of life, we can give our energy to making even the painful parts and the formally excluded parts belong to the now unified field."

In the second half of my life, he assured me, all the seemingly disparate parts of my life and spiritual journey fit and made sense. I had to transcend earlier experiences, unlearn a few things, but include everything. Even the Southern Baptists, the mask of the Buddha I picked up in Nepal, and the rosary that was blessed by Pope Francis the night of his election when I stood among a scrum of other reporters in the rain taking notes and witnessing history. In my story, the Living School taught me, all of it belongs.

Established in 2013, the Living School has helped more than a thousand adult students create "deep engagement with their truest selves and with the world." Through contemplative practice and study of the mystic tradition inside Christianity and beyond it, the school aims to invite students "to awaken to the pattern of reality — God's loving presence with and in all things."

The school has four core faculty members: Rohr; the Protestant author/activist and theologian [Brian McLaren](#); the Catholic mystic, Thomas Merton scholar and clinical psychologist [James Finley](#); and the contemplative activist, author and theologian [Barbara Holmes](#), who focuses on African American spirituality, mysticism, cosmology and culture. These four were also joined during the first year of my studies by

the Episcopal priest, author and mystic the Rev. [Cynthia Bourgeault](#), and, at the tail end of my studies, by the author, translator of the mystics and a leading voice in the interspiritual movement, [Mirabai Starr](#).

In the pre-COVID "before times," if you will, the Living School had a distance learning component. It is a school for grownups who are expected to be self-starters and invested enough in their education to read and study and integrate the wisdom on their own without tests and quizzes or any kind of "proving." But there also were several large, in-person gatherings each year of the program, where students could connect face-to-face with their teachers and each other. The pandemic scuttled that for my cohort, the only one to spend its entire tenure under COVID-19's pall, when all but our final gathering relocated to Zoom.



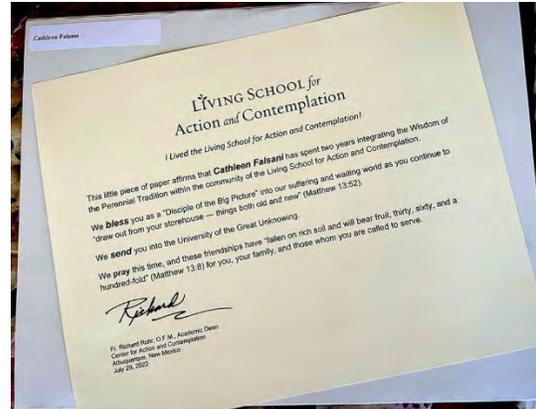
A group photo of most of the members of the 2022 and 2023 cohorts of the Living School, taken in a courtyard of the inn at Albuquerque, New Mexico, in late July (Courtesy of the Center for Action and Contemplation)

At times, that made keeping up and feeling connected to my classmates and our studies more than a little challenging. Even though our class of about 200 was broken into small "circle groups" of about 10 people each, with whom we met regularly via Zoom to talk about what we were learning and our

lives in general, and while we were grateful for the technology that allowed us to do so, it was a wan substitute for being together in person.

In late July, when we finally were able to be together physically for a five-day symposium in Albuquerque that marked the end of our cohort's studies, all the pieces fit together in a way I'd never before experienced. The wisdom imparted to us through the voices of St. John of the Cross, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, [Thomas Merton](#), Julian of Norwich, the Desert Mothers and Fathers, [Howard Thurman](#), [Thich Nhat Hanh](#), Ken Wilber, [Ilia Delio](#), [McLaren](#), Holmes, [Bourgeault](#), Finley, [Starr](#) and so many others took on flesh and walked among us. Hugging the people I'd been praying and sharing an intimate spiritual journey with for two years for the very first time was a precious gift, cool spring water after a drought that felt interminable.

When McLaren challenged us to not judge others, when Starr told us that grief is a spiritual practice, or when Finley urged us to ask ourselves, "All things considered, what is the most loving thing I can do right now?", we could see, hear, feel their intentions and our own in the way humans are only truly able to do when they're in the same room. And when Rohr made his first entrance, arriving with a health aide and his canine companion Opie by his side, he was a living, breathing master class of how to be fully present, not reactionary, and hold everything loosely — a lesson Mother Nature has been trying to teach the whole of humanity in the last couple of years.



Cathleen Falsani's certificate from the Living School (Courtesy of Cathleen Falsani)

Only a few times in my half-century of life have I been blessed with the awareness of something coming full circle, to see and understand the spiritual growth that has taken me from there to here. That week in Albuquerque was full of such numinous, transformational experiences. A turning point in a thin place.

"God put us on this earth for a little space, to bear the beams of love," Rohr, paraphrasing the poet William Blake, told several hundred students assembled in the Hotel Albuquerque ballroom for the final event of the week: our "sending" as students who had completed their studies (or at least their sojourn) at the Living School.

"It's all an enduring, an allowing — allowing the beams of infinite love to come toward you. In every event, in every setting, in every relationship, and even in your own mishaps and faults and mistakes," he continued.

For 79-year-old Rohr, who has been using a wheelchair of late after battling a few health issues, and for the Living School students, faculty and Center for Action and Contemplation staff, the July ritual marked the end of a chapter in their lives, and the beginning of something new. There is a student group just behind mine, the 2023

cohort, but none after that. For now, the Living School admissions process has been [put on hold](#) while Rohr and his colleagues discern what is to come next and how.

"May you know the height and the length and the depth and the breadth, may you know the love that surpasses all knowledge," said Rohr, lifting a hand from his cane and blessing us with the sign of the cross. "And may you know that you are infinitely children of God."



[Cathleen Falsani](#)

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Pope Francis' tenure isn't over. In fact, themes of his pontificate are now starting to gel.

Sep 2, 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis leads a consistory for the creation of 20 new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica Aug. 27 at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

While in Rome this week, I spoke with a number of visiting cardinals and curial officials. All agreed that speculation that Pope Francis' tenure is coming to its end is misplaced. But there was a sense that the papacy has entered a new phase in which the Holy Father and the Roman Curia are looking to consolidate the reforms.

The consolidation is focused on the central, ecclesial themes of the pontificate: discernment, encounter, accompaniment, emphasizing the mercy and tenderness of God, the revival of pastoral theology, synodality, how to care for creation, and how to engage, rather than confront, secularization. These themes are taking root, and even those cardinals and bishops who were once skeptical are embracing the pope's ideas. One cardinal who in 2015 gave what a synod father said was "a finger-wagging speech" to the pope, telling him he couldn't do what he thought he could do regarding Communion for the divorced and remarried, this time gave a speech commending the pope and endorsing his reforms of the Roman Curia.

The consolidation of themes is not like the consolidation of gains a general might undertake on the battlefield, halting an advance so that the rest of the army can come up, reestablishing supply routes and

taking measures to squash any counterattack. No, this consolidation is more like the flavors of a stew melding together in the course of a long, slow simmer, each flavor still distinct but improved by encountering the other flavors.

In conversations with people in different roles, the most consistently expressed opinion was that synodality was changing the way the church is, not just the way it functions, including what it means to be a pastor and an evangelizer. A bishop is a teacher of the flock, for example, but synodality reminds him in concrete ways that the Spirit of God is already at work in the lives of his flock. A bishop does not drop out of the sky with all the answers and if he thinks he can, his ministry will be limited, even crippled, and pedantic. The diocese may become an extension of his vision, and the people may be obedient, but the diocese will not be alive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The Master chose 12 apostles, not one, so the church has never been a univocal thing.

Similarly, cultivating discernment in the life of the church takes more work than simply memorizing the catechism. A rote faith may be real, but it will not be well suited to evangelization. It will only be capable of apologetics. There is a place for apologetics, to be sure, but unless pastoral leaders distinguish apologetics from evangelization, we will continue to drive away five young people for every one we attract. Reducing the faith to a set of propositions is very Kantian. For a sliver of the ambient population, such a reduction works, but for millions of other people, it is the tenderness of God, not the theses about God, that attract and stir the heart. Here it is Francis, not his critics, who is most faithful to the *ressourcement*, or return to the Patristic sources and Scripture that characterized Vatican II.

There is a place for apologetics, to be sure, but unless pastoral leaders distinguish apologetics from evangelization, we will continue to drive away five young people for every one we attract.

The Spirit of God is at work not only in the lives of the faithful, but beyond the walls of the church as well. This is one of the Holy Father's most provocative and important themes, one he touched on in his [address](#) to the bishops, clergy and religious of Quebec. There, building on quotes from Pope Paul VI, he said:

Saint Paul VI distinguished secularization from secularism, a concept of life that totally separates a link with the Creator, so that God becomes "superfluous and an encumbrance", and generates subtle and diverse "new forms of atheism": "consumer society, the pursuit of pleasure set up as the supreme value, a desire for power and domination, and discrimination of every kind" (ibid). As Church, and above all as shepherds of God's People, as consecrated men and women, seminarians and pastoral workers, it is up to us to make these distinctions, to make this discernment. If we yield to the negative view and judge matters superficially, we risk sending the wrong message, as though the criticism of secularization masks on our part the nostalgia for a sacralized world, a bygone society in which the Church and her ministers had greater power and social relevance.

Instead of wringing our hands about the secularization of the ambient culture, a process that has been ongoing for centuries, Pope Francis invites us to accompany those outside the church, mindful that the Spirit is at work in their lives too, that our Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation demands we stipulate that God is at work in their lives.

That speech in Quebec is one to read again and again if you want to understand Pope Francis and how his Christocentric vision is so rooted in the teachings of Vatican II.

What most surprised me about this visit to Rome was the cross-pollination among the themes of this pontificate. Officials who have been hard at work implementing the integral ecological vision of *Laudato Si'* talk about the importance of synodality to their work. Curial officials who are coordinating the synodal process talk about the importance of *Laudato Si'* and its commitment to the idea that everything is related.

It is ironic in a sad way that so many U.S. Catholics, and so many Catholic institutions of higher learning in the U.S., fail to see these connections or engage this cross-pollination. Ideologues always abhor synthesis and resist cross-pollination. Academics need to specialize to get published, focusing on ever narrower points of interest.

But a secular, non-Catholic school, the University of Louisville, launched in May a "[New Vision of Health](#)" downtown campus as part of its Christina Lee Brown Envirome Institute, and the organizers of that endeavor seem to have grasped what Pope Francis and the Curia grasp: Everything is related and if we do not break out of our silos, our culture and society will never meet the challenges we face. Science, justice, encounter, charity, faith all have a role to play in coping with the mess we moderns have made.

The picture of what a synodal church will look like, which was somewhat unknown and even vague when the Holy Father began placing emphasis on synods at the start of his papacy, is being filled in. This week, he added an element that has been missing since 2015, getting all the cardinals together

so that they can get to know each other because they one day have to enter into the conclave that will choose Francis' successor.

Critics of this papacy, however, shouldn't count on that conclave happening anytime soon. The pope seems to have made peace with his physical infirmities and doesn't appear to be going anywhere. What is more, the reforms he has begun are likely to be pursued by the next pope and the pope after that.

Francis' synodal commitment is not only changing the papacy and the Curia, although it is doing that. It is changing the church. The windows opened at Vatican II are letting in fresh breezes. There is excitement again in the ancient center of the Catholic faith as new ecclesial approaches spread the good word to a new generation of Christians and non-Christians: The cloth at the temple has been rent from top to bottom and the tomb of the crucified is empty.



Michael Sean Winters

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

Bishops' Labor Day statement touts bills to help children, women, families

2 September 2022

by [Mark Pattison](#),
[Catholic News Service](#)



A worker uses a shovel Aug. 30 at a highway construction site in Stony Brook, New York. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

WASHINGTON — This year's annual Labor Day statement from the U.S. bishops touts two bills awaiting action in Congress as being helpful to children, women and families: the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and an expansion of the federal child tax credit.

"Even before current economic uncertainties, women — especially women of African descent and Latina women — earned less than their male counterparts, including when doing the same work with the same qualifications," said Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, [in the statement](#).

"They filled the majority of direct care jobs, experiencing increased risk of injury, high stress, and exposure to illness while earning low wages. They were the majority of caretakers for their loved ones, yet many lacked adequate family and medical leave policies. These and other economic challenges continue to affect working families and children," Coakley said.

The statement, "Building a Just Economy for Women and Families," dated Sept. 5 — Labor Day — was released Aug. 31.

Noting that this was the first Labor Day since the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, Coakley said: "This unique moment necessitates a society and an economy that supports marriages, families and women; it demands that all of us reach across political aisles and work diligently to reframe social policies in ways that are pro-woman, pro-family, pro-worker and, thus, authentically pro-life."

He suggested that both the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and the child tax credit expansion fulfill that goal, calling the former one of the bishops' "policy priorities."

"There is currently no federal law requiring employers to provide short-term, reasonable accommodations to pregnant women in the workplace and the PWFA would do so. Common requests include being able to carry a bottle of water, a stool for jobs that involve long periods of standing, or lighter duty for jobs that entail heavy lifting," he said.

"Women in low-wage and physically demanding jobs, disproportionately held by women of color, are regularly denied these simple accommodations and terminated or forced to take leave without pay. A number of states already have laws like this in place; however, pregnant women in every state should be protected by these standards."

The bill has passed the House, but awaits action in a Senate running out of days on its calendar. "No woman should be forced to risk her or her child's health, miscarriage, preterm birth, economic security or losing insurance benefits just because she requests

a short-term, reasonable, pregnancy-related accommodation," Coakley said.

The archbishop used the statement to press for passage of an expanded child tax credit.

"In 2021, the CTC provided financial relief for families who were having difficulty making ends meet. Families largely spent this money on food, energy bills, housing payments and other basic needs. With rising inflation, continuing to expand this tax credit would be critically helpful to families forced to choose between buying food and filling up their gas tanks," Coakley said.

"Congress should move forward with a CTC proposal that has no minimum income requirement, includes families with mixed immigration status, is available for the year before birth, and is offered to every child — regardless of the size of the family," he added. "The CTC was enormously effective at reducing child poverty in 2021 and we should not regress from this progress."

"The efforts of labor unions have helped union workers fare better during the pandemic than nonunion workers, as they were more likely to maintain their pay and their jobs."

— *Archbishop Paul Coakley*

Passing both bills, Coakley said, "would have a profound impact on family stability, especially for families who are financially vulnerable."

He also voiced themes common in the annual Labor Day statement, among them federal paid leave policy, just wages and the right to organize. "We have long called for a system in which the whole of society enjoys fundamental human needs including nutrition, affordable housing, education, and health care," the archbishop said.

"The efforts of labor unions have helped union workers fare better during the pandemic than nonunion workers, as they were more likely to maintain their pay and their jobs," he added.

He also lauded the efforts of organizations funded through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development that "work on low-wage workers' rights and training, in an effort to eliminate labor trafficking and related workplace abuses such as wage theft."

Coakley took note of the death 20 years ago of Msgr. George Higgins, head of what was then known as the bishops' Social Action Department and who either wrote or consulted on multiple decades worth of Labor Day statements.

"He was a fervent advocate of economic justice for all, working closely with unions and union organizers, including Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, and received many awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom," Coakley said.

"May the spirit and example of Msgr. Higgins inspire us," he said, "that we might have the wisdom to build up justice and improve the lives of workers and their families as he did throughout his life."

We are the Church
A synthesis of the synodal
gatherings at St. James
Cathedral, Seattle
In Your Midst June 2022 by
Msgr. Michael Ryan, Pastor

The Synod Many shared feelings of reluctance, skepticism, and hope about the synodal process itself.

- There was a feeling of pessimism that there is nothing that is going to change no matter how much is said during these synodal gatherings, but for whatever the worth, sharing is good.
- A young man shared that when preparing for the session he had thought “this all sounds like corporate gobbledegook,” but upon hearing others’ stories, he felt inspired.
- The synodal process is great, but it will all end up in the theology machine, ‘the usual Catholic style.’
- The synod is seen as a healthy way of addressing divisions and disagreements. It is an official, Church-sanctioned conversation in which there are no taboo subjects, no off-limits subjects, no wrong answers. This is a healthy way to talk, rather than simply forbidding dialogue about some topics.
- The synod is teaching us how to listen to what God is saying.
- The worldwide Synodal process is a huge blast of oxygen in our Church. The role of women in the Church emerged immediately as one of the predominant themes in virtually every session hosted at St. James Cathedral.
- Ordination does not impart all of the gifts needed to build the Church. We need to honor and call forth the voices of women.
- I feel the exclusion of women from ministry is arcane and ill-founded, and is a waste of talent.
- To only hear the preached experience of men Sunday after Sunday, no matter how good they are, to have to listen to non-inclusive readings day after day wears us down, and deadens our spirits, especially

when there can be no discussion. This is sinful.

- As a single mother, sometimes it seems to me the Church is out of touch with human life. There is still so much that I love, but I hear the leadership— the bishops—make statements that feel inhuman, distant from my lived experience. I want the Church to be a place for my daughter to grow, where she will have role models.
- The Church as an institution is losing its credibility, because it clings to practices that cannot be found in Jesus’s life, words, or actions. I find no way to justify the exclusion of women from leadership and the ordained ministry. It’s too hard to explain that away. For me, the closer I come to Jesus the further I feel from the institutional Church. I would like to have that gap lessened for me.
- An elderly woman shared how her granddaughter had asked her a lot of hard questions about Catholicism, and despite her best efforts to provide answers, her granddaughter said, “I cannot be confirmed because I cannot say in truth that I believe everything the Catholic Church teaches,” specifically citing the limited role of women in the Church. The woman found this heartbreaking, but was energized by her granddaughter’s wellformed conscience, and agrees that “we wouldn’t have the crisis of too few priests if we understood the untapped vocations of women.”
- One thing I was really struck with was that the reason I’m still Catholic is that I’ve had strong women in my life, keeping me with a deep sense of the true Church. I’m at a place where I love my faith, but the institution: what do you do with an institution that

doesn't really believe that you are the Church?

- If this was given to me as an adult, I would never join an organization that was run by men only, and not by women and men. I love what it's about, the people you meet, the goodwill. The fact that it's just men really bothers me. I have lots of strong women in my life, from my marriage, to my family. The inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQ community was a theme that came up in every session.
- A young man shared that the day he and his husband were civilly married, they visited the outside of the church to pray with family and friends and were joined by a priest. Unbeknownst to them, their photographer was a Catholic who had been struggling with her faith because of the Church's exclusion of LGBTQ people, and she cried seeing the commitment of the couple and the attendance of a priest, finding renewal in her faith through that.
- The Church is a family and we should be able to get along. My gay, lesbian, divorced friends do not feel welcome in the Church. God does not divide people—people do.
- An older woman shared she is a lesbian and the Church's teachings have been hurtful. She has never had a problem with God, but she had to leave the Church for a long time. She returned because she missed the sacraments. She looks forward to a welcoming church someday—a church that takes barriers away rather than putting barriers up.
- My LGBTQ friends don't feel welcome in the Church—they are told from a very early age that they're sinners, and they feel unwelcome. I think that's very sad and I

believe the opposite. I believe the Church should welcome everyone. 10 In Your Midst June 2022 • I have two family members who are gay/lesbian. Because of that, not only have they stopped going to the Catholic Church, but so has one of their mothers. She feels she cannot be Catholic because the Church doesn't accept her child.

- The crisis over the firing of two gay teachers at Kennedy Catholic was a painful moment, as hundreds of young people came and protested at the Cathedral, moved by compassion and the love of Jesus. They were doing what we taught them, they were advocating for justice for the marginalized.
- God loves everyone, no matter what, no matter what type of person you are. My daughter is gay. I have no idea where that came from, but I realized: God loves everybody. I don't see the Church being open to embrace gay people. That hurts.
- My two children, as they grow older, they have both developed relationships and would call themselves gay. Their relationships are meaningful and loving, and yet, they've pulled away from the Church because the language is so harmful. My husband, in support of the kids, has pulled away also. On top of that, the abuse scandals have been very difficult. The structures of our family fray a bit. That mystery of forgiveness has been even more important to experience. Racism in the Church was mentioned repeatedly.
- An older black man recalled how after George Floyd's murder, the bishops suddenly decided to start talking about racism, but they talked to Catholics about George Floyd's murder much more as if they were talking to the police who had murdered George Floyd than to George

Floyd himself. He shared that ‘the bishops defaulted to the idea that the ordinary, acceptable, normal Catholic person is white—they weren’t looking at my face, or at the black people in the pews.’

- One woman shared that she has experienced much racism, especially during the sign of peace. White people would shake each other’s hands around her, but not hers, even when she had her hand out. “To be honest, I like that with the pandemic we do a touch-free sign of peace,” she said.

- How is there not a single saint of African-American descent? Are we saying that none of these people lead good holy lives to become saints? Just how far does racism go, up to heaven?

- Where was the Church in summer 2020, when the whole world was talking about racial justice and Black Lives Matter? Jesus was always with the marginalized.

- My mother was a staunch, devout Catholic who was absolutely committed to raising us in the faith. Being African American, most of my friends were not Catholic. They wonder how I can stay with ‘that church.’ It’s tough to deal with racism in the Church. It’s difficult to talk about racism because not everyone sees it, experiences it, or recognizes it. The synod, though, is the time to bring it up, difficult as it is. Communion and inclusion were constant themes.

- It is heartbreaking when individuals are not welcome. Everyone should be welcome to come to the table where we share the body and blood of Christ.

- The treasure of the Church should be shared widely and freely. You shouldn’t have to feel you are perfectly pure to

approach Jesus. We should not guard the treasure, but share it.

- I am very disturbed at how some of our US Bishops have politicized communion. It should be offered to everyone, regardless of marital status, and political beliefs. We all need it. Have mercy on us all, O God, for we are sinners.

- There are too many cases of sacraments intended to pour out grace instead being ‘weaponized’ to exclude and divide communities.

- It is a huge problem when we prevent people’s access to the grace of the sacraments. If we exclude people from the Church, where can they turn in In Your Midst June 2022 11 times of tragedy and suffering? They will not be able to access the grace and mercy in their times of need. The disciples of Jesus’ day did the same thing, trying to keep people away from him, telling them to shush, wondering why Jesus would bother talking to certain people, eat with certain people, touch certain people.

- Why don’t headlines read, ‘Jesus is Really Present in the Eucharist!’ instead of ‘Politician Denied Communion’? In the Gospel we read that Jesus welcomed sinners and dined with them, but too many are denied access to the Eucharistic table, not by Jesus, but by us.

- Everyone should be able to come to the table. Jesus is the example. He reached out and ministered not to the rule-followers, but to the outcasts. The abuse crisis was a constant theme, as was the Church’s loss of credibility and trust in the wake of scandals.

- I am a cradle Catholic. I was educated at Catholic schools, and I have been a Catholic school teacher for more than 30 years. I love

the Church, but I am still grieving and heartbroken about the priest pedophile issue. I'm still angry. I think about Jesus and the children, and then I think about what happened to children; what an outrage that people in charge just let it happen. To me, the people in charge who moved the priests around makes me angrier than the pedophiles themselves. I love the people in the pews next to me, I love Father Ryan. As a teacher, I know we have done things to prevent abuse from happening, but I'm not sure we have ever truly grasped it. It's heartbreaking when I love the Church so much. For a time, I was ready to quit my job and find a different Church, but still, I love the Church, and I know so many good people who love kids. I'm still processing it: I don't know if I ever will truly process it. I'm not sure it's something you can ever put behind you.

- Transparency is key. There is so much secrecy about things that don't need to be secret. The appointment of bishops, for instance. There should be broader consultation.
- I had an experience where I was sitting in Church during a protest by Native American communities, when they left children's shoes outside the door. I had the feeling of being on the wrong side: usually we marched for justice, and here we were the ones being protested against. That hurt so much. I remember wishing the ground would just open up.
- The scandals, the residential schools came down on me like a ton of bricks. Why would I stay in this Church?
- The Church has a responsibility to be a place of healing. We need to be forthright

and transparent about the sins of the Church. We can't let the story end there.

- We say fallen away Catholics, but that's a euphemism. Many Catholics have been driven away. We've heard a lot of apologies. We have lists of the credibly accused. We have advisory panels. But it's not enough. We need reconciliation and healing that can only come from an expansive outreach. We need to listen to victims. There needs to be more structural change in the Church.
- A middle-aged man shared that his former parish priest was the source of one of the first major public abuse crises and was arrested and charged, which caused him to leave the Church. After a rough period in his life, he returned to the Church and, despite still being mad at the continued abuse scandals, looks to devotion to the Eucharist and service to find healing. Where are the youth and young people? Another theme that emerged very strongly was the sense of loss over fallen away Catholics and younger generations who are disconnected from the Church.
- We raised our son in the practice of the faith. He's 27 now and he loves the rituals, but he is not happy with the Church and rarely goes to Mass.
- Kids and others who struggle to make sense of life... don't feel the embrace of God in Church for who they are, their questions, their feelings, their self-doubts, their differing opinions. They don't feel the Church journeying with them.
- A lot of young people are missing out on what the Church has to offer—that peace. I teach confirmation and in that group I encounter an increasing number of kids with a spiritual malaise—it's challenging to help

these young people find the peace, the community that comes with participation in the Mass.

- I asked my daughter what the ideal church would look like. “The Catholic Church isn’t a happy place,” she told me. “There’s nothing for me there. I find God in the outdoors.”

- One thing that makes me so sad is that my siblings, nieces and nephews, and one of my kids have stepped away from the Church. They can’t see beyond the troubles the Church has. They are big troubles, but I also feel that those troubles are not the Church—the people are the Church.

- Today, a deep concern is my family members, especially nieces and nephews, who no longer participate in Catholic worship. I don’t know how I can bring back the rest of my family to the Catholic faith.
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- Even though I’m the only active Catholic, it’s been a connection to the Church for my whole family.

- One elderly woman knows that no one in her family will ever set foot in a Catholic church again unless it is for her funeral. Her siblings and their children struggle with the church approach to divorce and remarriage, as well as issues of clergy sex abuse, and the lack of transparency around it.

- I feel like my core values—justice, love, care for humanity—are from my faith, and inspire my work in the non-profit world. But growing-up experiences put a lot of distance between myself and the Church. When my parents divorced, it was the right decision for them, but it was really difficult in the church community and the family community. It was the best thing they could

have done, but there was zero support. As an adult, I discovered I was queer, and that made it even more difficult to be in Church. My kids are Alaska natives. I know the Pope apologized to the native peoples, but I have to wonder how I could put my kids in a place where there is that legacy of harm.

- My daughters no longer practice their faith. I wish I could share my experience with them. I love arriving early to Mass, watching people slowly fill the Church. It feeds my soul. “How can you still be Catholic?” is a question many participants get from friends and family.

- How can you be so modern and open-minded while being part of a faith that is so backwards? • I know the kids I teach in a public school know I am Catholic, and I never want to hurt them or lead them to believe that just because my Church isn’t transparent, or because it publicly considers homosexuality a disorder, that I do not love them in all their diversity, their questions, their doubts, and their ideals. I don’t want them to think that I am in agreement with those hateful and hurtful stances of the hierarchy in many places.

- She has found herself asked why she remains a part of a Church that has seen so much scandal, rejects LGBT people, and only allows men to lead. She said she didn’t have good answers for her friends.

- St. James is more open than most other Catholic Churches, yet we can get lulled into thinking this is normal. It’s like a gated community, and we forget what’s out there. When the wider church published and continues to publish screeds against gay marriage or women using their consciences, or communion wars; when the Church thinks it can hide sex abuse for decades, and

calls gay friends 'disordered,' when women continue to be excluded from leadership, she stopped going to Mass and found other wells to refresh. "The things that sent me away are the things that those who stay are valiantly struggling with. Your choice to stay is inspiring to me. Yet I rest peacefully with my decision to leave."

- I tell my daughter, when you see me praying, it's not what it looks like. It's not easy. We have a Church and it's a human institution. It's broken, just like all of us are as humans. Treasure of the Tradition In the midst of many voices calling for reform and change, other voices expressed fear of rapid change and loss of our tradition.
- I am worried about losing all the good old stuff if we change too quickly.
- We need to understand the truth that Jesus gave us. If you're tolerant of everything, you believe in nothing. We need to put Jesus on top and recognize that everything else is secondary.
- Change is always a mixed bag. I feel as though Catholics want perfection. We're very hard on ourselves. We're a work in progress. There is so much good the Church does.
- The rules, formality of the institution have protected the Eucharist; that structure is the reason we still have Eucharist. But how do we honor conscience, where is that place where we protect and find beauty in that conscience. The Eucharist Many participants expressed their love and gratitude for the Eucharist.
- Catholicism is madness. We believe in the body and the blood of Jesus. No wonder we don't talk about it. People would think we are out of our minds! But that's why we're

here. The Eucharist. We have this great treasure. But how do you tell people that? I don't know anything except that I'm not good at it.

- To be a Catholic has everything to do with the Eucharist, because it's what's brings us together, and it's what makes us into Christ. It sends us out to be prophets and people who stand for really important issues in our world today—war, peace.
- It was a strange thing not having Eucharist all those many months. It was like someone died in your intimate life, and you kept looking for that person but couldn't find them. The greatness of Catholicism is the sheer physicality. It's a religion of the body, it's sacramental.
- I still have a lot of questions about the Church. Lots of hurts, too. What keeps me in is the Eucharist. I don't mean just receiving the Body of Christ at Mass, but being a part of the Body of Christ, In Your Midst June 2022 13 throughout the world. I can't imagine being elsewhere. What is your dream for the Church?
- A Church that reflects openness to change, nimble and adaptable.
- A church that is more centered on humility, a poor Church, for the poor, more centered on mercy.
- A Church which celebrates the gifts of women as leaders, as priests and deacons, as equally chosen by God as their brothers.
- A church where everyone feels like they belong equally.
- A radically welcoming Church. • I want the Church to be a refuge. A place for all people, for people of color, for LGBT, I want them to find peace here. I want people

to know that they are accepted and loved, that they have wings covering them, that they are watched over.

- I've left the Church and come back; hated it, loved it. I was angry with the Church for years because a priest encouraged me to stay in an abusive relationship. The last time I came back to stay. I would like the Church to avoid dualistic thinking. No one of us is better than the other.

- I think too often in the Church, we may settle for a false unity, but that unity came at the cost of avoiding conflict, avoiding differences of opinion, rather than letting people come together and voice their views.

- What is your dream for the Church? That question really spoke to me. I think of my children. I have two boys. I have been fortunate that my parents have passed on their faith. I want my children to have that deeper relationship with Jesus as well. Who is part of our Church? It should be all of us, regardless of where we are coming from, or what our background is. It's all of us. I think my faith is the greatest gift I can give to my children. Along the way things will happen that will make us question our faith, but I want them to have that foundation.

- I've been awakened to a God that pleasures in all of us, not just the ones that conform, but also the ones who are on the outside looking in. That is my hope for the Church. I long for the voices of those who are marginalized, because they hold truths that I'm impoverished by not knowing. I'm looking for the voices of women, of people of other cultures, other races, other sexualities, other genders. They are all rich gifts to me, and I want the Church to be able to embrace all those voices as something dazzling, like Revelation gives us, in that

wonderful city that is so filled with love. I look for newness, freshness, inclusion, joyful belonging from those who long for the rules, and those who long for no rules.

- I think we're all looking for a place to belong, and having that community, and that's what I want for my sons. I want them to grow up in a place where they belong to a community. We talk about the merciful God, and hopefully a merciful Church as well.

- I think what the Church needs to hold, in spite of the history, is that Catholicism is love. That's what we do—we love everybody. The Church is always there. I know it was there for me when I lost my parents and nephew. One of the things the Church can do is embrace, and not judge. God is the one who judges. Just being a beacon of light, hope, and love. That's my hope for the Church, because that's what I feel the Church has been for me. Being a loving, nourishing, awe-inspiring place where everybody is safe.

- When I think about the Catholic church, it matters to me that it is one global church, that really matters to me. I don't want to see Germany leave, or Nigeria leave. I do have fear there. As we journey together, I think what we should be doing is show Jesus to the world. I feel we do that better by serving than by preaching.

- I want the Church to take care of people here in this life, not just in the next life. I want my Church to be "Big Tent." I want the Church to embrace liberals and conservatives; I would also like the Church to embrace everyone, including gay people, divorced people, people who have gone through the trauma of abortion. In other words: everyone.

- We are the Church, and by changing ourselves, we are changing the church.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich



A eucharistic revival that renews the church

Wednesday 31 August 2022

The Catholic bishops of the United States have launched a eucharistic revival over the next three years. Pope Francis has made a singular contribution to that effort with the recent release of his powerful and theologically rich apostolic letter on the liturgical formation of the people of God, “Desiderio Desideravi” (“I have earnestly desired”). (See [vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html).) He tells us that his aim is to “invite the whole Church to rediscover, to safeguard, and to live the truth and power of the Christian celebration” as a means of more fully appreciating “the beauty of the Christian celebration and its necessary consequences for the life of the Church.”

This too must be the aim of our eucharistic revival. A central principle in that rediscovery is that in the ritual passed on to us from those disciples at the Last Supper, we encounter the crucified and risen Lord and are invited to participate in the paschal mystery by sharing in his work of saving the world. This engaging encounter by which the risen Lord invites us to share in his saving work is the core of our eucharistic

faith, for, as the Holy Father observes: “The Christian faith is either an encounter with Him alive or it does not exist.”

To put it another way, the Mass is not a representation of the Last Supper, a play acting just to memorialize what Jesus did, much like we do on civic holidays that recall moments in our history. Rather, the Eucharist is a real encounter with the crucified and risen Christ, for, as the Council of Trent reminds us, what is really made present in the Eucharist is Christ’s victory and triumph over death for us who participate in it.

It was for this reason that when the fathers of the Second Vatican Council took up the work of reforming the liturgy, a high priority was to promote the full, active and conscious participation of all the baptized. Every consideration was given to making sure that the liturgy would guarantee this encounter, and assist all the baptized to understand that they come to the Eucharist as authentic participants, not spectators.

From the start of Mass, in one voice we acknowledge our need for God’s mercy in the penitential rite. We then join our voices in praising God as we sing the Gloria. Then, together we listen to the word of God, and reply in one voice to the word in the responsorial psalm and greet the risen Lord as the Gospel in the words of Easter morning in the Alleluia.

We continue to deepen our participation in Christ’s saving action as the Eucharistic Prayer recounts what Jesus did in his life and at the Last Supper. In saying “amen,” we proclaim that his story is now our story, which we make real by participating in the sharing of the one bread and the one cup, thus becoming one body in Christ.

That is why Pope Francis writes in “Desiderio Desideravi”: “The action of the celebration does not belong to the individual but to the Christ-Church, to the totality of the faithful united in Christ. The Liturgy does not say ‘I’ but ‘we,’ and any limitation on the breadth of this ‘we’ is always demonic. The Liturgy does not leave us alone to search out an individual supposed knowledge of the mystery of God. Rather, it takes us by the hand, together, as an assembly, to lead us deep within the mystery that the Word and the sacramental signs reveal to us.”

The Holy Father notes that there are those who claim that we lost a sense of mystery about the Mass with the reforms of the Vatican II. To this he replies that we have to be careful not to pursue a false sense of mystery, which he describes as “being overcome in the face of an obscure reality or a mysterious rite.” Rather, he says, the real mystery is that Christ has invited us to participate in his saving work. This is what should astonish us, Pope Francis tells us. “It is ... marveling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus (cf. Eph 1: 3-14), and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the ‘mysteries’ of the sacraments.”