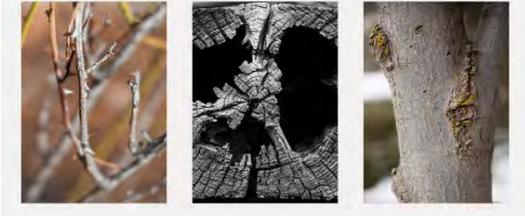


**Articles of Interest**  
**For**  
**21 August 2022**

Sunday, 14 August 2022

**Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation**

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Three: Suffering

**Love and Suffering**

*Father Richard Rohr teaches that God uses love and suffering, and especially suffering, as universal paths to reach and change us.*

Two universal paths of transformation have been available to every human being God has created: great love and great suffering. These are offered to all; they level the playing fields of all the world religions. Only love and suffering are strong enough to break down our usual ego defenses, crush our dualistic thinking, and open us to Mystery. In my experience, they like nothing else exert the mysterious chemistry that can transmute us from a fear-based life into a love-based life. None of us are exactly sure why. We do know that words, even good words or fine theology, cannot achieve that on their own. No surprise that the Christian icon of redemption is a man offering love from a crucified position!

Love and suffering are part of most human lives. Without any doubt, *they are the primary spiritual teachers* more than any Bible, church, minister, sacrament, or theologian. Wouldn't it make sense for God to make divine truth so readily available? If the love of God is perfect and victorious, wouldn't God offer every human being

equal and universal access to the Divine as love and suffering do? This is what Paul seems to be saying to the Athenians in his brilliant sermon at the Areopagus: "All can seek the Deity, feeling their way toward God and succeeding in finding God. For God is not far from any of us, since it is in God that we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27–28). What a brilliant and needed piece of theology to this day!

Love is what we long for and were created for—in fact, love is what we *are* as an outpouring from God—but suffering often seems to be our opening to that need, that desire, and that identity. Love and suffering are the main portals that open the mind space and the heart space (either can come first), breaking us into breadth and depth and communion. Almost without exception, great spiritual teachers will have strong and direct guidance about love and suffering. If we never go there, we will not know these essentials. We'll try to work it all out in our heads, but our minds alone can't get us there. We must love "with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, and our whole strength" (Mark 12:30).

Finally, there is a straight line between love and suffering. If we love greatly, it is fairly certain we will soon suffer, because we have somehow given up control to another. That is my simple definition of suffering: *whenever we are not in control.*

**Image inspiration:** *The hollow feeling when loved ones are no longer present, like holes in a log. The pain of a thorn piercing skin. This tree has suffered and witnessed suffering. We too have suffered and witness suffering.*

**Story From Our Community**

*Back in 2011, I was off balance. I retreated to a small home; I had no idea what I was doing, I only knew I was lost. Slowly poetry*

*began to pour out of me. A wise voice spoke to me and revealed a path forward—a new way to be. Through great suffering and turmoil, this gentle loving voice has brought me to a place of great peace and love for the oneness of all creation.*

- Karla

### **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.*

Monday, 15 August 2022

## **Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation**

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Three: Suffering

### **Opening a Doorway**

*Father Richard describes two paths that suffering can take us down—a path that fills us with bitterness, resentment, and blame; or a path that softens our hearts to grow closer to God. For many of us, suffering is a cycle. We go back and forth, holding on and*

*letting go, healing, hurting anew, and healing again.*

When we are inside of great love and great suffering, we have a much stronger possibility of surrendering our ego controls and opening ourselves to the whole field of life. In great suffering, things happen *against our will*—which is what makes it suffering. Over time, we can learn to give up our defended state, because we seemingly have no choice. *The situation is what it is*, although we will invariably cycle through stages of denial, anger, bargaining, resignation, and (hopefully) acceptance. The suffering might feel wrong, terminal, absurd, unjust, impossible, physically painful, or merely beyond our comfort zone. Can you see why we must have a proper attitude toward suffering? So many things, every day, leave us out of control—even if it is just a long stoplight. Remember, however, that *if we do not transform our pain, we will surely transmit it to those around us and even to the next generation.*

Suffering, of course, can lead us in either of two directions: (1) it can make us very bitter and cause us to shut down, or (2) it can make us wise, compassionate, and utterly open, because our hearts have been softened, or perhaps because we feel as though we have nothing more to lose. Suffering often takes us to the very edge of our inner resources where we “fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31), even when we aren’t sure we believe in God! We must all pray for the grace of this second path of softening and opening. My opinion is that this is the very meaning of the phrase “deliver us from evil” in the Our Father (Lord’s Prayer). In this statement, we aren’t asking to avoid suffering. It is as if we are praying, “When big trials come, God, hold on to me, and don’t let me turn bitter or

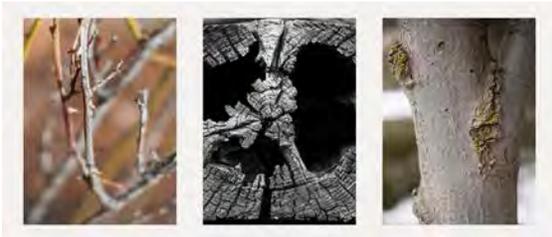
blaming”—which is an evil that leads to so many other evils.

Struggling with one’s own shadow self, facing interior conflicts and moral failures, undergoing rejection and abandonment, daily humiliations, or any form of limitation: all are gateways into deeper consciousness and the flowering of the soul. These experiences give us a privileged window into the naked now, the present moment, because impossible contradictions are staring us in the face. Much-needed healing, forgiving what is, and “weeping over” and accepting one’s interior poverty and contradictions are often necessary experiences that invite a person into the contemplative mind. (Paul does this in a memorable way from the depths of Romans 7:14–15 to the heights of his mystical poetry in Romans 8.)

Tuesday, 16 August 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Three: Suffering

### Let Go and Let God

*Womanist theologian Diana L. Hayes describes how Black women in her life rely on God to help carry their suffering. She draws on her upbringing in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, in which seemingly impossible difficulties are sustained with God’s help:*

The mothers of the black church, those elderly women who have worked hard all of their lives, often with so little reward, have a way of saying, whenever something goes

wrong or someone is burdened more than they feel they can bear, “You just have to ‘let go and let God.’” As a child, I would look at these strong black women who I knew had been through so much in their lives, and who were still going through difficult times, and wonder what they meant. . . .

They had experienced both the joys and the sorrows that human life has to bring. Yet, they could, when necessary, simply “let go and let God.”

They could “let go” of the pain of losing a child through illness or misfortune or of watching another child or their husband slowly give up hope of getting a meaningful job, of having something tangible to produce at day’s end. They could “let go” of the racism that confronted them at every turn. . . . They could “let God” carry those sorrows for a while. God did not take over the pain, the frustration, or the anger—it was still there—but they could rest their burden with the Lord for just a little while until they found the strength to take it up and carry it again. Some would say they were passive. . . . But they would be wrong.

*Through her own suffering, Hayes has come to understand what the mothers of the Black church meant by “let go and let God”:*

Today, as I battle with my own fears and doubts, my own frustrations (about who I am and where I am going) and yearnings for a life free from pain, free from prejudice and discrimination, free from the constant struggle to survive and simply be me, I have come to realize that there are times when life becomes infinitely more tolerable if the burden is shared, with human friends, yes, but even more important, shared with a God who loves and watches over me like a

“mother hen brooding over her chicks” [Luke 13:34]. It is that same God who has said, “Behold, while you were in your mother’s womb, I knew you and I named you [Jeremiah 1:5]. How could I love you less now?”

To “let go and let God” is to put yourself into the hands of God, even for just a little while, until the challenges of life are more bearable. . . . It is not a form of “otherworldly” escape, for the pain, the anger, the fears, the frustrations are always, sadly, a part of life, not because God wants it so, but because of our own human failure to make it different.

Wednesday, 17 August 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Three: Suffering

### Stay Where the Pain Is

*Father Richard teaches about the trustworthy authority that belongs to those who have stood with and “held” the suffering of their lives and the world—rather than fled and avoided it. Jesus and Mary model such “staying power”:*

Jesus on the cross and Mary standing near him are powerful witnesses to transformative spirituality. They return no hostility, hatred, accusations, or malice directed at them. They hold the suffering until it becomes resurrection! That’s the core mystery of Christianity. It often takes our whole lives to begin to comprehend this.

Unfortunately, our natural instinct is trying to fix pain, to control it, or even, foolishly,

attempting to understand it. The ego insists on understanding. That’s why Jesus praises a certain quality even more than love, and he calls it *faith*. It’s the ability to stand in liminal space, to stand on the threshold, to hold contraries, until we are moved by grace to a much deeper level and a much larger frame. Our private pain does not take center stage, but is a mystery shared with every act of bloodshed and every tear wept since the beginning of time. Our pain is not just our own. The normal mind can’t deal with that. That’s why mature religion always teaches some form of contemplation—to break our addiction to this egoic, disconnected thinking. [1]

*CAC friend Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis reflects on a friend’s wise counsel shared in a time of need. “Stay where the pain is,” she said:*

Once, mourning the toughness of 2020—a year marked with political upheaval, racial violence, the isolation and death from a pandemic, raging environmental fires, and the fire that took my sanctuary—I was feeling very low and frankly so weighed down with grief, I didn’t really know how to move forward. I kept throwing myself into work, running fast to do something about the pain. But, ever wise, [my friend] Lyn said:

“Wait, stay right there. Stay where the pain is, where the suffering is, where the struggle is. Stay there. That’s where it’s going to come. The insight. The knowing. The wisdom. Right there, Jacqui. It’s not here yet, but it’s coming. And when it comes, I’ll midwife it with you. It will come, we will do it together. Just wait for it. It will come.” . . .

*Right where you are, in the hurt and sorrow, that’s right where the insight is, that’s where the answer is, that’s where the wisdom is. The transformation is there, the rebirth is*

*there. And you're not alone. Your friend, your lover, your family, your helper—someone from your posse will midwife it with you. The healing will come, and you will emerge, shaped in the merciful womb of the fiercest love. The pain of birth is excruciating. But someone who loves you knows how to reach in and grab you and hold on to you until you make it through. You'll emerge lighter, less encumbered, ready for new stories, transformed by old ones. [2]*

Thursday, 18 August 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



### Week Thirty-Three: Suffering Dazzling Darkness

*Author and CAC friend Mirabai Starr finds inspiration in mystics Julian of Norwich (1343–c. 1416) and John of the Cross (1542–1591). Both endured profound suffering and yet discovered a deep and Divine love in its midst.*

Mystics see through a lens of paradox: dazzling darkness, beautiful wound, the longing that is the remedy for longing. Paradox points beyond itself to a truth that both transcends and includes logic, a truth that is alive, generative, and whole. Such a dynamic mode of knowing demands our complete attention. . . .

What does a religious woman who dwelt in an anchor-hold during the Middle Ages have to do with you and me today? Julian endured a long and cruel pandemic. The disease ravaged her community and carried off the

people that she loved. She learned to shelter in place, focusing on cultivating her interior landscape and sharing the fruits of her wisdom through the window that opened from her cell onto the busy streets of her city (think computer screen and Zoom), where she offered counsel to visitors . . . each day.

She found solace, not in the wrathful father-god of her childhood, but in an unconditionally loving Mother-God who could not help but forgive the transgressions of each one of her darling kids. She recognized that everything that is could be contained in a hazelnut in the palm of God's hand, and that it all endures because God adores every particle of Her creation. She also realized that, even though the night feels impenetrable now, dawn is coming, when we will see with our own eyes that not only is every little thing going to be alright, but that it has been all along.

And how could a renegade monk, who survived the Spanish Inquisition despite the Jewish and Moorish blood that flowed through his veins, have anything to teach us about flourishing in our own dark nights? John of the Cross illumines the transformational power of radical unknowing. He rekindles our latent longing for union with the Beloved and, through sublime poetry and precise prose, blows on the flames so that they dance back to life in our beleaguered hearts.

He reminds us that when everything in us wants to rush out and fix the problem of our brokenness, both individual and collective, the wisest and most loving thing to do is to be still, letting go of our attachment to the way we thought the spiritual life was supposed to feel and the sense we assumed it should make. Once we step out of our own way, into the dark and empty vessel of the soul, "an ineffable sweetness" will begin to

rise, permeating and nourishing the quiet earth, uncovering a resurrection we never dreamed possible: a dazzling darkness, a radiant night, a revolutionary newness of being.

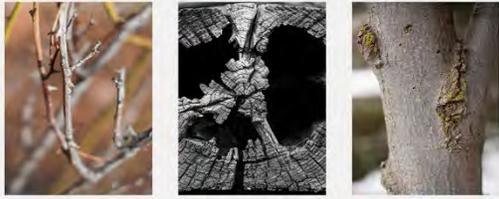
But maybe not quite yet.

We are not alone. The wise ones who walked before us have left luminous footprints for us to follow in our own apocalyptic times.

Friday, 19 August 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Thirty-Three: Suffering

### The Sign of Jonah

*Father Richard describes the pattern of transformation Jesus offers through “the sign of Jonah,” which is the mystery of death and resurrection:*

Jesus’ primary metaphor for the mystery of transformation is the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39, 16:4; Luke 11:29). Jesus tells the growing crowds, “It is an evil and adulterous generation that wants a sign” (Luke 11:29), and then says the only sign he will give is the sign of Jonah. As a Jew, Jesus knew well the graphic story of Jonah the prophet who ran from God and was used by God almost in spite of himself. Jonah was swallowed by a whale and taken where he would rather not go. This was Jesus’ metaphor for death and rebirth.

Rather than look for impressive apparitions or miracles, Jesus said we must go inside the

whale’s belly for a while. Then and only then will we be spit out on a new shore and understand our call, our place, and our purpose. Paul wrote about “reproducing the pattern” of Jesus’ death and thus understanding resurrection (Philippians 3:10–11). *Unless we have gone down, we do not know what up is!* Unless we descend, we won’t long for and make inner space for ascent.

This is the only pattern Jesus promises us, and we see it mirrored in other traditions as well. Native religions speak of winter and summer; mystical authors speak of darkness and light; Eastern religions speak of yin and yang or the Tao. Christians call it the paschal mystery; all point to the same necessity of both descent and ascent, usually in that order.

The paschal mystery is *the* pattern of transformation, and it indeed is a mystery—that is, it is not logical or rational at all. We are transformed through death and rising, probably many times in our lifetime. For some cosmic reason, there seems to be no better crucible of growth and transformation.

We seldom go freely into the belly of the beast. Unless we face a major disaster such as the death of a friend, child, or spouse or the loss of a marriage or career, we usually will not go there. As a culture, we have to be taught the language of descent because we are by training capitalists and accumulators. Mature religion shows us how to enter willingly and trustingly into difficult periods of life. These hard passages are good teachers.

We would prefer clear and easy answers, but questions offer the greatest potential for opening us to transformation. We try to change events in order to avoid changing

ourselves. We must learn to stay with the pain of life, without answers, without conclusions, and some days without meaning. That is the perilous hidden path of contemplative prayer. Grace leads us to the state of emptiness—to a momentary sense of meaninglessness—in which we ask, “What is it all for?” The spaciousness within the question allows Love to fill and enliven us.

South African bishop  
supports ordaining  
married men to  
priesthood to increase  
access to sacraments  
Roman Curia needs  
more African leadership  
to reflect church's  
global realities, bishop  
says

15 August 2022

by [Christopher White](#)



Bishop Sithembele Sipuka of Mthatha, South Africa, (left) is shown here at the opening Mass of the weeklong meeting of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and

Madagascar in Kampala, Uganda, July 21, 2019.  
(CNS/Courtesy of SECAM)

**NAIROBI, KENYA** — The Catholic Church teaches that the Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." For at least one South African bishop, this teaching raises concerns about the global and local priest shortage that means some Catholics receive the Eucharist once a month or less.

"This is where I would enter the debate," said Bishop Sithembele Sipuka of Mthatha Diocese, a rare voice among the African Catholic hierarchy to voice his support for ordaining "proven married men" to the priesthood.

"For this, there is a need," he told NCR, during an interview in July at the [Pan-African Catholic Congress on Theology, Society and Pastoral Life](#) in Nairobi, Kenya.

"In rural dioceses, the communities are scattered," he said, describing scenarios of priests traveling long distances to celebrate multiple Masses. Even then, certain communities go for over a month without the Eucharist due to the priest shortage, he said.

Sipuka's proposal is not a new one.

Bishop Fritz Lobinger, a missionary from Germany who led the South African Diocese of Aliwal 1987 to 2004, has been a longtime proponent of ordaining married men to the priesthood to reach communities in need of the sacraments.

In 2019, delegates at the Vatican's Synod on the Amazon also [requested](#) that Pope Francis allow for the priestly ordination of married men on a regional basis, though the pope has not moved the issue forward.

The 62-year-old Sipuka, who is president of the [Southern Africa Catholic Bishops' Conference](#), which includes South Africa, Swaziland and Botswana, said that bishops throughout the continent are engaged in a respectful dialogue on such proposals.

"I have not picked up any strong agitation against it or strong opposition," he said. "We are discussing it."

He also said he thinks proposals of this magnitude take time and that it is necessary to build unity in the process.

"It's good when these things happen that everyone is on board about it," he said.



Outside the entrance of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi, Kenya (NCR photo/Christopher White)

Discussions on the celibate male priesthood is among the many topics that have surfaced as part of the Catholic Church's newly revamped global synod process, meant to encourage greater participation of Catholics throughout the world. The [three-phase process](#) has just concluded the initial diocesan stage and now moves on to a continental one.

Sipuka said the results of the surveys and listening sessions in his diocese evidenced "a lot of enthusiasm" for the synod.

"Even as we are answering questions, we are beginning to understand and implement the synodal nature of the church," he said. "This is not like those synods where you answer questions and then it goes to Rome" and the process is complete.

"We will only be continuing and intensifying," he said.

For his part, Sipuka said he hopes that the synod process is one that is empowering to the laity to invest more deeply in their contributions to the life of the church.

He went on to cite Pope Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation [Evangelii gaudium](#), often considered the blueprint for his papacy.

In it, the pope encourages priests and bishops to have the "smell of the sheep," or of their flock.

"The pope is not talking to bishops and priests only," Sipuka said, adding that "the whole church must do this."

"The church, according to Vatican II, is all of the people of God," he said, adding that this means the laity should be invested in and leading the church's outreach to the world around it.

Sipuka praised the Vatican's synod office for its outreach to African church leaders during the synod process so far. But asked about the overall lack of representation of Africans in the Roman Curia, he said he is "concerned."

Following the [departure](#) of Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson as head of the Vatican's office for peace and justice in December, no Vatican dicastery is currently headed by an African prelate.

"It's a good feeling to observe that there is enough representation at the center of the church, which is Rome," Sipuka noted. "It does raise a concern that there is little representation of Africa."

Given what he described as the "inclusive" nature of the synod process thus far, he says he hopes that this might help provide a course correction for African leadership in the Vatican, as well.

Asked to describe what he felt would be the particular African contributions to the synod, he highlighted the continent's vibrant and exuberant spirituality, along with its commitment to local communities.

"We are still really a young church," he said, noting that this presents both challenges and opportunities. "But here the synodal church has begun."



Christopher White  
Christopher White is the Vatican correspondent for NCR. His email address is [cwhite@ncronline.org](mailto:cwhite@ncronline.org). Follow him on Twitter: [@CWWhiteNCR](https://twitter.com/CWWhiteNCR).

# Maryknoll begins discernment process in the face of climate change

15 August 2022  
by [Chris Herlinger](#)



Maryknoll Sr. Joji Fenixm, left, is working to preserve native trees and plant life at a tree nursery at the Maryknoll Sisters Pastoral Care Center in Darien, Panama. The center gives workshops on integrated health and nutrition, organic agriculture, small project administration and the family. The center is one of the congregation's environmental ministries. (Courtesy of the Maryknoll Sisters)

*Editor's note: Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a weekly feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.*

The [Maryknoll Sisters](#), a 110-year-old congregation based in Ossining, New York, with more than 300 members, has embarked on a new discernment initiative based on the recognition that climate change is altering the nature of mission work.

"Today, the Maryknoll Sisters take a new step in their history as climate change leads to worldwide migration, violence, racism, suicide, and poverty threatens peace and justice in so many parts of our world, the Sisters see the urgent need to ask how and where they are most needed today?" the congregation said in an Aug. 9 [statement](#).



Maryknoll Sr. Melinda Roper, center, in Darien, Panama, working at the Maryknoll Sisters Pastoral Care Center. The center is located in the Panamanian rainforest and has a model farm, conserving some 96 acres of the surrounding rainforest and letting it grow back with native plants and animals. The center is one of the congregation's environmental ministries. (Courtesy of the Maryknoll Sisters)

The congregation's leadership team sent an invitation to congregation members asking who was interested in helping lead the discernment process, and seven sisters volunteered.

The statement said the seven sisters "envision and embrace a new mission presence, as part of the One Earth Community, meaning that we are all connected as a human family and with all of creation. This will enable the Sisters to respond to God's call that we need to care for one another, the Earth and all the peoples' who reap its bounty."

The new mission initiative, the congregational statement said, "is not only for those seven Sisters, but belongs to the Congregation as a whole. The seven sisters will now continue discernment as a group to determine their next steps."

"We are called to take risks and experiment, be creative; and so we invite the Congregation in this discernment with not only prayers and support, but also by discerning for yourself, what is new in your mission life today?" Sr. Teresa Hougnon, president of the congregation, said in the statement. "Every day we are called into newness in the evolving and expanding universe. Every creative process holds the paradox of what is and what is to come."

Xavier, Adrian Dominicans endow scholarship honoring renowned theologian

Xavier University of Louisiana in New Orleans and the Adrian Dominican Sisters have signed an agreement to endow \$500,000 for a scholarship fund honoring Adrian Dominican Sr. Jamie Phelps.

The scholarship will provide financial assistance to students enrolled in the advanced degree or continuing education programs in Xavier's Institute for Black Catholic Studies.



Dominican Sr. Jamie Phelps is a theologian and social worker (Provided photo)

Phelps, formerly Sr. Martin Thomas, is a renowned theologian, educator, community leader and scholar who served as the

director of the Xavier institute from July 2003 to August 2011.

While the endowment honors "Dr. Phelps' remarkable contributions to the IBCS, the Black Catholic community and the church at-large," Adrian Dominican Sr. [Elise D. García](#), the congregation's newly elected prioress, said in an [Aug. 8 statement](#) the endowment is also a reparation for the congregation's "[past participation in structural racism](#) and in support of new pathways toward racial justice."

Kathleen Dorsey Bellow, current director of the institute, said "the sisters' investment responds boldly to the need for solidarity that engenders right relationships in the Body of Christ. The IBCS looks forward to this collaboration. IBCS participants are immersed in a unique learning environment rooted in critical theological studies that focus on Black approaches, critiques and contributions to systematic and pastoral theologies, ministry, aesthetics and education."

[A Sister's Story: Sister Jamie Phelps, OP](#) Phelps was instrumental in the institute's establishment at Xavier, the nation's only historically Black and Catholic university. Phelps served many years as a member of the institute faculty and was associate director for its degree program.

"My life objective is to assist in the inner transformation of the human community by participating in the education of Christians and other religious women and men committed to using their knowledge and expertise for the construction of a more inclusive world by sharing their knowledge and experience of God and in the case of Christians by continuing Jesus' proclamation of the good news of God's universal love and His call for social justice and

communion," Phelps in a previous statement said, quoted by the university.



More than 4,000 people, including 800 families, received food kits in the villages around the Salesian-run Ferrando Center for Vocational Training in Srirampura, India. The women here are beneficiaries. (Courtesy of Salesian Missions USA)

### **Salesians join recognition of World Humanitarian Day**

[Salesian Missions](#), the U.S.-based development arm of the [Salesians of Don Bosco](#), is joining other organizations in recognizing [World Humanitarian Day](#), the annual event honoring the work supporting those facing crises and the aid workers who face danger in helping others.

The United Nations established the annual Aug. 19 recognition to coincide with the anniversary of the Aug. 19, 2003, bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad that killed 22 people, including the chief humanitarian U.N. representative in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

"Because Salesian missionaries, sisters and volunteers live within the communities they serve, they are perfectly positioned to respond in times of humanitarian crisis," Fr. Gus Baek, director of the agency, said in an Aug. 9 statement. "Salesian programs help to provide food, clothing and shelter to those in need, and our missionaries remain through the long recovery process to help

families rebuild their homes and salvage their livelihoods."

Among the Salesians' work is support for a hospital in Ukraine in a partnership with the humanitarian group [MedShare](#). The initiative delivered surplus medical supplies and equipment to ambulances and clinics treating those who have been internally displaced within the country, which the Russian military invaded Feb. 24.

Salesian Missions also launched a [Ukraine emergency relief fund](#) to help provide shelter, nutrition and supplies to refugees in need.



Salesian Missions in Ukraine: Medical supplies are distributed to ambulances and clinics in May to treat internally displaced people within Ukraine through a Salesian Missions and MedShare partnership. (Courtesy of Salesian Missions USA)

Other countries where the Salesians work include Brazil, Pakistan and India. In [India](#), more than 4,000 people, including 800 families, have received food kits in villages around the Ferrando Center for Vocational Training in Srirampura, a residential suburb of Mysore in southwestern India, the agency said, as part of efforts "to mitigate the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic."

It noted that the [Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians](#) operate the center, which provides "education for poor and at-risk young women in the region. The area surrounding the school is made up of poor villages where people are daily laborers, migrants, widows and children."

Salesian Missions is headquartered in New Rochelle, New York, and is part of the Don Bosco Network, a worldwide federation of Salesian nongovernmental organizations. The organization's mission "is to raise funds for international programs that serve youth and families in poor communities around the globe."

The Salesian missionaries include sisters, priests, brothers and laypeople dedicated to caring for children who live in poverty in more than 130 countries.

While the U.N. prepares for the global humanitarian day, the [Conrad N. Hilton Foundation](#), the major funder of [Global Sisters Report](#), has [announced](#) this year's winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize: the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#).

Founded in 1946 in the wake of World War II, the refugee group works to protect the rights of people who are displaced by violence and find themselves vulnerable during crises.

The Oslo-based council will be honored at an Oct. 21 ceremony in Beverly Hills, California, and will receive \$2.5 million in funding.



Chris Herlinger

Chris Herlinger is the New York and international correspondent to Global Sisters Report and also writes on humanitarian and international issues for NCR. His email address is [cherlinger@ncronline.org](mailto:cherlinger@ncronline.org).

## GSR commits to memorializing Catholic sisters killed in service

15 August 2022  
by Gail DeGeorge

### Religious Life



Members of the Archdiocese of Juba, South Sudan, attend the Aug. 20, 2021, burial of Srs. Mary Daniel Abut and Regina Roba, Sisters of the Sacred Heart who were killed when their bus was attacked Aug. 16. (Courtesy of Christy John)

The brutal killing of Srs. Mary Daniel Abut and Regina Roba in South Sudan on Aug. 16, 2021, shook me and so many others. It

was an act so blatantly evil it was hard to comprehend.

They had traveled with other Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Loa, where the congregation was founded. As they traveled home the next day, their van was ambushed by armed men who threatened the passengers. Some of the sisters and the male passengers left the van, hoping to divert the assailants and spare other passengers. Abut and Roba were hunted down, shot and killed, along with three other passengers.

Abut was the head teacher of a primary school and Roba, a tutor and administrator at the Catholic Health Training Institute. Both lived out their faith by working to improve the lives of others in the young and troubled nation of South Sudan. No one has been arrested in their killings.



A prayer card for Srs. Mary Daniel Abut and Regina Roba (Courtesy of Friends in Solidarity)

Their loss is keenly felt by the congregation and the community, as Sr. Alice Jurugo Drajea, superior general of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, recounts in a column that Global Sisters Report will publish Aug. 16, the anniversary of Abut's and Roba's deaths.

Yet their deaths have prompted us at Global Sisters Report to do something more. Today, we debut a special section dedicated to Catholic sisters killed violently in African countries, "[Women of Faith: Honoring Catholic Sisters Killed in Service in Africa.](#)" The section features short profiles of each sister, links to other websites, and resources for more information, creating a "gallery of honor."

[Wycliff Oundo](#), a journalist and former intern in GSR's Nairobi office under the instruction of regional correspondent Doreen Ajiambo, has worked for almost a year on this project. He has identified and written about 43 sisters violently killed in Africa since 1990. He has done a fine job, drawing on journalistic and academic research skills. He explains his methodology at the bottom of the section. This is a project we wish we never had to do, but it is a cruel reality of our world.

This is the first part of a much larger project — and for that, we ask for your help, please. Over the next several months, we will continue to add to this special section, honoring sisters violently killed around the globe. You can fill out a form [here](#) to tell us about sisters who should be included.



The bus that was carrying seven sisters and five men from the Torit Diocese to the Juba Archdiocese in South Sudan on Aug. 16, 2021 (Courtesy of Christine John Amaa)

This is very much a work in progress, so please let us know of any errors that need to be corrected by writing to us [here](#). One of our biggest obstacles has been finding photos of the sisters that we can get permission to use, so help with that aspect is also welcomed. We've used a symbol of a dove for sisters for whom we do not yet have photos.

On a personal level, this is a project I have long wanted GSR to undertake. I pray the rosary often, and in doing so, I pray for my litany of saints, those officially recognized by the Catholic Church as well as for my parents, dear aunts, other family members and friends whose lives on Earth have ended but whose souls we believe live on through the promise of Jesus Christ.

I've prayed for sisters killed who many have heard about: Ursuline Sr. Dorothy Kazel, Maryknoll Srs. Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, and lay missionary Jean Donovan, the women [murdered in El Salvador](#); Sr. [Dorothy Stang](#) of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur; and Sr. [Valsa John Malamel](#) of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary and Sr. [Rani Maria Vattalil](#) of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation in India. I've prayed for Abut and Roba and for comfort for the members of their congregation and others who knew and

loved them and benefited from the sisters' work.

It has long bothered me that sisters from smaller congregations, often in poorer countries without the resources or media clout of U.S.-based or international congregations, do not get as much attention and that their stories remain largely untold. Without taking anything away from those we know of so well, the sacrifice of the sisters from the small congregations — and the pain of their fellow sisters, families, friends and the communities they served — is no less.

Sometimes, other media or Vatican offices recognize them. Yet there are usually no scholarships or schools dedicated to their memories and few honors bestowed to them. This is an attempt to start to change that. May their souls rest in peace, and may their legacy live on.

*"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5).*



Gail DeGeorge

Gail DeGeorge is editor of Global Sisters Report. Her email address is [gdegeorge@ncronline.org](mailto:gdegeorge@ncronline.org). Follow her on Twitter: [@GailDeGeorge](https://twitter.com/GailDeGeorge).

# Service of our hands helps tell 'the story of our heart'

Aug 15, 2022

by Laura Hammel

## Spirituality



Several weeks ago, I was listening to a podcast. At the end of this podcast was a meditation by Pir Zia Inayat Khan that caught my attention. I looked on the internet to get more information about him. He is a Sufism scholar. I found his words inspiring and relevant to my life right now. This is what he said:

We have a certain number of days left on earth. We don't know how many.

We have a certain number of encounters, meetings, experiences, ordeals. We don't know how many.

But this we know. We are in service; nothing can change this.

We have been brought forth out of emptiness to serve.

Earth has churned out these bodies, that with these hands we may serve.

We will serve and then we will disappear.

We will slip back into the earth, and this body will be soil again, and water and birds and fish.

And this spirit within will fly back to its

source with news from the frontier.  
What news shall we bring? The story of our heart.

This meditation took me back to those nagging life questions. "Why am I here?" "What is the meaning of life?"

It's *the story of our hearts*. The stories of the deeply personal things that we hold close to our heart. The happenings that have changed us. This is the energy and liveliness that we carry in our spirit even into death.

This meditation is a good way to initiate our journey to this sacred place by reminding us that our time on earth is limited. That this time will be filled with a certain number of interactions. We will collect these memories, with others on this life journey with us. These happenings are the creation of our heart's memories.

This is not the usual way we write our life story. This meditation presents an alternative value, that is, the service of our hands. This is a new ordering of events for me that leads me to a new appreciation of my caring for others.

So many of our religious traditions proclaim this as well. The Gospel of John read on Holy Thursday has Jesus washing the feet of the disciples with the command, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" ([John 13:5-17](#)).

The simple use of our hands to perform a needed action of comfort can help lighten the load of others on this journey. These intimate acts of service help us express the worth and dignity of the other.

My understanding of this passage from the Gospel of John is that foot washing was done by the lowest class of people. Jesus says we are to serve each other not because of rank, wealth or prestige but because we

have been given hands to serve. With these hands we can share the gifts and burdens of life with each other.

"We will serve and then we will disappear." Oh, how abrupt and so true.

We are not immortal; we have to contend with the confounding fact that our life on earth does end. We can't escape it.



There is a beauty in the image of slipping "back into the earth." The evolution of life continues. These bodies are transformed again in another ways.

However, it's the image of our spirit flying "back to its source" that captured my imagination. What a beautiful image of our journey home to God. We don't just go back to our source, we fly back — with great speed and desire, with the news of our heart.

What will we say? We will remember these "encounters, meetings, experiences, ordeals" of our life and how they have changed us into who we have become. We know this experience by the stories and memories we tell after a death of a friend. We tell each other of the moments we have shared with them. Their gifts, humor, generosity and particular quirks.

These people whose hands have touched us and shared our load of life, we carry with us. They form the packages of love, joy and

pain in our heart. These packages of memories hold the news we will tell. We will express the loveliness of the memories of the stories of our heart.



Laura Hammel

Laura Hammel is a member of the Sisters of St. Clare, a Poor Clare community in Saginaw, Michigan.

## In synod reports, US Catholics call for women's leadership, LGBTQ welcoming

16 August 2022  
by Brian Fraga

Parish  
People  
Vatican



The congregation looks on during the procession of Mass in St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral in Trenton, N.J., Oct. 17, 2021, as Trenton Bishop David M. O'Connell officially began the local process for his diocese's

participation in preparations for the 2023 meeting of the world Synod of Bishops on synodality. (CNS/The Monitor/Hal Brown)

More than a half million U.S. Catholics have participated in synodal listening sessions over the past year as part of Pope Francis' two-year process of grassroots listening ahead of the [2023 Synod of Bishops](#) in Rome, and responses indicate that many Americans want a more welcoming church that reaches out to the marginalized, especially the LGBTQ community, and that allows women to serve in leadership positions, including ordained ministry.

A review of more than a dozen synodal "synthesis" reports, posted online by dioceses across the country, also indicates that most Catholics are tired of the polarization in the church; believe that clerics need to do a better job communicating and involving the laity in ecclesial governance; and appreciate the opportunity to be heard, even if they harbor misgivings about what the [Synod on Synodality](#) will ultimately accomplish.

"I've been really touched by the amount of honesty that I've seen. Sensitive things are coming up, difficult conversations about difficult topics are coming up," said Julie McStravog, a consultant helping to coordinate the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' synodal work.

McStravog told NCR that since fall 2021, more than 650,000 Catholics in the United States participated in synodal listening sessions, either online or in person, or responded to written surveys. In all, she said Catholics had more than 30,000 opportunities to participate in the synod.

"I'm delighted to see that every single report I've read expresses an appreciation for and a desire to continue the synodal listening, to

enter into a sacred space and engage in deep listening and discernment with one another on a regular basis," McStravog said.

Still, the estimated 650,000 synod participants represent a little more than 1% of the roughly [51 million Catholic adults in the United States](#). The diocesan reports indicate that about two-thirds of those who attended listening sessions were 55 or older, and that most of those participants were women. An overwhelming majority of synodal participants were also white — [94% in the Diocese of Worcester, Massachusetts, for example](#) — and were more likely to be married and attend Mass weekly.

Massimo Faggioli, a theologian and church historian at Villanova University who has written about the synod, told NCR that he was not surprised that participation occurred mostly among older white Catholics who are already involved in the church. He said parish and diocesan outreach in many locations appeared to be geared toward that familiar demographic.

"For the synod, parishes had to be prepared for some kind of a controlled chaos, for the unexpected or a disruption, but I haven't seen much of this openness in the U.S church to taking risks," Faggioli said.

Several diocesan reports touched on the difficulty of engaging voices not often heard in church settings, especially younger generations of Catholics. In most dioceses, synod participants expressed concerns about the church not connecting with youth and young adults.

"The youth were recognized many times over as a focal point of concern. We need to take greater care for them, build up our catechetics, formation, service opportunities, and social programming for them," the

Diocese of Salt Lake City [noted in its synodal report](#).

In the Diocese of San Jose, California, [the synodal synthesis report](#) said the Catholic Church needs a better understanding of young people's concerns. Synod participants there "expressed a desire for more effective faith formation and activities that make youth feel like members of the Catholic family."



Julia McStravog, a former U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops employee, is a consultant to the bishops on the on the two-year discernment process underway to prepare for the Synod of Bishops in October 2023. (CNS/Jessica S. Zurcher)

As of Aug. 5, the U.S. bishops had received synodal reports from 172 of the 178 Latin Rite dioceses in the United States. McStravog said 75% of those dioceses have indicated that they plan to make the reports publicly available, while others are "still discerning" if they will do so.

"About three quarters of the dioceses that have submitted their reports say they're going to use those documents for other purposes like pastoral planning, to really continue bringing the synod into the activities and structures of their local churches," McStravog said.

McStravog said the bishops' conference's synod team planned a "writing retreat" in early August to begin synthesizing — into a

single 10-page document — the themes from nearly 300 reports submitted by dioceses, religious orders, Catholic universities, ministries and other groups. Those reports have already been combined into 15 "regional reports" that the conference's writing team has been reading over the last few weeks.

The deadline for national episcopal conferences to submit their reports to the Vatican's General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops was Aug. 15.

Described by some observers as "[the biggest consultation exercise in human history](#)," the 2021-23 Synod of Bishops' two-year process of global listening and dialogue is set to culminate in an October 2023 gathering of bishops and synod delegates in Rome. Pope Francis and other church leaders have framed synodality as a decisive step in the church's renewal that the Second Vatican Council proposed more than a half century ago.



Pope Francis speaks as Maltese Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, looks on during a meeting with representatives of bishops' conferences from around the world at the Vatican in this Oct. 9, 2021, file photo. Cardinal Grech and Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, released a joint prayer that calls for the Catholic church to "walk together with all Christians" during the synod process. (CNS/Paul Haring)

"The benefits of the synodal process itself will animate future applications of this synodal approach in unseen ways," said Richard Coll, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development.

Coll, who served as the bishops' liaison to diocesan synod coordinators, told NCR that the hundreds of synod reports from dioceses and other groups reflect a common theme of welcoming and reaching out to communities estranged from the Catholic Church in the United States.

"That seems to be a very important theme coming from these reports, as was anticipated by the Synod Secretariat and Pope Francis himself. That's been a beautiful part of the process in my experience," Coll said.

Welcoming was a common thread that ran through the dozen synod reports that NCR reviewed from dioceses in the Northeast, West, South and Midwest. Catholics who participated in the synod said that the church, from the parish to the diocesan level, has to do better at making people feel welcome in the pews and other church settings. They said that immigrants, people of color, youth and young adults, divorced and remarried Catholics, and other marginalized groups often do not feel welcome at church.

'For the synod, parishes had to be prepared for some kind of a controlled chaos, for the unexpected or a disruption, but I haven't seen much of this openness in the U.S church to taking risks.'  
—Massimo Faggioli

Synod participants across the country often highlighted the LGBTQ community, which they said is particularly sidelined by many in the church. [Francis DeBernardo](#), the

executive director of New Ways Ministry, a Maryland-based nonprofit that advocates for LGBTQ Catholics, said he was not surprised that it was a top issue.

"I think what church leaders have not recognized about LGBTQ issues is that they do affect almost everyone in the church beyond LGBTQ people because almost everyone has a family member or knows an LGBTQ person, either as a co-worker, a neighbor or friend, but often as a family member, and they see the terribly shabby way that they often get treated in church and church settings," DeBernardo told NCR.



Supporters of women's ordination gather in Jackson Square in New Orleans outside the St. Louis Cathedral during the archdiocese's ordination ceremony for new priests in June 2015. Many participants in the synodal listening sessions in U.S. dioceses cited support for women's ordination and more leadership roles for women in the church. (Gabriela Arp)

The role of women in the Catholic Church was another common concern. Participants said that women deserve to be in important leadership positions in the church, even in roles that are currently cut off to them via ordained ministry in the permanent diaconate and priesthood. Synod participants framed the issue as a matter of equity and justice.

"It is encouraging to see the sense of the faithful that encourages women's ordination, something we know to be true, to be reflected in these official documents," said Kate McElwee, executive director of the

Women's Ordination Conference, an organization that advocates for women to be ordained deacons, priests and bishops in the Catholic Church.

McElwee told NCR that she found it "very powerful" to see the grassroots call for women's ordination reflected in synod reports, adding that to "see their voices and longing reflected in them is a positive sign."



Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis is a theology professor at the University of Notre Dame who studies the history of women's roles in the Catholic Church. (Courtesy of Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis)

Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, a theology professor at the University of Notre Dame who studies the history of women's roles in the Catholic Church, told NCR that she was not surprised with the synodal responses calling for women to have equal positions of leadership and authority in the church.

"Women have had really prominent ministerial roles in the church, and this has been true since the beginning of the church's history, and I think it still remains true today," said Bugyis, who noted [historical research showing that women served as deacons in the early church](#).

"There are many women who are really thinking about their place in society and the ways in which many patriarchal forces are still at work that are keeping them from

making certain advances, and that includes the church," Bugyis said.

Synod participants across the board also called for better adult faith formation opportunities as well as vibrant liturgies and engaging homilies; better communication from priests and bishops; more efforts to integrate the different linguistic communities in multiethnic parishes and a sense of shared leadership between the clergy and laity. They also called for bishops and priests to address the widening polarization in the church, though they often disagreed on what constituted improper political commentary.

"There is an awareness of the difficult talks and the difficult conversations, and I think that is coming through to the top," said McStravog, who noted that many participants were somewhat skeptical about the synod even as they appreciated the opportunity to share their thoughts in listening sessions.

"There's excitement but also skepticism, though that skepticism may be less now than when we first started on this synodal journey," McStravog said.

Several dioceses indicated in their synthesis reports that they have already started to address some of the themes that emerged in local listening sessions, where participants also often said they want synodality to continue in their parishes.

"One of the things that I think is really important to remember is that the synod happens in the local church," McStravog said. "The diocese is where you're going to see the change first. It's not going to be at the USCCB level or the Vatican level, but in those diocesan reports is where you are going to see it first."



Brian Fraga

Brian Fraga is NCR staff reporter. His email address is [bfraga@ncronline.org](mailto:bfraga@ncronline.org). Follow him on Twitter at [@BrianFragaNCR](https://twitter.com/BrianFragaNCR).

## Synod report details US bishops' avoidance of church teaching on creation care

16 August 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)



A home is seen destroyed in the aftermath of Hurricane Delta October 10, 2020, in Creole, Louisiana. (CNS/Reuters/Adrees Latif)

The story starts off simple enough.

A woman starts a social justice group at her Catholic parish.

During one particular meeting, she begins to talk about "*Laudato Si'*", on Care for Our

Common Home," Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on ecology.

But she was quickly cut off.

"We shouldn't rock the boat," she said her pastor told her, as he felt the papal teaching document, the first ever devoted entirely to issues of the environment and humanity's relationship with the rest of the created world, was too controversial.

The anecdote, which did not name the parish or priest, was collected as part of the global church listening process that Francis has invoked through the [synod on synodality](#). It was included in [a report compiled by the Catholic Climate Covenant](#) at the invitation of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as part of the synodal process.

From January to June, Catholic Climate Covenant conducted a series of virtual listening sessions, online surveys, reflections with college students and more to give voice to the joys, hopes and, more often, "expressions of sorrow and disappointment" of U.S. Catholics with their church's response to *Laudato Si'* and climate change. Approximately 300 people, the majority women, participated, and the report was made public in late July.

Throughout the sessions, a near-unified message emerged: lay Catholics who have heard, embraced and worked to live out church teachings on the Christian responsibility to safeguard God's creation feel little to no support from clergy, bishops and dioceses, and in some cases direct opposition.

"The overarching takeaway was the need for unified support from U.S. dioceses and archdioceses to make *Laudato Si'* and climate change a priority," the report said.

That discovery was not a surprise for Dan Misleh, founder of Catholic Climate Covenant, who has learned often of stories like the woman rebuffed by her priest.

"I've been working on this issue for 16 years, and so I've kind of heard it all," he told EarthBeat.

But he hopes that the synod process will ensure the wider church hears it, too — a message increasingly from the laity that there is resistance within the U.S. church to addressing climate change and other environmental issues, even as Francis and the Vatican have [elevated them as urgent priorities](#) for Catholics and all people.



Pope Francis meets John Kerry, U.S. special presidential envoy for climate, May 15, 2021, at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Along with the lack of institutional church support, Misleh said another main takeaway from their synod listening sessions came from young adults, who are concerned by climate change but feel a disconnect between their college campuses, where the issue is discussed and engaged, and their home parishes where it's ignored or devalued.

"It's just not being supported or nobody's talking about it. Or nobody wants to talk about it because it's still seen as a political

issue instead of a moral issue or a scientific issue," he said.

The Covenant synodal listening sessions included responses from a small group of students at Creighton University. It also drew on feedback that young adults across North America delivered directly to the pope in February as part of a [virtual synod listening session](#) organized by the Vatican and Loyola University Chicago. During that session, one student [bluntly told the pope](#) that "U.S. Catholic leaders' failure to share and enact the church's own climate teachings is disillusioning young people."



Climate activists are seen near the Golden Gate Bridge June 14, 2021, in San Francisco. (CNS/Reuters/Amy Osborne)

In their feedback to the Covenant, Creighton students said they rarely hear climate change discussed in their home dioceses or connected to church teaching in homilies. One student described a sense of "idleness and ignorance" among priests. Another considered neglect of climate change as irresponsible. And a third expressed confusion when fellow Catholics describe themselves as "pro-life" but deny the environmental threats facing people and the planet.

"These testimonies from Catholic students revealed the failures of individual dioceses

and parishes to implement the teachings of *Laudato Si'* and the resulting frustration and disappointment at this failure," the report stated.

Throughout the synod report, respondents said that creation care has become politicized and "stigmatized" within their churches, pointing to factors like money and the belief that pastors and bishops see climate change as more a political, rather than moral, issue.

One woman shared that her parish pushed back on creation care efforts because a large donor had ties to the fossil fuel industry. Another respondent said that their diocese, which was not identified, ran negative articles on *Laudato Si'* in the diocesan newspaper, which the respondent said "made it virtually impossible" to implement ecologically focused programs. Overall, silence from priests and bishops, [a pattern documented in a recent study](#), "created an environment of apathy and indifference," the report said, that has made creation-focused initiatives an "uphill battle."

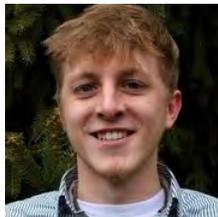
Despite a lack of support from the church hierarchy, the report indicated efforts to respond to the call to care for creation continue.

Many participants said they've started creation care teams or devised *Laudato Si'* action plans, and many drew inspiration from the example of Francis and the work of religious communities, particularly women religious who have long been leaders in environmental action. But those steps so far haven't led to more institutional engagement, which listening session participants believe is essential for a more robust church response to the global climate crisis.

Students suggested the Catholic Church could do just that by spreading its teachings on valuing and preserving creation in every parish and diocese, and for the church to use its power and influence "to enact meaningful discussions and solutions for climate change." Within the church, they recommended moves to better educate Catholics, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, divest from fossil fuel companies and urge advocacy.

Misleh said the report shows there are a lot of U.S. Catholics who approach climate change and environmental threats not from a place of politics "but from the perspective of their faith." And they want to see the same from church leadership.

"I think that's the motivation for a lot of people. So I hope that the bishops, the universal church hears that people do care about these issues because they are trying to authentically live their faith," he said.



Brian Roewe

Brian Roewe is NCR environment correspondent. His email address is [broewe@ncronline.org](mailto:broewe@ncronline.org). Follow him on Twitter at [@brianroewe](https://twitter.com/brianroewe).

# Disabled Catholics praise pope's example in publicly using a wheelchair

17 August 2022

by [Aleja Hertzler-McCain](#)



Pope Francis greets a cleric in a wheelchair during an audience with participants attending the general chapter of the Comboni Missionaries at the Vatican June 18, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)

When Amanda Martínez Beck saw a photo of Pope Francis sitting in a wheelchair and holding a baby during [his weeklong trip to Canada in July](#), she felt the same sense of camaraderie she feels seeing another mom at her children's elementary school using a wheelchair.

Beck, who uses a rollator, a kind of walker with a seat, teaches that "all bodies are good bodies" in her [fat liberation activism](#).

"Something is good that fulfills its purpose, and I believe that the purpose of the human body is relationship with God and others," she told NCR.

## Recommended reading

Amy Smith suggests these books:

- [\*'Us' not Them: Disability and Catholic Theology and Social Teaching\*](#) by Justin Glyn
- [\*The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability\*](#) by Nancy L. Eiesland

For Beck, "to see Pope Francis, having relationships, doing his papal duties" using a wheelchair or a cane, "it just reminds me of the goodness of a weak body like mine, because this is one of the holiest people in the world able to love and serve from a wheelchair."

Beck, who lives in Texas, is one of many disabled Catholics who praised the pope's decision to publicly use a wheelchair, which he has done since at least May 5 due to severe knee pain, making disability part of his visible identity.

Other world leaders have gone to significant lengths to avoid being seen in a wheelchair, and there have been [rumors](#) that Queen Elizabeth II has been among them.

"There is this belief that physical weakness yields moral or leaderly weakness," said Beck. "A lot of people, I have learned, view mobility aids as giving in or being lazy."



Amanda Martínez Beck uses a rollator, a kind of walker with a seat. "To see Pope Francis, having relationships, doing his papal duties" using a wheelchair or a cane, "it just reminds me of the goodness of a weak body like mine." (Courtesy of Amanda Martínez Beck)

"There's just so much shame that keeps us in pain," she said, encouraging Francis to speak about his experience using mobility aids.

Erin Murphy, a lifelong wheelchair user in Cambridge, Massachusetts, said the pope's use of a wheelchair "definitely normalizes disability, which I think is great."

"It's so valuable to have disabled bodies out there because there's a lot of power in seeing people who look like you, and to know that you can be a leader in the church, and you can be an integral part of the church. But when you don't see disabled bodies, it's hard to imagine being a leader or having a role in the church," said Murphy.

Because the lectern and the raised sanctuary area in Catholic churches are frequently inaccessible, Murphy has not been able to serve as a lector or a eucharistic minister. Even participating in Mass in many churches, which often do not have cutouts in the pews for wheelchair users, makes her feel isolated because she has to sit at the edge of the church.

"I'm very obviously not sitting with the body of Christ, and that is really bothersome to me," she said.

Other disabled Catholics said they found it troubling that there appeared to be [an increase in rumors](#) that Francis was considering resigning the papacy as his knee pain grew worse and he began to use a cane or a wheelchair in public.



Amy Smith, who is autistic and has acquired single-sided deafness, said that increased rumors that Pope Francis will soon retire since he started using a wheelchair in public "does a disservice to people who acquire disability." (Courtesy of Amy Smith)

Amy Smith, who is autistic and has acquired single-sided deafness, said she has been disappointed in the rumors.

The speculation "does a disservice to people who acquire disability," said Smith, who lives in Parramatta, Australia. "It can perpetuate this idea that if you have any kind of medical condition or disability, and you have to adapt to those circumstances, that you're basically going to become a shut-in, and that's all you're guaranteed to be. You're going to be at death's door at any point. You're going to have to give up everything that you're passionate about."

Disability is not new for Francis, who [had a small part of one lung removed](#) as a young man and who has [struggled with pain from sciatica for decades](#). In his public teaching, the pope has repeatedly preached about the dignity of aging, even dedicating a [catechesis series](#) to the "meaning and value of old age" this year.

He also has spoken about the church's responsibility to fight ableism and disability discrimination. In his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis quoted from his 2019 address on the [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#): "Our concern should be not only to care for them

but to ensure their 'active participation in the civil and ecclesial community.' "



Erin Murphy, a lifelong wheelchair user in Cambridge, Massachusetts, said the pope's use of a wheelchair "definitely normalizes disability, which I think is great." (Courtesy of Erin Murphy)

"We need to have 'the courage to give a voice to those who are discriminated against due to their disability, because sadly, in some countries even today, people find it hard to acknowledge them as persons of equal dignity,'" the pope continued. Francis has regularly given addresses to commemorate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, celebrated each Dec. 3.

Disabled Catholics have noted Francis' commitment to disability inclusion in his interactions with disabled people, especially children. On several occasions, Smith said, she has observed Francis allowing nonverbal autistic children to run around him and other officials as he is speaking, for example, during his Wednesday general audiences.

"Those children will remember those moments, and they'll be very positive memories," she said.

The pope's public use of mobility aids has tapped into disabled Catholics' dreams of greater inclusion. "I hope that having the pope show that one can have a disability and lead the church will lead to a greater respect

for persons with disabilities in the church," Murphy said.

'When you don't see disabled bodies, it's hard to imagine being a leader or having a role in the church.'

—Erin Murphy

"I hope that the church can become more attuned to things like the language they use to proclaim the gospel," she added. "So for example, can 'lame' or 'crippled' be swapped out for 'unable to walk'? If churches are using offensive euphemisms, like 'special needs' or 'differently abled,' can they just use the term 'disabled'?"

"'Special needs' implies that they're extra needs when in fact getting into the church is a basic need," Murphy explained. "The word 'special' can also imply it's optional."

In this moment of attention to the pope's disability, "I would strongly encourage people within the church to seek out disability liberation theology," Smith said, recommending Jesuit Fr. Justin Glyn's [\*'Us' not 'Them': Disability and Catholic Theology and Social Teaching\*](#) and Nancy L. Eiesland's [\*The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability\*](#).

"Clearly the Scriptures have lots of stories, both in the Old and New Testament, of persons with disability," said Mary Jo Iozzio, a professor of moral theology at Boston College who studies disability theology. "It's really quite remarkable how the discipline has grown and gone into so many different directions," she added.

Disabled Catholics also hope that the pope's public disability challenges the infantilization of disabled people. "As a parishioner, I've had an individual routinely pat my head after Mass, as if I were a child," said Murphy, who is 42.

"This attitude that disabled people can't really lead does need to be done away with," said Smith. "There needs to be greater disabled-led support for disabled people within the church, and I do emphasize disabled-led because it can be very tempting for many in the church hierarchy to just defer to the parents of disabled children."

"I think this is an opportunity for the church to improve its understanding and relationship with its disabled members," said Smith. "This is a way to shift the thinking [about disability] from a paternalistic charity-based model of thinking ... into one that is based more upon solidarity."



[Aleja Hertzler-McCain](#)

Aleja Hertzler-McCain is NCR's Bertelsen Editorial Fellow, based in Mount Rainer, Maryland.

## Synod reports from around the world raise clericalism, women as issues

17 August 2022

by [Phyllis Zagano](#),  
[Religion News Service](#)

[Vatican](#)



Bishops and cardinals are pictured as Pope Francis celebrates a Mass to open the process that will lead up to the assembly of the world Synod of Bishops in 2023, in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in this Oct. 10, 2021, file photo. (Remo Casilli, Reuters/CNS)

More than a year ago, Pope Francis announced the Synod on Synodality, an initiative to take the pulse of the Catholic Church. U.S. Catholics have been mostly silent about this effort, but in several countries, including Australia, France, England and Wales, and Germany, things are moving full steam ahead.

Two major problems have come up time and time again: clericalism and the place of women in the Church.

If you haven't heard much about this effort, which completes its first phase this summer, you are not alone. In May 2021, six months prior to the synod's October 2021 opening, the Vatican asked the world's bishops to name synod coordinators in their dioceses, who were expected to organize a program of public meetings for Catholics, ex-Catholics and non-Catholics alike to talk about the church.

Some did. Some did not. Yet, somehow most U.S. dioceses, 95%, according to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote reports, though relatively few are published. Participating dioceses melded parish reports into diocesan reports, which were combined

into regional reports. From the regional reports, as well as reports from some 110 independent Catholic organizations, the USCCB will create a 10-page report, due in Rome.

Some diocesan reports, such as those from Buffalo, Louisville, Salt Lake City and Trenton, point to clericalism and the lack of women in leadership as problematic. Louisville, Trenton and Salt Lake City noted calls for women deacons. The Buffalo report found the abuse scandal (and) the lack of respect for women as manifested in an all-male clergy caused declining church attendance and membership.

Even San Francisco, led by conservative Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone, admitted to clericalism, and Washington, D.C.'s rosy report notes one core fact: People do not trust the bishops.

The synod is a worldwide event, and early reports from bishops' conferences outside the U.S. repeat the same story: Clericalism is a scourge on the church, and women are not respected or included in leadership.

Australia recently survived a rocky Plenary Council meeting, during which the country's bishops voted down a statement witnessing the equal dignity of women and men, apparently because it included a request to restore women to the ordained diaconate. After nearly a quarter of council members protested, refusing to take their seats following a tea break, emergency meetings softened the statement to say the bishops would accept Rome's decision on women deacons.

France reported deep dissatisfaction with the place of women in the church and the need to recognize their suffering and expectations.

England and Wales recognized that women were a silenced, unrecognized majority, excluded from leadership and ministry.

Germany went so far on these and other topics that it earned a published reminder from the Vatican: While they might discern, Rome would decide.

Once all the national reports get to Rome, the plan is to create a general document for another round of discussion next year, in preparation for the October 2023 synod meeting of some 300 representatives in Rome.

Historically, synods are synods of bishops, but so far at least one woman, Xaverian Sister Nathalie Becquart, one of two undersecretaries (second in command) in the Rome synod office, will have a vote. The list of synod members, observers and experts should appear by the end of the year.

Whether anything will come of all this effort is anyone's guess, but strong words in several languages are calling out supercilious clerics who, convinced they control access to heaven, are ruining the church and chasing away members, especially women and girls. Overall, the people agree with Francis. These clerics do not. Whether clericalism can block calls for reform coming from the synod is uncertain.

How can this be?

For starters, the so-called biological solution touted by conservative Catholics is taking hold. As priest and bishop supporters of the Second Vatican Council and of Francis age out or die in place, they are replaced by a cadre of bishops ordained as priests during the reign of Pope John Paul II, who in turn appoint conservative pastors ordained during the reign of Pope Benedict XVI. Francis, as

strong and alert as he is today, is not getting any younger.

Positive takes on the situation say the voice of the Holy Spirit is heard through the people, and God will steady the barque of Peter. But meanwhile, the Catholic Church as a force for good continues to lose influence inside and outside its walls, in large part because of how too many of its clerics treat women.



[Phyllis Zagano](#)

Phyllis Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence and adjunct professor of religion at Hofstra University, in Hempstead, New York. Her most recent book is [Women: Icons of Christ](#).

## Caring for José Luis: A priest learns that love is love

18 August 2022

by [Fr. Peter Daly](#)



Clockwise, from top left: Peter Daly (left), José Luis Sánchez, and two friends, Jane Head and

Nancy Smith; José Luis in a chair; and José Luis holding coffee on the couch at Peter's house (Courtesy of Peter Daly)

I haven't written anything for a long time because I have been busy as a caregiver. The last 18 months have been the "story of José Luis." It has been one of the most important chapters of my life.

In October of 2020, my friend José Luis Sánchez was having severe stomach troubles. He thought it might be colitis.

Toward the end of November 2020, I drove him home from his final colonoscopy. He looked positively ashen. As we drove to his apartment he told me, "It's cancer." Specifically, it was metastatic colon cancer that had spread from his colon to his liver and to one lung. The doctor had told him that the cancer was inoperable. The best he could hope for was to delay its progress with aggressive chemotherapy.

I was devastated. "I'm so sorry José," was about all I could say. José Luis was a retired librarian, a man of deep intellect but few words. He said stoically, "C'est la vie." But I could see tears running down his cheeks. We rode the rest of the way home in silence, holding hands.

José had lived on the third floor of a walk-up building in Washington, D.C., for 28 years. In the four years that I had known him, I had often seen him take the stairs two at a time, all the way to the third floor. But this time, he moved very slowly up the stairs. He collapsed on the second-floor landing, completely out of breath.

I sat down on the floor with him and put my arms around him. I said, "José you cannot live alone anymore. You have to come home with me." A couple of weeks later, on Dec. 8, I moved him to the guest room in my

house with just some clothing, a few personal items, and a huge stack of books. José never went anywhere without a book. He was constantly reading in English and Spanish.

From Thanksgiving of 2020 until his death at the end of March in 2022 (just before Easter) I was José's caregiver, roommate and support system. It was the most intense period of love and loss in my life. It was a huge blessing.

Two things I want to say at the outset of this story.

First, José was a gay man. So am I. But we were not sexually involved. Our love was emotional and spiritual, not sexual. But nonetheless it was real love. In the course of our 16 months together, our relationship grew in intensity and complexity.

As a priest, I have often yearned for intimacy. We tell everyone that God is love. We tell people that the whole point of life is to love. But we seldom know the power and beauty and pain of love. Loving a group of parishioners is not the same as loving one other person. For me, as a priest, my friendship with José Luis was the deepest and richest experience of love that I ever had in my life. I think that it is something that most priests yearn for.

Second, José was a true and sincere seeker of spiritual truth. Like many gay people he was wounded and rejected by the Catholic Church. He was raised a Catholic in his native Puerto Rico, but in recent years he had rejected the church because he felt rejected by it.

As a priest, I have often yearned for intimacy. We tell everyone that God is love. We tell people that the whole point of life is

to love. But we seldom know the power and beauty and pain of love.

For the past 20 years he had become a Unitarian and worshipped every Sunday at All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington. He liked their openness to spiritual exploration. He loved their respect for everyone's dignity. However, even though he had "left" the Catholic Church, he still had an attraction to the Eucharist and the Catholic liturgy, especially at holy days like Christmas and Easter.

José read more theology and Scripture than most priests. He explored the writings of Pope Francis. Occasionally he went to Eucharist at the Dignity community in Washington, which is the LGBTQ community for Catholics and their friends and family. For years José was the coordinator of Dignity's lecture series.

He was also involved in Dignity's book club. That is how I met him. The book club was reading the novel that I had co-written with Msgr. Jack Myslinski, *Strange Gods*, a story of corruption and redemption in the church. José invited me to come speak to the club.

Despite his cultural roots, José was not a "Catholic in exile." He was not yearning for the church to take him back. He had moved on. His life was dedicated to spiritual growth and social justice. He helped All Souls to care for immigrants by translating for them. He spent his retirement serving the poor at soup kitchens and homeless programs in Washington. He was a much better person than I ever was, indeed, much better than most people. He was generous, kind, humble, thoughtful and selfless. He asked for nothing for himself and gave his few possessions away generously.

In the months that José lived at my house, we shared ordinary life. We ate our meals together. After dinner, we did the dishes and

then sat on the couch holding hands as we watched TV. Sometimes I would massage his feet. He suffered from neuropathy. Sometimes I would lean on him. Sometimes, he would lean on me. At the end of the evening, we helped each other up the stairs. Me short of breath and José in pain.

He needed help in getting dressed for bed. I would take his shoes and socks off. It was a profound act of service. We usually would give each other a hug and kiss good night. Most nights we would remember to say, "I love you." For someone like me who had lived his adult life never hearing those words, it was an earthquake.

José loved classic opera. Many evenings we sat on the couch and watched YouTube videos of operas. After he died, I found a note he had written to himself. It said, "When I work, God respects me. When I sing, God loves me."



José Luis, sitting on a porch (Courtesy of Peter Daly)

José had sung at numerous recitals in Washington and community operas in New York. He was good. He sang the male leads in "Carmen" and "Pagliacci." With his advancing cancer, his singing days were over. But he loved to watch all the great arias. When the singers would hit the high notes, José Luis would cry uncontrollably. It hurt him that he could no longer sing.

Cancer is cruel, but it is not consistent. There are good days and bad days. After the initial shock of the diagnosis, there was hope that chemotherapy could work. In the first couple of months, we made ready for death, "getting affairs in order" with a will, health care directive, plans for cremation and a power of attorney. We had numerous trips to the clinic for blood tests, chemotherapy, blood clots, pain relief and to drain his abdomen. José never complained.

Sometimes I forgot about the diagnosis. Once I returned home and said to José, "How are you?" He looked at me and said, "I'm dying." It shocked me. Later that evening I asked him, "When death approaches, do you want to go into a nursing home or hospital?"

"No," he said. "I want to stay with you." We both cried.

For a while chemo worked. By March he had gained back 25 of the 40 pounds he had lost. The pain was less. The cancer markers were going in the right direction. There was hope. Some weeks last summer he returned to his apartment for two or three days at a time. It gave him a sense of normalcy and autonomy.

But by the fall the pain was back and getting worse. His appetite was poor; his weight falling. We knew it was bad, but we said nothing. His belly was terribly swollen by the fluid resulting from his failing liver. He looked pregnant. His clothes did not fit. He had to tie his pants up with a rope. I had to help him dress. When we went for his treatment, he tried to cover up everything with a huge overcoat. Always a meticulous dresser before the cancer, José now looked like a homeless man. Through it all he remained dignified and humble.



Neither of us was in good condition physically. We were both in our 70s. José had his cancer. I had a congestive heart failure, brought on by a failing aortic valve. Through Christmas and New Year, we tried to carry on, but we knew that we were just "whistling past the graveyard." My heart was getting worse. The doctors said that I would need to have my aortic valve replaced for a second time in 11 years. José said once, "Maybe we will go together."

The first week of March I had my heart operation. It was "minimally invasive," so my recovery was short. But I was gone nearly a week. During that week, the Dignity community organized volunteers to come and stay with José. He resisted this at first, but later realized it was necessary. For a whole week, he had round-the-clock volunteers to talk with, eat with and watch TV. Fifteen volunteers rotated through during that week. When I came back, I said to José, "See how you are loved!" I know it meant a lot to him.

One incident in mid-March let me know that the end was near. For several weeks, José was not sleeping well. I tried to listen for him in case he needed help. One night I heard him calling my name, "Peter, Peter!" I got up and found him standing in the hallway near the top of the stairs. He had urinated, and there was a little puddle at his feet. I changed him into dry clothes and got him back to bed.

Sitting on the side of the bed, I asked, "Why were you at the top of the stairs?"

He said, "I've got to figure out how to get home."

There was something childlike in his simple sentence. But I thought he might be disoriented, so I said, "José, you are home. This is your home now. You live here with me."

He said, "No, home."

"Do you mean to Harvard Street?" I asked, referring to his apartment.

"No," he said again more emphatically. "Home!"

"Do you mean Puerto Rico?" I asked. He shook his head no.

"Where?" I asked.

He raised his index finger and just pointed up.

I realized he meant heaven. I started sobbing and put my arms around him. "Oh, José Luis," I said, "you don't have to figure out how to go home. When the time comes, God will send a legion of angels to lead you home." I lay down next to him and held him until he slept.

He died about two weeks later. By the end of March José could no longer walk and he could hardly speak. He was going blind. His beautiful voice was still. Hospice came to help. I learned to administer morphine. It was frightening.

Dear friends came to stay with us in the last week. Two of them were nurses. It was a huge help. I couldn't lift him or change him by myself. They knew what to do.

José died on Sunday, at about 1 p.m. The final few hours I sat by his bed, holding his hand. Our friends were downstairs, but they left us alone. It was a grace. I sang some hymns as his breathing grew shallower: "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Abide With Me," and "All Creatures of Our God and King." I stroked his brow and put a little sponge with water in his mouth. He looked at me, but I was not sure if he could see me. But he could hear me saying over and over again, "I love you, José."

One of the last verses of "All Creatures of Our God and King" is about death:

And you, most kind and gentle death,  
Waiting to hush our final breath,  
Oh, praise him! Alleluia!  
You lead to heaven the child of God,  
Where Christ our Lord the way has trod.  
Oh, praise him, Alleluia!

Just as I sang the final "Alleluia," José Luis looked my way, let out a sigh and breathed his last. I leaned over the bed rail, held his lifeless body and sobbed.

The 16 months with José Luis in my house were a pure grace. They were the antidote to the loneliness and the wound of celibacy. José gave me the great gift of saying, "I love you." I learned to say it back. Love is love.

I am not alone in this view.

Why did I write all this? First to pay tribute to my friend José Luis. He deserves to be remembered. Second, I feel the need to be honest about myself. In my 72nd year I need to live with integrity. If not now, when?

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, the head of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, agrees with me. In January of 2022, in an [interview](#) with Germany's Catholic News Agency, or KNA, he said that the

church's assessment of all homosexual relationships as sinful is wrong. "I believe that the sociological-scientific foundation of this teaching is no longer correct," Hollerich said. The cardinal went on to say that it is time for a fundamental revision of church teaching on homosexuality.

I hope that what the cardinal suggested comes true. Someday the Catholic Church will realize that it is wrong about same-sex love, which can be no less meaningful or Christian than heterosexual love.

Why did I write all this? First to pay tribute to my friend José Luis. He deserves to be remembered. Second, I feel the need to be honest about myself. In my 72nd year I need to live with integrity. If not now, when?

I have lived the life that the church has asked of me. I always took my vow of celibacy seriously and I always endeavored to live a chaste life. I was not breaking my commitments behind the scenes. But I have changed in the last 40 years. So has the church. So has the world. People now value honesty and authenticity. I am not the only priest with these struggles.

These days I sit on the sofa alone. José's place in the middle of the sofa remains empty. I remember holding his hand, rubbing his feet and leaning on his shoulder. I remember wrapping him up in a down comforter and putting a hot water bottle on his feet when his chemotherapy left him shivering. Now I put the recordings of José singing his favorite arias on the CD player. I hear his voice in the house again.

Our relationship was all a gift. It was a grace. Our love was good. José Luis was good.

And I'm sure that he didn't have any trouble finding his way home.



Fr. Peter Daly

Peter Daly is a retired priest of the Archdiocese of Washington who writes about living the faith while trying to be open to the world around us.

## Love is the essence of religious community life

18 August 2022

by Joan Chittister



Mahatma Gandhi, a seriously spiritual figure, [wrote](#) "Where there is love, there is life." But is that true of celibate religious communities?

To seriously consider joining a religious community is a life-changing decision, yes. But there are important questions to be resolved before we do. As in what is it like to live a spiritual life? Or even more impacting: What is the place of love in the spiritual life, if any?

The trouble with today's world is that it acts as if there were only one kind of love. And so, we are inclined to overlook the others. Whether we know it or not, that can leave a lot of life very empty.

For instance, the sound of a baby crying had become common in our monastery. Sister Judith, a woman with a soft voice and an even softer look on her face, had a reputation by now. She was known across the social service network in the city as "the sister who took in babies" from the time of birth until the completion of a successful adoption.

This particular morning, Sister Judith was at her desk in the office, as usual. Next to her desk, an electric swingset rocked methodically back and forth. Visitors to the monastery were delighted to see it but were also startled. The baby was the child of a drug-addicted mother and the baby showed the signs of drug withdrawal. She fussed and screamed, sobbed and kicked a bit.

***Religious life shows us that love is possible without sex and that love that asks for nothing in return is the purest, most dramatic love of all.***

Sister Judith stopped at every point, took the baby out of the swing, hugged her to her shoulder and walked up and down the hall till the sobs lost their energy and slowed to a halt.

Was she spoiling the baby? Not according to the latest research.

The amygdala of a baby's brain, [science tells us](#), only completes its development after birth. But this happens best only if the baby gets the attention and affection necessary to stimulate it. Development of the amygdala [determines the difference](#) between a child that grows up peaceful and one that demonstrates serious agitation or aggression throughout life.

That baby had a special need for someone to hold her as the withdrawal from her birth mother's drug addiction went slowly,

painfully on. This was clearly a very important kind of love.

In fact, Sister Judith did "take in babies." At the same time, every baby she took in meant that the rest of us took in another baby, too. The community enabled it, supported it and saw it as a direct outgrowth of our own corporate commitment to world peace.

Clearly, this first kind of love is love that culminates in service, the love of Jesus for the forgotten. And we did it, too, because religious life is also about self-giving.

The second kind of love, the physical bonding of two people, is meant to give life both to the world and to the relationship.

True, religious life is not about sex, but it is all about love. The confusion comes from the fact that contemporary society is all about sex and thinks it's the same as love. But love is much deeper than physical coupling. Otherwise, how do we account for the fact that sex is, at best, only a small part of even the healthiest life? It's only love that is beyond sex, more than sex, that is really about forever.

If sex were essential to love, then sickness, age, accident and disability would be the end of it. But the truth is that sex can't keep a marriage together and it can't end it either. Not a real one.

If anything, religious life, too, is a sign of real love. It shows us that love is possible without sex and that love that asks for nothing in return is the purest, most dramatic love of all.

It is love itself, not sex, that is the bond of life. Which explains why it is as real in a religious community as it is in any marriage. Sex is the nature of nature. But sex will

never be as consuming — as important — in anyone's life as love for its own sake.

The third kind of love is friendship at its highest, deepest level. It is the spiritual bond between people that makes all the great things of life, both personal and spiritual, possible.

Strong communities are made of those chains of friendship that cross generations and tie us to one another, however distant we may seem. Like the ropes of mountain climbers, the love of sisters holds us fast when everything in life around us — our health, our work, our very faith, our spiritual life, and the depression that comes with change and loneliness — threatens to leave us unmoored.

It is holy friendship that grows us up emotionally. When still unsure of ourselves, it is the warmth of the community that makes our journeys to new growth possible. It is holy friendship that shows us the way out of our own inner imprisonment, that helps us, sees us through our insecurities, and brings us love and stability.

When we reach for the stars and fail, it is the presence of a loving other, the sister-friend, who helps us stay the road. In this kind of holy wisdom, we learn that there is more love around us than we ever knew we had. It is one holy friendship that is enough to help us see the larger picture, the way back into the group and on with the journey.

The issues at hand and all the various positions on them will come and go in community life, but the people who make the community a community are its bedrock. Its sign that the sacrament of peace is possible. Even among strangers.

The challenge of spiritual love is to go through each phase of our lives and come

out even more committed, more holy and more mature than we were when we began. It's that kind of growth and spiritual development that is the byproduct of religious community.

During the years of change and renewal when life careened from point to point, from change to change, and community feelings ran deep and divided, votes designed to bring unity were dangerously close. Then someone suggested that we stop voting for the particular matter at hand and make a different kind of decision. Instead of trying to achieve a universal agreement once and for all, we were asked to decide if we would trust our sisters to do what they each thought best for their own growth at this particular time.

I remember looking slowly around the room at the community in solemn chapter assembled. The faces were drawn and the bodies were taut. But at the end, the vote was 121-1 in favor of trust and love. Community had triumphed over conformity one more important time.

Holy friendship had demonstrated what is and is not important in a community.

Let there be no doubt about it: Love is the essence of religious community life.

From where I stand, this is the love of the listening ear, a guide through the nights of every soul. Then someday, like our married friends, when that light leaves us, we come to know the power of death. And then, without doubt, in the midst of the pain of the loss, we realize that we have known the love that is needed here and now, also.

Or as Gandhi says, "Where there is love, there is life."



Joan Chittister

A Benedictine Sister of Erie, Pennsylvania, Joan Chittister is a best-selling author and well-known international lecturer on topics of justice, peace, human rights, women's issues and contemporary spirituality in the church and in society.



stock.adobe.com melita

## **ONE NATION, ONE WORLD, ONE HUMAN FAMILY**

**A Reflection from the  
Interpath Traditions  
by Thomas P. Bonacci, C.P.**

In his September 2020 Address to the United Nations, Pope Francis warned, “We are faced with a choice between two possible paths, a solidarity grounded in justice and the attainment of peace and unity within the human family, which is God’s plan for our world, or a path which emphasizes self-sufficiency, nationalism, protectionism, individualism and isolation.”

The Pope sounded the alarm. Once again, there are forces at work in the Nation and the World subverting religion for nationalistic and partisan motives. The situation is alarming and dangerous.

Take, for example, the recent speech of Viktor Orban, the Hungarian prime minister, to a political gathering in Dallas, TX. He advocated for racist policies, intolerance, white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and isolationism. Moreover, he upheld the tenants of Christian Nationalism which many, unfortunately, confuse with Christianity and patriotism.

Christian Nationalists in the United States have succeeded in attracting people who may have more conservative views concerning certain aspects of the so-called “Cultural Wars.” Honest debate about such issues is, of course, legitimate and welcome. Nationalists hide behind these issues to further their political agenda, which would destroy democracy and severely compromise the human rights of minorities, women, or

anyone they  
consider the enemy.

Christian Nationalism repeats a false story suggesting America is by nature a Christian Country to be governed by Christian principles for the sake of Christian people. Anyone who is not Christian cannot be a true American. Certain white men have a privileged position in this scheme of reality which endangers the rights and well-being of everyone else. We see this sad development in the removal of books from our libraries, schools, and institutions. Christian Nationalists demand history be told from their perspective. Slavery must be denied, and the genocide of Indigenous people obscured. Christian Nationalism honors power, might, and violence.

Nationalists think anyone who works for the right of all people to vote, freedom of religion for all faiths, and reparations for past injustices is unfaithful, treasonous, or sinful.

It is crucial for Christian Churches to stand up against the rising tide of Nationalism. The issues

should not be dismissed as "political". Instead, the Churches must reclaim the word "Christian" from those who would confuse it with partisan politics or a false patriotism fostering hate groups and violence.

The God of Christianity is the God of all people. Therefore, our borders must not be walls built by hatred any more than our hearts ought to harbor a sense of superiority over others. Jesus taught us to honor the human dignity of all peoples. It is our blessing to be of loving service to everyone.

Blessings to you, Holy Community, for resisting the temptations to think of yourselves in ways excluding others. Gratitude to you, Beloved Community, for following in the footsteps of our Teacher who taught us to be people of self-giving kindness.