In early October, FutureChurch’s Deb Rose-Milavec headed to Rome bringing with her the Voices of the People report, an effort led by 17 Catholic reform groups representing over 16,500 people (mycatholicfamily.org) who completed the initial survey sent out by Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family. In Rome, with the help of Kate McElwee of Women’s Ordination Conference, the report was shared with Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as Alice and Jeff Heinzen, the only U.S. couple to serve as auditors at the synod. All three promised to read the report and consider it as they continued their work at the synod.

FutureChurch also participated in a pre-synod press conference with International Movement of We Are Church, Women’s Ordination Worldwide and other international reform organizations. There Rose-Milavec shared a summary of what Catholics said about their experience and beliefs on Church teachings on contraception from the Voices of the People report.

She also attended the Vatican Press office’s daily press briefings and reported on the workings at the synod by e-mail and through the blog synodwatch.wordpress.org.

After the synod ended and the final document (Relatio Synodi) released in English, Rose-Milavec examined both the mid-term and the final document, side by side, to see just how much had been lost or gained in the small group vetting process during the last week of the synod. In a surprising find, Rose-Milavec found that, while key paragraphs had been stripped of their pastoral language and replaced or toned down, in many other places, the original language and much of the tone had been retained in the final document.

Some of her observations can be found in this newsletter or on the synodwatch blog.

FutureChurch has already been developing strategies to promote awareness of the synod and lobbying U.S. bishops to put mechanisms in place for listening to Catholics and their families. This was also taken up in November at the bi-annual meeting of Catholic Organizations for Renewal. Several committees formed to reach out to grass roots Catholics on the issues to be discussed at the 2015 Synod and to lobby the bishops to make sure mechanisms for dialogue and input are implemented in every diocese. The group sent out a formal “Call for a Year of Dialogue” to our bishops in preparation for the 2015 synod and issued a press release (mycatholicfamily.org).

At the Call to Action conference, Rose-Milavec led a caucus to talk about strategies for effectively lobbying our bishops to implement dialogue on the synod issues. She also shared some of her observations about the differences between the mid-term and final synod documents.

From Memphis she flew to Baltimore to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) bi-annual meeting to urge bishops to implement processes for dialogue in every diocese in preparation for the synod. She spoke with some bishops who admitted no plans were being discussed at the conference to get input from ordinary Catholics. Later that week, the USCCB conference elected the bishops that would serve at the synod. President Archbishop Joseph Kurtz and Vice-President Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston were elected along with Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia and Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone and Archbishop Blase Cupich were selected as alternates.

According to Fr. Thomas Reese, senior analyst for the National Catholic Reporter, Cardinal Sean O’Malley was on the ballot but was not elected. Reese contends that the election results indicate the U.S. bishops are reluctant to support Pope Francis’s direction at the synod.

The Synod of Bishops issued the new Lineamenta along with a new questionnaire on December 15, 2015 asking bishops to obtain grassroots input on the synod issues. FutureChurch will help lead a collaborative effort to ensure that the voices of all Catholics and their families are heard as we move toward the 2015 Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family. In a recent press release Rose-Milavec noted, “Over the next year, all Catholics, including those who are divorced and remarried, in same sex relationships, and who believe the Church’s teaching on contraception is out of step with the needs of Catholic families should have a voice. They should have the opportunity to engage our bishops in frank, honest and respectful discussions about the realities of family life, marriage and human sexuality. In every diocese, we need surveys, listening sessions and other creative ways to ensure the voices of all Catholics and their families are heard by their bishops and by those who will attend and make decisions about the Church’s pastoral practices at the 2015 Synod on the Family.”

This synod has the potential to heal wounds in a church that has been bleeding for decades. FutureChurch is committed to supporting Catholics as they make their faith and experience known to those who will shape pastoral practice in our Church for decades to come.

View Deb’s blog regarding the synod at synodwatch.wordpress.org
As my family gathered along with millions of other families across the country this Thanksgiving, I was gently (and humorously) reminded of the importance of the model of dialogue Pope Francis set in motion at the 2014 Extraordinary Synod on the Family. Catholic commentators of every stripe have heralded the new age of dialogue being stewarded by Francis. I agree. It is a magnificent start even though a large swath of key Catholic voices are not yet being heard or engaged. Yet for me, the unfolding of this new Catholic space is personal. I know I can get better at dialogue. I want to get better at dialogue. So, what better place to practice than with my family (the sounds of nervous laughter begin)?

To start, I grew up in a world where my father, a very loving parent, persuasively counseled me to avoid talking politics or religion "if you want to get along with people." Hmmm…that created a conundrum for the budding feminist and justice-seeker who had little use for exchanging polite small talk. I knew I would have to find a way into meaningful conversations with friends and family even though my father's words sometimes made my heart race with fear.

Because I want my children and grandchildren to care about justice and to work for it, I engage them in dialogue about important events around the kitchen table. My family, like many families, is composed of people from all spectrums of the political landscape. In the past, when we vigorously disagreed, I felt distressed if someone grew angry or defensive, a remnant of my past training. But this year, the Francis model of dialogue opened me up and helped create a more centered place of peace when differences were voiced.

Our Thanksgiving celebration was filled with wonderful comfort food, the sounds of children of all ages, the talk of young and older adults and the comments of the graying ones. In the course of our many discussions, I posed a difficult question about a devastating trend in the U.S. I asked, "How do you feel about what has happened in Ferguson?" And, thinking of Francis, I took pains to encourage the shy and those normally uncomfortable with confrontation to speak up. As in the past, the conversation started haltingly, built into a crescendo of voiced differences and finished with some leaving the room in frustration. Aaahhh…this is the family I love.

As I always do, I gave everyone a post-celebration call, told them how much I loved them and how grateful I was to have them in my life. I know we have a lot of injustices to overcome if we are to build the kin-dom of God, but this year, I also quietly rejoiced for the opening in my own heart and the new confidence I feel engaging my family and my Church in this messy model of dialogue. It is gift for which I am truly thankful.

DEBORAH ROSE-MILAVEC
Executive Director
You might imagine that a man who has been officially removed from his primary mission as a preacher and teacher, and who has been censured by Rome would look a little ragged around the edges or show some sign of sadness in his expression. But this is not the case for Fr. Tony Flannery, the founder of the Association of Catholic Priests in Ireland. He has charisma, but not the flashy type. It is the charisma of a man at ease with people. He’s approachable. He laughs easily. And when you hear him speak or get a bit of his gentle and often-humorous brogue logic, it makes your heart feel lighter as he sorts things out in today’s Church.

During October and November, thousands of Catholics across the United States had the chance to experience Fr. Tony’s presence for themselves. Over the course of 30 days, Fr. Tony visited 18 cities (60 cities made requests to host him!) giving talks, participating in meetings with U.S. priests and other groups, giving interviews and meeting with media representatives in each city.

Each city had a healthy crowd, but some venues were downright bursting with people eager to hear Fr. Tony speak. In Detroit, more than 500 people came from far and wide to hear him.

In Minnesota, Fr. Mike Tegeder invited Fr. Tony to speak at his Catholic parish, St. Frances Cabrini. When Archbishop John Neinstedt learned about the event, he called Fr. Mike in and asked him to move the event. A real stand-up priest, Fr. Mike told the Archbishop that he was not going to move the program. He reasoned that Pope Francis was inviting dialogue and that this was healthy for adult Catholics. With uber-resolve, Fr. Mike said Fr. Tony Flannery would be at his church and the adults who came would have a chance to hear his point of view. Seeing Tegeder’s determination, the Archbishop asked him to put up a sign saying the Archdiocese did not officially endorse Flannery’s visit. Tegeder happily complied and placed a sign on the podium that read, “Tonight’s speaker, Tony Flannery, is not to be perceived in any way as being sponsored by the Catholic Church. This announcement comes from Archbishop John C. Nienstedt, Chief Catechist of the Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis.”

On November 5, the crowds poured in and the church filled. More came. They were directed to the overflow space in the basement. Fr. Tony wrote in his blog that it was the most exciting stop of his tour up to that point. People were energized and they energized him!

In Memphis at the Call to Action conference, more than 700 people had the opportunity to hear Fr. Tony talk on women’s leadership, conscience, the synod, the role of priests and people and more. The crowds pressed in and two of his talks had to be moved to a larger room in order to accommodate everyone. Still, people lined the walls and the floor to have the chance to hear him. After each talk hundreds of people signed postcards and letters to Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò and to Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, president of the USCCB, asking for a number of reforms promoting women in ministry and leadership, opening the door to married priests, creating a synod process where all Catholics are heard and more.

Many who could not attend one of the eighteen talks had a chance to view Fr. Tony via YouTube where his talks were taped in New York City and St. Louis. Fr. Gerry Bechard and Fr. Tom Lumpkin’s Detroit-based Elephants in the Living Room Group taped his presentation for DVD distribution.

Fr. Tony remarks really hit home for many Catholics. Because of his experience in Ireland with a looming priest shortage, he was blunt, “The future of the church is in the hands of the laity, and I tell them not to wait around. Priests are largely of the past; you are the future of the church.”

In many places, he shared his story of censure by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and talked about the role conscience in his own life. Fr. Tony Flannery is a leader who walks what he talks. Catholics see it and are inspired by him.
Catholics Continue to Support the Sisters as the Apostolic Visitation Report Is Released

This summer over 17,300 Catholics spoke up when Cardinal Gerhard Müller accused the Leadership Conference of Women Religious of not adhering to the unjust reform agenda imposed on the group in 2012 and attacked them for their choice of Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ for the 2014 Outstanding Leadership Award. The NunJustice Coalition, a progressive Catholic coalition, issued an open letter to Pope Francis asking him to remove the unjust mandate and apologize to Sr. Elizabeth Johnson. In September, a representative of the coalition delivered 17,340 signatures to Pope Francis in Rome.

American nuns are in the news again. In 2008, under Cardinal Franc Rodé of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, an apostolic visitation was launched. According to Rodé, the investigation was undertaken in response to concerns, “by an important representative of the U.S. church,” regarding “some irregularities or omissions in American religious life.” He also commented, “Most of all, you could say, it involves a certain secular mentality that has spread in these religious families and, perhaps, also a certain ‘feminist’ spirit.” See http://globalsistersreport.org/news/us-sisters-apostolic-visitation-report-be-released-dec-16-16201.

The visitation sparked widespread consternation among Catholics who considered the move aggressive. On December 16, 2014, the Vatican will be releasing the results of this controversial investigation of U.S. women religious at a Vatican press conference.

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious said in a release to their membership that they had been informed in a letter dated December 2, 2014, that Archbishop Jose Rodriguez Carballo, OFM, secretary of the Congregation for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL), “invited superior general in Rome who were involved in the apostolic visitation, to attend a press conference at the Holy See Press Office on Tuesday, December 16, 2014 at 11:30 a.m.” The message also said, “In addition to the officials of the dicastery, Mother Clare Millea, ASCJ, the apostolic visitor; Sharon Holland, IHM, LCWR president; and Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, coordinator of the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, will take part in the press conference.” The press conference is to be live streamed.

As this edition of FOCUS goes to print, the NunJustice Coalition is meeting to determine the best way to support American nuns during this time. FutureChurch and the NunJustice Coalition continue to remain vigilant, ready to take action to support of LCWR and U.S. women religious.

Catholics Succeed in Keeping Churches Open

Indianapolis parishioners succeeded in persuading the new Archbishop, Joseph Tobin, to cancel his predecessor’s plan to create a mega-church from their four rural parishes. Instead, all four churches will remain open with vital local leadership intact. In Detroit, parishioners were unable to stop a parish merger but succeeded in convincing the Vatican to change the designated worship site, thereby preserving their church for continued organized outreach to the poor and homeless. Originally the Archdiocese had wanted the church closed, but now its mission to the poor is protected by Vatican decree.

On November 2, the Archdiocese of New York announced a wide-ranging plan to merge 112 of its 368 parishes to form 55 new parishes. In 31 of those new parishes, one of the churches will no longer be used except for occasional services, effectively closing it by next August. Sr. Kate and Sr. Chris are assisting parishioners from five New York parishes who informed Cardinal Dolan in writing of their intent to appeal his decision. Other New York parishes are still considering their options. Formal canonical decrees are expected soon, after which people have ten days to write the Cardinal to start the appeals process.

Sr. Kate’s landmark success three years ago effectively changed Vatican policy to make it more difficult for bishops to close and sell churches. Ever since, most bishops like New York’s Cardinal Timothy Dolan, are merging parishes into one entity with two worship sites, rather than close a church outright.

Often the diocese will merge a vital, well maintained parish that has money in the bank, with a struggling, poorly maintained parish that owes back due assessments. The newly merged entity then becomes responsible for all joint debts, and the diocese recovers its back due payments from the former assets of the well-off parish. Worse, the poorly maintained church too often becomes the designated worship site, probably because the well-maintained church will sell easily once people become too discouraged to continue supporting both properties.

FutureChurch has documented this pattern in a number of dioceses, including Detroit and New York City. Studies by the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development have found that 40 percent of merged parishes lose parishioners.

Among the scores of people who downloaded appeal resources from the Save Our Parish Community section of the FutureChurch website are Catholics from seven countries outside the U.S. including South Africa, Scotland, Philippines, Australia, Canada, The Netherlands and Ireland. The dynamic duo also recently presented a caucus on parish closings at Call To Action’s annual conference November 7-9.
October’s Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, convened by Pope Francis in preparation for next October’s Ordinary Synod on the Family stoked the interest and passions of a surprising number of Americans, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Reactions to the synod’s documents (both the midterm report and the final synod document) were mixed, with some expressing great hope at the possibility of change in tone or even content of some of the magisterium’s most controversial teachings on sexuality and marriage, and others expressing dismay at those very possibilities. Some critics focused on the likelihood of confusion among the faithful amid all the proposed change. The sight of bishops disagreeing publicly was enough to rattle the faith of some in the institution of the church and its grasp on ultimate truth, rendering it, as Cardinal Burke claimed, “rudderless.”

In truth, the process of the synod was a welcome change from previous synods, where proceedings were tightly controlled to give the appearance of complete agreement and unity among the bishops. Pope John Paul II was seen to read his breviary during previous synods, a commentary on their staged nature and pre-ordained conclusions. Pope Francis’s only instruction to the bishops gathered in Rome was to speak from the heart and not to censor themselves. Many prelates did just that, and from that template emerged serious disagreements about how best to approach the very real problems faced by contemporary families, including those who are divorced and remarried, gays and lesbians, and the poor. With daily press briefings broadcast in print and social media, anyone following the synod’s discussions could see that, like any meeting where there are a variety of approaches and opinions it looked like a bit of a mess. Some bishops advanced suggestions with which others strongly disagreed; some expressed contrary interpretations of doctrine; some objected to how their views were represented in the summary briefings; others complained their views weren’t sufficiently represented. As Archbishop Thomas Tobin of Rhode Island noted in a post on his diocesan website, “Pope Francis is fond of ‘making a mess.’ Mission accomplished.” (Tobin, “Random Thoughts About the Synod on the Family,” Diocese of Providence website)

The question is whether this messiness threatens the unity of the people of God or, as I believe, enhances it. The messy interactions and disagreements about pastoral issues and points of doctrine have a long history in the church—bishops at the Council of Nicaea came to blows! Rather than revealing disunity and disjuncture in the church, the public (or semi-public) airing of these different takes on doctrine reveals a reality that has always existed: that the unity of the church does not, cannot, depend on uniformity of views. Instead, the universal church, incarnate now and always since Pentecost in so many different languages and cultures, necessarily includes disagreement, and to ignore (or worse, suppress) these disagreements results in a false uniformity and a cultural colonialism, not the unity promised in the Holy Spirit.

The synod was not perfect. Many crucial topics were seemingly unmentioned, like the primacy of conscience. The presence and participation of women was negligible, which is unacceptable. And much work remains, as we prepare for the next phase of the Synod next October with the Lineamenta, the outline for the next meeting, released just this week. But for a people who celebrate the birth of a savior in the form of a baby born unassisted in a stable, and who await the fullness of the salvation that began there, messiness and grace remain intimately linked.

Written by Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Ph.D., Director of Catholic Studies at Manhattan College and FutureChurch Board member.

Guest column by Frances M. DeChant

Is Pope Francis leading the Catholic Church in new directions? Many pray he is. Within the recent first sessions of the Synod on the Family in Rome were suggestions of relief for divorced, remarried Catholics. Among them are educated, one time active Catholics. Barred from communion by the official position of the Catholic Church, they often yearn to participate again in the sacraments.

Pope Francis brings unique experiences to the papacy. He lived through Argentina’s “dirty” war and devastating economic collapse. He shows himself to be a man who senses peoples’ struggles. Our country now escalates war involvement. The middle class largely lacks adequate finances to properly support families and educate their children. Surely Catholics now barred from communion could find strength and solace in once more being admitted to the sacrament of Eucharist in the church they have loved.

If Pope Francis ultimately succeeds in finding a way through church discipline to bring home some of his missing flock, he will surely have walked in the footsteps of the Shepherd.

(A portion of this letter was published in the Cleveland Plain Dealer on November 12, 2014. Frances is a long time volunteer for FutureChurch.)

Order Your Packet Today!

Women and the Word

NEW! Restoring the Women of Advent

Want to learn more about women prophets from the school of Isaiah? Have you ever wondered if a woman was part of the Magi? Want to understand the history of our traditions surrounding the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception? Have you heard the story of Joseph, the Just Man? This new resource contains more than 20 prayer and educational resources sure to help make your Advent and Christmas season unforgettable. Purchase one today by writing info@futurechurch.org, calling us at 216.228.0869 x 5, or go online to our Magdala Market at futurechurch.org

See the article on page 6 for more information
As 2014 draws to a close, the excitement of the year's beginning requires examination of its promise. Pope Francis has brought Catholics joy and hope this year. He has offered important suggestions for dialogue and reform. The year began with such promise—the reporting of conversations about new models of leadership, the wisdom of the world of women, the opening of a conversation with laity, and the responsibility of bishops to be delegates for their conferences. We were ecstatic about the possibility of conversation and are committed to carrying out Francis' call for dialogue. As an organization we launched projects and set our priorities and our eyes on the promise of meaningful dialogue where once an impermeable wall stood blocking our view and voices.

Now it is December, and after an enormous nationwide Synod survey, postcards to Vatican Offices, a pilgrimage to Rome, the Easter Gospel Restoration Project, petitions to Pope Francis about justice for LCWR, the launch of the 2014 Open Letter, the AUSCP assembly, the celebration of the feast day of St. Mary of Magdala, the Extraordinary Synod on the Family, the Catholic Tipping Point Tour with Fr. Tony Flannery, the national Call to Action conference, and USCCB Fall Assembly, I wonder, “Where are we? What has become of the rights and responsibilities of all Catholics in the life and leadership of our church?”

Articles in this newsletter will focus on each action and project listed above, but I share here my thoughts on the current state of things. So much hope, and a good amount of fanfare later, I am in a familiar place. I watch as one of the key US advisors to Pope Francis appears on CBS talking carefully about the issues of the church but then stating—when asked about women’s leadership—that we must adhere to the structures “God has given to us.” I see bishops installed without consultation with the people of the diocese and parishes closed against the will of members; I cannot help but suspect that in the institution it is business as usual.

Change takes centuries but I also know that excitement wanes if not reinforced by some progress. Small wins are progress in the work of reform. So, is it really business as usual? Not for the church, the people that are the body of Christ. Undetectable tides under the surface are now discernible. And those tides have shifted. I must admit that I am not as excited as I was a year ago, but I am also not despondent. As I look at 2014’s small wins I see the renewed interest in the happenings of the Catholic Church as evidenced by the media coverage of US advisors to Pope Francis appears on CBS talking carefully about the issues of the church but then stating—when asked about women’s leadership—that we must adhere to the structures “God has given to us.” I see bishops installed without consultation with the people of the diocese and parishes closed against the will of members; I cannot help but suspect that in the institution it is business as usual.

We are pleased to announce that the Women and the Word: Project to Restore the Women of Advent education and prayer packet was completed in 2014. For several years FutureChurch supporters have asked us “Do you have anything for Advent?” So, we decided to go to work for you. Modeling our efforts on the Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost packet, we have focused our new project on the Advent season. Materials include essays about the Advent characters: Joseph, Mary of Nazareth, and the Magi and provide new insight into their roles at Christmas time. Joseph is the Just Man and Model of the New Fatherhood, Mary takes her place as part of the Prophetic Women and Men of Advent, and we ask “Was a Wise Woman among the Magi who Followed Bethlehem’s Star?”

The season of Advent is a time of reflection. As you gather to light the Advent candles you can note the Feast day of the Martyrs of El Salvador, December 2; celebrate a prayer service with the Prophetic Men and Women of Advent; consider the truth of the immaculate conception and assumption of Mary; or experience the revelation in the Epiphany, December 6. These are just a few examples of how you might use these materials; our Concrete Ways to Put Women Back in the Biblical Picture during Advent and the Christmas Season provides an outline for the entire season.

We are excited to offer this resource packet to you for Advent celebrations. The Women and the Word project seeks to raise awareness about the invisibility of biblical women in our lectionary, worship and Catholic formation and about the exclusion of women in Church. If you would like more information on this new packet or on the Women and the Word project please contact us today!
FutureChurch traveled to Memphis November 7-9 for the National Call to Action Conference “The Well of Many Rivers: Creating the Current of Change.”

During the conference, Liz England offered sessions Cry Out with A Million Voices, focused on the A Million Voices project, and Margin of Age an examination of being church from the view of a millennial. Deb Rose-Milavec facilitated a caucus discussion on the Synod on the Family. She joined Sr. Christine Schenck, Fr. Gerry Bechard, and Fr. Tony Flannery for a panel discussion on Building the Coalition of People and Priests: Trends in Shaping the Future Church. This presentation engaged the overflowing crowd in a discussion of how people and priests can come together around issues of reform. Creating a support network for those who stand up to unjust structures is critical as we move forward into the new possibilities of church. Sr. Chris Schenk and Sr. Kate Kuenstler offered a caucus on Save Our Parish Communities offering advice, ideas and resources to those who are facing parish closures and mergers.

Reverend James Lawson gave a keynote presentation “The Nonviolent Struggle for Justice.” Memphis, a historically significant city for the civil rights struggle and nonviolent resistance, was the place where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. This history provided a powerful context for Lawson’s statement about nonviolent action as “love in action.” FutureChurch’s work A Million Voices centers on this same concept of gospel nonviolence as we move forward in our struggle for justice within the institutional church.

Prior to the conference Liz attended a meeting of Call to Action Local Chapter Leaders and expressed gratitude for the support we receive from many of our projects including annual Mary of Magdala celebrations. When FutureChurch pursues actions we frequently rely on local organizers, including chapter leaders within CTA, to gather the people in their area to participate. It was exhilarating to be with them, to hear about the many other interests of their local groups have and to receive feedback on the state of the church.

FutureChurch also hosted a prayer and coffee session on Sunday morning with our members and supporters present at the conference. We prayed for the full inclusion of all Catholics, lay and cleric, at every level of leadership in our church and for a day when all will be welcomed to the table. It was good to pause and reflect on the work we have accomplished this year and to have the opportunity to thank some of those who helped make all these good things happen.

On the final morning of the conference, Call to Action presented its 2014 Leadership Award to Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ who then gave a keynote address on Loving God’s Beloved Creation.

The Call to Action conference brought together old and new friends and provided opportunities to gain insight into the larger conversations on church reform. Connecting face to face with other Catholic activists gave rise to new energies and support for FutureChurch programs and projects.

To read more about the conference, visit Cta-usa.org or check out the stories and photos at ncronline/authors/mick-forgey
How the Synod’s Mid-term Document Compares to the Final Document

Many Catholics followed the events of the Synod with a mixture of hope and disappointment. The mid-term report (Relatio post disceptationem) was an unexpected surprise for many reform-minded Catholics because of its welcoming tone. But, the final report (Relatio Synodi) left many of the same Catholics with a feeling of deep disappointment because it stripped away much of that welcoming, affirming tone.

There is no question that the final report was a compromise document. Cardinal Reinhard Marx described it even-handedly as “three steps forward and two steps back, but still a procession (cnblog.wordpress.org),” interpreted to mean “going forward.”

The “two steps back” describe the key areas in the document where pastoral welcoming language was modified, or scratched in favor of doctrinaire parlance.

Yet in a side-by-side comparison of the mid-term and final document (synodwatch.wordpress.org), it is noteworthy that much of the mid-term language was retained. In a few places, the final document is an improvement over the mid-term in respect to fleshing out some of the justice issues for women and children.

Still, without a doubt, there are key places where the final document intentionally stripped away welcoming and affirming language and covered it over with reassertions of the Church’s teachings and teaching authority.

A quick summary of some of the differences is listed below:

1. Overall, the final document retained much of the mid-term's text and conciliatory tone. It starts by preserving Pope Francis' beautiful conciliatory prayer spoken at the prayer vigil on the eve of the synod. It retains the language of accompaniment, “which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (#46).” It describes “the necessity for courageous pastoral choices ” (#45). And it retains the language about the Church being “welcoming” (#61) although some of the corresponding language in the section on homosexuality is omitted.

2. Paragraphs #21 and #22 are additions in the final version that reinforce the indissolubility of marriage, YET, on the topic of civil marriage the final retains much of the tone and language from the mid-term version about the positive aspect of civilly celebrated marriages (#41). In #5 the final continues to hold up the ideal, but also retains the language of care for those who participate in church life in “an incomplete manner, recognizing God's grace... to care for one another in love.” Paragraph #42 in the final version attempts to give the benefit of the doubt to those who do not live in Church sanctioned marriages.

3. In the final document, many of the mid-term passages are retained but encircled by more paternalistic texts meant to assert the authority of the magisterium as the teaching authority of Church. This often has the effect of toning down the more conciliatory language of the mid-term by reinforcing traditional Church teaching. The insertion of more Christological language is also used as a buffer against any perceived secularism in the mid-term tone and to support Church authority.

4. Paragraphs #13 and #24 of the final document try to spell out what the “law of gradualness” means. The additions have the effect of neutralizing the full impact of the pastoral concept.

5. Paragraphs #17 through #20 of the final document show an intentional shifting of foundational documents supporting Relatio from Vatican II documents to include more of John Paul II's teaching along with Benedict's.

6. The document puts the sexual aberrations of biblical women out front as the sole examples of how the Church should respond to those who have not lived up to the Church's teachings. A kind of misogyny on the doorstep, it touts the Church's paternalistic understanding of itself as the exemplar of truth using biblical stories of women caught in adultery. The moral is that an easy mercy is not enough. The Church must go “beyond compassion” and “tell the truth” as the ultimate mercy. The final document supports this with the story of Jesus telling the women caught in adultery to “sin no more.” There are no comparable biblical stories of wayward men in the document.

7. The final document actually improves the mid-term by drawing specific attention to:
   A. Violence against women
   B. The ill effects of pornography
   C. The ill effects of commercialization of body
   D. The epidemic of exploitation of women/children
   E. The importance of the father's role and the problem of absent fathers (qualified as those who are not forced into migration or other such circumstance)

In addition, the final document removed a blatant western bias by deleting specific references to Africa.

Finally, there has been much speculation about why three paragraphs did not pass.

Paragraphs #52 and #53 of the final version focus on sacraments for divorced and remarried Catholics. Obviously there were plenty of bishops who were not inclined to substitute “spiritual communion” for Eucharistic communion and did not pass these paragraphs because of the felt need for more study that would include the work undertaken by a special committee appointed by Pope Francis.

Paragraph #55 was really a slash and burn of the mid-term language. It omits welcoming language and reasserts current Church teaching substituting language from the Catechism and

Continued on page 9
Mid-term Document continued

a CDF text. It is interesting that Cardinal Vincent Nichols (Westminster) said the reason this paragraph did not pass is that it didn’t go “far enough (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/21/britain-vincent-nichols-synod-_n_6022364.html).”

Along the same lines, Archbishop Paul-André Durocher (Canada) remarked, “Why did some Bishops choose not to approve a text which only repeated the Church’s received teaching? I have the impression many would have preferred a more open, positive language. Not finding it in this paragraph, they might have chosen to indicate their disapproval of it. See http://singandwalk.blogspot.com/2014/10/synod-day-11.html?spref=tw.

Catholics share their skepticism and their hope as they follow the Synod on the Family

Over the past year, many Catholics have rightly questioned the effectiveness of gathering a group of celibate men, our bishops, to discuss, create and ultimately reach consensus on new pastoral practices related to the family. Jamie Manson, reporter for the National Catholic Reporter, points out the obvious: “These men are spending the next two years contemplating teachings that deeply affect women (marriage, family, contraception, domestic violence). Yet women have never had a role in creating these doctrines, they continue to have no voice in developing these doctrines, and, in the end, they will not have a vote in deciding whether these doctrines have a future.” (http://ncronline.org/blogs/grace-margins/synod-family-proves-father-still-knows-best)

“How many of the men who will gather… have ever changed a baby’s nappy?” asked former Irish President Mary McAleese, cited in the Irish Times. Her brilliantly simple, but pointed question exposes the real limitations of the synodal process as it currently functions. Lay people and Catholics with families are few in number and serve solely in advisory roles. The model of decision-making in our Church desperately cries out for radical reform.

Yet, this synod has also been rightly heralded as a breakthrough moment in the Catholic Church. In a Church that for too long over-valued and rewarded conformity with Rome, Pope Francis has changed course and shepherded in a new era of dialogue and collegiality among the bishops. He has emphasized his role as the “bishop of Rome” and through this synod process has helped the church develop a new appreciation for each bishop’s responsibility and role as pastors in their own right. Respected leaders like Cardinal Reinhard Marx and Fr. Charles Curran believe this is a step in the right direction. Both agree that this is the first time since the Second Vatican Council that such an open debate has been encouraged. And Marx’s enthusiasm for the direction Pope Francis is going is contagious. In the German newspaper Die Zeit he was effusive saying, “The synod debates were just a starting point. Francis wants to get things moving, to push processes forward. The real work is about to begin.”

Teleconference Series Line-up is Sure to Inspire You

FutureChurch teleconferences continued this fall with Fr. Michael Crosby who spoke about his book, Repair My House: Becoming a Kingdom Catholic, offering us a blueprint for reform in the Catholic Church.

On December 9, 2014, Fr. Thomas Reese, senior analyst for the National Catholic Reporter, talked about the 2014 Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family; the midterm and final documents; the differences in regional outlooks and bishops’ viewpoints; and the players and synodal processes in preparation for the Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family in October 2015.

On January 13, 2015, Fr. Thomas Rosica, English speaking representative for the Holy See Press office and founding Chief Executive Office of Salt and Light Television, will share his experience at the synod, his analysis of the events and documents and his forecast about the process leading up to the October 2015 Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family.

February 17, 2015 is the date for our teleconference with Dr. Richard Gaillardetz. He will discuss Reforming the Church with Francis. Dr. Gaillardetz is the Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology at Boston College and is the President of the Catholic Theological Society of America. In his 2013 article about Pope Francis he wrote, in response to the question of whether doctrinal changes will occur, “If Francis succeeds in creating a new generation of pastor-leaders who are willing to meet the people where they are, who are willing to create what he has called a ‘culture of encounter,’ he will have created the necessary conditions for appropriate doctrinal change. That’s how it works.” (NCronline, September 25, 2013)

Join us for these great discussions. Each teleconference offers insights on the state of the church today in addition to live discussions with the presenters.

Registration for these calls is easy. Just visit futurechurch.org and fill out a short form.

Audio recordings of past teleconferences are available at futurechurch.org/podcasts.
Heartache for New York’s Catholics as Church Closings Are Announced  There were gasps and tears at Holy Rosary Church in East Harlem. At Sacred Heart in Mount Vernon, congregants shared mournful embraces. And at Our Lady of Peace on the East Side, parishioners pledged a fight.

Across the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, a day of reckoning arrived on Sunday, as Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan announced how scores of parishes would be affected by the largest reorganization in the history of the archdiocese.

Over 200 celebrations were held on or around on July 22nd, 2014 in more than 30 countries worldwide. Visit celebratemarymagdala.org for photos, homilies and reports of Mary of Magdala celebrations in 2014. If you would like to submit information about your own gathering or for assistance in organizing a celebration in 2015 contact liz@futurechurch.org.

Archdiocese of Philadelphia: reviewing 14 more parishes for possible merger, closure  October 14, 2014  

Weeks after completing its last round of parish mergers and closures, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced Sunday that 14 more parishes in Philadelphia, Montgomery, and Delaware Counties could be combined with nearby churches or shuttered.

This time, the archdiocese is targeting three clusters of churches for cutbacks: In Delaware County's Springfield Township the parishes of St. Francis of Assisi, Holy Cross, and St. Kevin; in Montgomery County, the parishes of St. Alphonsus in Maple Glen, St. Anthony of Padua and St. Joseph in Ambler, St. Catherine of Siena in Horsham, St. Genevieve in Flourtown; and Holy Martyrs in Oreland. Read more at http://articles.philly.com/2014-10-14/news/54976137_1_ parishes-port-richmond-adalbert

Catholic officials say reorganization will not change ‘identity’ of South Shore parishes  BRAINTEER - The Archdiocese of Boston will organize parishes in Braintree, Milton, Randolph, Weymouth and 14 other communities into 18 collaborative ministries as part of its ongoing restructuring, though church officials say all parishes will remain open and keep their own identities.

The archdiocese on Friday announced it will organize 37 parishes into 18 collaboratives, each sharing a pastor, team of priests, staff, finance council and pastoral council as part of the third phase of its reorganization plan. The changes are expected to take place next June.

South Shore parishes affected include: St. Thomas More in Braintree, St. Agatha in Milton, St. Bernadette and St. Mary in Randolph, and Sacred Heart, St. Albert the Great and St. Francis Xavier in Weymouth. Read more http://weymouth.wickedlocal.com/article/20140922/NEWS/140929412
During a conversation in early 2014 with Bishop Erwin Krautler, prelate of Xingue, Pope Francis suggested that regional bishops’ conferences should discuss the problem of the priest shortage and make recommendations to Rome.

Recently, Bishop Krautler was in the news again pitching an innovative solution to his diocese's priest shortage problem (http://www.religionnews.com/2014/11/24/brazilian-bishop-urges-ordination-married-community-elders-priest-shortage-grows/). Along the Xingu River, more than 800 Catholic congregations have only 27 priests. Krautler is calling for drastic measures to correct the imbalance. He and Cardinal Claudio Hummes who is considered a close friend of the Pope, presented the idea of ordaining married community elders to Brazil’s National Conference of Bishops. That proposal is now being considered.

A commission has been formed to consider the matter.

Krautler contends, “The situation of Xingu is not an exceptional…” Further he says Pope Francis has encouraged open dialogue on the issue and urged bishops at the national level to come up with “courageous” proposals to address the priest shortage.

The Brazilian bishop is not the first to propose ordaining married men. Fritz Lobinger, a retired bishop in South Africa also put forward the case for ordaining married men in underserved areas. Lobinger reasons, “Lay leaders preach, conduct services, conduct funerals, pray for the sick and in some areas they are even authorized to conduct baptisms and marriages. There can be no doubt that they would also be accepted if they were ordained to the ministerial priesthood.”

Encouraged by such discussions, FutureChurch has urged the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to undertake a fresh examination of our early church tradition of a married and celibate priesthood, a diaconate served by women and men, and a fresh examination of our early church tradition of a married and celibate priesthood, a diaconate served by women and men, and invite priests who have married back to ministry.

In June FutureChurch kicked off our 2014 Open Letter campaign to United States bishops to take up this conversation encouraging local bishops to open this important dialogue at a diocesan level particularly in the areas most affected by the priest shortage. As of November 25, 2014, 1342 people signed our online letter and more than 350 of these signers expressed a willingness to engage their local bishop in dialogue. The FutureChurch website provides a breakdown of participants in each state and then by diocese. We are committed to assisting these engaged Catholics to pursue a meeting with their local bishop. These meetings are an important step for ordinary Catholics to express their thoughts on the state of the church and their hopes for the future. Pope Francis has left it to us to start the dialogue and assist our bishops in carrying it out at their assemblies. We are committed to helping concerned people in dioceses across the United States to secure meetings with bishops in 2015. For more resources or assistance visit futurechurch.org/actions/openletter2014 or contact us today at info@futurechurch.org.

News from Fr. Schüller on Catholics Resisting Parish Mergers in Austria

In the last few weeks the Pfarrer-Initiative has been developing a support system for parishes who do not want to merge with other parishes, but wish to continue their existence as an independent parish community. The organization has begun preparing for their first meeting on January 16 and 17, 2015. Schüller notes that more and more Catholics are becoming aware that they must be responsible for the future of their parishes. To support them, the Austrian priests provide them with materials and information on how to lead a parish without priests. They also assist them in developing a mission statement for their parish communities.

During a recent teleconference meeting, Schüller said, “The future of parish communities is a very key issue, but Catholics are already doing a lot to create a future for the Church. What we need to do is to make sure what they are doing is visible.”

To read (in German) the invitation and schedule go to futurechurch.org and see the resources in under our Save Our Parish Community initiative.

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Focus on FutureChurch

A LOOK AHEAD

January 13, 2015
8:00pm ET
Teleconference with Fr. Thomas Rosica, “My Experience at the Synod.”

February 17, 2015
8:00pm ET
Teleconference with Dr. Richard Gaillardetz
“Reforming the Church with Francis.”

March 8, 2015
Voices of Faith Event
FutureChurch heads to Vatican City to be part of the 2nd annual Voices of Faith highlighting women from around the world who are leading in the Catholic Church. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala who serves on FutureChurch’s Women in Church Leadership Advisory Group will speak about the Gender Policy (released in 2010) she helped develop for the Catholic Bishops of India.

April 14 – 16, 2015
FutureChurch joins the 2nd meeting of International Priests and People with Fr. Helmut Schueller, Fr. Tony Flannery and 40 others in Ireland

June 26 – 28, 2015
FutureChurch travels to the Conference of Intentional Eucharistic Communities.

June 29 - July 2, 2015
FutureChurch goes to the annual Association of US Catholic Priests meeting in St. Louis, MO.

August 11 - 13, 2015
FutureChurch travels to the annual Leadership Conference of Women Religious meeting

August - October 2015
FutureChurch hosts National Speaker Series in celebrating our 25th anniversary

September 22 – 27, 2015
FutureChurch attends the World Meeting of Families

October 4 – 25, 2015
FutureChurch goes to Rome to report on the Ordinary Synod on the Family

October 8 – 17, 2015
FutureChurch leads its fifth pilgrimage. This time we head to Greece to follow in the footsteps of early Christian women leaders there with Dr. Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ.

November 6 - 8, 2015
FutureChurch goes to Call to Action conference in Milwaukee, WI.

2015 Greece Pilgrimage

Join FutureChurch as we make our 2015 pilgrimage to the archeological sites of early Christian women leaders—in Greece!

October 8-17, 2015
$1800 (land only)

Join Executive Director Deborah Rose-Milavec and world-renowned scholar Dr. Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ as we follow in the footsteps of our foremothers in Greece.

Lydia, Euodia and Syntyche are women named by St. Paul as partners in ministry in Philippi. Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia are named as leaders in the church and in the city. Our Greek guide, Aliki, will delight you with her vast knowledge and stories. Our biblical scholar, Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ, will contribute rarely heard accounts of great women in the early Church.

Get a brochure and learn more at futurechurch.org. Reserve your seat by writing Deb Rose-Milavec at debrose@futurechurch.org or call 216.228.0869 x 4.

Don’t miss this great opportunity!