Beyond the literary evidence that was predominately shaped by men, Christine Schenk, CSJ gives us a new understanding of women's authority in Early Christianity by setting her eyes (and ours) on the funerary portraits of women. Sarcophagus portraits of Christian women outnumber portraits of Christian men by three to one with females being shown with scrolls, speech gestures, and in-facing apostle figures, enhancing their ecclesial authority. Schenk shows how the funerary evidence suggests that women exercised authority to a greater degree than previously recognized (p. xix). Donate $125 or more and receive a copy of Sr. Chris Schenk's groundbreaking book, Crispina and Her Sisters!

**FutureChurch Teleconference Series continues!**

**Emerging Models of Parish and Community Life**

Chris Lowney  
**Everybody Leads**  
Feb 8, 2018, 8pm ET  
[SIGN UP](#)

Fr. Joseph Healey, MM  
**Pastoral Responses to the Worldwide Eucharistic Famine**  
March 21, 2018, 8pm ET  
[SIGN UP](#)

Listen to Jamie Manson's teleconference on the future of religious life

Start a conversation about women deacons with
From the Executive Director's Desk

Women, and especially Catholic women, have been in the news this past couple of weeks.

On the winds of the #MeToo movement, hundreds of thousands of women from across the country and around the world marched this weekend to stand for justice and to support for women’s rights, peace, care for the most vulnerable, and care for the earth. The marches were a repeat of the marches last year in Washington D.C., around the country, and around the world.

I was in New York City for the women's march on Saturday and the energy and enthusiasm for change was heartening and hopeful.

On Sunday, FutureChurch, in partnership with The Women Who Stayed of the Church of St. Francis Xavier, Women’s Ordination Conference, and Call To Action sponsored Feminism and Faith in Union, a celebration of activism and sacrament. Women from various faith traditions offered a blessing for the effort. The blessings were followed by a march and a Mass at the Church of St. Francis Xavier. The event was inspiring and the Mass was both healing and uplifting with the gifts of feminism and faith deeply integrated throughout the entire liturgy. During the homily, the priest offered five minutes of silence as a sign of solidarity with women whose voices had
been silenced for too long in the Catholic Church. The symbolism was powerful and for me personally, it was the most meaningful and healing Eucharist I had ever been a part of.

On other fronts, a survey focusing on Catholic women was released by CARA and America Media. Funded by the Raskob Foundation, the survey maps the political viewpoints of Catholic women and sheds light on their views of the Church.

For instance, once women understand the duties of a deacon, a majority support women deacons.

Some of the findings call for further inquiry. For instance, the survey reports that only 1 in 10 Catholic women say they have experienced sexism in the church. Further, on page 30, 73% of Catholic women report that all their children are Catholic. Findings such as these may indicate flaws in the methodology since, in many places, it does not seem representative of Catholic women's experience. Finally, a few findings border the bizarre. For instance 3 respondents claim to have 37 siblings (p.82).

While the survey is certainly important and welcome, it would be hard to claim it is comprehensive since pertinent questions about women's authority were left off the table. Given the scope and the stated goal, why not ask how many women support women's ordination to the priesthood, women's appointment as cardinals, or the appointment of women in key positions of governance without ties to
ordination?

This kind of qualitative data would be so useful to a Church were women are still leaving in too great of numbers. Certainly more questions need to be asked.

Deborah Rose-Milavec
Executive Director

**National Catholic Reporter and William Grimm, SJ on Francis' commitment to abuse survivors**

In what will be remembered as one of the most disheartening moments under Pope Francis, the editors of National Catholic Reporter rightly call out Pope Francis in the wake of "calumny" when victims of clergy sex abuse press for justice in Chile. Read more

**Fr. William Grimm, SJ, suggests** that as an archbishop, Bergoglio was guilty of the same coverup. But he goes on to suggest that we should let loose of our idolizing the pope. He suggests, that like our mothers, "the pope needs deodorant."

But we at FutureChurch don't think that is the problem. Catholics are perfectly capable of weighing the works and deeds of the Pope for good or bad. We don't need apologists. Even someone like Francis who does a lot of good can and does cause grave pain and harm, not just to the direct recipients of his remarks, but to those who may be less inclined to tell their stories because of his influence.

**Who wants to be called a slanderer by the Pope?**

Those of us who are offended at
his treatment of victims/survivors can and should call him to accountability.

**Most American women want women deacons**

Carol Kuruvilla of the Huffington Post reports that a 60 percent majority of American Catholic women support the possibility of women being ordained as permanent deacons, according to a wide-ranging survey commissioned by America Media and conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, in partnership with survey firm GfK.

Twenty-one percent of respondents said they may be supportive but wanted to learn more before making a final decision. Only 7 percent definitely said they would not support women being ordained as deacons.

Catholic women who attended Mass weekly were less likely than more infrequent Mass attenders to respond “yes” to the idea of women deacons. But even among weekly attendees, a slight majority (53 percent) agreed the church should allow women to be ordained as deacons.

**Catholic women in crisis?**

America Magazine editors suggest that where you stand depends on where you sit. If you are one of the 24 percent of Catholic women who sit in the pews at least once a week, some of the results of America Media’s comprehensive survey of women in the church, featured in this issue, could be...
disheartening or even dismaying.

Over 50 percent of Catholic women attend Mass a few times a year or less; 70 percent go to confession less than once a year or never; very few take on parish ministry roles like lector or eucharistic minister.

But there are also more hopeful findings.

All the women who responded to this survey still identify themselves as Catholic, however far they may have strayed from a consistent practice of the faith they were raised in. Despite their low level of traditional engagement in the life of the church, 82 percent said they never considered leaving Catholicism; the vast majority have no or little doubt about the existence of God; 68 percent “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” that they are proud to be Catholic.

Read more

Creating new coalitions to preserving village churches in France

Bénévent Tosseri reports on the creative effort to keep village churches open in France.

When asking "What is a church?", Tosseri suggests that the answer to this question depends on whom you ask. For a municipal councilor from Lamure-sur-Azergues, a church is first and foremost a “PAB.” That is, he goes on to explain, “a public-access building,” that must comply with particular standards.

For the mayor of Vaux-en-Beaujolais, a rural community

When asking "What is a church?", Tosseri suggests that the answer to this question depends on whom you ask. For a municipal councilor from Lamure-sur-Azergues, a church is first and foremost a “PAB.” That is, he goes on to explain, “a public-access building,” that must comply with particular standards.

For the mayor of Vaux-en-Beaujolais, a rural community
1,100 inhabitants, a church is a budget item.

“I prefer to not tell my constituents how much the church is costing them,” explains Jean-Charles Perrin. “We celebrate three Masses a year and a few funerals and baptisms. We have to be pragmatic.”

“Relations between the owners of the churches and municipal officials are excellent,” points out Auxiliary Bishop Emmanuel Marie Anne Alain Gobilliard of Lyon.

Read more

**We Are Church Ireland urges Pope Francis to meet with Marie Collins**

Sarah McDonald reports that We Are Church Ireland, a lobby group has called for a meeting between Pope Francis and clerical abuse survivor, Marie Collins when the Pope visits Ireland next August.

We Are Church Ireland (WACI), a lobby group seeking to liberalise some of Catholicism’s structures and sexual teachings, said a personal meeting with Collins would show the Pope’s appreciation of her “valuable work” on the Vatican’s Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

Marie Collins resigned from the Commission on March 1 2017, after three years, in protest over a lack of funding and resources, inadequate support staff, and the Curia’s “cultural resistance” towards progress on issues such as bishops’ accountability for mishandling abuse allegations.

Read more
U.S. Priest group says "let laity lead parishes"

Priests are graying, fewer in number, with little relief in sight. That reality was the impetus for a resolution endorsed by the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, calling upon Catholic bishops in the United States to enlist the aid of lay pastoral workers to administer parishes.

Passed by the association at its convention in Atlanta last June, the resolution calls upon the church to allow "well prepared pastoral ministers who, working collaboratively with canonical pastors, can know, guide and accompany the faithful on their journey of faith via parish communities."

The resolution urged that bishops employ lay workers, deacons and religious who are currently in pastoral ministry to lead parishes under the direction of ordained pastors, a framework allowed in canon law.

These lay leaders and deacons should have "the flexibility to make ordinary decisions and actually lead the parish according to its gifts and needs."

The document envisions clusters of parishes, led by laypeople and deacons, who would make day-to-day decisions about their churches while reporting to an ordained pastor.

Read more

On January 21, Feminism and Faith in Union celebrated the power of activism and sacrament

Inspired by the global women’s
marches one year ago, and eager to share an infusion of feminist energy and truth with the Roman Catholic Church and religious institutions around the world, The Women Who Stayed, FutureChurch, Women’s Ordination Conference, and Call To Action launched Feminism & Faith in Union on January 21, 2018.

Feminism & Faith in Union was described as an invitation to Catholic women and men and interfaith allies in the United States and around the globe to rally and gather in prayer and song to bring feminism to faith and faith to feminism.

On Sunday, hundreds of Catholics in New York and Washington D.C. rallied with speakers and prayers and then celebrated the union of faith and feminism at Mass.

At the Church of St. Francis Xavier in New York City, parishioners greeted those marching and carrying signs with lively African spiritual music, clapping, and singing. The church was filled with joy, pure and simple.

The signs that were carried by the marchers were set around the altar. One sign said, "Feminism is for men too" and another read "I'm with her."

During the liturgy, Fr. Dan referred to the suffering that women faced in a church that did not fully appreciate their gifts. And at the time of the homily, Sylvia from the Women Who Stayed explained that Fr. Dan would offer five minutes of silence as a symbol of solidarity with women whose voices had been silenced for too long in the
In Washington D.C., Alice McDermott offered words of challenge and hope. You can find her offering below. The marchers were also welcomed into Mass. Find pictures and blessings at Feminism-Faith.org or on the Feminism and Faith Facebook page.

Feminism and Faith in Union promises to be more than a single event. More to come!

Imagine there's no clergy

William Shea believes the Roman Catholic Church is in a bad way. He asks, "What is to be done?" and suggests that if we did it, we’d possibly be in an even greater mess, thus proving Francis right.

Yet, Shea argues that the hierarchy of the church has so egregiously harmed its life and reputation that they have in fact abandoned their inherited apostolic status and suggests that if clericalism is the root of the problem, why not cut to the root? Why not a strategic plan to radically de-clericalize the church?

David Cloutier takes another view. He argues that a key goal that emerged during the course of the council was needed development of the identity of the church in the modern world, rather than merely against it.

Cloutier takes issue with Shea arguing that while Shea's desire to desacramentalize the church is supposed to solve many problems, his proposals just bypass them and create others. Read more
What Catholic women believe about Mass, the sacrament of reconciliation, and the existence of God

Leah Libresco reports that the women surveyed for the CARA/America Media study do not, for the most part, keep the Sunday obligation to attend Mass. A little over a quarter of the self-identified Catholics (26 percent) rarely or never attend Mass. Another quarter (27 percent) attend only a few times a year. Twenty percent attend every week (an additional four percent attend more than once a week).

Participation in the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) is also infrequent. A quarter of respondents (27 percent) went to confession at least once a year. A higher share (38 percent) reported that they had “never” been to confession. This is higher than might be expected...

Cardinal Beniamino Stella, prefect of the Congregation for Clergy suggests the church could open to "viri probati"

Pope Francis has already publicly entertained the idea of ordaining "viri probati" in the face of the priest shortage. Now, Cardinal Beniamino Stella is also suggesting such an opening -- one could be discussed at a regional Synod of Bishops in the Pan-Amazon.

Stella speaks of "sacramental emergence", the possible choice in favor of the ordination of the viri probati would be motivated by the supreme law for the Church, that law that should
undergird every reform: the good of souls. That is the good of those people and communities who for various reasons can not be reached by the priests except a few times a year.

Read more
Cindy Wooden report

**Indispensable Catholic women**

In her latest article for America Magazine, Kerry Weber writes about Catholic women who model the Gospel but shy away from titles. She refers to them as humble since they don’t see themselves as models but as people who work behind the scenes.

Read more

**Alice McDermott speaks at the Washington D.C. Feminism and Faith in Union rally and Mass on January 21st**

As part of the Feminism and Faith in Union march and Mass on January 21 in Washington D.C. Alice McDermott offered words that challenged Catholic hierarchs and inspired Catholic women.

------------------------

Nearly forty years ago, Sister Theresa Kane of the Sisters of Mercy caused a bit of a stir in the Catholic rank and file when she addressed Pope John Paul II on his first trip to the United States, imploring him to "be open to, and respond to, the voices coming from the women of this country.

Sister Kane went on to say, 'The Roman Catholic Church must recognize and acknowledge the serious social injustices by which its very system is imposed upon women
of the Roman Catholic Church. Until the institutional Church undertakes a serious, critical examination of its mode of acting toward women, it cannot, it will not, give witness to justice in the world.'

We know now that even as Sister Theresa Kane was making this plea, a grave injustice was being perpetrated by the male hierarchy of the Catholic Church, an injustice that would shake the foundations of our institutions and our faith – the clergy abuse scandal.

No Christian needs to be convinced of the moral error of discrimination. We hold at the center of our faith the conviction that every human life is of equal value. And yet, the institutional Church continues to elevate the male over the female, to bar more than half its members from full participation in the sacraments by barring women, for reasons of gender alone, from Holy Orders. The moral consequence of this antiquated rule becomes abundantly clear when we follow the inevitable logic of discrimination: if one life, one person, is of more worth than another, then “the other,” the lesser, is dispensable. The lives of women, and the lives of children, become secondary to the concerns of the more valued - in this case, the male hierarchy. You might call it Cardinal Law logic.

For the past few years, I’ve been researching the histories of religious orders of Catholic women in the United States and in the world. The accomplishments of these women – in founding hospitals, schools and universities, in
serving the poor, the destitute, the forgotten – is absolutely astonishing. It is another injustice that the Church and the broader culture have so thoroughly failed to acknowledge the work these women have done.

And more impressive still is what these women were able to accomplish despite the strictures of a male-centered Church.

One example speaks volumes: In 1925, an Austrian-born physician, Anna Dengel, founded with another doctor and two nuns The Medical Mission Sisters. Dr. Dengel had discovered through her missionary work that Muslim women were not permitted to be examined by male doctors, and so she understood the importance of the ministry of women physicians. And yet, at the time, the Vatican prohibited women religious from practicing obstetrics or surgery.

Less than a century ago, the Vatican prohibited women religious from practicing obstetrics.

In 1936, Dr. Dengel, with the enlightened help of Philadelphia’s Cardinal Dougherty, convinced the Vatican to lift this silly, cruel, unreasonable, antiquated, male-centered rule. As a result, religious women in Catholic hospitals and nursing schools were able to make full use of their education and their God-given skills to alleviate suffering.

So – what do you know? - The Church can change. The Church can act to rescind outdated prohibitions. For its own good. For the good of us all.

In Matthew 15, a gentile
woman persistently calls to Jesus. The apostles rebuke her, tell her to go away, to stop making so much noise. Jesus tells the woman he has been sent only for the people of Israel. Nevertheless, she persists. And Jesus relents, changes the rules, lifts the silly, narrow, discriminatory prohibition on his mercy. "You are a woman of great faith," he tells her. "What you want will be done for you."
We are women of great faith. We persist. We have hope. The God of Mercy compels us to seek justice.
Read more

**Pope Francis vigorously defends prelate accused of cover up demoralizing victims of clergy sex abuse**

Joshua McElwee reports that aboard the papal flight from Peru, Pope Francis, again, firmly defended his appointment of a Chilean bishop accused of covering up clergy sexual abuse, renewing a claim that accounts against the prelate are "calumny," a claim that survivor advocates say has brought the Catholic Church back to the bleakest point of the abuse crisis.

While the pontiff did apologize for causing survivors pain with an earlier defense of Bishop Juan Barros Madrid, he also repeatedly insisted during a 50-minute press conference aboard the papal flight to Rome overnight Jan. 21 that there was no evidence against the prelate, despite survivors' accounts to the contrary.

Asked by three separate journalists why he appeared ready to believe Barros but not
the abuse survivors, the pope repeated iterations of the phrase "there is no evidence." And although Francis said he would accept any new evidence brought forward with an "open heart," he also stated: "I am convinced he is innocent."

Read more
NPR report

New study signals uptick in women’s commitment to the Catholic Church

Michelle Dillon's recent research indicates that the previous decline in women's commitment to the Catholic Church may be reversing a bit.

She writes that in the case of women's commitment, the overall story is one of stability, and even slightly increased commitment, rather than further decline. Catholic women's weekly Mass attendance has stabilized. In 2011, continuing a pattern of sharp decline from the late 1980s, 31 percent of women went to Mass weekly, and a similar proportion reported weekly Mass in 2017 (see Figure 1). Today, women are just slightly more likely than men to go to Mass at least weekly.

Read more

Cardinal O'Malley calls Pope Francis to accountability

The Boston Globe reports that Cardinal Sean O'Malley issued a strongly worded statement Saturday reproaching Pope Francis for the pontiff's accusations in Chile last week that victims of a pedophile priest in that country were slandering a bishop they say covered up the case.
“Words that convey the message ‘if you cannot prove your claims then you will not be believed’ abandon those who have suffered reprehensible criminal violations of their human dignity and relegate survivors to discredited exile,” O’Malley said.

Read more

God made you: body image and image

Amanda C. Wright’s research shows that the majority of women, including adolescents and even young girls, feel dissatisfied with their bodies. But the heart of the problem is not merely dissatisfaction with bodies but their objectification. Art critic and writer John Berger perceptively observed that the experience of “being looked at” leads women to see themselves as “an object of vision: a sight.” Psychologist Rachel Calogero argues “that the sexually objectifying experiences encountered by girls and women in their day-to-day environments lead them to internalize this objectifying gaze and to turn it on themselves.” In other words, women and girls begin to view their own bodies as objects distinct from themselves—objects that, importantly, must be sexually attractive to be valuable.

Women receive these objectifying messages not only through social interaction but through the nearly inescapable exposure to media.

Read more

Women’s march renews demand for equality, justice

Jamie Manson and Heidi Schlumpf
write that if the first Women's March was about expressing anger and frustration about the election of Donald Trump as president, the second one seemed more focused on getting to work to overturn his policies and unseat his supporters.

As in 2017, Catholic women and organizations were among those marching at protests around the country Jan. 20, adding to record-breaking crowds in cities such as Chicago and Austin, Texas.

In New York on Saturday, nearly a quarter of a million people turned out on the streets of New York City, according to city officials. But the march, according to its organizers, wasn't just about women.

"This march is about equality for all humans," Katherine Siemionko, founder and president of the Women’s March Alliance, told WNYC’s Brian Lehrer in an interview days before the march. "Over the past year, basic rights for women, immigrants, LGBTQ+, the religious and nonreligious, people of color and even Mother Earth have struggled to survive under the weight of the current administration," she further explained on the Women's March Alliance Facebook page. Read more

Study asks why young Catholics are leaving

Julie Bourbon reports that St. Mary's Press and Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate recently conducted a survey trying to understand why younger Catholics are leaving the Church.

Both ecclesial and societal factors were found to negatively impact
participation in organized religion, leading the authors to identify three broad categories of former Catholics: the injured (someone who’s had negative familial or ecclesial experiences), the drifter (someone with uncertain faith and lack of engagement with a faith community), and the dissenter (someone who actively rejects or resists the church).

Findings include:

- Approximately 12.8 percent of young adults in the U.S. between 18 and 25 are former Catholics.
- Approximately 6.8 percent of U.S. teenagers between 15 and 17 are former Catholics.
- Seventy-four percent said they stopped identifying as Catholic between ages 10 and 20, with a median age of 13.
- About one-third (35 percent) are "done" with religious affiliation but still believe in something bigger, perhaps even God.
- About 14 percent say religious affiliation and faith are "nonsensical."
- Nearly half (46 percent) are looking for another faith expression or practice that better aligns with their sense of spirituality.

Read more

Cardinal Parolin on Amoris Laetitia and the Synod on Youth

Joshua McElwee reports that Cardinal Pietro Parolin called Amoris Laetitia "an embrace by the church of the family amid all the problems of today's world ... [and] at the same time a request for help from families that they might collaborate and contribute to the growth of the church."
The cardinal also spoke about the upcoming October Synod of Bishops, which will focus on young people, and the pope's process of reforming the Vatican bureaucracy, known as the Roman Curia.

Parolin said he thinks 2018 will see the church give a "special concentration" to young people. "I believe the most innovative thing ... is the search for a new relationship between the church and young people, characterized by a paradigm of commitment free of every type of paternalism," said the cardinal. "The church truly wants to enter into dialogue with young people's reality; it wants to understand young people and wants to help them," he said.

CTA Nebraska negotiates an end to excommunications while CTA National calls for an immediate end

Brian Roewe reports that nearly 22 years after area Catholics were excommunicated for their membership in a national church reform group, the bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, has proposed a way to end their censure and return them to full communion with the church.

In late 2017, after more than a year of dialogue with several members of the local chapter of Call to Action, Lincoln Bishop James Conley extended an offer to lift the excommunication of its members on an individual basis while leaving the decree in place against membership in the organization.

Conley, who in November 2012 became bishop of the
southeastern Nebraska diocese, 16 years after the excommunication, wrote in a Dec. 12 letter to Call to Action Nebraska members, "I have been clear from the beginning that no Catholic should become a member of Call to Action. I believe it poses a danger to the faith. However, I am willing to consider rescinding the excommunication in individual instances where members, currently not prepared to leave CTA, reaffirm their commitment to the full teachings of the Catholic Church," he said.

Read more

**Call To Action National Responds**

Call To Action National has responded to the bishop asking him remove the excommunication immediately. In a public statement they congratulated the Nebraska chapter for its work in building a relationship with Conley and also thanked the bishop "for his willingness to be in dialogue with our members, and to work toward reconciliation and healing."

The national office went on to praise its members in Nebraska who "have shown an incredible amount of faith and courage as they faced this injustice." "This excommunication should never have happened. Excommunication should not be used as a fear tactic, or as punishment for speaking out against injustice," it said.

Read more

**German bishop wants discussion on blessing same sex unions**

Bishop Franz-Josef Bode wants a discussion about blessing same sex
"I'm concerned with fundamental questions of how we deal with each other; although 'marriage for all' differs clearly from the church's concept of marriage, it's now a political reality," said Bishop Franz-Josef Bode of Osnabruck. "We have to ask ourselves how we're encountering those who form such relationships and are also involved in the church, how we're accompanying them pastorally and liturgically."

In the fall, the first gay weddings were conducted in Germany, following a June 30 vote by the parliament to allow full same-sex marriage.

"Same-sex relationships are generally classified as a grave sin in the church, but we need to think how we can differentiate," Bishop Bode said in a Jan. 10 interview with the Neue Osnabrucker Zeitung daily.

"Shouldn't we be fairer, given that there is much that's positive, good and right in this? Should we not, for example, consider a blessing -- something not to be confused with a wedding ceremony?"

He said the church should discuss same-sex unions in more detail and recognize "silence and taboo" settled nothing.

Read more
FutureChurch events!

Please support this work!

Be inspired! Catholic Women Preach!

Please support this effort!

Nearly 110,000 views in just over one year! PLEASE SUPPORT CATHOLIC WOMEN PREACH!

Please take the Catholic Women Preach survey and help us to make this exciting initiative even better!

Add your name to our 100 women deacons list!

Start a conversation with DeaconChat

Write a letter to our U.S. cardinals asking them to support Cardinal Anders Arborelius’ idea of a College of Women advisors to Pope Francis
Honor the Mary of Magdala in your life by having her name added to our list on Catholic Women Preach!

Learn what you can do to save your parish community

New! Emerging Models of Parish and Community Life 2017 - 2018 SERIES

U.S. Priest statistics

Get the latest scholarship on the role of early Christian women by Christine Schenk, CSJ. Receive a copy of Crispina and Her Sisters when you donate $125 or more to FutureChurch!

Crispina and Her Sisters will open your eyes to the role women played in the shaping and expanding Christianity

As co-founder of FutureChurch, Christine Schenk, CSJ spent decades researching and writing about women in early Christianity. Like many feminists who have recovered the history and importance of women's authority, ministry and leadership in early Christianity, Schenk's book, Crispina and Her Sisters unearths new evidence that women held prominent roles in shaping and spreading Christianity. The book has already received accolades from prominent scholars such as Gary Macy, Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, and Joan Chittister, OSB.
The book will be released on December 15. FutureChurch will be offering a free copy of Chris's book for a donation of $125 or more. Learn about women in early Christianity and support FutureChurch at the same time.