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From the Executive Director's Desk

The World According to Louise
This morning, at 6:22am, Louise Akers, SC, my/our friend, mentor, and companion died.

After learning the news, I wept. But then I spent the day frantically searching for the full resolution copy of this photo [right] that I took in 2012 when we were protesting the Vatican crackdown on LCWR at the cathedral in Cincinnati.

With the help of a generous computer technician, I was able to get into my old computer and find it. I was jumping for joy because this was her favorite photo and I wanted to make sure it was available for use for her memorial services and for future publications. That she loved it made my heart swell for I felt it captured her beautiful, radiant spirit and her confident, prophetic voice -- gifts she instilled in others with her unrelenting belief in them.

As she moved closer to death, one of the great frustrations of her last days was her inability to do the simple things easily. Brushing her teeth and reaching for her water became exhausting tasks.

As she grew weaker, those who stayed close for the long haul (MaryEllen, Sue, Sonny, Jeanne, Paul, a cadre of sisters, and me) grew more and more protective of her.

One night, as she struggled to breathe, I put my hand gently on her shoulder and kissed her forehead lightly several times -- a healing ritual I have carried out many times when my children and grandchildren have been sick. I felt the same tenderness I have felt for them pouring out of me for Louise. It
was pure grace. Nothing more. Nothing less.

And I know I'm not alone. Her love and light transformed so many. The halls outside Louise's room were often clogged with family members and lay, consecrated, and ordained women and men -- all trying to see her one more time -- conveying in words and touch their love for her.

Sun Magazine published an interview with Louise in November 2013. For those who want to recall all things Louise Akers, it offers a lens into the vast and rich landscape that is her legacy.

"Poverty is Violence" was a bumper sticker on her car and in her heart. A truth teller of the highest order, she cut through attempts to soften reality with pious or political poppycock. With the weight of a mathematical proof, Louise equated poverty with violence -- a sin that had to be eradicated with no room for error.

Louise loved being known as a radical feminist. She smilingly claimed, "Its redundant...all feminism is radical." Her attitude that helped many other women and men, including me, claim with greater conviction, that same calling.

And when a priest told her that her bumper sticker, "Subvert the dominant paradigm" would not be understood by many, Louise smiled and responded, "That's ok. I know what it means."

That is the Louise we loved.

That is the Louise we lost today.
May her unfathomable and indomitable Spirit live on -- with us, through us, and in each of us, forever and ever...

Deborah Rose-Milavec
Executive Director

**Parishes should make women feel welcome and heard**

Michael O'Loughlin reports that Catholic leaders believe Catholic parishes should form outreach groups for women who feel unwelcome at church and strive to make sure women’s voices are heard when parishes make important decisions.

Those are the takeaways from some Catholic leaders reacting to a recently published survey of Catholic women in America, which found growing levels of women disengaging from the church along with low-levels of women who agree “very much” that women are involved in the decision-making of their parish.

“Catholics are a family: we’re joined together by our baptism in Christ. Women are at the heart of that family in so many ways, and women's perspectives should be at the heart of conversations about how to build up the Church,” Kim Daniels, a member of the Vatican’s communications advisory body and a former spokeswoman for the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told America in an email.

Ms. Daniels said collecting data to understand the experiences of women in the church is “common sense” and that it “can help us think through how to convey our faith effectively...
Marie Collins Mystified

Christopher Lamb writes that a respected advocate for sexual abuse victims has described herself as shocked, mystified and surprised by Pope Francis’ response to a Chilean bishop accused of turning a blind eye to offending.

Marie Collins, an abuse survivor who has served on the Pope’s child protection commission, was speaking after it was reported that Francis had been presented with a letter from a victim of Fr Fernando Karadima detailing both abuse and the fact it had been witnessed by Juan Barros, who the Pope appointed Bishop of Osorno in 2015.

Karadima, sentenced to a life of prayer and penance by the Vatican in 2011, was the future bishop’s mentor and the letter written by Juan Carlos Cruz says a young Fr Barros was present during Karadima’s abusing which took place after the priest had himself been kissed and fondled by Karadima.

The appearance of the letter - which Associated Press reported was handed to Francis by Cardinal Sean O’Malley - challenges Francis’ earlier denials that “no one has come forward” or provided any evidence of a cover-up by Bishop Barros. It was Mrs Collins who handed Cruz’s testimony to Cardinal O’Malley, the top papal adviser on abuse, for him to give the Pope in 2015.
“This is a situation which the Pope has mishandled, and it’s gone from bad to worse,” Collins told The Tablet. “And it’s a shame he didn’t give the letter he received more thought, or send Scicluna to investigate sooner.”

Cardinal Marx on the blessing of homosexual couples, the ordination of female deacons, and the abolition of compulsory [priestly] celibacy

In an interview, Cardinal Marx was asked by Karin Wendlinger: So you really can imagine that there might be a way to bless homosexual couples in the Catholic Church?

Cardinal Marx: There are no general solutions and I think that would not be right, because we are talking about pastoral care for individual cases, and that applies to other areas as well, which we cannot regulate, where we have no sets of rules.

The president of the German Bishops’ Conference has said that, in his view, "there are no general solutions" regarding the blessing of homosexual couples, saying the matter should be left to "the pastor on the ground," and the "particular, individual case at hand."

Cardinal Reinhard Marx told the Bavarian State Broadcasting’s radio service that “we are talking about pastoral care for individual cases, and that applies to other areas as well, which we cannot regulate, where we have no sets of rules."

Speaking on Feb. 3, on the occasion of his 10th anniversary
as Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Cardinal Marx was asked, according to a transcription of the interview provided by the Archdiocese of Munich and Friesing, "why do we see little or no movement" with regard to the blessing of homosexual couples, the ordination of female deacons, or the "abolition of compulsory [priestly] celibacy."

English is not Latin

Gerald O'Collins, SJ and John Wilkins write that English-speaking Catholics like us have never given up hope that we may be able, one day, to celebrate Mass in our own native language. Despite our efforts, we have never been able to take to our hearts the halting, clumsy word-for-word translation from the Latin imposed by the rulings of a peremptory 2001 Vatican document—titled Liturgiam authenticam—that overturned thirty years of meaning-for-meaning creative work.

Until that point, we had felt that ICEL (International Commission on English in the Liturgy) was getting there, as it tackled the huge job of translating hundreds of liturgical texts from the Latin. The translators had proceeded in accordance with the 1969 “Instruction on the Translation of Liturgical Texts,” issued in six languages and named Comme le prévoit after the original French edition. This instruction specified that “the ‘unit of meaning’ is not the individual word but the whole passage.” Hence “a faithful translation cannot be judged on the basis of individual words.” Pope Paul
VI had read the instruction and made minor corrections to it.

Of course, translators have to be faithful to the words of the text on which they are working. But as Pope Francis has now underlined, true faithfulness in translation goes further. It must include faithfulness to the language into which the translation is being made—the receptor language. And it must be faithful to the cultural sensibilities of the congregations that will use it, so that they can participate fully with understanding as Vatican II and Paul VI prescribed.

Read more

**Voices of Faith creates space for young Catholic women to claim their rightful place in the Church in "Why Women Matter."**

According to Petra Dankova, "Today, in many places, women are leading the exodus from the Church. But they could be leading the return."

Voices of Faith will sponsor their International Women's Day event, "Why Women Matter" in Rome on March 8, 2018. This is the fifth year for the event and it will be held at the Jesuit Curia instead of the Vatican as has been the case for the past four years. The Voices of Faith press release explains:

**Cardinal bars 8th President of Ireland and Ugandan LGBT advocate from International Women’s Day event at The Vatican.**

Cardinal Kevin Farrell has stunned organisers of an annual International Women’s Day (IWD) event to be held at The
Vatican in March by barring the former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese and Catholic LGBT advocate as keynote speakers.

Ssenfuka Juanita Warry is a devout Catholic who runs a non profit organisation in Uganda, where to be identified as gay or lesbian can put your life at risk. Mary McAleese is no stranger to The Vatican having held the highest position in public office in a predominantly Catholic country. She is known for her staunch support for gay and women’s rights and has often spoken publicly about her frustrations with her Catholic faith.

Dr McAleese said in an earlier promotion for the event, "God gave us two wings so that humanity could soar to great heights and feel the power and see the beauty of his creation in all its wonder. Yet our Church insists on flying on one wing, overlooking and wasting the talents and insights of so many wonderful, faithful, Godly women. Why? Can this tragic dysfunction really be what God wants? I think not. Let us now begin to imagine a completely different future."

2018 marks the fifth year of the only IWD event ever held at The Vatican. The event is coordinated and led by Voices of Faith, an initiative that exists to empower and advocate for Catholic women to have a seat at the table of decision making in the Catholic Church. The most recent papers published by the Pew Research Centre on the changing religious landscape show a continuous decline in numbers of people identifying
as Catholics, especially amongst young people.

Chantal Goetz, the Executive Director of Voices of Faith says this is true for a multitude of reasons but in particular a lack of vision on what the Catholic Church could be if only women could participate, be heard and engage in dialogue right at the top of the Catholic Church’s leadership structure.

“It was disappointing to realise on IWD of all days, these women who have accomplished so much in their communities, could be turned away from respectfully sharing their stories and experiences as Catholics” says Ms Goetz. “This event allows us to not only celebrate the wonderful work Catholic women are doing across the globe, but also create discussion and dialogue on the current power and leadership structures of our Church today.”

Voices of Faith believe a key solution to many problems the Church is facing lies in having a diversity of thought, expertise and education at the leadership level, skill sets they say can be brought by women and lay people if only they were more welcomed into these structures.

In anticipation of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment, to be held in Rome in October 2018, this year’s IWD focused particularly on the work of young female leaders are doing across the globe to champion social justice issues and gender equality.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell is the
Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. Voices of Faith is yet to receive an official explanation from the Cardinal regarding his decision.

**To register for the Voices of Faith event **[CLICK HERE].**

**Check out their inspiring video -- [CLICK HERE].**

**San Francisco parish offers model for risk taking and lay-ordained partnership**

With the exception of the eucharistic celebration, reading the signs of the times to answer the Gospel commandment in Matthew 25 may be the most vital work a Catholic community can take on. But human fears and divisions are what they are, all of us carry the treasure in earthen vessels, and 2,000 years of experience have not made it any easier to go the margins in radical hospitality.

But one parish in San Francisco, St. Ignatius on the University of San Francisco campus, has been undertaking the risky pilgrimage in a new way, with surprising impact on the solidarity of the parish internally as well as on its capacity for Spirit-filled outreach. [Read more]

**Commonweal Editors Call Pope Francis to Task**

For the most part, Francis really has struck a contrast with the professorial Benedict XVI and the larger-than-life John Paul II. This pope’s freewheeling style is, at its best, a complement to his emphasis on mercy and calls to reach out to those on the margins. Francis’s embrace of a man disfigured by boils has become one of the iconic images of his papacy. His off-
the-cuff remarks to the press on the papal plane reliably generate both praise and controversy. It was during one such session that he proclaimed, “Who am I to judge?” From the simplicity of his dress to his description of the church as a “field hospital,” he is not one to obsess over rules and formalities.

As Francis’s papacy nears its five-year mark, the limits of this approach have become apparent.

On his January trip to Chile, Francis faced questions about his controversial appointment of Juan Barros as bishop of Osorno. The pope has long defended Barros, who has been credibly accused of covering up the sexual abuse of minors by his mentor, Fr. Fernando Karadima, and this time was no different. “You, in all good will, tell me that there are victims,” Francis said, “but I haven’t seen any, because they haven’t come forward.” Without proof, he dismissed the charges as “calumny.”

This was a shocking, incredible statement. Karadima was sanctioned by the Vatican in 2011, and victims testified to Chilean prosecutors that Barros and others had witnessed the abuse and done nothing. It was only because of the statute of limitations, the judge made clear at the time, that Karadima was not convicted and sentenced—not because the accusations against him were suspect. When Francis named Barros a bishop, it was over the protests of the Chilean bishops’ conference.

An Associated Press
story reported that Francis “seemed completely unaware of the details” of the scandal, raising troubling questions about the information he’s receiving and his approach to governing the church. The same story noted that Francis “has created an informal, parallel information structure that often rubs up against official Vatican channels” and speculated that he might be relying on “instinct” and his own network of informants rather than on “the high-quality briefings befitting a world leader.” The pope reportedly keeps his own visitor’s schedule and makes his own phone calls, all from the more accessible Santa Marta residence, not the Apostolic Palace. It is a system that makes accountability difficult and that substitutes Francis’s own temperament, judgment, and knowledge for real, structural change.

Read more

**Former Irish president Mary McAleese barred**

Patsy McGarry of the Irish Times was the first to break the story. The Vatican had barred former President of Ireland Mary McAleese from taking part in a conference to mark International Women’s Day which was originally due to take place in the Holy See.

The list of potential speakers required approval from a cardinal, but Mrs McAleese was not granted permission to participate.

As a result, the organisers have moved the “Why Women Matter” conference on March 8th to premises outside the Vatican, and have also invited Mrs
McAleese to be keynote speaker. She had previously been asked to take part in a panel discussion at the event.

The conference was organised by the Voices of Faith group, which is seeking to convince the Vatican that women “have the expertise, skills and gifts to play a full leadership role in the church”.

The inclusion of Mary McAleese and two other speakers on its programme was opposed by Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. A Dubliner who spent most of his clerical life in the US, he is the most senior Irishman at the Vatican.

Read more
ABC News report by Nicole Winfield
America Magazine report
Crux report
National Catholic Reporter report

Mary McAleese writes Francis regarding Vatican block at VOF event

RTE reports that former President Mary McAleese has written to Pope Francis after the Vatican declined to approve her and two other speakers who are taking part in a conference to mark International Women's Day on 8 March.

The Voices of Faith conference has taken place inside the Vatican for the past four years.

Deborah Rose-Milavec, a spokeswoman for Voices of Faith told RTÉ News that the group has not been given any
After failing to receive approval for the three speakers, the Fidel Gotz Foundation - a Catholic philanthropic group who organised the event - decided to move the conference to another location.

The names of potential participants had been submitted to Irish-born Cardinal Kevin Farrell at the Vatican. Mrs McAleese has challenged the Holy See on a number of occasions, including the Holy See’s policy on contraception and on recognising catholics who belong to the LGBT community.

Read more

The Tablet: Mary McAleese writes to Pope Francis over Vatican ban

More evidence that Pope Francis blew it when it comes to Barros

According to a BBC report, members of the Pope’s own Commission for the Protection of Minors, set up in 2014 as part of efforts to counter sex abuse by clergy, have told the Associated Press they hand-delivered a letter from Juan Carlos Cruz, a victim of cleric Fernando Karadima in the 1980s, who accused fellow priest Juan Barros of witnessing the abuse and doing nothing.

The Pope caused outrage after a
visit to Chile last month by defending Bishop Barros, who was made a bishop in 2015. Crux to Francis's top adviser on sex abuse, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, in April 2015.

Marie Collins, a member of the commission at the time, sent the BBC a photo of her handing Crux's letter to Cardinal Sean O'Malley.

"When we gave him the letter for the Pope, he assured us he would give it to the Pope and speak of the concerns," she told AP earlier. "And at a later date, he assured us that that had been done."

In an unusual step, Cardinal O'Malley openly criticised the Pope last month for his initial remarks in Chile, saying he had left victims feeling abandoned.

Pope Francis announced last week he was sending the Vatican's top expert on sexual abuse, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, to Chile to investigate the accusations against Bishop Barros.

Christopher Hale commentary in Time

**Francis has two weak spots and the Vatican response to the Voices of Faith's event is another sign of that weakness**

Robert Mickens argues that, while Pope Francis has shown extraordinary leadership throughout his pontificate, on at least two important issues that pose a challenge to the Roman Church’s credibility and its future, many Catholics feel Francis has been less willing to listen to other points of view. More precisely, they see him
dragging his heels as others try to force him to deal with these items.

The first issue is the worldwide clergy sex abuse scandal, most specifically how to hold to accountability those bishops who have ignored, attempted to hide or failed to report such clerical crimes.

The second is the role of women in church and society, specifically how to address the injustice of a global Catholic community (especially the Vatican) that continues to treat women largely as second-class members and excludes them from almost all of the church’s most important decision-making positions and structures.

"Created Equal" film uses women's ordination to gauge women's equality

Kristen Whitney Daniels writes that in recent years, the movie industry hasn't shied away from Catholicism — mostly seen through the lens of the sex abuse scandal. However, a new film seeks to expand the discussion on injustices both within the Catholic Church and society in general.

"Created Equal" — directed by Bill Duke and based on the novel by Roger A. Brown — begins with attorney Thomas "Tommy" Reilly (Aaron Tveit) being unwillingly assigned a pro-bono case for Sr. Alejandra "Allie" Batista (Edy Ganem).

When they meet for the first-time, Reilly apologizes to Batista for the abuse he presumes she's endured, since...
the case seeks to sue the Catholic Church. After a few awkward seconds Batista explains that she isn't suing the Archdiocese of New Orleans because of abuse, she's suing the church so she can enter a Catholic seminary and fulfill her call of becoming a priest. Read more

**Bishop Murry: Catholics need to fight racism**

Crux reports that according to Bishop George Murry, American Catholics have "shown a lack of moral consciousness on the issue of race."

While he believes America has made progress on the issue of race relations, he said that "recent events in our country have questioned exactly how far we’ve come.”

Murry, Bishop of Youngstown, Ohio, was appointed as head of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) ad hoc committee against racism, which was established in August following the deadly, racially motivated protests in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Speaking on Sunday to more than 500 Catholic social activists who are gathered in the nation’s capital for a four-day conference and advocacy sessions on Capitol Hill, Murry chronicled the development of the Church’s position on slavery, noting that previously the Church considered there to be “just and unjust forms of slavery.” Read more

**Millennial Catholic women disengage**
Pat Periello writes that an America article and its survey show that women in the church have had enough. They are choosing to no longer be the mainstay of keeping the church afloat. The issue is not that women are actually leaving. Women surveyed indicated that 82 percent of them had not considered leaving the church. Instead, they are disengaging and do not consider active involvement in the church important. Only 24 percent of women surveyed went to Mass weekly or more often. Less that half of respondents felt it very important or somewhat important to be involved in one’s parish.

Specifically, millennial women have chosen to back off their involvement in the church. Their disengagement is even greater that that of their male counterparts. The article also indicates that this same phenomenon is not occurring in Protestant denominations. What does this data mean? How serious is the problem? Kathleen Sprows Cummings, associate professor at the University of Notre Dame, and director of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, provides a pretty stark analysis. She states, “We are at a crisis point. . . . If you lose the women, you lose the children.” No one can doubt the formative role women have always played in the religious training of their children.

It seems fair to say that a combination of the rise of women in every secular sphere of influence, along with a continued refusal to consider
women for leadership roles in the church, is affecting the willingness of women to be engaged in the church.

It is even more true for young women who are part of the current culture and have a different understanding of what the role of women should be in the world and in the church. Although not that many women have actually left the church, it may be instructive to note that of those who have considered it, 48 percent mentioned the lack of an appropriate place for women in the church, and 69 percent mention disagreement with church teaching.

Read more

More women are sharing their stories of being called to the diaconate. Share your story at our 100 Women Deacons campaign!

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2017 - 2018 SERIES
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 was released mid-December. FutureChurch is 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.