



FOCUS E-News

May 21 - 27, 2017

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U.S. Bishops plan invitation only convocation, *The Joy of the Gospel in America*, from July 1 - 4, 2017 in Orlando. Do you know who is attending from your diocese?



[The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will be convening an unprecedented gathering of key leaders from dioceses and Catholic organizations from all across the country](#) in order to assess the challenges and opportunities of our time, particularly in the context of the Church in the United States.

An initiative of the Bishops' Working Group on the Life and Dignity of the Human Person this gathering will "assemble Catholic leaders for a strategic conversation, under the leadership of the bishops, on forming missionary disciples to animate the Church and to engage the culture."

This is an invitation only event. The USCCB website states, "Unique to this convocation will be the large number of bishop leaders and the hand-picked nature of the diocesan delegation chosen by each bishop."

Catholics who want to know who is representing their diocese [should contact their bishop](#) or the diocesan office. [Here is the USCCB page](#) describing who should be part of each delegation.

Here is [the list of speakers](#) for the event and here is the [event schedule](#).

[Read more](#)

<https://cruxnow.com/uncategorized/2017/02/05/summer-gathering-catholic-leaders-meant-revitalize-church-u-s/>

<http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2017/evangelization-at-the-margins-drives-usccb-convocation-planning.cfm>

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/not-just-another-trade-meeting-convocation-seeks-unify-us-church>

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/bishops-strategic-plan-urges-missionary-discipleship-across-church>

Pope Francis Explores the Possibility of Married Priests

Pope Francis has begun exploring the possibility of ordaining married men as priests to make up for a serious shortage in the church.

A little over a month ago, the pope began gathering information on married clergy in private meetings with Canadian bishops from eastern rite traditions – in particular, the Ukrainian Catholic Church which has allowed its clergy to marry and serve in the church for centuries.

Here in Philadelphia, the rector of the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Northern Liberties is married.



Father Roman Pitula has a wife and three children and got married while still in seminary.

Pitula says he finds it helpful to have a dual role as a married man and a priest.

“It gives you an understanding of what a family is all about, what people face, maybe in difficulties they face, so it helps a little bit to counsel them or help them in a special way.”

[Read more](#)

To send a letter to your bishop asking him to open the dialogue on married priests [CLICK HERE](#).

Catholics must stand up and become active citizens, not loyal subjects, within their own church community.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has pointed to weaknesses in culture and governance within the Catholic Church in Australia. Within the church the normal tenets of liberal democracy, including inclusiveness, transparency, equality and responsiveness do not apply.

The church hierarchy has responded in various ways to the revelations of the royal commission, including apologies, liturgies of lament, reparations and promises of new child safety regulations. But the bishops show no inclination to tackle these structural and cultural issues, so it is up to the laity to do so. This is the strong message of Francis Sullivan, the lay head of the church's Truth, Justice and Healing Council.

Unfortunately, historically the Church is not a community in which its lay members are called on to play such a role. Instead, as Bishop Vincent Long of Parramatta has pointed out on several



occasions recently, the church is a pyramid in which the ordained clergy are at the pinnacle and the laity at the bottom.

Catholics have been brought up to the constant refrain that the church is not a democracy. They are dissuaded from challenging its undemocratic structures and urged to accept discipline from the top.

Catholics are made subject to their bishops and other church leaders. As subjects they can be professional and hard-working senior church employees in education, health or welfare agencies or lay Catholics in organisations like St Vincent de Paul, but they are not church decision-makers in the democratic sense. That role is left to bishops and priests.

Catholics have a proud record of exercising their democratic rights within wider Australian democracy as voters, members of political parties and lobby groups, and as elected representatives. But within their own church they have been taught to leave their democratic rights at the door. Now is the time to challenge that norm in parishes, dioceses and the wider Australian church.

[Read more](#)

The Eastern Orthodox Case for Deaconesses

I watched with interest in August 2016 when Pope Francis made good on his promise to convene a commission to study the female diaconate. I was especially attentive to this development because I am a supporter of the renewal of the order of deaconesses in my own church—the Orthodox Church.

Later last year I was astonished when one of the self-governing churches of the Orthodox world, Alexandria, decided to revive the female diaconate



in Africa and proceeded to consecrate five women as deaconesses this past February. These moves by the Synod of Alexandria surprised those of us in the United States working on this issue—we did not know the female diaconate was even under consideration by the African church. Rarely does anything happen this fast in the Orthodox world.

That we were unaware of support for the female diaconate in Africa is evidence of two Orthodox realities. First, our church is fragmented: we do not yet have established international mechanisms for theologians and historians, or even hierarchs, to communicate with one another. Second, the autocephalous Orthodox churches throughout the world are self-governing, which means that any one of them could decide to revive the female diaconate tomorrow and ordain a deaconess the next day.

As my Catholic sisters and brothers await the report from Pope Francis's commission, we in the Orthodox Church are waiting to learn more about the ministry of the new deaconesses in Africa.

[Read more](#)

Australian Catholics Call for Deep Reforms

Catholics for Renewal, an organization of reform minded Catholics, has organized an open letter to their bishops calling for deep reforms within the Church.

They write,

Changing processes is not enough. We ask each and every bishop to act now on these reforms:

Eradicate the corrosive culture of clericalism – “an evil . . . in the Church” (Pope Francis).



Become truly accountable with full involvement of the faithful, including diocesan pastoral councils, and diocesan assemblies or synods; with pastoral plans and annual diocesan reports.

Appoint women to more senior diocesan positions, such as chancellor and delegate of bishops.

Hold diocesan synods/assemblies in 2018, with deanery and parish listening sessions, to develop the agenda for the national 2020 Plenary Council; and as part of normal diocesan governance.

Further remodel priestly formation, including ongoing development, assessment and registration.

Reconcile publicly and fully with all the persons abused, their families and communities, and commit to just redress.

Send an urgent delegation, including laity, to Pope Francis:

- urging him to purge child sexual abuse from the Church: legislating civil reporting of abuse, and ensuring effective discipline, major canon law reform, and review of priestly celibacy;
- advising him of the Royal Commission's exposure of the Church's global dysfunctional governance; particularly its clericalist culture and lack of accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness, especially the exclusion of women from top decision-making positions; and
- requesting immediate reform of bishop selection processes, fully including the faithful in identifying the needs of dioceses and local selection criteria.

[Read the open letter](#)

When a retired pope interferes

Pope Benedict XVI is not keeping his vow of non-interference in the current pontiff's affairs according to Andrea Grillo, a well-known Italian layman who teaches sacramental theology at the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant' Anselmo in Rome and liturgy at the Abbey of Santa Giustina in Padua.



According to Grillo, the former pope continues to promote his man, Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW) who has shown himself to be opposed to the reforms of Pope Francis.

Most recently, he has written a blurb for C. Sarah's book, **The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise**, that credits Francis for bringing Sarah into his present position writing, "We should be grateful to Pope Francis for appointing such a spiritual teacher as head of the congregation that is responsible for the celebration of the liturgy in the Church... With Cardinal Sarah, a master of silence and of interior prayer, the liturgy is in good hands."

Robert Mickens noted that Sarah was not Francis' first choice. Originally, Francis wanted to appoint Archbishop Piero Marini, a strong proponent of the liturgical reforms following the Second Vatican Council. But that rubbed the former pope the wrong way and Francis appointed Sarah.

In the end, according to Grillo, the Pope Emeritus is not keeping his word to let Francis exercise his papacy according to his own lights and is working to wield his influence.

[Read more \(subscription link\)](#)

Eighteen of 34 parishes in two counties may close in the Diocese of Pittsburgh

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh is proposing sweeping reductions in the number of parishes, churches and priests over several years in a six-county region that includes Washington and Greene counties.

Bishop David A. Zubik, while meeting with members of the media Friday, said the diocese's 188 parishes have been divided into 49 groups that have been assigned to make recommendations for the cutbacks as the church faces a critical shortage of priests and a large reduction in the number of people who attend Mass.

[Read more](#)

Learn what you can do to save your parish from merging and closing with [FutureChurch Save Our Parish Community Resources](#)

Pope Francis appoints 5 new cardinals

Joshua McElwee reports that Pope Francis has named five new cardinals, again diversifying representation in the most select body of Roman Catholic prelates by elevating bishops from places as far apart as Laos, Mali, Sweden, Spain and El Salvador.

The pontiff made the surprise announcement at the end of his traditional Regina Coeli prayer with crowds in St. Peter's Square, saying he would install the new cardinals during a consistory at the Vatican June 28.

In an unusual move, only two of the prelates named by Francis Sunday as new cardinals are currently archbishops. Two others are bishops. The last, Jose Gregorio Rosa Chavez, is the long-time auxiliary bishop of San Salvador, known to have worked closely with slain Archbishop Oscar Romero.



[Read more](#)

[Pope names five new cardinals all outside Italy and the Vatican](#)

[Pope Francis new cardinals show universality of the Church](#)

Support our work

Don't miss these opportunities and events!

Join FutureChurch in Greece and follow in the footsteps of our foremothers in faith

[Listen to Sr. Chris and Russ Share a Preview of the Pilgrimage](#)

From October 5 - 14, 2017 join FutureChurch as we explore the archaeological sites of early Christian women. Learn about the ancient Greek goddesses Athena, Artemis and Gaia to women of the New Testament and finally present day nuns in Greek monasteries. This pilgrimage will focus on the influence of women on the spirituality and history of Christianity. Sr. Christine Schenk will serve as educational director and Russ Petrus, FutureChurch program director will serve as spiritual director.

[Read more](#)

Celebrate the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene!

Go and Tell My Sisters and Brothers: A Celebration of



Women Preachers

Join thousands of Catholics across the U.S. and worldwide as we celebrate the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene.

This year, FutureChurch will lift up women preachers from Scripture and history – from Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala to Catherine of Siena and Thea Bowman. Together we will honor and learn from their witnesses and ask them to pray with us as we work to lift up women’s voices in Church and society today.



[Learn more](#)

FutureChurch offers second retreat for Catholic women discerning a call to the diaconate

FutureChurch will host a second retreat for women who are discerning a call to the diaconate September 8-10 in San Francisco, CA. This second retreat will also include a special workshop on one component of diaconal ministry: the Ministry of the Word – particularly Liturgical Preaching. Sign up today!



[Learn more](#)

Catholic Women Deacons

Are you called or are you discerning a call to the permanent diaconate? Share your story.

As Pope Francis' commission on women deacons continues their work, women around the world are already discerning their own call to be a deacon. Share your story today and help make Catholic Women Deacons a reality!



[Learn more](#)

FUTURECHURCH FALL EVENT

SAVE THE DATE!
October 27, 2017

Sr. Sandra Schneiders
presents:

***John's Gospel: Blueprint for
the Future of Parish Life***



Catholic Women Preach

Each week throughout the year, Catholic Women Preach offers the wisdom and challenge presented by the Gospel through the experience and faith of women. Be inspired by the Catholic women who preach each Sunday and some holy days.

[Learn more](#)

**Join us as we launch our new
initiative - Emerging Models of
Parish and Community Life**

2017 - 2018 SERIES

September 13, 2017

Association of US Catholic Priests
Priestless Parishes

October 23, 2017

Professor Ed Hahnenberg
Emerging Models for Ministry

October 27, 2017

Sr. Sandra Schneiders
*John's Gospel: Blueprint for the Future
of Parish Life*

November 8, 2017

Fr. Robert D. Duch
*The Lobinger Model for Parish
Leadership and Ministry*

January 17, 2018

Jamie Manson
Religious Life for the Next Generation



EMERGINGMODELS
OF PARISH AND COMMUNITY LIFE

February 7, 2018

Chris Lowney

Everyone Leads: How to Revitalize the Catholic Church

Save the dates!

Learn what you can do to save your parish community

FutureChurch supports parishioners who want to preserve their parish community from being merged or closed. In doing so we have, together, changed Vatican policy. This FutureChurch initiative is designed to provide Catholics with tools to defend their parish homes has contributed to a highly significant change in Vatican policy. Since 2007, our Save Our Parish Community project has guided successful parishioner appeals across the U.S., and in Cleveland, Ohio.

[Learn more](#)

Make your voice heard to open the door for married priests

On a trip home from Tel Aviv, Pope Francis stated, "Celibacy is not a dogma of faith, it is a rule of life that I appreciate a great deal and I believe it is a gift for the Church. The door is always open given that it is not a dogma of faith." Bishop Erwin Krautler and Pope Francis discussed the priest shortage and future of the priesthood in Brazil urging the Bishop and all local bishops to be "courageous" and to make concrete suggestions on the possibilities available to assist in this crisis, including expanding the priesthood to include married men.

Catholics in the United States call on our bishops to follow Pope Francis' call to be courageous in seeking solutions to our growing priest shortage and to present these solutions to Rome.



As you know well, over the past forty years, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and worldwide has experienced a steadily worsening priest shortage. At first, the process was so gradual that it was hardly noticed. But now, the rapidity of the decline is having a devastating impact on parish and sacramental life.

According to a 2008 Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate study, half of the 19,302 active diocesan priests plan to retire by 2019.

Following Pope Francis' model we urge the U.S. 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 invite priests who have married back to ministry. Please encourage local bishops to open this important dialogue at a diocesan level particularly in the areas most affected by the priest shortage.

We also ask U.S. Bishops to open a discussion of these issues at their general assemblies with a view to presenting concrete suggestions for opening ordination to Pope Francis.

We call on you, our bishops and brothers in Christ, to encourage discussion of the genuine reform so necessary to the future of the Church. We urge you to take action now.

[Learn more](#)

Support our work



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