FOCUS E-News
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Please support FutureChurch during our Women in Church Leadership Campaign!

Follow in the Footsteps of Our Foremothers in Faith in Greece with Educational Director Sr. Christine Schenk!

Women lead, minister, baptize and preach around the world

La Croix journalists wrote a special issue this week highlighting women who lead, minister, baptize, and preach around the world.

One of their featured Catholics was Dominican theologian, Sr. Diana Culbertson, who lives in Ohio in the northeastern United States. At the end of 2016, she helped found the site "Catholic Women Preach" with dozens of women, religious and secular. She delivers on this platform, in the form of text and video, her comments on Sunday readings.

For her, this site is above all an opportunity to share a feminine point of view on the Bible: "A woman will not talk about the Nativity as a man for example! We publish our videos two weeks in advance so that the priests can view them and draw inspiration from them in their own homilies. Some do, it is a great recognition," rejoices the nun.
In her video, Sister Diana Culbertson emphasizes feminine biblical figures: "Junie, Prisca, and the deaconess Phoebe, of whom Saint Paul speaks for example, are very little evoked in the classic Sunday liturgy. Yet they had a great role in the establishment of the first Christian communities."

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Marie Collins voices approval for new appointments at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Resigned member of the Vatican's abuse commission, Marie Collins, backs Pope Francis' new appointments at the CDF. That includes Monsignor John Kennedy as the head of the disciplinary section of the CDF, "an important position within the Congregation." It also includes Cardinal Sean O'Malley who became a member in January. She believes it could signal that more significant changes "may come in the future which could bring a greater openness to the necessity for a change in how the issue is dealt with at this level."

According to The Tablet reporter, Sarah Mac Donald, the 48 year old Monsignor John Kennedy was a well-liked Dublin priest who came to work for the CDF in 2003. He has worked in various areas there and has a good knowledge of the four sections: doctrine, marriage, discipline, and archives. For the last two and a half years he worked as the assistant to the former section head, Fr. Miguel Funes Diaz. More recently, he was given the task of bringing order and transparency to the Congregation's finances.

He worked with the former Prefect, Cardinal Ratzinger who he described as the "most intelligent person he had ever met."
All of Kennedy's experience, education, and skills will be needed for the challenges ahead according to Collins. She hopes Pope Francis' promise of more resources for Kennedy's department will improve the service to victims of clergy sexual abuse.

[Read more](subscription link)

**Bishop John Stowes reaches out to LGBTQI community**

Clad in traditional brown Franciscan robes, Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky, seemed at home among the rainbow of colors at New Ways Ministry's eighth annual symposium here April 28-30. This was the first time that the bishop had spoken in front of the advocacy group, which supports lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Catholics.

"New Ways Ministry made me want to come here," the bishop told NCR during a 40-minute interview at the gathering. He has been observing and admiring the group's outreach to LGBT Catholics over several years, he added.

[Read more](subscription link)

**Catholic Women Speak members meet at the University of Roehampton to discuss issues facing women in the Church**

Speakers included former Tablet editor Catherine Pepinster and Ursula Halligan, political editor for Ireland's TV3. They spoke about their experiences and vision of a more inclusive Church. Tina Beattie said, "None of the women at our gathering wants to bring the institutional Church toppling down, but we all want a Church that is more able to create spaces for women and girls to grow and flourish" (15April17, The Tablet).
Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, criticizes judgmental attitudes that drive away people

The Archbishop of Dublin criticized the judgmental attitudes that have been applied to single mothers and minorities. During his Good Friday Way of the Cross reflection he blamed the scandals within Catholicism as well as "judgmentalism" for causing people to reject their faith. He asked, "How can we be so judgmental and hurtful towards those whom we decide have failed and those who drift outside our self-made ideas of respectability?" He warned that Christianity has been turned into "a faith of prohibitions" and stressed that "sin is not a failure to observe rules and norms but a failure to love."

The Tablet, 22April17

Cardinal Joseph Tobin offers historic welcome to LGBTQ Catholics

David Harvie received a green light from Cardinal Tobin to have an LGBT pilgrimage to the cathedral on Sunday, May 21, with a Mass that Gargani will say in Our Lady Chapel, followed by a tour of the cathedral.

Harvie immediately created a colorful flier and for the first time used the initials LGBT in relationship to a Catholic institution in the Newark Archdiocese with the blessing of the cardinal.

"I am delighted that you and the LGBTQ brothers and sisters plan to visit our beautiful cathedral," Tobin wrote in an email to Gargani approving the flier. "You will be very welcome! The flier is fine; please circulate it."

Harvie was thrilled.
"The fact that Cardinal Tobin was so open and welcoming is a unique experience."

Indeed, it is historic.

**Religious vocations on the decline in Vietnam**

Religious leaders have noted a decrease in the number of vocations, which they explain by the rapid economic development of the country. The drop in the number of children in each family and easier access to higher education also play a role, they say.

"Now, 80% of young Catholics take higher level studies whereas even ten years ago many of them, particularly from poor families, lacked the means to continue after high school," explains Fr. Duy Nguyen Khuong, finance officer, and teacher at the Assumptionist scholasticate in Ho Chi Minh City.

Globalization is another factor involved since it motivates young Vietnamese to leave for overseas.

**Are our bishops ready for a synodal church?**

Massimo Faggioli writes that the reception of the pope's focus on synodality is still largely ignored by the bishops.

The day after Easter marked one and a half years since Francis gave one of his most important speeches to explain the need for a synodal Catholic Church.

"The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that..."
the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission,” the Pope said on October 17, 2015.

“It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium,” he insisted.

Then the Pope described the three levels of synodality. The first level is that of the local Church. The second is the level of ecclesiastical provinces and regions, particular councils and, in a special way, conferences of bishops. And the third level is that of the Universal Church.

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Reform of the Curia and Pope Francis' address to Catholic Action

Robert Mickens reports that from April 24-26, Pope Francis gathered with his nine advisors (C9) to talk about reforming the Curia. It was the nineteenth gathering since the Jesuit pope instituted the novel idea of having a “kitchen cabinet” or privy council. And many reformed-minded Catholics have expressed hope that he and his aides will radically alter the nature and composition of the Vatican’s central offices. According to the head of the Holy See Press Office, Greg Burke, the C9 are making progress on a new constitution for the Roman Curia. However, he said it would only contain “updates, not fundamental changes” to the old constitution that John Paul II implemented three decades ago.

Pope Francis met with delegates of the Catholic Action congress in the Vatican Synod Hall and he spoke to them in his native Spanish for over an hour, mostly making ad-libbed asides from his prepared speech.

Francis used the occasion to repeat, once again, the importance of his 2013 apostolic exhortation, Evangelii
gaudium. He said it was an updated version of Paul VI's exhortation from 1975, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, what he called “the most important document after Vatican II.”

“We must always be changing because time changes. The only thing that does not change is what’s essential. What doesn’t change is the announcement of Jesus Christ, missionary attitude, prayer, the need to pray, the need to be formed, and the need to sacrifice. That does not change. You have to find the way, how to do it, but it does not change,” said Pope Francis.

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**Catholic bishops in England and Wales urged to review the church's celibacy requirement**

Catholic bishops in England and Wales are facing a fresh call for a national commission on the ordination of married men amid mounting concern that the church’s celibacy requirement is contributing to a shortage of priests.

The call for a review of celibacy as a condition of priesthood comes after Pope Francis signaled last month he was open to the possibility of ordaining married men under specific conditions. The issue is expected to be raised at a synod next year on vocation.

The Movement for Married Clergy (MMaC) is renewing its call for a national commission of bishops, clergy and laity to discuss ways of tackling the shortage of priests. “We’re asking bishops to recognise the issue and examine possible solutions in good faith,” said the MMaC secretary, Chris McDonnell.

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**Fifty-nine parishes in the Archdiocese of Hartford will**
Under a plan that church leaders say is designed to launch a new era of Catholicism in Connecticut, church leaders announce the merging of 59 parishes and closure of 29 parishes.

The mergers, which will be effective as of June 29, will involve unions of two, three, four, five and six parishes, according to a press release.

New Haven County was hit the hardest, with 16 parishes there slated for closure, according to the plan available on the archdiocese’s website.

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Mass going Catholics on the decline in Scotland, but faith is still alive

A 2016 Church Census found that the number of people regularly attending services in Scotland had fallen by more than half over the last 30 years to around 390,000 people. Around 32 percent are Catholic and in those parishes where Catholics still attend Mass, 42 percent are over 65.

A spokeswoman for the Catholic Church in Scotland acknowledges the decline in attendance, but says, "Non-attendance doesn't mean that people don't pray or live a Christian life with [its] values. Caring Christian values aren't on the decline in Scotland..."  
The Tablet, 22April2017

Cork priest shortage will result in fewer Masses

The Diocese of Cork and Ross is facing a priest shortage crisis and some Masses could be replaced by public prayers with no communion in the years ahead, writes Rob McNamara.

Father Charlie Kiely, director of pastoral development in Cork and Ross
revealed the extent of the problem, as it emerged that Mass will not be said at any church in Limerick today, the first time this has happened in any Irish Diocese in 188 years since Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

The Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy has also warned that Mass may not take place every Sunday in some parishes due to a lack of priests.

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Instead of selling shuttered churches, New York Catholics want Cardinal Dolan to open them to immigrants

Felix Cepeda, an advocate for immigration rights and church reform, shared ICE agents can enter a church threshold with a judicial warrant but generally avoids any houses of worship, which are technically qualified to be "sensitive locations."

Due to ICE's general avoidance of such locations, shuttered churches have become the new safe houses for immigrants.

Cepeda further explained: "A couple of these buildings need to be opening immediately. At least one place that can be open 24 hours. We could really have an emergency immigration center there.

"Most of these churches have houses next to them where the priest used to live. Thirty or forty people could easily live there."

Though the thought is there, the reality was produced by Joseph Zwilling, an archdiocese spokesman, who stated: "Catholic Churches in the Archdiocese of New York that are not currently being used for regular Mass and Sacraments are not appropriate places for sanctuaries. They do not have the facilities necessary for people to reside there."
Regardless, Cepeda and Matthew 25 agree: "The future of the church here in NYC is black and brown people from Latin America."

Both agree Cardinal Timothy Dolan isn't doing enough to help immigrants in need.

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Can political science help a troubled Church?

Last Saturday, political scientist and Catholic Tom Urbaniak was at the Atlantic School of Theology for a conference called “Healing the Body: Church Renewal in Response to the Sexual Abuse Crisis.” The presenters were Sister Nuala Kenny, a leading medical doctor and ethicist, Prof. David Deane, a respected AST theologian, and Prof. Cathy Driscoll, who specializes in management at Saint Mary’s University.

These dedicated Catholics shared their research and called attention to “pathologies” in the church: an emotionally immature clerical culture made worse by mandatory celibacy (Kenny); a church that punishes internal criticism and often pities itself instead of victims (Deane); a church that is heavy on cold internal legalism but not the rule of law (Kenny and Deane); a church that still clings to the powers of state and empire, to the point of invoking diplomatic immunity to hide corruption (Deane); and a church that expects too much of priests, alienates many good priests, and keeps the laity in a lower caste (all three speakers).

The structures have become so “calcified” (Deane’s term) that even the recent popes have struggled with how to heal the institutional church.

Where do we start?

I hypothesize that two incremental, short-term reforms could lead to other
changes and allow fresh air in. These two initial changes would be consistent with Catholic theology.

First, each diocese would have a permanent diocesan synod. It would be composed of parish representatives, periodically elected, plus clergy. The law of the church allows this already.

Second, Pope Francis has already floated the idea of more broadly permitting married priests. (There are already married priests among converts and Eastern-rite Catholics.) That could change church culture for the better.

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At home with my father the Catholic priest

Patricia Lockwood, one of the most critically acclaimed contemporary poets of the Twitter age, talks about her unique childhood as the daughter of a Catholic priest.

If Lockwood is sounding angry with the Catholic Church, then that is because she is. Anger, she agrees, was also a factor in her decision to write about life with her father. “Not bitter angry,” she insists. “The book is done in the way you would rib your own family.” When she told her father about Priestdaddy, he threatened to murder her. She makes it sound the most natural reaction in the world. “It was the same sort of jesting,” she shrugs. “It was a very affectionate comment, I think. It’s hard to tell. He won’t read it. I don’t know if he has any idea what is in it, but he is proud enough to want the book club at his church to read it.”

“I hope that in writing Priestdaddy I have been very tender towards my father,” she says. And, alongside the jokes and the barbs, she has been. In one powerful passage she describes how, after Mass, she would walk through the presbytery and see that her father had
been joined by “shadowy figures with their backs turned to me. They were in need … Sunday after Sunday in our living room sat the unthinkable and spoke to my father.”

Being such a diligent shepherd had its toll. After those who needed him so badly had gone, there was, Lockwood says, “nothing left” for his own family – “except a desire to be alone with himself, so he could regenerate the language he needed to speak universally”. The usual argument advanced for resisting a return to a married priesthood is that it would short-change parishioners if their pastor had a family to care for as well as them. Patricia Lockwood’s experience suggests the real problem is the other way round. It is the family who suffer physical and emotional deprivation so that the flock can have its needs met.

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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.

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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 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. In this season of Easter, be inspired by the Catholic women who preach each Sunday and some holy days.

Learn 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

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