FutureChurch
25th Anniversary
Celebration & Benefit

The Church:
Presence and Possibility

Thursday
November 12, 2015
Cleveland Airport Marriott

Keynote Speaker
Fr. Michael Crosby, OFM Cap.

Special Presenter
Sr. Theresa Kane, RSM

Special Honoree
Sr. Christine Schenk, CSJ

Panelist Presenters
Sr. Christine Schenk, CSJ
Natalie Kertes Weaver, Ph.D.
Russ Petrus, M. Div.
Celebrating 25 Years and Looking Toward the Future
Congratulations FutureChurch!

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Don and Kathy Rynbrandt
Barb and Frank Tercek
Mary C. Michael
Bill and Emmy Lou Plato
Mary Ann Theby
Mary C. Mitro
Mary Nemec
Stephanie Hunt
Katie Burke
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Jackie Eastman
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Ingrid Angel

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Pat and Joyce Casey
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FutureChurch
With gratitude for the many supporters of our 25th Annual Benefit
As of November 2, 2015

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Barbara Beimesch
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Mary Catherine Bunting
Mary Louise Chesley-Cara
Charles Davis
E. Thomas Dowd
Bette Downing
Constance Dubick
Sarah Dwyer
Rita L. Houlihan
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Paul Lakeland

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With our Special Thanks
Maryanne Hiti, Maryanne Hiti Design
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Opening Prayer

**Linked to You**

*believing She is there*

Leader

_Holy Living God,_

your presence points to the absolute future,

_of the world throughout its history _

as that which provides its ultimate consummation.

You are in the world as ground, inspiration, and goal of all our struggles.

We know your presence

_when we stop a moment to ground ourselves in reality._

We feel your presence also when something in your creation

_suddenly overawes us._

But we are most linked to your passionate caring presence

_when we join the struggle for justice and freedom, _

whether we know you explicitly in the midst of it or not.

_All_

_Dynamic God, empowering and freeing,_

_In you we live and move and have our being._

AMEN.


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**Thursday**

**November 12, 2015**

_Cleveland Airport Marriott_

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**Meet the Speakers Reception**

**Dinner and Presentations**

_Welcome_  
Deborah Rose-Milavec  
Russ Petrus

_Opening Prayer_  
Deborah Rose-Milavec

**Dinner**

2015 Trivison Award Recipient  
_Dr. Paul Lakeland_  
Deborah Rose-Milavec

_Introduction of Sr. Theresa Kane_  
_Sr. Theresa Kane_  
Sr. Diana Culbertson

_Schenk Stories_  
_Sr. Theresa Kane_  
Fr. Michael Crosby

_Introduction of Fr. Michael Crosby_  
_Sr. Diana Culbertson_  
Sr. Christine Schenk

_Keynote Address_  
_Dr. Natalie Kertes Weaver_  
Russ Petrus

_Panel Discussion_  
_Possibilities for the Church_

**Announcements and Closing Prayer**  
Marie Graf
Featuring Keynote Speaker

**Fr. Michael Crosby**

**Michael Crosby** is a Capuchin Franciscan. He lives in community with other friars in a downtown Milwaukee parish that serves the urban poor, homeless and marginalized. His own ministry revolves around his attempt to proclaim the gospel of God’s Trinitarian reign and the conversion that is needed to bring about Trinitarian relationships of equality at all levels “on earth as it is in heaven.” He has been very involved in a wide range of issues—from South Africa and infant formula to climate change and tobacco control. He coordinates the work of religious institutions in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. Michael’s preaching and writing on contemporary biblical discipleship has taken him around the world. Toward this end he gives retreats, workshops and parish missions. He has written seventeen books and received numerous awards.

2015 Trivison Award Recipient

**Dr. Paul Lakeland**

**Dr. Paul Lakeland** will receive the Trivison Award on December 2, 2015 at Fairfield University at a 25th Anniversary Celebration where he will present a talk on *The Future of Ministry*.

**Dr. Paul Lakeland** is the Aloysius P. Kelley S.J. Professor of Catholic Studies and Director of Fairfield’s Center for Catholic Studies. Hired in 1981, he is a former chairperson of the Religious Studies Department and a former director of the Honors Program. He holds a Licentiate in Philosophy from Heythrop Pontifical Athenaeum (1969), an M.A. in English Language and Literature from Oxford University (1976), a Bachelor of Divinity from the University of London (1977) and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University (1981). Research interests include Roman Catholic ecclesiology, the theology of “la nouvelle theologie” especially the writings of Yves Congar, the place of the laity in the Catholic Church, and religion and the arts, especially literature. He has published widely and has been the recipient of numerous awards including Catholic Press Association Award for Best Book in Theology for *The Liberation of the Laity*, 2004.

Panelist Presenters

**A Founder, GenXer and Millenial discuss the Presence and Possibilities for the Church**

**Sr. Christine Schenk** is a Sister of St. Joseph and the co-founder of FutureChurch. In 1990, she worked with Fr. Louis Trivison and Catholics from parishes in the Cleveland area to ensure that the Eucharist would be available as the priest shortage unfolded. She retired in 2013 and continues to serve as Executive Director Emerita.

**Natalie Kertes Weaver, Ph.D.**, is Chair and Associate Professor of Religious Studies and the director of the Humanities program at Ursuline College in Pepper Pike, Ohio. Her areas of interest and expertise include feminist theology, theology of suffering and death, theology of the family, and religion and violence.

**Russ Petrus, M.Div.**, is Program Director for FutureChurch. Russ has over ten years of experience in ministry. He has a Master of Divinity from Weston Jesuit School of Theology—now a part of Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry where he focused his studies in the areas of sacramental theology and the history of liturgy.
From the Director’s Desk

Deborah Rose-Milavec

As my taxi sped along quiet roads lit pink by an awakening sun on the way to Fiumicino airport, tears of gratitude ran down my cheeks. The 2015 Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family had just concluded and I was heading home.

After days of rushing from one appointment to another, from one press briefing to another, working long hours to research and write my daily blog, the gesture of an elderly, bent over nun whose English was as impoverished as my Italian left me weeping. As I dragged my bags to the taxi, she stopped me, embraced me, kissed both my cheeks—and sent me off—surrounded by her pure kindness.

I doubt if she knew why I was there, but her simple act was a reminder of all that was real and important about the synod.

God breaks through.

As often as I was repulsed by the harsh attitudes of some prelates, I was more often touched by the many acts of sincerity, generosity and courage I witnessed.

Bishops confessed that they had a lot to learn from families. Bishops confessed that they wanted to learn. Bishops confessed that the synod was limited and that they were limited in resolving the issues that families face.

God breaks through.

And in the small group environment that Pope Francis had created it was the stories that changed hearts; the story of a little boy sharing his First Communion host with his father who was divorced and remarried; the Filipino couple who lost two sons and pleaded for a church that accompanied the suffering; and, the story of refugees fleeing their beloved home in Syria and who were desperate for help. It was the stories that melted the hearts of the people sitting in the synod hall.

God breaks through.

As I traveled back and forth to the synod hall, I stopped regularly at a beautiful old Church that was dedicated to John Paul II. I sat in silence listening for God. I lit a single candle for the women in the Church and in the world— that one day they would live free of violence and in full and equal partnership with their brothers in the Church and in the world. That day is coming.

God breaks through.

As I sat in the Vatican press room on the last day and read the words of Pope Francis in his closing address, I was overcome with emotion again. He said, “Listen—speak frankly—don’t hurl stones—don’t sit and judge—bear witness to God’s love for everyone. I heard him proclaim this Good News to the cardinals, to the bishops, to all Catholics and to me.

God breaks through.

Catholics find rays of hope as the Ordinary Synod on the Family comes to a close

As the Ordinary Synod on the Family comes to a close, Catholics can be assured some of the old ineffective dogmas are losing their grip despite the efforts of some to block any changes. This Bishop of Rome, with a strong contingent of allies, is untying a few knots.

Shifting to a new format for the synod—small groups—Pope Francis separated the power brokers, contained their influence and got people talking at a deeper level than previously experienced.

In many of the thirteen language groups, bishops listened and learned, something the Pope encouraged during his remarks at the 50th anniversary celebration of the synod. The stories they heard hollowed out room for new conversations about pastoral practice and language.

Interventions from auditors Sr. Maureen Kelleher, Sharron Cole and Sr. Carmen Sammutt, as well as voting members like Archbishop Paul-Andre Durocher and Archabbot Jeremias Schroder raised awareness about violence against women, the lack of gender parity in the Church and in society and, surprisingly, the need for women deacons.
FutureChurch Urges Synod on the Family to Discuss Greater Roles for Women in the Church

Pope Francis has repeatedly called for a “more widespread and incisive female presence” in the Church. One Canadian Archbishop, Paul-Andre Durocher of Gatineau, Quebec, took that call seriously by proposing that the Synod on the Family reflect on the possibility of allowing more women into leadership and decision making and to open the way for female deacons. Archbishop Durocher made his remarks on October 6th.

In a press statement released the same day as Archbishop Durocher made his proposals, FutureChurch executive director, Deborah Rose-Milvec said, “FutureChurch urges the Synod on the Family to take up Archbishop Durocher’s proposal calling for greater roles for women in the Church and for ordaining women deacons because we need both women and men governing and ministering in the Church.”

In addition, FutureChurch launched a petition calling on bishops participating in the Synod on the Family to take up Archbishop Durocher’s proposal for ordaining women to the diaconate and welcoming them into roles with decision-making authority within the Curia and in local Church structures. In under a week, over 8,300 supporters signed the petition, which was delivered to the bishops participating in the Synod.

Catholics find rays of hope, continued

In his allotted three-minute intervention, Archbishop Durocher urged bishops to consider new roles for women, including women deacons.

FutureChurch responded quickly launching an online petition supporting his effort and reaching out to individual delegates asking them to support him. Deb met with Archbishop Durocher to express gratitude, talk about future strategies and to deliver the signatures. Archbishop Durocher assured her that he would continue to bring these issues forward in his own conference.

The interventions of the auditors, Durocher and other delegates found their way, in part, into the final relatio stating the church should show, “greater recognition of their [women] responsibility in the church: their participation in decision-making processes, their participation in the governance of some institutions, their involvement in the formation of ordained ministers”(27).

The German contingent of bishops wielded enough influence to create a wider opening for divorced and remarried Catholics up and against staunch opposition. And while the final document did not explicitly open the doors to Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics, it re-affirmed and strengthened the recognition that we need to find ways to integrate all Catholics into our faith life. Many bishops ultimately want Pope Francis to decide.

The final document left most of the necessary discussions about LGBT Catholics for another day, repeated the language of dignity, reaffirmed the Church’s opposition to marriage equality, but also included the language of accompaniment so that “all may learn to take off his sandals before the sacred ground of the other” (cf. Ex. 3,5), a powerful exhortation to put away destructive old judgments.

While the final relatio did not sort out all the thorny questions, it did make a start.

The new small group process was nothing short of revolutionary in the staid environment of synodal worlds where bishops had been closely controlled and served to rubber stamp papal pronouncements.

What the document did not capture was the transformative power of a Francis synod. Hearts were changed and imaginations opened. In this new environment it was safe to let go of the instinct to control.

Cardinal Donald Wuerl said it best, “No longer is the framework of the church’s pastoral response the code of canon law.” (America, 24 Oct 15).

To that we say, “Amen.”
#OpenOrdination Campaign Highlights Continued

**Decline in Number of Priests, Parishes in US**

The Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University keeps track of vital Catholic statistics and shows those numbers in five-year increments on its website. When the 2015 numbers were released, the data revealed the devastating consequences of the priest shortage in the United States. The total number of diocesan priests in the United States dropped from 27,182 in 2010 to 25,868 in 2015 – a reduction of 1,314. The percentage of priests available for active ministry also dropped from 68% to 66% in the same span of time. In 2015 just over 17,000 diocesan priests were available for active ministry. This data reinforces the validity of the prediction that CARA made in 2009 that nearly half of all currently active priests would retire by 2019.

Perhaps even more troubling, however, is how these numbers play out in the lives of everyday Catholics. Despite a growing Catholic population, the priest shortage has prompted the closing of more than 620 parishes in just the last five years, displacing hundreds of thousands of Catholics. Moreover, research conducted by the Catholic Research Forum of the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development in 2003 suggests that parish closings and mergers are responsible for some of the 25 million adults who identify themselves as “former Catholics.” More closures and mergers will continue to alienate Catholics while failing to meet the sacramental needs of a growing number.

Responding to this updated information, FutureChurch launched a social media campaign, #OpenOrdination, to increase awareness of the critical shortage of priests and its calamitous effects while urging Catholics to speak out in favor of opening ordination to married priests and women deacons. Since launching the campaign in July, over 700 new signatures have been added to FutureChurch’s 2014 Open Letter to the United States Council of Catholic Bishops asking them to open a discussion of the priest shortage, parish closings, women deacons, and optional celibacy for priests at their general assemblies with a view to presenting concrete suggestions for opening ordination to Pope Francis.

**FutureChurch pilgrims in Greece follow in the footsteps of Lydia, Phoebe and other women of the early church**

Thirty one women and three men from four countries traveled to Greece with FutureChurch’s Deborah Rose-Milavec and world-renowned scholar Sr. Carolyn Osiek to explore the sacred ground where Christian women witnessed to the message of the Gospel. We also walked the paths where women sought solace and protection from the goddesses they knew best, such as Athena, Artemis, Persephone and Afeia.


In Philippi we visited the place where Lydia and her household met Paul and Silas and were baptized (Acts 16:11-15). Our prayer service honored Lydia and our Christian foremothers and the women who lead in the church today.

In Thessaloniki, we visited the Church of St. Demetrius where many beautiful icons of women saints and martyrs like Irene, Olympias, Annyxia, Chione and Agape helped us experience the powerful presence of the communion of saints.

In Corinth, we visited the area where Paul first met Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1-3) and took up the trade of tent making with them.

We visited at the seaport of Cenchreae where Phoebe the deacon lived (Rom 16:1-2). Walking on the sacred ground where she once walked, we considered her witness and her work as well as her charge as a deacon and her role carrying Paul’s letter to Rome.

On the island of Aegina at the Temple of Afeia we prayed together honoring the God Beyond All Names—the culmination of our shared experience and our learning about the women of faith from long ago. From Lydia to Phoebe, Aquila to Chione, Agape to Athena, Irene to Iris - we honored all that is holy and sacred.

The hymn by Bernadette Farrell sums up the movement in our hearts during this journey together.

*God, beyond our dreams, you have stirred in us a memory, you have placed your powerful spirit in the hearts of humankind. God, beyond all names, you have made us in your image, we are like you, we reflect you, we are woman, we are man.*
On March 8, 2015, International Women’s Day, four women from Sweden, India, Rome and the United Kingdom dared to dream aloud about their hopes for the future of women’s roles in the Catholic Church. From inside the Vatican, this first-of-its-kind discussion under the auspices of Voices of Faith (voicesoffaith.org) evoked hope—a sign that Francis’s quest for greater dialogue is real in a structure which has too often maintained its power by suppressing the voices of the loyal opposition and, significantly, women’s voices.

In an hour-long panel discussion led by FutureChurch’s Deborah Rose-Milavec, Ulla Gudmundson, diplomat and Sweden’s former ambassador to the Holy See; Astrid Lobo-Gajiwala, scientist and feminist leader from India; Gudrun Sailer, journalist for Vatican Radio; and Tina Beattie, professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Roehampton in London talked about their experiences with the church and their dreams and hopes for women’s leadership, ministry and roles.

Where are the women?

Throughout the hour, there were times when the room grew very still with the weight of the words being spoken or lit with laughter and applause as the four touched the audience’s hearts, minds and funny bones with their keen insights.

While Gudrun Sailer believed that the Church had made great strides in including women, she dreamt of a church in which governance was not tied to ordination and where the mentality of the clergy changed so that, instead of just two women undersecretaries in the dicasteries, there would be ten or twenty in the next couple of years.

Ulla Gudmundson admitted that in her role as ambassador to the Holy See from 2008 through 2013, she was struck by the absence of women there, especially in high-level positions. She also noticed that when clerics spoke about women, they described them collectively as “tender, patient, sensitive, motherly, empathetic and gentle,” descriptors that Gudmundson felt shortchanged a much broader set of qualities that belong to women.

Gudmundson dreamed of a church that gave “freedom to both women and men to realize their full human potential…”

Astrid Lobo-Gajiwala acknowledged that her experience with the Church was often frustrating because, “governance is linked with ordination.” She pointed to the absurdities of women professors teaching homiletics but not being able to preach the homily, or of women going through the diaconate training program along with their husbands without the same opportunity to be ordained alongside them.

Yet, in some arenas, Gajiwala found a great deal of satisfaction. In 2008, the bishops of India asked her to help draft a gender policy for the entire Catholic Church of India. Along with Sr. Lily Francis and others, a draft was prepared that was later approved by the bishops. “I really felt respected,” noting the significance of the process. “They trusted the women to be strong, courageous, intelligent, to exercise all these qualities. And I would also like to see men have the opportunity to be tender, patient, sensitive, etc.” She drew more laughter and applause when she added, “I think Pope Francis is a shining example of ‘feminine genius’: patient, tender, emphasizing mercy and love.”

Tina Beattie, a longtime advocate for women’s ordination, suggested that if ordination is ruled out and “we are asked to accept that and respect it, we have to see that in every single other situation there is full and equal promotion of women’s leadership in the Church, that every single position that does not require ordination is equally filled by men and women.”

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FutureChurch helps New York parishioners defend canonical rights

Catholics from over 25 parishes in the Archdiocese of New York appealed November 2nd 2014 and May 2015 announcements by Cardinal Timothy Dolan that would merge 149 of the archdiocese’s 368 parishes. Sadly, the archdiocese initially obstructed parishioners’ rights to appeal by refusing to make public the canonical decrees giving reasons for each merger. These documents are required for any appeal to the Vatican.

A barrage of letters and telephone calls finally led to a handful people being permitted to view their individual decrees last December but only by appointment and only under the surveillance of diocesan personnel with no photographs or notes permitted. Because of the confusion and lack of access to the decrees, many appeals were denied since appeal letters must be sent within ten days of the date the decree was issued. It was only discovered in late December that decrees were dated November 2nd too late for many to appeal.

Finally, on February 11th 2015, after numerous requests asking the Vatican to intervene, the archdiocese posted the decrees online. A spokesperson lamely explained to the New York Times that it had been an oversight and the archdiocese had intended to post the decrees all along. For many New York Catholics, these comments constituted a new low in credibility. The same Times story documented that while the archdiocese routinely touts the democratic nature of its Making All Things New reconfiguration process, many final decisions contradicted recommendations from the parish committees.

FutureChurch cofounder, Sr. Chris Schenk has been working closely with canon lawyer Sr. Kate Kuenstler to support beleaguered New York parishioners, who understandably feel betrayed by their episcopal leadership. At this writing, at least 15 New York appeals have been accepted for review in Rome. Four were denied at least in part because of confusion caused by the Archdiocese’s failure to provide the decrees. Vatican officials recently notified appealing parishioners that their cases have been extended until November 2015.

In addition to the New York Archdiocese, FutureChurch has provided support and free resources to parishioners across the U.S. and around the world over the past year.
Catholics faithfully support LCWR through the crisis

The mid-April resolution of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s (CDF) mandate against the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) is a second win-win for U.S. sisters and for Pope Francis who concluded the Apostolic Visitation Report in a similarly positive manner last December. It seems the Vatican finally realized some leading U.S. prelates had given them gravely misleading reports about U.S. nuns.

On the positive side, contemporary religious life has been affirmed at last, not only by the thousands of ordinary Catholics who came to their defense, but also the Vatican itself. Consider this excerpt from the Apostolic Visitation Report:

“In a spirit of creative fidelity to their charisms, [the sisters] branched out in new ministries to those most on the margins of the Church and society. Women religious in the United States also notably pursued ongoing theological and professional formation seeking to further their ability to serve the Church’s evangelizing mission and to prepare others to collaborate in it as well.”

The petition went on to state that correcting the record on Mary of Magdala “would provide a good historical and biblical starting point to discuss the role of women in the Church today” – a discussion that Pope Francis has called for numerous times.

In just three months, 1,500 people joined the call by signing onto the petition. In October, while in Rome for the Synod on the Family, FutureChurch Executive Director, Deborah Rose-Milavec, hand delivered the petition and the signatures to Archbishop Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

FutureChurch concurrently released a new resource, #ReclaimMagdala, which compiled existing Mary of Magdala educational resources and projects such as the Gospel Restoration Project and Mary of Magdala Feast Day Celebrations into one convenient package. The resource also gave practical suggestions for telling the true story of Mary of Magdala online and in social media using the hashtag #ReclaimMagdala. The resource has been a big hit with audiences at the 2015 Assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in Houston and the 2015 Women’s Ordination Worldwide Conference in Chicago.

FutureChurch calls on Pope Francis to Correct the Record on St. Mary of Magdala, for Mercy’s Sake!

In March of this year, Pope Francis announced a Jubilee Year of Mercy, calling on the entire Church to take up one of his papacy’s central themes. The jubilee year will begin on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which is December 8, 2015. It will close on the feast of Christ the King, November 20, 2016.

Then, in May, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization – the body charged with organizing the details of the Year of Mercy – released the “Prayer for Mercy” written especially for the Holy Year. While much of the prayer is beautifully written, it falls short by perpetuating the historically inaccurate portrayal of Mary of Magdala as a prostitute and public sinner by pairing her with the “adulteress” and stating that she sought “happiness only in created things.”

In response, FutureChurch launched a petition in July calling for a public correction on Mary of Magdala, saying that “the portrayal of Mary of Magdala as a repentant prostitute has overshadowed her true role in the early Church and has contributed to the marginalization of women in the Church throughout the centuries and even to this day.”

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Priesthood Sunday Expands to Include Priestly Retirement

On February 24, 2015, The National Catholic Reporter published research conducted by Jack Ruhl, professor of accountancy at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, which revealed that 74% of diocesan pension plans for priests were severely underfunded. If these plans were subject to the Department of Labor requirements that most pension plans are, they would have to adapt immediate strategies and plans to improve and rehabilitate their funding.

The FutureChurch Optional Celibacy Advisory Committee, the group responsible for planning Priesthood Sunday Celebrations, opted to expand the 2015 Priesthood Sunday Celebrations to include priestly retirement alongside the issues of optional celibacy and women deacons, which have been part of the celebrations since their beginning in 2010.

The new Priesthood Sunday Organizing Kit was released at the beginning of September 2015 and included several new resources on priestly retirement including: an interactive spreadsheet with all of the data collected by Jack Ruhl, a suggested letter to bishops on behalf of retired priests, a prayer service for retiring priests, a prayer for retired priests, and a litany for retiring priests.

The Organizing Kit also offered new and updated resources on optional celibacy and women deacons including a completely updated “Brief History of Celibacy in the Catholic Church,” which documents recent statements on celibacy by Pope Francis and bishops around the world; a brand new “10 Reasons to Allow Married Priesthood,” which includes the latest polling data and developments in the Church; and a revised version of “7 Reasons to Restore Female Deacons.”

Priesthood Sunday was celebrated on October 25th this year. At the time of writing over 60 celebrations were being planned, including 8 international celebrations in Canada, Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom.

By 2019 Half of All Active Priests Plan to Retire

We can’t take care of them. And we have no one to replace them.

Priesthood Sunday is October 25th
Download Your Organizing Kit Today at www.futurechurch.org

International meeting of Catholic priest associations and lay reform groups call for expanded roles for women and new strategies for keeping parishes open

From April 13-17, 2015, thirty-eight Catholics from priest associations and church reform organizations across ten countries met in Limerick, Ireland, to discuss some of the most pressing issues facing the Church today and to work together for change.

The second such meeting, men and women, both ordained and lay, developed common strategies for expanding women's roles in the Church and keeping parishes open. In May, the group adopted and sent an Open Letter to Pope Francis urging him to open ordination and develop new models of pastoral ministry and management to keep local parishes open rather than merging or closing them. In September the group launched an open letter petition along the same lines asking Pope Francis to urge the world's bishops to find creative ways to keep parishes open rather than merging or closing them.

The Limerick conference was also important because questions arose regarding women's roles as the group prepared to celebrate the Eucharist. Some of the women reasoned that the Eucharist, the sign and symbol of our unity in the Church, should reflect our common work together in Limerick as co-equals. One person asked, “After working alongside each other these last few days, how can we celebrate a Eucharist that isn't a sign of our unity? Could a woman co-preside?”

After the long, painful, but ultimately rich conversation, the group decided to forego the celebration of the Eucharist. In its stead a prayer service was held, designed to help honor the sorrow felt by so many regarding the many barriers women still face -- a sacramental sign of our shared pain and our common hope for a Church that will one day honor women as true partners and equals in all aspects of Church ministry and life.
FutureChurch was honored to host Sisters Ruthmary Powers and Josie Chroniak, both Sisters of the Humility of Mary, at our July 22nd Mary of Magdala Celebration in Cleveland. The theme for the evening’s prayer was “Being a Witness for the Victims of Human Trafficking.”

Through their work with the Collaborative Initiative to End Human Trafficking, Sisters Ruthmary and Josie are shedding light on what they call “a hidden problem.” Their message was all the more poignant within the context of our touching Mary of Magdala prayer service which paired the first-person accounts of victims of human trafficking with John’s complete account of the exchange between Mary of Magdala and Jesus at the tomb on Easter morning.

Listening to the stories of victims and to the story of the Resurrection, one couldn’t help but draw parallels between the victims of modern day trafficking and the long tradition of “trafficking” Mary of Magdala’s false reputation as a prostitute. Atrocious abuses such as rapes, beatings, emotional manipulations, and threats of deportation silence the victims of human trafficking, just as the abusive portrayal of Mary of Magdala as a sinful woman and a repentant prostitute has silenced her true role as the first witness to the resurrection, “Apostle to the Apostles”, and influential leader in the early Christian community.

Neither the victims of human trafficking nor Mary of Magdala are able to speak for themselves. It is up to us to be witnesses for them, to tell their stories, to pull them out of the shadows cast by those who would use them for their own purposes and into the light of freedom to be who and what God has called them to be.

Catholic priests and people launch petition to keep parishes open as Pope Francis visits U.S.

During Pope Francis’s trip to the United States, he visited Our Lady Queen of Angels school where the parish had been closed down amid protest in 2007. The families of two of the women who had helped lead those protests and later died conducted their funerals on the sidewalk in front of the locked church. Today, parishioners still gather to pray together and when they learned Pope Francis would be visiting their school they prayed for a miracle.

No such miracle occurred, but the Pope’s visit provided an opportunity to show the devastating effects of parish closings on Catholics who have shared a common Eucharistic life and worked together to make the Gospel real in the lives of those at the margins.

FutureChurch, six international Priest Associations including the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests launched an open letter petition asking Pope Francis to urge U.S. and world bishops to end the merging and closing of parishes and to find creative and pastoral ways to keep local parish communities alive. To learn more or sign the petition go to action.groundswell-mvmt.org/petitions/pope-francis-help-us-build-the-church-by-keeping-our-parishes-open.

Slicing and dicing “complementarity” at Women’s Ordination Worldwide Conference

FutureChurch’s Deborah Rose-Milavec gave a well-received workshop presenting the history complementarity in Catholic thought, how and when it landed in our lexicon, the pitfalls of the framework, and what we need to do to educate other Catholics about its limitations. To learn more or schedule a presentation contact FutureChurch.
futurechurch teleconference series continues

the futurechurch teleconference series is always exciting and informative and it allows us to bring world renowned scholars and leaders right into the comfort of your home.

our line up this past year included, fr. thomas reese, dr. richard gaillardetz, fr. thomas rosica and fr. michael crosby.

in august 2015, astrid lobo gajiwala talked about her work drafting the gender policy of the catholic church of india. released in 2010, the bishops of india instituted a model for raising awareness and bringing women into more equitable roles in society and in the church.

astrid said the women who worked on the policy felt respected. the bishops trusted them to articulate their own vision and gave them the freedom to shape the document.

after the women wrote the document the bishops endorsed it.

to learn more about the gender policy of the catholic church of india go to: http://cbci.in/downloadmat/gender_policy.pdf

in september 2015, we dr. elizabeth johnson, csj graciously agreed to help us launch our mary of nazareth project by giving a presentation about her entitled “will the real mary please stand up?”

referring first to her historical roots, dr. johnson laid out a picture of a poor jewish women who lived in an oppressed community. she also traced some aspects of her image throughout hisotry and her role for the church today.

you can listen to the podcasts by going to our website: futurechurch.org/podcasts.

futurechurch welcomes women deacons intern, luke hansen, s.j.

futurechurch is pleased to welcome luke hansen, s.j. onto our team as an intern for our women deacons work. luke is master of divinity student at the jesuit school of theology in berkeley, california on track towards ordination in the society of jesus. luke will be working with futurechurch for the upcoming year as a part of his field education.

when asked why he was interested in working with futurechurch, luke reflects, “i admire futurechurch’s consistent witness over 25 years. it is an organization full of people who love the church and want the church to better serve its mission. they are deeply rooted, spiritually, and have always valued parish life and dialogue with church leaders.”

luke hopes to make the most of this field education working for the ordination of women deacons: “women are already serving in some diaconal roles but the church is unnecessarily denying them the grace of the sacrament of holy orders. pope benedict and pope francis have called for greater roles for women in the ministry of the church. to ordain women as deacons makes it real.”

opening ordination to women deacons is a deeply personal cause for luke, who notes, “i have met women who are drawn to these ministries and have experienced a call from god and their community to serve as a deacon. we need them. there is no legitimate reason to exclude them.”

luke reflects that through his experience in a number of different ministries, “i have begun to understand—as a man, a member of a religious order, and a candidate for priesthood—how much privilege i have in the church, and i have experienced god calling me to become more involved in the renewal of the catholic church.”

luke’s work will include developing new resources for advocating for women deacons as well as resources and opportunities for those women who are discerning a call to the diaconate.

we’re happy to welcome luke and we pray for god’s blessings on his time with futurechurch and beyond!
The Catholic Tipping Point returns with Fr. Tony Flannery

From October 21 – November 19, 2014, Fr. Tony Flannery, founder of the Association of Catholic Priests and author of, “A Question of Conscience,” toured 18 cities throughout the United States talking about the role of conscience in the Catholic Church today. The tour entitled, People of Conscience: Reforming the Church Today was sponsored by fifteen organizations led by FutureChurch under the auspices of the Catholic Tipping Point.

Fr. Flannery joined the Redemptorists at the age of seventeen in 1964, and was ordained a priest in 1974. He spent his priestly life as a preacher of missions, novenas and retreats, mostly around Ireland. He has written a number of books, and numerous articles in a variety of publications, both religious and secular. For about fourteen years he contributed a regular column for the Redemptorist magazine, Reality.

In 2012 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) objected to some of his writings. He was summoned to Rome, told he could not minister as a priest or serve as leader of the Association of Catholic Priests. After months of negotiations, the CDF demanded that Fr. Flannery state in writing his acceptance of all the moral teachings of the Church while rejecting any notion that women could be ordained priests. This was a demand that he could not accept in good conscience. In 2013 he published his story in “A Question of Conscience.’

Throughout his eighteen city tour, Fr. Flannery met thousands of Catholics who welcomed his message and were renewed by his vision. As people gathered in cities across the U.S., they sent hundreds of postcards to their local bishops urging them to take action on a variety of reform issues including women’s ordination, worker justice and other important local issues.

Worldwide Mary Magdala Celebrations Continue to Uncover the Church’s Earliest Practice of Inclusive Leadership

Celebrating Mary of Magdala takes on renewed purpose as Pope Francis calls for a more incisive role for women in the Church. By remembering Mary of Magdala as the Apostle to the Apostles and trusted leader in the early Christian community, we can uncover and restore the Church’s earliest tradition of male and female leadership, modeled on the inclusive practice of Jesus.

FutureChurch’s Magdala Project, now in its 19th year, continues to inspire organizers and participants worldwide to tell the true story of Mary of Magdala. More than 200 organizers held celebrations this summer to honor the July 22nd Feast of St. Mary of Magdala. 29 celebrations were held outside of the United States in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Mexico, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Uganda.

Visit futurechurch-blog.org for highlights from this year’s celebrations.

Radical Grace Delights Audiences in Cleveland

Near capacity crowds filled the Cleveland Museum of Art’s Morley Lecture Hall for two screenings of the new documentary Radical Grace on Friday October 2nd and Sunday October 4th.

Radical Grace Director, Rebecca Parrish, followed three nuns for four years as they worked to reform both our society and the Church, despite actions from the Vatican that threatened to silence them and suppress their missions. The result is a brilliant film which captures so beautifully the faith, bravery, compassion, sense of humor, and tenacity that so many of us have come to love and admire about women religious.

FutureChurch co-founder, Sr. Christine Schenk, one of the films three subjects delighted audiences during the post-film question and answer session that raised a myriad of topics including what it was like to have a camera crew following her for years, the important role FutureChurch members played in helping the nuns through the Vatican oversight, the potential for women’s leadership in the Church under Pope Francis, and the evidence that women held leadership positions in the early Church.
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Jerry and Eileen Jarc, Hosts

Proudly featuring Sr. Christine Schenk’s column, Simply Spirit.

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From the
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Mary’s Pence

Mary’s Pence congratulates FutureChurch on 25 years of dedicated Catholic leadership.

With the support of our donors, Mary’s Pence funds women’s social justice projects across the Americas.

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The Community of St. Bridget

An inclusive Catholic community
invites you to celebrate Eucharist with us Saturdays at 5 pm
Brecksville United Church of Christ
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All are welcome at our table!
www.CommunityOfStBridget.org

Proudly featuring Sr. Christine Schenk’s column, Simply Spirit.
6 weeks of sessions include:
Reform Throughout the Ages, Aaron Bianco, S.T.D.
Jesus the Reformer, Emily Dykman, D.Min.
To Reform or Not to Reform, MT Davila, Ph.D.
Called to be Church, Called to Reform, Robert Ludwig, Ph.D.
Spirituality of Reform, Kimberly Lymore, D.Min.
Organizing for Justice, Melissa Browning, Ph.D.

For More Information: CTA-USA.ORG/MINI-COURSE

CALL TO ACTION

New Ways Ministry honors and thanks Sr. Chris Schenk for her work to create a more just and inclusive church

Join our Co-Founder, Sr. Jeannine Gramick, for
Ireland:
Land of Rainbows and Wedding Bells
An LGBT-friendly Catholic pilgrimage
April 11-18, 2016

The Sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph offer warm congratulations to FutureChurch as you celebrate your 25th anniversary.

Together we believe in fostering deep relationships with God, with one another, and with all creation, and we live and work for unity with you. We pray for your ministry, your vision and your leadership in our church.

New Ways Ministry honors and thanks Sr. Chris Schenk for her work to create a more just and inclusive church

And blessings on your mission, vision and activities to effect change in the Church

humidityofmary.org
Closing Prayer

Group 1
God of faithfulness, we come to you at the end of a day, and find ourselves needing to begin again on new projects and new ideas. We are in need of energy and renewed hope.

Group 2
What change are we able to effect by all our words or actions or prayer? What do our efforts matter? We are in need of your grace to unsettle and redirect our hearts.

Group 1
We are in need of your power to rekindle and sustain our passion for justice.

Group 2
We are in need of your love that we might recognize the ever-present possibility for change and conversion and growth.

All
We believe your Spirit is at work in our world. Give us eyes of faith that we might see such wonders in our midst and the courage to live in hope.

AMEN.

Congratulations, FutureChurch, on 25th Anniversary

As FutureChurch gathers for its 25th anniversary celebration, we offer our congratulations and commend FutureChurch’s ongoing commitment to The Church: Presence & Possibility.

A special thank you to our Optional Celibacy and Women in Church Leadership Advisory Committee.

With gratitude to the FutureChurch supporters and contacts for all their help, support and prayers throughout the year.
Our Mission

FutureChurch seeks changes that will provide all Roman Catholics the opportunity to participate fully in Church life and leadership.

Our Vision

FutureChurch works for:

- Just, open and collaborative structures for Catholic worship, organization and governance.
- A return to the Church’s early tradition of both married and celibate priests.
- A return to the Church’s earliest tradition, modeled on the inclusive practice of Jesus, of recognizing both female and male leaders of faith communities.
- Regular access to the Eucharist, the center of Catholic life and worship, for all Catholics.

New Opportunities and Resources

Mary of Nazareth Project: Restoring Mary to her Own Time and Place

Reinterpreting Our Lady of Guadalupe

Educational resources tracing Mary’s development from Jewish maiden to queen of the universe, written by Mary Christine Athans are the fruit of the latest historical research, post-Vatican II Jewish-Christian dialogue, insights from feminist theology and contemporary spiritual reflection. Athans helps us to restore Mary to her own time and place and rediscover Mary’s message for our own time.

In the first installment of this project, Jeanette Rodriguez provides a detailed study of the symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Her conclusions dispute the common perception that Guadalupe is a model of servility and suffering. Rather, she reinterprets the symbol of Guadalupe as a liberating and empowering catalyst for Mexican-American women and indeed all women.

Highlights of the Mary of Nazareth: Our Lady of Guadalupe Resource:

- Educational Resources on Mary from the Early Church to Modern Day by Mary Christine Athans
- Educational Resources on the Symbolism of Our Lady of Guadalupe by Jeanette Rodriguez
- Prayer Service in Honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe by Sr. Christine Schenk, CSJ

Reflections on Images and Readings Related to Our Lady of Guadalupe by Judith Davis