

Future Church

Jamie Manson

Deborah Rose-Milavec

I will now introduce our guest speaker Jamie. Jamie Manson is a columnist and the books editor at the National Catholic Reporter. Probably everyone on the phone knows that. To her knowledge, she is the only out, queer woman in the global Catholic media. Fantastic.

Jamie received her Master of Divinity degree from Yale Divinity School, where she studied theology, spirituality, and sexual ethics. She served as research assistant to Margaret Farley, work that she continues to do to this day. In 2015, she edited the book, *Changing the Questions: Explorations in Christian Ethics*, a collection of writings by Margaret Farley, published by Orbis.

She began her career as director of publications at Yale Divinity School, where she created an entirely new publications program and relaunched the School's magazine, *Reflections*, serving as editor-in-chief for five years. Her calling to be an activist ignited in 2005, when she was hired as pastoral associate and director of faith formation at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Manhattan, a parish dedicated to lifting up the poor, homeless, and LGBTQ people.

In 2008, she was hired as director of social justice ministries at Jan Hus Presbyterian Church in New York City, where she ministered full-time to the needs of Manhattan's poor and homeless population.

In 2008, she also began writing her National Catholic Reporter column, *Grace on the Margins*, a very popular column, which has won dozens of awards from the Catholic Press Association and the Religious News Writers Association. She also won the 2015 Wilbur Award for best online religious news story for the story, *Feminism and Faith*, written for BuzzFeed.

Her activism on behalf of women and the LGBTQ people earned her the Theresa Kane Award for Women of Vision and Courage from Women's Ordination Worldwide in 2015.

A native of New York, Jamie lives on the south shore of Long Island and travels around the country as a speaker, retreat leader, and media commentator on issues related to women and LGBTQ Catholics, young adult Catholics, and the future of the Church.

In 2012, Jamie was the featured speaker at the annual gathering for the Leadership Conference for Women Religious. That year, she offered a powerful reflection, one that all of you got to access when you signed up for the conference, on the future of communities of women religious and the emerging and growing desire of Catholic women, especially those who had invested in their own theological education and who had transformative experiences of community in the course of their university life, to be more profoundly engaged in community and mentorship. Her talk was well received, to say the least, by leaders there.

Then came the Vatican mandate and this aspirational insight was lost in the sea of criticisms and condemnations coming out of Rom.

We're here today to resurrect this conversation and to begin anew the rich and wide-reaching conversation we need to have together about the vibrancy and future of religious life. We all know that women religious have pioneered the best of what it means to be Catholic in the United States and beyond, and as my friend and colleague, Petra Dancova, from Voices of Faith, has said so beautifully, religious communities are the greenhouses of the gospel. We want to work together to keep those greenhouses alive, robust, and continually taking risks for the sake of the gospel.

So, I'm going to turn this over to Jamie Manson.

Jamie Manson

Thanks so much, Deb. I really appreciate that lovely introduction. Whenever I hear my full bio I always say, gosh, I have trouble keeping a job. But it's very, very nice to be here. So, thank you.

And I appreciate your mentioning the talk I gave at LCWR religious, because a number of people have asked me, why are you speaking about the future religious life? You're not a sister. And it is because back in 2011, I had written a column for the National Catholic Reporter. It was called the Future of Religious Life and the Plight of Young Adult Catholic Women.

And it was published in November of 2011, and it got enough attention from the LCWR religious leadership that they asked me to speak at their annual meeting that following August. And it was a very heady meeting, as you said, because the crackdown had just started. But the reception I got to the ten-minute talk I gave was so powerful that I clearly touched on something. And so I'm really happy to be able to share it again with everyone.

And what got me to write the column initially was that there had been a lot of writing in the National Catholic Reporter about the future of religious life, and I think it was the previous LCWR religious meeting that people were sort of unpacking.

And what I noticed was that there was input from a lot of longtime, vowed women religious, a few younger women religious, but no one had been in conversation with young adult women, and specifically, young adult Catholic women who had degrees in theology and ministry who were not vowed but who, it dawned me, in another generation, would have been nuns. And that really strikes me more and more the more I reflect on it. So many of my young women friends and I say that had we been born in 1940 rather than 1975 or 1980 or 1985, we would have been nuns.

And so there are a few things I struggle with about the conversation about the future religious life. One is that young, non-vowed Catholic women who really feel some sort of a calling are

not invited into the conversation. And to me, the greatest struggle is, it seems to suggest, when we talk about this death of religious life, that God isn't calling women anymore, and I could not disagree with that more. And I base that on all of the young women I know, and there are so many more that I don't know who are studying theology, studying ministry.

And they're studying knowing in many cases that they have no place to go in their own church, and yet they feel somehow compelled to carry on with this. And I think those are the women that, for me in many ways, they are the most marginalized part of the Church right now, because they're so longing to serve and they have no place. And so many of these young women have told me, "I feel spiritually homeless."

So, it dawned on me that we had an older group of women religious who were really struggling to figure out what the future was, recognizing something was dying, not knowing what was emerging, and then I had all these young Catholic women speaking to me, saying, "We have no spiritual home." And so I had this great longing to get these two communities into conversation, and additionally, young women who are newly vowed, need to be part of that conversation too.

So that's why I wrote the piece and I got that invitation, and that is what started out this whole journey into this whole question. There's a book by Diarmuid O'Murchu, who I'm sure many people on the call know about. He has written quite a few books, but one of his most recent is with Orbis Press, and it's called *Religious Life in the 21st Century: The Prospect of Refounding*. And one of the key points he makes is that religious life has never been static, that it has always gone through a cyclical process of birth, death, and rebirth, and that this is a natural progression for religious life.

So what is emerging? We know something is emerging. And so why is it so tricky to figure out. And one of the reasons I think it is so tricky is that the new generation of young adults—so the Millennials, even some of the Generation X, which I'm technically part of, and even whoever is coming after the Millennials—have grown up in such a radically different sociological structure than any generation that has come before them.

When I try to explain this, I talk about my grandparents' generation versus my generation and those who have come after me. So my grandparents were born in the early 1920s. I was born in the late 1970s. And if you look at the social structure and the culture in which we grew up and how radically different it is—my grandparents grew up in a communal structure. They grew up in a time when the community told them who they were; the community gave them their identity; the community gave them their religious beliefs. All of these things were passed on by the community.

No one told my grandparents to go out and find themselves. No one told them to figure out what their religious beliefs would be. No one told them to figure out their own morality. These things were handed down by the older generations. And this is how all human beings lived. And in many parts of our world, human beings still live in a very communal structure of society.

By the time I came on the scene in the late '70s, and those who have come after me, have grown up in such a radically different understanding of our purpose, of where we are in life. We live in

a very individualistic society. So our needs come first before the needs of the community. Very different from my grandparents, who grew up understanding that you always sacrifice your individual desires for the desires of the community. So they grew up in that kind of a village model.

Not so much for new generations of people, Millennials particularly, who grew up not only in an individualistic society, but one in which they have been told—they did not really necessarily inherit a community, did not inherit a village. They have been told that they have to figure out what their religious beliefs are. They have been told to find their own communities. That's an enormous pressure to put on any individuals. They have to create their own communities now.

And I think the impact that has had on future religious life cannot be discounted, because most women religious who are serving today joined religious life before 1940. The vast majority grew up in such a different culture from today's Millennials in particular. And so the new generation is not necessarily born with a communal mindset.

And so what happens is, there's a lot of great benefit to that kind of individuality. Individual structures tend not to be so patriarchal, you tend to have unlimited freedom to choose what your future will be. But what has happened, I see, especially with Millennials, is that there's a lot of loneliness, there's a lot of sense of isolation, and now we're hearing more and more that things like Facebook are only doing more harm rather than good. They're only exacerbating those feelings of rootlessness and loneliness and isolation. And so this is a great struggle.

So, ironically, young people have all of this freedom and yet their hunger for community is so strong. They hunger almost for something they didn't grow up with. And so it has had a very interesting impact on religious life. Because the mindset is not to live in community, there's a fear, I think, of commitment, particularly by Millennials.

When I taught at university a few years ago, none of the young people I taught ever even dated. So the idea of making a life commitment to a religious community in the early '20s was just unthinkable. They weren't even ready to—like, dating was too much of a commitment. So all of these different sociological forces have had a great impact, not only on the future religious life, but even on the future of the Church, the future of the parish. I think young people are seeking smaller, more intimate communities where they can get that presence and that intimacy that they're lacking in their lives.

So what I find really interesting about women's religious communities is that, for me, those religious communities have always offered sort of what I call a parallel church. So what does that mean? So women's religious communities are deeply sacramental, which, if you've read anything I've ever written, I always talk about that as the great gem of the Catholic tradition—our sacramentality, our idea that all things in creation are capable of revealing God to us.

Women religious just understand that intrinsically. The life of prayer, the life of communal support, the life of contemplation—all of those things have helped women religious, I think, to do the work they have done. And we know well that women religious in the U.S. have been very intrepid from their beginnings. They've been very, very bold. They go to the broken places, the

toughest places. They see enormous amounts of suffering. How could they possibly have sustained themselves amidst that much darkness that they have had to witness without knowing that at home there was that communal support, that prayer, that solace waiting for them?

That is what the young Catholic woman I know are craving and are really lacking. So I say in this piece I wrote for the LCWR religious that Deb made available that so many adult women, and men, I know are doing what I call the traditional work of the Church.

Now, what did I mean by that? I didn't just mean parish ministry or different forms of religious ministry. What I meant was that, for me, the traditional work of the Church is what women religious have been doing, whether it's advocacy, social work, serving the poor, serving the homeless, trying to protect people caught in sex trafficking, supporting labor unions, going to these dangerous missionary places.

So many young adult Catholics I know are doing that or want to do that, but they don't have that basic communal support, that community to hold them, to teach them wisdom, to talk them through what they're going through and what they're seeing. And so that's one of my biggest concerns: that young women want to be intrepid, they want to go to these very, very high-risk places in their work, but they don't have a community to hold them.

And they also don't have the safety net, quite honestly, that women religious have, that they've offered each other. If they lose their job, well, they're in trouble. The community isn't going to be there to pick them up and support them. You know what's going on with health care in this country. They don't necessarily have health care, all of the different securities that women religious have given one another, which is a tremendous thing. It's a very just thing that they've given that to one another. So many of these young women, and young men, don't have that, and yet they want to go do this very, very high-risk work.

And so that's what I think: What is the great gift that women religious can offer these young men and these young women who, in another generation, probably would have joined religious life? They offer this incredible spiritual mentorship that I know so many of my friends are very hungry for. And I believe that they can. Many of them are so well trained in theology and ministry, they CAN perpetuate a charism, they CAN drive a mission. But they need that safe, sacramental space.

I think so many young people I know want to be Catholic in the way in which women religious are Catholic, and what I mean by that is, a non-hierarchical community grounded in the work of social justice, grounded in the life of prayer and communal support and communal sharing. So many people I know are longing for that.

So one thing I often invite women religious to do is to invite these young women and young men into their spaces to teach them, to give them mentorship, to give them just a space to be a safe sacramental space to be quiet, where they can even learn about the charism, where they can drink from the deep wells of the wisdom of women religious, so they can understand what it means to be Catholic in a way in which women religious uniquely understand that—not in a way in which the USCC women religious understands it or the ordinary parish understands it.

Because these young people aren't finding a home in the parish. They are not finding a place. Part of it is, the parish isn't equipped to know how to deal with young adults. They don't know how to welcome them, they don't know how to embrace them, they don't know what to do with their gifts and their skills. And I think there's a real opportunity for women religious to provide those kinds of spiritual homes where these young women can grow. And I think there has to be an openness to the way in which religious life is emerging.

And so I was looking at some of the questions I got from some of you that signed up. One of the questions I got was, "You have an example of a new sort of form of religious life that you know of," and I do. And one of my closest friends actually founded a community. It's called Benin Casa Community; it's in Manhattan. And it was envisioned by my very dear friend Karen [Gargamelli]. And later on, several people have joined her in that community. I consider them some of my closest friends. And though I'm not a part of the community, I guess you could almost say I'm an associate of the community.

And I could spend an hour telling you about them, but what I can tell you as a brief sketch is that these are young adults who live together. They share their meals together, they pray together daily, they have weekly liturgy, they share all of their money in common, and they have provided this space in Manhattan. They were able to get a large space in an old convent.

And Karen spent years looking for someone to give her a convent, because it was very important to her to continue that tradition and to be in a space that had that sacramental presence of women religious of generations before, and she finally found one. It was truly a miracle, given the New York City housing market, and the way in which the Cardinal was trying to shut down churches and sell them to developers.

And so they have, by Manhattan standards, a very large space, and they're welcoming in advocacy groups. They have Christ rooms for people who need temporary accommodation. They're providing all sorts of services to the community. They're connecting with farms, they're running a CSA. But the most important thing they're doing is that they're appealing to a lot of young adults.

And what they're finding more and more is that young adults, as they find out about this community, are coming to their doors, young adult Catholics who say, "I went to Catholic school" or "I have a Master's degree in Divinity" or "I have a doctorate in Theology." "I can't find a community. There's no place in me for the parish. This is the kind of Catholic that I want to experience."

Now, this Benin Casa community is deeply connected with the Dominican Sisters. The Dominican Sisters come in, they mentor them. And so they have that spiritual mentorship with the Dominicans. They're not canonical; they're not lay associates. They are their own unique, emerging community that is mentored by Dominican Sisters and by other sisters who they invite into the space.

But it's remarkable how many young adults are hearing about this community and are coming in and are interested in joining them.

Now, what makes this community different? Why are they not in religious life? Well, several members of the community, including Karen, considered religious life; tried. And for whatever reason, they did not fit in religious life. One of them maybe wanted to be more radical in terms of political views, or one of them wanted to be married; didn't want to take a vow of celibacy. But they still believe in the Dominican pillars; they're trying to live out that Dominican charism in what they're doing.

And every women religious they've talked to says, "Well, the vows have evolved for me." And I think that's something really important that we have to pay attention to, because so often when I talk to women religious about these communities, about these new, emerging forms of religious life, they're like, "But they're not taking the religious vows." And I think we have to be bold and say that those vows aren't working anymore. It doesn't mean that they're utterly useless and we cast them off. But women religious themselves will say, "Well, the vows have evolved for me." Well, they have evolved now for these young people, too.

And a lot of young people want to be married. Part of it is the loneliness and the individualism of our culture is that the need for a spouse, the need for a partner, has become much more urgent. We also don't have taboos around sexuality. We don't have this belief anymore that there's a superiority to virginity and celibacy over married life. We understand the holiness of married life now.

But what's interesting is, most women religious I talk to, when they talk about chastity or celibacy, will say, "Well, that's transformed for me and it's about availability." So someone who takes a vow of chastity or celibacy can be more available. Now, the young people who are living in Benin Casa Community are readily available. They are there to open the door at midnight; they are there to open the door to the stranger.

And that, I think, is a distinction. I got a lot of questions about, what's different from this new form of religious life versus a lay associate or companion. The difference is, there are a lot of young adult Catholics who want to dedicate their whole life to this. They want to consecrate their life. They want to open the door at three in the morning. They want to live among broken people.

There is a quality that is different. They're not associates. They don't want to have a life or career separate. I see myself as a lay associate of the Benin Casa Community. I don't live in the community with them, but I certainly am nourished by them spiritually. I pray with them; we eat together when I'm available. But there is something really different, I think, about this emerging life.

They lead a very simple life. They share all of their money and things in common. That sounds like an evolving understanding of poverty to me. And in terms of obedience, well, I think they have that model of obedience that the women religious I know have. It doesn't mean obedience to the man or obedience to the Pope; it's about consensus. It's about being in community

together and agreeing together, and listening to the spirit, and following where you think the spirit is leading. That's what obedience is for the women religious I know. That is how these communities are understanding obedience.

So this a whole other... They may not be making the traditional vows, but my goodness, this looks like the same kind of evolving vows that I hear older women religious talk about, and young women religious talk about.

So these are all things that have to be considered. And I think these communities are emerging more and more. I think they're popping up all over the country, and I think it's a very exciting time in this discussion. But I think we need to start to open our eyes to these communities and get into dialogue, because these young communities, these young adults, really need the support of the older generation. They need the mentorship, they need the space. There are so many things.

And when young adults hear about these new, emerging communities, young adult Catholics are showing up. This great question: Where are the young adult Catholics? Well, they're turning up at the doors of communities like Benin Casa. Who are they? They're married people who want to be in community. They're people who [discerned?] religious life or even tried out religious life and for whatever reason, didn't fit. There are women who feel spiritually homeless, who maybe feel called to the priesthood and maybe can't find a place in their church.

So there's really a lot of richness going on here, and I think we have to be open to the vows and how they're being expressed in these communities. And I think, also, we have to move beyond this—one of the most extraordinary things about women religious in the United States is, aside from maybe the Girl Scouts, the only community that has been founded by women, led by women, organized by women, and women and women alone. They are a vision of what it could look like if women were truly in power. And that is no small thing.

And by their nature, these communities are non-hierarchical. And so one of the things I hope we can get beyond is the hierarchy that I hear about so often between vowed women and non-vowed women. Also, I hear nuns refer to me as a lay person, and I'm always astonished, because they're lay people too. We're all lay people here. It's amazing. Women's religious communities are non-hierarchical within their communities, but a hierarchy creeps in when they start to relate to women like me, or men, or non-vowed people. And so that is something I would invite us to think about too.

But most important, I think we need to really open our eyes and open our hearts to see and hear that God is still calling. And to say that women religious life is dying is to say God isn't calling. And God most certainly is. And we have to open our eyes and we have to get into dialogue together—longtime vowed women religious, newly vowed women religious, and women and men who, in another generation, most certainly would have joined religious life but who have that longing to consecrate their whole lives to mission, to charism, and to community.

I have said a lot, and I want plenty of time for questions, because I really enjoy dialogue. That's when I remember to say all the things I forgot to tell you. So, Deb, is this a good time to open up for questions?

Q&A

Deb: Sure. So I'm going to take us into the question-and-answer period. I know there will be lots of questions, so when you hear someone else talk, just step back and just wait your return. [Provides phone instructions.]

Sister V: This is Sister Barbara Valukas. I'm a school sister of Notre Dame. And I'm a facilitator and have worked with religious congregations for about forty years helping them in their communal discernment. And I was the one who sent in the question about the communal discernment. How do you envision women religious or men religious, too, in dialogue with some of the women you described discerning together the future of religious life? How might this look?

Jamie: Thanks for the question. Karen and I have written a number of grants to create sort of an invitation-only consultation of these three groups of people: longtime vowed, newly vowed, and non-vowed. Unfortunately, we can't seem to get grant money to do this, but I think that what it would look like is, even just some sort of weekend retreat by invitation; a consultation, not a conference. Conferences are tricky. Not a lot of work can necessarily get done at a conference. But a consultation is a great thing.

And women religious have the gift of space very often, and the gift of retreat centers, and I think if you draw maybe ten longtime vowed, ten newly vowed, and ten non-vowed people for a weekend just to be in conversation. You have a few presentations. And that's what I think it would look like. And when Karen and I were pulling this together for grants, we were making our list of what women religious we know of, and what non-vowed, and what newly vowed, and we just had these enormous lists of just people we know moving in these circles.

And so that's really my idea; a brain trust, really, a brain trust around the country of people really thinking together.

Valukas: Thank you. That's very helpful. I also had thought, when you were describing these opportunities to come in dialogue, that it would need to take place in several different venues to begin to see what pattern is emerging.

Jamie: Yes, I agree, Sister. And not every woman religious is ready to have that conversation. There are certain women religious who I think are ready to have those conversations and I think we need to call them forward. Because it is a very scary conversation to have.

Sister V: Yes, it is.

Roses: My name is Rose Miles. I'm with Sisters for Christian Community, and I had submitted a question regarding the relevance or necessity of canonical status. We are a non-canonical community and we have found that we have attracted many members from formerly canonical communities who have found our community much more receptive to their living out of their ministry. Do you find canonical status relevant and/or necessary for the future?

Jamie: There are benefits, obviously, that come with canonical status, but I don't, not for the future. And I see that there is a lot of new life emerging. There's a Sister Allison McCrary in New Orleans who many people know and have read about, and she is a non-canonical woman religious. And she is creating a community of people.

And so I don't think it's necessary. In some ways it could be a hindrance, because there are a lot of Millennials have issues with authority and for many of them, it's justifiable. And I think suspicion of the Vatican and diocesan authority is still justifiable, and it does limit you. That said, it's tricky, because there are ways in which women religious have benefited from having canonical status and the space that they have.

I think in some ways, women religious should continue to talk about amongst themselves to what extent is their hanging on to canonical status hindering them from supporting new growth. So I think that's another conversation, too, that has to be had.

So I'm of two minds about it. Yes, I don't think it's necessary and I see how it could be a hindrance, but I also see that women religious have gotten quite a bit done because of their canonical status. And women religious have power, and I think we really saw that with Nuns on the Bus. They have power over the imagination, in the same way priests do. That's no small thing. And it gives them a certain authority that, when used well, like Nuns on the Bus, is a very powerful thing.

So I think it's something we still have to continue to talk about.

Rose Miles: Excellent. Thanks a lot, Jamie.

Q: Could you please define canonical versus non-canonical to us lay people listening in, and does canonical mean that the bishops have control over your property and can essentially kick you out if they want to?

Jamie: It can definitely mean that. Deb, do you have a pithy way to describe it?

Deb: I think we should ask someone who is a religious. That would be much better.

Jamie: Anyone want to jump in?

Deb: I would feel a little bit uncomfortable describing what that relationship is from a lay perspective. My suggestion is that we can put something out there in terms of a

follow-up on this and give a better description rather than try to tackle it. So why don't we move into another question.

Joan: This is Joan Mitchell. Jamie, is there any pattern to what young Millennials encounter when they try religious life with older communities? I wonder if there are just too many canonical regulations. There isn't really a lot of canonical stuff. I don't know. What are they encountering in your experience?

Jamie: I think it's a tricky thing. There can be quite a sense of loneliness of not having a lot of people—

Jamie: I think in many cases, Joan, what they're encountering is older women communities. And again, there is a great longing for that kind of wisdom and that kind of spiritual mentorship. But I think there's a certain amount of loneliness that can also happen when not among your peers also.

Karen and I were talking to a Good Shepherd sister last year, and she said, "I know a lot of young women don't want to live with a lot of older women, but I don't want to live with young women." And I think she had a really good point. It's stressful sometimes for the older women religious to have one or two young women. And so I think they're encountering that sense of feeling alone. Some women manage it very well. There are a lot of young women religious who write for NCR who have written really beautifully about that, the struggle and the beauty of it.

So I think that's part of it. And I think there is a sense of a clash of generations and of cultures. Again, a lot of that speaks to what I mentioned about most women religious joining before 1960. Today's Millennial is growing up in a very different culture. Some want to be more radical; some want to take more of a stance. I think that women's religious communities are predominantly white, so women of color struggle to find a place also.

And also, there is that overarching authority of the Vatican, and that idea that, I guess, a man or a bishop can swoop in and take it all away the way they tried to back in 2012. I think it just doesn't jive at all with the Millennial mindset. So I think there's that sense of authority or abuse of power that can maybe put them off.

Deb: Joan, can you give us a quick primer on what it means in your mind to have a canonical relationship?

Joan: Well, I think if you're under a bishop—some communities are under their local bishops and some communities relate to Rome. And if you relate to Rome, it's good, because you're a long way away from them, so they don't interfere much. [Laughter.] And, really, the only thing they can do to you is say you aren't Catholic if you really take on something that... It's really whether or not you want to be Catholic, I think, in the end. They really have a hard time touching you unless you're local.

It's kind of hard to wiggle out of it, in a sense, because if you're Catholic, you're Catholic.

Jamie: Right. So they can take away the brand name 'Catholic,' but you can't take away the spirit and the sacramentality. But they can de-consecrate, so to speak, your spaces; remove the Eucharist [*inaudible*].

Joan: Well, I don't know. They maybe could. But it hasn't been done.

Jamie: Well, what I always say is, "Dare them to try it and see what happens." That has always been my argument. Call their bluff.

Deb: Okay. Well, that's helpful, Joan. I know that you're so knowledgeable.

Linda: What makes a community a religious community? The difference between that and an intentional lay community?

Jamie: Well, I think in the mindset of the women religious I speak to all the time, it's about taking those traditional vows. That's what they think makes it religious. And so the community like the one I spoke about, Benin Casa Community, would be seen as an intentional lay community. And so what I'm inviting conversation about is that maybe we need to expand what it means to be religious.

If a community wants to pray and have liturgy and eat their meals together and really have a very sacramental life together—not just in terms of the big sacraments, but the daily sacraments that we as Catholics think we share with one another—can you begin to call it religious? And if they are living a form of the vows—not the traditional vows, but a new, evolved version of them—can we call them religious?

Right now, the distinction is really pretty rigid, and to me, quite hierarchical. And so I'm wondering if we can start breaking down some of those walls together.

Sister V: Something that I would add to that question about what makes a religious community a religious community is inspired by theologian Bernard Lee, who has written a lot about charism. A particular religious community—because you can also say what makes one religious community different from another one—have many things in common, including the vows, Jesus Christ, community. All of those things are in common. So what makes one community different from another?

And what he talks about is, they have a different deep story. Each religious community has a story that began with the founder or foundress, and the way that got lived out—and of course, that deep story is always evolving. But that's one thing. For example, my community, School Sisters of Notre Dame, has a different story than these Dominican Sisters, who are working with [*inaudible*]. We have many things that are similar, but that deep story is what's different.

Jamie: That's right. And that's why I think so many of these new, intentional communities are longing to connect with religious communities because they want that charism, they want that sense of history, they want that sense of being rooted in something much older and much greater than they are, to be part of a legacy, really, or spiritual lineage.

So I think you, Barbara, because those are also the things I find the young people are hungry for, are those stories.

Phil: Jamie, you've talked about women religious. Do you have any insights or comments about men religious? They're sort of in the same boat in many ways as women religious insofar as less in numbers in their congregations and communities.

Jamie: Yes, I always give a smart-aleck answer and say the men's communities never want to talk to me, so I really don't know much. I think it's a little trickier with male communities because there is a priesthood in those male communities, and obviously it's not open to all people. It's only open to men. And so there's even another hierarchical level that we have to deal with.

And again, women would not be welcome in those spaces. That's one thing I always say—that if you're a young man and you express even the slightest interest in Jesuits, you will be welcomed into dinner, you'll be given the cocktails. You're just welcomed in so quickly as a young man if you have the slightest interest. Young women could give their whole lives to a master's in divinity and have enormous gifts, and they'll never, ever get into that dinner.

And so, for me, my experience of male communities is that they are much more exclusive, where I don't think women religious would ever think about excluding a man for coming in and finding spiritual support. Obviously, they can't make vows right now to a women's community, but they can become associates and things like that.

And so I imagine that obviously the same dynamics are at work, but in my experience, I have found the male communities much more closed off and unwilling to even entertain what is emerging, admitting that they're dying, trying to think anew. But it doesn't surprise me that women religious are at the forefront of this, because they're always been intrepid and are willing to take on difficult things and scary questions.

I wish I had more to say about them, Linda.

Phil: You speak well. I agree: the women are much more in front than the men. Thank you.

Deb: One of the things that I'm interested in in this talk about canonical versus non-canonical emerging communities—one of the things that in my mind is interesting is watching the way that affiliates or associates—some communities are trying to evolve that relationship and deepen it. So the [Murphy's] have developed companions in addition to associates. The Loretos are co-members.

Any time we talk about the future, there's certainly going to be diversity in terms of what emerges, and I personally applaud all these innovations. I think they are leading towards something that people are hungry for. But I just wondered what you would say to the notion that there will be and are diverse ways that religious life is emerging in the Church.

Jamie: Oh, most definitely. And I think the associate and companion programs are really interesting. And one thing I've often wondered is if I could talk to those associates—I want to talk to them more—and say, do you want to give your whole life to this; or maybe when you retire, do you want to give your whole life to this, when you have real freedom or your children are all out of the house?

So I think there has to be a diversity, because there are different levels at which people are able to commit. There are different forms of the life that will help them flourish in. And so I think we have to be open to all forms. And ideally, in these conversations that I'm hoping we can have, we will have companions and we will have associates in those kinds of conversations, because their witness is just as important and their voices are just as important.

So I think there has to be that diversity. And again, I think of myself as an associate member of Benin Casa, because I'm not ready to make a full commitment to that community. But they are what is giving me life, and I like to contribute to them as much as I can. And so there's a real need for young people to get some sort of sense of community from them, even if they can't make their whole-person commitment at this point.

Deb: I think we have time for one question.

Kathy: I have a 21-year-old daughter and in my conversations with her, a lot of what she's looking for is what I would classify as intra-spiritual more than religious. So it goes beyond just Catholic; it goes beyond just Christian. And in some ways it maps to the global perspectives that these kids have grown up. They probably travel, they're seeing a broader world, and they're recognizing the common groundings. How does that play into what you see?

Jamie: Yes, I think that's wonderful, Kathy. I have a very good friend who's pretty well known, Adam Buckowrote, and he and his friend, Rory McEntee wrote a book called, *The New Monasticism*. And their vision is very much an intra-spirituality, because they're just as deeply inspired by the sacramental tradition of Catholicism as they are by Buddhist traditions. Both of them have lived in ashrams.

And one thing they encounter when they talk to the older generation is that the older generation wants to do inter-faith dialogue, and they're like, "We don't need dialogue. We just need to pray together." One of the gifts I think the new generation gives is they don't have those boundaries. They didn't grow up with this mindset of, "My

mother grew up in a mindset where, if she walked into a Protestant church, she was sinning." I think there's some baggage. It's not everyone, but there are residual effects to that. And I think that young people are just ready to do intra-spiritual prayer, and I think there's tremendous opportunity for that.

And I think you see it in some women religious-led retreat houses. You see a lot of practice of Zen sitting, of yoga. One of the best examples of that is my former classmate, Brandon Nappi, who's a retreat director at Holy Family Retreat House in Connecticut. He has created a separate retreat center for intra-spiritual practice called Copper Beech. I encourage you all to look it up.

It's an extraordinary groundbreaking model, to me, of the way in which you can create a whole new retreat program that answers the hungers of secular and religious people by offering mindfulness meditation and Zen and all those different things—on the grounds of a Catholic retreat center. And so I think that's another excellent example.

This is what folks are hungry for, and we do have to answer those hungers for intra-spiritual practice. And so I think the new generation gives an interesting opportunity for that. But again, also in need of mentors. All of my friends who are into intra-spiritual want mentors from the older generation.

Deb: Well, folks, oh, my gosh. An hour is not enough to talk about all the things that need to be talked about. This is just the beginning of this conversation, but I really want to thank you, Jamie, for just a wonderful presentation, for your spirit, for your curiosity, and for awakening so many people, young and old, to become part of the dialogue, part of the conversation, on the way the Church will go forward in terms of religious life. So, thank you so much for sharing so much of this with us tonight. And as I said, this is the beginning of the dialogue.

[*End.*]