

# Voices of Faith – All Voices Count

## Panelist Discussion

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The Vatican, Rome

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### Moderator

Welcome back, everyone. I hope you enjoyed the break and got to speak one-on-one with all of our unbelievably unforgettable speakers. This positive energy in here is so contagious, I feel like we're all... I don't know...we'll change things in every way that we can. So thank you for all your inspirational stories and what you continue to do for the better for humanity, really.

Now for the second part of this unforgettable day. Here to discuss the expanding role of women in the church — I said it—[*laughter*]*—women in the Church is Father Tom Smolich, who is—*

*Father:* There's something wrong with introducing a man after you talked about women.

[*Laughter.*] I know. That's the part of it. I'm trying to make you just squirm a little bit—in a good way. Anyway, Father Tom Smolich, who is the international director of the Jesuit Refugee Service here in Rome. At least you get to live in this beautiful city, right? Father Smolich's panelists should keep you just as riveted as what you heard in Part I. So without further ado, I turn it over to you.

### Father Tom Smolich

Thank you very much for that introduction. We've spent the first part of our afternoon together hearing that mercy requires courage. And we've heard from women and a few men who have been out on the frontiers of our church, the frontiers of the society, expressing that mercy, and we've seen what courage that has taken. We've also met some of the women who have benefited from that mercy, and we've realized that it takes courage for them as well to get on that first rung of the ladder and to keep moving forward.

For the second half of our afternoon, we're going to pivot from the frontiers, from the sort of edge of things, back to the center. What brings us all together here is we are members of the Church. We have Pope Francis's picture in front of us, who is inspiring us to bring that mercy to the frontiers, especially through this Year of Mercy. But we are here in the Vatican and we cannot and we should not not talk about being part of the Church itself.

Several of us celebrated Eucharist earlier today to begin the celebration of the International Women's Day. And the Gospel today is John, Chapter 5, where Jesus cures a man who has been lying by the pool of Bethesda for 38 years. He's never the first one into the water when the water is stirred.

The Gospel is quite clear that miracles happen when the water is stirred. Our panelists today are going to stir the water a little bit and talk about both what opportunities have occurred, what things are happening

in the Church, and some of their visions, some of their dreams, some of what they hope can and should happen in the Church.

So allow me now to get off the stage and turn it over to them, but let me do that by introducing each of them briefly, starting on my left—your right.

Nicole Perone is a graduate student at Yale University, completing her Master's of Divinity degree. She's originally from New Jersey and also is an alumna of Loyola University, Maryland. She's passionate about the engagement and empowerment of women and young people. I have seen her in action and I know this to be true.

Geralyn Sheehan to my immediate left is country director for the Peace Corps in Columbia, currently living and working there. She's also a faculty member at the Asset-Based Community Development Institute of DePaul University in Chicago, where she has written, trained, and consulted on how to build communities from the inside out, especially focused on community-led economic development among low-income populations. Her career has been most influenced and informed by her early work with immigrant and refugee populations from Latin America and Asia.

Dr. Carolyn Woo serves as CEO and President of Catholic Relief Services, the official international humanitarian and relief agency of the U.S. Catholic Church. CRS works in over 100 countries and touches 85 to 100 million people every year. The majority of them I would guess are women and girls. Previously she was the dean of the business school at the University of Notre Dame, and she was proudly educated by the [Marianal] Sisters, who as she says live their faith with humor, grace, courage and joy. She's been married for 36 years. She's the mother of two sons.

Petra Dankova, further to the right, is a Postulate with the Sisters of the Holy Redeemer, a religious congregation based near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the United States. As an international social worker, Petra has eight years of experience working with forcibly displaced people in large refugee camps in Eastern Africa, as well as urban situations in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and she is originally from the Czech Republic.

And finally, last but not least, on the far right, is Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala, who was born and raised in Mumbai, India, as a product of an interfaith marriage where both religions worked together to shape her identity and gave her insight into how she views the world today. She holds a master's degree in literature focused on post-Colonial theory, and in her spare time writes poetry that explores feminist issues and identity. She is currently teaching literature in India to high school students.

Welcome to all five of you. A little background. Each of them began by sharing some reflections personally and then in the group in terms of, as I said, what is going well in the Church, where are women's voices being heard, and later, where might some opportunities need to arise, where does the water need to be stirred. So we'll move in sequence, more or less. And Petra, if I could ask you to open us up with that first question of where have you seen strides in success for the role of women in the Church?

### **Petra**

Thank you. I think the first thing that we have to really ask ourselves is what or who is the Church for us. And I think it's really dangerous that we would look at the Church in this dualistic view of this man-dominated institution to which women are somehow external.

And I think in my own experience as someone who has converted to Catholic faith as an adult, I know that the church that I converted to was a community, a community of my friends and teachers at the University of Notre Dame, where I did my undergraduate studies, and a community of people who showed me not just liturgies but how they lift their faith in their everyday lives.

And so I think right at the beginning we have to say that our Church—yes, it is the Vatican; it is the Sunday mass that we go to. But it is both much more intimate than that and much bigger than that. And so I would like us to keep that in mind.

But when I think of the role of women, I wonder if, when women were perhaps not as able to move to the top of the hierarchy, if their leadership really focused on moving towards the margins. And as Tom mentioned, I am a postulant of the religious congregations. And the Sisters of the Holy Redeemer in Germany about two years ago met a refugee family and decided to give this family church asylum to help to prevent this family being unjustly deported.

And from knowing this family, they saw the needs of refugees and very courageously, with no previous experience, decided to open a wing of their [Mother House] to 100 asylum seekers and to host them in their own homes, essentially. And when that actually turned out to work, they found another and started hosting unaccompanied children and started using their hospital to provide health care to asylum seekers.

Now, where I'm going with all that is that they didn't start looking for leadership; they saw people who were in need. They heard the Gospel saying they should take care of the stranger. And from doing that they have become leaders in this field of assessing asylum seekers, and now other people are coming to the sisters and asking their opinions, asking their advice. And now our sisters are leaders in this field. And I think that's part of the leadership that women in the Church are taking up in a great way.

### **Nicole Perone**

I would like to echo Petra as far as the way religious orders have really taken initiative to empower women and to empower lay people, and really gifting lay people with their charisms. I think that's a really excellent model for the Church. And, as ever, religious, especially women religious, are at the forefront of that, to the surprise of probably nobody in this room.

But I'm also blown away by all the places and spaces women currently occupy in the Church as heads of Catholic health care organizations, of universities, of different organizations that operate within the Church. And in fact, some of them are sitting at this table or in this room today. And they are really my heroines, my sheroes, in this.

And so I rejoice in how these amazing, important women are doing the vital work of the Church. And while there are far too few, I think the Church also does well engaging women in the institutions so far as consulting. So women consult for the bishops' conferences; women consult for the Vatican. And I think, most commendably, I would—great work, Pope Francis—on the Sexual Abuse Commission. Pope Francis really took the initiative to make sure there were women on that, as well as men, and I think that's an area where the Church is doing well.

And I think it's vital to bring women to the table for decision-making. And right now we see women who are doing that every day. As Petra said, they already sort of operate in the periphery, and all we need to do is just bring them closer to where the heart of the Church is beating, because women already are the heart of the Church.

## **Geralyn Sheehan**

When I listen to both of them talk about women, whether it's religious or lay, we can't talk about women's role in the Church without talking about the role of motherhood—our mothers. And mothers are the heart of every family. That crosses every culture around the world. And most of us receive our first witness of faith through our mothers.

And I think of my own mother, who was a very devout Catholic. I come from a big Irish-Catholic family and so you can't help but have Church as part of your culture. And she also taught us about service. And I think that women, by our nature, are nurturers. And so that's a voice that really fits for us.

But I also think about my own story. I've been influenced by Sister Giovanni, school sister of Notre Dame, my first boss, who was a force to be reckoned with. Sister Mar, you remind me of her when you talk about your own work in the Bronx. But Sister G saw, on the west side of St. Paul, Minnesota, a growth of Latino gangs and rival gangs that were entering into violence. Because most Latinos were undocumented immigrants and couldn't get into school, and so the way into society were the gangs.

And I worked with her with the immigrant populations. I later worked at Catholic Charities for another powerful woman, [Marguerite] Loftus, who ran our refugee program. And both of these women, I think that we can talk about women's giftedness and heart, but not to overly romanticize it or think in terms of stereotypes.

Because the women that I've met have been visionaries, they have changed systems, they change policies and laws. And I witnessed both of them literally impact the immigrant and refugee policy in my state. And I can tell you—there was not an archbishop or a corporate executive or a mayor who would say no to them. So I think those roles are played also and are really important for us to think about when we have this dialogue of women's impact.

## **Dr. Carolyn Woo**

I would say three things. And I'm going to take a more macro perspective [other] than micro. The [*inaudible*] in the work that we do, CRS would go out into the world where people are very, very poor, very vulnerable. We truly see the commitment and the labor of the Church in serving women and girls where there's education, health care, HIV-AIDS and so on. And so that cannot be discounted: that the Church has been working for the well being of women.

The second point I want to make is that whether it's out of necessity or whether it's out of invitation, about 80% of the work of the Church is done by women, outside of the clerics. So, actually, the formation of people in faith, the evangelization work, the witness work that is being done is being done by women. And so the impact of women is felt in that extensive ministry.

The third and final point is that different people have acknowledged that, actually, in the United States, many women hold high positions in the Catholic Church. Among Catholic universities, I think there are more Catholic women as presidents than in secular universities—many hospitals and so on, and even in dioceses—chancellors and general counsels are women. What that actually shows is that the practice of empowering women and the ability to share power with women is there.

### **Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

I want to agree with you, Carolyn, because if we're talking about opportunities for women's voices to be heard in the Church... We've got one right here. You have four women sitting at a panel discussion and our voices are being heard. So it's living proof that this is happening.

And from my own personal experience, like you've already said, I grew up in an interfaith household, and I grew up with this duality of religion that shaped how I view the world. But I also grew up with a very strong female role model in my mother because, as GERALYN said, your mother is usually your first introduction to your relationship with God.

And my mother was an excellent role model. And one of the things that she was part of last year in India was, they instituted a general policy within the Church in India. And what's exciting and great about it is that they work with the Church. So the Church and the women—the the three women were invited to draft the policy. So you have people working alongside each other in order to encourage equal representation of women within the Church. And I think that's fantastic—the way you have this collaboration. So there is stuff happening all around us as we speak.

### **Father Tom Smolich**

I would be interested to follow up on your comments. We have a cross-generational panel here. Do you see differences, given your own history, as to what you've seen over the years, those of you who might have a little more experience in this? How have you seen changes? And I'd be curious if our younger panel members have also seen those changes, or in a sense received what our more senior panelists might have observed over the years?

### **Geralyn Sheehan**

Well, it's been interesting being here in Rome at the Vatican as a group and just getting to know particularly the younger panelists. And there is definitely an age difference, a generational difference, in how we experience Church. And I think the more interesting comments come from our two Millennials here in terms of the insights that they've even given me as they talk about themselves but also their friends.

I think I grew up...as I mentioned earlier, when you grow up in a family where church is not something you do on Sunday, but it's literally part of your identity, it's part of your culture, the history of your family... I had an uncle who was a bishop and many who were priests and nuns. And so it simply becomes part of how you see the world.

And I think in that case, the difficulty often is to move away from the faith of your father and mother, if you will, and to really go through the search yourself to have a mature faith, where you're asking the kinds of questions based on your life experience, and where you then move away from what you've inherited but begin to develop a depth on your own.

I had kind of a crisis of conscience when I was in my thirties. My father died suddenly from a working class family, and he had no life insurance, and left my mother and four sisters, really, with very little financially. And at that point, some of my sisters and I were more educated than our mother. It was a very scary time.

And there was a Jewish man who owned the grocery store I worked for—Milton Fagel—and he was incredible, and oftentimes gave food to our family. But he was always in a hurry; always left the car running; and would bring overstock to my mom. And if my mom tried to pay, it was always like, "I've got to run; the car's running. I have no time; I have no time."

Anyway, Milton became like a father to me. His daughter, Cheryl, was one of my best friends. I often went to synagogue with them. Cheryl came to mass with us. And Milton died when I was 30 or 31. And I was crushed. He was like a second father to me. And I went to my uncle, who was a bishop. He has passed away since then. My uncle, Bishop Dudley.

And I went to him at that point and said, "I need to tell you face to face: I'm leaving the Catholic Church. Because I refuse to believe that Milton Fagel will not enjoy the arms of God. Milton was more Christ-like than many Christians I know. And my uncle hugged me and said, "Geraldyn, I'm so happy for you, because you're absolutely right. I'm sure Milton was greeted—well done, good and faithful servant."

And what he told me then is something I've hung on to. He said, "What you're distinguishing is between what is the word of God and what is the word of man." And he said, "Your questions can always be answered, the truth, the word of God," that "our institution," he told me, "as a Church, has been ruled by very holy men, and we've also had some bad men." And so he said, "Never take everything for granted. Discern. Because your faith will withstand your questions. The word of God always does." With that I cried, and I said, "I want to be a Catholic still."

But that was something that really informed me and made me fearless about questioning. In fact, he told me it was our duty, that the Church is only made stronger.

### **Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

In fact, Geraldyn, my mom always said, "The path to holiness is paved with questions." And we grew up with that in mind. And because both of my parents are very spiritual—and my father in Hindu; my mother is Catholic... And as my brother once said, "Usually in these sorts of situations when you have an interfaith marriage, you have one or both people who aren't religious, because otherwise there's a lot of friction. Now, in our family, they're both very spiritual, so we grew up privileged. Again, we never saw it as a disadvantage; we always felt we were privileged to grow up with two very different spiritual identities that ultimately merged into one.

And for me, I chose to get baptized when I was 22. And it was never a decision; it was never, oh, did you finally decide to pick being Catholic. I didn't pick; I was always Catholic. Just because I am Catholic doesn't mean I'm not Hindu. It wasn't a question of picking one over the other.

And I think very often there is that internal monologue—Nicole and I were talking about this earlier—where you wonder, am I Catholic enough? I always feel a little insecure, a little uncomfortable, like do I deserve to be here? Am I Catholic enough? And I've had experiences that have sometimes reinforced that. Because a few years ago my mom and I decided that we would go for mass on my birthday. And my mom was delayed and I happened to go to a church that I'd never been to before.

Now, I don't know what it was—maybe how I was dressed, or maybe I just gave off this vibe. But when I went to receive communion, the priest looked at me and decided that I didn't look Catholic enough. So he said, "Are you Catholic?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, how do you receive communion?" Now, to me that seemed like such a simple answer that I thought, no, this is a trick question. And I froze.

And then he said, "When is the last time you've been to confession?" And I don't go to confession. So I was like, "Oh, my god. What am I doing here? I shouldn't be here. I want to go home right now." And he said, "You know what? Please wait. We will chat after mass." And I felt like I was in high school and I was being punished by the principal. And I stood on the side while everybody else in that line received communion. And I waited about three minutes before I ran back home, by which point my mom had just come from work.

And I think we were in the car park. And she saw me. She took one look at my face and was like, "What happened? Are you okay?" and I just sobbed; I was crying. It was terrible. And I told her what happened. And you don't want to get my mom mad. She marched right up to that church and she spoke to the priest. And she said, "You know what? You had an opportunity to make somebody feel welcome and instead you turned them away."

And I'm going to be honest with you: I haven't been back to that particular church since.

### **Father Tom Smolich**

Good move.

### **Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

But I'm just saying...this is the sort of experience that a lot of Millennials like me face. We feel like maybe just because we don't follow the same rules that our parents did or we don't necessarily always go to mass every Sunday or we choose not to go to confession, we're not Catholic enough. And then we feel like we're denied a space within the existing structure of the Church and our voices aren't being heard.

And if we don't have a space, how are we going to make a change? How are we going to make a difference? Because I want to be a part of this structure and I want to make my presence felt.

### **Dr. Carolyn Woo**

Tom, I want to say there is a gender difference. So I would say, GERALYN and I, growing up, only saw religious women doing the work of the Church. Our mothers were volunteers. Actually, I didn't grow up in a Catholic household. But we did not see lay women doing the core work of the Church. So that is a major difference: the fact that there is this particular forum, the fact that I'm CEO of Catholic Relief Services, and so and so forth. I think the generation that followed us actually do see lay women in the work of the Church. And that's very, very important because it allows for a different imagination.

But I think there are two other influences going on, too, and that is, the generation that follows us also settles for less; they ask more questions. Because in these last forty years, women have woken up and asked—I'm not just happy with what is at the margin. They ask more questions.

And so I think those are the two cross-cutting...you have a generation who *will* ask those questions and expect those answers.

### **Nicole Perone**

I would like to also take this opportunity to say, we are not knock-off Catholics. Our Catholicism is legit as Millennials. Our Catholicism is legit as women. And so when we have these experiences that Gaya had, I really think it does the Church a disservice by turning young people and women and young women away.

Because the fact of the matter is, I don't think this panel in any capacity is trying to be punitive towards the Church, even if we've had negative experiences. This is not a critique, per se, but really an opportunity for the Church to utilize the valuable resources that young people and women are.

And so to speak to your question, Tom, about what change we've seen, I want to echo everything we've already heard, which is that, first, women religious are amazing and outstanding and I love them. But seeing lay women do something that is meaningful and visible and authoritative makes all the difference in the world.

And in my lifetime, I had that point where I realized, oh, women can do those things. So being surrounded, even just in this room, are so many women I admire. I've had so many gifted advisors, outstanding mentors who really had just driven to the heart of the Church and made their voices heard. And I think that's a big difference for Millennials.

But as Gaya said, we want to have a space to occupy, and so that is where I think there's a bit of a break, because although we've seen a lot of great changes in the Church, things my grandmother and my mother, maybe, have not experienced, Millennials ask the questions. They don't, as Carolyn said so well, settle for less. They want to know, why can't women do this, where are the voices that look like me, that believe the things that I believe? And I think that's where the Church has, as I said, not a problem, but really an opportunity.

### **Petra Dankova**

And I would just...a few words. Maybe I'd move our conversation geographically a little bit. So I come from Czech Republic, which sadly now is one of the most atheist countries after fifty years of Communism. And for us, I'm the first person in my family in the three generations who has found her way back into the Church.

And the question of women expecting more is not just a question of young women, but it's a question of the generation of my mother, who is a professional woman who has her whole life been in a workplace where she has had a lot of opportunities but also had to struggle sometimes in professions that were always a little more male dominated.

And when she comes with me to church, she might be excited about being part of this tradition. She might be curious about coming to mass with me. She might be curious about the things I've done after I converted. But there is this barrier that she will never cross, because she doesn't see people like herself in the church. So I think it's not just a question but it's also the question of keeping the people who might be leaving church, but it's also the question of evangelization and of bringing people to the church who are not seeing themselves right now.

**Father Tom Smolich**

I think that's a very good point: that your experiences, both generationally and where you come from, gives each of you a different perspective on this question. And since you said you were fearless about questioning, Carolyn, I'd like to slide into that next side that we've touched on. We've commented a lot on what's working and where some real opportunities have evolved and opened up for women. Where are some places that opening, that process, still needs to move?

**Geralyn Sheehan**

Well, I've worked over the years for and with a lot of institutions in very diverse situations. The one thing I know is, institutions never change because they should; they change when it's in their self-interest. And so part of the question we have to ask ourselves is, what is the current self-interest of the Church.

And I think to myself, when I think about the global issues that our Church faces, whether it's Boko Haram, ISIS, female infanticide, genital mutilation, man trafficking, which is really sexual trafficking—we all know that—the target of all of those too often are women and their children.

And as women, as we said, we're often the heart of the family. And so, for me, when we look at where will the solutions come for those issues the Church is facing today, they have to come from the people who have lived those situations, which is part of what we heard from our speakers this morning. In fact, it's the only place from which those answers will come.

I, myself, have been a victim of both sexual and physical violence, and for many years, much more than I wish I had lived, but I lived in silence. And the power stays of the violence unless you have the opportunity to speak about it, and then you can begin to move into having survived it.

And I think that statistics show that one in four women will experience violence in their lives, and that's across the world; that's not geographically specific. So the reality is that as we think about Church, as we think about the role of women of bringing faith to the next generation, and when we think about the strength of their survivorship around the key issues of today, now I can begin to talk about the self-interest of our Church to have women at every level of engagement, because it *is* the way our Church will expand.

And, Tom, you said something the other day in one of our conversations, and I don't remember what you talked to, but you said there was some study that showed that women are actually leaving the church.

**Father Tom Smolich**

Or fewer young women are in a sense maintaining their faith. There are more men maintaining their faith than women, at least in the States right now.

**Dr. Carolyn Woo**

Okay. Thank you. I just remember that general comment—which, again, is such a dangerous environment for us to be in when we begin to really understand the role of women—women in the Church, women in civil society, women in business. And so we need that voice in the Church. And I think we

need to come at it from that perspective, of understanding the key issues of the Church and where we will find solutions.

### **Petra Dankova**

Maybe I'll follow up on that. [Carolyn?], you spoke about it being in the self-interest of the Church to attract women. And so I've also spent some time thinking about how that can be done. And a lot of people on the panel already mentioned that maybe in the past it was religious women who were really the face of women in the Church.

So I spent some time thinking how we can distill some of this. If the religious women are the greenhouses of women in the Catholic Church, what can we do to now go beyond the greenhouses. And I thought, [being?] information, true in my own experience and thought of the formation of women religious, which has a component of really growing into depth and spirituality. It has a component of education, and it has a component of really practical ministerial experience. For folks out there who have never had that experience, it's like doing a different rotation over a period of years and different experiences in the Church.

And I thought, okay, maybe we could take this, and what would be the equivalent that could bring more women into the center of the Church. And I thought, maybe fellowships. What if we did fellowships for women in the church, where women with maybe a couple years of practice in the field, so to say, or women who are in their mid careers would be able to come into a program and bring their experience, maybe, to the Vatican, or maybe to a Diocese, and to be encouraged to become part of this structure.

As some people pointed out, we have a lot of women in health care and schools, but maybe we need to take the next step of making them present in the center of this hierarchy. And so maybe that would be one idea of planting seeds, and yet, as Carolyn said, to really actually attract women at this point. Because women have a lot of opportunities these days, and it should be in the self-interest of the Catholic Church to attract the best of the best, because it really makes an impact for the whole community.

### **Perone**

I would like to echo a little bit of both of what we've heard. And I think it's a top-down and a bottom-up model that is really what the Church needs to adopt at this point. So women need to be entering the structure of the Church on high managerial levels. There should be women on every parish council, every pastoral council, every finance council. They need to be advising dioceses; they need to be advising the parishes; and they need to be advising more in the Vatican.

And this can be a numbers game. There's nothing wrong with looking at numbers and adopting a policy, as you said, which is happening in India, and saying there needs to be certain numbers. Numbers and percentages are not scary things; they are very useful things. And sometimes that's what you need to make sure you're accomplishing what needs to be accomplished.

In that same vein, I can't help but wonder why there are two pontifical councils that would have really great spaces for women not being run by women. I'm looking at the Pontifical Council for the Laity— hi! [*Laughter.*] I mean, really, it baffles the logical mind why a non-lay person would be running the Pontifical Council for the Laity. This is just logic. And the Pontifical Council for the Family: What a great opportunity that would be to have someone in the space who, as far as the Church defines a family, is part of a family.

And so a component of that top-down method is that women need not only to be in leadership, but they need to be in visible leadership. It's not fair that I can name women in leadership in the Church, because I'm really into this topic. [*Laughter.*] I talk about it a lot. That's just cheating. I want my mother and my grandmother to be able to name—let's start with five—five women who are making really important decisions in the Church, because those are not the nerds of the Catholic Church, but... I'm okay with that; I can live with that. But the women who are [being?] Catholic day to day really need to be able to name that. And I think if they can name clerics, they should be able to name women engaging in the Church. And so that's the top-down.

And when you're appointing those women, it shouldn't just be women for the sake of appointing women, but appointment women who are invested in these things, women who have been to the peripheries, have been to the margins, have served, as we heard Cecilia talk about today, who are warrior women. Those are the women who should be bringing their voices to the table, not just women for the sake of having a number. So that's the top-down.

And for me, the bottom-up, I'm really interested in a cultural shift that needs to happen in the Catholic Church. So when I think of the story Gaya told, that's where I see a real need for cultural shift. Because when we say all are welcome in this place, do we actually mean all are welcome? And I wonder about that with the Catholic Church today.

When we have young people or women who have great ideas or want to engage in their parish or dioceses, they want [a lector], they want a Eucharistic minister, they come to mass, and, okay, they came at the wrong time. Do we turn them away? Do we scoff? Or do we really bring them in and figure out how to utilize their gifts and talents?

Because here's the thing: Those women, especially the young women, as we've talked about before, have, as Petra said, every opportunity in the secular sphere. I'm 24 years old and I have every confidence that if I wanted to, I'd be President of the United States. I believe it. Who's laughing? Excuse me—I'm fabulous. [*Applause.*] Thank you. You're all welcome to call the United States government.

But women can be president of the United States; they can be the prime minister of their countries; they can be a Fortune 500 CEO. They can succeed in any sphere. So why is the Church the last frontier on that? [*Applause.*] Yeah, yeah. It's too much for the go. Sin of pride. But I think it's just the Church, again, doing itself a disservice, because that is a brain drain. It's a brain drain; it's a talent drain. So right now, if the Church wants to stop that and really utilize those gifts and talents, they just need to continue to let that wealth blossom. It's there. The seeds are planted and we just need to continue to nourish them.

### **Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

It's interesting what Nicole says, because we're talking here about equal representation within the Catholic Church, and we're talking about looking at women in leadership roles. And to me, what I think is really important is you need to be introduced to women in leadership roles from a very young age. Because as Geralyn put it, women may be the backbone of their family.

But to me, I think women and children come as a package deal. I don't want to be sexist, but women and children tend to come as a package deal, at least within the Church. And, the children are our future. So you want to be raising children who look at both men and women on equal footing in the Church. And I think one of the best ways to instill that...

Now, I'm an educator. I work with high school students. And what I love about them is that every day for me is a learning experience because they're always questioning; they always want to take things apart and figure out why and how and what next. And I think the Church has such a great opportunity to do that with young people.

You have Sunday school; you have Catholic schools. When you're teaching them the catechism, when you're doing Bible study, you have the opportunity to teach them a little bit of theology as well. Get them to question; get them to reason. Because that is not going to encourage dissent; that is going to make them their faith stronger. And you're going to then be able to teach them that men and women have the leadership skills that are equal to each other. So young women, young girls, are going to grow up thinking, hey, I can do that; I can be that. And that's really what I want for the future of the Church.

### **Dr. Carolyn Woo**

So before I start, I just want to say, women *are* knocking on the door of the Church. And sometimes it's wearing for the people who are suddenly on the other side of the door. Too much knocking. And I like that particular analogy because Scriptures tell us, those who knock on the door, it will be opened to you. So I do believe in that.

But I also have the fear—that is, the generation of women who follow us, not the people at this table but many, they will stop knocking. And there will come a day when there will be this silence of people not knocking, that the young people who follow us, they cannot imagine the light behind that door. They begin to not see that door at all.

And so I think the greater fear for me is that we're knocking right now, but a generation will come where they will not knock. And I think that is what the Church faces.

And I also want to say this conversation about women in the Church is not for the women; it's actually for the Church. And there are five things I want to talk about. I was the dean of a business school, so I've seen in the last thirty, forty years, how woman have come into the whole corporate world. There is a whole set of things to do. But I think that this conversation is richer than that.

I don't want to talk about what you can do, but I want to talk about five types of contrasts, because these are the contrasts of how women are thought of or [are?] engaged.

The first one is that we do have women leaders in various positions. The issue is taking it from the exceptional and the occasional to the habitual so that it becomes part of the regular process, that there is the expectation, there is a pool of candidates, there is a sense of [inaudible] councils and advisory boards and so on. We could have that. But moving from the exceptional to the habitual.

The second is that women are engaged. But I have a question: Are women engaged as family or are they engaged as guests, or are they engaged as guest workers? And I'll leave you to think through that particular analogy.

The third: The voices of women, are those voices taken as a little threatening or are they thought of as enriching? And I think because so much of the conversation, particularly the dominant conversations and the loudest conversations, have focused on women ordination, which is off the table. But whenever women [plead] or speak or recommend or propose, there's this skepticism and suspicion: Is this conversation leading to women ordination? Is this a slippery slope? So that everything that women want eventually is to the priesthood.

So that is why, could women be [install?], not just practice [and] lecture. But in all of this there is a suspicion: When women speak, is this all leading to women ordination. And I think that is unfortunate, because in a lot of ways we fail to hear the voices of the mothers, of the single mothers, of the lay pastoral associate, whatever. So the voices of women, is there some suspicion around where that conversation leads. And I think we should check that.

I think the fourth point is different popes. Not just Pope Francis, but Pope Benedict also referred to the term of 'feminine genius.' And a lot of times that term is evoked to mean women's sensitivity, women's intuition, intuitiveness; women's ability to tend to others, to nourish, to care; women's loyalty and their steadfastness. Well, that's wonderful. In fact, it's daunting to live up to [*inaudible*].

But what about women as social critics or social activists, like Dorothy Day? What about women who are scandalous, like Dorothy Day? [*Laughter.*] And Mary Magdalene and the woman at the well. What about women who are entrepreneurial, hard-headed, persistent, and sometimes even defiant? Like many of the women religious who founded their congregations and sustain it, the women who follow them who went into these territories to establish what they do? What about those women? What about women who really take the spiritual works of mercy seriously, like Catherine of Sienna, who wrote words urging the Pope and the political leaders to change their ways? What about those women?

So the conversation about feminine genius, is there a place for the other part—which is a bit thorny, a bit pushy? But if you look at the history of the Church, those women did a lot—Joan of Arc, for example. So that's my fourth point.

And my fifth point is, I think the Church really does minister to women. I work with a global church; I know what the Church does. But in addition to service to women, I think we need to think about the rights of women: the right of women to own land; the right of women to not be married off in a child marriage; the right of women to education—so that we're not just ministering to them in their misfortune, but we're actually standing with them to understand how to create an environment through rights. Rights are very important ways to protect women in society.

So I think those are the five things I want to offer for thinking. But I also want to have two cautions. And that is, I'm not totally comfortable that a lot of conversation is about titles and so on, because I think Pope Francis has this sort of teaching against the lure and the temptation of clericalism. I don't think women should be going after that, which is the sense of privileged status.

And I think the second thing is, I hear a lot about that [within] the Vatican. I think it's also a danger to thinking of the Vatican as the heartbeat of the Church. The Vatican is the power structure of the Church in many ways and women need to have a seat at the table as family. But I discourage women in all the really inspiring stories we hear of the different [*inaudible*] who showed up at the right time, and lay women at the right time to allow life to move forward. So I just want to also caution against those two things.

### **Father Tom Smolich**

Thank you. [*Applause.*] So let me feed this back to you. We began, I think, with a good image, Geryl, of what is in the Church's self interest. And let's face it—all of us have self interest, but it's not always enlightened self interest; it's an interest that is comfortable; it's a self interest that is familiar—which in a sense is the way it has always been. And I think all of you have been talking about how do we, not just

on an affective level, but also on an intellectual—and I don't want to say spiritual level, how do we push these questions out.

So we still have a few more minutes to talk about where might that enlightenment come from. Where do you see moments of enlightenment happening right now, and what does that enlightenment look like to you? And where would you want to push for that enlightened self-interest to really make a difference right now?

### **Geralyn Sheehan**

Well, I'll tell you what comes to mind for me. And Carolyn, I love your points. Thank you so much for being so specific. That is so helpful to this conversation. A simple thing that I think about, I think so much of some of the fear of where the conversation is going to go comes from really not understanding what women want. I don't want to be a priest, and a lot of us don't. We love this Church. We're here because we love the Church.

And so one thought that has come to mind for me is, wouldn't it be incredible if Pope Francis would just want to ask that every seminary have a women's study course? Imagine how a young seminarian would come out if during their preparation they studied and understood the role of women historically. And I don't mean just in the Church; I'm talking about understanding the role that women have played in government, in business, leading nonprofits, and movements.

And imagine if we had every young seminarian coming out understanding that voice. What might that do as he then goes out to wherever he's placed? And I think that could be a good step, because I can't imagine if the seminaries really understood the history and role of women, that they wouldn't want them engaged to help do whatever their work is.

### **Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

I think to some extent that is already happening in India, because I know a lot of seminarians who also have to study feminist theology as part of their course. We were just talking about it earlier. And I think that is clearly a positive step.

### **Father Tom Smolich**

So where would you push the enlightenment right now? What's that one thing you would like to see happen to move us forward?

### **Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

Honestly—and this is coming from the heart—I would like to see welcome. As a Millennial, as a woman, my experience at that church the last time could have gone two ways. I could never have gone back to church. But I did. And I think that for a lot of us, we would love to come back to the church; we would love to be part of it. Because for many of us, church is family. And I think feeling welcomed is a huge step in the right direction—just welcoming people back and not passing judgment. And I think Jesus would have [*inaudible*]. [*Applause.*]

**Father Tom Smolich**

Any other thoughts on enlightenment?

**Nicole Perone**

I think when we think about enlightened self interest, one thing that comes to mind, and I'm just putting this out on the table, is, when I've been talking to women who are maybe a little more experienced than me—let's put it that way; I am a Millennial—and I talk to them about, oh, sometimes it feels really frustrating to be constantly raising my voice, every single one of them talks to me about the prayer that is often attributed to Oscar Romero, about planting the seeds of being a prophet of a future not your own.

And I think if we really want to move this enlightened self interest, as you so eloquently put it, we as women in the Church really need to orient ourselves in that ability to say everything we do on some level is work, and it makes a difference to perhaps even one person, but that disconnect to say, I may never see the fruits of this labor. But that doesn't mean to stop knocking.

So I really see what Carolyn said before about that generation that will eventually not knock anymore as a clarion call for us to be really cognizant of the fact that we have to keep planting the seeds; we have to keep watering the seeds and tilling the ground. Because women in the Church, I think, are an endangered species. They really are.

**Petra Dankova**

And I would go back to what Carolyn said at the beginning about speaking to men. And I draw on my experience of working with women who have faced violence, and I think in the past years this work has come into the important realization that when you talk to women about violence against women, that's great. Women can really imagine how bad that is. But you have to talk to men. You have to [*inaudible*] among men who will stand up and say violence against women is not okay.

And I think in the Church we have to do the same thing. So I am glad that you are chairing the panel today; that there have been other voices of men among us. And I think we really have to grasp these opportunities and to very consciously look for men who are allies and who will raise voices and say women in the Church are important. Because we are all convinced that we need to put this now a step further.

**Dr. Carolyn Woo**

Tom, you say who do you want to enlighten. Well, I have a somewhat related answer. The first one is actually, the most important people for me to get this first is really my sons, and I have two of those. By the way, there is research beginning to show that when a young person makes a decision about his or her faith—this person grows up in some type of tradition rather than no tradition—the most important influence is actually their peers. The most important influence are their parents.

When they make these decisions about what life they want and how to live it, they actually look at their parents' model and say, do I reject it because I've never seen the work, or I do not want to walk away from it because I've seen how it works. So I think that actually the family is a very important place where you form these attitudes and acceptance.

But for this panel, one of the strange things that I'm going to say is, sometimes I'm tired of being "the woman," like I'm an entity that people don't know. I want to say, "You know me. I'm not a different species." It's like when my nephew was very young, and his mother is Canadian and his father's Chinese. We took him to Chinatown and we kept on pointing out all the things that are Chinese. He came home and he said, "I've now got it: I'm half-Chinese and half-human."

[*Inaudible*] say you have mothers and sisters and aunts, and you know us. We are not a different species. And I work with a lot of men and women. I never look at my colleague who's a EVP of strategy and say, "She's a woman." And I work with someone else but he is "a man." It doesn't even enter into that equation.

So I know it's ironic on a panel of this, but sometimes I just want someone to say, I know them. They were my family. They're not some species that needs a lot of, whatever, figuring out.

**Father Tom Smolich**

Back to what you said earlier: You're not guest workers; you're not guests; you are part of the family. We are part of the family.

Our time is running out. I think for all of us, it's been a very rich day. I would just invite us all to take just a brief pause here. Reflect a bit on what we've been hearing, maybe earlier today or in this panel. And panelists, I would just invite you to share with all of us a word or a phrase that stays with you that might be a touchstone for each of us to continue thinking about what we have experienced and heard today. So whoever wants to start, feel free and we'll move to that person's right.

**Nicole Perone**

Gracious and tenacious.

**Geralyn Sheehan**

I'm just thinking, let's use everyone's gifts. They were all given to us uniquely for a purpose. They are all needed to be given.

**Father Tom Smolich**

Gratitude. Just hearing the voices of so many people for whom God entered their lives through one another. I'm grateful for what I've heard today and people's abilities to share their stories. That's what stays with me right now.

**Dr. Carolyn Woo**

Welcome.

**Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

I was going to say [that].

**Petra Dankova**

Together we can go to a new depth and a new horizon.

**Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala**

I'm going to go back to what Carolyn said but just add a little bit more to it. I think it's really important that in order to empower, first we welcome. So I'd like us to think that we welcome to empower.

**Father Tom Smolich**

I hope you've enjoyed this as much as we have enjoyed it. Panelists, thank you very much [inaudible].  
[*Applause.*]

[*End of panelist discussion.*]