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Why the US should accept more Afghan war refugees

Young Catholic whose family was left behind in Vietnam argues for greater openness

COMMENTARY

By THERESA LA

On the Monday after Kabul fell, I came downstairs to find my mother with tears streaming as she watched the unfolding scenes of desperation and fear. My dad, a man who rarely shows his emotions, stood in the kitchen, his cup of soy milk forgotten, tears welling.

It was only 46 years ago that both were in the same position: fearful, anxious and desperate as their country was overtaken, in turmoil, and the United States helicopters were flying farther and farther away without any of them or their families on board. During the Vietnam War, my grandfather worked alongside American soldiers as their translator, a crucial part of the mission against the Viet Cong. Yet even with documentation of such work, he and his family would be one of the many that were left behind after America evacuated from Saigon on April 29, 1975.

My grandfather was arrested and sentenced to 13 years in a "reeducation camp." He, however, was considered to be one of the luckier ones. Others were executed immediately, their bodies buried in a mass unmarked grave as a systemic massacre of the enemy.

Continued on Page 6



—Courtesy of Theresa La

Writer Theresa La, center, with family members, from left: sister Lucia, her uncle, grandfather, mother and dog Bailey

Protests against language school show Northern Ireland's post-Brexit divisions

By SAHM VENTER

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND · The announcement of Northern Ireland's first integrated Irish language preschool was enthusiastically received and soon its 16 places were filled by among others, the children of mixed — Catholic and Protestant — marriages.

But a hate campaign against the naiscoil and its founder Linda Ervine

quickly emerged on social media and on lampposts, driving her to consider moving it from the grounds of a primary school to protect the children.

A Protestant, Ervine is a dedicated Unionist — she identifies as British and hopes that her birthplace will always remain part of the United Kingdom, as it has been since its creation in 1921.

Continued on Page 10



—Courtesy photo

Linda Ervine sits on a replica of the ancient stone chair used to inaugurate the Gaelic Chieftains of Clondeboye in Northern Ireland. Ervine, founder of Northern Ireland's first integrated Irish language preschool, has faced bullying and intimidation.

As Southern states restrict voting rights, local bishops remain largely silent

By BRIAN FRAGA bfraga@ncronline.org

Local Catholic bishops' conferences in Georgia, Florida and Texas have chosen not to speak out or take positions on the "election integrity" bills that their states' Republican-controlled legislatures passed this year to impose new voting restrictions, which civil rights organizations say target Black and minority communities.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has also declined to directly address nationwide changes to voting rights as at least 18 states enacted 30 laws to restrict access to the vote between Jan. 1 and July 14, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. Those laws make mail-in voting and early voting at drop boxes more difficult, impose stricter voter ID requirements and make faulty voter purges more likely.

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This issue was mailed on Aug. 27.

EXECUTIVE EDITOR'S NOTE

# Peace activist reacts to Afghanistan withdrawal



By HEIDI SCHLUMPF  
hschlumpf@ncronline.org

*On Sept. 11, 2001, Kathy Kelly was in New York City, participating in a liquids-only fast against U.S. economic sanctions that were costing Iraqi children their lives. After the attack, her first question was to ask who was so angry that they would undertake such a heinous act. The next was to identify where the criminals were from — and it wasn't Afghanistan.*

*Opposed to the war in Afghanistan from the beginning, Kelly joined a group that marched from Arlington National Cemetery to the United Nations, carrying a banner that said, "Our grief is not a cry for war." She also opposed the "surge" of U.S. troops in 2009 under President Barack Obama.*

*Over the years, Kelly has traveled to Afghanistan nearly 30 times. She spoke with me by phone on Aug. 21, describing the suffering of the Afghan people and how she prays the world doesn't forget them. This is an edited transcript (a longer version is available online at [NCRonline.org](http://NCRonline.org)).*

\* \* \*



—Abdulhai Darya

Kathy Kelly holds Shoba at the Chamin-E-Babrak refugee camp in Kabul, Afghanistan, in January 2014, a few days after the child had been saved from a burning tent, during a fire that destroyed much of the camp.

**NCR:** You've been in touch with folks in Afghanistan. What's your perception of what's happening on the ground?

**Kelly:** This has been a terrible, terrible week for the people of Afghanistan. U.S. allies, people who worked with the U.S. military, contractors or NGOs feel they are at great risk and many are stranded. But also at great risk and with very slim possibilities of evacuation are a group of young idealists dedicated to forming a nonviolent community within Afghanistan that has been active since 2008. They now face extreme dangers. Having already manifested bravery and passion under difficult surroundings, they deserve to be helped to a place of safety. There are many panicked messages coming from Kabul, saying, "My life is at risk. Can you help me get out?"

**Some of the images in the news are very difficult to watch: the chaos at the Kabul airport, a baby being handed over a fence. What is your reaction?**

Of course, the level of anxiety is very high. And I can only imagine the panic and the alarm that people I know are feeling. I can't help but notice that in the last week, there has probably been 20 times more coverage of Afghanistan in mainstream media than there has been in the last 20 years. The drama is certainly riveting and awful.

But I wish that there was also constant coverage of the

fact that Afghanistan has drought in most of its provinces, that people have a hard time getting access to clean water, that 41% of the children have stunted growth, that the one out of three young girls suffers from severe anemia. And now a new wave of COVID is going through the country. So many hardships have been going on before the Taliban arrived in Kabul.

I think in the U.S. people had the impression that somehow the United States was helping in terms of humanitarian issues in Afghanistan. But that's not really true. There wasn't a marked improvement in the basics of health care, or in terms of nutrition. Education has not been available to the majority of the people, although it did get better for young girls in the cities.

The people who really are the "winners" in all of this — and in the history of U.S. occupation and invasion — are the military contractors, the ones who manufacture the war planes and the bombs and the drones, and the Hellfire missiles and the Apache helicopters and the material for building bases and equipping soldiers. Those are the people who win in these situations.

And then, of course, war isn't over when it's over. The trauma that ordinary people have suffered over all these years will be with them for the rest of their lives.

### How concerned are you about how life for women in Afghanistan will be under the Taliban?

In the countryside, many of the practices which we tend to associate with the Taliban were actually in effect before the Taliban even existed. It's not an easy life for a woman, because much of your life is spent in servitude.

I've seen the impoverishment of the country, the desperation of widows and orphans, the hunger people experienced day in day out. I can remember women just bursting into tears, and asking, "What's wrong?" The answer was almost always the same: "I cannot feed my children." They would only have some stale bread and tea without sugar. So many women had no partner to bring in an income and could not themselves go out and have a livelihood. Eventually, the only way they could bring some scraps of food into the household was to send their children out as child laborers.

### Did you support the decision for the U.S. to leave Afghanistan?

I always wanted the United States pullout. I do think that it should have been done in a way that attended to the needs of those people who were working with the United States. Veterans groups have been petitioning for two years to get their allies out of the country. The Trump and Biden administrations could have accelerated the glacial pace of processing those visas. They also could have greatly expanded their criteria for who could leave Afghanistan and be resettled into the United States. They should have been activating and refining the process that would enable a massive evacuation. They could have done it. It's not like they don't have the wherewithal or knowledge to do a mass evacuation.

### What do you see as the future for the people of Afghanistan?

It's very difficult to predict what the Taliban will be like. They are not all alike: Some are more ferocious than others. So it's really, really hard to say what is going to happen. I don't want to see economic sanctions, which always has the harshest effect on the poorest people who can't control their government.

My hope is that people will begin to rehabilitate the agricultural infrastructure. I also hope that the United Nations can continue its work and that the Taliban won't hinder them — maybe the U.N. can have an even stronger presence inside of Afghanistan to help protect human rights.

My hope is that Pashtun, Hazara and Tajik people can make overtures toward each other, learn each other's languages and find ways to live together without killing one another.

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Missouri descendant Robin Proudie and Jesuit Br. Ken Homan at the dig site at St. Inigoes in southern Maryland.



—Kevin Porter



—Kevin Porter

(From left) Jesuit Br. Ken Homan; Colleen Betti, field technician and Ph.D. candidate; Robin Proudie, a Missouri descendant; and Laura Masur, anthropology professor of the Catholic University of America, at the former plantation dig site at St. Inigoes in southern Maryland.

# A sacred journey of discovery

By KEN HOMAN, ROBIN A. PROUDIE, CLARISSA ASHTON STRIPLING and GREG BEAMAN

## What descendants felt during an archaeological dig at a Jesuit-owned plantation

**Editor's note:** Over the summer, two anthropology professors — Laura Masur, of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and Steve Lenik, of St. Mary's College of Maryland — led a dig on a former plantation owned by the Jesuits: St. Inigoes, in St. Mary's County in southern Maryland. Several descendants of enslaved people, including the Georgetown University 272, a list of enslaved persons the Jesuits sold to Louisiana plantations, joined the dig. We asked four people who participated in the dig to share their reflections.

**Ken Homan is a Jesuit brother of the Midwest Province. He is currently a history doctoral student at Georgetown University.**

I sat on an upside-down five-gallon bucket, taking a few moments to breathe in the brutal July heat. Even under the cooling tent, I felt every bit of the 105-degree heat index. I spent that steamy July day busting sod, peeling back the top layer of a 5-foot square where we searched for artifacts of those who lived, worked and died here, those who my fellow Jesuits enslaved here.

Most of the primary source documents I have read in my historical study as a doctoral student were written by my fellow Jesuits. They bear our obvious biases. But during the dig, the artifacts we encountered — animal bones, bricks, shells, nails, pottery, porcelain, cufflinks, pipestems, bottles — told that story with a frankness and honesty that our ledgers lack.

**Robin A. Proudie has served as a civil servant with the federal government for over 23 years, and is a proud Navy veteran. She enjoys listening to straight ahead jazz, traveling and writing poetry.**

In 2019, I received a letter from the Society of Jesus informing me that I descended from people they enslaved and made to labor at St. Louis University, or SLU, from 1823 until 1865. Like most people, I hadn't learned of the Jesuits' slaveholding history. I was somewhat perplexed that men of faith would undertake such an inhumane mission as to traffic men, women and children for the sole purpose of economic empowerment.

Since then, I've collaborated with researchers from the Slavery, History, Memory and Reconciliation Project to assist with the important work of uncovering the history of my Jesuit-enslaved ancestors and honoring their sacrifice by telling their stories and repairing the damage done through reconciliation.

I am a St. Louis native, but currently I live in Bowie, Maryland. I recently discovered that I reside on the very land where many of my SLU-enslaved ancestors once lived and labored. They were held in bondage on a Jesuit-owned plantation called White Marsh. In 1823, and again in 1829, a total of 26 of my ancestors were forced from their families and support networks on White Marsh to Missouri to establish the first Missouri mission and St. Louis College, now St. Louis University. My being back here, on this land, is just another confirmation that I'm being led by my ancestors on a sacred journey of discovery to reclaim their humanity.

I spent two days at the dig sites. When I picked up a rusty nail from the colonial period, or sifted through the soil with hopes of finding a one-of-a-kind artifact, I never let on that I could see shadowy figures illuminating out of the hallowed ground that was being dug up. Nobody would have believed me anyway. I travailed through the entire experience, convincing myself that this was all a necessary part of the sacred journey.

And on those nights, as I wept, I was comforted by the seraphic voices of the ancestors affirming that I am "their hope and their dream." And in those moments to come, when I will have no choice but to swallow another harsh reality of their unimaginable existence, equipped with a renewed purpose, I will hold my head high. For I know, but for my ancestors and the grace of God ... go I.

**Clarissa Ashton Stripling, a retiree, serves as the family historian and is active in the Unified Committee for Afro American Contributions of St. Mary's County, Maryland.**

I recently learned I am a GU272 de-

scendant. The GU272 were enslaved people who were sold by Georgetown University and the Maryland Jesuits to southern Louisiana in 1838. My family's DNA matches six of the Ancestry kits managed by the Georgetown Memory Project, which means we match cousins we were never aware of in Louisiana. Through endogamy, I am related to many other Southern Maryland GU272 descendants.

I am angry that my ancestors were victims of well-documented Jesuit human trafficking. My ancestors were bought, sold, enslaved, forced to labor, and converted and indoctrinated into Catholicism. Families were broken up and sold off, never to be seen again, all in the name of Jesus.

I was heartbroken to learn that single, white, female Catholics aspiring to become nuns brought their slaves as dowries, or when I read the names and descriptions of my ancestors from the manifest of the Katherine Jackson or the Tweed slave ships, or to see people identified as cargo.

Despair takes hold of me when I realize I may never find my ancestors. Non-direct line descendants spend countless hours researching and collaborating through grassroots descendant work groups. These same descendants spend money testing with different ancestry websites and buying research books. Through necessity, non-direct line descendants have been forced to become subject matter experts in slavery, migration patterns, DNA and ethnicity mapping tools, researching obscure sources and combing through archives.

This despair is exacerbated when I realize I may never uncover my link to my enslaved ancestors in my lifetime. Georgetown has been adding records to the Georgetown Slavery Archive since 2016, but they have not shared a completion date. From my perspective, there has not been engagement from Georgetown to the descendant community as to which documents are digitized first. I know of no descendants who were consulted about the documents they are most interested in seeing first.

I am angry that this atrocity is not taught in schools, nor preached about in churches. I am angry that repara-

tions have been slow in coming, or about Georgetown's refusal to provide free tuition to descendants to attend Georgetown or a college/university of the descendant's choice.

**Greg Beaman is a historian who specializes in slavery and urban development in the Atlantic world. He is a doctoral candidate in the History Department at Georgetown University.**

My eight-great-grandfather, Richard Duke, arrived in what is now Maryland aboard the Ark as an indentured servant owing a fixed term of labor to Ferdinand Poulton, a Jesuit priest. Duke labored at the St. Inigoes plantation and helped construct the first buildings there. Duke appeared in a number of court cases while in Maryland, notably a 1648 case in which he testified of his attempt to capture and enslave a Wicomico woman. Along with his fellow Protestant servants, Duke harassed the Jesuits' overseer with anti-papist verbal abuse. By 1650, he claimed 100 acres of land from the Jesuits in return for his years of indenture.

Even though the surviving archive only tells of Richard Duke's enslavement of a Wicomico woman, a glimpse at the histories profoundly demonstrates that African slavery became the dominant mode of labor organization in the Atlantic world. Enslaved Africans and their descendants suffered natal alienation, social death and immeasurable pain at the hands of their enslavers. By contrast, Richard Duke returned to England, watched his sons immigrate to America and died peacefully in the land of his birth.

How does my ancestry impact my role in the process of reconciliation? While some of Richard Duke's descendants enslaved people of African descent and forced them to produce agricultural commodities, another, Daniel Robert Alexander Dukes (the name later acquired an "s" at the end), worked as a Methodist clergyman in 1850s Kansas, where he may have contributed in some way to the movement to abolish slavery in the United States.

Perhaps a beginning of my contribution to reconciliation is telling both of these stories in their proper historical context. The next step might be recognizing that both the honorable and the wicked parts of my family history deserve telling for the examples they offer to us in the present.

“

As a people, we are made up of any combination of this [*mestizaje*] ... It's such a beautiful contribution to humanity.”

”

JEANETTE RODRÍGUEZ

## Diversity of Latino college students

In response to the need to better recognize and celebrate the diversity of the Latino community, a conference designed to help Catholic colleges and universities better serve Latinx students, made an intentional effort to do just that.

Keynote speakers, campus ministers and students shared their various Latino backgrounds, including citizenship status, countries of origin, colors, language capabilities, class status and education level, during the Aug. 3-5 “El Futuro Is Here!: Cuentos y Recuerdos for the Journey,” hosted by Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois.

In her opening remarks, Jeanette Rodríguez, a professor of theology and religious studies and couples and family therapy at Seattle University, commented on the role of “*mestizaje*” (mixed race) when talking about race and culture.

“As a people, we are made up of any combination of this [*mestizaje*], that is, you're American, African, Indigenous, Asian, etc.,” Rodríguez said. “It's such a beautiful contribution to humanity.”

Community and *comunidad de los santos* (community of saints) were two themes listed as a focus for the event.

In response to Rodríguez's keynote, “Cuentos y Recuerdos: Stories, Memories and Dichos that Teach, Heal and Sustain,” participants reflected on the power of memory and the role storytelling plays in the healing process.

Read more of the story at [NCRonline.org/node/200215](https://www.ncronline.org/node/200215).

— Melissa Cedillo



## DEVASTATION IN HAITI

—CNS/Reuters/Ricardo Arduengo

A woman takes shelter in a makeshift camp Aug. 17, 2021, during the passing of Tropical Storm Grace in Les Cayes, Haiti. The storm swept over Haiti with drenching rains after a magnitude 7.2 earthquake battered the impoverished Caribbean nation Aug. 14, 2021. Relief workers said the earthquake might not be as catastrophic as the 2010 quake, but recovery will be complicated because the quake came on the heels of July's presidential assassination, of an economic and ongoing political crisis, the coronavirus pandemic and an active storm season now underway. CRS staffers reported widespread damage to buildings and homes as area hospitals have been overwhelmed by the disaster, pushing them to capacity and forcing them to turn away people in need. The major road connecting Les Cayes to Jérémie is impassable due to landslides and cracks on the road. You can read more of the story at [NCRonline.org/node/200322](https://www.ncronline.org/node/200322).



## ON THE WEB

### 1 Francis was right on Latin Mass

NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters writes about the “wailing and gnashing of teeth” by those who are championing Latin Mass following Pope Francis' *Traditionis Custodes*, the motu proprio rendering his decision to revoke the permissions to celebrate the traditional Latin Mass.

Their reaction proves that Francis was right to do what he did, Winters says.

“The traditional Latin Mass had become an incubator for division,” he writes. “Schism is in the air along with the incense.”

You can read more of Winters' column at [NCRonline.org/node/200296](https://www.ncronline.org/node/200296).

### 2 The problem is traditionalists

In a commentary, Rebecca Bratten Weiss says that Pope Francis'



—CNS/Nancy Wiehenc

restriction on the traditional Latin Mass was not the best way to deal with the problems in traditionalist communities.

“A more effective move would have been to put restrictions on the destructive behaviors and ideologies they promote,” she writes. “The traditional Latin Mass is not itself the problem. The problem is that many traditionalist communities embrace and promote ideologies contrary to the Gospel.”

Read more of Bratten Weiss' commentary at [NCRonline.org/node/200374](https://www.ncronline.org/node/200374).

### 3 Two nuns killed in South Sudan

Srs. Mary Daniel Abut and Regina Roba, South Sudanese members of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in the Juba Archdiocese, were shot and killed along a South Sudan highway on Aug. 16.

The sisters were in a bus returning to Juba with seven other sisters and five men after attending centenary celebrations at Loa Catholic parish in the eastern Diocese of Torit, according to a statement.

According to the statement, the bus left at 7:30 a.m. and was an hour into the trip when armed men ambushed the bus and started shooting at it. The driver ordered the men on the bus to flee, thinking that the gunmen would spare the sisters. Four of the sisters left the bus with the men. The gunmen followed and shot Abut and Roba.

You can read more of the story at [GlobalSistersReport.org/node/200344](https://www.globalsistersreport.org/node/200344).



### 4 Celebrating John Krejci

Carol McShane writes an appreciation for the founder of Call to Action Nebraska, John Krejci, who died Aug. 11. McShane, Krejci and others were excommunicated in 1996 by then Lincoln Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz.

“He blessed all that he did with a spark of life,” McShane says about Krejci. “He knew goodness and truth when he saw it and had the courage to speak up when he didn't see it.”

You can read more of the appreciation at [NCRonline.org/node/200379](https://www.ncronline.org/node/200379).

# Synodality's promise for a more inclusive church

## COMMENTARY

By HOSFFMAN OSPINO

My colleague Rafael Luciani is one of the world's leading experts on the topic of synodality, the experience of "walking together" rooted in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council that Pope Francis has called on the Catholic Church to embrace.

Luciani, a native of Venezuela, serves as a theological expert for the regional Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) and the Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR).

He is also one of three Latin American theologians invited as expert advisers for the theological commission of the secretariat for the next Synod of Bishops. Earlier this year, Francis expanded the upcoming synod: It will begin with a diocesan phase this fall, followed by continental meetings next year, and will conclude with a general assembly at the Vatican in 2023.

Luciani is professor extraordinarius at Boston College and a full professor at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Venezuela.

We spoke in early August about synodality, why some Catholics seem reluctant or unwilling to consider this way of being church, and what it means that Xavière Missionary Sr. Nathalie Becquart, his former student, will be the first woman serving as a voting member at a Vatican synod.

Following is our interview, which I translated from Spanish and edited for length and clarity.

**Ospino: We hear much about synodality these days. What do you think needs more clarity to understand this topic better?**

**Luciani:** Above all, synodality is a way in which the church is and acts in history. It is not a method of doing things. It is an ecclesial way of proceeding grounded in the ecclesiology of the people of God described in Chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium*. According to Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, the document's architect, this is the key to interpreting the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. During Francis' pontificate, the reflection on synodality has unfolded as an exercise of deepening the vision of Vatican II.

More than a drive to reform structures, synodality points to communicational dynamics and ways of relating with one another as baptized people. A synodal vision challenges us to transform clericalist practices in which an individual or a group in the church makes decisions without listening and consulting, as if existing beyond the people of God. Synodality demands that we listen and engage in dialogue to establish binding relationships that build church.

"Binding" means "mutual need," as *Lumen Gentium* reminds us. It is more than collecting opinions or running surveys. Synodality is an invitation to foster processes of conversion as we listen to one another and to the larger society while reading the signs of the times together.

**What is the novelty in the concept of synodality?**

Synodality retrieves a more dynamic and inclusive model of being and acting ecclesially. In the first millen-



People hold candles during a prayer vigil for the Synod of Bishops on the family attended by Pope Francis in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican in this Oct. 3, 2015, file photo.

—CNS/Paul Harring

## NCR

### ON THE WEB

Read the full Q&A with Rafael Luciani at [NCRonline.org/node/200436](https://www.ncronline.org/node/200436).

nium of the Christian tradition, there were many practices from which we can learn much theologically, liturgically and pastorally.

Think of the synodal practice of St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage: do nothing without the council — of presbyters and deacons — and the consensus of the people. The order is important: *take advice* from some and *build consensus* with all as people of God. Consensus presupposes a process of consultation, listening, dialogue and discernment *en conjunto* (collaboratively). During the second millennium, with the Gregorian Reform and the Council of Trent the attention shifted to uniformity and institutionalization (e.g., parishes, seminaries).

As it unfolds, the synodal model today seeks to achieve some *sensus ecclesiae* (to feel with the entire church). It is not about limiting or eliminating the decision-making power of the pope or that of the bishops. In fact, it affirms that and strengthens it, demanding that their decisions emerge from sincere consultation and seeking consensus, since every exercise of authority in the church is to be at the service of the people of God.

**Why do you think that some sectors in the church in the United States still see synodality with suspicion?**

I think that it has to do largely with how Catholics in the United States received the Second Vatican Council: an incomplete reception with more emphasis on structures, delimitation of ecclesial authority, and more emphasis on worship. In Latin America, the council was received in a more horizontal manner via *Gaudium et Spes* (option for the poor), *Lumen Gentium* (church, people of God), and *Dei Verbum* (a communal reading of the word of God).

This was crystalized in Medellín [Colombia, 1968], inspiring a *pastoral de conjunto* (more collaborative and inclusive ways of pastoral praxis). Yes, clericalism exists but there is more evidence of a desire to engage in horizontal ecclesial relationships.



—NCR screenshot/YouTube/Boston College School of Theology and Ministry Continuing Education

Rafael Luciani

We should not be surprised that many Catholics in the United States do not understand or simply refuse to embrace a synodal conversion. A clericalist mentality seems to permeate many of the ecclesial structures and pastoral practices. This applies both to the ordained and to lay ecclesial ministers who often act as if they were beyond the rest of the people of God or as corporate agents.

**When Catholics in the United States follow synodal processes in Germany and in the Amazon region, for instance, many worry that local churches may engage in discernment processes that lead them to conclusions or decisions that perhaps other local churches may not be ready to consider or embrace. What do you think of this concern?**

The concern echoes a pre-conciliar ecclesiological mentality that treated unity as equivalent to homogeneity. In its document "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church" (2018), the International Theological Commission reminds us that the first level in the exercise of synodal discernment is listening to the local churches and how the faith is expressed in different cultures and contexts.

That is what the conciliar decree *Ad Gentes* proposed. Seeking to impose ways of being Catholic that are theologically and culturally homogeneous is akin to arguing in favor of a new colonialism.

The local church is to express the church's universality in terms of what it believes and to affirm its diversity in

terms of how that faith is inculturated through differentiated ecclesial forms and practices.

**You served as Sr. Nathalie Becquart's academic adviser and directed her graduate thesis on the topic of synodality when she studied at Boston College. Now she is undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops, and the first vowed religious woman with a right to vote in such an ecclesial entity. How should we read this appointment?**

It is a meaningful appointment, although its major impact is not what many U.S. Catholics and mass media venues often highlight. Many interpret her ability to vote in the Synod of Bishops as an exercise of lay power. That perspective may give the impression that the church is moving toward a model of representative democracy in which a majority — ordained or lay — may impose its will.

That analysis would be simplistic. There are several other lay women and men at the Vatican with juridical power that was traditionally reserved to bishops. To vote in these instances must be understood in a much wider context.

Sister Nathalie's appointment is an affirmation of the voice of ecclesial minorities and their representation in ecclesial processes. Only a culture of consensus can guarantee that minorities are recognized and included.

**What do you recommend to understand and appreciate more these conversations on synodality?**

First of all, humility and openness to listen. We need to overcome fears and prejudices when talking about these topics.

Read more, starting with a more in-depth study of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Become familiar with the document of the International Theological Commission, "Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church," which has not received sufficient attention, even among theologians. I also recommend taking part in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2021-23).

[Hosffman Ospino is a professor of theology at Boston College, where he chairs the Department of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry.]

# REFUGEES: IT IS OUR TURN TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL

Continued from Page 1

Although my grandmother, mother and uncles were not sent to a “reeducation camp,” they lived in fear of imprisonment and were constantly harassed and ostracized from the new society. They also lost their ability to worship freely as Catholics. They had to bury their Bibles, rosaries and altar in the fields.

Everything they were had to be hidden; their sense of self was buried. Even after my grandfather was released home, the family was placed under close monitoring and observation by the government to ensure that he truly had been “reeducated.”

Therefore, the family had to escape individually — with my mother being the first to try to pave the way for everyone else. A Catholic priest who had baptized her and presided over her confirmation gave her his spot on a departing boat. One night at midnight, with only a rosary and three banana-wrapped sticky rice buns, my mom climbed onto this dinghy with 14 other people, and searched for freedom on the Pacific Ocean.

It was a horrendous journey during which they faced sickness, starvation, lack of water, robbery, rape and murder by pirates. Yet my mom made had no choice but to make this journey because, as she told me, “to die free, being able to say my last prayers without fear, is better than to live with no voice and no hope.”

Out of fuel after the first day, they drifted until they were rescued by a passing Filipino fishing boat and taken to a refugee camp in Palawan, Philippines.

From there, the combination of my grandfather’s papers and sponsorship by a California parish supporting her with their time, treasures and talents paved the way for my mom to rebuild her life in America and help her family with their escape from Vietnam.

My family’s stories and experiences are not unique. Countless similar stories make up the Vietnamese diaspora. Although I listened to those stories over and over, it was not until I sat on the couch with my mom that morning and watched the videos of the panic and desperation unfolding in Kabul that I could only begin to truly grasp what my mom, dad, grandparents and others in my community had experienced.

Even though they rebuilt their lives in America and other countries around the world, they still suffered decades later from the trauma of having their dignity stripped from them as they left everything to escape and search for freedom. That trauma left behind physiological and psychological scars for them and subsequent generations.

Woven into the lives of the Vietnamese War refugee community is a collective, intergenerational trauma. The adverse impacts of intergenerational trauma in refugee communities is well-documented by the scientific community, with “long-term effects of the health and psychosocial well-being of individuals in a subsequent generation.”

No one should ever be subjected to the destruction of one’s dignity. The concept that “every human being is created in the image of God, entitled to human dignity and respect,” as the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, is the foundation of modern Catholic social teaching.



—Courtesy of Theresa La

Theresa La, right, celebrates her sister’s graduation day with her father and mother.

**When the dignity of a refugee, a migrant, a human being is destroyed by war and/or in the aftermath of war, the *imago dei* is destroyed.**

When the dignity of a refugee, a migrant, a human being is destroyed by war and/or in the aftermath of war, the *imago dei* is destroyed. When we ignore the destruction of a refugee, a migrant, a human being’s dignity that we can see unfolding right before our very eyes, we too are ignoring the destruction of the face of God. Therefore, Catholics striving to live out the teachings of the church are obligated to advocate for and serve all refugees and migrants.

Our moral and ethical duty to protect the dignity of Afghan refugees is twofold. First, we are obliged to call on our president, senators, representatives and other elected officials to evacuate and resettle all Afghan refugees, without any numerical caps but particularly those families who, because of a relative’s work alongside the United States, are now in grave danger.

This includes not just Afghan refugees currently stranded in Kabul, but also those in other provinces who cannot make it to Kabul. While this poses some additional logistical questions, implementing solutions now is better than creating a secondary humanitarian crisis because we did not fully address the precipitating one.

Second, we are also obliged to actively assist refugees in rebuilding their lives. Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI in his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2013, tells us: “The Church and her various agencies ... are also called to promote real integration in a society where all are active members and responsible for one another’s welfare ... rightfully sharing in the same rights and duties.”

It is our moral and ethical imperative, particularly as Catholics, to welcome all Afghan refugees into the folds of our communities, into our homes, as God welcomes us into his — “The land is mine, you are but strangers resident with me” (Leviticus 25:23).

In supporting the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees, sponsoring my parents, offering English and citizenship classes, providing shelter, purchasing food and supporting them psychologically, spiritually, and physiologically, parishioners in Michigan and California performed the corporal works of mercy.

They lived out God’s calling to “cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more ... and uphold the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriend the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the

land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:16-19).

By focusing on the humanity of Vietnamese refugees rather than subscribing to the political drama surrounding the Vietnam War, they helped my parents to regain their human dignity. These servants continued the Catholic tradition of caring for migrants and refugees, which can trace back to the Old Testament when Abraham becomes the world’s first immigrant (Genesis 12:1-3) and includes Jesus’ family when they had to escape to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14).

Now it is my turn, it is *our* turn, to do the same for our Afghan brothers and sisters to ensure that the currently unfolding humanitarian crisis does not leave intergenerational scars as deep as the humanitarian crisis of the Vietnam War. It is our turn to answer God’s call to tend to the needs of our brothers and sisters. It is our turn to call on our elected officials to rescue, resettle and integrate Afghan refugees into our communities by supporting them with our God-given time, treasures and talents. It is our turn to “act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

[Theresa La is the proud daughter of war refugees and graduate of Catholic schooling from elementary parochial school to Loyola Marymount University and Georgetown University. She is currently a master’s student in physiology at Case Western Reserve University. When not advocating for social justice issues, she can be found drinking coffee and trying to teach her dog how to pray.]

**Information to identify the case:**  
 Debtor: The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation, EIN: 06-0687373  
 United States Bankruptcy Court District of Connecticut  
 Case number: 21-20687 JLT  
 Date case filed for chapter 11: July 15, 2021  
 Official Form 309F1 (For Corporations or Partnerships)  
**Notice of Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Case** 10/1/20  
 For the debtor listed above, a case has been filed under chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Code. An order for relief has been entered.  
 This notice has important information about the case for creditors and debtors, including information about the meeting of creditors and deadlines. Read carefully.  
 The filing of the case imposed an automatic stay against most collection activities. This means that creditors generally may not take action to collect debts from the debtor or the debtor’s property. For example, while the stay is in effect, creditors cannot sue, assert a deficiency, repossess property, or otherwise try to collect from the debtor. Creditors cannot demand repayment from the debtor by mail, phone, or otherwise. Creditors who violate the stay can be required to pay actual and punitive damages and attorney’s fees.  
 Confirmation of a chapter 11 plan may result in a discharge of debt. A creditor who wants to have a particular debt excepted from discharge may be required to file a complaint in the bankruptcy clerk’s office within the deadline specified in this notice. (See line 11 below for more information.)  
 To protect your rights, consult an attorney. All documents filed in the case may be inspected at the bankruptcy clerk’s office at the address listed below or through PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records at <https://pacer.uscourts.gov>).  
**The staff of the bankruptcy clerk’s office cannot give legal advice.**  
**Do not file this notice with any proof of claim or other filing in the case.**  
 1. Debtor’s full name: The Norwich Roman Catholic Diocesan Corporation  
 2. All other names used in the last 8 years:  
 3. Address: 201 Broadway, Norwich, CT 06360  
 4. Debtor’s attorney: Patrick M. Birney, Robinson & Cole LLP, 280 Trumbull Street, Hartford, CT 06103, Contact phone: 860-275-8200, Email: [pbirney@rc.com](mailto:pbirney@rc.com)  
 5. Bankruptcy clerk’s office: 450 Main Street, 7th Floor, Hartford, CT 06103. Hours open: 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Monday - Friday, Contact phone: 860-240-3675. Documents in this case may be filed at this address. You may inspect all records filed in this case at this office or online at <https://pacer.uscourts.gov>. Date: 2/8/21  
 6. Meeting of creditors: August 16, 2021 at 1:00 p.m., Conference Line: 877-915-2934, Participant Code: 8494974, Location: DUE TO COVID-19 THE MEETING OF CREDITORS WILL BE HELD TELEPHONICALLY. The debtor’s representative must attend the meeting to be questioned under oath. Creditors may attend, but are not required to do so.  
 7. Proof of claim deadline: Deadline for filing proof of claim: Not yet set.  
 A proof of claim is a signed statement describing a creditor’s claim. A proof of claim form may be obtained at [www.uscourts.gov](https://www.uscourts.gov) or any bankruptcy clerk’s office.  
 Your claim will be allowed in the amount scheduled unless: your claim is designated as *disputed*, *contingent*, or *unliquidated*; you file a proof of claim in a different amount; or you receive another notice.  
 If your claim is not scheduled or if your claim is designated as *disputed*, *contingent*, or *unliquidated*, you must file a proof of claim or you might not be paid on your claim and you might be unable to vote on a plan. You may file a proof of claim even if your claim is scheduled.  
 You may review the schedules at the bankruptcy clerk’s office or online at <https://pacer.uscourts.gov>.  
 Secured creditors retain rights in their collateral regardless of whether they file a proof of claim. Filing a proof of claim submits a creditor to the jurisdiction of the bankruptcy court, with consequences a lawyer can explain. For example, a secured creditor who files a proof of claim may surrender important nonmonetary rights, including the right to a jury trial.  
 8. Exception to discharge deadline: If § 523(c) applies to your claim and you seek to have it excepted from discharge, you must start a judicial proceeding by filing a complaint. The bankruptcy clerk’s office must receive a complaint and any required filing fee by the following deadline.  
 9. Creditors with a foreign address: If you are a creditor receiving notice mailed to a foreign address, you may file a motion asking the court to extend the deadlines in this notice. Consult an attorney familiar with United States bankruptcy law if you have any questions about your rights in this case.  
 10. Filing a Chapter 11 bankruptcy case: Chapter 11 allows debtors to reorganize or liquidate according to a plan. A plan is not effective unless the court confirms it. You may receive a copy of the plan and a disclosure statement telling you about the plan, and you may have the opportunity to vote on the plan. You will receive notice of the date of the confirmation hearing, and you may object to confirmation of the plan and attend the confirmation hearing. Unless a trustee is serving, the debtor will remain in possession of the property and may continue to operate its business.  
 11. Discharge of debts: Confirmation of a chapter 11 plan may result in a discharge of debts, which may include all or part of your debt. See 11 U.S.C. § 1141(d). A discharge means that creditors may never try to collect the debt from the debtor except as provided in the plan. If you want to have a particular debt owed to you excepted from the discharge and § 523(c) applies to your claim, you must start a judicial proceeding by filing a complaint and paying the filing fee in the bankruptcy clerk’s office by the deadline.  
 If you have any questions about this notice, please contact the Debtor’s Claims and Noticing Agent, Epiq Corporate Restructuring, LLC, at (855) 654-0902 (toll free from the U.S. or Canada), +1 (503) 597-7676 (international), by email at [RCNOrwichInfo@epiqglobal.com](mailto:RCNOrwichInfo@epiqglobal.com), or visit <https://dm.epiq11.com/RCNOrwich>.



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“I rely on NCR for its independent news analysis of my church and our people. I look to NCR to feed my faith and its stories undergird my spirituality and in it I find community. I want NCR to have the funds to continue so I enthusiastically put them in my will, donate to the annual Friends of NCR fund and gift a dozen subscriptions annually.”

—Anne M. Jenkins, Edmunds, WA



## NCR Legacy Society

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“From NCR I get a view of the church I find in very few other publications. It gives me a vision of the church that is dynamic and open to the Holy Spirit and at the same time, a church which is changeable and always in need of reform because it is made up of frail human persons. NCR holds the church accountable for its failings, but above all it is committed to be a voice of the church’s mission as the hope and the light of Christ in a darkened world.”

—Fr. Anthony Schumacher, NCR legacy donor, 1927-2019

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*In the same spirit of gratitude, we offer our heartfelt thanks to members of our board of directors whose generous gifts made it possible for NCR to offer a wonderful opportunity to those who choose to make NCR part of their legacy plan through our Legacy Challenge.*

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Learn more about NCR’s Legacy Challenge:  
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Demonstrators in Atlanta gather outside the Georgia State Capitol March 1, 2021, to protest H.B. 531, passed by the Georgia House to restrict ballot drop boxes, require more I.D. for absentee voting and limit weekend early voting days passed.



—CNS/Reuters/Dustin Chambers



—CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz  
Women religious and laypeople attend a rally at the Sisters of St. Joseph motherhouse July 26, 2021, in Brentwood, New York, urging U.S. Congress to pass the voting-rights For the People Act.



—CNS/Reuters/Callaghan O'Hare

Protesters take part in a July 31, 2021, march in Austin, Texas, for voting rights and against a measure in the Legislature to enact voting restrictions.

**VOTERS: 'THE SILENCE IS VERY NOTICEABLE'**

Continued from Page 1

"The silence is very noticeable, and it's sad and disappointing," said Sr. Anita Baird, a member of the Religious Congregation of the Society of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary who serves on the board of directors for the National Black Sisters' Conference.

State legislatures in Georgia and Florida passed and Republican governors in both states signed controversial broad omnibus bills that the Brennan Center and civil rights groups like the NAACP describe as voter suppression laws.

In Texas, two similar voting restriction bills have been introduced in a special session of the state legislature, but House Democrats have fled the state to deprive their chamber of the quorum required to pass legislation.

In May, the National Black Sisters' Conference issued a joint statement with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious defending the right of all citizens to vote. The sisters also called on Congress to take up legislation to protect voting rights, such as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, and called out elected officials "at every level who continue to introduce measures that would return us to the era of Jim Crow."

"This should be an issue that would be very easy for the bishops collectively to issue a very strong statement on the sanctity and the right to vote, and the responsibility we all have to ensure that every citizen's voice is heard," Baird told NCR.

Instead of challenging Republican lawmakers and conservative lobbyists who have led the charge to tighten voting regulations on questionable grounds that the 2020 presidential election was marred by fraud, the bishops have widely opted for a nonconfrontational posture — either remaining si-

lent or issuing general statements reiterating official Catholic support for voting rights without mentioning the recent bills.

The Catholic bishops have not joined leaders of other Christian denominations and faith traditions who have spoken out and mobilized against the new state voting laws. On Aug. 12, dozens of interfaith leaders and state legislators spoke outside the U.S. Supreme Court to call on federal lawmakers to secure voting rights and end the filibuster, the threat of which Senate Republicans utilized in June to block debate on the For the People Act, Democrats' voting rights and campaign finance reform bill. The interfaith leaders also marched to the U.S. Capitol with signed letters to present to lawmakers. No Catholic bishops participated in the march.

On June 24, the chairmen of two U.S. bishops' committees sent a letter to congressional lawmakers urging them to ensure "the right to vote is available to all citizens in our democratic society." However, the bishops took no position on any federal legislation and did not mention new laws that restrict voting access in states like Georgia and Florida.

Fr. Bruce Wilkinson, a priest of the Atlanta Archdiocese who is retired from active ministry, told NCR that "as a Black man, it doesn't surprise me. But as a Catholic, it really disappoints me."

The typical response from the Atlanta Archdiocese to previous concerns raised by him and others regarding issues of racial injustice has been silence, he said.

"When all these things happen, like voter suppression, which has been a very big issue, especially in the Black Catholic community, there's silence," Wilkinson said.

A spokeswoman for the Atlanta Archdiocese told NCR in an email that the archdiocese was "not interested in participating" in this story.

The Georgia Catholic Conference, which acts as the public policy arm for the state's bishops, did not take a position or comment on the passage of the Election Integrity Act of 2021, which Gov. Brian Kemp signed into law on March 25. In addition to provisions that tighten restrictions on drop boxes, voter IDs and absentee ballots, the Georgia law prohibits volunteers from handing out food and water to people waiting in line to vote. The law also enables the state legislature to take more direct control over the ballot counting in Democratic-majority areas.

Two months before the law's passage, Francis Mulcahy, the executive director of the Georgia Catholic Conference, told The Georgia Bulletin, newspaper for the Atlanta Archdiocese, that the local church would defend voting rights as a key feature of Catholic social teaching in the upcoming legislative session.

"We would be opposed to any restriction on voting rights," Mulcahy said in January. "Exactly how that will play out in legislation and what we will do about it will depend on what comes out in the legislation."

But when organizations like the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the League of Women Voters of Georgia and the American Civil Liberties Union filed legal challenges and accused the state's Republican lawmakers of crafting legislation designed to suppress voters in Black-majority districts, the Georgia Catholic Conference did not join the challenges.

As NCR has previously reported, major Catholic philanthropists and pro-life leaders have bankrolled and spearheaded voter suppression efforts

in conservative-leaning states since Donald Trump's defeat last November to Joe Biden, a Democrat. Trump has attributed Biden's victory to baseless claims of widespread voter fraud that helped fuel the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and that have helped provide a shaky foundation for Republicans' election integrity push.

Besides possibly not wanting to alienate politically conservative donors, other potential factors — including political calculations and disagreements among the bishops themselves — could explain their hesitancy or inability to collectively speak out against the new state-level restrictions on voting.

"I think the USCCB, the church hierarchy in general, might say that we take stands on issues that directly reflect the teachings of the church, and that how elections are administered is not really central to Catholic teaching," said Geoffrey Layman, chairman of the political science department at the University of Notre Dame.

"I think they might say that, so in an effort to not stick their head into politics where it doesn't belong and to restrict their political activities that are central to church teaching. That might be one thing that they would say," said Layman, who also suggested that bishops in conservative states could be playing the political long game as well.

With the U.S. Supreme Court and its conservative majority more likely to give states further latitude to regulate abortion rights, possibly even overturn *Roe v. Wade*, bishops in those states may not want to alienate Republican lawmakers when the time comes to legislate away abortion, he said.

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, on its website and its Twitter feed, has staked out positions on dozens of bills this year related to abortion, conscience rights for health care workers, "the advancement of gender ideology," as well as on issues related to immigration, religious liberty and education. But there is no recent mention of the Texas Legislature's pending bills to restrict voting access.

A spokesperson for the Texas Catholic Conference told NCR in an email that the conference would not comment.

In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed his state's new restrictive voting law on May 6 during a live taping on the Fox News show "Fox and Friends." The law immediately drew legal challenges from groups such as the League of Women Voters of Florida and the Black Voters Matter Fund.

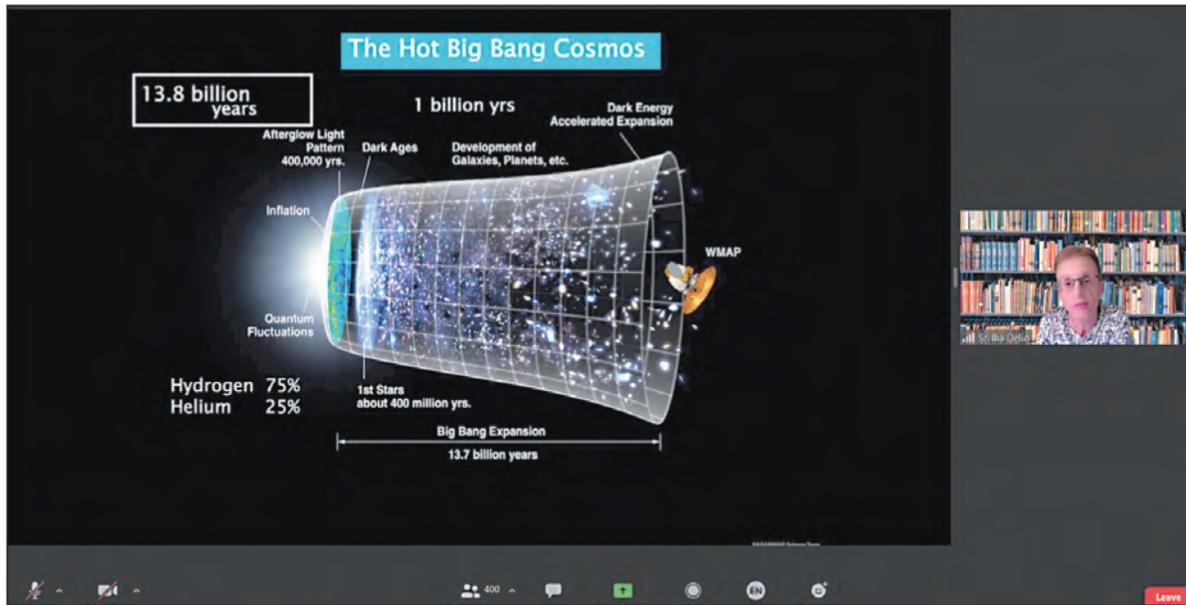
The Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops did not take a stand on the law. "Not having sufficient expertise to know the true impact of the provisions, it would have been imprudent to take a position," Michael Sheedy, executive director of the conference, wrote in an email to NCR. "At another level, we expected that if the bills were passed, the provisions would be challenged. In this case, the courts would be better suited to sort things out."

Baird of the National Black Sisters' Conference said many Black Catholics feel that the church has given lip service to issues that impact their communities, when in reality the institution often doesn't stand in solidarity with them.

"This is about the very survival of our democracy, and certainly what is happening is also very racist in that these bills are being put forward to keep African Americans, Latinos and other people of color from voting," said Baird.

[Brian Fraga is NCR staff reporter.]

Franciscan Sr. Iliia Delio speaks during the virtual *Laudato Si'* workshop Aug. 17, 2021. "We have built a very complex world for ourselves at a very rapid pace. And so we did not learn how to really live in this world adequately," she said.



—NCR screenshot

from climate change. Seventeen DART-affiliated groups are building care for creation teams as part of the initiative, with the goal of identifying climate impacts in each community and mobilizing faith organizations to lobby for local policies to address them.

**EB** ON THE WEB  
Read the full story at NCR online.org/node/200404.

# How might *Laudato Si'* guide community responses?

By BRIAN ROEWE  
broewe@ncronline.org

Flooding is a prevailing problem in Charleston, South Carolina.

In 2019, the Atlantic coastal city experienced 89 days of flooding, or nearly one of every five days that year. That blew past the previous record of 58 times, set in 2015, and represented a dramatic shift from more than a half-century earlier, when in 1950 flooding events occurred roughly twice a year, according to a recent study by the coastal ocean science center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In some ways, it's no surprise that Charleston regularly floods — it sits only a few feet above sea level, is next to an ocean and is surrounded rivers and tributaries. That makes it especially prone to storm surge from heavy rains and coastal storms, though flooding can also occur on sunny days, too. The hazards are exacerbated by climate change, which is causing more intense storms and is also causing sea levels to rise.

But that only partly explains the rise in flood events in Charleston, people involved in justice ministries said at a virtual workshop on Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home." They point



—CNS/Reuters/Randall Hill

A vehicle navigates a flooded road Sept. 14, 2018, during Hurricane Florence in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The next year, the coastal city of Charleston experienced 89 days of flooding, nearly one every five days. Charleston's previous record, 58 times, was set in 2015.

to development that has replaced critical marshlands with waterfront properties in one of the country's fastest-growing cities.

"If you build on that salt marsh, you're taking away that buffer from sea level rise, the buffer from floods, from storms as well as just a buffer in general," said Lee Ann Clements, a marine scientist and chair of the committee on integral ecology for the Diocese of St. Augustine, Florida.

"It's very easy for people to see that coastal environment, that waterfront property, as the thing they want, as

desirable. But to the detriment of the whole environment and to the detriment of the community," she said.

The flooding has also intensified the southern city's racial and economic gaps. Black and poor communities are located in areas most prone to flooding, but they are least likely to receive assistance, said Marina Lopez, a member of Charleston Area Justice Ministry.

"We never have enough money for the poor neighborhoods and the things that need to be done in those places. But we are discussing without any concern the money that we are going to spend to save the more affluent neighborhoods," she said.

The situation in Charleston was one of several environmental challenges identified during the *Laudato Si'* workshop Aug. 17. The event was organized by the Direct Action and Research Training Center, or DART Center, and co-sponsored by five Catholic dioceses, Allegany Franciscan Ministries and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The workshop featured Franciscan Sr. Iliia Delio and Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski, each of whom reflected on the pope's encyclical and how Catholics and others can respond to its message.

In July 2020, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development awarded a \$500,000 grant to the DART Center, which is made up of 28 multifaith justice ministry organizations in the Southeast and Midwest, to put the principles of *Laudato Si'* into action in Southeast communities facing hazards

The *Laudato Si'* workshop was the kickstart of a series of listening sessions planned for the coming months that seek to engage as many as 1,000 people in each of the 17 locations to continue discussing local impacts of climate change and solutions that benefit all people, particularly those who are poor and historically disadvantaged.

Josette Josue, a parishioner of St. James Catholic Church in North Miami, described how property values and rents are soaring in the Little Haiti neighborhood — located near the center of the city and therefore farther from the coast and rising sea levels — and forcing people to abandon where they've lived for decades.

"Haitian residents are moving out while wealthy communities are moving in," she said.

Wenski said that for Floridians concerned about rising seas, "the news was not good" in the recent report on the state of the global climate from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The archbishop said that a core message from Francis in *Laudato Si'* is that addressing the environmental challenges facing the planet begins with restoring broken relationships with God, with neighbor and with the Earth itself.

"We are all interconnected, and if we're going to solve the problems that beset us we have to recognize that," Wenski said.

Delio, the Josephine C. Connelly Endowed Chair in Theology at Villanova University, said part of the problem is that humanity has become disconnected from the earth.

"We have built a very complex world for ourselves at a very rapid pace. And so we did not learn how to really live in this world adequately," she said.

That has led to a selfish mentality, particularly evident during the coronavirus pandemic, of "take for me first, let me take care of myself first, and if I have anything left over, maybe I can help you," she added. "And that's a deep problem for us. We have no real sense that we really belong to one another and we belong to one another on this Earth."

Delio said that solving the problems of climate change and environmental degradation begins with changing ourselves, and that communities seeking to live in the spirit of *Laudato Si'* must reflect a sense of mutual caring and mutual sharing that sees the Earth as part of that community and not simply a repository of resources.

"The ultimate concern of the human must be the integrity of the universe upon which the human depends in such an absolute matter," she said. "Care for the Earth sounds like we're in charge, but the fact is the Earth cares for us. And if we destroy ourselves, it's likely that simple biological life will continue on."

[Brian Roewe is NCR environment correspondent.]

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## PROTESTS: STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Continued from Page 1

“It’s been tough, it’s been depressing, it’s been very stressful for all of us,” she said of the bullying and intimidation, which included her face being superimposed on posters of the nationalist Sinn Féin party accompanied by the words: “Every word of Irish spoken is like another bullet being fired in the struggle for Irish independence.”

“The idea that somebody would deny me the right to speak Irish because I’m a Protestant and tell me that I’m doing something wrong, is some form of insanity,” Ervine told NCR.

Over the years Northern Ireland’s divisive politics have led the ancient Irish language, once spoken by all here, to be identified more with Catholic and nationalist communities, who broadly seek for the territory to be a part of the Republic of Ireland from which it was carved a hundred years ago.

After the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union, the Irish language has become even more of a political touchstone. Identity is a sensitive issue across Ireland and politicians often use questions of “Britishness” or “Irishness” to rally their supporters. That’s likely to be ramped up as the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election approaches.

Still to be legislated here is the Irish Language Act, *Acht na Gaeilge*. While a growing number of unionists are comfortable with Irish, many Unionist politicians oppose its proposed formal recognition as an official language alongside English, as the Welsh language is in Wales.

“The Irish Language Act will provide statutory protection for the language and will, essentially, remove it from the whimsical decision-making of whatever politician finds him or herself in a position to decide what should or should not happen with the language,” said Niall Comer, a lecturer in Irish at Ulster University.

Comer said the act “will also recognize Irish as an official language of Northern Ireland and help to end years of persecution and under-development of a language that was once spoken throughout Ireland.”

Speaking Irish is nothing new for Fr. Darach MacGiolla Cathain, who was born and raised in Shaw’s Road, a West Belfast Irish speaking community his parents Adam and Monica helped to establish.

A pioneering group of 12 couples decided in 1969 to create the community, raised funds and built their own houses. As children were born, the parents drew together to start North-

ern Ireland’s first Irish language preschool. They then campaigned for primary schools and later secondary schools. Today Belfast is served by some 15 Irish language middle schools and two high schools.

The Shaw’s Road community lies at the heart of the West Belfast *Gaeltacht*, an Irish speaking community, said MacGiolla Cathain, who coordinates the chaplaincy for Irish middle school education in the Diocese of Down and Connor.

Of the five Catholic dioceses in Northern Ireland only two, Down and Connor and Dromore, lie entirely within the British nation’s boundaries. The other three are partly in the Republic of Ireland, where Irish is the national language and a compulsory school subject. *Gaeltachts* can be found in several of the Republic of Ireland’s 26 counties.

Once a month MacGiolla Cathain celebrates Mass in Irish at St. Mary’s Chapel Lane, Belfast’s oldest Catholic church, and greets parishioners in their native tongue. *Dia duit* (“God be with you”) is traditionally how Irish speakers say hello. The response is *Dia’s Muihre Duit* (“God and Mary be with you”).

St Mary’s, where MacGiolla Cathain was baptized, was built in 1784, largely with funds raised by Presbyterians and The Church of Ireland, when only 365 Catholics, about 8% of the population, lived in Belfast.

The number of Catholics reached about half the city’s population by 2011, and the latest figures from the 2021 Census will be published next year.

It is the only church in Down and Connor to celebrate Mass in Irish weekly. Others might do so on occasions like St. Patrick’s Day or when people request Irish language services for First Communion, weddings and funerals.

“It’s obviously more prevalent in the likes of Donegal,” said MacGiolla Cathain, referring to a Republic of Ireland county, where he said celebrating Mass in Irish is “about as unremarkable as Mass being celebrated in Spanish in Spain.”

The priest said he measures the “growing appreciation for the language” in Northern Ireland by the number of Irish language confirmations in his diocese. “Around seven years ago the number of children was around 200, now it’s around the 300 mark — a 50% increase,” he said.

Ervine’s new school, named *Naiscoil na Seolta*, was set to open in September in the predominantly Protestant East Belfast. She chose the name



—NCR/Claude Colart

Fr. Darach MacGiolla Cathain greeting parishioners

*na seolta* or “the sails” as a nod to the area’s shipbuilding history including, most famously, the RMS Titanic.

She fell in love with the language on a six-week taster course as part of a cross-community women’s group and has been teaching it to beginner adults for nearly 10 years, an achievement that saw Queen Elizabeth II awarding her a special honor this year for her services to the language.

Her classes on behalf of the Methodist Church’s East Belfast Mission started in November 2011 and the next September saw the establishment of a center named *Turas*, meaning journey or pilgrimage in both Irish and Scottish Gaelic.

Seeing attendance grow “year-on-year” in East Belfast convinced Ervine of an increased interest in Irish there. She decided to open a *naiscoil* after being invited by Braniel Primary School’s principal Diane Dawson to teach Irish as part of a post-COVID-19 lockdown “recovery program” in March.

Dawson, also a Unionist, was thrilled at the results. She introduced Irish, Spanish and sign language to gently ease the children back into a school environment.

She delights in a mother’s recollection of a scene in the back of her car when the children’s iPad stopped working. She overheard her 8-year-old ask her 5-year-old: “What is two plus two? Tell me the answer in Irish.” “A ceathair,” the 5-year-old responded: Four.

When Ervine wondered aloud if there was space for an Irish language preschool, Dawson immediately suggested an empty mobile classroom on the property.

Within weeks the education authorities granted permission and two years of funding was secured from *Foras Na Gaeilge*, which promotes the Irish language throughout Ireland.

While only three complaints came from parents of Braniel Primary School, most of the resistance to the *naiscoil* was falsely claimed to be from the community, Dawson said. In reality, some votes against the school were from different parts of Northern Ireland and some from as far as England and Scotland.

Both Ervine and Dawson took the threats seriously, mindful of the 2001 attacks on children walking through a Protestant area to the Holy Cross Girls

Primary School. “We knew it cannot be another Holy Cross,” said Ervine.

She is determined to open the *naiscoil* and is confident that someday it “will just be part of our history and it will show how far we’ve come.”

If she could, Ervine would tell the *naiscoil*’s opponents: “Come and sit down with me. Have a cup of tea and let’s talk about the issues that you have, reasonably and rationally.”

MacGiolla Cathain calls Ervine’s work “tremendous.”

Reflecting on her trailblazing efforts half a century after his parents’ own contribution to the Irish language, he said: “It’s very important just to break down those barriers. It’s not about claiming, it’s about reclaiming because the Irish language does not belong to one religious group or another, it belongs to everybody.”

[Sahm Venter is a freelance journalist and the editor of several books, including *The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela*.]



—NCR/Claude Colart

A street sign in West Belfast uses both the English and Irish languages.



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Part of my new role involves getting to know you, our readers. Over the past several months, I’ve had the pleasure of talking with many of you. I have so enjoyed these conversations. Again and again, I hear that NCR is a breath of fresh air, that NCR nourishes your faith life.

These words inspire all of us at NCR to continue bringing you the news coverage, analysis and reflection you need and expect from us. Now, it is our turn to say to you, “Thank you. Your support keeps us going.”

On the following pages, we list the names of those who made a donation to NCR during the fiscal year that ended on June 30, including those who made their gift as a tribute to someone special.

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With gratitude,

*Bill Mitchell*

Bill Mitchell  
NCR CEO/Publisher



P.S. I encourage you to check out the full-page ad in this issue that lists our NCR Legacy Society members and introduces the NCR Legacy Challenge.



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## Q&A with Sr. Matilda Inyang

Sister cares for malnourished and abandoned children in Nigeria

By VALENTINE IWENWANNE

For more than a decade, Sr. Matilda Inyang of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus — one of the foremost religious orders of the Catholic Church in Uyo, Akwa Ibom, one of Nigeria's oil-rich states — has cared for dozens of malnourished and homeless children from the streets of Uyo, many of whom had family who believed they were witches, at Mother Charles Walker Children Home.

Social, economic and religious factors have influenced the rise in belief in witchcraft and black magic, paving the way for some Pentecostal pastors to incorporate witchcraft beliefs into their brand of Christianity, which resulted in violence against children.

Born June 6, 1960, in Kaduna, North Central region of Nigeria, where her father worked as a military officer, Inyang is the second of six children in the family from Ifiayong Usuk in Uruan Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom.

In 1981, Inyang answered the call to a religious life of chastity and service and joined the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus. Her first profession was in 1984, and her final profession was in 1992.

Her work has included fighting adults' superstitions and the accusations of locals that has led to the stig-



ON THE WEB  
Read more at [globalsistersreport.org/node/199871](http://globalsistersreport.org/node/199871).



Sr. Matilda Inyang with some of the children at the Mother Charles Walker Children Home, which cares for malnourished and homeless children from the streets of Uyo, Nigeria

—Valentine Iwenwanne

matization, torture, abandonment and killing of thousands of children. She also helps provide quality education for them.

**Many children suffer because of the superstition of the adults, and the accusations have become a menace that has led to the stigmatization, abandonment and death of thousands of children. Why is it important to deal with this problem?**

*Inyang:* As humans, we have the right to live; we have the right to choices and decisions in life. This fight against the abuse of children and their rights to live is simply about preparing and spreading adequate information and speaking up on behalf of others to authorities, to bring their abusers to account and live up to their responsibilities to these poor children. It's also about helping them so they know and understand their rights and can demand that they are fulfilled.

**How do you teach children and the adults in the communities where they come from about how to prevent the violation of children's rights and how to act in any case of such violation?**

We start from the home; we care for them from their first day here. The caretakers here have been taught about the rights of a child, and our children also know their rights. Even in the school, they teach them about the rights of a child, so in that way, they are educated about their rights and their environment, and they also know when such rights are violated.

**How do you strengthen the position of these local communities to solve the problem of superstitions?**

Well, it's not an easy project, and it takes the grace of God because advocacy work requires a lot of strength and time, too. To do this, I visit churches

and women's groups to sensitize and educate them about children's rights. I talk to them about the dangers of abuse on children and how it affects their psyches and growth, also. I also go to their village meeting locations, village halls where they host events and other activities, and talk to parents and guardians about knowing the rights of children and keeping to them, too.

**How do you strengthen family bonds broken by superstition and accusations of witchcraft before the child is reintegrated to the family?**

When a child is labeled as or accused of being a witch and is being sent away, it will break their family bond to a large extent. The family is not going to outwardly tell you what happened because the government has enacted laws criminalizing this as an act of child abuse. So, they will give an excuse that a child ran away on his or her own.

In some cases, depending on the level of acceptance, you'd tell the child to go back home and stay around, monitoring and observing how he's being accepted and treated because they are likely to accept that child, and when you are gone, they'd start maltreating him.

So, pushing this child back without properly strengthening the family bond is a problem because they would still be pointing accusing fingers on him, and when you tell them it's a mere case of misbehavior, they would be watching to see if the child has truly changed from the way he or she was before.

We also strengthen the broken family bonds by having the child live here and going to school, from primary to secondary school. Then, the parents will start showing interest in him, especially when he has gone to the university. They will no longer have any negative impression about that child.

**How has the work and ministry**

**impacted your spiritual life, and how is working as an advocate for children's rights a fulfillment of your call?**

I have a very strong faith in God, and I believe that God is greater than anything, I believe in Jesus Christ. Whether there are forces or not, I believe in God. I can't go every day without being thankful to God. When I have a problem, I turn to him because he is with me and in me. So, the most important thing to me is his will for my life. Coming to work with the children in that field I can say is giving me that fulfillment. As a Christian, anything you do to the least of my brethren, you're doing it to me.

**Are there plans for expansion of the home?**

The facility we have now is an old convent where three sisters used to live. The problem is accommodation, and we have started work on a multistory building that will take about 80 children. And when the new accommodation is ready, the children will be relocated there while the renovation of this old one begins. The challenge now is accommodation, and we are on it. We ask our friends to support us, and people are already supporting us with bags of cement, sand, concrete and iron rods.

But we need much more than that to meet the needs of the children. Two of them will be going to university soon; they have passed their examinations and have been given admission to study. So, a lot of money is involved. Even the children who are already at school at other universities, we pay their school fees and buy them clothes and books, too.

[Valentine Iwenwanne is a Nigeria-based freelance journalist who writes about global health, development and the environment for various publications, including The National and Vice World News.]

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# LCWR's virtual assembly tackles racism

By PAM HACKENMILLER  
phackenmiller@ncronline.org



Hundreds of members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and guests convened for the organization's annual assembly Aug. 11-13, which was as much a retreat as a meeting.

On the assembly's opening day, Dominican Sr. Elise García, now past president of LCWR, gave a presidential address that chastised the church, its bishops, vowed religious and institutions for participating in "our nation's perduring sin of racism."

She and other LCWR leaders acknowledged "these sinful acts by our congregations and institutions" and offered "a profound apology."

"We as Americans have cheated ourselves of the full truth of our history, ignoring or eliding the painful stories that inextricably interweave and form the full fabric of our lives as African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Euro Americans, Latinx Americans," García said.

"There is a direct through line of oppression and white supremacy in our history, from the first enslaved Africans disembarking the White Lion, an English privateer ship, in Hampton, Virginia, in late August of 1619 to the murder of George Floyd on a street corner in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in late May of 2020," she said. "We need to know this."

García's address reflected the reckoning LCWR, its member congregations and sisters across the United States are undertaking in regard to their role in the country's systemic racism and grappling with their own failures.

"We as women religious are absolutely called to this work," García told Global Sisters Report in an interview before the LCWR assembly. "It's fundamental to who we say we are, and the first step is to revisit our history, all our collective history and our specific history. We have to admit and recognize the ways we have been complicit in this."

In addition to working to eliminate racism, LCWR and its members also are looking to the future of religious life. This has been a common theme at recent LCWR assemblies.

On Aug. 12, in her keynote address to the 2021 assembly, Sr. Mercedes Casas Sánchez, of the Daughters of the Holy Spirit of Mexico, wove together wisdom from poets, popes and philosophers in a literary and mystical reflection on what the future may hold.

Though religious life today can feel frail, "we are not starting from scratch," Casas reminded attendees, offering Pope Francis' warning that they ought not "give in to the temptation of numbers and efficiency."

Through its first Lifetime Achievement Awards, LCWR celebrated the lives and ministries of three sisters who in their decades of religious life have advocated for those on the margins: Sr. Joyce Meyer, of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Sr. Amata Miller, of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; and Sr. Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph of Medaille.

Meyer is a member of the board of directors of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and is GSR's international liaison. (The Hilton Foundation is a

major funder of GSR.)

Miller is an economist who has taught countless sisters and students about economics as a tool for social justice.

Prejean is well-known for her tireless advocacy to abolish the death penalty, made famous in her book *Dead Man Walking* and the movie of the same name.

Meyer reflected on her decades of traveling the world, including once riding on the back of a motorcycle in Vietnam disguised as a Vietnamese woman and the time she dressed as a Muslim woman to visit a sisters' school in Afghanistan that taught children with disabilities.

"I remember it with great joy, mostly," she said. "We were all together, defying the darkness — and sometimes the suffering — that surrounded us."

Prejean said if she has achieved anything, it has been because of her fellow sisters and the Holy Spirit.

"God bless our sisterhood. I love that we are free agents of the Gospel in the world," she said. "I don't do anything apart from the sisterhood."

Miller said she had grown up with a passion for social justice, so she "learned how to teach economics as economic justice and social justice." She said young sisters and economists must seize this moment as more and more people question capitalism.

"But after all these years, it looks like maybe I was the right woman in the right place at the right time," Miller said. "I'm humbled by the award."

On the final day of the assembly, LCWR bid adieu to Sr. Jayne Helmlinger, a Sister of St. Joseph of Orange, California, who ended her time in the presidential triumvirate. She served as president-elect 2018-2019, as president 2019-2020 and as past president 2020-2021.

"We're deeply grateful for your thoughtful approach to every conversation, for your thorough reflection on every matter that came before us," said Sr. Carol Zinn, a Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, who is LCWR's executive director. "We thank you for your listening ears, your listening heart, your deep, contemplative spirit."

In a column for GSR, Helmlinger reflected on the highlights of her three years in LCWR leadership, almost half of which was spent navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our collective response to the mounting needs of our brothers and sisters were met with ingenuity, creativity, daring and grace," she wrote.

"Networks formed over the decades were accessed to assist our brothers and sisters from around the world — and often accomplished through emails, phone calls and virtual meetings," she added. "It brought home to all of us the fragility of life and the importance of the ministry of presence."

The LCWR presidency now passes to Sr. Jane Herb of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In interviews with GSR, Herb's friends and former co-workers described her collaborative approach to

leadership, which also could have its roots in the years she spent playing sports, then coaching.

"What she tries to do is listen, to take the experience she has and what's happening and see how it all fits together," said Sr. Marianne Gaynor, who joined the leadership team of the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters in 2018.

Joining the presidential triumvirate for 2021-2022 is the new president-elect, Sr. Rebecca Ann Gemma, of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois. She is prioress of her community and has been a member of LCWR for 16 years.

She also was a founding member of the Springfield Dominican anti-racism team and has been working in anti-racism at the community level for almost two decades.

"The work doesn't get easier, it gets harder, because we recognize our relationships with people of color aren't what they should be," she told GSR in a Q&A after her June 28 election. "You can hide a lot, but when you are in a real relationship and accountable to other people, there's no hiding."

The third member of the triumvirate is García, who begins her third year in LCWR leadership, now serving as past president.

Next year's assembly is currently planned as an in-person event in St. Louis. This year's gathering was supposed to be in Orlando, Florida.

[Pam Hackenmiller is managing editor of Global Sisters Report. Dan Stockman, GSR national correspondent, contributed to this story.]

## UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA

### Diocese of Winona-Rochester Chapter 11 Reorganization Proceeding (Case No. 18-33707)

#### NOTICE OF HEARING AND OBJECTION DEADLINE FOR MOTION TO APPROVE THE SETTLEMENT WITH SETTLING INSURERS

**PLEASE TAKE NOTICE** that the Diocese of Winona-Rochester ("Diocese"), the Debtor in the captioned bankruptcy proceeding, case number 18-33707, in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Minnesota ("Court") and the Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors ("UCC") filed a joint chapter 11 plan of reorganization [Docket No. 316] ("Plan") and a disclosure statement for the Plan [Docket No. 317] ("Disclosure Statement") under Section 1125 of the United States Bankruptcy Code ("Bankruptcy Code"). On July 16, 2021, the Bankruptcy Court approved the Disclosure Statement.

**PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE** that the Diocese has entered into a Settlement Agreement and Release ("Agreement") pursuant to 11 U.S.C. §§ 105(a), 363, & 365 and Fed. R. Bankr. P. 2002(l), 6004(c), and 9019(a) with Interstate Fire & Casualty Company, National Surety Corporation, and London Market Insurers ("Settling Insurers"), and on August 17, 2021, filed in the Court a motion to approve the Agreement ("Motion"). [Docket No. 339]. If the Motion and the Plan are approved, the Diocese will (a) sell, and the Settling Insurers will purchase, certain insurance policies and certificates issued to, or subscribed on behalf of or allegedly issued to or subscribed on behalf of, the Diocese ("Subject Insurance Policies"), by the Settling Insurers, as described more particularly in the Agreement, free and clear of all liens, claims, encumbrances, and other interests, and (b) fully release any all claims against the Settling Insurers and certain related entities under or relating to the Subject Insurance Policies, including extra-contractual claims. In addition, there are other provisions in the Agreement than those set forth in the preceding sentence, which should be reviewed to understand completely the Agreement and its effect on your rights.

**IF THE MOTION IS APPROVED, FOR THE AGREEMENT TO BE EFFECTIVE, THE PLAN MUST ALSO BE APPROVED AND PROVIDE FOR THE ENTRY OF AN INJUNCTION, PERMANENTLY BARRING ALL ENJOINED CLAIMS (AS DEFINED IN THE AGREEMENT), BY ANY PERSON OR ENTITY AGAINST THE SETTLING INSURERS AND CERTAIN RELATED ENTITIES; INCLUDING COMMENCING OR CONTINUING AN ACTION AGAINST THE SETTLING INSURERS; ENFORCING A JUDGMENT OR ORDER AGAINST THE SETTLING INSURERS; CREATING OR PERFECTING LIENS OF ANY KIND AGAINST THE SETTLING INSURERS; AND ASSERTING OR ACCOMPLISHING ANY SETOFF, RIGHT OF INDEMNITY, OR RIGHT OF CONTRIBUTION AGAINST THE SETTLING INSURERS. FURTHER, THE AGREEMENT SPECIFIES THAT THE PLAN MUST INCLUDE AN INJUNCTION CHANNELING ALL THE CHANNLED CLAIMS (AS DEFINED IN THE AGREEMENT) TO A TRUST, TO BE ESTABLISHED BY THE PLAN, WHICH WILL ADMINISTER AND RESOLVE THE CHANNLED CLAIMS, AND THE HOLDERS OF ALL SUCH CLAIMS WOULD BE BARRED FROM TAKING ANY ACTION AGAINST THE PROTECTED PARTIES OR SETTLING INSURERS, INCLUDING COMMENCING OR CONTINUING AN ACTION WITH RESPECT TO ANY CHANNLED CLAIM; ENFORCING A JUDGMENT OR ORDER AGAINST THE PROTECTED PARTIES OR SETTLING INSURERS WITH RESPECT TO ANY CHANNLED CLAIM; CREATING OR PERFECTING LIENS OF ANY KIND RELATING TO ANY CHANNLED CLAIM; AND ASSERTING OR IMPLEMENTING ANY CHANNLED CLAIM AGAINST ANY OF THE PROTECTED PARTIES OR SETTLING INSURERS.**

Copies of the Plan, Disclosure Statement and Motion are on file with the Court, 200 Warren E. Burger Federal Building and United States Courthouse, 316 North Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101. Copies of the Plan, Disclosure Statement, and Motion may be obtained by (a) contacting the Diocese's counsel by mail, telephone or email at Bodman PLC, Attn: Robert J. Diehl, Jr., 6th Floor at Ford Field, 1901 St. Antoine Street, Detroit, MI 48226, Tel.: 313-259-7777, Email: rdiehl@bodmanlaw.com; (b) visiting the Diocese's website at <https://www.dowr.org>; or (c) visiting the website of United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Minnesota at <https://www.mnb.uscourts.gov>. A PACER login and password are required to access documents on the Bankruptcy Court's website and these can be obtained through the PACER Service Center at [www.pacer.psc.uscourts.gov](http://www.pacer.psc.uscourts.gov).

**PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE** that the hearing on the Motion will occur on [September 23, 2021, at 9:30 a.m.] before the Honorable William J. Fisher, United States Bankruptcy Judge, Courtroom 2A, 200 Warren E. Burger Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse, 316 North Robert Street, St. Paul, MN 55101. Any response or objection to the Motion must be filed and served by September 17, 2021. Any written response must reference case number 18-33707, state the specific legal and factual basis for the objection, be accompanied by a proof of service, and conform and be served in accordance with the Local Rules for the Bankruptcy Court for the District of Minnesota.

**IF YOU HAVE A CLAIM AGAINST THE DIOCESE AS TO WHICH INSURANCE COVERAGE IS OR MAY BE AVAILABLE OR HAVE AN INTEREST IN ANY OF THE DIOCESE'S INSURANCE POLICIES OR CERTIFICATES, YOUR RIGHTS MAY BE AFFECTED.**

# Catholics have no grounds to claim exemption

## COMMENTARY

By JASON T. EBERL and  
TOBIAS WINRIGHT

Concerns regarding recently instituted or expected mandatory vaccination policies for COVID-19 by various governmental and institutional authorities, including Catholic health care systems and universities, have been voiced by the Catholic Medical Association, the National Catholic Bioethics Center and the bishops of Colorado.

These statements either critique the mandates themselves, casting them as a form of authoritative overreach, or call for wide allowance of religious/moral exemptions. There is, however, no sufficient moral reason for Catholics to request such an exemption. Furthermore, as Pope Francis has affirmed, there may be a *moral obligation* to be vaccinated for COVID-19 unless one has a medical contraindication.

Such an obligation is fundamentally grounded in the Gospel's call for each of us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31). Insofar as loving oneself entails a moral obligation to use proportionate means to safeguard one's own life and health, Christians are called to love others by taking proportionate means to safeguard *their* lives and health. As St. Thomas Aquinas exhorts in his commentary on St. Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians:

It is prescribed that a human being sustains his body, for otherwise he murders himself. ... Therefore, one is bound to nourish his body, and we are bound likewise with respect to all other things without which the body cannot live.

Epidemiological data clearly shows that the best way to fulfill this moral duty is through vaccination and, further, that the currently available vaccines are proportionately safe and effective even if they have not all yet been fully approved by the FDA. COVID-19 vaccination is thus an appropriate means of fulfilling our moral obligation to promote the common good.

Invoking the concept of the "common good" immediately raises red flags for those, such as National Catholic Bioethics Center President Joseph Meaney, who emphatically assert each person's right and obligation to follow their own conscience in deciding whether to be vaccinated. There is an evident "culture war" ideology underlying Meaney's position and that of the Colorado bishops.

Fordham University theologian Charles Camosy provides more informative support for this view by citing the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, which stipulates that conscience should not be coerced. However, Camosy neglects to note *Dignitatis Humanae's* further stipulation: "In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church."

One of the church's highest doctrinal authorities, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has affirmed unequivocally that one may receive any of the currently available COVID-19 vaccines in good conscience.



Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, wears a yellow vest as he assists with a COVID-19 vaccination clinic for the poor at the Vatican March 31, 2021.

—CNS/Vatican Media

There is a concerning subjectivism inherent in such absolutist calls for conscience exemptions in the current circumstances. The present assertion of personal political rights is not all that different from the "expressive individualism" that Carter Snead rightly critiques as being at the heart of American public bioethics, underlying advocacy for abortion and physician-assisted suicide among other morally contested practices.

While every person should follow their conscience, even if their conscience is in error, this personal moral obligation does not excuse every act if one's conscience is misinformed by voluntary ignorance. Nor does it warrant respect in all cases by public authorities who, engaging in prudential reasoning, are charged with devising laws and policies that promote the common good — whether restricting access to abortion to protect the unborn, disallowing assisted suicide to safeguard vulnerable terminally ill patients, or mandating vaccination to promote the physiological, social and economic health of civil society.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the "common good" as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily." Though among those conditions are included freedom of conscience and religion, the catechism also emphasizes "the *social well-being* and *development* of the group itself" and stipulates that "it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests."

The catechism concludes: "It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society."

Far from being intrusive government overreach into an inviolable sacrosanct realm, it is precisely the proper function of governmental and institutional authorities to adjudicate competing claims among individuals in light of what will promote "the progress of persons" and thereby cultivate a virtuous citizenry. Pope Benedict XVI further affirms in *Caritas in Veritate* that promoting the common good requires concrete action on behalf of others:

To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of "all of us", made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society [*Gaudium et Spes*]. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it.

The expressive individualism implied by Meaney's absolutist position — a right-wing mirror version of the "my body, my choice" rhetoric of abortion rights advocates — runs counter to the conversion to which the eucharistic liturgy calls us. As Benedictine Fr. Virgil Michel aptly puts it:

The development of a true culture, i.e., the realizing of the best possibilities in human nature, is essentially a social phenomenon, as we have seen. Now the liturgy presents us with the divinely established model of social intercourse between men [sic] under the guidance of Christ. While it safeguards all the values of human personality, it uses the energies of God Himself for sloughing off all the excrescences of individualism, thus elevating all that is good in man above the narrowness of individual selfishness, of snobbery, or of extreme love-blind nationalism, into the catholic sympathy of Christ for all men, for all things human, for all that is good in God's world.

Catholicism is not a religion that promotes the glorification of the individual in asserting their political rights over others. Rather, a distinctly Catholic stance holds that respect for the intrinsic dignity of each human person is inextricably bound up with the social ethic expressed in the sacrament of Communion and articulated by the magisterium.

Benedict XVI further notes in *Caritas in Veritate* that the teaching of *Hu-*

*manae Vitae*, by emphasizing both the unitive and procreative meaning of sexuality, "is not a question of purely individual morality" but rather evinces "the *strong links between life ethics and social ethics.*" Benedict concludes:

The Church forcefully maintains this link between life ethics and social ethics, fully aware that "a society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized" [Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*].

A society that, through its governing authorities, fails to employ proportionate measures to curtail the spread of a deadly virus and its mutation into even more virulent and deadly forms effectively devalues and violates human life. Duly-appointed civil authorities have not only the right by virtue of their office, but the duty to promote the common good by whatever measures that prudential reasoning informs their consciences are required, so long as such measures are proportionate to the end at which they are aimed.

In the present case, given the clear evidence of mutations and rising infections due to the prevalence of unvaccinated persons, as well as the safety and efficacy of the available vaccines, vaccination mandates fall under the legitimate authority of civil and institutional leaders fulfilling their moral obligation to promote the common good — and we, as individual citizens, fulfill ours by adhering to such mandates without invoking dubious claims of "conscientious exemption."

[Jason T. Eberl is a professor of health care ethics and philosophy and director of the Albert Gnaegi Center for Health Care Ethics at St. Louis University. Tobias Winright is an associate professor of health care ethics and theology at St. Louis University.]

# Sisters scramble to respond to delta variant

By CHRIS HERLINGER  
cherlinger@ncronline.org

The COVID-19 pandemic has reached a critical and even alarming point, say Catholic sisters and humanitarian leaders who are responding to the fast-spreading delta variant amid multiple problems.

“Just pick your continent, and we have some incredible challenges,” said Sr. Carol Keehan of the Daughters of Charity, who heads a health task force for the Vatican COVID-19 Commission. “The pandemic is a mess.”

“The situation is worse than ever in many different places,” said Sean Callahan, president and chief executive officer of Baltimore-based Catholic Relief Services. “There’s a combination of problems going on that we need to address.”

One continent facing a severe problem is Asia, where countries like India and Indonesia are being devastated by the presence of numerous variants, including delta.

As one example of how quickly the dynamics of the pandemic are changing, the Philippines, which sustained one of the longest and strictest lockdowns in 2020, reimposed another two-week lockdown that ended Aug. 20.

During the lockdown, those younger than 18 and those 65 and older are not allowed to leave their homes. People with comorbidities, those with weak immune systems and pregnant women are also told to stay home. Mass gatherings are prohibited, including religious services.

In the face of such quickly changing circumstances, Callahan, Keehan and others spelled out some of the ongoing challenges worldwide: the swift spread of the delta variant and the threat of new variants; widespread hesitancy about the COVID-19 vaccines; and the continued inadequate vaccine supplies in many countries.

The pandemic also continues to pose challenges to countries already facing difficulties, including hunger, social unrest and other longstanding health problems like malaria and HIV/AIDS.

In the midst of so many challenges and new developments, Keehan said there is at least one bit of good news: COVID-19 vaccines will be available for distribution in most countries by the end of the year, an important milestone, she said.

Yet any optimism surrounding that goal will be tempered by the ongoing challenge of vaccine hesitancy. This is a problem in many U.S. states, where stockpiles of vaccine sit unused, but it is also a dynamic in countries with a long history of corruption, suspicion of vaccination programs run by governments and pharmaceutical companies, and fear of fraudulent vaccines.

“The thing I worry about is that we’ll have enough vaccine, but that people won’t take it,” Keehan said. “If people aren’t vaccine-willing, we’ve got a real problem.”

Keehan said one welcome development was the announcement in early August that the Association of Sistershoods of Kenya is launching a six-month awareness campaign intended to work with the government



—CNS/Reuters/Ajeng Dinar Ulfiana

A health care worker checks on patients at a Catholic church training center turned into a self-isolation shelter for COVID-19 patients in Jakarta, Indonesia, July 22, 2021. Indonesia has seen a spike in COVID-19 cases and has the worst coronavirus outbreak in Asia.



ON THE WEB

Read more at [globalsistersreport.org/node/200276](https://globalsistersreport.org/node/200276).



—Courtesy of Catholic Relief Services/Justin Makangara

to create a “Covid-19 free nation.”

That is part of the Vatican COVID-19 Commission’s overall efforts to enlist sisters and local parishes in the work of grassroots vaccination education efforts, including providing access to a resource toolkit that includes information on vaccines and church teaching on vaccination.

Keehan, the former director of the Catholic Health Association of the United States, said such efforts are moving slowly, given the considerable health and social challenges in African countries and on other continents.

One country where that metaphor seems apt is Liberia in west Africa, where as of Aug. 12, only about 0.2% of the population had been fully vaccinated.

For now, Liberia is holding its own in terms of rates of infection, but that could quickly change with the spread of the delta variant, said Sr. Barbara Brilliant, dean of the Mother Patern College of Health Sciences in the Liberian capital of Monrovia.

“I think if the delta variant gets a hold in Africa, it will be a disaster,” she said in an interview with Global Sisters Report, noting that African countries have been generally behind the rest of the world in the spread of the virus as well as vaccination.

## The Philippines

The latest restrictions in the Philippines are difficult to implement in

The secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have hit many countries hard, including worsening hunger in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Catholic Relief Services provides food and cash assistance to hard-hit families

densely populated urban poor areas, said Sr. Mitzy Perez, a Mexican member of the Hermanas Misioneras Servidoras de la Palabra. She and Sr. Vicky Pham, a Vietnamese member of Perez’s community, live in southern Caloocan City, part of metropolitan Manila.

“This is a very populated place, full of people,” Perez said in a recent telephone interview with GSR.

“My neighbors in front, [their house is the] same size as our house, but they have three families living there,” she said, adding that the houses are so close that they can hear their neighbors on either side.

One sister oversees the implementation of the Kalookan Diocese’s feeding program, which continues even with the return to lockdown. The sisters and their volunteers help provide one good meal for approximately 550 children once a week.

“The community pantry is for 100 families, and in order to cover all the areas, we need 13 community pantries so we can reach all the people,” Perez said.

## South Sudan

South Sudan faces a number of challenges in getting people vaccinated, said Comboni Missionary Sr. Esperance Bamiriyo, a sister from the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo who heads the Catholic Health Training Institute in Wau, which trains young South Sudanese health professionals.

These include delays in setting up COVID-19 testing facilities and vaccination sites, which means some communities do not yet have access to vaccines. There is also no well-coordinated response about vaccination, with “no prioritization for either ‘front liners’ [such as health workers] or elderly,” Bamiriyo wrote in an email to GSR.

“Since vaccinations were open to all, in Wau where I reside, there was a high rate of response,” but as a result, doses ran out. “Some people who travelled long distances missed [receiving the vaccine].”

Other challenges: A vaccination rollout plan was not implemented, and there is a lack of enforcement of preventative measures, like mask mandates, she wrote. As of July 19, the most recent data available, only 0.5% of the population had received one dose of the vaccine, and not even 0.1% had been fully vaccinated.

But perhaps a more basic challenge is that the country’s attention remains on resolving an ongoing civil war, which is contributing to endemic hunger.

“People’s basic needs are not satisfied. People are more worried for their daily living than for COVID-19,” Bamiriyo wrote. As a result, “they go about their daily lives as usual with few people wearing face mask, no social distancing at all.

## Vietnam

Earlier this year, Vietnamese hoped some sense of normality might be returning to the country. The delta variant has dashed those hopes.

Dominican Sr. Mary Nguyen Thi My said the Dominican Sisters of Phu Cuong based in Bien Hoa near Ho Chi Minh City had 61 sisters infected with the delta variant as of Aug. 4. Those infected were quarantined and treated at a day care center.

The news from the southern coastal city of Nha Trang is perhaps not as grim, but it is still serious.

Sr. Mary Nguyen Thi Nguyet, superior of the Carmelites of the Sacred Heart based in the coastal city of Nha Trang in central Vietnam, said the congregation’s two day care centers closed in early May because of an outbreak of the delta variant. That has caused hardship for the sisters, who live on the income generated from the centers, which serve approximately 140 children.

“We are given [ration] tickets to go out to buy drinking water, vegetables and other basic food at some shops every four days, as our area has been isolated since July 28 after some infections were detected,” Nguyet said.

“We attend online Masses and spend a lot of time contemplating, saying prayers, reciting the rosary.. and strongly appealing to God to end the pandemic soon,” she said. They also read, improve their computer skills, sew clothes, garden and clean the day care centers.

“We will face a lack of food if the movement restrictions are extended to one month more,” Nguyet said. “We absolutely trust in divine providence.”

[Chris Herlinger is the New York and international correspondent to Global Sisters Report. Charity Durano in the Philippines and Joachim Pham in Vietnam contributed to this report.]



—CNS/Tyler Orsburn

Jesuit Fr. John W. O'Malley, author of *The Education of a Historian: A Strange and Wonderful Story*.

## Jesuit John O'Malley's memoir tells his 'strange and wonderful story'

Reviewed by MASSIMO FAGGIOLI

Memoirs can be a tricky literary genre, particularly for churchmen and scholars. It can mutate easily into score settling, justification of unsavory church and academic politics, or signaling a change of loyalty.

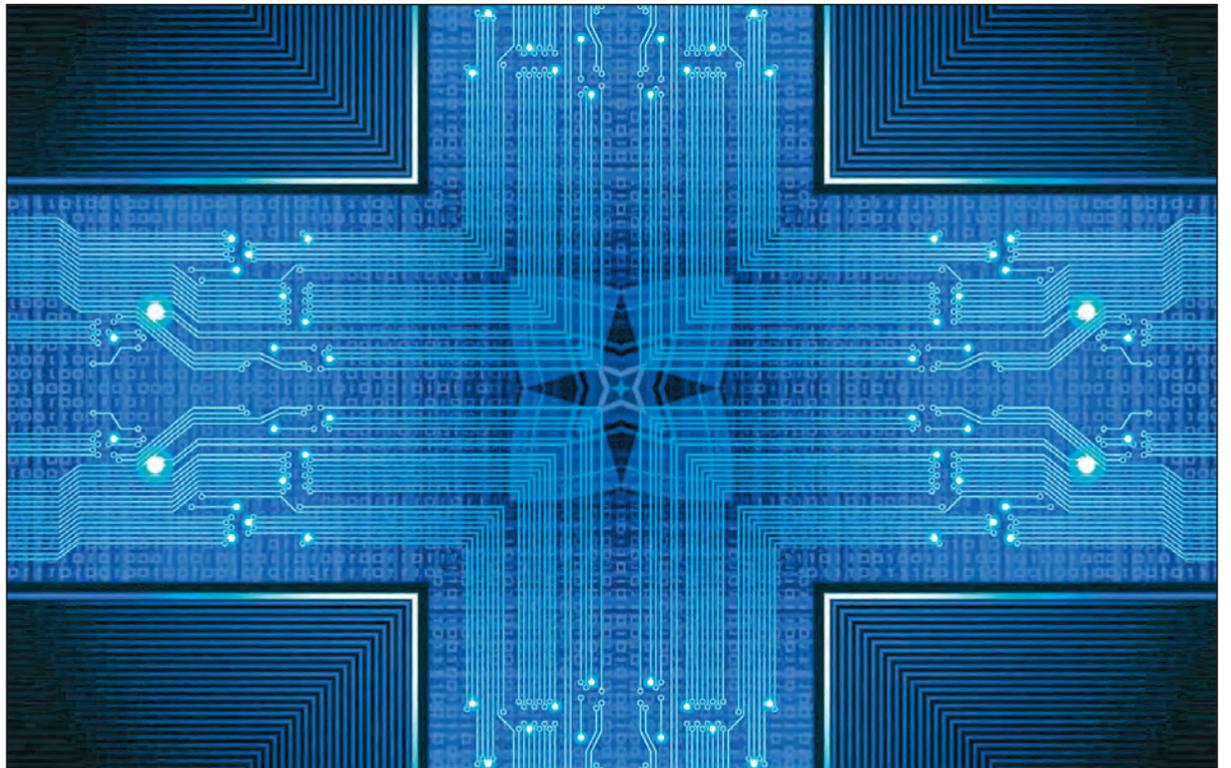
The just-published memoir of Jesuit Fr. John W. O'Malley, *The Education of a Historian: A Strange and Wonderful Story*, is exactly the opposite. It finally provides a narrative for one of the most influential Jesuits — in the United States and abroad — in the last hundred years and helps readers understand some enormous differences between Catholicism in the mid-20th century and today.

In the introduction, O'Malley already shows the connections between his life as a scholar and as a Jesuit priest. Talking about the post-Vatican II crisis of the Society of Jesus and General Congregation 32 (1974-75), he points out "how a crisis in the order intruded into my life and how it changed the direction of my scholarship."

But O'Malley's memoir is not inside baseball. It is full of wisdom and wit and poetry: "It tells how my first-time taste of gelato helped turn me into a resolute Italophile and prodded me to abandon German history in favor of Italian. The book thus reveals the crucial role of intuition in life and in scholarship. It illustrates how neither life nor scholarship is a tale of two plus two equals four."

The first chapter, "Growing Up in Tiltonsville," paints the picture of the small town in Ohio where he was born: social and religious

Continued on Page 16



—Pixabay/ParallelVision

# VIRTUAL REALITY AND THE COMING CATHOLIC METAVERSE

The combination of pandemic lockdowns and Zoom have spawned a new way of being Catholic. Or, they have spawned a new way of seeming to be Catholic. We are moving toward a Catholic Metaverse.

A metaverse is a virtual world, like those existing in virtual reality games such as Roblox, Minecraft and Fortnite, where individuals exist as avatars, or three-dimensional icons of themselves. These games are precursors to an even larger virtual world, where individuals would be able to hide their identities, interact and present their views anonymously.

The future, however, is upon us. Now, it is possible to be wherever you want, say whatever you want and find like-minded folks to be with, even to worship with, all within a cocoon of anonymity.

The word "parish" has taken on a new meaning. In pre-pandemic times, folks chose parishes according to their likes and dislikes: the community, the location, the pastor and the liturgies, pretty much in that order.

Now, the good news is the bad news. It is easier to shop around.

Community has nothing to do with it. Location only presents temporal considerations: What time zone is the parish in? It is the pastor and his lit-

urgies that make or break the choice. Tridentine or novus ordo? Intelligent homilies? Women altar servers and readers?

Community is increasingly disconnected from both online and in-person parochial life. While once the parish church was the one down the block, where the Friday potluck suppers helped cement social interaction, now the "parish" is virtual. Community is in a Catholic Metaverse created through social media in which you can participate anonymously. Or not.

Most folks are conversant with the ways and means of, say, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the like. What they may not see, even if they participate in them, is the solidification of distinct virtual communities on these platforms. Each virtual community has a different aim and ethos. Each has a different outlook on church teaching and discipline. None is controlled by Rome.

We are not there yet, but on the horizon is a virtual reality far beyond online Masses and Catholic

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PHYLLIS ZAGANO

## O'MALLEY: MEMOIR IS A LOVE LETTER TO SOCIETY OF JESUS

Continued from Page 15

dynamics, the impact of the Great Depression, the distance between the big cities and the rest of the U.S. Most of all, it depicts the uncomplicatedness of his vocation to the priesthood and the serendipity of his choice of the Jesuits.

Interestingly but not surprisingly, O'Malley seems to have arrived at Ignatius of Loyola starting from Augustine of Hippo. But the real intellectual and spiritual love of O'Malley's life remains Erasmus of Rotterdam: "My work on Erasmus provided me with important perspectives on two subjects that later became major projects for me — Vatican Council II and the history of the Jesuits."

"Many of the council's decisions echo themes in Erasmus, such as the need for vernacular liturgy, the evils of war, and openness to divine inspiration in other religions," O'Malley writes.

Chapter 2, "Trained as a Jesuit: America and Austria," is full of details on his understanding of himself thanks and through a deeper understanding of the U.S. in the 1940s and 1950s: called to be a witness to interracial marriage in Chicago, the reading of the 1958 political novel *The Ugly American* as a passage toward a more cosmopolitan cultural sensibility.

Chapter 3, "Trained as a Historian: Harvard and Rome," has wonderful and moving pages on his choice to abandon German religious history in order to embrace Italy. (His pages on the discovery of Italy, from Venice to Florence to Rome, during a trip from Austria in July 1961, brought tears to my eyes: I read O'Malley's book in Italy, where I have returned for the summer after the longest absence ever from my own country due to the pandemic.)

This key turn happened at a crucial time in the history of the Catholic Church as it was preparing for the Second Vatican Council. O'Malley was doing research in Rome and therefore in the "eternal city" for two of the four sessions of the 1962-65 council, and during one of these moments, his scholarship and life as a Jesuit priest were enriched mutually. The election of Pedro Arrupe as general of the Jesuits in 1965 was a turning point in the history of the Jesuits and also of global Catholicism.

Chapter 4, "Ever Deeper Into the Renaissance," describes the rise of O'Malley's scholarship in national and



—Wikimedia Commons/Uccio "Uccio2" D'Agostino

The dome of the Church of the Gesù, the mother church of the Society of Jesus in Rome



**THE EDUCATION OF A HISTORIAN: A STRANGE AND WONDERFUL STORY**

By John W. O'Malley, SJ  
Published by St. Joseph's University Press;  
176 pages; \$30.00

international recognition. It is the beginning of the story of a historian and of how his books had field-changing influence — especially four books, all of them translated in many languages: *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome* (1979), *The First Jesuits* (1998), *Trent and All That* (2002) and *What Happened at Vatican II?* (2008).

But this book introduces us to a scholar well aware of what was happening around him: the November 4, 1966, great flood of Florence (which took place when he was there), the 1967 riots in Detroit (where shortly after he took leadership roles in the university and in the society). An important chapter focuses on his participation as an elected delegate to the General Congregation 32 of the Society of Jesus, which opened at the beginning of December 1974.

In O'Malley's own words:

Somewhat to the surprise of the Jesuits worldwide, Father General Arrupe called for a general congregation of the Society to meet in Rome in early December, 1974. He wanted from the Society an assessment of how the Society was faring in the difficult scene

of the late 1960s and early 1970s, years of turmoil in the church and in society at large — the student and race riots, the "sexual revolution," the wars and other troubles between colonies and mother countries, the Vietnam War first involving France and then the United States.

O'Malley describes his participation in that assembly not just as one of the three or four most consequential general congregations in the history of the Jesuits, but also as one of the most important experiences (and not just because another delegate was Jorge Mario Bergoglio, future Pope Francis).

It was much longer than anticipated, and a physically and emotionally challenging time: "Then, finally, on March 15 [1975], the congregation declared its business concluded. I sometimes describe the congregation as the worst — and the best — three and half months of my Jesuit life. It was the worst for reasons I just described. It was the best for many reasons."

Chapters 5, "From the Renaissance to the Jesuits," and 6, "Cultures, Councils, and Early Modern Catholicism," tell how a scholar who acquired international recognition for his studies on the Italian Renaissance became a key player in the research on the Society of Jesus (especially on its very early history), on a new way to interpret Catholicism at the time of the Protestant Reformation, and on Vatican II — in all of these cases initiating a new phase in the international scholarship in these fields. Intellectual curiosity goes hand in hand with ecclesial concerns.

By looking at O'Malley's story, we

can understand the human element of doing history:

The book is therefore about how I worked as a historian and developed methods that resulted in such understandings. It shows how events impacted on my life and on what I chose to write about. It shows how and why I began to puzzle over certain issues and then shows where the puzzlement led me. Most broadly, it shows how a naive young man from Tiltonsville made his way in the world. It thus shows that historians are creatures of flesh and blood, fears and hopes, living in time and space.

In six decades of scholarly work, O'Malley educated us to a deeper understanding of style and literary genres. He would not mind me saying that this book has pages that seem lifted from a Frank Capra movie (Chapter 1 about growing up in Tiltonsville) or from Federico Fellini's *"La Dolce Vita"* (Chapter 3 on Rome in the '60s).

Like the masterpieces of cinema, this memoir has different kinds of audiences.

For Americans, it's the life of a fellow American who changed the way we look at the church, also thanks to the effort of looking at America from afar, both geographically and chronologically.

For Catholics, it's the example of a member of the church born, raised and educated in a pre-cultural war Catholicism, where confessional boundaries with Protestant were clear, but probably more passable than today's intra-Catholic trenches.

For church historians and theologians, for academics young and old, it's the story of when church history was still struggling to be accepted as an integral part of the theological canon — and what Catholic scholars had to do and still can do about it.

For Jesuits, it's like a painting describing life of a scholar in the Society of Jesus at a particular time, from one kind of religious order to another kind after Vatican II, and the "Jesuit crisis" of 1981-83 after the dramatic change of leadership from Arrupe to Peter Hans Kolvenbach. (O'Malley's account of his testimony for the canonization process of Arrupe in 2019 is very interesting.)

This memoir has also the courage to be like a love letter for the Society of Jesus and for the Catholic Church: to echo the title of O'Malley's favorite book, a letter with much more praise than blame.

[Massimo Faggioli is professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University.]

## METaverse: VIRTUAL CHURCH COMMUNITY

Continued from Page 15

Twitter-fights. We are on the verge of a genuine metaverse, a grandchild of the internet, which expands to encompass more than just words and pictures. What is upon us is a development in online gaming platforms that will allow people — as avatars — to move from one platform to another. Individuals will no longer need distinct Facebook profiles, Twitter handles and internet accounts. They will be able to invent themselves and exist in the virtual world and move around (virtually) in real time, seamlessly from one platform, or community, to another.

The metaverse will not be a game. It will be an alternative reality. Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg says that within the next five years or so Face-

book will be a "metaverse company," an "embodied internet." He predicts "a persistent synchronous environment" in which users are embodied as holographs. The entire point is to build community.

How? Zuckerberg says the present research objective is to deliver a much stronger sense of presence, a more natural way of interacting. Think of it as a new way of being present to other people, a three-dimensional Zoom with surround sound and holographs that you can access anywhere.

Religion is included in the plans. Already, Facebook has been partnering with faith communities, such as the Hillsong megachurch in Atlanta, the Assemblies of God, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). The company

is creating products for churches, including audio and prayer sharing and online tools to build congregations using Facebook.

As Zuckerberg moves Facebook to a metaverse company, he predicts even more. His vision is a genuine metaverse, where different companies' platforms will be compatible and which will include public spaces and social systems anyone can access, including churches.

That is in the future. What is upon us now is remote access to worship, spiritual direction, preaching, Bible study, after-church socials, just about anything the in-person parish might provide in terms of information and interaction. Remote access allows people to choose whom to listen to and with whom to interact. It is moving to the point where Catholic fact and Catholic

fiction are in competition.

The question: Will there be a Rome-controlled Catholic Metaverse? Or will the various Catholic virtual communities continue to grow in their own directions? Then, there is the big what-if in all this: What happens to sacraments?

Someday, the pandemic will be under control. But the church is changing. It won't be your grandfather's Catholic church. It is not that already.

[Phyllis Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University, in Hempstead, New York. Her most recent book is *Women: Icons of Christ*, and her other books include *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future*. Read more of Zagano's columns at [NCRonline.org/columns/just-catholic](http://NCRonline.org/columns/just-catholic).]

# How I wound up living across from a strip club

## SOUL SEEING

By MARK REDMOND

God sometimes puts the right people in our lives at the right time and if we don't pay attention we'll miss it, or we'll just call it something else, such as luck. But our soul tells us it is more than that. It is grace. It is real.

I went to Villanova University, not because of its affiliation with the Catholic Church, but because I was turned down by Yale, Princeton, Brown, Dartmouth, Williams College and Hamilton College. Villanova was my safety school.

When it was time to send in the first tuition check, I had to also fill out a form selecting a major. The choices were nursing, arts and science, engineering or business. I turned to my father and asked, "Which should I pick?"

"What do you want to do with your life?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Pick business then," he said, which made sense because that's what he was, a businessman and a successful one.

So that's what I ended up studying, and I was good at it to the point of finishing near the top of my class, inducted into the business honor society and elected president of the finance club. By senior year, it looked like smooth sailing toward a career on Wall Street or something similar in which I'd make a great deal of money.

But in the first semester of senior year, I happened to pick up a copy of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, which I rarely read, and the cover story was about a Philadelphia native who had been working in Guatemala after a terrible earthquake there, helping to rebuild. Edward Fischer was now walking to his home town of Philly in order to raise funds. "That is some long walk," I remember thinking.

A few months later, I was at Georgetown University for our annual rugby game against the dreaded Hoyas. We played on a Saturday, lost to them for the first time in my four years on the team, partied all night and gathered in front of the statue of Fr. John Car-



—Unsplash/Austin Chan

roll as we planned to caravan together in our cars back to Villanova. Lying there in the grass, I noticed a van nearby with lots of children, balloons and a young man, tanned and athletic. For some reason, he wandered over and asked us who we were. When we told him, he laughed and said that he was a Georgetown graduate and had played rugby for them, and he teased us about our loss. I then realized that this was the Edward Fischer, whom I had read about and who had apparently made it all the way to D.C.

A few weeks later, I attended the 6 p.m. Mass at the main Villanova chapel. It was the most popular Mass on campus and always well attended. When it came time for the homily, the Augustinian celebrant handed the microphone to a guest speaker, someone he introduced as Edward Fischer.

Back then there were no iPhones, so I don't have a recording of what he said, but he showed slides of the devastation in Guatemala, what he was doing there, and said something along the lines of:

"I look out at all of you and I see myself at your age. I had everything in front of me in terms of financial security, job security. But now I have very

little money of my own. I have spent hours and days walking in the pouring rain, cold and shivering. But I'm telling you, I could not be happier. I felt joy even when I felt physically miserable. I would not trade the life I have now, and what I am doing, for anything else."

After Mass, as everyone filed out of the chapel, most toward the campus library to study, I stood there in that pew. I felt like yelling out to everyone leaving, "Hey! Didn't you hear what he said? Didn't you listen to him? How can we all just get up and go about our business and our lives, as if nothing was different? Where are you all going?"

I also desperately wanted to go up to this Edward Fischer to tell him how much he had affected me, how I suddenly wanted to be doing with my life what he was doing with his. But I lacked the courage.

Eventually I was standing in the pew alone. Only a few people remained in the chapel, chatting with their friends. So, I wandered out, carrying my business books, walked into the library, found a desk and started studying about interest rates, stocks and bonds. But then, more than ever, the focus of my studies felt so futile, so useless, so not me. In light of all that I had just heard,

a paradigm shift had taken place.

There would be all kinds of twists and turns in my life in the next few years, including ending up in a much-sought-after management training program for a multibillion-dollar corporation on Madison Avenue, and a studio apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

But I didn't last long there. Within 18 months, I walked away from the job and the apartment and moved into the Covenant House faith community, helping homeless and runaway teenagers, earning \$12 per week, living across from a strip club and a heroin shooting den.

I still do this kind of work, now in Vermont. This June marked my 40th anniversary. I never went back to Madison Avenue, or to the Upper East Side. But I do go back to Villanova, every five years, for my class reunion. And each time, I go back to that chapel, and I look at where I was sitting that night in 1978, somewhere on the left side, near the back. And I think to myself, "This is where it all started."

I really do believe that God brings certain people into our lives, at certain times, for a purpose. Was it just a coincidence that I'd happen to pick up the *Inquirer* that day, a paper I rarely read? That I'd be sitting in front of Georgetown, hung over, and Edward Fischer would come over and talk to us? That I'd happen to go to that particular Mass, on that particular Sunday?

No. I don't think it was a coincidence at all. I think it was meant to happen. And I don't think it was luck or the universe or fate. In my mind, it was God.

According to St. Augustine, "You are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstances, are brought into closer connection with you."

That has certainly been my experience, and it has made all the difference in my life.

[Mark Redmond is the author of the newly published *Called: A Memoir*. Read more Soul Seeing columns at [NCRonline.org/columns/soul-seeing](https://www.ncronline.org/columns/soul-seeing).]

## Addressing the US housing crisis must be a top priority for churches

### COMMENTARY

By SERGIO LOPEZ

I know what it's like to lose your home. As a boy, I watched, helpless, as my childhood home was lost to foreclosure. Predatory lenders and financial institutions offering subprime mortgages specifically targeted demographic groups like my family's: low-income, first-generation Americans. It's one of my most painful memories. As an elected councilmember for my hometown of Campbell, California, I've made addressing our housing crisis a top priority.

While campaigning, I heard heart-breaking stories from residents who were worried that they may soon be priced out of their own community by unaffordable housing costs. Campbell is part of the metropolitan region with the worst housing crisis in the entire United States — but housing is quick-

ly becoming a national crisis.

Across the country, many Catholic churches own plots of land, and, whether large or small, that property can be used to build housing for the community. With attendance declining in some congregations, and in flux in others due to impacts from the pandemic, many churches also find themselves with underutilized structures on their property.

The potential of churches in communities across the country to help tackle the housing crisis is tremendous. A 2020 report from the Turner Center at University of California, Berkeley found that in California alone, nearly 40,000 acres of church property could be developed with housing. (The full impact could be even greater than the report estimates, since the authors did not tally smaller plots of land where single or smaller units of housing could be built.)

The study's authors concluded that



—CNS/Lucy Nicholson, Reuters

Californians ask for the Los Angeles City Council to vote against adding more short-term rental units and call for more affordable housing Nov. 12, 2020.

property near public transit could offer the opportunity "to build housing that meets the state's twin objectives of expanding access to opportunity and reducing greenhouse gas ... emissions through improved land use."

But though the report focuses on

the public policy benefits of building housing, this work is also deeply in keeping with the church's mission. Already, many congregations give back to their community, practicing hospitality through donation drives for

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## 18 OPINION/LETTERS

## HOUSING: ROOTED IN THEOLOGY OF LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR

Continued from Page 17  
unhoused individuals or by hosting food pantries. As all of us are created in God's image; caring for our neighbors as ourselves is a basic duty for all Christians. Providing housing is a natural extension of this work.

There is also a powerful case to be made for building housing, grounded in the theology of ecology.

When we refuse to build infill housing in urban and suburban areas, it crops up in the rural areas that are most vulnerable to wildfires. Yet churches, often centrally located within a community, are positioned to build housing that alleviates these pressures by tapping into existing infrastructure rather than contributing to sprawl. To do so would be to follow the example of St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology, whose words Pope Francis cited in *"Laudato Si"*, on Care for Our Common Home.

Despite the need for more housing, there are passionate and righteous debates in housing policy about the impact gentrification has on communities. Others advocate for social housing, run by the government, as a solution to the problem. While these policy nuances are important, there is ultimately no single solution to our housing crisis, and churches have the power to alleviate this painful reality.

This is housing not just as hospitality but as ministry — modeling God's kingdom on earth, rooted not in the philosophy of the moneychangers but the theology of love for neighbor and community.

There are a number of different models for building housing on church property. Some may choose to build shelters or affordable housing. Other churches can choose to use the revenue from renting out housing units as a reliable, steady source of income to stabilize parish finances.

While most congregations might lack experience with issues like construction or property management, churches can partner with existing organizations in the community, such as developers (both for-profit and non-profit) and direct service organizations.

Local governments, which would be involved in entitling the housing, can also help make those connections. In areas such as Pasadena, California, experienced community groups like Making Housing & Community Happen are set up to help churches navigate the process and bring relevant stakeholder groups to the table, with many more resources available online. Examples of successful housing projects by churches can be found across the country.

As Christians, we are called upon to live our values. The truth about our housing crisis is that it is a manmade one, rooted in decades of public policy mismanagement. Yet solutions are uniquely available to faith leaders and congregations.

In building housing for communities, our churches can do their part, and in so doing, offer up an alternative vision for society — that of God's word enacted here on Earth.

[Sergio Lopez is an author and city councilmember for Campbell, California. He graduated from Yale University and studies at Duke Divinity School.]

## Take and eat

Regarding your July 9-22 edition on the bishops drafting a Communion document, by what authority do our bishops have the right to decide who can and who can't receive the Eucharist?

I don't recall Jesus at his last supper saying, "Take and eat, but just those without sin and who are worthy, for this is my body."

The Eucharist was given by Jesus for all who wish to receive it, and no one should be judged and denied this precious sacrament — whether saint or sinner.

(Sr.) JOEL GUBLER, OP  
Springfield, Kentucky

\* \* \*

My question is this: Who's going to read the document? It is described as being "catechetical," meaning dense theological language, which will appeal only to a few. There are some who will read it looking for references to politicians to confirm their own biases. Others will dismiss it as the product of a group of men who have little credibility.

The Eucharist does not lend itself to excess verbiage. What is needed is a document that will speak to the heart, for the Eucharist is all about love. Time would be better spent on showing us how Jesus' statement "I am the bread of life" could influence everyday life. How can the reception of the body and blood of Jesus influence our thoughts and actions on issues such as immigration, personal freedom vs. common good, income inequality, and so on? In fact, how wonderful it would be if documents were written on those issues, for they are much closer to the real lives of real people.

Even better, what if the U.S. bishops' conference were to join forces with leaders of major religious denominations and draft a document on the responsibilities of politicians to speak truth and eschew partisanship. Such a document might even apply to some members of the conference.

(Fr.) HERBERT C. YOST, CSC  
South Bend, Indiana

## Timely readings

St. Joseph Sr. Mary M. McGlone's recent reflections have been thoughtful and good starting points for personal lectio.

However, I think here is another perspective that is significantly timely. I believe the readings from the 16th through the 18th Sundays (NCR, July 9-22 and NCR, July 23-Aug. 5) are pointed arrows at the bishops' efforts for a Eucharist document. With Jeremiah's warning "woe to the shepherds" and the sharing and distribution of loaves and fishes to the 5,000, presumably to mostly non-Christian people who had not gone to confession, this is eucharistic coherency. These readings are for the bishops to digest what Jesus is calling them to when he said, "Remember me."

A few years back, when I worked at a counseling program, a young man came up to me a bit distraught. He was recovering from addiction and returned to church for support. He had walked to church and was chewing some gum. At Mass, the priest said, "If you had been eating or even chewing gum less than one hour before Mass, you cannot receive Communion."

Think of that! Chewing gum is on the same plane as mortal sin in pre-

venting someone from receiving Christ in the Eucharist.

If the bishops and priests really believe in the efficacy of the Eucharist, who are they to deny it to anyone?

DAVE MURRAY  
Cedarville, Michigan

## Attachment to Latin

Every time I read about the traditionalists' attachment to the Latin Mass (NCR, Aug. 6-19), I can't help thinking about these lines from the book of Exodus:

Having set out from Elim, the whole Israelite community came into the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.

Here in the wilderness the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died at the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our kettles of meat and ate our fill of bread! But you have led us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of famine!"

The Lord didn't let them go back to Egypt. The Lord gave them the food they needed to keep marching toward the promised land.

It's hard to miss the parallel!

PAUL CADRIN  
Montreal, Quebec

## Divestment

I am pleased to learn that many Catholic institutions have already divested from fossil fuels (NCR, July 23-Aug. 5). Is there a way to have an ongoing report published that shows these groups? Is there also a way to sign and send petitions to those institutions that have not done so?

Are you also encouraging all investors to reinvest in renewable forms of energy? I wonder also how many institutions have plans to electrify their heating and hot water systems, stoves and air conditioning.

Thank you for all that you are doing to fight climate change.

FRAN AGUIRRE  
Denver, Colorado

## Marriage prep

The commentary "Can the church better prepare Catholics for marriage?" (NCR, June 25-July 8) hit home for me, since I have worked in parish marriage prep since 1993 and in diocesan programs since 1977. I was distressed to hear what David Steinkraus was reporting about his experience, since I, too, think that it is a crucial time for the couple and their lifelong relationship with the church as they begin another domestic church.

In my experience, it is key for the church to address the culture in which young adults live, as well as the unique needs of some couples, such as those who are in midlife or entering a second marriage.

The Catholic Church has a powerful sacramental vision of marriage, but that is also built on a set of skills which any couple needs, such as communication, sexual and financial attitudes, as well as clarity on their families of origin. An openness to children is also important, and it is good to in-

troduce couples to natural family planning as the helpful resource that it can be, but there is far more to good marriage preparation than just that.

The Catholic Church has an excellent track record on marriage preparation. We need to work at making a good resource even better for the sake of healthy marriages.

KATHY FINLEY  
Spokane, Washington

## Truth sets us free

Thank you for the latest paper (NCR, July 23-Aug. 5). There are so many excellent articles reflecting that "the truth will set us free" remains the essence of each person finding their true self. It is the covenant lived faithfully. A basic requirement? Discerning the truth.

For Christians, it is the *sensus fidelium* becoming the essential truth of living in the Spirit. For Americans, it is the honest efforts of working together in achieving the promises of democracy. Current divisiveness is the reality that church and state have not sought nor promulgated them.

God's truth to "love neighbor as ourselves" parallels democracy's commitment to "seek the common good of all its citizens." We are a far cry from both and each of us needs reflection to choose to be participants and contributors to setting ourselves free by living these truths. Religions and government are as good as the faith, trust and willingness of all members to live what we mouth.

(Fr.) MARK FRANCESCHINI, OSM  
Denver, Colorado

Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words and preferably typed. If a letter refers to a previous issue of NCR, please give us that issue's date. We reserve the right to edit all letters. Letters, National Catholic Reporter, 115 E. Armour Blvd., Kansas City, MO 64111. Or via email: [letters@ncronline.org](mailto:letters@ncronline.org). Please be sure to include your street address, city, state, zip and daytime telephone number.

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## Whose disciples are we?

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021, TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 50:5-9a; Ps 116; Jas 2:14-18; Mk 8:27-35

By MARY M. McGLONE

I've heard theology students joking about contemplating the Angry Mysteries of the Rosary. Along with the cleansing of the Temple and cursing the fig tree, we have today's Gospel in which Jesus named Peter "Satan," and ordered him out of his sight. That's good fodder for fun among seminarians who need a chuckle break, but it's not a very good interpretation of what happens in today's Gospel.

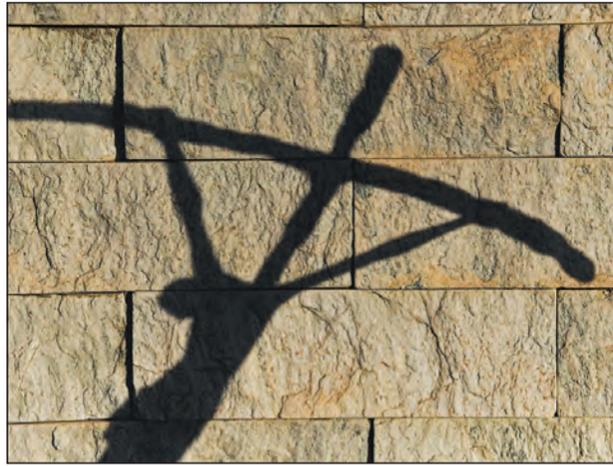
Today, we see how a journey with Jesus could become an intense experience of spiritual formation. Taking advantage of the leisure of a journey, Jesus asked his disciples about how folks were perceiving him. Disregarding the opinions of his adversaries, they recounted the rumors they'd heard from people who were both impressed and confused.

Some suspected he might be John the Baptist. That was a rather odd thought; anyone who knew about John would have known that Herod had beheaded him not too long before this conversation took place.

They added that others thought that perhaps he was another of the prophets. Those ideas sprang from their sense of how they knew God had interacted with Israel throughout their history.

When Jesus fixed his gaze on those who had chosen to journey with him, the answer changed. Peter responded, "You are the Christ." Peter testified that they saw Jesus not as a prophet of old, but as the anointed one sent by God to save Israel.

That's the good news. Then came the hitch: "He



—CNS/KNA/Harald Oppitz

began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer ... be killed, and rise after three days." That was so shocking that Mark adds the incredulous phrase, "He said this openly!"

Of course, Peter was as ready to help Jesus revise his thinking as he had been to proclaim his faith in him. He pulled Jesus aside to talk some sense into him.

Peter realized that Jesus had just veered wildly off the script for a messiah. Jesus' disciples might have been free from the expectation that the Messiah would be a warrior or king, but weakness, rejection and being killed, no. That scenario didn't correspond at all to their image of the one God would send to redeem Israel.

Although Peter rebuked him in private, Jesus' reply made witnesses of everyone present. He addressed Peter as "Satan," calling him a tempter, the kind of enemy that would sow weeds in the garden of God's reign. "Get out of my sight" is one way to translate the next text.

into coercion. That made him a threat to people who flaunted their status and strove to control others to their own advantage.

Today's selection from the Book of Wisdom portrays clearly the fate of prophets like Jesus. Their humble dealings with others create an implicit critique of authoritarianism and religious pretension.

As we see everywhere from neighborhood playgrounds to international politics, people who act with great generosity, who serve by bringing out the best in others, are frequently recognized as a threat by those who need to make their importance felt.

People who strive to be first, whose driving motivation is their own advantage and advancement, cannot abide the servant leader. The servant's style unmasks their egoism.

At their core, those who wield dominating power intuit their own weakness. They know that they are susceptible to anyone with greater power and thus they must hold tight to their fragile supremacy. Deep down, they understand that their control is limited to the efficacy of the threat they can muster. They gain a following by inspiring fear, an emotion incapable of generating loyalty.

Jesus relied solely on the attractiveness of the message he incarnated, a method so contrary to the way of the world that, like us, the disciples found it extremely difficult to grasp.

Today's Gospel presents Jesus' second attempt to help his disciples understand that his enemies were going to use all the coercive power at their disposal to put an end to him and his ministry. Worse yet, it would look like they succeeded. The first time Jesus taught this way, Peter tried to correct him. This time, Mark says the disciples were "afraid to question him." Obviously, they were beginning to understand what he was saying.

Their fear was entirely rational. It wasn't just that Jesus was going to suffer; but his fate involved similar implications for them. Love him as they did, they weren't quite ready to go that far.

Additionally, they were still enthralled by the images of power that surrounded them. They had suffered

What Jesus said to Peter at this moment is exactly what we heard in Mark 1:20, which says that Peter followed Jesus. Thus, Jesus came back at Peter with the message: "You are to follow me, not the other way around!"

Peter's reaction to what Jesus had said was as natural and as narrow as his experience and expectations. He had grown up on salvation stories that portrayed a God of power and might. It's unlikely that either he or the other disciples had ever interpreted Isaiah's suffering servant as an image of God or the Messiah.

People suffering under Roman domination were hardly longing for a savior who would suffer. People who waited for God to punish the wicked and reward the good didn't couldn't fathom the idea that God's chosen one could be put to death. They knew that isn't how God works!

Finally, Jesus' talk about rising on the third day offered small comfort. In their religious imagination, the third day had nothing to do with clocks or calendars; it was the day of salvation, which could come in an instant or an eon.

The question Jesus put to the disciples remains relevant for us today. Who do we say he is? What do we expect in our interactions with God?

Much as we resist it, the God we meet in Jesus, the Christ who is our savior, is thoroughly unlike the materialistic, political or militaristic gods the world urges us to worship. The God we meet in Jesus does not squash evil, but takes it in. In Christ, God suffers evil to transform it. Jesus did not escape the cross, but revealed evil's ultimate powerlessness to overcome with life and love.

The victory of life and love Jesus tried to reveal to his disciples is what we celebrate this week in the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on Sept. 14. The feast celebrates the height and depth and breadth of the love of God that no evil can overcome. Yes, this is a mystery, and our liturgy asks us the same question Jesus' followers had to answer: Whose disciples are we?

Knowing that Jesus the Christ is the divine servant who does not avoid suffering, but transforms it, are we still ready to get behind him?

[St. Joseph Sr. Mary M. McGlone serves on the congregational leadership team of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.]



—CNS/Reuters/Nacho Doce

A volunteer carries coffee for people waiting for a free meal at the Church of Santa Anna in Barcelona, Spain, April 21, 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Power, service and love

SEPTEMBER 19, 2021, TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

Wis 2:12, 17-20; Ps 54; Jas 3:16-4:3; Mk 9:30-39

By MARY M. McGLONE

Historians tell us that the ancient Incas' preferred method of incorporating new groups into their empire was by gift-giving. A delegation would enter a foreign territory carrying an abundance of food and rich offerings to demonstrate how people's lives could thrive under their rule. If that didn't work, they found other methods to subjugate the group.

The Incas provided a wobbly attempt at something like Jesus' model of servant leadership. The great distinction between the Inca and Christian approach is that Jesus limited himself to the humble, vulnerable power of service and attraction, never moving

under Rome's domination and, as simple people, they were cowed by the sophisticated, haughty religious elite. Except for Jesus, they had precious few examples of authority that expressed itself in love that empowered others and created unity. Competition and power struggles were much easier to understand.

When the disciples prayed today's psalm saying, "By your might, defend my cause," they probably imagined God crushing their enemies. In contrast, Jesus longed for them to comprehend the power of the invincible love of God. They wouldn't really understand that until they saw it played out in the cross and Resurrection — exactly the scenario Jesus was preparing them for.

As we listen to today's readings, rather than wonder at the disciples' thickheadedness, we might examine our own attitudes about power, service and love.

The message Jesus taught with his life was that God's dominion is solely one of attraction. God so loves the world that God will have nothing to do with coercion — not even to save the Son from suffering and death. Instead, the greatest revelation of God's character shines through Jesus' refusal to allow any rejection, threat or suffering to cause him to abandon his mission of making God's love present.

The Incas' offering of the good life was tentative. Unlike God, they abandoned that method if it didn't produce rapid results. What they and political and religious systems before and after failed to do was to prioritize the faithfulness that flows from love. Love is the only power capable of generating genuine loyalty, a faithfulness that is stronger than death.

Today's liturgy invites us to assess our personal and communal relationships with God and one another. Do we, like the Incas, attempt coercion when love seems too weak? Are we willing to gamble that servant love is sufficient to transform evil? Do we as a church give witness to such fullness of life and joy that we entice others to give their lives to it?

Today, we are invited to walk the road with Jesus and his thickheaded disciples, praying that we, too, can learn the invincible and irresistibly attractive power of self-giving love.

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## After Afghanistan, will we wage peace or war?

Early on in the “war on terror” — not even four months after the Sept. 11 attacks — the editors of the National Catholic Reporter asked for an alternative to violence and retribution.

“The real insult to those who lost their lives to terrorists would be the stubborn continuation of unsuccessful policies that guarantee only more terror and war,” the editors wrote in an editorial published Dec. 21, 2001.

“This time, in Afghanistan, can we expect different results?” we asked. “After all, the world is watching closely, and we have cited the suffering of the Afghan people under the Taliban to help justify U.S. bombing. With our new attentiveness, will we finally begin to face the desperate poverty of that country and see it within a broader context? Will we begin to imagine U.S. complicity in the suffering of the region? Will we begin to repent the way we support dictatorships when it serves U.S. economic interests? Can we finally imagine waging peace, not war?”

Sadly, the answer to those questions has been no. Now, nearly two decades later, as the Taliban seizes power, the U.S. military is pulling out of what has become the U.S.’s longest war.

The costs, by any measure, have been astronomical: Tens of thousands of people have died, including 2,448 U.S. service members, 3,846 U.S. contractors, 1,144 allied/NATO service members, 444 aid workers and 72 journalists.

The death toll for the Afghan people is even worse: more than 50,000 Taliban and other opposition fighters and 47,245 civilians.

The financial cost of the war is in the trillions of dollars, and because the U.S. borrowed most of the money to pay for it (rather than raise taxes), we will be paying it off until halfway through this century.

And for what? The most touted domestic success — an improvement in the lives of women and girls — has been an uphill battle. A 2017 report found that two-thirds of Afghan girls still did not attend school, not only because of discriminatory attitudes, but also because they did not have access to education.

The improved infant mortality rate, which has declined from 89 deaths per 1,000 births in 2001 to 47 deaths today, still puts Afghanistan at a rate similar to Haiti and other poor nations.

Yes, the U.S. was able to destroy al-Qaida’s military bases and training camps, and to take out its leader, Osama bin Laden.

But Americans who have witnessed firsthand the suffering in Afghanistan report little improvement



—CNS/U.S. Marines handout via Reuters/ Staff Sgt. Victor Mancilla

Civilians prepare to board a plane during an evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug. 18, 2021.

among the poorest in the countryside. Peace activist Kathy Kelly, who has made nearly 30 visits to the country in the past 10 years, describes poverty, desperation and hunger, especially among women, children and widows.

As Kelly told NCR executive editor Heidi Schlumpf, mothers weep because they cannot feed their children more than some stale bread and tea without sugar. Instead of going to school, kids are forced into labor or to scrounge for scraps of food in markets. Access to clean water may require hours of walking down dangerous mountain passes. During the rainy winter, mud houses provide little insulation and newborn babies die of exposure.

And now, those Afghans who worked with U.S. troops, contractors or aid groups are fearful for their lives under Taliban rule, and a chaotic evacuation plan — if you can call it that — seems likely to leave many of them behind.

Even veterans are depressed and angry that their tours in the country accomplished so little.

Regina Tetreault, a former U.S. Army motor transport operator who served two combat tours in Afghanistan with the 101st Airborne Division, told NCR the war was “wasteful.”

“The lives, the resources, all the many different things that were wasted on this, and it’s not OK. It’s frustrating,” said Tetreault, who was nearly

killed in combat when a rocket-propelled grenade struck her convoy on one mission.

What can Americans do now? We can expand our acceptance of refugees from Afghanistan, and other war-torn countries, while we’re at it.

And vow not to do it again.

Another NCR editorial, this one two days before the U.S. bombing in Afghanistan began in October of 2001, urged nonviolence as a practical strategy.

The argument: “Jesus taught nonviolence. The earliest Christians followed the way of nonviolence. Nonviolence teaches that violent acts have practical consequences: They cause harm to the person who engages in them. They add to the cycle of violence and they do not achieve their stated purpose. Nonviolence is not simply a goal, an end; it is a way of life.”

We also quoted now-St. John Paul II, who tried to convince the first President George Bush not to start the first Iraq war. He said killing “leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution of the very problems which provoked the war.”

The pope’s plea for “Never again war! No, never again war” was not heeded then, nor by the second President George Bush, who took the U.S. into conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Perhaps our country’s second Catholic president will listen. When will we ever learn?

## GSR’s Sr. Joyce Meyer honored by LCWR

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious honored three of their members with Lifetime Achievement Awards Aug. 13: Sr. Helen Prejean, a Sister of St. Joseph, for “her tireless work against the death penalty,” Sr. Amata Miller, a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for her teaching of “economics as a tool for social justice equity and fairness,” and Sr. Joyce Meyer, a member of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for her “generous service that has had far-reaching impact on sisters in hundreds of congregations.”



Sr. Joyce Meyer

At NCR, we’re especially delighted to see the recognition for Sister Joyce, who serves as international liaison for our Global Sisters Report.

“Her continued dedication to connect with sisters and write about their perspectives from around the world amplifies the international reality of the whole of religious life,” LCWR said of Sister Joyce. “No one has been a more diligent advocate for creating a global sisterhood than Joyce Meyer.”

You can read more about the three Lifetime Achievement recipients at [GlobalSistersReport.org/node/200217](https://www.GLOBALSISTERSREPORT.ORG/node/200217). A brief video highlighting Sister Joyce’s work can be found at [ncr.media/sisterjoyce](https://www.ncr.media/sisterjoyce). You can also read a blog by Sister Joyce about sisters carrying on in the face of tragedies in Haiti, South Sudan and Afghanistan at [ncr.media/srjoyceblog](https://www.ncr.media/srjoyceblog).

—NCR staff

