Introduction

I am very pleased and honored and delighted, first of all, to welcome you, and secondly, to introduce our speaker, Deborah Rose-Milavec. Deborah serves as the executive director of FutureChurch. She has had more than 20 years of experience working in Church-based organizations, with a strong background in theology, Church history and Catholic social teaching. Her professional experience includes serving as the executive director at the Domestic Violence Prevention Agency and Shelter in Shelby County, Ohio; program director for the American Friends Service Committee; and prior to coming on the board for FutureChurch, vice-president and project director for Catherine of Siena Virtual College, offering women’s and gender studies worldwide, with a special outreach in Africa, China, the Philippines, Thailand, and other countries in Asia. Deborah holds a master’s degree in Theology and a bachelor’s degree in International Studies. She trained as a lay pastoral minister in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and is an associate of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati.

Just a word about FutureChurch. FutureChurch is a twenty-eight year old national organization seeking changes that will provide all Roman Catholics the opportunity to participate fully in the ministry and governance of the Church. FutureChurch has five initiatives and has developed hundreds of programs, campaigns and educational materials that focus on the future of Priestly Ministry, Women in Church Leadership, Emerging models of Parish and Community Life, and Justice in the Church.

So, it is my pleasure to present to you Deborah Rose-Milavec.  

(Applause)

A Woman’s Perspective on the Church

OK! Well, thank you all for being here today. I can’t tell what an honor it is to come to the Elephants.
I was asked to talk about “Women’s Experience in the Church,” or “Women in the Church.” And you heard that my predecessor was Chris Shenk; she is a brilliant, wonderful woman. And when I took this job, it was about two months into it, I asked, “What in the world did I get myself into?” I mean, talk about big shoes to fill; but it’s been a great journey. We’ve been solid; we’ve grown; we’ve expanded.

**FutureChurch Promotions**

Our programming—I’m going to do a quick, tell you about a couple of things, you know, before we get started. So, when I get into something, I’m going to get deep into it. So, we have a couple of projects I just want you to know about. So, at the end of March, we’re going to go to Rome; and Chris is going to lead that trip. If you ever wanted to follow an expert like Chris Shenk, to learn about women in the early Christianity, Chris is wonderful. She - you may or may not know – she just finished a book; it is original research, ground-breaking research, where she has studied the inscriptions, and the epigraphical evidence, and the archeological evidence, which tells us something about women in the Church.

This other evidence shows, in a brand-new way, just how prevalent women in leadership were prevalent, how much authority women did have in the Church. So, it’s a trip of a lifetime; and then, we’re going to go on to Naples and Pompey, and do some original research there as well. So, to learn about that, go to FutureChurch.org; and we have a slider right across the top of the page. We hope you can come; it will be great; it will be a trip of a lifetime.

The other things we have going on, we have a new series coming out. Tom Reese will start it for us. It’s called, “Power to the People, from Clericalism to Collaboration.” And what we’re trying to do is bring on a number of speakers; and we know with the whole clergy sex abuse crisis, and what has happened. The bishops just got together in Chicago, and everybody will go to Rome—the heads of the bishops’ conferences will go to Rome in February—and the people are trying to sort out what we can do to end this horrible crisis within out Church, and the crimes that are being committed. They are crimes for sure.

Pope Francis himself has said part of the problem is clericalism, where ordained people and Catholic lay people are part of the whole problem as well, where we treat a certain group of people as if they are privileged, that they should have privilege. So, part of this series is to delve into clericalism, and what lay people can do to turn this Church around.
So, we hope you will tune into that. Tom Reese will state it off with “A Lay of the Land,” which is coming up on January 23, at 8:00 PM. All you have to do is sign up; you can do it in your pajamas at home. You just listen to it. It’s a good series; and we do all these teleconferences that way.

And the other thing, I just wanted to make sure you know about our “Catholic Women Preach” cycle.

So, one of the things we have been promoting for the last two years, especially in the face of the fact that we might get women deacons in the next couple of years; but the Church is impoverished because it does not hear the wisdom and the reflection and the preaching of Catholic women. So, every week and on some holy days, we have fabulous Catholic women from all over the world, some of them very famous, and some of them not so much, preaching. So, tune in to “Catholic Women Preach,” and watch the video; we also have it as a podcast. So, if you want to download the podcast and listen to it, go for it.

Women in the Church

So, I want to start today; I came to this work with FutureChurch, because I care so much about women in the Church, and many other issues, e.g., justice in the Church. My mom told me when I was a little kid, she said, “You’re always for the underdog,” whatever that is inside of me. And that’s true for me. I always cared about justice, like part of my DNA. And one of the reasons I’m still Catholic is because I know the Church’s teachings on social justice. They have formed me and shaped me and brought out the passion in me; and I always say I should have a T shirt that says, “The Church made me; now they have to deal with me,” because now I’ve learned what social justice is about; and I know that the Church itself doesn’t always apply it to its own members.

So, one of the reasons I do that is because I care so much; and I’ve always cared about women’s empowerment. All my life I’ve some work around – I’ve been executive director of a domestic violence shelter, and agency; for a while I worked for the Quakers; I worked with disadvantaged youth for a while. So, all my work has been focused on – and the last job I had with Catherine of Siena College was really traveling to developing countries to offer women and gender studies to women who would not have access to women and gender studies in developing regions. We offered classes on-line; and it was a wonderful experience. I met some of the most incredible women from all over the world. And today, I bring those connections to the work I do at FutureChurch. We have quite a lot of international activity now, beyond our national activity.
But the other reason I do the work I do is because I’ve got ‘skin” in the game. I’m a mother, I have six children; and I’m a grandmother of fourteen grandchildren. Here are some of them (pointing to the slide). And for the first time in our history, the Center to Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) tells us that for the first time the number of women attending parishes has gone down, so much so, that it now matches where men are, right around 30%. You know, a decade ago, it was different. So, we see those changes.

And so, for the first time, women are leaving the Church in slightly higher numbers than men. That’s a travesty!

If we don’t have young women in our Church, their children are not coming; and if we don’t have their children, we don’t have a future. So, this stuff matters for all sorts of reasons; and no matter what your complaint is with the Institutional Church, and there are plenty of reasons to complain, there is no other organization that has the outreach that the Catholic Church has, has the ability to reach out to the margins of society the way the Catholic Church has.

And if you care what happens to the poorest woman at the edge of some poor society in Africa, or India, then you should care about how the Church governs itself, who’s making those decisions, who decides. So, there’s my little beginning bit.

**Women’s Stories**

So, I have a story to tell you about the experience of women in the Church. It is a story of tragedy and triumph, despair and tenacity, faith, hope and fierce love. The first story: the taming of a radical. How many of you think Mary of Nazareth was pretty tame?
I remember on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, sitting in Church with a couple of kids, looking at her pure white statue, and just fuming: “You know nothing about what is like to be a mother. You’re so far away. You’re so perfect. You’re so everything I’m not.” And I just had one of these moments of understanding, the way it happens to all of us, a moment of insight. And I just heard her saying to me, “I’m just like you. I’m running around chasing kids, changing diapers, feeding people, loving, caring, just liked you.” And I just wept. I thought, “I get it.” But beyond that, the Church has taken Mary and turned her into something that I think is really a disservice to her and a disservice to women.

So, Mary of Nazareth was probably about 15 or 16 when Judas, the Galilean led a rebellion in Sapphoris, a city in Galilee about three or four miles from her village. He overtook Sapphoris and armed himself and his men with weapons from the royal fortress. Rome response was to crush the rebellion, They came in and crucified two thousand men, women and children; they burned all the villages nearby. Mary lived three of four miles from that. One of the reasons—she lived in one of the poorest regions in the world at that time. She may have been one of the poorest women in the world at that time. And one of the reasons for that is because the Romans exacted taxes triple fold on peasants.

And so, these heavy taxes created—they were barely able to survive - and they kept those taxes in place to beef up their military and keep their political people in place. Mary knew these stories; she grew up in this world. No one had to tell her.

So, she is remembered, in my mind and in many other people’s minds, who have reimagined Mary, she is remembered for having some very radical and dangerous ideas. And guess what? She passes these onto her son, Jesus, and to those around her. Jesus didn’t get all this stuff, if he’s really human, and you believe that, he didn’t get all this stuff out of nowhere. He got it from the people around him; he got it from the village he lived in.

In her own words, “God has shown the strength of his arm. He has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he has sent empty away.” (Luke 2: 51-53.) That’s a radical woman. She could have been crucified for those words. That’s a radical woman.

But, through the centuries, Mary has been tamed. I liken it to a Hallmark card, i.e., commercialized for general consumption, something we can all live with—sweet, nice Mary, like the Mother’s Day card, the stuff we remember on Mother’s Day, instead of the women who were out protesting while their men were away at war. But in reality, Mary was tough, resilient, gutsy, independent. She was possessive of a radical agenda. She believed in this radical gospel. She believed in this God, who was going to deliver them from this oppressive world. She was part of a community of believers who incarnated the God of liberation. That’s the Mary I like.

What does it mean to be tamed like Mary today if you are a woman in the Church? And who else have we tamed in this Church? Does anyone here knows what it’s like to have your voice tamed in this Church? And what effect does it have? Shout out!

Responses from the audience:

- I lead LGBT people. They have been tamed by the Church to the point where they are almost invisible.
- In 2012 the LCWR were attacked by some Church leaders about their lifestyles working outside convents and with the poor. These guys didn’t know what they were dealing with.
- A sister of Mercy, I can’t remember her name, (Sr. Theresa Kane) was put down by Pope John Paul II.
- Our black sisters are scarcely represented anywhere in the Church. One of the great things that Fr. Brian Massingale tells very beautifully is the way racism persists within the Catholic Church.

Women were part of the inner circle of disciples, and they exercised significant ecclesial authority on patrons—that’s important—as itinerant prophets, evangelists, teachers and missionaries in the earliest days of the Jesus movement, which by the way was a formal movement within Judaism. We’re talking about Jewish women. We’re talking about a Jewish Jesus. So, in the beginning, we’re talking about a reform movement within Judaism.
The Second Story. This is my favorite Gospel story! Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But Jesus did not answer her. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” And he answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15: 21–24) “I’m not going to have anything to do with you.” That’s not very nice. That’s not very nice.

But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.”—he’s calling her a dog—She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly. (Mt 15:25-28)

How many of you here have heard someone try to soften this story? Make Jesus into a nice guy? If Jesus was totally human, Jesus learned from women too. Right? This is what happens here. He has narrow vision now. “This is what my mission is.” And she opens his eyes. She’s a Canaanite woman; and they don’t get along. And she opens his eyes.

What does it mean to be a Canaanite woman today? I want to tell you my story first; then I want to hear a few of your Canaanite stories.

So, I grew up in a small rural town in the middle of Ohio. There were 500 people, all Catholic except one Protestant family, all white. The women did the housework when I was a kid, maybe a teacher or two. Mostly, the women stayed home. It was a delightful town, as long as you thought like everyone else. But, when I wanted to go to college, and my dad said to me—and I had two brothers and a siste—he said, “Girls don’t go to college; they have babies. There’s no return on investment,” literally, no ROI.

Now I loved my dad; and so, I didn’t go to college, got married young, and had children—the best thing that ever happened to me—but I had a father who didn’t recognize my potential. My brothers went to college; my sister and I did not.
It wasn’t until I entered my forties that I began to recognize that while I loved being a mother, my other talents were not being recognized. That came from people outside of my small rural sphere. I had always been an advocate for women’s equality in school; and, as my mother said, I was always “for the underdog.” So, I raised my children, and at the encouragement of a deacon, I began to go back to school and study art, theology and international studies. And in my own way I contributed. I led the effort to build a library. I became involved on our civic council. I became the first woman president of the parish council.

When it became time to doling out of priests, being a small town at the edge of the archdiocese, we often got the priests who are kind of at the bottom of the barrel. They had drinking problems, were cantankerous—I don’t know if there were any who were abusing people—or they just weren’t able to make it in the city. So, our cantankerous little priest was nearing the end of his twelve-year stint. I said to the council, “We are not going to take this anymore. We’re not going to let them just send us any old priest.” They said, “But what can we do about it?” I said, “Let’s go out and find our own Vatican II priest.” Of course, I had done some research, and knew that this was in our purview. But the council was nervous.

So, we had a great auxiliary bishop I invited him out to one of our meetings. He explained that we could carry out a research. So, we did. We found the list of potential priests, those nearing the end of their twelve-year contract, interviewed them regarding their views on Vatican II, and went to their parishes to see them at work. When we finally found the most wonderful Vatican II priest, he said, “Yes!”

Gene Bonamaker was his name, in case any of you knew him. He was tired of the city, running a parish school, and getting older. And so, we began to recreate ourselves into Vatican II parish, like you’ve never seen before, women participating, lay people participating, with SCC (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) and a host of reforms.

One Sunday, Vocation Sunday, our wonderful priest preached about vocations—to half of the parishioners. He talked about raising vocations to the priesthood, and he’s talking to the men; and he wasn’t talking to these four little girls sitting next to me. And gthey are getting a message. I began to steam up. He wasn’t addressing me, or them, or any of the women in the church, the same women who were so faithful in every aspect of ministry. The girls looked up at my face and began to shuffle a little nervously, sensing their mama’s frustration.

And so, I walked up to receive Communion with all of them in tow behind me. And when he said, “Body of Christ,” I replied, “Not yet.” I didn’t say it loud, but I said, “Not yet!” After mass we talked; and you can’t just do this with anybody.
I could do it, because we had a good relationship. He said, “You can’t deny the Body of Christ!” And I said, “You just did! You gave a vocation talk and you didn’t say anything to half of the people in this church. You didn’t talk to me; you didn’t talk to my four daughters.” I said, “Who is denying the Body of Christ now?” And he looked at me and said, “You know, you’re right,” he said, “What can I do to change it?” And I said, “For one thing, let women preach; let women express themselves in this church.”

That’s my Canaanite moment. It’s kind of long from “return on investment,” you know, and saying, “You’re really not worth it,” to speaking up and saying, “You’ve got it wrong. I’m not in your Body of Christ. It may be your Body of Christ, but it can’t be my Body of Christ unless we’re included.

And if you think that is too radical, Fr. Daniel Berrigan himself has stated, “Until women are fully integrated into this Church, every time I go to the altar, I feel compromised.” We’re talking about the Body of Christ; and we’re not living it yet. In some ways, we’re not very close yet.

So, what does it mean to you to be a Canaanite woman today? Like the Canaanite woman, how have you found your voice? How has it changed those in authority?

Responses:

- I have been a religious sister for twenty-five years. In a meeting with some older priests, discussing the ordination of women, one priest said, “Well, if you were ordained, I can just see your pantyhose hanging in the shower.” All I could think of in response was, “Don’t you hang your jockstrap there?” (laughter)
- What I’ve heard many times is: “Women are inferior. Get used to it!” That’s what you get in many places. My response is: “If you want to feel superior, don’t put it on me.”

How many explicit and implicit messages do we get in our lifetime, about how much you have, how much our decisions, how much our experience matters in this Church?
Christianity’s enormous success and expansion would not have been possible without women. Our literary sources are written by men, and we read them with an androcentric bias. We read them like those in power want us to read them. But women were there, and they helped shape – they had an enormous presence in shaping - the way Christianity formed. Women founded and presided over house church worship and held titles such as diakonoi and apostoloi. Remember Phoebe and Junia?

If you look at the way Greek is read, when you see the Greek word for faithful, people interpret whether its male or female; but when you see the word apostoloi, it’s been interpreted as only meaning male. So, even the way we read Greek has been influenced by an androcentric lens.

Although women’s voices and stories have been muted, distorted and diminished, we recognize today, thanks to the work of so many brilliant, Catholic feminist theologians, that women have always been at the heart of our salvation history. Although women’s voices and stories have been muted, distorted and diminished, we recognize that women have always been at the heart of our salvation history. We’re just coming to appreciate that. And women continue to be at the heart of our salvation history today.

Women speak today. So, I want to move from our fore-mothers to modern women speaking up. So, here’s a question I get a lot. People want to know why is women’s full participation in the life and ministry of the Church, why is women’s ordination important? Why don’t you just go out and do social justice? Why don’t you take care of the poor? Quit worrying about this; that’s just a white, western privilege isn’t it, to think about women’s ordination? And those who seek equality for women in the Church are often criticized, not just by people like Lifesite News who are going to criticize you, like Church Militant, the ultra-right wing of the Church, who want to see women stay in their place. But, we also get criticized by the folks who are progressive. You know, why should you care about that? Just go out and do the work. The good sisters do it; why can’t you?
They think that advancing women’s authority through ordination and governance is too narrowly focused—the concern of people of privilege. It’s an important thing to consider. I’m going to make a case here.

So, I believe there a connection between women serving in ministry and decision making and the way we serve the poorest women, children, and men at the margins. There is a connection. It does matter how we structure our governance and how effectively we’re going to do that work. As good as we do it now, it could be better.

So, ask yourself, what difference would it make if women had been equal, integral partners in ministry and decision making and officiating when Vatican II was going on? We had women there, twenty-three. They were auditors; they did have some influence, but not much. What if they had been writing those documents alongside men? What would have changed? What issues would have been brought up? The synod documents, the same, canon law, liturgical norms, the (USCCB) Dallas Charter, which was pretty good, nonetheless, pastorals on economy, war, domestic violence, poverty, racism, not to mention the failed attempt of the pastoral on women. What if women were equal partners to men as we shaped and formed those documents, those teachings?

- Would including women in ministry and decision making change;
- The way we reach out to those who are poor and marginalized?
- The way clergy sex abuse was covered up and the way clericalism has taken hold, what it changes?
- What kind of issues that are addressed in our documents and from the pulpit?

I don’t know about you, but I ran a domestic violence shelter for years. I only heard one priest ever preach about domestic violence; and that was a priest from India. How is it—how is it—that we are in a Church, where every Sunday we go to hear someone talk on, preach on the word of God, when at least fourth, if not more, of the women in those pews are being abused; and at least a fourth are perjured? How is it that I came to be 63 years old, and never heard one sermon, one homily, on domestic violence? That would change if we were equal partners.

What kind of language would we use for God? We all know that problem, don’t we? I still—it’s so deeply embedded in me—I still think of God as male, even though, intellectually, I know that God is neither. And often times I pray to God, my Mother—the Mother. But it’s still a reflex; it’s been inside me so long. What would change if we thought of God in a broader context?
The third story. In February, last year, 2018, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Family and Life forbade a group I work with, Voices of Faith—I was the moderator for the very first time; we had a group of women speaking freely inside the Vatican about their experiences inside the Church; and they were not vetted by the Vatican. So, we brought in women who were not the usual suspects the Vatican usually chooses. And so, we were going to have this event again this year. And on our list of speakers was—and we never had any problems getting speakers for four years; we tell them who’s coming and they let us do it. This year, we had a new person in charge. They handed the responsibility for this event over to Cardinal Farrell, who may be in some ways a good guy; but in this case, he took three of the names off the list. “You can’t invite them.” And one of them was Mary McAleese, the former president of Ireland. Why? Because Mary has a way of speaking up about LGBT issues, because she has a gay son, and she supports women’s ordination. She speaks about it. And so, he said, “You can’t ask her to come.”

Instead of silencing the voices the Church would want to silence, we moved the event. And we went to the Jesuit Curia; and they welcomed us. And it was a wonderful event.

But, I’m telling you, we’re going to spend a little time with some of the things Mary said, because her manifesto is one of the most brilliant speeches I’ve ever heard spoken in the Church in terms of women. I think it equaled the Magnificat.

There’s Mary. She says a few things with her Irish brogue—I wish I could do it, but I can’t

• The Catholic Church has long since been a primary global carrier of the virus of misogyny. It has never sought a cure though a cure is freely available. Its name is “equality.”
• Today, the Catholic Church lags noticeably behind the world’s advanced nations in the elimination of discrimination against women.” Even the military is ahead at this point; and that’s saying something.
• “Worse still, because it is the ‘pulpit of the world’” — you know, the Church has so much influence, “to quote Ban Ki Moon, “Its overt clerical patriarchalism acts as a powerful brake on dismantling the architecture of misogyny wherever it is found.”” It’s women in Africa, who are suffering the effects of the particulars of their culture. The Church isn’t helping this. This is the connection Mary makes. It matters what we do inside the Church, because it affects the way women are treated in the world, because we have a big void. We have a lot of influence.”
• “There is an irony here,” she goes on, “for education has been crucial to the advancement of women, and for many of us, the education which liberated us; and we became frontline workers.

• Yet, paradoxically, it is the questioning voices of educated Catholic women and the courageous men who support them, which the Church hierarchy simply cannot cope with. It scorns them. The Church regularly criticizes the secular world for its failure to deliver on human rights; yet it has almost no culture of critiquing itself. It has a hostility to internal criticism which fosters blinkered servility and which borders on institutional idolatry.

• Failure to include women as equals has deprived the Church of fresh and innovative discernment; it has consigned it to recycled thinking among a hermetically sealed cosy male clerical elite flattered and rarely challenged by those tapped for jobs in secret and closed processes. It has kept Christ out and bigotry in.

• Pope Francis has said that “women are more important than men because the Church is a woman”. Holy Father, why not ask women if they feel more important than men? I suspect many will answer that they experience the Church as a male bastion of patronizing platitudes.” They have put Mary on a pedestal; they put Mary up, up, and up on a pedestal so we never have to deal with her.

• “John Paul II has written of the ‘mystery of women’.” I love it! “Talk to us as equals and we will not be a mystery!” (Laughter) I love it.

• So, she said, “Today we challenge Pope Francis to develop a credible strategy for the inclusion of women as equals throughout the Church’s root and branch infrastructure, including its decision-making.

• Only such a Church of equals is worthy of Christ. Only such a Church can credibly make Christ matter. The time for that Church is now, Pope Francis. The time for change is now.” She brought the house down. She still brings me down. I just ... it’s incredible!

You know, the bishops themselves said this in the 1971 Synod of Bishops. The document they produced, “Justice in the World,” says, “While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes.” Makes perfect sense, doesn’t it? So logical. Why don’t we practice it?

Then, there’s the practical case, which I love to bring out too. I mean, the military figured this out; corporate America and other corporations around the world figured this out:

• In Business: A 2016 survey of 21,980 publicly traded companies in 91 countries demonstrates that the presence of more female leaders in top positions of corporate management correlates with increased profitability of these companies, i.e., 30% of females in top positions leads to a 15% increase in profits.

• In Governance: We know that women govern differently than men. I’m not talking about what’s going on in the United States right now; this is a general. They tend to be more collaborative and bipartisan. They push for far more policies meant to support women, children, and social welfare.
• And then, Family/Community: especially in poor countries; if you give the resources to women, her family will rise up.

• And in many of the Professions: women have changed the medical field, e.g., when women became doctors, when more women entered that field, the number of lawsuits went down; the quality of care went up. Women do have some important gifts to offer.

• And of course, we have the Catholic sisters, whom I love. I say they are the Wall Street of the Gospel. They know how to take their resources and invest in the works of the Gospel. If you think about it, it’s brilliant. They pool their money together—I’ve watched this in my own community—they go down to the border: they say, “We need a clinic down there. They take care of that need. It’s brilliant. These sisters have been leading us; they’re the pioneers. They have invested in those at the margins with services that provide education, health care, and social services.

• And they are at the forefront today in reducing human trafficking, care for the earth, healthcare, policy reforms aimed at poverty reduction, immigration reform, LGBTQ pastoral care, etc.

So, the question is: “Would incorporating women fully into the ministry and governance (of the Church) change anything?” What do you think?

**Responses from the floor:**

• Women are going to save the country! (applause)

There is something in the way women are socialized that brings out a particular way onto any situation. Hopefully men—and I see this in my son and son-in-laws—my gosh, they raise their children so differently than they did in my generation, but especially in my parent’s generation, where a man would not change a diaper. These young fellows, they know everything that’s going on with their children. I remember, for one of them, I was babysitting my grandchildren one time, and the baby spit up, or something; and dad said when he came home, “Oh, you changed her clothes.” And I thought, “Wow!” I don’t know of another man in my generation or above who would have noticed that. It’s a very different world; and it’s a much better world. It’s beautiful to watch them.

So, things are changing; but I do believe, not that it’s a panacea, not that women are essentially better; but women do have gifts to offer that are different and necessary. And not just women and men, but different kinds of women: women who are African-American, women of color, women from different cultural contexts. We need them all. We need them, because we can’t open our eyes until we are confronted by somebody who’s living a reality that’s very different from my own.
Just a quick story. I worked for the American Service Committee; and my boss was an African-American woman.

And I thought I pretty much knew my stuff on racism, and my master’s degree—I know what I’m doing—and we went to lunch one day; and we were talking about work; and we’re sitting at one of those places where you’re going up and getting the food. And the waitress is coming by and picking up the dishes and filling glasses; and she says to me, “You see what’s happening here?” And I said, “What?” And I looked down at the table. My side of the table was clean; her side of the table had dishes piled up. The waitress was not taking her stuff away, because she was African-American, and was taking my stuff away. I was mortified; but that’s why we need diversity. Eating while white can be a real problem, let me tell you. But, I was mortified; but that’s how it is. We need diversity.

I don’t blame my male colleagues who have made all these decisions and built these beautiful documents for not understanding what women might bring to that conversation that would be different from theirs. But, I do blame them for leaving women out. What they don’t know, they don’t know. What I don’t know about men, I can’t even imagin—OK, I’m going to make a document for all you men—what would I know? I need your advice. I need your input. I need you as a colleague. Why doesn’t the Church recognize that simple fact?

And since I was recently at the synod, I thought I would bring you some of the experiences I had there around women and the Church. So, we know from October 3rd to the 27th, Pope Francis held this synod on youth. And in 2014 and 15, I was also in Rome for the synod on the family. And so, this is just a little bit of the timeline to understand the process:

- So, he announced it in January 2017.
- A questionnaire in January 2017 that was supposed to be completed by young people. I don’t think they got ass many young people to complete it as they wanted. If you read the questionnaire, it wasn’t all that clear. I don’t know who put it together; it was really bad.
- A preparatory document was created with a survey for bishops in January 2017, given to all the bishops who were going to attend.
• And then, they had a pre-synod meeting. This was different. In March 2018 he invited young people from all over the world to discuss together where the Church needs to improve; basically, that’s why they were there. You know: “We appreciated the Church; we love the Church; here’s why young people may not be coming.” And they created a document.

• And the actual working document for the synod was a compilation of the survey, the questionnaire and this document that came from young people. It’s called, “Instrumentum Laboris.” This is the document they worked on for three weeks.

• So, every day they would divide up into different language groups. This was another innovation of this pope. It’s really amazing. The one thing I want to make clear, and I will come back to it if I don’t do it here, Pope Francis is very savvy, and he’s making some very radical changes in how the Church functions. Reports from fourteen language groups there were four in English, three in French, one in German, three in Italian, one in Portuguese, and two in Spanish. And so, each week they worked on a part of Instrumentum Laboris. And this included all the voting members, the bishops, and all the members who were considered experts. So, these groups went through the document, line by line, talking about what it should say, how it could be said better, or giving their ideas about it, how it could be changed for the better.

• And then, the final document that did pass with a two-thirds majority, just out in English, I think it was in the last two weeks. So, there is a final document out of this whole process.

• And so—I’ll come back to this later—it is complementary in dialogue with Instrumentum Laboris. So, the beginning document, where they started to work, and they got input from young people, is in dialogue with the final document. And I’ll tell you why that’s important in just a little bit.

In September 2018 Pope Francis issued Episcopal Communion, a very important document for a number of reasons:

• First, it replaced 1965 document issued by Paul VI; and he calls for the entire Church to be synodal – and I’m going to walk you through how he is going to make that a reality

• He seeks to more fully incorporate the People of God. And what’s new in this issue is the document is to become part of the Ordinary Magisterium, which raises the stakes. If you remember, under John Paul II and Benedict, this was an exercise; people fell asleep – everybody know what the pope wanted; they kind od did and said what the pope wanted.

• This document is a very different way of being a synodal Church. This document became part of the Ordinary Magisterium, coming up through this process. And it stated that, for the first time, that voting members did not necessarily have to be priests. He’s getting us ready folks; he’s ruling us; he’s moving us.
The fourth story: So, when I went to Rome, I think in the first of October, we had already started a campaign: Votes for Catholic Women, because twenty-three women went to this synod: one major superior, a female; two other women religious from the International Union of Superior Generals; and then … but none of these could vote. They were all just auditors. And so, we started educating people. But the story of this is that in 2015, on the Synod on the Family, one religious brother (not ordained) voted on the Synod on the Family. He was chosen by the USG, the male superior generals, as one of their representatives. In 2015, the USG met with Cardinal Baldisseri and asked to give five of their ten votes to their co-members, who would be their equals. They said, “Can we give five of them to the women religious superiors?” (UISG) Of course, Baldisseri said, “No!”

In 2015 Francis implemented small language groups to discuss and make changes to the Instrumentum Laboris. That’s very important, because in the prior process, everyone was in a big room, and people would get up and read their five minute intervention, sit down; and the next person would get up and read their intervention. People would fall asleep; people wouldn’t pay attention—they had a picture of people actually sleeping. You know, people weren’t paying attention to the things that were being said.

So, Pope Francis changes the way the document is going to be structured; and he put people together on purpose. Of course, it depends on who is in your little group; but they were language groups so they could understand one another. So, they made changes. This change was implemented in 2015. And women were part of those groups—women religious—because they lobbied hard to get these.
Sister Carmen Sammut is president of the UISG, the Union of Superior Generals. She’s one of my favorite people in the whole world. She was very, very savvy. They had to send letter after letter, knocking on the door in 2015, “Let us in!” Three women religious got together in 2015; but she was at the coffee break. Here is a picture of her with Francis. And she said to him, “You know, I’ve been sending you letters about our upcoming conference, and women being there.” And he said, “Why, I haven’t gotten any of them.” As gatekeepers, we’re keeping her letters away.

So, the next day, 2015, she gets a hand written letter from Francis—I love it—He said, “I’m going to be at your assembly.” And it was at that assembly that Carmen says to Pope Francis, “Why don’t you open the discussion on women deacons?” And he said, “Yah, I will.” It was she and those women religious that got that started. He has a real soft spot for them; and he should. But, she’s so savvy. I love the story of him shaking her hand at coffee. “You know, I’ve been trying to talk to you; and nobody will let me.”

So, in 2015, the small groups made it possible for women to have some influence in shaping the final document. Still women could not vote. And for some, like Sr. Maureen Kelleher in 2015, who was in a small group with Archbishop Charles Chaput, the experience was difficult and at times demeaning. She said, at one point in her interactions with him, “The condescension was so thick you could cut it with a knife.”

In 2018, the number of non-ordained men chosen by the USG doubled. Now they chose two men who were not ordained who would vote.

So, they bring in two men who were not ordained; we learn about it, and we go, “Why are two men who are not ordained voting, and none of the women religious appear to be voting?” Now the one thing, it’s not ordination, is it? They’re brothers; they’re not ordained. The only thing that standing between the women and the men is sex.
The USG elected their 10 participants, two of them were not ordained. And the UISG did get to bring some people. The USG got to decide who they can bring; the UISG were told who they could bring. So, they got told who to bring: one superior and two other younger nuns.

Women sing, chant and pray a protest. Knock, Knock, who’s there? More than half the Church

So, we got together; I think there were women from four or five continents here, not a gigantic group, but big enough. And so, we wanted to make some noise about the fact that we had two men voting, who were not ordained, and no women. We wanted to raise awareness about that. So, we came out and prayed the Hail Mary; we started singing; we started to chant, “Knock, knock, who’s there? More than half the Church.” (laughter) It was fun, real fun. We knew we were going to get arrested pretty quickly; but it went on for about twenty minutes.

And they went through the list of cardinals and archbishops we knew were there. And we’d say, “Cardinal Baldiserri, let women vote. Knock, knock, who’s there?

More than half the Church.” And so on, down through the list. All of the sudden the policia came. But before that happened, we did get some of the Irish archbishops to come over.
So, Jamie Mason (NCR) was there reporting: “Breaking news: women’s advocates gather outside the Vatican, calling out cardinals by name, demanding that they allow women to vote at the synod.” And they have Kate McElroy, from Women’s Ordination Conference; she’s one of the head honchos of it; and they really gave her a really rough time. The police are trying to get her arm, and one of the board members is trying to get him to let go. They circled us; and they were threatening us – women singing and chanting. Of course, we’re dangerous people. Nobody actually went off in the paddy wagon.

And here is the New York Times’ story: “Vatican Faces Modern-Day Suffragists Demanding Right to Vote.”

I know I vote, because someone cares enough to advocate for me, and for my daughters and granddaughters. So, I want to do the same for those generations that come after me in the Catholic Church.
And then, we have the campaign where we put out petitions for “Votes for the Catholic Women’s Campaign.” Within a short time, we got almost 10,000 signatures. And this was a very good way to get the news out. And we have people with their signs in all different places. I think we had some Benedictines from Switzerland who heard about our campaign. I think one of the things that’s really important about my being there at the synod, I have media credentials; so I got to go every day to the media briefings. And I’m sitting next to people from the New York Times, and Reuters, and the National Catholic Reporter, and Religi0us News Service; and then, of course, we had Church Militant folks, who sneered every time they saw me. What was really important about my being there – I knew this from 2014-15 – is, I ask different questions than everybody else does.

And every day we’d have four or five cardinals; and they would give their spiel. It was really interesting when we started to ask questions. So, we got called upon to ask questions. So, every time I got called upon to ask questions, I would ask the question about women voting. And that was, in part, to raise awareness about the inequity involved, about men voting who were ordained, and the fact that women weren’t voting. So, that was my question on a regular basis.
So, during one of these sessions, this is an interesting encounter; there was this Archbishop Johannes de Jong. Someone else asked the question, “Why aren’t women in the church voting? Women aren’t heard in the church very much.” And he said, “You know, I don’t think you have much of a problem. You know, men and women are different. But then, he went on to say, “Women have this power, the way men will talk about women in power, like they have this power at home.

And so, he tells this joke, “Maybe you won’t like this joke;” he said, “man is the head – and he holds his head with his hands —of the family; but the woman is the neck—and he holds his hands around his neck. And then, she turns his neck—using his hands to turn his head from side to side. The whole place was so quiet. Nobody left. “And then, they turn the head where we men go.”

And then, I got to ask a question, “Did you knows that women are not able to vote?” And so, he answered again, “I think we do a pretty good job of listening to women, but, we want women to speak up.” But then, he goes on a personal attack, which was really interesting. Women have been exposed to this many times, when they ask too many questions. And he said, “You know, maybe we need to clarify this.

Maybe you feel like the Church is a male castle, and you want to conquer it.” And he said, “So, tell me, what is it you want to know? Please make it known to me.”

And so, after this little dressing down he tried to give me, I went up to him afterward and said, “Yah, let’s talk. And so, we met. And we had a pretty good conversation and some coffee. And some of the things he said to me, the first thing he said, “I’m sorry; I am really sorry. I didn’t know that men who were not ordained were voting;” he said, “I thought you were making a joke.” And I said, “No!”—This is the beauty of doing this work. You actually can educate people with these campaigns who should know these things—“And I went into this briefing,” he said, “I thought I was going to get any hard questions.” And I thought, “Good luck! You’re gonna have some hard questions.”

But one of the really interesting things he said to me was that he thinks he gets it when it comes to women; but, he doesn’t get it—a lot of prejudice and sexism going on there. And he said to me, “You know, I’ve been to Episcopal churches, where women preside,” he said.
“They do everything right, but I don’t feel the “holy” in them.” (murmurs) Now, I mean, I just went, kind of, “Oop!” But then, I got it; to some degree I get it.

Have you ever gone into a Hindu Temple, or a Mosque, or a Synagogue; and you’re kind of watching, but you don’t get what’s holy yet? That’s part of a practice, part of the relationship. I thought, “As bad as that sounds, he hasn’t been in a relationship enough to understand the holy in that.” And so, I don’t want to beat him up completely, but I understand that is part of a relationship. I would only understand how that would function in another religious tradition if I were part of it, a practitioner for a while.

![The fifth story](image)
The fifth story. The story of Sr. Mina Kwan. I love this story. So, Sr. mina Kwan is from South Korea. And if you’ve never heard a modern-day gospel story, her’s is the modern-day gospel story when it comes to women. So, she tells us during her talk, and I’ve heard her at other times, that “Catholicism came to South Korea 200 years ago, but not with missionary forces; it came from within. Up and against a society, built on strict Confucian norms, Catholicism was a place of freedom for women and slaves.” Where have we heard that story before? Amazing!

But, she said, “During the persecution—in the initial stages, the Church was persecuted—and Catholicism was bringing brand new opportunities for women to be leaders and teachers within the Church.” She said, “It was magnificent, revolutionary.

And after religious freedom had arrived”—they weren’t being persecuted so much—“clericalism began to creep in”. And so, women religious who had been doing a lot of things with people, priests would say, ‘You don’t need to do that; we’ll do it.’” So, she was really upset with the idea that this tradition that had offered so much freedom for women began to become clericalized. And I thought, “Isn’t that our story, Jesus, Paul the freedom women experienced in those earlier times? And as the church comes under the ‘peace of Constantine,’ it changes. It changes, and women become more and more excluded.”

And so, she is saying, “How can we overcome this clericalism? We’ve got to reform these attitudes and ideas.” She was so meek and so on-topic at the same time; it was wonderful.
She Said, “We need to rediscover our stories; and the Church can give greater responsibility to the lay people. And women’s religious voices should be heard; they should have greater participation in Church decision making.” She knows what they need.

So, one of the things that happened after the synod, the UISG, the conference of women religious superiors, had a press conference. Sr. Mina said – I asked this question: “What disappointed you?” She said, “The final document did not address clericalism more fully.”

And the final story; the story of Sr. Sally Hodgdon. She was one of the religious superiors who went to the synod. I loved her; you talk about a Midwestern farm girl—that’s Sally; she’s tough. And she was not impressed by pomp, not at all. If you’re going to earn her respect, it was because you were good at what you were doing, not because you had a red sash on your body.

So, what she told us: “The men’s groups (USG) and the women’s groups (UISG) of superior generals, were quietly meeting in the background; and they decided they were going to write a joint proposal to Pope Francis urging him to allow women to vote at the synod.”

This is amazing, isn’t it? So, you know, they’re doing this quietly. And what we learned from her, as well as the male leaders, “We’re putting in these non-ordained men.” They were testing the system, opening the system. And in his document (constitution), Episcopal Communio, it says: not everybody who votes is not going to have to be a priest from now on. Something is happening here, isn’t it? You’re seeing something move!

And so, Sally says—when she was first invited—she said, I don’t want to go. I don’t want to be around all those men, with all those clerics, who are used to working in their own circles, getting things done. What am I going to do with all these males?” But she said, “One of the things they did do in her small group: every time they saw overtly patriarchal language, they changed it, the document,” which was cool to know.

But, she said at the press conference, she said, “We want to know why women are not voting?” And she pledged (the UISG) to keep pressure up until women, not only get some votes, but an equal number of votes.
She said, “80% of the religious are women; why aren’t they voting at the synod?” And she said, “We need to be the dangerous memory of this synod, and the spirit of what happened at this synod. We will not let this issue just die.” I could have cheered!

And then, of course, we had Cardinal Marx; and we did have a good intervention in terms of what he wanted for women. And he basically said things like, “We can’t do this anymore, fellas. It’s not sufficient to say the words and not do the actions.” And he said, “The young people here are not going to let it go on anymore. We’re not going to keep them in the Church unless we do something to bring women in to our decision making roles.”

He said, “For the sake of our own credibility, we must involve women in all levels of the Church, from the level of the parish to the levels of the diocese, the Bishops’ Conferences, and also in the Vatican itself.” He said, “It’s high time.” Amen.

After three weeks, 267 cardinals, bishops, religious superiors (men and women), young adults, (men and women), and experts—it was really interesting—so they spent all this time sitting in all these little language groups—all the English speaking people could be together, all the other language groups—so they could understand one another; and then, when they got the final document, it’s only in Italian! (laughter) Not only is it not only in Italian, they don’t get a copy of it. So, the one time they get to hear what’s in the final document, they get it read in simultaneous translations. You tell me, who creates a system like that?

There was so much controversy—I mean, it’s been done like that for a long time—but after all this time, making sure we understood each other, then the final document is only in Italian. So, after about two and a half months they produced the final document in English:

- There were three paragraphs on women.
- The paragraph on sexuality got the most “no” votes.
- The six paragraphs on synodality, which were actually, the most controversial.

If you are conservative in this Church, you do not like what Pope Francis is doing in terms of decentralizing authority in the Church; and what he is doing is radical and savvy. So, this is just the top votes, from the most negative; for the most part, sex and the synod, those were the most controversial:
Those who want to keep power centralized and in the hands of clerics don’t like this at all.

The document on women had three paragraphs: two of them were so-so: complimentary, reciprocity—women have certain roles; men have certain roles—it’s the same old, same old in terms of subordination of women.

But, this one actually has something in it to say.

This paragraph, no. 148, says: “An area of particular importance is that the presence of women in the ecclesial bodies at all levels, also in functions of responsibilities, and of female participation in the ecclesial decision-making process, while respecting the role of ordained ministry. It is a duty of justice”—that’s new language around women—“It’s a duty of justice.” I found that very important in this document; not are we talking about, “women have certain gifts; they have a certain place;” but, “It is a duty of justice” to bring them in.

If you read the paragraph on sexuality, it’s so backward. I’m going to take you through what they did with the moniker, LGBT in this whole thing. I want to shows you how Francis is working the system. But this paragraph on sexuality was - if they had taken out LGBT – and they only said they would delve deeper into the theology of sexuality, that was enough to get them a bunch of “no” votes. “No, we can’t talk about sex in the Church.”
So, if you think Francis doesn’t get it when it comes to women, you’re right; but he’s doing something that is shifting fundamentally the way the Church operates. And he’s really savvy about it. Make no mistake, our savvy pope is doing something new, something very radical.

So, you can see, I bring up all this stuff about synodality. Overall, it was the most controversial part of the document and received the most “no” votes.

119. The young people walk together
120. The synodal process continues
121. The synodal form of Church
122. The synodal form of Church (additional)
123. A participatory and co-responsible church
12. Community discernment process

So, the experience of the Synod is: it needed to make people aware, the Church needs to work together; we need young people to help us to wake up to this.

But one of the really interesting things: I take LGBT as a marker for understanding what Pope Francis is trying to do in terms of the synodality of the Church.

So, there was this questionnaire completed by young people in January 2017. This fed into a preparatory document with a survey for the bishops. And at the pre-synod meeting in Rome, March 2018, these young people got together, and they struggled together with this notion, “Should we have this moniker, this acronym, LGBT, in this document. Should we talk about LGBT here?” And it was a great struggle. Some of the young people from Africa did not want it. But, they struggled together, this language in the document.
But there it is: LGBT people; we’re talking about LGBT people. They need more pastoral care; they need more acceptance in the Church; you know, all these things.

That document gets worked into Instrumentum Laboris, the document that everybody is going to work on. And the language is there; so, LGBY language in the working document for the whole synod. And then, you’ve got people – there’s fourteen language groups working with this. Language is so controversial here. You know, the Church is going to blow up if you left it in there. And the African bishops are saying, “People are going to come home and they’re going to say, ‘What does that mean? What does that word mean?’” When you’re a teacher, you teach what that word is. But, this just reflects their bias. So, people like Chaput and the Africans end up getting their way; and the LGBT gets X’d from the final document.

I want to tell you, I cried after that. When you have a bishop say, “That’s just a political name.” And I thought, “Maybe it’s so important what you name yourself, what you name those you love. How dare you decide what my brothers and sisters call themselves.” I was furious. I was angry. I was hurt. I was sad.

And here’s the brilliance of Francis. So, the final document, the bishops kind of get their way, don’t they? But Francis, in the final language of the document, also said, “It’s important to note that the working document is complementary, or in dialogue with, the final document.” See what he is doing? He’s not letting the bishops get their way. He’s making sure that the language that young people wanted in that document find a way. And that was some of the language that got the most “no” votes. The bishops don’t get to wipe out the language that the young people wanted to put in it. That’s radical thinking, folks. He knows how to work this “old system” and these folks who are about keeping their own power. It’s amazing.

Does it matter if women are included as equals in ministry and governance? To what extent does/would their presence make a difference? And I just give you some of the women I think are some of the most prominent leaders in the Church today:
This is Marie Collins. Marie Collins sat on the Commission on Sexual Abuse. She quit that commission when she saw the game plan that was going on in the Vatican. I love her for that. And, if you’re lucky, we’re going to bring her to the United States next year. She’s going to do a five state tour for us. So, we want her to talk about her experience there. She’s a brilliant woman. Yes, it matters! “Marie Collins for pope,” I say.

Elizabeth Johnson. We all know what she went through. Boy! Breakdown those barriers about a male God, and get yourself a bunch of trouble.

Theresa Kane. The day she stood up and said to John Paul II, “You need to ordain women.” Look at that face; does she look dangerous? (laughter) that’s what I love about this. These women are so beautiful. If you ever met Theresa Kane, she is the most gentle, serving, loving person you’ll ever meet in your life. She’ll come and speak at your event; she’ll come up to you and say, “What can I do to help? Can I make some coffee?” “No! You’re my speaker.” She’s thrilled to do that.
There’s Carman Sammut, and her savvy way of getting Pope Francis to open that discussion on Catholic women deacons. She is amazing. She is going to retire, and so is Sally; and I hope that organization stays strong after they’re gone, ‘cause they’re some fighting women.

There’s my Mary McASleese and her manifesto for women. Amazing women! So many more, just a few names, many of them sitting right in this room.

Since Vatican II, as women have entered traditionally male dominated fields in greater numbers, they have asked new questions.

- Why are there seven sacraments for men and six for women? That’s a good question. (laughter)
- Why was Mary of Magdala, the first witness to the Resurrection, and the Apostle to the Apostles, remembered as a prostitute? Man! Do we ever do it to women! Wow!
- How can we have synods on the family, youth, etc. without women? Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous? A synod on the family, and not one grandmother or mother there as a voting member. That is crazy stuff! You can’t make this up.
- Why do the manifold victims of domestic violence and their perpetrators, rarely, if ever, hear about violence against women from the pulpit?
- Why is there nothing in our documents on social justice about maternal mortality?

Just a few questions; there’s so many. Since Vatican II, as women have offered new insights on

- Biblical and historical theology
- Moral theology
- Systematic theology
- Ecclesiology
- Liturgy
- Canon law
In the words of Mary McAleese,” the walls of Jericho are coming down.” I really do believe that. She says, “The Israelites under Joshua’s command circled Jericho’s walls for seven days, blew trumpets and shouted to make the walls fall down. (cf. Joshua 6:1-20). We don’t have trumpets but we have voices, voices of faith and we are here to shout, to bring down our Church’s walls of misogyny.”

We are the men and women of salvation history! Let us tell our stories! Let our voices be heard!

Thank you. (applause)