



## ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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### SR. THERESA KANE, RSM A VISION FOR THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

MERCY CENTER  
FARMINGTON HILLS, MI  
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#### Introduction

#### Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

I am pleased to introduce Sister Theresa Kane this afternoon; and I'm very grateful for that opportunity. But I thought that today, before I introduce Sr. Theresa Kane, I would like to address and comment on the fact that this is the first time, as far as I can recall, that the Elephants have been disinvented from having a program on parish property, any property owned by the Archdiocese of Detroit. And so we have a special responsibility, I think, to thank the Mercy Sisters for providing this wonderful facility; (Applause) and for sharing Sr. Theresa with us.

And it's kind of a commentary of what is happening within the Church, and especially the kind of thing that happens where a Catholic group such as ourselves is disinvented from using Catholic property, I call your attention to current edition of the America Catholic Magazine. There's a very extraordinary article, short but very pointed; it's *On Their Way Out*<sup>1</sup>, the title. It's written by William Byron, who's a Jesuit professor at St. Joseph University in Philadelphia. And the subtitle is, *What Exit Interviews Could Teach Us about Lapsed Catholics*.

Now you may not be aware, but 30 some million Catholics have walked away from the Catholic Church. And Fr. Byron wrote a short article that only appeared in diocesan newspapers; so he was amazed at the responses that he got, overwhelmed by the e-mails and letters he got. And a couple of those responses he shared in this article; and, I think, it is very enlightening to us, or could be:

One person: "Why did I leave?" wrote a business executive with experience on his parish council. "It's simple! Dealing with the top-down organization structure was like trying to change the direction of a bulldozer heading right at me. It was frightening, suffocating and frustrating. It went against my natural tendency to get involved in real change. I gave up on the Church.

Then another retiree, who recently re-read the documents of the Second Vatican Council, says, "I am on the knife's edge between staying and leaving the Church. He offered these reasons:

- I no longer trust the management;
- I have no way of influencing the selection or change of a priest or bishop;
- The clergy sex abuse scandal continues to grow;

And then, finally, another person wrote, "Aren't you sorry you asked?" because he got all these responses. (Laughter)

And Fr. Byron says - and I think this is the point this is the point that's important for us - he says, "No, I am not sorry at all. I just wish I could improve the organizational acoustics in the church, so that leaders could hear what the people of God want to say. Leaders must try to discern the presence of the Spirit in what laypeople are saying, and find the pastoral courage it will take to implement necessary change."

And that's what the Elephants do, I think; is gives laypeople the opportunity to speak up, and then, perhaps - it's a long distant hope - perhaps, before it will come about, to improve the organizational acoustics in the Church; and the leadership in the Church will begin to listen to people like yourselves, people like Theresa Kane; and our Church becomes what God really wants it to be. And so I suggest that

you, perhaps, read that article and recommit yourselves to everything we are trying to do as the Elephants in the Living Room of the Catholic Church. (Applause)

Now, after that kind of out of order speech, I will do what I was asked to do. (Laughter) And a couple of things I'll tell you about her - more than the facts about her life - I was asked to contact her at one of the meetings we have with our committee; and I hadn't done it yet; but then, when I went to Call to Action, the national meeting in Milwaukee, the first weekend of November, I had the great joy of seeing Theresa Kane there. And, I think, the fact that she was at such a meeting, indicates a good deal about Theresa, because it shows her commitment to what Call to Action - which was started here in Detroit by Cardinal Dearden - Call to Action was a call to action for justice. It was part of a large program that took place for over a period of three years, preparing for our bi-centennial as a nation in 1976. Theresa is still committed to everything that Call to Action, started in Detroit by Cardinal Dearden, continuing now with a national program of Call to Action. She is committed to all that call to action for justice means in the Church; and so that's a very important thing about her, I think.

Secondly, when I said that the group that invited her was the Elephants in the Living Room, she had no difficulty in understanding what that was about, (Laughter) because she became internationally known for exposing an *elephant in the living room* in the Catholic Church back in 1979, when she spoke in Seattle, when Pope John Paul II made his first international trip here in the United States. And I can remember watching this on television; and Theresa looked so tiny in that big sanctuary, as the pope was sitting up there on his throne, and she's standing down below; and she speaks out. And he knows she's tiny; and maybe the pope wouldn't think she had a very strong voice, but she had a strong message: and that is that women have to have their rights in the Church recognized, including ordained ministry. She said that to the pope. Now, he didn't listen very well; (Laughter) and I don't think he even acknowledged, when he got up to speak himself, anything that she had said; but she understands what it means to be one trying to help all of us see what an elephant in the living room is; and if it's not uncovered and exposed, how wrong it is. And so she knows why we gather; and so it's very appropriate that she is one of our speakers.

So very briefly, a couple of things about her... As you will be able to detect immediately from her speech, she is from New York. The accent is very recognizable immediately, and it's also part of the Irish. Her parents were Irish immigrants; and she was born here though, in this country, went to Catholic schools - a good Irish Catholic - and eventually, when she was 20 years old, in 1955, she entered the Sisters of Mercy. And she completed her education, got a certificate in Hospital Administration from Columbia University, a Bachelor of Arts from Manhattanville College, a Master of Arts from Sarah Lawrence College, and a Master of Public Administration from New York University. So she is very well qualified as a teacher and also a hospital administrator, the two ministries that the Mercy Sisters are especially noted for throughout the world: hospital work and education work.

Sister Theresa, after she entered the Mercy Sisters, before very long, she was elected to their Leadership Council. Later on, she became the Provincial of the Sisters of Mercy for her province, and then, subsequently, it was from 1979 to 1980, she was the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. And it was during that time when she was asked to speak to the Pope in Seattle. Sister Theresa continues to teach at the present time. She is on the faculty with Mercy College in New York, teaching World Religions and the History of Women, especially administration and behavioral science is what she is teaching at New York. So she continues that, even though she qualified by age to be retired; and she also continues to lecture around the country. And that's why she's here today, to speak to us about *A Vision for the Catholic Community for the Twenty First Century*; and I'm sure it will be a vision that will challenge us, and inspire us, and motivate us to continue our work. And so I ask you to welcome Sister Theresa Kane. (Applause)



## **A Vision for the Catholic Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century    Sr. Theresa Kane, RSM**

First, I want to say thank you to Tom Gumbleton for that beautiful introduction, and thank him for initiating this meeting of all of us today. He was very persevering. We spoke in Milwaukee. We had several conversations; but he followed it up with about three phone calls, all within two days. Are you coming? Are you coming? When are you coming? (Laughter) So it was wonderful. I could not refuse him. And I want to say thank you to the Sisters of Mercy here at Mercy Center for providing such a beautiful, beautiful environment for the conversation that we are going to have today. And I want to say particularly to Tom: through the years he has been a model of what my theme is today, A Catholic Community. He has been a great model. He has been a friend, a peer, an advocate. He's never been authoritarian, as far as I know, and I couldn't help but think we have Tom and many others among us who are really our saints for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Applause)

We often wait to speak beautifully about each of us when we die and then we go on to canonize us. But I think it's wonderful to know that even though there are certainly beloved deceased, and many of us know so many who have never been and will not be publicly acknowledged as official saints, that among us we have many saints. And that's what contributes to this community and gives us hope and inspiration. I also want to acknowledge the Elephants who began all of this, because they too were very creative, very visionary; and I think it took a great deal of courage, because it was primarily the priests of Detroit who began all of this, and that was not easy. And it certainly is not easy to continue; so they too are among our living saints, and we want to thank them. (Applause) And to the Sisters of Mercy, who have always welcomed me here as a friend, and a companion, and a sister; and there are so many of them whom I know, living and deceased; but I am just in awe of them, and thank them. And our first reading today was done on Isaiah by Sr. Margaret Brennan, an outstanding Catholic woman leader, who was recognized last year for leadership for many years among the women religious in our country. So I am honored and privileged that she is with us today. So thank you, Margaret. (Applause)

### **A VISION FOR THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY.**

As I approach this topic I identified five areas that I believe are important for us to spend some time meditating on. So let me tell you what they are.

I would like to begin with some attention to Vision. I believe it is absolutely urgent and critical that we continue throughout our lives to have a vision. So I'd like to speak to that.

I'd like to speak to the moment in which we find ourselves. We are 21<sup>st</sup> century faithful Catholics; maybe among us, many who are Protestants, who are Christians. We may have other faithful people who are not of the Christian faith. But we find ourselves as a 21st century community of faithful people and I think we need to appreciate it, and just spend a moment on it.

My third point that I would like to make is that for myself, personally, the Catholic Church has become a community; and it's my conviction that this is the primary identity that we want to foster and develop. Institution is part of my life, but it's there to enhance and develop and deepen community. If it does not do that, it needs to be reformed at the best, and ignored at the worst, because community is very primary to our understanding of church. I identified among many qualities of community four that I believe we need to look at to be a Catholic Community of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

They are:

1. *A passion for social justice. And I use that very deliberately. We need to have a passion. We need to have a fire about social justice.*
2. *The second is a Gospel mandate. Not a Church mandate. Not a Canonical mandate. A Gospel mandate for solidarity with the economically poor.*
3. *The third is a discipleship of equals. Very essential to community.*
4. *And the fourth is peace and nonviolence.*

So I would like to speak to each of those qualities. And finally, I wanted to include the critical agenda for our 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is that of gender equality. And as I understand that, and in much of my reading and my teaching, we're going through an emerging transformation of gender equality. It certainly began back in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, full blossomed in the 20<sup>th</sup>. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we're seeing the consequences of that. So that's what I would like to do, in the about one hour or less that I have, and let us begin.

### **A VISION OF OUR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY.**

What do we know about vision? We've heard wonderful statements about it. "I dream things that never were, and say why not?" That should be part of our mantra. We should be doing that all the time. Why not? I say to my students, "What do you want to see change before you die?" Find something that you believe has to be, needs to be changed, and just say, "Why not?" and change it - absolutely essential. We know the beautiful story of the Quixote story, the impossible dream. It's to dream the impossible dream. I may not see it realized, but that's not terribly important. It's to keep dreaming it, to keep seeing it, to have the vision.

Bill Callahan, who died this past year, and a very good friend of many of us, he and his associates began The Quixote Center about 35 years ago. Bill, as you know, was a Jesuit. And they continue that vision of The Quixote Center and often would say, "These are dreams and we say, 'Why not?'" And they continue to dream. They really were very influenced, as were many of us, with the Synod of Justice on the World; and it's my recollection from having seen all of that, that the bishops of the United States are to be commended for having gone to that Synod, 1972, and came back with that document, a powerful document, *Synod on Justice in the World*. And Cardinal Dearden and Cardinal Bernardine, and others, took the leadership to actually begin the Call to Action in 1976. And this year, that will be 35 years ago. And, as you know, there will be an American Catholic Council that will be meeting here in Detroit in June on that same anniversary.<sup>2</sup> So that's still very much alive. They began it; they gave it leadership; and it continues. So that's all part of a vision that we had back in the 70s. Many of us in this room continue that vision today. So let me ask "What is your vision of church and society?" And when I think about vision, I think most of life is quite complicated; but if I can hold on to some vision, it simplifies part of my dream and my vision, and it simplifies part of my life.

*It's very clear to me that women are to be included in all ministries of the Church.* I said that 31 years ago; I believe it ever more urgently today. There's no question in my mind. So that's a vision I have. It simplifies my life, I can assure you. People will continue to say women cannot be ordained. Why would you want to be ordained? I have no hesitation. That is my clear conviction that women, in order for us to think about church as community, need to be ordained. It's not even a matter that it is needed in terms of service to our people, but it's needed because of the very principle. We cannot consider community, even at our beautiful Eucharistic Liturgies, until women, as men, are there on that altar. It's not truly a communal celebration, not for many women. And that's why I think Tom was mentioning the number of what he's called in the article that was read: *Lapsed Catholics*.<sup>1</sup> I do not meet many lapsed Catholics. I meet many who have turned and created a new form of church, small faith communities, going into homes.

I was at Call to Action in New York State Thru-Way Tour, and went through five cities last summer. I cannot tell you the number of older people, like many of us maybe here today, who said, "I have not been near a church in ten or fifteen years. We have formed our own faith community. We meet in different houses. We may go to a parish church once a month, where we have a priest who is in solidarity with us; and we have our own Mass there." There are so many different things that are going on. So people have already created new worshipping communities. So that's part of a vision.

And if you remember, so beautifully, that very powerful statement "I came to cast fire upon the earth." Jesus did not come to be just a passive receiver, and just to say, "That's fine. Yes, you may do it." He came to cast fire upon the earth. So what is our fire? What is your fire? That's where your vision comes from. There's a beautiful passage in the Old Testament in the Book of Habakkuk, Chapter 2. Habakkuk is complaining to God because of the circumstances of his day. We may have come in here complaining

that we did not go to St. Blasé. We came to Mercy Center, right? I mean, something happened to us. We got put out. That's a complaint we have. We say, "God, why did you allow this?" The message from God to Habakkuk was: "Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets, because the vision has its time. It presses on to fulfillment. If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come," a very powerful message that we have from many, many centuries ago.

*My own vision is that we want to be a community of equals. We want to be a discipleship of equals. We want to be service oriented and service people. We want the absence of a hierarchy, a monarchy, imperialism and a patriarchy.* That's my vision, right? (Applause) There's no doubt that that vision is alive and well in this room; and we are a community; so, therefore, we are a part of this vision of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can make it happen. Every one of us has the authority and the power to make it happen. So wherever such qualities are present in this community of friendship and equality, God is present. And it's my own vision that if we continue as a hierarchy, a monarchy, a patriarchy, God is not present. (Applause) And when God is not present we are permeated with forms and expressions of idolatry. We have the idols of the Old Testament. - the very first commandment: "Thou shalt not have idols." They had them then. We have them now. We have them in bishops who are very concerned about their power in the Church, about their promotions in the Church, and how much we can compromise in order to keep that power going, and to have the advancements made. Those are all forms and expressions of idolatry: to have men only.

And on Christmas Eve I was watching TV a little bit late, and for about 15 minutes I watched the Vatican Mass. And I was not dispirited; I was scandalized. There was certainly not a woman in the procession. There was not a woman at the altar. The entire choir was made up of young men. So we don't even allow women to sing in the Vatican church on Christmas Eve. It was a great scandal. And obviously, I wasn't watching it other than to see what the logistics were like, and what was going on. And, of course, it was all in Latin; so, at one time, I knew a little Latin but, I've lost it; and I actually don't want it again, because I pray to God in English; I don't pray to God in Latin. (Applause) So if you're using Latin, I'm not praying.

So that's very clear to me, I need to pray to God. And it's very important for us to keep that in mind. I don't say prayers anymore. I haven't said prayers in a long time. I pray. I talk to God. I'm like Habakkuk, I talk to God, and complain to God, and praise God, and give great awe to God. But I'm praying to God; so every word has meaning to me, every word. It's not the Our Father. It's "Our Father, Our Mother in heaven." It's a loving parent. But that's only one image I have of God. God is a companion, a friend, an advocate, an inspiration, a tower of strength. There are so many powerful images of God in my life. And so I think that that's what I find, that not to have those beautiful expressions, and not to live in a sense of that, is truly a form of idolatry. And I think for us to be a community, we need to say, "What are our idols?" And what do we need to not only diminish, but we need to eradicate them. They need to be eradicated, which may mean changing structures, changing language, changing systems. When I read in a church, I find people a little bit nervous, because I don't read what's on the paper. I read what is very important to me - that I am including everyone. So if someone hands me a reading from the New Testament that is sexist, I will not read it. But I will read. And I've been told a few times I wasn't asked to read because they were concerned I would change the language. I said, "You are absolutely right". (Laughter) So don't ask me to read if you're concerned about changing language, because that's not what I do. It's just very important to me. So that's what I want to bring in terms of vision. I want to say to you today, "What is your vision of church as community?" Write it down. Begin to have a deep conviction about it, act on it. Let's organize around this new vision of Church that we have, whatever that will mean. I've been in a number of groups throughout the country. There's been tremendous reorganization going on, in different parishes, in different dioceses. Many creative things are going on, but it's because we have a different vision of church as community.

*I want to speak now for a couple of moments on our 21<sup>st</sup> century moment.* And I cannot tell you how much I appreciate that we are in, not only in a new century, but we are in a new millennium. We are living through the beginnings of the next 1000 years. For those of you who are historians, go back a thousand years ago. See what was happening. What was going on among basically Europeans, because that's what we knew of the world then? We still don't know a great deal about Africa, and Asia, and Latin America, because we've written them from the European/North American perspective. But that was the

center of the world at that time; and the Church had become quite institutional; and the first code of Canon Law was put into effect a thousand years ago. And it's very interesting, that this past 100 years, the early part of the 20th century, it got rewritten for the second time. Now we here today know that it has to be rewritten again; and it has to be rewritten to reflect church as community. And I think that that is one of our visions.

But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which we find ourselves, I believe, is exciting, creative and mysterious, and very revolutionary. I think that we realize there is something very different going on in our world today. We're at the beginnings of a new moment. I do not think anyone has control of our future. And we come out of a country that has military superiority; and we often refer to ourselves as number one in the world. But we're one of about 220 nations; and in terms of population, we represent about five percent of the world's population. And I can assure you from having traveled to China, to South America, and to different countries, to Africa, they look north and say, "That's the old world." The first time I heard it, I was shocked. They say, "Europe and North America is the old world. We're the new world." And so we need to know that the world itself is totaling changing, right in front of us. No one really has control of it; therefore, we are all responsible to author, direct and influence. We cannot just be passive and say, "That's happening. There is nothing I can do about it." That's not true. I have as much authority over this planet, over my life, as anybody else. And you do not have authority over my life; and I don't have it over yours. Hopefully, we share authority. But no one really has power over us. Jesus told us that. Here was a model of a man, a human being, who lived his whole life without formal authority - never in authority - and yet what was said: power went out from him; power went out from him; the power came from within. And our own convictions, our own vision, will bring the power forward so that we have a responsibility for this 21<sup>st</sup> century to author it, to direct it, to influence it. It's not happening without us.

So, I believe, that there is so much going on. Just think back sixty years ago: the beginnings of the United Nations, sixty-five years ago, there were fifty nations. We're now talking about over 200 nations. All of those nations were colonies at the time. So, think of the tremendous sense of nationhood, of independence, of pride in a new nation that's going on. And that's happening; and it's causing a tremendous amount of growth. I think at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we had the very beginnings of dialogue and appreciation for the different world religions. The first Council on World Religions was held the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 20th century we had the Civil Rights Movement that went right around the world. It was not only in the United States, it went world-wide. In 1850, a hundred and fifty years ago, we had one billion people. We have now over seven billion; getting close to 2010, it was close to eight billion. So what has happened in a hundred and fifty years in terms of our population?

So what's our goal? What's our vision for our 21<sup>st</sup> century? We know what we have. We have a tremendous technological explosion. TV is universal. We have transistor radios in the poorest parts of the world, where there is no education. I've been in the poorest places in Central America. Those young boys did not go to school, but they had their transistor radios, and knew everything that was going on, and were very knowledgeable. We have the cell phones, the computers, e-mails, the Blackberry, the I-pods, texting, and tremendous amount of communication that's going on. It's explosive! And we can be sure that the ninety five percent, who live outside of the United States, know far more about our country than we certainly know about theirs, because they are very interested in what has happened here. This has been a tremendous development. We have a great deal to offer, a great deal to share but a great deal to learn.

*So my hope and vision for our 21<sup>st</sup> century is we can convert the militarization of the planet to a commitment in human and social services, very especially, that all of us can provide basic human needs, an end to world hunger, an end to homelessness, provide basic health care and education, 'cause it's my belief that this is a very mysterious, sacred moment, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that we are in touch with people who are longing for the holy. I teach many young people, and constantly they will say, "I am spiritual. I don't attend any particular church, but I'm spiritual; and I'm yearning for some values that are spirit filled." But they're not finding it; so they're still struggling for it; and I think that's where we are in terms of our moment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*Let me move now to my third point, which is the priority or primary identity of church as community. I think what happened at Vatican Council II, along with its many other achievements, is it brought the Catholic Church closer to the time of Christ than probably ever we remember it, because we were given a*

wonderful gift of the Gospel message. Now for those of us who are here, who are Catholics, we did not grow up with the Bible. It was something that we were really not allowed to read. It wasn't in our homes. So it was always second hand to us. But after Vatican Council II, we've really began to meditate on it, to contemplate it, to live out of it. So that returned to that spirit and culture of Jesus' community is what inspired us, I believe, to start our journey of a reformed Catholic Church in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Think about Jesus. He's there with a group of peasants. And the word pagan is very interesting. Pagan really means peasants. It's a group of people coming out of a particular geographic area. I grew up in the South Bronx, New York. Many of my students are from there. They say, "Oh! I am from the ghetto, the South Bronx." I said, "Well I was from the South Bronx also." So then they identify better with me, because I'm from the South Bronx also. I said, "However, it was an Irish ghetto at that time. Now it's a Spanish ghetto." And it truly was a ghetto, but basically that's what it meant. Jesus was with a group of peasants, pagans they referred to them, people coming out of their own neighborhood. They were economically poor. Their circumstances somehow attracted Jesus to them; and they were attracted to Jesus. It was his zeal. It was his passion. It was his inner authority. It was also his influence with the formal authorities. Remember, he got killed by the authorities of his day. He was subversive. He was a revolutionary. He had to be done away with. And in many ways, that may not happen to us physically, but it can happen, at times, psychologically and spiritually. We can be put out. We can be sent away. But we still continue. So basically what Jesus was about and he said it. He said, "Do not call me Lord; call me friend," all right? I am your servant. I am your friend. Community was the enduring quality he left with his followers; and community was that enduring quality for the first two or three hundred years: qualities of friendship, equality, and certainly shared governance. And one of the beautiful passages is that nobody was in want; everything went into the common fund; everything went into community. They were not in want. And Vatican II Council became a wakeup call; and it brought us back to that.

And remember what we had: we had 500 years of defending the faith. We were highly defensive, right? Initially, I think, revenge, and maybe even stronger towards the Protestants. When I was growing up, and until Vatican Council II, there was hostility towards Protestants. Certainly they were welcome to come to our church, but we were not permitted into their church. There was a tremendous amount of antagonism. We were defending the faith, always defending the faith. I remember being in community and sisters who had come to the United States, they were from England, wanted to go back and visit parents. They were not allowed, because they might lose their faith in Protestant England; so they were not allowed to visit. That whole sense of what happened in the last 500 years, in a way, became just a whole new moment for us at the end of 1965.

So, what's happening to us, these structures, these systems that we've had? Remember what happened to the Catholic Church? It became a monarchy - the institutions, the governance is a monarchy. And in a monarchy we have a king; and there's no appeal to the king. And in our present Church governance structure, there is no appeal to the Pope's decision. I tried it! So I know. (Laughter) You remember our wonderful Sister Agnes Mary Mansour, who lived and died as a Sister of Mercy. (Applause) We went to the highest court of the Catholic Church, the *Apostolic Signatura*, who is now headed by an American Cardinal, and we said we were appealing the decision. Waited months, and the answer came back: the Pope was personally involved in that decision; there is no appeal to the Pope's decision. We didn't stop there. We wrote to him three times, and said we need to come over, and sit down, and speak to you. Each time the answer was, "No!" So what happened is, in a beautiful and mysterious way, that woman continued as a Sister of Mercy, and lived and died, and was actually buried right in this chapel. So that was a beautiful miracle that we had. But I say that to you, because that's what we're dealing with. Our governance structure is a monarchy.

Now I take great, great hope from what the women religious of the United States and around the world have done. When Vatican II Council came out, we had already had the sister formation movement. So our women were getting educated. We took our constitutions; we totally revised them; we rewrote them. We also had a monarchy. We had a very hierarchical structure; and we had our matriarchs; and we called them Mother Generals. They were both military and matriarchal. (Laughter) And we called them Superior Generals; and we called them Mother. And we had to change all of that - and we did. We changed our governance; we changed our lifestyle; we changed many of the decisions that were made at

a higher level, for them to be made by the individual sister. Which what it did for us, it made us adult co-responsible Catholic women religious. We really did become very much adults. (Applause)

And I personally think that's our struggle right now. As a Catholic community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we want to be fully active, engaged women and men in our Church. We want to be part of the decision making. We have a responsibility to be part of the decision making. We are not just receivers of sacraments, receivers of directives, receivers of all that is coming from us from the Church as a monarchy, and asking basically for us maybe to be quiet, and to turn in our money, right? (Laughter) And we've often said, "You see, boycotting the collection basket will probably be one of the best things that we'll do some day." (Applause) Because that's where we're giving, we're active in that area. So I think what the sisters did is a model; and we can use that model; and I've heard many priests and bishops say that. That's the model we have to bring into our Church.

So this Catholic Council on the Laity next June is a national effort, beginning to say, "How can we be truly Catholic in a Catholic community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?" We need to change our governing structures. We need to look at all of our institutions. We need to see where do we have a hierarchy? Where is it that we do not have decision making? And as I said at the beginning, we need to reform; we need to transform; and if we had to, we need to ignore structures and systems that are not advancing community. So, I think we have our work laid out for us for the 21<sup>st</sup> century on how we become a community. And those are some of the practical ways we need to look at. But recognize that we are struggling with two systems: an emerging system that's talking about discipleship of equals - that's what the very beginning Church was - and struggling with that against a monarchy that's says the king is the final decision. And even the term Supreme Pontiff: it's not a religious term; it's a civil term from the Roman Empire. That's what we called the Roman Emperor: the Pontiff. So now, we don't use that as much. We use Holy Father, right? so in order to give it a religious tone. But I think that's what I'm saying in terms of a primary identity of church as community.

*I want to identify what I listed as four qualities.* There are many more; and I encourage you to think about qualities that will bring about this Church as community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The ones that I listed were:

1. *A passion for social justice;*
2. *A gospel mandate for solidarity with economically poor people;*
3. *A discipleship of equals; and*
4. *A zeal, and I say a passion, and a thirst, for peace and non-violence.*

*Very difficult to do, when the militarization of the planet is going on, but we have to keep working on it - a passion for social justice.* And what came out of the Synod of the Bishops in Rome, and what came out of Call to Action was a powerful statement that is part of our blood in our veins now. Justice is a constitutive element of the Gospel. So if someone were to say to you, "You do those justice things." No! We all do those justice things. It's a constitutive element of the Gospel. As much as I pray, I work for justice. They're two parts of the same coin; and passion for social justice was definitely a quality of church as community. I believe that a passion for social justice is the fruits of solitude, prayer, a deepening of spirituality arising from contemplation. So it's my contemplation on some of these issues that have somehow given me an insight to say, "There's something wrong with that. There's something not right with that." That comes out of my own deep contemplation of the issue. And I believe a passion for social justice includes direct service, which many, many Catholics have done all through the centuries. It also includes advocacy, which is more difficult; and it includes systemic change, both in the society and in the Church. And that's the most difficult. How do we bring about systemic change? Some of us think it's easier in society than it is in the Church; and I think it's because we are so invested in the Church. It's akin to us, for many of us through the years, although I think there is a certain divorce that has gone on, and maybe a new renewal, and a new way of looking at church.

But justice I believe, includes all of that: direct service, advocacy and systemic change both in society and in the Church. Justice in my perspective is synonymous with equality. We often think of equality as a social quality, political quality, economic quality. I believe that equality is inherently religious, because unless we have a sense of balance, a sense of equity, a sense of equality in areas of social justice, again

we have our forms and expressions of idolatry. So justice for us as a Catholic community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not an option; it's a mandate. And we need to take that mandate; and we need to run with that mandate.

I think we also have a Gospel mandate for solidarity with the economically poor people. If you would go to Israel, there is a powerful inscription right outside the museum honoring all those who have died. And the inscription says, "The degree of civilization achieved by a group is known by how we treat the most lowly and outcast among us," a very powerful statement. And I often use that, and meditate on it, and say "I live in the United States. Am I a member of a civilized society? How do I look around and see how those who are the poorest and the lowly among us? How are they treated?" To the degree that they are treated respectfully, we are a civilization - a great test of how advanced our civilization is. The essence of the Gospel is a challenge of justice; and it's also the works of mercy. I mean, we know what Jesus did. He went around. He fed the poor people. He raised the dead. He comforted people. He was doing the works of mercy all the time. He did justice. He did social justice.

There's a powerful story about a young man who returns to India; he's a Hindu. And as he walked through the streets of India, he saw many, many people laying out on the streets, homeless people, extremely poor people. And he stopped, and cried out, and says, "God, why are you doing this?" And he waited a little bit and he heard an answer. He said, "My child, why are you doing this to each other?" It's not God doing it. God is not causing homelessness. God is not causing poverty. God is not causing people to be starving all over the world. We are doing it. It's how we are with each other, not only how we treat each other nationally, but universally. So that's the Gospel mandate we have for being in solidarity with the economically poor.

*The third I would look at is a discipleship of equals.* I think it's probably the most radical, and the greatest challenge for us. I think consequences of being a discipleship of equals are personal, social and ecclesiastical. So when I go to plan a liturgy, I will say, "We will do it as a discipleship of equals. That's how we do our liturgy." And if I can't be part of that, then we don't have a liturgy, if I'm planning it. Now if I have influence on one that's being planned, that's what I also would want to say. And I think a discipleship of equals has to do with one's spirit, one's consciousness. We need to be extremely conscious to say, "Are we indeed a discipleship of equals?" We have to look at our habits and our customs. And many of our customs have been institutionalized into mindsets, structures and systems. So when I again refer to sexist language people will say, "Well, it's really not a problem for me, because I know it doesn't mean men. I know it means women as well as men," you see. But it's part of our customs. In a sense we've been propagandized to think that that's all right. We even hear it very often on our television programs, where we use the male language, and we don't do the inclusive language, we don't use the female. So we won't have a discipleship of equals if we don't become conscious that we are women and men forming this community.

I believe a discipleship of equals means the absence of chauvinism, machoism, imperialism, subjugation, inferiority and superiority. And very often that's what happens. We're feeling inferior or superior to other people, and very often people say, "I'll do that for you." Well maybe I don't want you to do it for me; and in some gracious way say, "I'm really able to do it myself. If I can't, I'll ask you." It's a wonderful way to do something. But I think that happens very often, we condescend. Some of you who are retired, I'm sure, you have experienced it. They say, "Can you get that? It's high upon a shelf. Can you hear me? Do you need some help?" We have many, many experiences of how we are condescending towards people who are older. I live in a community where some of the sisters are retired; and they are women who were highly educated, have had very responsible jobs; but people who are with them, some staff, don't know their background, and actually act as if because they're elderly, they don't hear, and they are somewhat slow in their mind, and in their memories. So we have to keep reminding them, in a very gracious way, to remind people that when I need help and when I don't. But that's what I mean; there is a sense of chauvinism that goes on.

For me equality is very sacred; it's the absence of idolatry. It means friendship that is a mutuality friendship, and not a complimentary; and very often we've had this in recent years in the Catholic Church. I think it has dropped a little bit, thank God! where they will say that women are complimentary to men; But we've never heard them say men are complimentary to women. See? So we're the compliment,

because we believed only in one version of Genesis, where the woman came forth from the rib. We don't believe the second version of Genesis, where it says, "God created them equal," inherently equal. The Book of Wisdom says, "There is an innateness in each individual that is akin to the Spirit of God." So we're made in God's likeness. But, basically, what we've done is we've made God in our likeness. So we have many expressions of idolatry as we look at God. I mean, I grew up thinking that God was an old man, white hair, white beard, and just sat in judgment behind the big altar that I used to look at. That was my understanding of God. So that was made in someone's image, probably a young man, not an old one, who created that picture. Then, we have the Last Supper from Michelangelo. Remember, that was middle ages. There are some powerful inscriptions back in the Catacombs of the early Eucharistic banquet, not at all like Michelangelo's version. But that's the one we believe and we promote. So those are all customs, mindsets, institutions that we've come to, which has really in a sense inhibited a discipleship of equals. So I think that's very important.

*My last quality I want you to spend a few minutes on is a zeal for peace.* Now, my vision is that we need to eradicate, not diminish it, and not re-juice it, which is what we are doing. We need to eradicate the growing militarization of the planet, because what's happening is, it's using up all of our resources. My belief is that we are using all of our resources that is available for the human education, social services of our citizens of the world; and we need to get to a conviction that this is truly what's happening. The United States is - this was a few years ago, it may even be more - we had military bases in 140 nations; 70 of them were permanent. It's difficult to think that that's all defensive. At least for me it is, because we have them directed to the nations that are there as part of our global reality. And I think that we have to recognize that the nuclear age, and the militarization that has gone on, has been the greatest obstacle to even a healthy environment; and that has been documented so often. I think we have, in a sense, been conditioned and trained to glorify our military. We haven't given Medals of Honor to the women who were widows, and the children who were orphans, to the men who don't come back. They are heroes too. They are the unsung heroes. And not to take from the courage of these men and women now who have gone, but we need to look at all of those affected by military and military action. So it seems to me that peace needs to include a very direct active involvement in how we go about demilitarizing our planet. So we know it's taking away what we need for other services; and I think that that comes again from the Gospel - certainly it does - it comes from Vatican Council II; it comes from many of the teachings in our Church.

*My last and final point - this is number five - I just want to put a couple moments into what I'm calling a 21<sup>st</sup> century emerging transformation of gender equality.* And I believe that Margaret Mead said it well, I think, in the beginning or early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She said that, "In the 20<sup>th</sup> century women would come to a new identity and a new understanding of ourselves as women." And the change would be so transformative; she compared it to the Ice Age or the Industrial Revolution. She saw it happening around the world. She saw it happening in the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gerda Lerner is a retired woman, who was one of the deans of women's history. She has an interesting phrase which I've used. She said, "I do not refer to it as male dominated, although it is very often, but it's male defined." So we have defined our world, our society, and the Church as a male defined entity; and somehow, the women have been peripheral to that in the past; and that's an emerging transformation that's going on. Gender equality, as a system, affects us socially, politically, religiously, economically and ecclesiastically. All of the components have contributed to a deepened inequality, and because it was a belief for centuries that inequality was of divine origin, that it was planned by God, that God so designed inequality, that it was of divine origin. It was divine origin that certain men were born to be king; and, therefore, women were always, in a sense, the property.

Remember women were really property of men; and to this day we still have examples of it. The woman assumes the man's name, very often not only his last name, but his first name. And I can remember sitting with my mother a couple of years after my father died; and she wrote Mary Kane on something; and she was probably in her early eighties. She said, "It's so nice to write my own name." I said, "What do you mean, Mom, write your own name?" "Well, when your father was alive, I always had to write *Mrs. Philip Kane*; I never wrote *Mary Kane*, but now that he died, I'm Mary Kane." I mean, there's a woman in her eighties who said, "That's an identity that I had; but if I did, I repressed it for a very, very long time." So the sense of name - name is very important. And we know from sociology that a man is born and dies

with the same name almost ninety-eight percent of the time. A woman is born and dies with one, two, maybe three different names. So identity is very important and very critical to that.

So that has brought about a sense of a consciousness, I believe, in this 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. And we have for instance socialized gender equalities. The male is strong, rational, higher intelligence, a warrior and superior. Traditionally - and it's changing - the female was fragile, inferior, emotional, limited intelligence, passive and receptive. And it's interesting in the seven sacraments, I can still receive all of them, but I can't administer any of them. So when I go to Mass, I can receive the Eucharist. Now as a Eucharistic Minister, I can dispense it, but I can't consecrate it, 'cause I'm a woman. I belong to Woman's Ordination Conference, when Tom mentioned Call to Action. That began in 1975. I've never left it. I'm still a member, along with some other women here. They asked us one year, "When the priest says the words of Consecration, say it with him." It's been wonderful. I've done it for about 15 years. People around me say, "What are you doing. What's going on?" I said, "I'm concelebrating." See, I'm saying the words of Consecration, so I'm concelebrating. (Laughter and Applause) It's been a great experience. I was at a Mass one day; the priest came to me and said, "You're saying all those words I'm saying, right out loud." I said, "Yes, I am." "Why?" And I told him. He said, "Well, I want you to say it a little bit lower so I don't hear you." (Laughter) Well I thought that was a major accomplishment. He didn't say don't say it; he said, "Do it a little lower." So I did my best but he kept looking at me once in a while.

But, I mean, that transformation of gender equality is so very important. After many civilizations societies are beginning to acknowledge womanhood as a value, all right? We have given lip service to valuing motherhood, all right? But then we come into this tension, all right? There's a mother and a baby, or a mother and a fetus; we go through another whole set of circumstances, but we haven't really valued womanhood. A woman was not to be single, remember? for a very long time. She certainly wasn't to live alone. I remember, growing up, when there were comments made, because a woman lived in her own apartment; that was not allowed. And she certainly had to be married. So we refer to her as being unmarried, or a spinster. We had all kinds of titles for her, because a single woman was not what life was about. So that's beginning to change. But motherhood was very valued. An appreciation for the female as a woman connotes gender equality. So both females and males are challenged by it.

And so again, I want to end saying that God as Mother and Father, because I think another area that we need to look at, and I didn't prepare it for today, is to look at the gender inequality that we have in terms of our prayer. And we also have militaristic: "Thine is the power, and the kingdom, and the glory;" that all comes out of a real, militaristic part of life. And even kingdom. I mean, we don't use kingdom anymore, because we're not a monarchy. - at least we're hoping the Church will move from being a monarchy.

So what I've tried to do is to say what we want to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a Catholic community. We want to be a community of friends. We want to be a community of equals. We want to really have God present to us, and with us, in a way that is very alive. It's not just something that is stilted. I don't just continue to pray the way I always prayed. What is it that brings me closer to God? What prayers that I have that express my relationship with God? That's what I want. So I need to pray the Our Father that brings me to God. I need to pray the Hail Mary that brings me to God. There's one part of the Hail Mary, the second part, "Pray for us sinners." Now I'm devoted to Mary, but not to the Rosary. But when I used to be praying the Rosary - pray for us sinners, pray for us sinners - at the end of 55 of those I was depressed. (Laughter) And I said, "I'm not a sinner. I'm spending my life dedicated to God to other people. I'm certainly imperfect. I'm in progress. I'm in process, all right? I have limitations. I have faults. I have blinders on. There are many things I don't see, right? But I'm not deliberately sinning." So I changed it to say, "Pray for all people." I love it. "Pray for all people, now, and at the hour of our death." Pray for all people.

When the priest says, "The Lord be with you," I don't say, "And also with you;" I say, "And with all people." I mean, I'm there as a worshipping member of an entire planet of eight billion people. I'm not just praying for Catholics. I'm not just praying for Catholics in the United States. I'm not just praying for the United States. I'm praying for every individual created by God, who walks this planet with me, and with all people. So, I want God to be with all people, however they call that God. Remember the Islam Religion called Allah by 99 names; and when you see those men, if they are in your neighborhood, and they kneel down in the middle of the street on Friday at noon, they are calling God by 99 names. Now we have 99

names too. We have many more. It would be wonderful someday to just identify them all - all of the names that we've given to God through the centuries.

So I think that in our vision of community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we want to know that we live in a very, very spiritual time. We live in a special moment. We want to be a community. And we need to author this community. We need to be the authors. We need to be co-responsible. So what is it that develops and deepens community? That's what I want to be about. We need to look at those qualities, and also to know that spirituality and social justice. They're not intentional, all right? They belong with us. They belong in our psyche. They belong in our spirit. So I believe that that brings us to a new moment in our 21<sup>st</sup> century; and I challenge myself, and I challenge all of you to look at some of this. So with that, I thank you. (Applause)



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- 1/ [Exit Interviews for Catholics Leaving the Church, America Magazine, January 3, 2011.](#)
- 2/ [American Catholic Council's national conference at Cobo Hall, Detroit, June 10-12, 2011.](#)