

Parish Newsletter
For
26 September 2021



From Father Robert: Reflecting On The Gospel

“But they’re not one of us!” is an exclusive catch-cry that can be raised in many contexts, from the bullying on the school playground to that in the much more serious social, political, and religious arenas. Just consider, say these cryers: migrants will take our jobs, asylum seekers will threaten our security, community housing in our street for people with disabilities will lower our property values, ecumenism and contact with other denominations will dilute or weaken our faith! And those who hold these views consider that they have a monopoly on wisdom and insight!

In the gospel proclaimed today we hear exclusion spoken from the midst of the Twelve. John is their indignant spokesman, informing Jesus that a man who “does not follow us” is “driving out demons in Your name.” The real issue from John’s point of view is not doing his healing acts in Jesus’ name, which implies some faith in Jesus; the problem is that he is *not following the Twelve!* They tried to stop him, apparently unsuccessfully, since they make an implicit appeal to Jesus to do something about it. Jesus responds to John’s indignation by telling him that they should see such a

person not as a competitor but as a companion along the way, even if he is not physically traveling with the Twelve, because” whoever is not against us is for us.” Work for the kingdom is not to be the jealously guarded preserve only of the disciples who are physically accompanying Him.

Jesus expands on what being “with” Him means. In a land where the availability of water can mean the difference between life and death, offering someone a cup of water symbolizes the simple but generous hospitality that should characterize a Christian disciple, for doing this to another is doing it to Jesus. Those who are aiming to be “the biggest and the best,” even religiously, can too easily overlook or disparage the service to the “little ones” of great faith: the behind-the-scenes workers in a parish; those who seem to have the gift of a spontaneously positive response to everyday relationships and crises; the people who welcome demands on their time without fuss and with unfailing generosity. “Little one” may also refer to those who are young in faith, new members of the Christian community. As a parish, how hospitable have we continued to be toward those who were baptized at Easter, or have we forgotten them and the drama of the Great Vigil? How inclusive are our attitudes to people who are entering from surprising – and even from what some “established” Christians might consider unwelcome and scandalous – quarters or lifestyles?

Strong feelings evoke strong language, and the Markan Jesus uses vivid images to heighten the impact of His words about the sin and scandal of those who are a tumbling block to the faith of others. Rather than concentrate on criticizing those whom we consider “outsiders,” disciples need to be self-critical. The harsh words about self-

mutilation are to be taken figuratively, not literally. It would be better, says Jesus, to go through life physically handicapped than to give scandal by our sinfulness and so become spiritually maimed and unfit for the kingdom of God. The final image of “Gehenna” for “hell” refers to what was a valley just outside the city of Jerusalem, and once the site of Canaanite human sacrifice. The Israelites had converted this into a garbage dump where the stench of the burning refuse became a constant reminder of corruption and a symbol of punishment. The alternative is the life of the new heavens and the new earth, the Isaiahan memory that probably lies behind this verse. As we have prayed in the responsorial Psalm 19, it is only by trusting in God’s guidance as do the simple, those who are wise enough to know their own frailty, that we can live wisely, truthfully, and reverently.



In the first reading, Moses tells Joshua, “Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!” Who are some of the modern-day prophets call us to holiness at this time in history?

How do you exercise prophetic ministry in your life of discipleship?

In the second reading, St. James condemns the corrosive power of wealth build on the suffering of others. How do we as a faith community speak out for the rights of workers and the dignity of the poor?

In the gospel, Jesus instructs the disciples to sever ties with anything that causes them to sin. At this moment in your life, are you being called to give up a practice or possession that separates you from God?



Those who arrive early each Saturday morning to clean and prepare the church and bathrooms for the weekend and the week ahead: **Adaugo Nnaji, Jean Rogers, Carole Miller, Angela Bueno, Al Cosce, Rose Salamanca, and Steve Rojek.**

Those who provide parking lot security during our liturgies: **Don Benson, Tony Gumina, Jose Perez, Dave Simpson.**

Lisa Lombardo who faithfully records our liturgy each week and then uploads it to our YouTube Channel for those who cannot be with us in person.

Our parish office volunteers: **Bev Iacona, Alicia Perez, and Melodye Costanza** who work with Maryann Peddicord; to those who work with Estrella Rusk, assisting with Finances, Collections, and Banking, and especially now with the accounting of the Grand Raffle contributions and tickets.

All those who help with the distribution of food, groceries, and produce from the Contra Costa – Solano County Food Bank in

our parking lot on the first and third Fridays of each month.

To **Rich Confetti and Don Benson** for all the work they do each day to oversee our expansion building project and to make sure it progresses according to the plans and schedule, working with the project director and contractors.



On behalf of all of us, we extend a very warm and grateful welcome to **Rosie Davis** who has joined us as our Interim Organist. She played for and supported our sung prayer at each Eucharist last weekend and will be with us as we search for a new Music Director/Organist. So many parishioners commented on how beautifully she accompanied our singing as well as remarking how wonderful it is to hear and sing with our beautiful instrument once again. Please feel free to welcome her personally and thank her for her contribution to our worship through music.

The Search Committee continues its work of interviewing candidates and reviewing resumes. One candidate has completed his interview and there are presently four more candidates to interview. We thank the members of the Search Committee for their work: **Doreen Manalac, Theresa Nelms, and Susannah Nelson.**

***Justice Corner by Carolyn Krantz,
Pastoral Associate***

The Gospel talks about recognizing people by their deeds not by their group affiliation. Recognize goodness wherever you find it.

Don't store up riches, store up good deeds. Goodness comes from the Lord and it comes in all shapes and sizes. Wherever you see goodness this week, rejoice. Get rid of all that causes you to be farther away from the Lord. As the Ogala Lakota holy man, Black Elk said, "It is in the darkness of their eyes that men get lost."

When we gather in grief and loss, we are united. We gather with a deep sense of the importance of life. The celebrations of 9-11 proved that. People have been divided by religion, by nationality and tribe, but ultimately we are one. Our humanness draws us together.

So when we feel separation, let us stop and remember what brings us together: family, community and various levels of relationship. We are drawn together by common purpose: "Love one another as I have loved you." Love one another in sickness and in health, in common faith and shared purpose. Measure unity the way the Lord does, not by human standards. Pray and think as God thinks, not as humans do, noting divisions, other religions and other countries. All communities have prophets and healers. One does not have to be catholic to possess spiritual qualities. Let us recognize truth and goodness where we see it. God gives to all.

It doesn't matter what political bent we ascribe to. It matters that we stand for truth and justice. It is the same Spirit that guides us all. We empty ourselves of egoism and selfish ways so that God can fill us with His love.

Recently I met a mother with three sons, exhausted with providing a good home and guiding her sons to good choices. She was expending herself to guide them on right paths toward a wholesome life. Many

women in our community know that feeling. Many fathers have gotten up day after day to go to work and provide for their families. Congratulations! You who have given of yourself to raise a good caring family. “No one who performs a righteous deed in My name will lose their reward.”

One who can see goodness and truth in those “not like us” is certainly a man/woman of God. A person “not of our group” can still be listening to the Spirit. Gandhi was such a man. He teased the British into independence for India. Black Elk was such a man who prophesied for all, even those who killed his people at Wounded Knee.

May we be big hearted enough to see the humanity in those who do not think as we do. May we guide our children to see the goodness in the earth and all its tribes.

Expansion Update

September 24, 2021

We're getting even closer!

Final painting, electrical, mechanical and plumbing work is underway. The new storefront entry doors to the parish hall have been installed. Most appliances have also been installed. We are awaiting the delivery of the stainless steel worktables, shelving and countertops. City building and health department inspections are scheduled over the next three weeks. Supply chain issues continue to plague the fire alarm and some of the needed equipment may not be available until December. We remain confident that the estimated January occupancy date will still be met.

A new paint scheme and flooring option for the expanded hall are under discussion and will be finalized shortly. This work is not part of the construction contract with Oliver & Co.

The \$216,261 progress payment to Oliver & Co was approved and paid this week.



Entrance to the walk-in cooler

Entrance to the kitchen pantry

Reach-in freezer

Note: many of the appliances and hoods are still covered in protective plastic.

Dishwasher & hood system

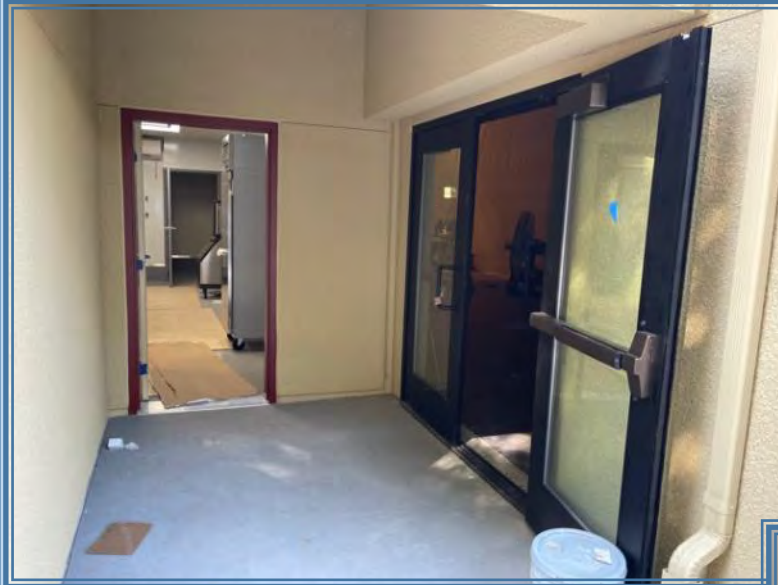
Two 6 burner Wolf ranges with ovens

Griddle. Will sit on a stainless steel stand between the two ranges.



Appliance hood system

Frymaster deep fryer. Retained from existing equipment.



West portico view. The entry doors to the parish hall are now completely installed, including the glass. An access door to the kitchen is shown at the left.

New single door reach-in refrigerator standing in front of the rollup window. When in place it will be located to the right of the window. The window itself is powered, similar to a garage door. It is fire rated and will automatically close in the event of a fire emergency.



Exterior paint, including the trim is complete.

At Home in Creation: God is as close as your next breath

The Spirit in the Assembly

Preparing for the synod on synodality

By [Austen Ivereigh](#)

16 September 2021



Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of a synodal Church in his speech marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican, October 17, 2015 (CNS photo/Paul Haring).

The most far-reaching event in the Catholic Church in my lifetime officially gets its start next month. It is Pope Francis's boldest move yet, the historic shake-up that a Church brought low by sex-abuse scandals badly needs, and potentially the most transformative moment in Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council, which it seeks to embed permanently into the life of the Church. The two-year "synod on synodality," launched in Rome on October 9 and in dioceses worldwide a week later, is set to mark Christianity forever.

Yet who knows it is even happening? A global process set to mobilize millions and transform the world's oldest and largest institution has so far registered as no more than a blip on the Catholic radar. Bishops briefed by Rome's synod secretariat back in May have been mostly quiet about it, hiding behind cautious communiqués buried on websites, awaiting details, fearful of unleashing forces and expectations beyond their command.

So we begin with a paradox. The path to the 2023 Synod in Rome, on the theme "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission," is designed to engage every diocese, every bishops' conference, and every continental Church body. It will unleash the biggest popular consultation in history. It will require, as never before, the assembly of the People of God, in mass meetings at parishes and across dioceses around the world, who are being given "the ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received," in the words of the Preparatory Document released last week.

Yet so far the disengagement has been almost total. (Has your parish priest mentioned anything? I thought so.) For pastoral leaders, as the synod secretariat's Vademecum puts it, "this consultation process will evoke a range of feelings...from excitement and joy to anxiety, fear, uncertainty or even scepticism." The anxiety is real. The Catholic Church is already a deeply polarized place. What if, when people speak boldly, it all falls apart?

Into this vacuum of hesitancy step militants of both sides, traditionalists and progressives, adding their hermeneutic of fear and suspicion. On the September 9

edition of Raymond Arroyo's EWTN show, his acerbic guest, Damian Thompson, declared that synods were "a means of dismantling historic teachings," a sure route to Protestantism. He was confident "the Holy Spirit won't be present because the Holy Spirit has better things to do." The following day a "lay-led" and "inclusive" Root and Branch Synod in England was addressed on September 10 by former Irish president and Church-reform campaigner Mary McAleese, who described the synod as an "absurd process" that was ultimately "pointless" because it failed to recognize "the full equality of all members as Church citizens." Her proof was that, following the initial consultation and listening phase in the dioceses, the bishops alone would be responsible for taking the process of discernment forward.

Yet this is exactly what a Catholic synod is. Unlike synods in other traditions, the Roman version is consultative. Final responsibility for discernment and the decisions that flow from it lies with the bishops and ultimately the pope, who are assisted in their discernment by the body of believers. Or so the theory goes. In practice, before this pontificate any pre-synod consultation of the People of God was at best perfunctory, and the synods themselves were less exercises in discernment than confirmation of existing belief and practice. That has changed under Francis. Ever since his election, when he announced that he wanted to proceed "gently, but firmly and tenaciously" towards a synodal Church, Francis has been shaking awake this dormant Catholic institution. Synods in Rome (there have been four) are now pastoral, inductive, and dynamic; the discernment is genuine. Conversion happens, and change results, just as in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. But the People of God have so far mostly

been passive spectators. That is what this synod sets out to change.

The object of the next two years is not a one-off process but a permanent conversion.

The object of the next two years is not a one-off process but a permanent conversion, one that involves the transformation and extension *versus populum* of the existing synod institution revived by the Second Vatican Council. As the *Vademecum* released last week by the synod secretariat puts it: "While the Synod of Bishops has taken place up until now as gathering of bishops with and under the authority of the Pope, the Church increasingly realizes that synodality is the path for the entire People of God." That means making pastoral decisions "that reflect the will of God as closely as possible, grounding them in the living voice of the People of God." This is not, of course, to divinize the popular will, as the French Revolution claimed to do; the bishops remain the discerners-in-chief, the pope the one who decides. But there is now a genuine recognition that the discovery of the divine will—uncovering the presence of the Spirit of God and the bad spirit that seeks to thwart it—has to involve the whole body of the faithful, not just the bishops. Thus, "the purpose of this synod"—and indeed, the point of a synodal Church—"is to listen, as the entire People of God, to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church." It is to make the People of God actors in the process of discernment, rather than passive onlookers.

Unsurprisingly, most Catholics have yet to grasp this challenge. A Church accustomed to a command-and-control model does not adapt easily to synodality, which may be "an essential dimension of the Church," as Francis put it in his groundbreaking October 2015 speech, but is so far more like an unexercised muscle. To exercise it again

suddenly is no small task; it will be effortful, painful, and initially it may seem hopeless. But it is what God asks of the Church in the third millennium, said Francis in the same 2015 speech. It was a conclusion he did not reach lightly, the fruit of a deep discernment over decades.

While the *Vademecum* offers a general account of the meaning of synodality and lists “good and fruitful practices” to enable it, the other document released last week, the Preparatory Document (PD), prepares the ground for the initial, diocesan phase of the process. Both documents are clear that what is at stake is *culture change*.

A synod is not called to defend or to change anything; it is called to enable an assembly that discerns what the Holy Spirit asks of the Church at this time in relation to the mission for which it exists: to evangelize. A synod is not a program, in other words, but a process; or rather, the program *is* the process, and never more than in *this* process, which is precisely about how the Church can become more synodal. Conservative and progressives can both struggle with this concept, because it is not tied firmly to any particular agenda. If a synod does not double down on tradition in the face of new threats, say the conservatives, or if it does not lead to long overdue reforms that advance equality, say the progressives, then the whole synod process is not to be taken seriously. For then it is either it is useless or dangerous.

Yet a meeting called to agree on a foreordained program is not a synod, whatever it calls itself. Synods are all about being attentive to whatever the Spirit is trying to say to the Church, not what people have decided ahead of time that the Spirit should be saying. A synod invites us to scrutinize the signs of the times by reading the movement of spirits in the *sensus*

fidelium, in the body of the People of God gathered by the Church’s leaders. It is an ecclesial process of discernment of spirits, with a missionary objective—not just *for* the people but *with* the people, under the guidance of the bishops.

Synods are all about being attentive to whatever the Spirit is trying to say to the Church, not what people have decided ahead of time that the Spirit should be saying.

The PD presents this, using Scripture, as the interconnectedness of Jesus, the crowd, and the apostles. Jesus, who takes the initiative, is constantly open to the people, recognizing them as interlocutors in ways that shock and scandalize. At the same time, he calls some to follow him, and entrusts them with special responsibility for helping others to encounter him. All three actors, says the PD, are essential: without Jesus (the Spirit) as the protagonist, the synod descends into a political game between the apostles and the crowd, a churchy parliament. Without the crowd, it becomes sectarian and self-referential, an exclusive, inward-looking sect. Without the apostles instructed by the Spirit, the crowd risks falling prey to myth and ideology. The PD adds that it is the role of a fourth actor, the *diabolos*, to try to separate these three actors. Without all three—the People of God, the Holy Spirit, and the bishops—it is not a real synod.

This is what is so hard. We have no model for this; and, as we look around us, in the pews and at our clergy, it seems unrealistic. A synod calls for attitudes and mindsets that seem almost the opposite of what we’re used to in our daily life and in our Church. The synod documents ask us to speak boldly and honestly (with *parrhesia*), and to create space for those who seldom speak to do the same. Yet the documents also ask us to be humble in listening, to be open to changing

our minds in light of what we hear, and to accept that we don't so much possess the truth as come to be possessed by it. We must let go of the myth of our self-sufficiency, give up prejudices and stereotypes, surrender our rigidity, and learn to recognize the Spirit moving where we least expect it. We must abandon, too, the lure of clericalism, to see that true power lies in service, that the voices of all the baptized must be heard. And while we must be bold in giving our views, we must resist the temptation of sterile polarization, for where two views are in opposition, a third may yet present itself, transcending both. To enter into synodality is to embrace an alchemy in which the Spirit acts as a *complexio oppositorum*, in which what is good and valid on all sides is preserved in a new vision.

While acknowledging that “the synodal process will naturally call for a renewal of structures at various levels of the Church in order to foster deeper communion, fuller participation, and more fruitful mission,” the *Vademecum* adds that this renewal flows from that of the members of the Body. This renewal can only come about by “doing” synodality: spending time in human encounter, in the company of our fellow faithful in parish meetings and “synodal consultation meetings,” but also informally: sharing a meal, walking together, and so on. This informal synodality—“renewing the Church,” as the *Vademecum* puts it, “through new experiences of fraternity with each other”—helps those intimidated by more formal meetings to open up, which is one of the core challenges. How to hear the Spirit speak through those who do not usually speak? How to avoid the process being hijacked by the articulate and educated? And then, as the PD notes, the Church must deal with the weight of its own clericalist inheritance, “with those forms of

exercising authority on which the different types of abuse (power, economic, conscience, sexual) are grafted.” But it must also cope with the impact of a culture that swings between secularist intolerance of religion and fundamentalist religious intolerance.

All these attitudes can be transcended only by a synodal conversion. In the words of the PD, “The ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute.” It means being “educated by the Spirit to a truly synodal mentality”—a “conversion process” on which the mission of the Church now hangs.

From where we stand now, this looks like a fearsome challenge: in just five months, each “particular Church”—usually, a bishops’ conference—must organize a consultation of the whole people of God across its dioceses and religious communities that turns on one or two key questions: “A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together.’ How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your particular Church?” What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?” Each particular Church must synthesize its blizzard of answers into no more than ten pages. From these syntheses the synod secretariat in Rome will create the first “working document,” which will be pondered and worked on by bishops’ bodies at a continental or regional level before March 2023. The synthesis of their syntheses will then produce a second working document by June 2023, to be refined and finally voted on by a three-week

synod of bishops in Rome in October of that year. Their final report will be given to the pope.

Too much, too soon? Of course. That is the point. The genius of the process is that it will starkly reveal just how little traveled is the road to the synodal Church of which Francis dreams, how anti-synodal is the culture of a command-and-control Church. And that is good, for no conversion happens without a first, chilly confrontation with the truth of who we are, followed by a realization of how much the Spirit's help is required to get us to where we are called to be. If such humility and openness to grace should prove the synod's main fruit, it will yield a rich harvest indeed.

Austen Ivereigh is a regular contributor to Commonweal and a Fellow in Contemporary Church History at the Jesuit-run Campion Hall at the University of Oxford. His most recent book is Pope Francis's Let Us Dream: A Path to a Better World. Conversations with Austen Ivereigh (Simon & Schuster).

Diocese of Oakland Mission Alignment Process



The Catholic Church is the longest continually running institution in the world. She keeps herself relevant in every age because she is more than a human institution; she is also divine. It is the Holy Spirit that makes sure the Catholic Church is relevant in every age, and every age must look to her for inspiration and guidance. Recent declines in Mass attendance, baptisms, vocations to the priesthood and other factors are challenging us to take a fresh look at ourselves. In response, Bishop Michael Barber, S.J. is asking every Catholic in the Oakland diocese to support the Mission Alignment Process (MAP).

Guided by the Holy Spirit, this process will help us align our precious resources: our wonderful lay faithful, our parishes and schools, our clergy, and our financial resources for missionary fruition. Change is never easy, but when did God ever say that our lives would be easy? The way to salvation always has a cross in its path. But it is precisely the cross which leads us to new life.

MAP Mission: To align our diocese for missionary fruition and lead in this age of change.

- *Mission Alignment Process Prayer*

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- Dear Catholic faithful, please support this process of self-reflection and renewal with your prayers/participation as we call on Mary, the Queen of the World and our mother, to please pray for us.
 - Dear Father in heaven, look kindly upon the Diocese of Oakland as we take stock of the many gifts you have given us. Send your Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us so that our efforts to proclaim the saving gospel our Lord Jesus Christ more effectively may bear tremendous fruit.

May we, as your people, courageously proceed on this path of self-reflection and renewal.

In the end, with your divine assistance, we know that we cannot fail.

Holy Mary, Queen of the World and St. Francis de Sales, co-patrons of our Diocese, pray for us! Amen.

Our parish has prepared a well-developed process to help us participate in the Mission Alignment Project. Susannah Nelson has graciously agreed to be our parish point-of-contact and will be speaking to you publicly soon to invite your participation in the survey that will soon become available and needs the participation of every one of us. This is the first time in the history of the Diocese that such an effort has been undertaken. Please watch for further announcements and dates to provide the Diocese the information they need to do immediate and future planning.

Pope Francis issues thinly veiled criticism of EWTN, comments on gender ideology

21 September 2021

by [Christopher White](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis talks with members of the Society of Jesus at the apostolic nunciature in Bratislava, Slovakia, Sept. 12, 2021. During a private meeting, the pope spoke to the Jesuits about his health, the pastoral work of Jesuits in Slovakia, and how he deals with suspicions or criticisms. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Pope Francis has issued a thinly veiled criticism of the U.S.-based Eternal Word Television Network, known as EWTN, saying that while he may be worthy of personal scrutiny, the church does not deserve attacks such as those regularly made by the station.

"There is, for example, a large Catholic television channel that has no hesitation in continually speaking ill of the pope," said Francis. "I personally deserve attacks and insults because I am a sinner, but the church does not deserve them. They are the work of the devil. I have also said this to some of them."

The pope's comments came during a Sept. 12 meeting with Jesuits during his [Sept. 12-15 visit to Slovakia](#). His remarks [were published](#) by the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* on Sept. 21.

In recent years, EWTN, which is headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama, and is one of the Catholic Church's largest media enterprises, has become known for its [regular antagonistic coverage of Pope Francis](#) and partisan political focus. No other Catholic media conglomerate has

regularly featured such open criticism of Francis.

Most notably, host Raymond Arroyo has [regularly promoted and interviewed](#) the schismatic former papal nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò. Viganò has previously called for Pope Francis' resignation.

Arroyo also regularly hosts a "[papal posse](#)" of commentators known for their anti-Francis views, including Fr. Gerald Murray, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, and author Robert Royal.

In his 2020 book, [The Outsider: Pope Francis and His Battle to Reform the Church](#), British Vatican journalist Christopher Lamb reported that the apostolic nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, had expressed displeasure to EWTN CEO Michael Warsaw over the network's coverage of the papacy. Warsaw is [a consultant](#) to the Vatican's Dicastery for Communications.

During his remarks to the Jesuits in Slovakia, the pope also directly addressed priests who are openly critical of his ministry.

"Yes, there are also clerics who make nasty comments about me. I sometimes lose patience, especially when they make judgments without entering into a real dialogue. I can't do anything there," he said. "However, I go on without entering their world of ideas and fantasies. I don't want to enter it and that's why I prefer to preach, preach. ... Some people accuse me of not talking about holiness. They say I always talk about social issues and that I'm a communist."

Francis has made regular unscheduled stops to meet with his Jesuit confreres during his international travels and their free-ranging exchanges are published in *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

While meeting with the Slovakian Jesuits, the pope also spoke freely about those that are skeptical of his more welcoming approach to marriage and family life, his recovery from his recent surgery and traditionalist priests.

When asked by one Jesuit about concerns over "gender ideology," the pope said there was a need to distinguish between those seeking to push an ideology that one could choose their own biological gender and engaging in pastoral outreach to LGBTQ persons.

"The 'gender' ideology of which you speak is dangerous, yes. As I understand it, it is so because it is abstract with respect to the concrete life of a person, as if a person could decide abstractly at will if and when to be a man or a woman," Francis said.

"Abstraction is always a problem for me. This has nothing to do with the homosexual issue, though. If there is a homosexual couple, we can do pastoral work with them, move forward in our encounter with Christ," he continued. "When I talk about ideology, I'm talking about the idea, the abstraction in which everything is possible, not about the concrete life of people and their real situation."

The pope also recalled the controversial 2014 and 2015 [Synod of Bishops on the Family](#), where pastoral care for divorced and remarried couples and LGBTQ concerns were openly discussed, prompting a rift among conservative prelates participating in the event.

"It frightens us to go forward in pastoral experiences. I think of the work that was done ... at the Synod on the Family to make it understood that couples in second unions are not already condemned to hell," the pope recalled. "It frightens us to accompany people with sexual diversity. We are afraid of the crossroads and paths that Paul VI spoke of. This is the evil of this moment, namely, to seek the path in rigidity and clericalism, which are two perversions."

In July, Francis sent shockwaves through Catholic traditionalist communities when he significantly [restricted](#) the celebration of the traditional Latin Mass.

In response to pushback of the decision, the pope shared the story of a cardinal who told him of two newly ordained priests seeking permission to study Latin and to celebrate the traditional Latin Mass.

"With a sense of humor he replied," the pope recalled: " 'But there are many Hispanics in the diocese! Study Spanish to be able to preach. Then, when you have studied Spanish, come back to me and I'll tell you how many Vietnamese there are in the diocese, and I'll ask you to study Vietnamese. Then, when you have learned Vietnamese, I will give you permission to study Latin.' "

"So he made them 'land,' he made them return to earth. I go ahead, not because I want to start a revolution," Francis said. "I do what I feel I must do. It takes a lot of patience, prayer and a lot of charity."

Francis, who kept up a demanding schedule during his four-day travels to Hungary and Slovakia, also responded with humor when asked how he was faring after his surgery and [10-day hospitalization](#) in July.

"Still alive, even though some people wanted me to die. I know there were even meetings between prelates who thought the pope's condition was more serious than the official version," said Francis. "They were preparing for the conclave. Patience! Thank God, I'm all right."



[Christopher White](#)

Christopher White is the Vatican correspondent for NCR. His email address is cwhite@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: [@CWWhiteNCR](#).

At Home in Creation: Fighting for life and clean air in Cancer Alley

22 September 2021
by [Brenna Davis](#)

[Spirituality](#)

PAUSE



Sharon Lavigne, the 2021 Goldman Environmental Prize winner for North America, in front of oil storage tanks in St. James Parish, Louisiana (Courtesy of Goldman Environmental Prize)

This week's reflections focus on air.

READ

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

*Our steps are made firm by the Lord,
when he delights in our way;
though we stumble, we shall not fall
headlong,
for the Lord holds us by the hand.*

— Psalm 37:23-24

The World We Need: Sharon Lavigne's Story of RISE St. James

REFLECT

Sharon Lavigne is a Catholic environmental activist and founder of Rise St. James, a grassroots group formed to save the lives of community members impacted by toxic air from petrochemical plants in St. James Parish, Louisiana. The area is known as Cancer Alley because of the high rates of illness among the predominantly Black and low-income residents living near the factories.

Rise St. James is [leading opposition](#) to an effort by the Formosa Plastic Group to build

what would be one of the world's largest petrochemical complexes, comprising 14 plants, in the community where Sharon lives. I spoke with Sharon about how Rise St. James began in her living room and how her deep faith in God guides her advocacy for life and clean air in her community.

"We formed a meeting in my den, and we had about eight people," she said. The next meeting drew 20 people, and the movement gradually grew into what is now Rise St. James.

Me and other people would say, "Let's fight Formosa!" And a bunch of them said, "Oh, no, we can't fight that. The governor approved that, and we're not stopping them anyway because the parish council is going to approve it. And those people have money. We don't have money to fight the industry." I said to myself, "What does money got to do with it?" We are fighting for our lives so I never worried about the money.

When I first started, I didn't think it would get this attention, and I didn't think we would have people all over the world looking at what we're doing in St. James. I had no idea of being an environmentalist or being an activist. I didn't even know about a [Goldman Award](#), because I wasn't in it for an award, I was in it to live.

One Sunday evening, I sat on my porch after hearing about the Formosa coming, and it just got to me. I sat on my porch to read my Bible. I read Psalm 37 and the 23rd Psalm, I read that daily ... I was just talking to God. This time I listened for an answer. I asked Him if He wanted me to give up the land, the land that He gave me. To my surprise, He answered me and told me no, and it startled me. So I asked Him if He wanted me to give up the home He gave me, and I pointed to my home. He said no again. I almost fell out of my chair, because I thought he was going

to say, "Yes, go on and pack up and leave."
But He said, "No."

And then I asked Him, "What do you want me to do?" And that's when He said, "Fight." And all the tears came down my face like a faucet. I said, "Oh dear Lord, fight? I didn't know how to fight."

But when I was praying, I could see the birds going back and forth. About three or four birds, looked like they were having fun, going from one tree to the next. And it's so nice to see those red birds. I said, "I wonder what that means?" And my daughter said it means change, and somebody else said, "The ancestors are speaking to you."

And I could feel the vibrations, the wind blowing through me, and I knew that was God. You gonna know when God speaks to you — it's a certain voice of feeling or whatever, and I knew it was Him. And I said, "Thank You, Jesus. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." And from that day on, something inside of me just went. It's been going ever since, and it has been going in the fast lane. I used to say, "Dear Lord, why did you choose me?" I'd say that for a long time. Then I stopped saying it. Now I say, "Dear Lord, thank you for choosing me."

Sadly, since the founding of the group, two of the original eight members of Rise St. James have passed away due to health issues.

Louisiana's governor has said Formosa will bring much-needed money to the state, but Sharon noted the environmental injustice inherent in this thinking. "You will make us the sacrifice zone to save the whole state," she said. "Don't use us to save the state."

Of plastic pollution, she said:

We need to go back to the way we were in some aspects. I know they'd call it progress

from way back when my great-grandparents were living. We had milk, the milk was in a glass jug so we didn't put it in any plastic. Today, the chemicals that's in that plastic are cancer-causing. We need to get away from all this plastic. I know we can't do it overnight. But gradually, we need to get away from this plastic. There's too much.

Plans for the plant [have stalled](#), and there are signs of hope that Formosa will not prevail. Because of pressure from Rise St. James and others, an [Environmental Impact Statement](#) is being required before permits are granted. Although Hurricane Ida damaged her house and others in the area, Sharon and Rise St. James have persisted, most recently serving a [hot meal in a local park](#). They will continue until Formosa's plans are canceled.

"This is a life and death situation," Sharon told me. "If they [Formosa] come in here, it is a death sentence. That's why we have to continue to fight, and that's what I am going to do. I am going to fight."

ACT

- [Learn more](#) about the fight against Formosa Plastic Sunshine Project, and check the [Rise St. James website](#) for updates.
- Sit in prayer, and ask God how God is "choosing you," in your own community and context, to work for clean air and a healthy planet. Who else might join you in this work?

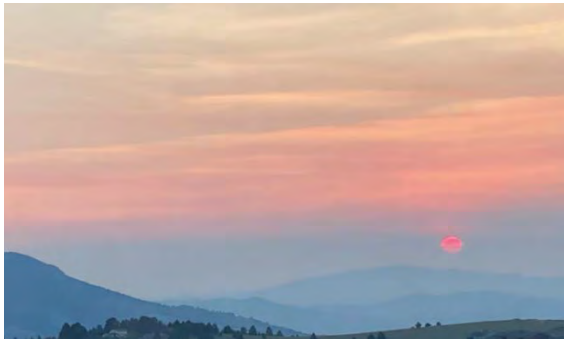
At Home in Creation: Keep on breathing

24 September 2021
by [Michael Downs](#)

[Spirituality](#)

This article appears in the [At Home in Creation](#) feature series. [View the full series.](#)

PAUSE



Smoke from fires in California settles over the author's childhood hometown in Montana. (Michael Downs)

This week's reflections focus on air.

READ

The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it is coming from and where it is going; so it is with everyone who has been born of the Spirit.

— John 3:8

Some forms of pollution are part of people's daily experience. Exposure to atmospheric pollutants produces a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and causes millions of premature deaths.

— *Laudato Si'*, 20

What can we do but keep on breathing in and out, modest and willing, and in our places?

— Mary Oliver

REFLECT

As I sat across from my father's hospital bed last week, I watched his breathing while he slept. This second bout with pneumonia, among other health challenges, made each breath seem precious and fragile.

I longed to wheel him outside for some fresh Rocky Mountain air, but the smoke from Northern California (where I live) rolled into Western Montana (where I was visiting my dad), and the air quality index reached "unhealthy" levels. Meanwhile other hospital beds were filling up with severely ill COVID patients, many with pre-existing respiratory issues.

My eyes shifted from the rising of his chest, out the sealed window to the gray sky. The N95 mask felt suffocating and hid my sense of overwhelm and fear. But along with my dad, I kept breathing in the reality around us, breathing out love.

It is true that we all breathe the same air, but the reality is that the quality of that air varies significantly based on where we live.

I never thought about this as a child breathing pure Rocky Mountain air. But as an adult I have learned that, according to the United Nations, air pollution continues to be our [single biggest environmental health risk today](#); 90% of the global population is [breathing polluted air](#).

In many urban areas, like the Bay Area where I am raising my family, the most marginalized communities live and work disproportionately close to the factories and highways where air pollution is most acute. These locations are not accidents of history, but often the result of racist policies that have informed urban planning and roadway construction.

Communities of color and lower socioeconomic backgrounds have also suffered disproportionately during the pandemic, partly because the many pre-conditions which make COVID-19 more

lethal, including lung and respiratory disease, are caused by air pollution. How do we keep breathing when the suffering of the world knocks the wind out of us?

This month Catholic schools around the country celebrate the Mass of Holy Spirit to begin a new academic year. One meaning of "Holy Spirit" is the "breath of God," a mysterious concept found in many religions of the world. An annual moment of inspiration, this year's Mass also made space for feelings of relief (of being back in person) and grief (for all that has been lost). Even as air pollution seems so pervasive, so too is the Holy Spirit blowing where it wills (Jn. 3:8). More and more people across nations, generations and religions are breathing in the suffering of the planet and the poor, and breathing out solidarity, resiliency and action.

As we keep breathing in and out, modest and willing, what are we called to do with and for the source of life that sustains us?

ACT

- Consider ways you can [advocate for cleaner air and respiratory health](#).
- (Re-)read the [landmark Clean Air Act](#) (1970), which has resulted in improved air quality throughout the country.
- Learn about and practice the [Buddhist meditation of Tonglen](#) ("taking and giving") and the [peace prayer attributed to St. Francis](#) ("where there is darkness, may I bring light"), both of which can be aligned with our breath for a profound exchange: taking in the suffering around us, releasing the Spirit of compassion that is within us.

St. Ignatius Knights of Columbus Bocce Tournament



Saturday – October 16, 2021

Bocce Courts @ Chichibu Park

3116 Acorn Rd. Antioch - Off of Longview Rd.

4 Player Teams - \$25 Per Player

3 Games – Total Score

18 yrs. & up – up to 12 Teams

Prizes for 1st and 2nd Place

Check-In and Continental Breakfast – 8:30 AM

Games Begin @ 9:00 AM

45 Minute Games – 15 Minute Breaks

Lunch & Awards after the Games

Proceeds Benefit Special Olympics

Hosted by K of C St. Ignatius Council 12587

Register by calling Steve at 925-642-2329

Team Name – Team Capo

Payment to be mailed to:

4408 Reimche Drive, Antioch, CA 94509

Deadline for Registration and Payment – October 13



MEALS on WHEELS
DIABLO REGION



WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!

A few hours twice a month will keep a senior from going hungry! Meals on Wheels Diablo Region needs volunteers to deliver grocery bags on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month to seniors in Antioch and Pittsburg. The Grocery Bag Program, a partnership of MOW Diablo Region and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, provides groceries to seniors who can cook simple meals but can't travel to the food bank.

To learn more, contact **Casey Claibourne** at **925.448.3695** or **cclaibourne@mowdr.org**. To sign up to volunteer, apply online at **<https://www.mowdiablореgion.org/deliver-meals>** or contact **Lee Davenport** at **925.954.8736** or **ldavenport@mowdr.org**.