

Our Better Version of Catholicism

Proceedings of "Saints in Sin City"

A Gathering of Inclusive Catholic
Clergy and Laity

Las Vegas, Nevada

November 4-6, 2021

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Preface

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

After our first national, interjurisdictional gathering of Old/Independent Catholic clergy and laity in Austin, Texas in October 2019, we had planned to reconvene in Saint Louis, Missouri for our second such gathering on October 15-17, 2020. Bishop John Plummer had agreed to keynote the experience, and we were looking forward to gathering again, to continue building relationships and learning together about the rich, inclusive Catholic movement of which we are part. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, which took many of our efforts online for 20 months.

By the summer of 2021, as the vaccines of Spirit-inspired scientists spread throughout our nation, causing COVID hospitalizations and deaths to subside, we dreamed of our second national, interjurisdictional gathering. I first shared of the idea with Father Marek Bożek of Saint Stanislaus Polish Catholic Community in Saint Louis, Missouri and with Reverend Trish Sullivan Vanni of Charis Catholic Community in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Father Marek pulled aboard his longtime friend and collaborator, Father Mike López of All Saints Priory in Ridgewood, New York. Bishop Thomas Abel generously offered to host us at his church, Santo Niño Catholic Church in Las Vegas, Nevada, and he invited Bishop Martin de Porres Griffin to help us co-host the gathering. We set a date eight weeks in the future and began to plan “Saints in Sin City”!

As a movement, we have come a long way in the two years since our first gathering in Austin, Texas. Many clergy have been actively building relationships with others. In 2020, we hosted a virtual summer school that attracted 106 participants. Since then, we have also assembled a database of over 2,000 Independent Catholic clergy throughout the world. Many clergy regularly join our “virtual happy hours” and “think tanks” through Zoom. During the pandemic, we gathered with one another in virtual ways, and, as “Saints in Sin City” approached, we looked forward to seeing one another face-to-face!

This gathering in Las Vegas was important in many ways. It allowed 25 clergy and lay people to gather, pray together, and build relationships in person. Another dozen clergy attended the event through Zoom. “Saints in Sin City” allowed all present to reflect on

the present state of Inclusive Catholicism and to hear from a variety of voices on various issues, including the experience of women in our movement. As evident in these proceedings, this gathering laid the foundation for conversations that will continue for some time in our movement.

We thank all who joined us for this experience—and all who helped to make it possible. Together, may we continue to provide to others what, in the words of Father Marek Božek, might be called “our better version of Catholicism”!

A Homily for the Mass of the Holy Spirit

Bishop Martin de Porres Griffin
American Catholic Church, Diocese of California
Sacramento, California

Our encounter in Las Vegas began with a Mass of the Holy Spirit on the afternoon of November 4, 2021. Bishop Thomas Abel, Pastor of Santo Niño Catholic Church and Bishop of the Catholic Church of America, led us in prayer, and Bishop Martin de Porres Griffin of the American Catholic Church Diocese of California broke open the Word of God for us. The text of his homily follows.

“There’s a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
and I know that it’s the Spirit of the Lord.
There are sweet expressions on each face,
and I know they feel the presence of the Lord.
Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet heavenly Dove,
stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.
And for these blessings, we lift our hearts in praise;
without a doubt we’ll know that we have been revived,
when we shall leave this place!”

It is truly good for us to be here, my brothers and sisters, as Peter said at the site of the Transfiguration (Mk. 9:5, Mt. 17:3, Lk. 9:33). It is truly good for us to be here. It is truly good for us to be here as family. It is truly good for us to be here as Church: to worship in unity, in faith, in peace, and in love.

It is truly good to see the diversity that we share, to see the diversity in this room and in our Church, and to know that we are called to oneness. Today we celebrate that oneness, knowing that the Holy Spirit always unites and can keep us together.

My brothers and sisters, today we celebrate Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17, the prayer with which he concluded his final dinner with his friends. That high priestly prayer prepared him to offer up himself for the world, the cosmos. He interceded for his disciples, in

the same way that the high priests interceded for Israel. And that prayer is a prayer for you and for me today as well.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 parallels the "Our Father" in other gospels (Mt. 6:9-13, Lk. 11:2-4).

"Our Father, who art in heaven." In John, Jesus looks to heaven and prays to God as Father (Jn. 17:1).

"May your name be kept holy." Jesus is concerned about God's name, and he speaks of the power of God's name (Jn. 17:11), the name that is above every other name, at whose name every knee shall bend (Phil. 2:10).

"Let your kingdom come." Jesus' time has come. He is preparing for his sacrifice for the world, for the cosmos,

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus brought God glory on earth by doing the work of God (Jn. 17:4) and is beginning to prepare himself for the cross and, subsequently, the resurrection.

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Jesus asks God to protect his disciples, who live in a hostile world, and to keep them safe from the evil one (Jn. 17:15).

Like the Our Father, Jesus' priestly prayer in John 17 calls us to unity, to live as children of the one God, to seek forgiveness, and to be *in* the world, but not *of* it.

In John 17, Jesus prays four prayers for us. He says, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one" (Jn. 17:11). I love this prayer: "that they might be one, as we are one." As parts of Christ's body, we are all different, and we recognize that each part of the body is important and has a role to play (1Cor. 12:12-27). Even the smallest parts of the body, even the smallest churches preaching the gospel among us, are important and possess a role and a responsibility in the one Body of Christ. We should not take them for granted.

Jesus also prays for us: He prays not that God will take us from the world, but that God will keep us from the evil of the world. The world is not bad; God made the world, and it is good! As we transition to heaven, we are called to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world, and to help make it a better place. We need to live here, and we need to try to eliminate from our world those things that separate us from our God.

Jesus' third prayer is: "Sanctify them in your truth." Jesus asks God to bless us and to be with us, that we might live in truth and love and peace, that we might live as brothers and sisters.

Jesus' fourth prayer is for us: "My prayer is not for [my friends] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (Jn. 17:20). We weren't there, but Jesus, our brother, prayed not only for the disciples of his day, but also for each and every one of us. He prayed for the Church, for all who continue to proclaim the good news of his life, death and resurrection. He prayed for the salvation of all the world.

These are the prayers that Jesus had for his disciples over 2,000 years ago, and the prayers that Jesus has for each one of us today. As Independent Catholics, we are a small part of the Body of Christ, but we have a unique purpose, a reason for our being, to which God calls us. We are the Church—no less than any other church.

As Independent Catholics, we can't lose sight of the fact that we are not so much "independent" as we are interdependent and interconnected. We have a relationship with God, and we are called to relationship with each other as disciples. We need one another, and we pray that the unity for which Jesus prayed might become a reality through our words and actions, in our parishes and ministries.

It is truly good that we gather here to worship together, to listen to one another, to pray together, and then to go out to spread the Good News.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and enkindle in us the fire of your love!
Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth!

What We Love About Inclusive Catholicism

As we gathered to begin this time together, we shared what we most love about Inclusive Catholicism. Our responses included the following.

"I love the independence and the ability to be me. I wasn't able to do that in the Roman Church. I had to conform to a set of rules that I found obsolete. So, I found a home in the Independent Sacramental Movement. I also love the closeness: that, despite our difference, we are close to one another."

Most Rev. Thomas E. Abel
Las Vegas, Nevada

"I like to sum it up as salvation, not condemnation. I have found the Independent Catholic Church to be an open community of faith rooted in the gospel, for ordinary people."

Most Rev. Martin de Porres
Sacramento, California

"I love that we have all of the joys of Catholicism, with none of the guilt of Rome!"

Rev. James Morgan
Las Vegas, Nevada

"I love that we're Catholics without all the rules."

Most Rev. Leonard Walker
Kingman, Arizona

"I like that there's more emphasis on service and compassion, than on rules."

Louise Rauckhorst
Henderson, Nevada

"We're able to connect with our history and be what Jesus wanted us to be."

Rev. Linda Pilato
Las Vegas, Nevada

"I'm proud to be an Independent Catholic priest. When other churches say 'no,' we say 'yes.' We emphasize love and compassion, and we're more authentic."

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

"The Roman Church decides who can receive the sacraments, and who can't. I like that we can welcome people without passing judgment on them. We let people make their own decisions in good conscience before the Lord."

Rev. Kathleen Jess
Kingman, Arizona

"The Independent movement allows us to be at the margins without being chastised for it. My experience in other branches of the faith was of being punished for being on the margins. Now we're able to work among the poorest of the poor, and to love people who have been disenfranchised. Now when we're in *The New York Times*, we're not called to the chancellor's office!"

Rev. Mike López
Ridgewood, New York

"There are very few things that I like about Independent Catholicism. I don't like the independence of Independent Catholicism. I don't like the fragmentation and separation: They drive me crazy! But I do like the fact that we can be inclusive and on the margins."

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

“What I love is that the laity have a voice in their faith. Instead of being in a hierarchy that pushes down people, we acknowledge that we come together at the table. I also love the fact that I could answer my call to ministry as a woman!”

Rev. Kathleen Jess
Kingman, Arizona

“What I love about Independent Catholicism is that we are inclusive. We accept and welcome everybody—just as Terry and her husband welcomed me when I first came to Holy Family. I felt like an outsider at my old church, where they pushed people away, saying they had enough people in their ministries. At Holy Family, we try to get people involved. I’m sorry that I’m getting emotional, but I love the inclusiveness of our Independent Catholic Church!”

Rebecca Saenz
Cedar Creek, Texas

“What I love about being an Independent Catholic is that the Independent Catholic Church accepts me as I am. Despite everything that I’ve done in my life, it accepts me as me.”

Stephen Rodríguez
Austin, Texas

“I didn’t choose Independent Catholicism. It chose me. The Spirit pulled me here, and I met Father Mike and Father Ángel and everybody else, and I learned what it means to be an Independent Catholic.”

Rev. Marianne Melchiori
Ridgewood, New York

“I knew nothing about Independent Catholicism until the Holy Spirit shook me and called me in this direction, to minister in this way.”

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

"I love being able to be Christ in the world. From the moment I stepped into All Saints, I heard, 'You're here to love! You're here to serve!' That's what we're called to do!"

Sister Gillian Navarro
Brooklyn, New York

"What I love about our movement is the Eucharist. When I decided to leave the Roman Church, I couldn't find the Eucharist in the same way that I have here in Independent Catholicism."

Most Rev. William Cavins
Winter Park, Florida

"I speak with so many of my friends who are clergy in the mainline churches, and they're so miserable. It's sad. After 20 or 30 years of ministry, they're stuck. Many of them are suffering inside, and many don't have the courage to leave. When I hear Mother Karen here, with her courage to leave religious life after nearly 30 years...that takes courage! As a married priest with children, I experience the full joy of ministry, as well as the real joy of family life. We really need to pray for our sisters and brothers of the mainline churches, who are sad and depressed and suffering – who haven't taken the leap to this beautiful thing we call Independent Catholicism. The ability to be a full-time father, a full-time worker in the secular world, and a full-time priest: Those are all joys!"

Rev. Mike López
Ridgewood, New York

"I don't want to be a downer, but I had a similar experience. When I was a young priest in the Roman Church, an old priest sat me down in his office and said to me, 'If you're ever going to leave, leave now. Don't wait until you get to be my age and you don't have any other option!' Many of our sisters and brothers feel that they don't have options. For that reason, I so greatly admire those who have stepped out of other churches and faith traditions and into our Independent Catholic tradition. For me, one of the things I most love about the Independent Catholic movement is seeing the Spirit alive and at work in incredible ways: in parish ministries, food pantries, chaplaincies, and so many other good works. At Holy Family, our parish motto is:

“Loving. Catholic. Inclusive. Doing It Jesus’ Way.” Jesus condemned the Shammaite Pharisees for their pomp and rigidity and for placing themselves among others. Rather than judge or exclude others, he reached out to the woman at the well, he healed lepers and dined with prostitutes and tax collectors, and he told stories of heroic Samaritans—those who were harshly criticized and condemned for their religious practices. There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus would more readily recognize his teachings in our inclusive spirit, than in the exclusion and judgment practiced by other churches. That’s certainly one of the things I love about the radically-inclusive Catholicism that we live!’

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias
Austin, Texas

“I learned about Independent Catholicism through a priest who later became an Independent Catholic bishop in Chicago. When he mentioned it, I thought, “Independent Catholicism? What is that all about?” It was frightening to realize that I couldn’t see beyond the Roman Catholic exclusivity in which I was grounded. That’s how I was exposed to what we’re all about—and it won me over. It really drew me to Independent Catholicism, and I feel that I’m home. I’m now able to respond to the Spirit in an authentic way without having to settle for less than an authentic, inclusive Catholicism.”

Most Rev. Thomas E. Abel
Las Vegas, Nevada

“I’m hearing that one of the distinguishing traits of our movement is our inclusivity, in contrast to the exclusivity of other churches. Perhaps it’s time for us to rebrand ourselves: not as “Independent Catholics,” but as “Inclusive Catholics.” At Holy Family, I take great pride and joy in referring to ourselves as “Austin’s only *inclusive* Catholic community.” I believe it with every fiber of my being. Austin has all sorts of Catholic communities, but, of all those communities, only one is truly inclusive of all God’s people. In a world of 1.2 billion ordinary Catholics, we truly are extraordinary, inclusive Catholics!”

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias
Austin, Texas

The 21st-century Phoebe Experience

Part 1

The epistolary literature of Saint Paul indicates that women were an essential element of the early Church. Paul even named a deaconess, Phoebe, who was entrusted with carrying his message to the church in Rome (Rom. 16:1). Though women were definitively excluded from the ordained ministries of the Western Church at the Second Council of Orange in 529 A.D., Inclusive Catholicism seeks to restore them to the ministries that rightfully belong to them and that were enjoyed by them for a quarter of our Christian history. As part of this gathering, we invited our sisters to share of their experiences in Inclusive Catholicism.

Mother Annie Watson
Saint Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church
Saint Louis, Missouri

When I was a young girl, my cousin Lisa and I celebrated “mass” on the front porch of my century-old home. We invited only girls, no boys. We passed out oyster crackers and blessed each other. We recited the Hail Mary in unison — our very, very favorite prayer. If you didn’t bring your chapel veil, Lisa gave you a shameful look, and you got a Kleenex on your head!

My sweet, Italian mother stood at the doorway and said, “You, Andrea Marie Elizabeth, were destined in my womb to be a nun — but, my dear child, you will *never* be a priest.” So it came to be that, following in the footsteps of many of my aunts and a few of my cousins, I entered the order of the Sisters of Mercy, where I spent seven and a half years. I was a missionary nun, working in orphanages in Oaxaca, Mexico; in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; in Bondo Kenya; in Medjugorje, Bosnia; in Harlem; and then back to Chicago.

During my work as a nun, I couldn’t help but feel that we, women, were marginalized by the “good ol’ boys” always in control. The hierarchy was “here to stay.” Deep down, I wanted to be a priest, but that dream would never be within my grasp in the Roman Catholic Church, even though I had a love for God and the Church and an endless desire to serve — as strong as any man’s, and maybe even stronger. When I was a girl, Jesus called me. I always came back to the story of Jesus calling men *and women* to be disciples (Lk. 8:1-3).

I left my order, but I vowed to continue to serve my church. I became a special education teacher for over 25 years. I received a master of psychology, with an emphasis on family therapy and behavior modification. I worked as a case manager and advocate for the state of Kentucky. All the while, I was serving my local parish in the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky: as a pastoral associate, eucharistic minister, and Confirmation teacher. The desire to become a priest lingered.

In 2012, my husband, Dr. Jimmy Watson, a United Church of Christ pastor, came home and announced that his church, St. Andrew's in Louisville, Kentucky, was going to host the ordination of a Roman Catholic Womanpriest. I was intrigued, to say the least. I met Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan, a Roman Catholic Womanpriest, and Janice Sevre-Duszynska. I also spoke with Father Roy Bourgeois, who was excommunicated by Pope Benedict XVI for attending Janice Sevre-Duszynska's ordination in Lexington, Kentucky. What a perfect storm: After years of discrimination and being denied the basic human right of being a spiritual equal before God, it was my time to serve in priestly ministry!

After additional course work, I realized my long-awaited dream and was ordained a priest in the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement in 2015. I serve two parishes: a parish in Indianapolis with a bunch of hardcore feminists, then Bloomington Inclusive Community on the campus of Indiana University, a home for LGBTQ+ students to worship freely and without judgment.

Then my story drastically changed. Divine providence brought me to Father Mark Božek, and, after our first meeting, I knew that St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church was where I was supposed to be. I became the first woman priest at St. Stan's, a church that, for over 100 years, maintained the male hierarchy of the Roman Catholic tradition.

I've learned a lot over six years at St. Stan's. The first years were not so easy, as I struggled to find my footing. A lot of women reminded me that I am a woman. Father Marek and Deacon Donna told me it would all work out, and it did.

Over the years, I have touched the hearts of the many people I've served. I've grown in my ministry. I'm the assistant priest to a wonderful mentor and friend, Father Mark. I am the religious education coordinator. I am a spiritual director and retreat leader, both within St. Stan's and to other denominations. This chapter will

end in three years, when my husband retires from ministry, and we'll move back to Texas.

The world is different now for 21st-century Phoebe, for women priests. God is beyond gender. As Paul said, "There is neither male nor female: In Jesus Christ, you are one" (Gal. 3:28). As Catholics, we are taught about the sacredness of our conscience, and Pope Francis says that we must always be guided by the primacy of conscience. We know that we can no longer discriminate against women, the LGBTQ+ community, and those who live on the fringe. We need to empower one another to truly become inclusive Independent Catholic communities, a church of equals! We must transform Catholicism, maintaining tradition while embracing *all* people. At their best, our churches should become spacious gardens of freedom, love and grace—spaces for people to grow spiritually, to relate to God, to work out their salvation. In other words, to evolve in their practice of love.

We have all committed ourselves to love and to the service of God. Love refuses to tally the cost, but came to be with us, to heal us. I took a vow at my ordination, that I will always do one thing: I will always point to God and say one simple word: Love! Love must be our constant. Love will sustain us always. In John 13:34, Jesus says: "I give you a new commandment: Love one another! Just as I loved you, you, also, should love one another." Love isn't some abstract concept. It's something tangible that we feel over and over in our lives.

I offer all my soul, energy, heart, mind and body to the service of God, knowing that yesterday was a stepping stone, today is a new beginning, and tomorrow is limitless possibility. Today is important: You are exchanging a day in your life for it! When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever and in its place will be something that you have left behind. Let it always be something good. Let it always be love!

The Present State of Inclusive Catholicism at the Dawn of 2022

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias
Holy Family Catholic Church
Austin, Texas

As we begin our time together, let's reflect on who we are and where we, as a movement, find ourselves at the end of 2021.

I admit outright that this presentation is largely shaped by my own perceptions of our movement and my experiences within it. Those of you who served in this movement longer than I could no doubt add great richness to this presentation.

My Experience with Catholicism and with Autocephalous Catholicism

I have always self-identified as Catholic. My parents raised me in the old rectory beside a Roman Catholic church in the middle of the corn fields of Ohio. My father trained the altar servers in the parish, so it was inevitable that I would become an altar server. My mother was the religious education coordinator, so I inevitably accompanied her to religious bookstores and assisted her in small ways to prepare for her classes. After three years of piano and organ lessons, it was also inevitable that I would spend the next six years of my adolescence playing the organ at church. I am inevitably Catholic.

At the invitation of Father Kevin Przybylski, a Conventual Franciscan Friar at that time, I joined the friars straight out of high school. I spent more than 15 tremendous years with them. I also served as a Roman Catholic priest for over ten years. I have no regrets.

The then-bishop of Austin, Gregory Aymond, ordained me in 2001 and greatly empowered me. I will forever be indebted to him. When I was 33, he named me president of his Cristo Rey Network high school. Four years later, he named me pastor of what we grew to be Austin's largest Spanish-language community. He was appointed archbishop of New Orleans, and his successor, appointed by Papa Ratzinger, was a bad fit for my progressive spirit, ultimately forcing me, in a public clash, to choose between the immigrant community I

served and his hardline stances on women's reproductive health. The vicar general of the diocese—later named a bishop by Papa Ratzinger—phoned me, expressing his bishop's wish that I disinvite a U.S. congressman whom I was preparing to welcome to the parish as a speaker on comprehensive immigration reform. The reason for the desired disinvitation: the congressman's stance on a singular issue. Within weeks, I made headlines again, this time for the pastoral message that I preached during the funeral of a young woman and her mother—both murdered by the father of the young lady's lover, when he discovered that his daughter was a lesbian. A friend who read the article stated quite bluntly, "Your days in the Roman Catholic Church are numbered."

That friend, Alberto García, who took over 120,000 photos for our parish newspaper, invited me to breakfast one morning and made a simple ask: His wife, Blanca, wanted me to bring the American Catholic Church to Austin.

"The what?"

In ten years of seminary education and ten years of priestly ministry within the Roman Church, I never once heard of Old Catholicism, Independent Catholicism, or the Independent Sacramental Movement. Never once. I enjoyed a rather progressive, post-Vatican II theological education, but I never once heard of y'all! If I were honest, I persecuted you. As a pastor, I once received the report of a former Roman Catholic priest from Mexico who was performing baptisms in a garage in Austin. I sent a staff member "undercover," and he returned with information and a self-published catechism in Spanish. I alerted the media, which allowed me to righteously explain on *Univisión* what a "real" baptismal certificate looks like. I was a Pharisee, and I protected and defended my religious institution.

Alberto took out his iPad and showed me the website of an Inclusive Catholic jurisdiction: the American Catholic Church in the United States (ACCUS). I saw the photos of three former Conventual Franciscan Friars. I didn't know that these friars had left the Roman Church, and I knew nothing about this organization of which they were now part. I was intrigued.

After a 45-minute conversation with then-Archbishop Lawrence Harms of the ACCUS, he concluded, "You sound more American Catholic than Roman Catholic." He was right: I was the "ugly

duckling,” an Inclusive Catholic with a post-Vatican II vision of Church in a church now bent on a “reform of the reform.” One of my seminary professors, Father Kenneth Himes, once warned my class: “If you want to be part of the Mickey Mouse Club, you have to sing the Mickey Mouse Song. You can’t be part of the Mickey Mouse Club and sing the Donald Duck Song.” Archbishop Harms led me to see that the “Donald Duck Song” that I sang was more fitting with his inclusive expression of Catholicism.

Holy Family and the American Catholic Church (2012-2018)

I still knew nothing of Autocephalous Catholicism—one of my preferred terms for Independent Catholicism, since the term doesn’t refer to other entities from which we are “independent.” I knew nothing of the Independent Sacramental Movement, but I now knew the American Catholic Church in the United States. As a result, we brought to birth a new community that, to distinguish us from local Roman Catholic communities, we branded Holy Family American Catholic Church. I quickly set myself to the task of composing Frequently Asked Questions, to respond to the questions of who we are and what we believe.

We focused on building Holy Family, and I’ll be honest: I wasn’t yet thinking about y’all. In 2014, we ordained to the diaconate Roy Gómez, the co-founder of our community, who possessed some 25 years of ministerial experience in the Roman Church. In 2015, Father Libardo Rocha, a Roman Catholic priest, came to us with nearly 25 years of experience as a chaplain, postulator of saints, and professor at a pontifical university in Rome. That year, we ordained Father Roy Gómez, as well as Father Cleofas María Cruz, who served as a Roman Catholic deacon for more than 20 years. We also ordained two deacons who participated in our formation program for over two years: Deacon John “Canica” Limón and Deacon Angelita Mendoza-Waterhouse. Now with three priests and two deacons, I wanted to connect them with other clergy in parish ministries like ours.

Holy Family and the Independent Catholic Movement in 2018

2018 was a turning point for Holy Family Catholic Church. Parishioners were asking where they could attend mass while traveling, and I wasn’t satisfied with the response of our bishop: “Tell them to attend a Roman Catholic parish.” I assembled a spreadsheet

of 1,586 clergy of the Independent Sacramental Movement, dividing them into the “buckets” of Independent Catholic, Independent Orthodox, Independent Anglican/Episcopalian, and other Christians possessing apostolic succession. That spreadsheet contained 216 eucharistic communities and 64 jurisdictions. It was a first attempt to answer the question of where our parishioners could celebrate the eucharist with communities like ours outside of Austin.

In May 2018, we flew in Father Lawman Chibundi of Rabbouni Catholic Community in Louisville, Kentucky, who led us in a spiritual retreat. I invited our Holy Family clergy to be ambassadors to other jurisdictions. We flew Deacon Angelita to the annual convocation of the Ascension Alliance in New Mexico, and we flew Father Libardo to connect with Bishop Armando Leyva and his Spanish-speaking clergy of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion’s California Diocese. I traveled to Maryland for the annual convocation of the American National Catholic Church. We also made plans to fly Father Libardo and Deacon Angelita to Louisville, for the tenth anniversary celebration of Rabbouni in 2019.

In 2018, we suffered great disillusionment: We hosted a celebration of Father Libardo’s silver jubilee of priestly ordination. In the Roman Church, we celebrated such occasions in grand style. We offered to cover travel expenses for the clergy of our jurisdiction who wished to join us for the celebration, and we were saddened that only the archbishop and one priest took us up on the offer. For over six years, we were the only parish community in the jurisdiction. There was not a single attempt to bring clergy together. Now, it seemed, we found ourselves among clergy with little interest in connecting with others. After flying the bishop to Austin 20 times over six years, we had the difficult conversation in October 2018 to bring to an end his formal relationship with our parish, and Holy Family has been truly autocephalous ever since.

I continued learning about our movement, and I started improving the Wikipedia pages for Independent Catholicism, Dominique-Marie Varlet, and the archbishops of Utrecht in 2018, adding English pages for all Old Catholic bishops.

Independent Catholic Activity in 2019

In January 2019, we unsuccessfully attempted an app with the geolocations of Independent Catholic clergy and eucharistic

communities. In April 2019, I visited Saint Miriam Parish in Flourtown, Pennsylvania and was impressed with the vibrancy of that “Old Catholic” community. In May 2019, we flew in Bishop Armando Leyva of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, to assist our parish celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation.

In July 2019, I attended the annual one-week summer school in Old Catholic Theology at Utrecht University, where I met Father Peter-Ben Smit, the director of the program, in addition to various clergy from the U.S., Europe, Philippines, Brazil, and the Czech Republic. Greatly inspired by that event, I immediately set myself to the task of planning “Utrecht Sweet Utrecht,” an interjurisdictional gathering for Old/Independent Catholic clergy (the term that we began to use, to respect the “Old Catholic” self-identity of some clergy). We planned the event for October 24-27, 2019 at Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin, Texas, and we spread word to over 800 Old/Independent clergy through publicly-available email addresses on the internet. Bishop Francis Krebs of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion responded with enthusiasm for the idea and brought Bishop Raphael Adams and Bishop Rosemary Ananis into our planning efforts. 37 people joined that gathering, and its proceedings were published in book form, as *A New Way of Being Catholic*. Incidentally, Bishop Frank had been planning a gathering of Old/Independent Catholic bishops with representatives of the Episcopal Church the same week in Saint Louis, Missouri, so he and others directly traveled to Austin from that event.

In 2019, we published our first four books in Austin: *A Bibliography of Old Catholic & Independent Catholic Works*, an Old/Independent Catholic ordo titled *Extraordinary Celebrations, Extraordinary Growth*, and a translated work by Father Libardo: *Island & Bridges: Three Essays & an Interview on Independent Catholicism in the United States*, and *Islas y puentes: Tres ensayos y una entrevista sobre el Catolicismo Independiente en los Estados Unidos*.

Old/Independent Catholic Activity in 2020

For six months, before pandemic interest in Zoom, participants of “Utrecht Sweet Utrecht” gathered for a monthly conference call to continue building relationships. Springing from Father Mike López’s suggestion that we form a confederation, we piloted the acronym OICCUS—the Old/Independent Catholic Confederation of the U.S.—

soon discovering, though, that our focus should be on continued relationship building, rather than on the creation of a meta-organization. Together, we began to plan our second interjurisdictional gathering of Old/Independent Catholic clergy and laity, which we planned to host after the conclusion of the biannual synod of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion in the fall of 2020. Bishop John Plummer agreed to keynote the experience.

Then came COVID-19. By mid-March, many U.S. churches were temporarily closing. Within four weeks of the onset of the pandemic, we hosted our first Zoom conversation for Old/Independent Catholic clergy and laity, to check in with one another amid the pandemic. 32 clergy attended. Our next two biweekly conversations focused on the challenging transition to virtual liturgies. 80 people attended six Zoom gatherings, with an average of 23 people at each. Our planning team at the time consisted of Father Scott Carter, Bishop Cathy Chalmers and Reverend Trish Sullivan Vanni, all participants in our “Utrecht Sweet Utrecht” experience.

I piloted a YouTube interview series called “Extraordinary Catholics,” with a Facebook group of the same name. Largely modeled on “Sacramental Whine,” which interviewed ISM clergy and highlighted a number of fringe voices in the larger movement of which we are part, the series was intended to highlight Old/Independent Catholic clergy, in the same way that Bishop David Oliver Kling highlighted ISM clergy and other voices.

I also planned an Old/Independent Catholic Virtual Summer School, which we hosted through GoToWebinar on July 6-17, 2020. 106 people registered for the experience. The faculty included Bishop Raphael Adams, Father Marek Bożek, Father Robert Caruso, Bishop Theodore Feldmann, Bishop David Oliver Kling, Bishop Frank Krebs and Father Peter-Ben Smit. It was brought to our attention that the faculty was comprised solely of White men, so we enhanced the diversity of the experience with a panel on the experience of women within Old/Independent Catholicism, a conversation with Bishop Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, panels on ministry in Latino and African-American contexts, and presentations on the present state of Independent Catholicism in Brazil, the Czech Republic, the Philippines, and Poland.

In 2020, we published another four books: the proceedings of “Utrecht Sweet Utrecht,” *A New Way of Being Catholic*; our work for

World Mission Sunday, *Aglipayan: The Flourishing of Independent Catholicism in the Philippines*; our 2021 ordo, *Celebrations that Stick*; and a collection of Father Roy Gómez's homilies, *Love God & Love Others*.

Old/Independent Catholic Activity in 2021

The Texas winter storm of February 2021 allowed us in Austin to create ISMDB 3.0, the third iteration of a database of ISM clergy. The project was admittedly born of frustration: I had submitted my information three times to the second iteration of an ISM clergy database, independentmovement.us, and never saw it published. ISMDB 2.0 contained only 300 entries, with greatly-outdated information—including clergy who were deceased for years. Our new database contains over 2,000 clergy, and, because it is a wiki, it allows all clergy and laity to assist with editing and updating.

In 2021, we created extraordinarycatholics.faith as a clearinghouse for Independent Catholic resources. We also continued our semimonthly Zoom conversations for Independent Catholic clergy and laity. Attendance wasn't kept for the first seven gatherings. The subsequent 11 gatherings attracted 42 people, with an average of 10 people attending each.

Because *Convergent Streams*, previously self-branded as "the premier ISM magazine," ceased publication in April 2020, in May 2021 we piloted the publication of *Extraordinary Catholics*, a 20-page, bilingual (English/Spanish), bimonthly magazine with articles of interest to Independent Catholic clergy and laity. We have published four issues to date. The magazine is published digitally, with over 400 hard copies distributed in eucharistic communities.

In late July, I initiated a "hive mind" think tank series, to bring together various voices on Independent Catholic issues. 46 people have participated in our first ten think tanks, with an average of 15 clergy in each conversation. The most popular conversations—on the role of Independent Catholic bishops and on how to grow local communities—attracted 23 participants. Other themes have included unity and independence, things we can agree on, Independent Catholic celebrations and clerical dress, patriarchy, sacramental justice, and the future of Independent Catholicism.

In 2021, we have published four more Independent Catholic books to date: a first volume of transcripts from Bishop David Oliver Kling's podcast, "Sacramental Whine"; English and Spanish editions of *Father*

Roy's Rosary, and our 2022 ordo, Extraordinary Celebrations for Extraordinary Catholics: Ideas for Autocephalous Catholic Communities during the Year of Luke 2022.

Most recently, only last week, Bishop Frank Krebs convened the Catholic Bishops Forum for its second-ever gathering in Saint Louis, Missouri. A photo posted to social media showed 11 clergy gathered around an altar. Bishop Frank reports that ten bishops signed an agreement comprised of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, with a fifth point on synodality. They self-identify as “bishops of (canonically- and administratively-independent) Catholic churches,” and they have agreed to gather for an in-person gathering on an annual basis and to virtually gather on a quarterly basis. Their executive committee will convene on a bimonthly basis.

Reflections on the Past Ten Years

Historically, most activity and organization within our movement have occurred at the local and jurisdictional levels. Since 2019, we have seen increasing activity, relationship-building, and organization at the interjurisdictional level. The Catholic Bishops Forum convened for the second time last week, and this is our second interjurisdictional gathering as well.

The apparent hunger of clergy to learn about our movement was expressed when over 100 people attended our 2020 virtual summer school. The thirst for relationship with others is witnessed every time clergy remain online after our Zoom events, often for 30 to 150 minutes at a time.

The past ten years have seen an evolution in our self-identity, and we now have a clearer picture of the movement of which we are part. We have seen an increase in resources for clergy and laity, and we have a better understanding of who we are, of our strengths and weaknesses, and of the opportunities and threats that surround us. Finally, a clearer vision of our future is emerging, allowing us all to consider our vision and commitment with respect to our future.

The Independent Sacramental Movement at the Dawn of 2022

ISMDB 3.0 contains a directory of 2,209 “Independent Catholic” clergy worldwide from publicly-available data. It is found at: https://en.everybodywiki.com/Independent_Catholic_Clergy.

Unlike ISMDB 2.0, this database divides clergy into three statuses: 1,605 members of the clergy are apparently active, 272 are seemingly inactive, and 332 are contained in a necrology of deceased clergy. This wiki, which can be updated by anyone, does not include clergy from such large bodies as the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches, Roman Catholic Womenpriests, or the Society of St. Pius X.

ISMDB 3.0 shares the location of 1,272 active and inactive clergy. 901 deacons, priests and bishops are found in the United States, with an additional two clergy in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico. Independent Catholic clergy are currently found in all U.S. states.

The **“Big 12” states for Independent Catholic clergy** (with number of clergy and state population rank in parentheses) are:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. California (114, #1) | 7. New Mexico (35, #37) |
| 2. Florida (93, #3) | 8. Colorado (33, #21) |
| 3. New York (56, #4) | 9. Massachusetts (33, #15) |
| 4. Texas (56, #2) | 10. Virginia (31, #12) |
| 5. Pennsylvania (38, #5) | 11. Illinois (26, #6) |
| 6. Arizona (37, #14) | 12. Washington (24, #13) |

One immediately sees that the top five states for Independent Catholic clergy coincide with the states with greatest populations.

When the numbers of clergy are compared to state populations, the *per capita* of U.S. clergy ranges from one member of the clergy per 60,143 people in New Mexico, to one clergy per 3.6 million people in Georgia and 4.9 million people in Alabama. The **“Big 12” states for *per capita* of Independent Catholic clergy to people** (with the clergy/people ratio in parentheses) are:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. New Mexico (1:60,143) | 7. Nevada (1:176,988) |
| 2. Rhode Island (1:88,459) | 8. Colorado (1:178,594) |
| 3. Vermont (1:124,650) | 9. Arizona (1:203,246) |
| 4. Delaware (1:165,055) | 10. Massachusetts (1:209,461) |
| 5. New Hampshire (1:171,525) | 11. Florida (1:235,963) |
| 6. West Virginia (1:176,785) | 12. Connecticut (1:236,854) |

After the outlier of New Mexico, six of the “Big 12” for *per capita* Independent Catholic clergy are New England states. The lowest per

capita of clergy are found in the “Bible Belt”: in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi. For perspective, Georgia possesses 15 times more people per member of clergy than #12 Connecticut.

At the dawn of 2022, ISMDB 3.0 indicates that Independent Catholicism is also found in 34 countries outside the U.S. The **“Big 12” (plus one) Independent Catholic countries outside the U.S.** (with the number of clergy in parentheses) are:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Philippines (195) | 8. Poland (9) |
| 2. Mexico (53) | 9. Australia (6) |
| 3. United Kingdom (36) | 10. France (6) |
| 4. Cameroon (22) | 11. Chile (5) |
| 5. Colombia (16) | 12. Ecuador (5) |
| 6. Argentina (11) | 13. Peru (5) |
| 7. Brazil (10) | |

Less than five Independent Catholic clergy have been found in the following countries: Belgium, Britannia, Burundi, Cuba, Finland, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, Haiti, Hong Kong, Italy, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Spain, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and West Indies.

These data lead us to conclude that Independent Catholicism is largely an American and Philippine phenomenon. The 2015 Philippine national census counted 756,000 Independent Catholics (listed as “Aglipayans,” that is, members of the Philippine Independent Church first led by former Roman Catholic priest Gregorio Aglipay y Labayán), down from 1,071,000 Aglipayans in the Philippine census of 2010. No such data are available for the number of Independent Catholics in the United States.

Available data do not substantiate various claims asserted by the human tendency to create numbers. The claim, for instance, that “there are over 1,000 Independent Catholic bishops in Florida” cannot be verified, nor can we substantiate such claims as the existence of more than one million Independent Catholics in the U.S. or 1,000 Independent Catholic jurisdictions worldwide.

Independent Catholic Jurisdictions at the Dawn of 2022

Many Independent Catholic clergy have come together with others to form jurisdictions. At our first interjurisdictional gathering in 2019,

I attempted to present the “Big 12” jurisdictions at that time. This ranking is difficult to create. The following numbers, unless otherwise noted, come from websites, and many Autocephalous Catholic websites are not regularly updated and do not clearly indicate the names or numbers of clergy. The following numbers do not include the Union of Utrecht, the Philippine Independent Church, Roman Catholic Womenpriests, or the Saint Pius X Society.

Since 2019, we have discovered three new jurisdictions that are now part of the “Big 12,” thus bumping three jurisdictions from our last iteration of the “Big 12”:

1. The Communion of Synodal Catholic Churches, which seems to no longer exist; it possessed 43 clergy in 2018, many of whom are now part of The Old Catholic Church Province of the U.S. (TOCCUSA),
2. The Reformed Catholic Church International, which possessed 18 clergy in 2018 and in 2021, and
3. The American Catholic Church in the U.S., which possessed 20 clergy in 2018 and 13 in 2021.

The “Big 12” jurisdictions are important insofar as their 432 clergy comprise 48% of known clergy in our movement. If these jurisdictions were to unite and collaborate, they would form a tremendous force in our movement!

The “Big 12” Autocephalous Catholic jurisdictions (with the numbers of U.S. & worldwide clergy, as found on jurisdiction websites, and change in membership since 2018 in parentheses) are:

1. **Independent Old Catholic Church (IOCC)**, led by Archbishop George H.W. LeMesurier (87/98*/new to Big 12) [*Bishop LeMesurier reports 125 clergy worldwide];
2. **Orthodox Old Roman Catholic Communion**, led by Archbishop Jerome Lloyd (40/110/new to Big 12);
3. **Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC)**, led by Presiding Bishop Francis Krebs (48*/48*/+53) [*Bishop Krebs reports 107 clergy];
4. **Ascension Alliance**, led by Presiding Archbishop Roberto Foss (51/56/+17);
5. **National Catholic Apostolic Church in the U.S.A.**, led by Presiding Bishop Michel Joseph Pugin (10*/33*/new to Big 12) [*Bishop Pugin reports 5 U.S. clergy & 45 worldwide];

6. **The Old Catholic Church Province of the U.S. (TOCCUSA)**, led by Bishops Rosemary Ananis, Robert Fuentes, Steve Rosczewski, Michael Scalzi & Marty Shanahan (35/35/+18);
7. **Progressive Catholic Church International (PCCI)**, led by Presiding Bishop Barry Frier (18*/24*/+8) [*Bishop Frier reports 21 U.S. clergy & 29 worldwide];
8. **American National Catholic Church (ANCC)**, led by Bishop George Lucey (22/22/-7);
- 9/10. **Liberal Catholic Church Province of the U.S.**, led by Archbishop William S.H. Downey (21/21/-17);
- 9/10. **Old Catholic Churches International (OCCI)**, led by Presiding Bishop Gregory Godsey (19/21/+1);
- 11/12. **Catholic Apostolic Church in North America (CACINA)**, led by Presiding Bishop Anthony Santore (19/19/-11); and
- 11/12. **Old Catholic Confederation**, led by Primate & Archbishop Craig John Neumann de Paulo (19/19/-1).

This week, I reached out to all bishops of the “Big 12.” To provide a glimpse into the challenges of uniting these bishops, their responses might be summarized as follows:

- The ECC and Ascension Alliance expressed an openness to collaboration.
- The IOCC, PCCI and National Catholic Apostolic Church in the U.S.A. shared numbers but have not yet expressed an interest in collaborating.
- Leadership of the OCCI view our efforts to build bridges as money-making and self-aggrandizing and refuses to collaborate in anything in which a certain bishop is involved, but seems open to ongoing conversations.
- No response was received from the Orthodox Old Roman Catholic Communion, TOCCUSA, ANCC, CACINA, the Old Catholic Confederation, or the Liberal Catholic Church Province of the U.S. The Liberal Catholic Church responded in the past that it is not interested in collaboration with other jurisdictions.

Bishop Francis Krebs shared more detailed numbers for his jurisdiction, the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), which shed some light on the current state of Independent Catholicism in one large jurisdiction. He noted that, whereas his jurisdiction’s website lists 48 clergy, the ECC contained 107 clergy in 2020. This may suggest

that our count of Autocephalous Catholic clergy is greatly undercounted due to websites not showing all clergy and/or not being updated. In 2020, the ECC possessed 29 communities and four missions. The jurisdiction also enjoyed full communion with three priests and one deacon in Poland. The ECC is led by six bishops, three of whom are women. In 2020, 10 of 13 deacons were women, 28% of ECC priests were women, and 57% of the jurisdiction's pastors were women. This suggests that some jurisdictions are bringing greater balance to the traditional, male-only, Roman Catholic model of clergy.

Autocephalous Catholic Communities

A 2020 internet search revealed 85 Independent Catholic communities in the U.S. that were listed as "businesses" on Google. When faith communities are large enough to host regular eucharistic celebrations in spaces outside of homes, they naturally look for free means, like Google, to promote their communities and liturgies. A map of these 85 communities confirms previous data on the presence of Independent Catholic clergy in the most populated states and in New England.



*85 Autocephalous Catholic communities
in the U.S. listed as "businesses" on Google.*

To place the number of U.S. Autocephalous Catholic communities in context, the Philippine Independent Church possesses 140 churches (60% more) listed as "businesses" on Google in a land mass 1/32 the size of the United States. This suggests that, despite their much larger number, Independent Catholic clergy in the U.S. possess relatively few eucharistic communities of significant size that are ready to advertise their ministry to God's people.

Independent Catholic Social Media

At the dawn of 2022, Facebook seems the most popular platform for communication within our movement in the English-speaking world. Many clergy and various jurisdictions and communities are found on Facebook.

Facebook “likes” are one measure of the most popular Independent Catholic Facebook groups at present. The **“Big 12” of interjurisdictional Independent Catholic Facebook pages and groups** (with the numbers of Facebook “likes” or members and the name(s) of group moderators) are:

1. **Independent Catholicism** (1,824 likes)
2. **Extraordinary Catholics** (585 members, Jayme Mathias)
3. **Independent Catholic Communities** (544 members, Ricardo Rivera)
4. **Independent Clergy Support Group** (396 members, Gordon Nicely)
5. **Independent Sacramental Movement** (322 members, Rob Suttie)
6. **Advocates for Welcoming Congregations** (133 members, Richard Roy)
7. **Old Catholics in the United States of America** (129 members, Bishop Charles, Daniel McKenney, Bernard Benedict, Solomon Sims, Jr.)
8. **Blooming Seeds** (26 members, Gus Howard Thompson, David Strong)
9. **Conference of Catholic Communities** (8 members, Chris Tobin)

One immediately notes that there are not yet 12 interjurisdictional Independent Catholic Facebook groups or pages in existence at present. All other Facebook groups and pages are for Independent Catholic jurisdictions, communities and individuals.

Facebook “likes” are another measure of a jurisdiction’s significance, impact or reach. The **“Big 12” of Autocephalous Catholic jurisdictions** on Facebook (with the numbers of Facebook “likes”) are:

1. **The Liberal Catholic Church U.S.A.** (3,353)
2. **ECC Franciscans of Reconciliation** (3,041)
3. **Old Catholic Church of the Americas** (2,878)
4. **American National Catholic Church** (2,425)
5. **Old Catholic Confederation** (2,290)
6. **Reformed Catholic Church International** (2,224)
7. **National Catholic Church of America** (2,220)
8. **Old Catholic Diocese of Napa** (2,030)

9. **Liberal Catholic Church International** (1,713)
10. **United Catholic Communities of the Americas** (1,704)
11. **Ecumenical Catholic Communion** (1,624)
12. **Catholic Church of America** (1,534)

Facebook “likes” are also a measure of a ministry’s size, impact or reach. **The Independent Catholic eucharistic communities and ministries with 1,000+ Facebook “likes” are:**

1. **Saint Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church**, Saint Louis, Missouri (5,232 likes)
2. **Holy Family Catholic Church**, Austin, Texas (3,710 likes)
3. **Christ the Good Shepherd Independent Catholic Community**, Ferndale, Michigan (3,595 likes)
4. **Holy Spirit American National Catholic Church**, Montandon, Pennsylvania (2,819 likes)
5. **Oratory of Saint Catherine of Siena**, Beverly, Massachusetts (2,808 likes)
6. **Saint Teresa of Avila Catholic Church**, Phoenix, Arizona (2,505 likes)
7. **Sacred Heart Mission/Old Catholic Shrine of the Sacred Heart**, Ruffin, North Carolina (2,413 likes)
8. **Our Lady Queen of Angels Liberal Catholic Church**, Río Rancho, New Mexico (2,412 likes)
9. **Christ the King Old Catholic Church**, Albuquerque, New Mexico (2,272 likes)
10. **Saint Michael the Archangel Parish**, Tucson, Arizona (2,246 likes)
11. **The Church of Antioch at Santa Fe**, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2,040 likes)
12. **Saint Clare Pastoral Center**, Mount Vernon, Washington (1,982 likes)
13. **Pilgrim Chapel of Contemplative Conscience**, Ashland, Oregon (1,934 likes)
14. **Saint Gabriel & All Angels Church**, Fairfield, Iowa (1,976 likes)
15. **Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Apostolic Church**, Virginia Beach, Virginia (1,885 likes)

16. **Saint Francis of Assisi American National Catholic Church**, Glen Ridge, New Jersey (1,814 likes)
17. **San Damiano Ecumenical Catholic Church**, Little Rock, Arkansas (1,642 likes)
18. **Saint Victor's Old Catholic Church**, Vallejo, California (1,603 likes)
19. **Oratory of St. Michael the Archangel**, Fayetteville, Arkansas (1,594 likes)
20. **The Church of the Virgin Mary of the Life Giving Fountain**, Mount Clemens, Michigan (1,403 likes)
21. **Holy Trinity National Catholic Church**, Albany, New York (1,378 likes)
22. **Santo Niño Catholic Church**, Las Vegas, Nevada (1,374 likes)
23. **Christ the King Independent Catholic Church**, Kansas City, Missouri (1,338 likes)
24. **Saint Anne's Old Roman Catholic Mission**, Chicago, Illinois (1,329 likes)
25. **Holy Family Old Catholic Church**, Fairfield, California (1,310 likes)
26. **Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity**, Long Beach, California (1,292 likes)
27. **Saint Matthew Ecumenical Catholic Church**, Orange, California (1,285 likes)
28. **Holy Family Old Catholic Church**, McMinnville, Oregon (1,259 likes)
29. **Saint Miriam Pro Cathedral Parish**, Flourtown, Pennsylvania (1,228 likes)
30. **Church of Holy Wisdom Ecumenical Catholic Communion**, Indio, California (1,196 likes)
31. **Saint Nicholas Sanctuary**, Longview, Texas (1,188 likes)
32. **Christ the Servant Catholic Church**, Tampa, Florida (1,167 likes)
33. **Holy Family American National Catholic Church**, Las Cruces, New Mexico (1,139 likes)
34. **Rabbouni Catholic Community**, Louisville, Kentucky (1,040 likes)

35. **Saint Joseph Cupertino Independent Catholic Church**, Fall River Massachusetts (1,023 likes)
36. **Saint Cecilia Catholic Community**, Palm Springs, California (1,104 likes)
37. **Saint Aelred Mission Parish**, Aberdeen Township, New Jersey (1,001 likes)

Many communities and jurisdictions have websites, though it is often difficult to assess the vibrancy of a community or ministry based on the information shared on websites.

Some communities and jurisdictions possess other social media, like YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, and some clergy are found on LinkedIn, but no assessment has been made to date of such sites.

Inclusive Catholic Podcasts

Though podcasts have become a popular means of receiving information by those younger than 55, only three known podcasts are produced at present by Autocephalous Catholic clergy and laity:

- **“Sacramental Whine”** by Bishop David Oliver Kling – 103 episodes since October 2018 on the larger Independent Sacramental Movement of which Independent Catholicism is part, often spotlighting fringe voices within the movement. Two volumes of interviews are published in book form.
- **“The People’s Priest”** by Father Jerry Maynard – 50 brief “Monday Musings” since September 2020. The musings of Season 1 are published in book form.
- **“The Sonic Boomers”** by Pete & Maureen Tauriello, lay members of the American National Catholic Church, who sometimes speak of their choice to leave the Roman Church for their Independent Catholic community.

Inclusive Catholic Periodicals

Likely due to the necessary investment of time to publish a periodical, very few Independent Catholic periodicals have been published in recent history.

The longest-running publication, *The Call*, an online magazine of the American National Catholic Church (ANCC), has shared articles for ANCC clergy and laity since February 2014. All articles are

available online. Because the articles are unindexed, it is a laborious task to search the archives of *The Call* for past articles.

Bishop Gregory Godsey of Old Catholic Churches International published twenty issues of *Convergent Streams*, which he branded as “the premier ISM magazine.” The quarterly was self-published and sold through Amazon from 2013 to 2020. Godsey complains that he was often unable to sell even two copies of an issue, and he recently threatened legal action against an effort to catalog the titles of articles from his publication in a bibliography of Independent Catholic works. A number of *Convergent Streams* articles are now available online at no cost. *Convergent Streams* ceased publication in April 2020.

Beginning in May 2021, we have published four issues of *Extraordinary Catholics*, a bimonthly, interjurisdictional, bilingual (English/Spanish) magazine available online at no cost, with 400 hard copies distributed in eucharistic communities throughout the United States. Regular contributors represent a variety of jurisdictions, with some being truly autocephalous and not belonging to any jurisdiction: Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek, Rev. Kevin Daugherty, Rev. Mike Ellis, Very Rev. Ben Jansen, Rev. David Justin Lynch, Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias, Rev. Jerry Maynard, Rev. John Robison, and Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni.

Inclusive Catholic Authors

The corpus of Inclusive Catholic literature is quite small, and the market for works on Inclusive Catholicism is not of considerable size. Many past authors have not contributed to the corpus in some time, including Dr. Julie Byrne, Rev. Robert Caruso, Rev. Dr. John Mabry and Most Rev. John Plummer.

During the past five years, the most significant authors to the Inclusive Catholic corpus include:

- **Rev. Dr. Kerry Walters** – 45+ books on faith, saints, deism, U.S. history, retreats & reflections, three of which are award-winning;
- **Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias** – 12 books, including a bibliography, three ordos, event proceedings, devotions, and a history of the Philippine Independent Church;
- **Rev. Dr. Gianni Passarella** – 10 books in 3 languages on angels, scripture & reflections;

- **Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni** – 12 books on catechesis, liturgy, meditations & 12-step spirituality, translated into three languages;
- **Most Rev. Alan Kemp** – 9 books on prayer, liturgy, abuse & death/dying;
- **Most Rev. Serge Theriault** – 9 books on historical figures like Varlet & Vilatte;
- **Edward Jarvis** – 3 books on Duarte Costa, Thuc & the Catholic Apostolic Church of Brazil;
- **Rev. David Justin Lynch** – 2 catechisms;
- **Most Rev. David Oliver Kling** – 2 books on ISM podcast transcripts;
- **Rev. Libardo Rocha** – 1 book in two languages on the present state of Autocephalous Catholicism; preparing to publish his second book in two languages.

A Theoretical Framework for Independent Sacramental Movement Clergy

During the past ten years, we have advanced in our perception of ourselves and of our movement, but, because confusion persists, I offer a theoretical framework for Independent Catholicism and its place within the larger Independent Sacramental Movement (ISM). Some people confuse Independent Catholicism with the ISM, as if the two were synonymous. They are not. It is true that Independent Catholicism is part of the ISM, but the ISM is larger than Independent Catholicism and also contains such “buckets” or “concentric circles” within the ISM as Autocephalous Orthodox clergy, Independent Anglican and Episcopal clergy, and other non-Catholic clergy for whom apostolic succession is important. ISM clergy are often distinguished by such factors as the names of their communities, the titles they use of themselves, the manner in which they dress, the liturgies they celebrate, and the way in which they self-identify.

We might do well to think of Independent Catholicism and the ISM as concentric circles, as shown in the following diagram. While I’m not the best person to theorize about the composition of other ISM “buckets,” I’m certainly happy to address some of the overlapping “concentric circles” within Independent Catholicism. The largest group of Independent Catholic clergy by far might be placed in the “bucket” or the concentric circle of clergy who share a certain post-

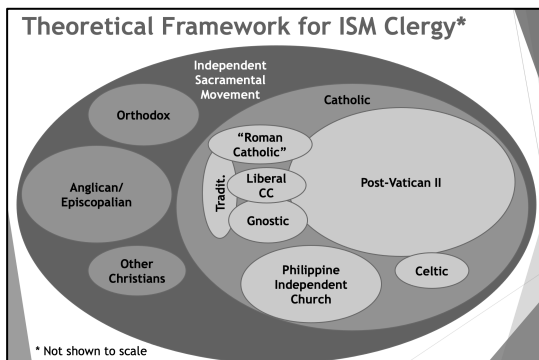
Vatican II view of the Church. When I speak of “Extraordinary Catholics” or “Inclusive Catholics,” I am referring to the clergy and laity of this subgroup.

There is some overlap among the “circles” within Independent Catholicism. Some members of the

Liberal Catholic Church tradition, for instance, also identify with post-Vatican II Inclusive Catholicism, as do some from Celtic and Gnostic movements within the ISM. Other members of these same groups flirt and/or self-identify with more traditionalist expressions of Independent Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Womenpriests and the Society of Saint Pius X are examples of groups that self-identify as reform movements within the Roman Catholic Church, though their self-governance and their lack of recognition by Rome might lead researchers to conclude that they are more rightly considered part of the Independent Catholic tradition than the Roman Catholic Church. Though we have no formal relationship with the Philippine Independent Church, it is an excellent example of a church that squarely falls within the Independent Catholic “circle.”

With this theoretical framework in mind, we do well to question some of the statements that we hear made about the ISM and about Independent Catholicism. In its gathering of perceptions on our movement, for instance, “Sacramental Whine” has recently shared the following mistaken notions. After each misperception, I share a note on the challenge presented by each.

- “What is the Independent Sacramental Movement? The quick definition is: Vatican-free Catholicism.” The challenge: Not all individuals and communities in the ISM self-identify as Catholic.
- “The [ISM] is a large association of Catholic and apostolic Christians.” It would be a stretch to suggest that we are united as an association. We also do well to question what it means to be an “apostolic Christian” in the 21st century.
- “[We are] Vatican-free Catholics....It’s the same sacramental worship, the same beliefs, the same devotions [that we have],



but we have a different quality of how we govern ourselves and see ourselves.” It would be a grave error to suggest that all persons within such a diverse movement possess the same beliefs and/or devotions. In many places, our modes of sacramental worship also differ.

- “The Independent Sacramental Movement is the anti-mainstream churches.” Many of us would hesitate to say that we are *against* mainstream churches.
- We “identify with the three most prominent Christian traditions of Anglican, Catholic and Orthodox.” Not all members of the ISM self-identify with these three traditions.
- “In a lot of Independent Sacramental communities, there’s an esoteric undertone to a lot of it.” Both instances of “a lot” are likely overstatements. After 10 years, I have yet to meet an ISM community with a largely esoteric undertone.

The Self-identity of Inclusive Catholic Clergy

We witness a continually-evolving self-identity within our movement. When I first came to the movement ten years ago, many clergy self-identified as Old Catholic. I’ll be the first to admit that I really had—and continue to have—a problem with this. While I deeply respect those who self-identify as part of the Old Catholic tradition, it seems that it would be just as disingenuous for me to refer to myself as Old Catholic, since I’m not part of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches, as it would be for me to refer to myself as Roman Catholic, since I’m not part of the Roman Catholic Church. I find it difficult to understand why a member of the clergy would want to create such confusion.

Beginning after our “Utrecht Sweet Utrecht” encounter in Austin in October 2019, I began referring to us as Old/Independent Catholics—to respect the “Old Catholic” self-identity of many, while trying to bring us together with those who, like my parish at that time, identify as Independent Catholic.

During an informal survey of the 106 participants in our 2020 Old/Independent Catholic summer school, we found that many clergy in our movement are now coalescing around the identity of Independent Catholic. Many voices criticize the descriptor “Independent,” since this word will always lead to the question:

“Independent of whom or what?” Personally, I like Bishop Francis Krebs’ answer to this question – that we are independent *of each other*, but, historically, this descriptor, “independent,” arose to manifest the independence of the members of our movement from the mainline Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches.

Numerous other descriptors have been offered for who we are: Apostolic Catholics, Ecumenical Catholics, Evangelical Catholics, Free Catholics, Liberal Catholics, Orthodox Catholics, Progressive Catholics, United Catholics, Reformed Catholics, American Catholics, National Catholics, Mexican Catholics and Hispanic Catholics, to name a few.

In his podcast, “Sacramental Whine,” Bishop David Oliver Kling has attempted to find new ways for referring to the ISM. One guest suggested the “United Sacramental Movement” – though it is difficult to understand how any unbiased person might describe such a fragmented movement of independent spirits as united. Another interesting insight comes from Bishop John Plummer, who states that “whatever else we may disagree about, we all believe earnestly in apostolic succession” – thus leading some to conclude that perhaps we might refer to our larger movement as the Apostolic Sacramental Movement. Like the Union of Utrecht, many of us possess an ecclesiology that bends toward the early (or apostolic) Church, but it also seems hubris for us to suggest that we are the embodiment of the early or apostolic Church in the 21st century!

Beginning with this month’s issue of *Extraordinary Catholics* magazine, I’ve begun referring to us as Autocephalous Catholics, to distance us a bit from the term “Independent Catholic” and to more accurately describe us as we are: “self-headed” or self-governing. All communities and jurisdictions in our movement are ultimately “self-headed” by pastors, bishops, archbishops, metropolitans, primates, etc. I’ll readily admit that the five-syllable word “autocephalous,” which is better understood in Orthodox circles, is not comprehended by most people in the pews.

We might do better to brand ourselves as Extraordinary Catholics, in contrast to the more than one billion “ordinary” [Roman] Catholics. There might be some room for addressing us as Inclusive Catholics, since, unlike Roman Catholic parishes, we are—or can be—truly inclusive. You can imagine, for instance, my pride in referring to Holy Family Sunday after Sunday as “Austin’s only inclusive Catholic

community"! That very phrase causes people to wonder: Is no other Catholic community in Austin inclusive? The answer, of course, by our standards of inclusion, is "no."

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats at the close of 2021

Strategic planning often involves the jargon of SWOT analyses — studies of an entity's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as of the external opportunities and threats that confront the organization. If we were to examine what we're doing now at the end of 2021, we could likely formulate various strengths and weaknesses of our movement, as well as various opportunities and threats facing us.

Some of our greatest strengths at this moment include the fact that we're bringing an expression of inclusive Catholicism to our world. We are more nimble, flexible and able to pick up the "castaways" who have "jumped ship" from larger, mainline churches. (Many of us know that experience, since we "jumped ship" ourselves!) We're touching lives, we're building relationships and bridges, and we're achieving greater visibility.

My list of our weaknesses at this time is quite long. According to Wikipedia's standards, our movement largely lacks "significance." Some clergy and communities in our movement have snuck onto Wikipedia, but many of the clergy and communities that I've attempted to enter into the wiki are kicked back for lack of "notability," which Wikipedia describes as "sufficient coverage in multiple, reliable sources independent of the subject." It's certainly nothing that I take personally, but I, with a wealth of newspaper articles and news stories written on me as a result of my longtime service in elected office to a district of 55,000 voters, have not yet achieved "notability" in Wikipedia's eyes. Hence, the growth of everybodywiki.com, which doesn't have the same standards regarding notability and is a resource for our movement.

Other weaknesses? We possess a lack of communities of significant size. We lack a true network that connects us. We lack unity and community, leaving many of us wondering how we might better bridge the many "islands" of this movement. We lack a unified identity. Many of us lack a sense of the history of our movement: who we are and what we do. We suffer from a lack of stability, permanence and legacy in this world. In many places, we ordain and consecrate

individuals who lack adequate formation and education to lead and serve God's people. To borrow a phrase from Father Libardo Rocha, for far too long we have not had our own "scriptures," our own writings on who we are and what we believe.

It might be alleged by some that, as harsh as it might sound, a lack of mental and/or social/emotional health resides in some corners of our movement, complicated by the egos of self-important, sheepless shepherds, who don't play well with others. The image I often turn to is that of Fred Flintstone dressed as the Grand Poobah of the Loyal Order of Water Buffalos. Some within our movement admittedly dress in peculiar ways, giving themselves exalted titles, like those of the character Poo-Bah in Gilbert and Sullivan's 1885 comic opera, "The Mikado," who proclaimed himself First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Chief Justice, Commander-in-Chief, Lord High Admiral, Archbishop, Lord Mayor and Lord High Everything Else. The seeking and bestowal of non-accredited "degrees" by members of our movement also makes it difficult for others to take us extremely seriously.

Fortunately, there are many forces outside of our movement that might work toward our advantage. These opportunities include the remarkable attrition of individuals from the Roman Catholic Church. Consider this: The Pew Research Center stated in 2018 that 13% of U.S. adults self-identity as former Roman Catholics! For every convert to its church, the U.S. Roman Catholic Church bleeds 6.5 former Roman Catholics. If former Roman Catholics in this nation were to unite, they would form the second-largest church in the U.S. after Roman Catholicism. Similarly, a 2011 study found that attrition from the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico had resulted in a net loss of 1,300 Mexicans who daily left the Roman Church from 2000 to 2010: That's some ten airplanes filled with Mexicans departing from the Roman Catholic Church every single day!

Other opportunities include the fact that many people, particularly former Roman Catholics, have yet to discover us. We live in a nation that esteems freedom, independence and religious tolerance. The upside of being such a small movement is that we have tremendous opportunity for growth. It has now been over eight years since Pope Francis became the symbolic head of the Roman Church: In many places, we provide the inclusive, merciful, compassionate expression of Catholicism that he has preached, and our present conversations

on synodality within our movement fit solidly with his hope for the same in the Roman Church.

Isaac Newton suggested that every action results in an equal and opposite reaction, so it is only natural that, as a result of our growth and increased visibility, we should experience increased forces that might work against us. While social media provides a forum for us to spread word of ourselves, it also provides plentiful opportunities for us to hear the (mis)perceptions others have about us. We also face innumerable persons who perpetuate misunderstandings about us and/or who paint us in unfavorable ways—including the characterization of our clergy as “dressing up and playing church.” When I worked with Father Roy Gómez ten years ago to co-found Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin, the Roman Catholic diocese quickly responded with a letter to all parishes suggesting that I had excommunicated myself and that my sacraments “might be gravely illicit or invalid” —an extremely disingenuous statement crafted to be misunderstood by laity and a single example of the way in which hierarchs of the Roman Church have attempted to undermine us.

The Holy Family Vision for and Contribution to Inclusive Catholicism in 2022

Having considered the present state of Inclusive Catholicism in the U.S. at the conclusion of 2021, we all do well to step back and consider our own commitment to the movement of which we are all part. Here, at Holy Family, we have considered the following elements as part of our contribution to the movement during the upcoming years:

1. **Semi-annual events for continuing education and formation of clergy.** Prior to the pandemic, we hosted at Holy Family semi-annual opportunities in May and October for the continuing education and formation of our clergy. In October 2019, we opened this event to all clergy in our movement. It became “Utrecht Sweet Utrecht,” our first interjurisdictional gathering of Old/Independent Catholic clergy. We will happily invite all who wish to join us for upcoming opportunities for continuing education and formation, with the next gathering scheduled for late May 2022. Come, join us for a few days in Austin!

2. Publications.

- A. ***Extraordinary Catholics* magazine.** We intend to continue publishing this work on a bimonthly basis, making it available digitally and with printed copies available for eucharistic communities.
 - B. **2021 “Saints in Sin City” proceedings of our gathering in Las Vegas.** We will publish these proceedings in book form.
 - C. **2021 Think Tanks.** As previously mentioned, we have now hosted ten “hive mind” think tank. We hope to publish the rich ideas of those conversations in book form.
 - D. **2020 virtual summer school proceedings.** We still hope to publish the proceedings of our 2020 virtual summer school, which resulted in over 400 pages of transcripts filled with rich content.
 - E. **Father Libardo’s next book.** We are helping Father Libardo Rocha, our former associate pastor who organized *San Judas Tadeo Iglesia Católica Independiente* in Niederwald, Texas, to publish his second book, both in English and Spanish. He hopes to finish this work before the end of 2021, and we are challenging him to author four books in 2022.
3. **Possible podcast or other social media (Tik Tok), in English and Spanish.** A university student who attends our weekly bible study at Holy Family is urging me to host a podcast. I am considering this possibility, to spotlight the Inclusive Catholic movement. Bishop David Oliver Kling currently hosts a podcast that highlights the larger ISM of which we are part. I sometimes hear feedback about the fringe voices highlighted there and fear that “Sacramental Whine” might lead a listener to incorrectly believe that our movement is largely comprised of such voices. I am hopeful that Father Libardo, who has the gifts for such an endeavor, might assist us with a podcast in Spanish.
 4. **Clergy database updates.** We continue to update ISMDB 3.0 (on Everybodywiki.com) with ISM news on social media. We are currently working to build a database of current Inclusive Catholic eucharistic communities.
 5. **Wikipedia articles.** We continue to dream of the possibility of improving and building Wikipedia pages on our movement and its clergy and communities. We know that many people

learn about our movement through online means, but this project is admittedly a bit farther down on our list of priorities.

6. **Strengthening of our movement.** We continue to ask ourselves how we might better support the strengthening and growth of our movement, better equipping clergy to grow their eucharistic communities.
7. **Convening the leaders of the “Big 12” jurisdictions.** As previously mentioned, the “Big 12” jurisdictions are estimated to contain nearly half of the clergy in our movement. I continue to dream of the possibilities of bringing their leaders together, so that they might build relationships with one another and explore how they might better work together. It remains intriguing to see the responses of leaders to this possibility. These lead me to wonder how viable this idea is.
8. **Convening the clergy of large parishes and ministries.** I have long wanted to connect my parish clergy with the clergy of other large Inclusive Catholic eucharistic communities. We have made attempts at this through opportunities like this conference. I’m imagining a regular virtual gathering for the sharing of ideas and best practices.
9. **Online platform for formation and education.** I continue to dream of an online platform for the formation of clergy and laity in our movement. I am not interested in creating yet another “diploma mill.” What I envision is a type of Coursera platform, where clergy can share opportunities for formation and education that meet certain academic standards.
10. **Scholarly research on the ISM.** Not being aware of any published quantitative data on our movement, I’m currently working with a small group of Ph.D.’s to explore possible research studies on our movement, for publication in peer-reviewed journals. If you or anyone you know is interested in such an endeavor, please let me know.
11. **Pilgrimages.** After my visit to Utrecht in 2019 and the resounding success of our 2020 virtual summer school, I am considering the possibility of pilgrimages for clergy and laity of our movement. I spoke with Father Peter-Ben Smit, director of the Old Catholic program during the Utrecht University summer school; he says that no one has ever expressed interest in a pilgrimage to Utrecht. After the pandemic, I imagine this

as an alternative to the Utrecht summer school, which, rather than largely confine participants to a university classroom, would allow us to visit Old Catholic ministries in and outside of Utrecht (e.g., throughout the Netherlands and perhaps in neighboring nations).

- 12. Formation of future leaders of our movement.** I am poignantly aware of the finite nature of human life, and I am a firm believer in succession planning for organizations – a veritable weakness of our movement. Each of us needs to find others who can learn to do what we do. I recognize the challenge of finding those who can help to carry on all of the above.

Your Vision and Commitment

It falls to each of us to discern who we are and where we're going – as individuals and as a movement. In this presentation, I shared an overview of our movement as I see it at the advent of 2022. I also articulated our Holy Family vision for and commitment to this movement, in which I deeply believe. Despite the shortcomings of our movement and the people who comprise it, I am a true evangelist. I pray that you, too, might join us in accepting the Great Commission of taking the good news of Inclusive Catholicism to the ends of the earth!

What is your perspective on our movement and on your role within it? What is your vision for our shared future? What commitment are you willing to make, to realize that vision?

I conclude with words that I first read more than 30 years ago in a vocation newsletter of the Conventual Franciscan Friars. May these words fuel you, as they have fueled me over the years.

*If not us, who?
If not now, when?
If not here, where?
If not for the kingdom, why?
Dare the dream.*

Let's "dare the dream," and let's work together to make our dreams for this movement a reality!

Reflections on “The Present State of Inclusive Catholicism”

“I knew that there were a lot of clergy and laity out there, but I hadn’t heard Jayme’s numbers before. I didn’t know that we are so many! I like Bishop Frank’s thought of saying that we’re ‘independent’ of each other. We need to remove our association as ‘independent’ of Rome. Our independence is also a challenge that leads to the fracturing of many communities: I’ve witnessed several groups that were working together, then someone gets mad and forms their own parish.”

Most Rev. Thomas Abel
Las Vegas, Nevada

“I like the word ‘autocephalous’ better than ‘independent.’ I have a vision that we might one day be ‘notable.’ I also like that thought: If we continue to engage people with open arms and loving hearts and show that there is another way to grow spirituality, we can be the second-largest religion in America! Let’s continue to do what we do, but let’s make ourselves more significant. Let’s work together, rather than ‘independently.’ Instead of comparing ourselves to the ‘mainline churches,’ let’s talk about who we are and how we do things.”

Rev. Ángel Lugo
Ridgewood, New York

“Many Roman Catholics don’t know about our movement. They ask me, ‘What do you mean by independent? If you’re not with Rome, you’re not a Catholic!’ We need to go out and market; we need to teach people that there’s another option for Catholics than losing their faith and no longer going to church. They need to know that there are churches that will welcome them. We need an apologetic to explain to people who we are and what we believe, so that we can be on solid ground when we ‘go into battle’ against those who try to twist and turn and break us. Many people attack us for not being with the Roman Church, saying that we’re not a true church or true clergy. We need to prepare our clergy to defend themselves and our movement!”

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

"We need to develop who we are without comparing ourselves to something else. That's why I don't like the term 'Independent Catholic'—because the question becomes, 'Independent of what? Independent of Rome?' It's exhausting."

Rev. Karen Furr
Kingman, Arizona

"My vision and hope is that we might all learn to work together. Rather than being individual churches, let's find common ground, so that we can all be 'on the same page' and so that, when we go to different cities, we'll know what to expect when we go to mass and what type of people will be attending."

Rev. Donna Nachefski
Saint Louis, Missouri

"My vision is for us to come together, but not with all the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. Let's come together as independent churches of one big movement!"

Jordan Dickenson
Austin, Texas

"I left the Roman [Catholic] priesthood after 32 years, and I was invited into Independent Catholicism by two bishops. I kept putting their invitations aside, because Independent Catholicism was such a joke. As a [Roman Catholic] pastor in Mesa, I researched it because an Independent Catholic church there offered sacraments, and we had to say that their baptisms were legitimate, but that wasn't the case for Confirmation or First Communion. We made fun of and dismissed Independent Catholicism. Two years after I left the Roman Church, I was invited by a couple to celebrate mass, and I needed the 'cover' of a bishop. It took me a while to come to Independent Catholicism, and for a while I was very embarrassed to be an Independent Catholic. I was unsure of who I was as an Independent Catholic priest. I was embarrassed by the jokes, and I was embarrassed to be associated with the jokesters who loved dressing up and giving themselves titles, but who had no real ministry. At the Utrecht summer school and at Jayme's virtual summer school, I found a foundation. I no longer need to compare myself to the Roman Church. I'm not 'independent' of Rome. We have a different history and foundation. To discover our history was an incredible revelation, and it took away that sense of

embarrassment and of contrasting ourselves with Rome. I like the word 'independent.' Our American tradition supports independence. For me, it brings to mind the American values of freedom and independence. As Independent Old Catholics, we bring synodality to the Church. Everyone at the table has a voice. The authority of Jesus Christ and of believers—and not some hierarchy— that binds us together. Pope Francis is now challenging Roman Catholic bishops to synodality, but they'll never arrive at where we are. The hierarchy won't allow it. That synodality is part of who we are!"

Most Rev. Leonard Walker
Kingman, Arizona

"We're inclusive, and we're including people who have been rejected by other churches. Let's involve them and listen to them. In our parish, the homeless population comes and worships with us every Sunday. Even in the middle of snowstorms, they come to worship and receive Eucharist. We need to involve them and help them feel good about themselves."

Sister Gillian Navarro
Brooklyn, New York

"It troubles me that many Independent Catholic communities and clergy have small visions. We don't dream big. For 100+ years, the Independent Movement in this country has been a failure. We have created hundreds of tiny, miniscule 'denominations,' and we fail to create something of significance, as Wikipedia defines it. According to Wikipedia's terms, we are not significant. We are so used to failure that we are afraid to dream big and to have visions. Someone asked me, 'Do you want to be Joel Osteen?' I said, 'Hell yes! Why not? Imagine the difference that 10,000 people would make coming out of our mass!' What's wrong with the vision of having 10,000 people at your mass on Sunday? We're so used to small visions and dreams that we don't dream of bigger possibilities. Jesus didn't say to his apostles, 'Go to the suburbs of Jerusalem...but don't dream big!' He said, 'Go to the ends of the world!' What a huge vision! He didn't limit himself to the Jewish world—so why should we limit ourselves to small visions and dream?"

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

“We fall into routines. I’m a military man, so I like routine, but we need new ideas. We need big dreams. We need to listen to others. I’m committing to open myself to conversation with others, from other jurisdictions, and to see how we can respond to their needs and realize their dreams!”

Rev. Ángel Lugo
Ridgewood, New York

“When you fall in love and envision yourself with a person for a number of years, vision isn’t enough. We have to commit to that person, like Jordan is doing with his fiancée. Then we have to make plans, like Jordan and his fiancée are planning their wedding. In marriage, we make very concrete commitments to our shared vision: We open a joint account, we own a home together, we have dogs together. We all need to ask what commitment we’re willing to make to this ‘marriage,’ to make this relationship work, and to bring our vision to reality.”

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

“We need to find a way to get the word out about who we are. I grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, but I never felt that I fit in. I never felt that the Roman Catholic Church’s beliefs were my beliefs. Before discovering Holy Family, I never felt that I fit in. Then Stephen read an article on Father Jayme. That’s how we found out about Holy Family. We started going to Holy Family, and we became really involved in the church. I don’t think most people know about the Independent Catholic movement. I had never heard of it. Father Jayme says that 1,000 Mexicans leave the Roman Catholic Church every day. Where are they going, and how can we bring them in?”

Jordan Dickenson
Austin, Texas

“There’s a huge need, a huge ‘market’ for what we bring, but we are failing miserably to ‘sell’ ourselves. What we’re doing is good and holy, and most of our clergy are dedicated, holy people, but we fail in our ‘sales pitch.’ It’s the definition of insanity: We keep doing the same thing over and over, hoping that something will change—and nothing changes. Independent Catholic parishes and communities appear and disappear. Very few communities last beyond 20 years.

We need to educate the next generation. All our bishops have 'cathedrals' and miters, but how many children and youth are they teaching? How many young people are attracted to our movement? We should dare to dream about these questions!"

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

"We are these people. We have this power. Now it's time to include others. We're in. No more worrying. No more being stagnant. No more small dreams. Let's go out and conquer! It's time for this to spread like wildfire!"

Sister Gillian Navarro
Brooklyn, New York

"Minimally, we need to commit to supporting one another. When we're in New York, we need to go to All Saints. When we go to Austin, we need to go to Holy Family. Let's commit to supporting one another when we visit other cities. That's the least that we can offer one another."

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

"Many of us have a sense of longing for more, a longing to be comfortable and feel 'at home.' I've been challenging the clergy and laity of our diocese to consider how we market ourselves and let more people know about us. J.C. Penney doesn't talk about Sears Roebuck, and the Roman Catholic Church is not going to tell people about us! We need to allow people to see who we are — and to see us as another option! Just like any business, as Father Jayme points out, we need to build a strong foundation that outlasts any single person, because other people will be attracted to it."

Most Rev. Martin de Porres Griffin
Sacramento, California

"Father Jayme is committed to this Independent Catholic movement, and he's working hard to try to bring us all together, to be a cohesive unit, while each community can remain its own congregation with its own priests. He's not trying to be the pope or to put in place a hierarchical structure. He's trying to enable all to participate. He's a work horse. In addition to our bible study, I participate in his weekly

classes for seminarians—I'm not going to become a deacon; I simply go for the information. Father Jayme is so meticulous in his teachings: He'll say, 'For the *orans* position, your hands have to be like this, not like this.' He's so detail-oriented, the sign of a true leader. It's interesting that he was taught all this and wants us to be the best that we can be. Our bible study classes are amazing; he's such a learned man. I think he's going to reach the goal of bringing us all together. Meetings like this make us aware of everybody else in the movement, outside our local communities. If we continue with these meetings, we're going to be one, big, cohesive family."

Rebecca Saenz
Austin, Texas

"That presentation was very intense, very data-driven—and we need that. When I was in the Roman Catholic seminary, Independent Catholicism never came up. When I left, I knew that I still had a vocation, so I looked for other resources. I wanted to be a married priest, but I didn't want to be Anglican or Orthodox. People need access to this data. They need to know about us!"

Rev. Mike López
Ridgewood, New York

"When I was trying to find my place in life, my spiritual director at Guardian Angel Cathedral here in Las Vegas encouraged me to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I knew that I wasn't called to be a Roman Catholic priest. When I learned about the Independent Catholic movement, he was very aware of it. He said, 'They're valid priests, and most young priests don't know about them, but older priests are very aware of this—and European priests are, too. I can't encourage you to go that route, but you need to go where your conscience leads you.'"

Rev. James Morgan
Las Vegas, Nevada

"When I first started looking into Independent Catholicism—and I'm not sure how I feel about that word—there's wasn't a lot online. It wasn't until I saw a newspaper article about Father Jayme that I decided to go and find out what it was about. That was the same year that Father started releasing all those books. I even gave the books to my grandmother, who is a devout Roman Catholic. At first, she

wasn't sure what I was doing at church, but now she's all for it, because of Father Jayme's books. A lot of people put us under the same 'umbrella' as Roman Catholics. On the plane, I was listening to a radio show on people who do things that aren't smart, and the host was talking ugly about the Catholic Church. I had to remind myself that he was talking about the *Roman* Catholic Church, that he wasn't talking about us. We need to distinguish ourselves from that, we need to make clear that we're different."

Stephen Rodríguez
Austin, Texas

"Father Jayme's virtual summer school last year was an immense learning opportunity for me. My previous bishop referred to us as Old Catholic, and a group of bishops sent him a letter in 2012 asking him not to do so. That's where 'Independent' came in. I agree that 'Independent' is not the right word for us, and I like the idea of 'Inclusive Catholics.' I'm an alumnus of St. Meinrad Seminary, and I give to their annual fund. One of their seminarians asked me, 'How can you be a bishop?' So, we had a discussion on Old Catholicism. He had never heard of the archbishop of Utrecht or the Leonine privilege. We need to make ourselves known!"

Most Rev. William Cavins
Winter Park, Florida

"I went to the Roman Catholic seminary for ten years, and I never learned about Old Catholicism. They didn't teach us about Anglicans or Episcopalians or Methodists. They thought, 'You're here to learn about Roman Catholicism!' I'm the president of our local ecumenical council, and Roman priests never come. They're not interested in coming. Why would the Roman Catholic Church tell anyone about us? Everyone would 'jump ship' and come this way! When we first came on the scene, we were accused of pretending to be Roman Catholic, so we put on the home page of our website, 'Though we love and respect our sisters and brothers of the Roman Church, we are NOT part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn.' I was a Vincentian seminarian running a youth apostolate, and I was in charge of youth ministry for the diocese, so they were coming after us for that. It's a waste of time to compare ourselves to other churches. Instead, we need to make people aware of what makes us different. My 'elevator speech' is: 'Are you Catholic? We're probably the church

that you've always dreamed of.' When Brooklyn and Queens were at the center of the worldwide pandemic, we fed 10,000 families a week. The largest Roman Catholic parish in the Diocese of Brooklyn is two blocks from us. They closed. They shuttered their church and did nothing. We were the only church that served people throughout the pandemic—and that priest said, 'There seem to be men at a church two blocks from here dressing as priests and promoting themselves as priests.' He knew exactly who we are, but we were a threat! We were feeding 10,000 families a week, and his parish didn't have time for that. My background is in federal law enforcement and logistics, so I knew the pandemic was going to be a big deal, particularly in New York. We had a mobile food pantry, an ambulance that we converted into a food truck, and it fed 200 people a week. During the pandemic, the *National Catholic Reporter* covered us over any Roman Catholic parish in the U.S. How sad that they had to choose an Independent Catholic parish because the Roman Catholic parishes were not doing anything! My heart is in the Roman Church. There are phenomenal priests and religious in the Roman Church who are doing amazing work—but they're oppressed by the grandiose mentality of the system and by the egos at the top. When you die, they'll make you a saint, but while you're alive, they treat you like sh*t. We all make excuses. We say, 'I can't feed 10,000 people.' Then feed two or three! We say, 'I'm too old.' Sister María Grace is 92 years old, and every day she was in the soup kitchen. It's time for us to stop making excuses."

Rev. Mike López
Ridgewood, New York

Creative Financing of Inclusive Catholic Ministries

Louis Núñez
New York, New York

I look at the Church not so much as the “Bride of Christ,” but as a system of power seeking to maintain its power, and, in order to do so, it keeps people in their place. For centuries, the Church advised, “You cannot heal yourself. There’s something intrinsically wrong with you, that you cannot fix. You must come here, and, when you come here, you must bring us money.” So, the Church set up systems that require money. To make matters worse, we have priests who have never managed finances. They sometimes go on spending sprees, tanking their churches. I know of one parish that was so mismanaged it had to fire half its staff and merge with another parish. This mismanagement is one reason that people leave the Church.

The “big idea” of this presentation focuses on creative finance. It argues that we need a certain framework or foundation in order for the system to make sense. So, let’s start with basic financial concepts.

What is money? For some people, money is just paper. For others, money represents hope or security. For me, money is energy. It allows people to create things in our world. At its essence, money is not real, but it can create very real consequences. There’s little difference between a \$1 bill and a \$20 bill—they both look almost exactly the same—but we all agree how different they are!

In that way, money is like racism, which is also not real: No race is intrinsically better than other races—but race can lead to real consequences.

Value is also not real. If I bring a big pile of gold to someone on a deserted island, would they think that the gold is valuable? Food or rescue would be more valuable to them than gold! For some people, having an iPhone is a value; others are quite content with flip phones.

Three important concepts concerning money are income, expense and management. Income is money coming in as payment for services. Expenses are outgoing. Perhaps we should call them “out-go.” Management comes from an Old French word, *manège*, which means horsemanship. We have to learn to control our finances in the

same way that we learn to control a wild horse, so that it can help us to farm or to win battles.

Money also needs a plan. When Father Mike needs money, he doesn't say, "I need \$50,000." He says, "I need a truck to deliver food to people.

Are you concerned about keeping your church open? Do you see the bills and get nervous? Money gives you more options! It allows you to help people! Father Mike is humble, but I'll brag on him: In New York City, he moved over 20 million pounds of food, feeding 500,000 families. There are people in New York City who are alive today because of Father Mike!

So, let's talk about financial freedom. When money comes in, it's usually one of two categories: It's working income or passive income. If you have a job, and they pay you, that's working income. The challenge with working income is that, if you stop working, you don't get any more money. Passive income is when you set up a system that generates money even when you're not there. The best example of passive income is real estate. Imagine for a moment that you have a rental property, that you've decided to buy a four-unit, multi-family home. You'll live in one of the units, and you'll rent the other three to other people. If you pay \$1,200 for the mortgage, \$600 for taxes, and \$600 for utilities, your total monthly upkeep of the property is \$2,400. If you charge each tenant \$1,200, your income is \$3,600. What's the difference? That's called financial freedom! When your income is greater than your expenses—your "out-go"—that's passive income. It's the foundation of creative financing.

Business and non-profit corporations are like people. They have "birth dates"—the date of incorporation. They have "social security numbers"—employer identification numbers. They have "parents"—the owners of the business. They're allowed to donate money, and now, with Citizens United, they're allowed to support political campaigns. They can also own and rent property and space to other corporations and thus achieve financial freedom.

Jesus was a good teacher. He summarized for us the most important concepts, and he gave us the answers for the "final exam"! He tells us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe those who need clothes, look after the sick and imprisoned. In 2,000 years, we haven't solved these problems.

Saint Benedict had a beautiful vision for community. He said that we are healed in community, that humans are meant to be communal. He formed communities that accepted people and provided them a support structure, with stability and a routine, so that they could be successful. He also taught self-sufficiency: Every monastery needed to be self-sufficient, which is why Benedictines sold liquor and jams and ran schools, so that they wouldn't have to rely on dioceses.

The Church does not need to be rebuilt; the Church needs to be reimagined. There is no reason for us to rebuild a system that isn't inclusive and that hides child molestation. Contrary to what Saint Francis of Assisi said, we don't need to rebuild a broken church system! That model of church isn't working. People are leaving!

I encourage you to imagine what you might do through a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit that could receive public funds and grants. If the monthly upkeep for your church is \$2,400 a month, imagine renting out your basement for \$4,000 a month. You no longer need to worry about donations! Father Mike went from a budget of \$0, to an annual budget of \$1.8 million

What would you do with all your time if you didn't have to worry about money? Isn't that the question that all guidance counselors ask? Ask the same question of your church! What would your ministry look like if money weren't an issue? Remember the "final exam": Work with local, state and federal politicians to feed the hungry! Ask them about the needs in their areas for which they have funding. Subcontract work from larger nonprofits in your area who are already doing great work. Consider putting shipping containers on your property: People can live in them, you can turn them into restaurants or food trucks, you can rent them to people in the area, or you can provide showers for the homeless.

Our political system and taxation system can also seem very daunting. Understand this: They are *not* broken; they work exactly as intended. Instead of constantly fighting these systems, learn how they work! I know an activist in Jersey who used to chain himself during protests that rarely resulted in change. When he started working with politicians and donating to their causes, they wanted to spend time with him, and they wanted to hear what he had to say. Taking a new approach, and listening to and working with people on their level, he was soon able to create a free daycare system in his town that the politicians funded.

Your town or county likely has a masterplan—a vision for where they want to be in 10 or 20 years. It's public information, and you can likely get a copy from your city clerk or county clerk. See where you fit into the funding of that plan.

The great thing about our churches is that we don't reject anyone—which is the mission of any non-profit! In order to keep their funding, non-profit organizations must serve *everyone*. They are forced to actually be "churches"!

To fill this need, we have established our own consulting company called "Monks and Nones." We help people set up non-profits. We assist with staffing and finding money. It's a really creative way for us to finance our ministries, keep our ministries alive, and share the gospel message.

Reflections on “Creative Financing of Inclusive Catholic Ministries”

“It’s hard to get money for something you’re not yet doing—unless you have a private donor who says, ‘I like what you’re doing. Here’s some money for your church.’ For us, planned giving is a big thing. Talk to your parishioners, and ask them to write you in their wills.”

Rev. James Morgan
Las Vegas, Nevada

“People move to Florida thinking that they’ll work for Disney or in the parks. The jobs aren’t there, and the amount of homeless that we’re seeing is overwhelming. There’s a lot of talk, but nothing ever gets done. Five years ago, the pastor of Saint George Orthodox offered to sell a downtown church building at cost to take care of the homeless. It hasn’t happened. He feeds people sandwiches from his kitchen every day. We collect money to support his ministry.”

Most Rev. William Cavins
Winter Park, Florida

“We rent from the Lutherans and the Episcopalians. We don’t want to purchase a building. Purchasing a building in New York is way too expensive: It would cost me \$4 million, and then I’d have the upkeep of an old church. In every lease that I sign, I create a clause where I’m allowed to rent my space to other social services. So I rent space to other nonprofits that pay the rent. We started housing homeless men in our church, without any money. Then a local council member got really excited about the idea. He advocated for us to get money from the city, and the city told him ‘Absolutely not.’ Then a homeless man died in the streets, and we had a vigil, and all of a sudden everyone wanted to work with us. The city now calls me and asks, ‘Where’s the need?’ They provide the money, and I rent the churches. Roman Catholic churches won’t rent to us, for the most part, so I go to little Lutheran and Episcopalian congregations that need money. We get money from the city, we rent from churches, and everybody wins!”

Rev. Mike López
Ridgewood, New York

"I joined Saint Marguerite's two years ago, right before the pandemic. We can't even talk about financial support. Father James depends on the six or seven of us. We rotated among us, to celebrate mass together. Then, about three months ago, Reverend Linda found a tiny space that's not ideal for \$800 a month. We're finding ways to split the rent, but we're certainly interested in hearing about possibilities."

Carmen Lim
Henderson, Nevada

"Even if you're six people, it's worth investing in a 501(c)(3), because it will allow you to access other opportunities. It's rough being in this movement. Because of our of hierarchal governance, we're largely on our own. Non-profits create the potential for stability in a movement where bishops and priests are walking out on one another all the time."

Rev. Mike López
Ridgewood, New York

"It's very clear to me that the Spirit is very alive in this movement—and how that translates into ministries and initiatives. When we talk about how we can be of service to our communities, for many of us that's in the context of liturgy. We manifest our gratitude by being servants—in the liturgy and in service. In our Eucharist, I always say, 'This is the Body of Christ, bread blessed and broken, as we are for one another.'"

Rev. Karen Furr
Kingman, Arizona

"Louis reminds us that our mission should be focused on the marginalized. To just exist and not reach out to the marginalized is not enough. We need to address the needs of the poor, the marginalized and the needy. Our liturgy isn't complete without them."

Rev. Roy Gómez
Austin, Texas

"We went to an ordination in Rhode Island and met a guy from Brooklyn, who was a prominent lawyer with a lot of money. He said he wanted to do something for us, and I said, 'Send me a food truck.' Two days later, I received a call from a tow truck driver at 10:00 at

night, saying, 'I'm in front of your church with a truck.' It was a giant ambulance from the Buffalo Police Department, which was used as a canteen truck for emergencies. He bought it for us and sent it on a tow truck! I said, 'I can't afford this.' That lawyer did all the paperwork for us to have our own 501(c)(3), the Hungry Monk, and he paid for everything himself. When we created our second non-profit, Monks and Nones, we did the paperwork ourselves through LegalZoom. We now have a \$1.8 million budget, and we don't have to worry about rent or insurance. I don't suggest it just for income; I suggest it for the sake of ministry. In Emergency Medical Services, we say, 'A dead rescuer rescues no one.' Many of us exhaust ourselves in this movement, banging our heads against a wall and trying to make our ministries grow, trying to find money and resources. We have to find ways to create stability for ourselves. For me, one of the greatest blessings of ministry is hearing someone say, 'You're my priest.' They take ownership of me as 'their priest.' That's the goal in ministry. It's not about creating organizations; it's about finding ways to touch those who'll come to call us 'their priests'!"

Rev. Mike López
Ridgewood, New York

"For me, creative fundraising is all about making money in ways that give us less headaches. As a pastor, I love the idea of having two corporations: one for religious purposes and one for non-religious purposes. That's very appealing. At Saint Stanislaus, we've allowed a 501(c)(3) to feed the hungry from our church. They feed hundreds of people every Friday, but I've never thought about charging them. Now that their non-profit is becoming successful, I'm left thinking that I should speak with its executive director, to see if they have grant money for rent and facility costs."

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

"This presentation didn't really apply to me. My community is small, and we worship at an Episcopal church where we pay nominal rent. We have insurance costs, but our community is easily able to cover those expenses. We don't have a financial problem. We had a property on which we were going to build, but the community never got large enough to make that possible. When I was the pastor of a large Roman

Catholic parish, this would have been interesting—but at my age now, not so much.

Most Rev. Leonard Walker
Kingman, Arizona

“I find this very appealing. The worries of maintaining a church and covering expenses make it very difficult to focus on ministry. We don’t have a food pantry, so we don’t enjoy that same opportunity of reaching out to the poor and needy. Something like this would certainly free up money for ministry. It’s a tremendous concept.”

Rev. Roy Gómez
Austin, Texas

“I came to All Saints in 2018, and they started their 501(c)(3) in 2019, and it really freed us up to do ministry in a way that brings in people because it’s attractive to others. They come to volunteer in our pantry, especially during the pandemic, when people wanted to get out. And they bring their own talents. We had an artist who built a big wooden cross outside our church, and she changes it for every season, so it has become an attractive feature. They volunteer for church events, too, because they want to help—so we’ve been surrounded by beautiful souls who wouldn’t have come to us if our ministry were less attractive.”

Sister Gillian Navarro
Brooklyn, New York

“I’m gifted in social ministry, and I’ve done a lot of volunteer work during the past ten years—but I know that I could do more with grants. I’m not a grant writer, so I need to find somebody to write grants. I told my bishop that we need to create a 501(c)(3), and he said, ‘No, we can’t do that.’ So, it’s a battle. The city council has \$4 million ready for us to tap into, but we need a 501(c)(3). What I’m hearing today is a great concept, but I need talented people to help me, and I don’t want to get involved in the management of the money, because that can get very ugly.”

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

"I've been a non-profit administrator for over 25 years, and one of the most successful efforts I've seen was by Bishop Yvette Flunder of City of Refuge United Church of Christ in Oakland, California. She serves as executive director of an AIDS ministry that has done tremendous work in the Bay area – and I'm glad to hear of such possibilities for us. Non-profits have to have staff, and we can be those staff members, but we have to deliver the services. Here in Tacoma, the Presbyterian Church created a neighborhood center, where they hire staff, and the non-profit pays the bills of the church building. They have to serve everyone who comes to their door – but that's a model of service that we embrace."

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

"This is a model that I've seen in the Anglican Church in North America. I don't mean to brag on their church-planting, but they do it right. Here in Atlanta, we have Saint Peter's Place, a generic Anglican community that has a non-profit that produces espresso roast from Rwanda and gives money back to survivors of the Rwandan genocide. It's a big, reciprocal business run by the church, and it collects a very steady monthly income because all area churches get their coffee from them. At our very small ministry at Agape Fellowship of Greater Atlanta, we've talked about this quite a bit. A few of the folks on our board are grant writers, so we've talked about approaching local non-profits and hiring grant writer, to bring us some regular income."

Rev. MichaelAngelo D'Arrigo
Madison, Georgia

"To plant Saint Oscar Romero Catholic in Albuquerque, I established a 'side gig' of celebrating passages – *quinceañeras*, weddings and funerals – for people at no cost. I asked people to give an appropriate donation, which I put into the treasury of the parish, and that's how we generated income outside of Sunday liturgies."

Rev. Frank Quintana
Albuquerque, New Mexico

"We have our 501(c)(3) for the Ascension Alliance, and we also have a group exemption letter from the IRS, so that subordinate ministries can participate in the Alliance's 501(c)(3). Churches are allowed to provide salaries for pastors, most of us in the Independent movement don't have that kind of income, so we have 'tent-making' jobs, to keep body and soul in one place. But, as Bishop David suggests, pastors and executive directors can receive salaries so long as they 'deliver the goods.'"

Most Rev. Alan Kemp
Gig Harbor, Washington

"I attended a non-profit conference where a fundraiser said, 'Money is mission, and mission is money.' Because of that, I'm not afraid in my secular job to ask for money. I'm also not afraid to ask in my church, and I try not to use guilt. Now that I'm going to be 60, I want to get out of working and do ministry full-time. I like how Louis talked about identifying the needs in your community. In my community, we have an issue with addictions and with AIDS in the Black community. We rent a building from the Methodists; perhaps I could rent out an office space there. I had never heard the quote of Benedict: 'People are healed in community.' Those words profoundly changed my day."

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

"The Ecumenical Catholic Communion requires each community to have its own individual 501(c)(3). I led two 501(c)(3)s as part of my ministry in the Roman Catholic community: the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project in its second phase, and the Leaven Center in its first phase. I heard Louis say, 'If you have space, monetize it.' Most of our churches don't own our spaces. Creating additional ministries to monetize is a bit more of an undertaking because you're effectively launching a business under your 'business.' We don't want to be naive about that. There's a very high level of tolerance for poverty among ministers. All kinds of threads weave into that. Some go back to first-century asceticism as a form of holiness. On the positive side, there's also a perspective on getting rightly related to money, where we find we don't need

as much money because our relationship to it is dramatically different. I don't receive a salary, and my housing stipend is really miniscule. If it were not for the fact that my spouse has been so committed to my success, I would not be able to do what I do. I don't know that that's what Jesus wants for us, and I'm not sure that the formula for clergy success is to have successful spouses. I'm not sure that our struggle in the ECC to pull together sufficient funding for the operations of the Office of the Presiding Bishop is healthy. We struggle to fund things in our local communities, and Catholics are notoriously low givers. Finally, part of what makes it hard to ask is that we are in a culture that really disdains talking about money. In fact, money lets us do our bliss and be of service. I love how Louis says that 'money is energy.' I believe that."

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

"In our canons and constitutions, it's important for us to establish and clarify the paid roles in our ministries. At Agape, we receive a stipend, rather than a salary. How can a person live off such a stipend? My answer is the same as Trish: I have an amazing wife who really believes in the mission of our church and the work that we do in the community. She keeps on breaking her body to support our ministry, and I'm grateful—but it can't be the final solution. Not everybody is blessed with a partner who is capable of doing that for them. I agree that we tend to see money as a bad thing. Before we started Agape, we started Metanoia Ministries, which offered a course for all members called Metanoia Finance. It helped people rethink how they dealt with money and how they tithed. Growing up Roman Catholic, we tithed so that we wouldn't burn in hell for all eternity! When your church teaches a universal message of salvation, very little is required to avoid burning for eternity. So, what's the financial necessity for tithing? The answer is really basic. If you don't give, how is the electric going to get paid? If you don't give, how is the heat going to be on? If you don't give, things don't get paid, and we end up meeting on a park bench—hoping that they won't kick us off the bench!"

Rev. MichaelAngelo D'Arrigo
Madison, Georgia

“How many of us really own our own buildings and can have that passive income? It doesn’t apply to me. I wonder to what percentage of our communities that might apply. Four years ago, our parish, Holy Spirit Ecumenical Catholic Community, started a ministry called Pinwheels Café, a focused time for recreation and socialization of LGBTQ+ allies in our community. Contributors allowed us to offer monthly dinners with speakers for adults, and games for children. I’m understanding that I could apply for grant funding for events like that. I’m not sure, though, that I understand the advantage of applying for a separate 501(c)(3), rather than seek designated gifts for such activities, though I do recognize the challenge we had in helping people to get over thinking that it was ‘a spiritual thing’ – since Holy Spirit was sponsoring it – and that we weren’t trying to recruit or evangelize them.”

Rev. Rosa Buffone
Newton, Massachusetts

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A Homily for “Saints in Sin City”

Father Ángel Lugo
All Saints Priory
Ridgewood, New York

Today’s gospel speaks of a dishonest manager (Lk. 16:1-8) — so I’ll be honest: When Father Jayme called me and said I could choose whatever scriptures I wanted for this gathering, I told him I would just preach on the gospel of the day. I didn’t know what the gospel was. I’m a big procrastinator: I leave everything to the last minute!

So, when I sat down yesterday to prepare this homily, I read the chapter before today’s gospel. In Luke 15, Jesus speaks about the 99 sheep and how heaven rejoices when the lost sheep is found. Then Jesus shares the story of the woman who lost a coin. She lighted a lamp and swept the house. She rejoiced when she finally found the coin. Then Jesus tells the story of the son who takes his share of his father’s inheritance, then goes crazy spending it — and still his father welcomes him home.

Today’s gospel is different. Jesus speaks of both “the children of this world” and of “the children of light.” The “children of this world” don’t want to mingle with us. We’re too complicated. We think “outside the box.” We are inclusive.

Be honest. Think about how you might be dishonest: with yourself, with your family and friends, and with others. If we were all honest, we wouldn’t need today’s gospel!

Like “the children of the world” and “the children of light,” we must figure out how to come together with one another. It’s a problem we have to solve.

In his letter to the Romans (Rom. 15:14-21), Paul claims authority due to his relationship with Christ. He is a representative of Christ (Rom. 15:15-16). We, too, are called to be representatives of Christ — loving one another, loving those on the margins, loving those who aren’t loved by others. We love the homeless who stink. We love those who live other lifestyles or who love others of the same sex. We love hippies — like Deacon Marianne! We’re all humans. We’re all different, but we’re called to live together as one, as yesterday’s gospel calls for. Otherwise, we’re dishonest to the movement to which we all belong.

So, let's be honest with each other. Let's be honest with our master, Christ. Let's be honest about ourselves and who we are. When we are broken, let's work to fix one another. Let's be like Paul: representatives of Christ who gives us the power to go out and to touch hearts!

The 21st-century Phoebe Experience Part 2

Deacon Marianne Melchiori
All Saints Priory
Ridgewood, New York

Two months ago, I was asked, “Where are you on your spiritual path, and how did you get there?” I wrote the following.

My spiritual path has been a decades-long journey. I attended eight years of Catholic grammar school, followed by four years of Catholic high school. I learned prayers, the bible, church rituals, and the lives of the saints. I also learned integrity, honesty and love for my neighbor. Most of all, I learned love for my Jesus. It took me a few decades to follow Jesus.

I’ve always been an introvert, and, while my classmates played in the school yard during lunch, I found myself praying in the church. I talked to Jesus. I made my way through the Stations of the Cross. I felt safe, happy and protected there.

I loved celebrating the Mass, but I couldn’t get over the fact that only boys could serve at the altar. In the 1960s, that was the rule. I so wanted to be an altar girl! I also thought of becoming a priest, but it was not to be.

My spirituality was enhanced by the fact that my mom suffered from multiple sclerosis, from the time I turned five, until her death when I was 18. I learned from my family that Mom’s needs came first. What I wanted or needed didn’t matter as much as what Mom wanted or needed. I learned that the needs of others always come first. This became my *credo* for the next 50 years.

I clung tightly to God, while not feeling worthy myself. I experienced two unhappy marriages. I was an enabler and a “savior.” To this day, I work very hard to change that part of myself. At age 68, I still hang tight to my Jesus.

For 20 years, I’ve worked with a spiritual director. With her help, I made great progress in learning who I am.

For a long time, I had been dissatisfied with the Roman Catholic Church. It disillusioned me by its lack of dedication to the world outside its doors and its exclusion of the homeless, the poor, different

ethnic groups, people of color, people of different genders, and those with different sexual orientations. All Saints came into my life five years ago. I worked with Father Mike and Father Ángel, rescuing food from local markets and distributing it to our street partners as part of the Hungry Monk Rescue Truck. We cooked meals and served them at the shelters in our churches.

Father Mike kept saying to me, “Why don’t you become a deacon?” It was daunting to think about that possibility, but I warmed up to the idea as a way to fulfill my childhood dream of serving at the altar. With Brother Kevin as my role model, I watched, learned and became an altar girl at last. “Waiting on God” is my new passion, following what God leads me to do. This where God now leads my whole life, and there is always more work to be done!

The 21st-century Phoebe Experience

Part 3

Sister Gillian Navarro
All Saints Priory
Ridgewood, New York

For as long as I can remember, I have never been a lover of darkness or evil. When I watch horror films, I always root for the bad guy, hoping that his poor soul will come to the light. I always feel sorry for the villains whose fear and anger led them to commit such horrific acts. I'm more focused on rescuing the villain than the victim!

After I was baptized at age seven, at All Saints Catholic Church, my grandmother took me in another direction: We went Pentecostal. I became a member of *Iglesia Mar de Galilea*, the Sea of Galilee Church. There I came to understand that Christ is love. I became better acquainted with God and with God's greatness. I learned to be kind, to practice humility, and, most importantly, to love others as myself. I absorbed all their teachings on the Holy Scriptures, and I tried very hard to refrain from sin. As I grew, it became harder to fight temptation.

At age 18, I strayed from *Iglesia Mar de Galilea*, and I stopped receiving the nourishment my soul so desperately needed. I strayed from God, but God never strayed from me. I let go of God's mighty hand, but God never let go of my misguided hands. I continued down that reckless path until one day I realized I was purposely hurting the One who continuously loved me, the One who held my life in His holy hands. I wanted to live for the Lord again!

In October 2018, by the grace of God, I walked into All Saints Priory. I have stayed to this day. The second time I attended, Father Ángel said in his homily that when God calls you to service, your answer should always be "yes." Little did I know how many times I would say yes! After a month, I was asked if I would read the first reading and responsorial psalm. I became nervous, but how should we answer God's calling? I said "yes"! Father Michael stated that the sacrament of Confirmation was approaching. Again, I say "yes." He asked if I would participate in the Hungry Monk Rescue Truck's efforts. Another resounding "yes"! Then Father Michael introduced us to the Order of St. Benedict.

The sense of peace and love that I feel within our community provides exactly what I have been searching for. It became the biggest “yes” of my life! I am now a new creation, guided by the Holy Spirit, who opens my mind and shares with me God’s wisdom. Now, when temptations rear their ugly heads, I stand firm, waiting for God’s deliverance!

**Ever Ancient, Ever New:
The Search for Authenticity in the ISM
from Vilatte to Today**

Father Mike López
All Saints Priory
Ridgewood, New York

Joseph René Vilatte was a Roman Catholic who slipped into Independent Catholicism at a very young age, in a small church in Paris, the *Petite Église*. He grew up with some trauma, was educated, jumped from tradition to tradition, was commissioned as a lay Methodist minister, then came to the U.S. as a catechist of the Presbyterian Church USA. He was born on January 24, an Aquarius. No one tells an Aquarius what to do! During all that bouncing around without finding what he needed, he maintained his Catholic identity.

Vilatte found himself in the northern territories of the U.S., ministering to Dutch- and French-speaking people from the Gallican and Old Catholic traditions. The Episcopal bishop of Fond du Lac sent Vilatte to be ordained by the Old Catholic Church in Switzerland. When Vilatte returned to the U.S., he decided that the Protestant Episcopal Church of the USA—which is how they identified the Episcopal Church at the time—was not Catholic enough. Like many of us, Vilatte found himself in a church that wasn't right for him.

Historians of mainline churches speak of Vilatte as a villain, as one who needed salvation and who wreaked havoc in the Church. But his writings show Vilatte had a real concern for ministry, a concern for fully involving people in the life of the Church. He understood that the Church did not work as it should. So he started his own thing and to seek episcopal consecration. A decree from the Episcopal Church reads, "It further appears that Vilatte, in seeking the episcopate, made statements not warranted by the facts of the case and seemed willing to join anybody whatsoever—Old Catholic, Greek, Roman Catholic or Syrian—which would confer it upon him." Vilatte sought the episcopacy because he knew that, in order to create an authentic expression of Catholicism for the American Catholic Church—the term for the church he was founding—he must become a bishop. He needed the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders, so he went on a

mission to find a bishop who would ordain him. He tried Utrecht, but they immediately shut him down, saying, "You belong to the Episcopal bishop in the U.S." Have you heard that before? Do you want to be an Old Catholic in America? Good luck: You're an Episcopalian now!

Vilatte wrote to the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska, which almost consecrated him—except that the Episcopalians intercepted his plans, writing a letter to that bishop, asking him not to do so. Vilatte made his way to Ceylon, in India, where he was consecrated by the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church as Mar Timotheus I. He was illicitly consecrated in the eyes of the Episcopal Church, the Roman Church, the Greek Church and the Russian Church, but he didn't have much concern about that.

Vilatte returned to the U.S. to wreak the "havoc" of creating the expression of Catholicism that we practice today.

I'm not a historian or a theologian, so I won't teach extensively about him. But I will talk about my own "Vilatte experience." I'm also happy to speak about the experience of the movement as a whole in seeking authenticity, including how we, at All Saints, are coming closer to our sister churches.

From the age of eight, I felt a calling to the priesthood. Like Mother Annie, I played mass, but with Nilla Wafers instead of oyster crackers. My parents were Puerto Ricans from New York, so, by definition, I was going to be either Pentecostal or Roman Catholic. We worshiped as Roman Catholics. I attended Catholic schools from pre-kindergarten to university. From a very young age, I knew I wanted to be a priest. When girlfriends in high school tried to get fresh, I said, "Absolutely not: I'm going to be a priest!" I applied to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn at age 17, and Father Fitzpatrick asked, "Have you gotten laid yet?" He said, "Go, get laid first, and then figure out if you really want to be a priest." I entered formation with the Scalabrini Fathers, an order of Italian priests who worked for many years with immigrant communities in Brooklyn. They wanted to send me to Colombia for my postulancy, but my mother said, "Absolutely not!" Knowing that I wanted to be a cop or a priest, I did my undergraduate studies at St. John's University, with a double major in philosophy and criminal justice. Eventually, I met the Vincentians of the Eastern Province of the United States, a congregation with a mission of working in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul. It was a phenomenal community. I thank God for my

experience with the Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity, who were phenomenal people. I was stationed at Saint John the Baptist, a Black Catholic parish. I lived in a house of formation with seven priests in the 'hood, in the worst neighborhood in New York City. But it was a place filled with vibrant life. Our music director played gospel riffs, and my soul was fed. I finished my postulancy, entered novitiate, made my simple profession, and studied at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in New York.

Six months before ordination, a lot of issues surfaced in our house: Three good, holy priests with whom I lived and worked were arrested...for having sex with kids. They were all Latinos, and I thought they were the saving grace for a church filled with Irish problems. I simultaneously fell in love with a woman at the parish. I had a hard time discerning my vocation. I didn't want to be a shitty celibate, sneaking around and doing silly things. She loved me, and I loved her. Then one day, the provincial came to visit, with the deputy chancellor of the diocese. I was the director of youth and young adult ministry in the parish. They showed me the pictures of three kids and asked, "Do you know these kids?" I said, "yes." They said, "These are the kids who are making the accusations against Fathers [X, Y and Z]. We must come up with a plan. We must create a story, with alibis to disprove what these kids are saying." I clearly heard God telling me, "You've got to go!" I spoke with my formator, who saw that I was shaken. He said, "You'll get over it. You'll be okay. This is all business, and you're going to be fine." That was his consolation! I called my mom, hysterical and crying, saying, "I've got to get out of here!"

I left and got married. One year into our marriage, on the day after our first anniversary, my wife said to me, "You need to be a priest. I don't want to be married, I don't want to have kids, and I don't want to do this anymore." Despite everything in my power, that relationship collapsed. I went to the priest who was my spiritual director. He had married us. He said to me, "God is punishing you for leaving the Church" —and he offered me a job as a youth minister. After that, I worked in federal law enforcement.

One day, I saw a former seminarian, Alex, an ordained priest, holding a woman's hand in court. I congratulated him for doing the right thing and leaving the Roman Church. He said, "I want you to officiate our wedding." I'm a hardcore Catholic, so I said, "Absolutely not. How can I do that?" He said, "Bro, you know all the things to say. Just buy a cassock, show up, and do the wedding. Nobody will

know." I showed up at the wedding in a cassock, surplice and stole—without any ordination, credential or license—and I celebrated a Catholic wedding at a venue, something not allowed by the Roman Church. Everyone loved it. After the wedding, people asked me, "Father, where is your parish?" My first thought was, "*Mea culpa*, I'm going to hell!" I said, "I'm a missionary priest. I'm not from here. I'm from a diocese far, far away!" I went home feeling sad and guilty, because I loved ministry so much, and I knew that I was born to be a priest.

Like Vilatte, I started looking for the right church for me. I found the Episcopal Church, which was perfect—except that it was too White and too gay, with little diversity or vibrancy. They constantly pushed the message, "We're gay, and it's okay," which I agree with. But that was all they talked about. I visited another church with a Latina as a woman priest. All she talked about was being a woman priest.

I wasn't looking for a single-issue church. I don't care if you're gay or a woman. Can you do the job? Priesthood has nothing to do with your sexuality or the gender affixed to you at birth. It has to do with your heart. It has to do with your willingness to go out into the world and to love people—not to limit your love to the clowns who come to your church. That's easy, right? Jesus taught us not to love only the people close to us, but to go to the margins.

I visited some Orthodox churches that were very nationalistic. They wouldn't even talk to me. They said, "Are you Greek? No? Have a good day!"

So, I googled "married Catholic priests." I learned about the "Married Priests Now!" movement and Bishop Peter Paul Brennan. I thought, "Holy smoke: There's a married Catholic bishop?" I learned about Roman Catholic archbishop Emmanuel Milingo, who married a beautiful Korean woman—and he's ordaining men? I found out about the American Catholic Church and Holy Family Catholic Church in Austin. I discovered a whole movement that I didn't even know existed!

We're celebrating our eighth anniversary this year. Eight years ago, there wasn't a lot of information on our movement. Because of my experience in the Roman Church, what I had seen looked like a bunch of crazy people "playing church"! It didn't feel right. It was a really scary transition for me, from "holy mother Church." How would I reestablish myself as Father Mike?

I had to start with my mother. I have a very supportive family, but one of the reasons I love church so much is because my family never went to church. As children, we ran into the church to place our envelope in the collection basket, simply to get the tuition discount at our Catholic school. That was the extent of our relationship with the church.

I found this movement. I made contact with a bishop. I dragged Father Ángel along with me, and we did this together. Eight years ago, we planted the Parish of All Saints in Ridgewood, New York.

We started in a Presbyterian church, which kicked us out after five years because we were “working too much with the poor.” We ended up in a Lutheran Church where we are now. We have a phenomenal parochial life, with really vibrant ministries. At first, I found it extremely embarrassing to wear a collar and walk in the street as a priest. I felt extremely embarrassed to wear my habit. People would see me and Father Ángel —and run the other way! I felt fake and phony. Then something happened: We received authority, not from some pope, cardinal or bishop, but from the poor in our community. We became the priests of the poor in our community!

Authority and power don’t come from top-down; they come from the bottom-up! As two hot, young priests in our early 30s, we said mass really well, with nice vestments and incense and the aspergilla at every mass. We shared 5,000 glossy flyers with the cool slogan “Rethink Catholic.” But people didn’t come. Instead, they called the chancery and asked, “Who are these people? What are they doing?” We thought people were just going to show up. On most Sundays, it was just me, Father Ángel, my mom and his mom. On Christmas, Ash Wednesday and Easter, we had maybe ten people.

We became the priests of the poor by accident. One day, I was walking in my habit in the street when a drunk man ran up to me shouting, “Brother Mike!” As a Vincentian, I was known as Brother Mike, so I figured he knew me. He hugged me and kissed me. His name was Jerry. He stank, and he had really strong breath and deep, blue eyes. He said, “I haven’t seen you in so long!” I didn’t know him —and every time we can’t explain something, we mysticize it. So I thought, “This must be from God!”

Jerry said, “I’m hungry,” so I took him into the *bodega* and bought him a sandwich, a coffee, and a tallboy Budweiser. The next day, I was setting up for mass, and five drunk guys stumbled into the church —so now I had to buy five sandwiches, five coffees, and five

tallboy beers. And I realized there was a Capuchin Franciscan named Brother Mike at a neighboring parish, who looked like me. He left the parish and is now happily married with children. We inherited his homeless community, and we committed ourselves to handing out sandwiches and coffee before every Sunday liturgy. That turned into a sit-down breakfast. It was a humbling experience: Our trendy ministry didn't work because no one wanted to celebrate mass with two young, handsome priests in an empty church. God taught us a better way to enter into the fullness of God's service to the most vulnerable in the world.

No matter where you meet—in a living room or in a cathedral, in a beautiful space like Father Marek's church, or in a dance hall, like Father Jayme's old church—there's a five-foot "mission" for your community staring you in the face. If you want to grow your ministry, seek authority through authenticity. We became an authentic expression of Catholicism and of Christianity when the poor came and said, "You are our priests!" They wouldn't let us go. Our authority doesn't come from a power structure that we need to maintain. It comes from the people of God, the most vulnerable. That's where we get our authority and our authenticity—by stepping into the needs of our communities. Many mainline pastors who have pastored for 30, 40 or 50 years still don't have the authority of their people. They haven't stepped into the needs of their communities. Their motto isn't "fake it till you make it." It's "fake it until you die." Don't just "fake it." Go out, touch and hold. Lift up and console and bring peace!

Now that we had authority from the people, a local Roman Catholic parish invited us to operate their food pantry. We operated in their space because we had a rapport with the homeless. We had authority from the people!

Arek was the catalyst of much of what we do. He was one of our homeless street partners who froze to death during a random New York snowstorm on November 16, 2018. I took a picture of him on the day that I tried to send him back to his native Poland. We raised thousands of dollars to send him back. He was fed up and sick, literally dying on the street, so we cleared all his warrants, so that he wouldn't get detained at the airport. We took him to get a haircut and new clothes. We bought his plane ticket, cleared his departure with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and took him to the airport. We wore our cassocks and got him to the front of the line for the

airplane. We said, “God bless! Get home safe!” Hours later, when I received a notification that his plane landed in Poland, I was happy that he would die with his mom. The next day, Brother Kevin called me: Arek was passed out in front of our food pantry. I thought Brother Kevin was joking. This couldn’t be happening. Arek left the airport, took the \$60 that I gave him for a taxi in Warsaw, got drunk at a local bar, was arrested by port authority and taken to Jamaica Hospital, then discharged as an alcoholic. Our work began with Arek.

If you ever question who or what will make your ministry work, it’s people like Arek. If you’re not in with him, you’ll have problems in your ministry. If you want to make your ministry work, the secret is not some fancy flyer or cool Instagram page. The secret is that guy. It’s the single mother who doesn’t know how to cope. It’s the addict. It’s the young gay man dealing with his identity. It’s the grandma who doesn’t know where her faith is anymore. It’s the person who feels broken, ashamed and embarrassed. It’s not brain surgery: Louis quoted Matthew 25.

How do you become a saint? Not only by dying, but by doing something really cool—as Jesus taught us. Stop doing all the wrong stuff. Cut out all the nonsense. Be the seed that dies and produces much fruit (Jn. 12:24).

Our response to Arek’s death was to open a winter warming center so that homeless people wouldn’t die. The city refused to give us money, but a local Lutheran pastor opened his doors, joking, “You can run a brothel out of this place—as long as rent is paid on the first of the month!” We removed 10,000 pounds of garbage from the Lutherans’ basement. Many of our homeless guys are Polish, with backgrounds in carpentry, so they provided the labor for a new space that we call Ridgewood Abbey. We told the police what we were doing. We threw these homeless guys in a church and made them live like monks: communal meals, grand silence, chores. It worked perfectly, and guys who killed one another in the streets now came together in community.

We opened another warming center after that in Saint James Episcopal Church, the second-oldest church in the state of New York. The remodeling was estimated to take six months and cost \$500,000. We did it in two months for \$25,000, with fair wages paid for homeless manpower. When the City saw how we were saving homeless people from dying, they gave us \$100,000, and we opened two bed programs.

Fast-forward to COVID: We became superstars in our community because we had tons of authority there. I have a background in logistics. I was deployed with FEMA for natural disasters. I worked with the Red Cross. We started our food operations, and, as Louis said, we distributed 20 million pounds of food during the 14 months of our contract. U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called to ask what he could do to help. A week later, we received a call from the USDA, which wanted All Saints, our tiny Independent Catholic Church, to run the distribution of USDA emergency food boxes for the entire city of New York! As Sister Gillian suggested, when these opportunities arise, we, at All Saints, say “yes!”

As a result, we became a parish of 200 people—because everyone who showed up to volunteer became a “parishioner.” Parishioners aren’t simply people who come and sit in your pews. Read *Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, and Making Church Matter*. Your parishioners are those who live in your community! Historically, in the Roman Church, parishes are physical, geographical districts. The counties in Louisiana are called parishes because they were built around churches. Your parish *is* your community, and, as one of my formators used to say, if you walk in your community without clerical dress and if no one recognizes you a block away from your church, you’re not doing a good job! Our people need to know who we are!

During COVID, all these volunteers showed up at All Saints. They weren’t “parishioners” in the traditional sense, and they don’t come to church, but they come for ministry! Ministry trumps church and liturgy, in the sense that we’re called to ministry. The liturgy and the Eucharist are our fuel, our source, our substance, but there’s a reason why the deacon says at the end of the liturgy, “Go out into the world and bring the good news”!

At All Saints, we have no need for people to praise us and clap for us and make us feel like “real Catholics.” We identify with the Old Catholic tradition in terms of our theology and ecclesiology, and we have decided as a community to live that tradition as best we can. Do I care that the archbishop of Utrecht is not giving me high fives? No. Do I care that the Episcopal diocese has given us a hard time. No. As Benedictines, we were recently received into an Anglican Episcopal order. It’s called the House of *Initia Nova* at Genesis Abbey. We’re a Benedictine community recognized by Canterbury and received on the basis of becoming Episcopalians, so we’re doing that “tap dance”

and asking for their blessing as we come closer to the Episcopal Church. One of our asks is that they receive us as Old Catholics, so there are conversations above our heads, at the bishops' level. We're not doing this because we feel that someone needs to give us a "bone." We're doing it to be closer to our sisters and brothers—just as many of us experienced a closeness as we sang the *Salve Regina* last night. No matter how much we want to disagree with the Church or how far we want to run away from her, she is still inside of us, and we love her. She's just hurt and broken, like my girlfriend who divorced me a year and a day after we married.

We give thanks to God for allowing us to do this work. We give thanks to God for people like Vilatte and for men like Marek and Jayme and Martin de Porres and Karen and all of you here who "walk the walk" and who were brave enough to say, "This church isn't right for me—but I still want to do the work. I still want to love God and be Church and serve God's people in ministry!"

Reflections on “Ever Ancient, Ever New: The Search for Authenticity in the ISM from Vilatte to Today”

“I identify with the call to be of service to those most in need, and I believe, too, that that’s what will bring us growth. When I was with the friars, there was one Polish church where the doors were almost always locked. There was nothing going on, except on Sundays. The scriptures say, ‘faith without works is nothing’ (James 2:17)!”

Most Rev. Martin de Porres Griffin
Sacramento, California

“Deacon Donna also started a summer program for inner-city kids in the low-income housing near our parish. That grew into a ministry of giving the kids backpacks for school. When the city cut its food program for kids, she brought together people to give kids enough food to last through the weekend. The kids looked forward to their afternoons in our community center—and many of them joined our faith formation and First Communion programs. Some of them became altar servers!”

Rev. Annie Watson
Saint Louis, Missouri

“As Catholics, we must stand for justice. In the Hebrew scriptures, God is often introduced as a God of justice. We recognize that to exclude people is not just, and that to not fully embrace only some people is not just. We can’t limit ourselves to issues of sex or gender, though: We can’t march in Pride parades but then fail to show up at demonstrations to support our Black and Latino neighbors. We must see all these issues through the prism of justice.”

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

“I celebrate all that Father Mike is doing in his ministry, but it’s hard to apply those principles to my ministry, where we don’t all live in the same town. He asked whether people will recognize us when we walk outside our ministries—I can’t relate to that. People drive for 40 minutes to come to our community.”

Rev. Rosa Buffone
Newton, Massachusetts

“Father Mike made the very worthwhile point that we might do well in our movement to stop seeking external validation. He pointed out a difference between power and authority: Power is top-down. Authority is bottom-up, from the people. In our case, God is the ultimate Authority, but local authority still comes from the people. Reverend Rosa’s community is more geographically distributed, but her authority is not to be questioned because she serves the real needs of her community. Rosa does the real work of the Church! As priests, we are present for people. For some, that might mean moving huge amounts of food for a community. For others, it might mean being present to someone who just lost a best friend to COVID. I understand Father Mike to be saying, ‘Let’s be less concerned with how “authentic” we are. Let’s do the work of Jesus!’ If we do God’s work, we have authority, and our ministry is valid.”

Very Rev. Scott Carter
Ashland, Oregon

“Father Mike always says, ‘These principles work for us—but you need to find what works for your context.’ I was consecrated a bishop in Vilatte’s succession. I received a lot of pushback, but that was colored by the experience of the Episcopal Church. Vilatte went to the people—despite objections by the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches concerning the validity of his sacraments. His authenticity and authority came from the people he served. That applies to all our situations. I have a Roman Catholic classmate who says, ‘Well, you know you’re not a valid bishop; you’re not a real priest.’ I reply, ‘To the people I serve, I am—and that’s all I care about.’”

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

“I was ordained January 3, 1976, so I’ve been in this movement for 45 years. When I first came to this movement, I was very disappointed by the prelates and clerics who were only concerned about showing their apostolic succession and convincing you that they were valid. They were hoping to influence people, rather than minister to people and glorify God through their ministry. We have to own that history. Two books that I recommend are *Bishops at Large* by Peter Anson, and *Episcopi Vagantes*. They discuss the silliness of these ‘roaming bishops’ who were more concerned about vestments, lace and titles. Like Jayme said last night, they wanted everyone to recognize them as the

‘Grand Poobah’! We have to own that history, in order to move to authenticity. One of the ways that we grew in Albuquerque was to be able to say I’ve ‘got my boots on the street.’ The police were gathering up the tents and property of homeless people. I went to the place where this was happening, and I stood between a police officer and a trash truck. We began helping the unhoused of Albuquerque. We set up an encampment for them, and the very first mass of St. Oscar Romero Community was in the midst of that homeless camp. I fully agree with Father Mike: We get our authority, authenticity and legitimacy by how we serve the people. Not from long charts of apostolic succession. If we live the spirit of the gospel, particularly of the *Magnificat* and of Luke 4:18-19, then we are legitimate, valid priests and churches. Don’t start a church and then try to fill it. Minister to the people, and they’ll be there!”

Rev. Frank Quintana
Albuquerque, New Mexico

“I like to say that ‘I’m more interested in apostolic success than apostolic succession.’”

Most Rev. Alan Kemp
Gig Harbor, Washington

“My community, Spirit of Christ, was started not because it was Catholic, but because there was no affirming community or worship experience for Black LGBT folks. Some White parishes say that they’re multicultural, but they never play our music. For me, Facebook became a major tool for evangelism. People see pictures of me saying mass. Then they see me at a gay bar and feel that they can come to me and ask me for a prayer. People really are watching us on Facebook. They see what we’re doing in our communities.”

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

“Atlanta can count a massive population of affirming churches—maybe 10% of them—doing anything beyond saying, ‘It’s okay to be gay and Christian.’ It’s the ‘kiddie pool’; it’s where you go when you first come out and want to be in Christ. Too often, they don’t offer a place to grow beyond that. Our mission is to give folks room to grow in their faith while still attending an affirming church. I do not teach every lesson, saying, ‘It’s okay to be gay and Christian.’ You can be

an affirming church without being a single-issue church—like the ones that Father Mike pointed to. My gut reaction was to be taken aback by his statement on single-issue churches. I thought, ‘What right do you have to question the model of an affirming church when you’re not part of that community, when you don’t have a card to play in that game? You haven’t been told by your family and extended family and church that you will burn in hell because of who you love. How dare you attack that element of the affirming Church?’ I realize that’s not what Father Mike said, but that’s often my first reaction to people who make judgment calls about an affirming church: ‘Be careful about the statements you make as a cis, straight person.’ It’s more complex than we’re willing to admit.”

Rev. Michael Angelo D’Arrigo
Madison, Georgia

“I had a similar reaction to ‘single-issue’ churches, but, as a straight, cis man, I thought, ‘I need to ask my friends,’ since I don’t have that experience. I wonder if there’s a bit of an answer in Father Mike’s framework: If authority comes from the bottom-up, and if you’re doing the work of discerning what your people need, then maybe that will be more of a focus in your community than in others. I’m a big believer that we all have charisms in our individual churches. It’s our job to discern how best to minister to the people in our concrete context.”

Very Rev. Scott Carter
Ashland, Oregon

“We also have to acknowledge classism. Many White, gay churches have still not addressed the question of the classism that they reflect to our world—and the fact that many Black people do not feel welcome in those communities as a result.”

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

The 21st-century Phoebe Experience

Part 4

Deacon Donna Nachefski
Saint Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church
Saint Louis, Missouri

I am Deacon Donna Nachefski, a permanent deacon at Saint Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church in Saint Louis, Missouri. I grew up in a mixed-faith family: My mother grew up a staunch Missouri Synod Lutheran. They are known to be, in the words of Father Peter-Ben Smit, “more Roman Catholic than the Roman Catholic Church.” My father was raised by his Roman Catholic mother to embrace Catholicism. My dad eventually conceded to become Lutheran. He agreed to raise all his kids as Lutherans—but he couldn’t let go of some things, so we practiced customs of both faith traditions. We attended Catholic mass and Lutheran services.

My first recollection of a burning desire for ordained ministry came at five years old. It was very similar to other experiences that we’ve heard today: My brother and I played mass in the basement—not with oyster crackers or Nilla Wafers, but with Saltines. We stuck birthday candles in a planter and lighted them as our altar candles. My brother always played acolyte, and I the priest. My mom would come downstairs, to see what we were doing. She would remind me that women could not be priests in the Catholic Church or pastors in the Lutheran Church.

I attended Lutheran parochial schools through high school, where we were reminded how to become a good pastor’s wife. When I was in grade school, there was a split in the Missouri Synod, that led pastors and seminarians to walk out of the seminary because they didn’t literally interpret the Bible. Women were being called to ministry as pastors in the newly-formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Many of my high school girlfriends later became ELCA pastors. It could have been the perfect time for me to join them—except that I had married a Polish, Roman Catholic man, and my children were being raised as Catholics.

We attended Saint Stanislaus. However, after our fight with the Archdiocese of Saint Louis, we were free from Roman rules. We were free to serve all of God’s people in an inclusive and equitable way!

Finally! I acted on God's calling for me, for ordained ministry. As I discerned this calling under the guidance of Father Marek, I realized that God was calling me to the diaconate. I am at my best when I am needed. I enjoy serving people in any way possible. So I entered the diaconate formation program at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana, where they train deacon candidates from different Roman Catholic dioceses around the country. Needless to say, I faced a bit of pushback at times from male deacon candidates in the program. When I came across as too progressive or, God forbid, when I suggested that divorced people should be able to receive communion, they realized I wasn't from a Roman church.

The women in my class and our women facilitators were very supportive, as were some of the men. After three years of classes and a certificate in Catholic theology, I was ordained to the diaconate. I continue to take classes. I recently completed my second certification in doctrine.

In addition to serving as a permanent deacon, I served as our sacristan for the past 15 years, training the acolytes, lectors, eucharistic ministers and other sacristans. I've also participated in a weekly Bible study, a social justice ministry that led to a wonderful food outreach program, our annual Pride events, and a summer program for the children of our parish and neighborhood. We've worked closely with the Catholic Worker House, which shelters homeless and abused women and children, sharing with them meals and needed items. Every time I tell Father Marek that I have an idea for something new, he goes along with me. As a deacon, I have baptized several children in our church. I have officiated at graveside services of parishioners. I have officiated at weddings. Two were especially memorable: the wedding of the daughter of a friend from high school, and the marriage of a Jewish woman with a Polish Catholic man. I co-officiated with Rabbi Randy Fleischer, a famous rabbi from Saint Louis, who treated me as an equal and included me in all the Jewish customs before, during and after the ceremony. I also enjoy hospital visits, and I feel blessed to bring Christ to those in need. It warms my heart to spend time with them, pray with them, and see the smiles on their faces when they see me enter the room.

In my secular job, I'm a customer service manager for a large, Midwestern grocery chain. I'm amazed every day at how my religious ministry and secular job work together for the good of God.

I serve God not only at my church, but also through my customers. Some of them know that I'm a deacon and ask me for prayers. I'm in awe every time someone at work asks me to visit a family member or friend in the hospital.

I'm forever grateful to the many people who have nurtured and guided me along the journey to ordained ministry. I've been blessed to meet so many people whom I've admired and who share the same love of God and of God's people—like Father Mike and his ministry in New York. I truly embrace that my ministry is not mine alone; it is the ministry of all of God's people. I'm very proud and fortunate to serve such a faith community as Saint Stanislaus!

The Challenge of Inclusive Catholicism to Embrace and Minister to “Nones”

Louis Núñez
New York, New York

In his homily, Father Ángel said that we need to be honest in prayer and in our relationship with God. If you're not being honest, just stop! If you're not being honest, it's not a relationship; it's manipulation. It's a lie. It's not real.

What resonates with me in all the stories here is the call to something greater. Certain churches are too “small” for us. No matter how big the Roman Catholic Church likes to think it is, it's a very small church. Many of us are here because we believe in a bigger God. We know that Christ opened his arms so wide that he included everyone. He saw the possibility and the deepest desire in every heart.

When I studied the philosophy and theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, I realized that my understanding of the Eucharist was very different from most people's. I recall one conservative seminarian who could never turn his back on the monstrance: He felt he was turning his back on God! I thought that was weird. I wanted to ask him, “What makes you think that God is limited to a golden box?” What makes us think that God is limited by the four walls of a church? God is infinite, vast and expansive, with a single love and energy that fills the material world. All reality and every single part of our universe.

In the same way that we have a bigger God, we have to acquire a bigger understanding of Church and of community. As Father Mike said, if Church is limited to the people in your building, you're doing it wrong.

From a financial perspective, the people who go to your church, who give money and fund your campaigns, will die, and, if there's no one new to replace them, you'll have a simple cash flow problem. I believe that God is calling us to be creative, to open our doors, and to take risks. It's as if God is telling us, “Let's try it this way. Let's try it *my way*.”

Father Mike spoke about a common myth for most church people: We believe our churches need to be trendy to attract people! We hire musicians and invest in speakers. Still it doesn't work. Since the 1960s,

we've seen a rejection of authority. Just watch the news: Authority is not doing what it should. We see financial scandals at the federal level, police brutality, and, in the Roman Catholic Church, child molestation. The graves of children at Roman Catholic residential schools in Canada hid other ghostly signs of abuse. We put trust in authority and in people—only to discover that they are...people. We believe what they say. We give them power and authority. Power comes from two sources: organized people and organized money. Any massive corporation, like Apple or Tesla, has organized people and money. We give them money for the needs they help fulfill. They have a mission.

As churches, we need to be very clear about our mission of healing people. When I worked with the homeless and did street counseling, I realized that everyone is addicted to something. Addictions are simply more obvious in a homeless person. Everyone needs healing, and, as churches, we can help people experience healing and feel most alive. That's our mission as a church: to bring healing to the Body of Christ—because we're all in this together!

We also must understand that people may not like what we like. As churches, we focus on liturgy. We like to be the center of attention. We like the vestments, the "bells and whistles." We like to pray like this. We like to live in community. We like to dress in habits and do these things. All that is perfectly fine—but people may not like these things in the same way.

In *You Can Heal Your Life*, Louise Hay suggests the mantra, "I love and accept myself exactly as I am." That's hard for a lot of people to say—and the Church needs to be a place where people are loved and accepted for exactly who they are.

We also need to recognize the myth that the Church needs to support its ministries. When we start thinking about creative financing and creative ministries—and Father Mike showed us how they work—our ministries will support our churches. When we become so focused on keeping a building open, we forget the whole purpose of the building! Saint Benedict recognized that monasteries brought people together. Monasteries came to many European towns before churches did! People wanted to live around those communities that helped people—and the ministries of those monasteries grew. Father Mike didn't grow his ministry by talking to people about the salvation of their souls. He helped them with concrete needs—even

when the “need” of the person was to have a beer! Think about that for a second: People told Father Mike what they needed—food and alcohol. Who the hell are we to tell them differently? Rather than tell the homeless that they don’t need a drink, we should welcome them. Rather than tell the gay young man that there’s something wrong with him or that he needs to change, we need to welcome him. Rather than tell a woman that she can’t do certain things within the Church, we need to welcome and support her. We need to create spaces that welcome people. That’s what the Church is supposed to look like! Do you want to advance your theology? Reflect on how the Church is supposed to look!

Many churches that were once filled with life and activity became simply empty buildings. Some turned into apartments and night clubs! The Church is running out of people and Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York may one day be the “Catholic Cultural Center of New York”—showing what the building used to be like in “the good old days” before it started rejecting people who look like us. Who does Jesus show the most contempt for in the gospel? For the religious leaders! He loved the blind, the leper, and the woman caught in adultery. He told the religious authorities that they should know better.

Think about this: On the night before he died, Jesus’ last act on earth before he was crucified was to introduce something new! He didn’t partake in a traditional Passover meal, with bitter herbs and the theologizing of an event, and with a little boy asking, “What makes this day different from any other day?” He did something completely different! He knew that the old system didn’t address the needs of his world. He reimaged Church!

“Nones”—those who don’t consider themselves part of any traditional organized religion became the largest growing “religious” group in the world. They tend to be in all religions, conservative and liberal. Younger generations no longer subscribe to or want to be part of previous realities. They don’t like the way things are going. They want something different. They’re not interested in maintaining systems or upholding churches, but they will support ministries. They’re not interested in heaven and hell, or distinctions in theology, or systems that seek to maintain power. We must find ways to do what’s important to them. When a four-year-old niece or nephew brings you a banana and pretends it’s a phone, how do you do react?

You hold the banana like a phone and talk on it—because it's important to *them*! If it's important to them, it's important to you!

We're in the middle of a deconstructionist movement, where people are leaving the Catholic Church and Christianity. These things no longer make sense to them. They want to see what we do. When Jesus had massive gatherings of 5,000 people, what did he do? He fed them! He addressed the real needs of people. Look at the people in front of you who have real needs: If it weren't for their pride and their not knowing how to ask, they'd be asking you to help address their needs!

Build a relationship with people so that they can let their guard down and tell you what's important to them. What they need. Then work with them to create new systems that are fairer and just.

When you rent your basement or office space to a nonprofit, you get a bunch of new people coming to your church—then you'll hear them say, "I didn't know there exist inclusive Catholic churches!" Get them in the door. Greet them there. Get them involved—volunteering and packing food. See what appeals to people and create roles for them!

One reason I had to leave the Roman Catholic Church was because my pastor openly endorsed Donald Trump in 2016 and again in 2020. We were the largest immigrant parish in Brooklyn, he served as the vicar for immigrants in Brooklyn—and he endorsed Trump from the pulpit! I admit I'm a Bernie Sanders guy: Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, visit the sick and imprisoned. Those are the points from Christ's "final exam."

Feed the hungry! Some states don't allow kids to graduate if they owe money for school lunches.

Visit the imprisoned! We don't have proper systems in our prisons to help people when they leave to reduce recidivism.

These are the things that "nones" care about. They care about making people's lives better and actually bringing heaven to earth! They care about non-judgmental spaces, more than spiritual conversations that don't impact our world. They care about people being decent human beings and about tearing down walls. Jesus constantly took down walls for people. His crucifixion ripped the veil in front of the Holy of Holies. His final act ensured that nothing separates us from God!

We are a threat to the Roman Catholic Church, which separates people. Opponents would love to squash us. They tell people you aren't valid. You have no power or authority. For them, you are renegades and heretics. Let's not rebuild their old system.

Let's reimagine what the Church could be like—especially for those who no longer identify as part of the Church!

Reflections on “Ministering to ‘Nones’”

“Father Mike and Louis have me asking what more we might do at our parish. We gather to worship every Sunday, but what else do we do, and who else are we serving? When I hear them talk about loving smelly people, I think that’s what being a Christian is all about: loving those people who aren’t so easy to love. Hearing Mother Annie speak about ‘blessing boxes’ [with food for those in need] and hearing Father Mike and Louis leaves me thinking, ‘What else can we do? How else can we help?’”

Stephen Rodríguez
Austin, Texas

“I’m very good at social ministry, but we say that the Eucharist is the center of our faith, so my goal is still to have a church that offers mass each week. For me, it’s reversed!”

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

“We will not all become All Saints in New York. We will not all become Saint Stanislaus in Saint Louis or Holy Family in Austin. We each need to find our own unique charism and passion. It’s important to find that passion and be “on fire,” as these guys clearly are. They are burning hot! When we find a passion, everything else becomes less important. If we fight for LGBT rights or women’s rights, others things take second or third place. That’s normal. What I appreciate about Father Joseph’s words is that Jesus said “Feed the hungry and clothe the naked” (Mt. 25:34-40), but he also said, “Do this in memory of me” (Lk. 22:19, 1Cor. 11:24). It’s not a binary: the Eucharist *or* a passion for feeding smelly people. They complement and flow from each other. Social work and outreach ministries remain extremely important, but they must flow from the Eucharist. I’m intrigued by Louis’ ‘myths.’ How do we explain the popularity of the sleek ‘Starbucks churches’ that fill with people who want a shiny, popular, New Age thing? That ‘myth’ brings people to church!”

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

"I go back to the 'mantra' that 'ministry trumps liturgy.' Yes, liturgy provides a place of spiritual nourishment and rejuvenation, a place where we gain our strength, but people want to be out there, serving others. I liked his quote: 'If your church is only a church on Sundays—that's not a church! It's not doing the work it needs to do.' Having a liturgical calendar doesn't make any sense if we don't live the liturgical year in the streets."

Rev. Rosa Buffone
Newton, Massachusetts

"Our lifestyles should reflect our liturgies. If we say these things are important, they have to shape the way we live our lives—including how we actuate our ministries. There shouldn't be any separation between our liturgy and our service—but, unfortunately, there's a huge separation."

Rev. Michael Angelo D'Arrigo
Madison, Georgia

"I've been here at Charis for four and a half years. We have a cluster of 20- and 30-somethings who connect to Charis because of their relationship to me. At the big, Roman Catholic community where I raised my kids, I used to have a group called the Upper Room, for upperclassmen, for juniors and seniors. They completely set the agenda. When they said they wanted to learn about Buddhism, I didn't say, 'We need to learn about Catholicism!' Instead, we learned about Buddhism, and then I taught them about practices of silence in Christianity. They also learned centering prayer. Because of that option, many of them stayed close to me over the years. They remain curious about what we're doing, but they don't think that Church is relevant. Making judgments about this cohort based on their engagement in liturgy is not the best benchmark. What I've noticed that's relevant with them is that they are seekers, although many describe themselves as agnostics and atheists. They like to come and be part of the community when we have a potluck and learning opportunity, which we call Community Night. They'll hang out with me at the brewery for "Brew and Belief." Ten years from now, maybe they'll come for Christmas and Easter. We live in an era where people are more and more indifferent to faith communities. It's a big, cultural question: 'How is this relevant, and why should I bother? I have community at my gym!' Our distinctive should be to love the heck

out of them. I keep telling my community: ‘Don’t judge or hassle your kids. Just love them.’ Part of the genius of 12-step programs is attraction, not promotion. We need to live in such a way that people say, ‘Wow, why are they like that?’”

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

“We do the same at Holy Spirit. If people want to learn Buddhism or Taoism or Celtic practices or Native American spirituality, let’s do it! A lot of times, my agenda is not their agenda. I describe our liturgies as ‘75% familiar, 25% different’ – which leaves me flexibility to speak about what people are yearning for. Many want relationship and deeper spirituality. They want to learn about themselves in relationship with God and their higher self. I find myself nudging them to bring that out into the world, into a ministry. If we were all in the same town, we could get involved in the same ministry together, but, for us, it’s hard to get our ‘spirituality on the street’ together. We haven’t been doing our Pinwheel Café during the pandemic. I miss that. I long for that. It was our monthly opportunity for our people to come from all over, to do ministry together.”

Rev. Rosa Buffone
Newton, Massachusetts

The 21st-century Phoebe Experience

Part 5

Mother Kathleen Jess
Kingman, Arizona

My journey is one of passion for the sacraments and spirituality found in the Roman Catholic Church. I have no qualms about being raised within the Roman Catholic Church. I loved it. I loved the rituals. I loved the Latin masses, the smoke, and the songs. Those are my roots, my tradition, and my own spirituality.

But I wasn't sure that anyone was listening to me, because I am a woman. I am a rebellious woman and a protester. Out of frustration, I left the Roman Catholic Church in 2002. That made me very sad.

I know pain. I married and divorced three times. I lost five babies because my body wouldn't carry them. I have one child, and she was taken from me by her father. Depression set in, a world of darkness. From the mid-1970s into the mid-1980s I struggled with inner conflict even as I relocated out into Lancaster, a high desert in California, working for Rockwell Aerospace as a labor relations representative.

I attended church at St. Mary's, not receiving the sacraments due to being divorced. I went to confession numerous times and was told by the priest that "sometimes we live in grey, because it is not always about 'black and white.'" I struggled with my doubts in that "grey" place. I was invited to become a young adult leader in Search, a great young adult program. It was a perfect fit: I was struggling, and I worked with wonderful, struggling young adults. Due to a downsizing of workers at Rockwell, I was let go.

Discernment led me to Long Island, New York in the mid-1980s, where I applied and was accepted at the University of New York at Stony Brook. In 1994, I earned my B.A. in Psychology, with a minor in Philosophy. I also received my pastoral formation certificate in spiritual mentoring. I worked at a bakery and was mentored by a Franciscan brother, Brother Ed. He gave me the assignment of writing every night that I loved myself. He accepted me, journeyed with me, and answered all my questions. I didn't have to pretend with him. He was good for me, and I was good for him.

Afterward, I relocated back to California and accepted a position as a language arts teacher for 7th- and 8th-graders in my former Catholic grade school, St. Joseph's. During this time, I applied to Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, and was accepted into the Religious Education Department, in the Master of Divinity Program. I earned this degree in 1999 as a laywoman. I learned more about spirituality. I professed vows of poverty, chastity and obedience with a Benedictine order.

In 2000, I was accepted into the certified chaplaincy program at UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, California.

One day, I visited Saint Andrew's Priory, where I sat on the cliff overlooking the expansive valley below. I prayed, "God, you have protected me. I want to do your will!"

In 2005, I was ordained in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, in the desert of California. Bishop Susan Provost later welcomed me into The National Catholic Church in North America, now led by Bishop Leonard Walker.

Throughout my life, I have struggled to love myself. I have been told by so many people that I am no good, so I always struggled. Now I have realized: "Oh, my gosh, I am loveable!"

What Would It Take?

Sine Qua Non Conditions of Autocephalous Unity

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Stanislaus Polish Catholic Church
Saint Louis, Missouri

Before I begin my presentation, you need to know a few things about me. First, English is neither my first nor my second language. Second, my first graduate studies in Poland were in canon law, which may shed some light on how I think and organize my thoughts. Third, if what I say scandalizes, hurts or offends you, I ask your forgiveness. I love and respect every single one of you, so please don't take anything that I say personally.

We should not accept independence as an ideal. In theological terms, independence is an aberration of God's "blueprint" for us as the image of God in which we are all created. It's not a goal for which we should strive. God is a triune unity of persons. We are created to live in unity with each other. We are not made to be separate from each other. Theologically speaking, independence is an aberration with no place in ecclesiology. Jesus prayed "that all may be one, just as you are in me and I am in you" (Jn. 17:21). Because he prayed for this unity "so that the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21), we might ask ourselves: Why does the world *not* believe? One reason is because our separated world refuses to believe in a fragmented witness! We are called to be one, just as God the Father is one with Christ the Savior.

Our separation and independence is a sad consequence of sin—a sin of our forefathers, because very few women were in positions of power for centuries. It is also the result of personal pride, existing from the beginning, with the first separation that occurred in the biblical narrative of the pride of an angel (Is. 14:12-15, Ez. 28:11-19).

Because I believe that God's blueprint for the Church and for the entire universe is unity and connectedness, rather than separation and independence, I refuse to accept the current *status quo* in our movement. I refuse to give up and say, "It is what it is." We must dream, we must pray, and we must work for the unity of humankind and of Christianity, including, in particular, the unity of Catholics.

I can imagine us achieving unity in two ways.

The first possible path to unity requires us to return to the larger churches from which we separated—if that were possible, even in theory. The second path is to come together as the many, fragmented “denominations” we are.

Allow me first to address a very hypothetical, but still theologically-possible scenario of what it would take for us to go back to the churches to which we once belonged. Many of us came from the Roman Catholic tradition. Some of us moved from the Episcopal or Anglican Church. Others moved from groups and denominations that we left or were told to leave because of who we are, what we do, and how we choose to govern ourselves.

Many of us likely believe in the righteousness of our act of leaving, of our separation. We longed for—and still long for—a more just, inclusive and Christ-like Church. By our own choice, or by the forces of exclusion, we now reflect the divided, wounded and scarred Body of Christ. We say how good it is for us to be free to do what we believe is right. We are now free to be who we are, and many Independent Catholics believe they are free to believe what they want to be true. Though we have all these freedoms, the reality of the vision dims all our achievements once we leave or are asked to leave our original churches.

To be honest, 16 years after my excommunication, I grieve the reality of my separation from Mother Church. The Roman Church is far from perfect: It can be sexist, racist, homophobic and abusive—but it is my mother church. I have been hurt, traumatized and condemned by Mother Church, but I can’t stop loving her. If we were honest, many of us would likely admit to similar mixed feelings about our mother churches—the churches of our parents, of our childhood, of our Sunday school and youth groups, of our first choir or of our marriage. Notwithstanding all the pain they caused us, these churches will always remain in our spiritual DNA. Our mother churches are like “first-love” ex-spouses. If I were to ask you your first love, you would remember. They were not perfect, but you will never forget them. We think that we can get over our ex-spouses and our ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends, but they remain forever a part of our spiritual stories. And, just like our first love, we may even wonder from time to time what it would take for us to get back together. What conditions would he or she need to fulfill, for me to go out with them again? What changes would need to take place in my mother church,

or what conditions would need to be met, for me to consider reuniting with my first ecclesial love?

Here's my short, subjective and personal list of what it would take for me to go back to the Roman Church:

1. **Rome would need to end its clericalism**, with clergy at the center of its power structure. For me, this is the most important condition. The power, governance and mentality of the Roman Church would need to be community-centered, not clergy-centered. If that were to happen, I would say, "Let's date again!"
2. **The Roman Church would need to end its sexism**. All qualified and properly-trained members, with no regard to gender or gender identity, whether ordained or not, need to be able to serve in all positions in the church.
3. **The Roman Church would need to end its homophobia**. All loving couples, with no regard to the gender of the spouses, need to be able to receive the benefits of all seven sacraments, including the sacrament of Marriage.
4. **The Church of Rome must end its Eurocentric uniformity**. Unity does not mean uniformity. For me to date the Church again, local and national churches must be free to express their unique cultures and identities in the way they pray and self-govern. Many times, during our Monday evening think tanks, we talk about the Primitive Church, which, prior to 312 A.D., existed as one, but with great diversity: The church in Jerusalem was different from the church of Rome, the church in Antioch, and the church in Corinth. Each was uniquely beautiful, but they formed one church.

These are my *sine que non* conditions that must be fulfilled by Rome before I would gladly go back—and go back I would, because I humbly recognize that our very real and apparently necessary separation is the result of sin, not of grace. When the wife of Pope Mary Magdalene calls me and asks me to come home, I will gladly go home to Rome. Until that day, as we await the call of Pope Magdalene's wife, we find ourselves in this imperfect state of separation.

We call ourselves—as we truly are—the Catholic Church, but we are not in communion with Rome, Canterbury, Constantinople, Utrecht, or even with each other. There are more Independent

Catholic bishops in the United States than Roman Catholic bishops in Poland.

Since the arrival of the first “Old Catholics” on U.S. shores, we have established and seen the demise of countless independent “denominations,” most of them miniscule in size and impact. In my experience, new Independent Catholic jurisdictions and structures come to life each year, while others fall down. We heard that when Jayme listed the jurisdictions that no longer exist. Every year, new jurisdictions create professional-looking websites. They establish “cathedrals” in rented space or backyards. New bishops don their cassocks. Countless good and holy people, with very pious intentions, have tried over and over again to build a church that would proudly carry the banner of “Old Catholicism” in these United States and provide a valid alternative to so many souls who find themselves on, or outside, the margins of Roman Catholicism. Unfortunately, in my opinion, they have all failed.

When I say that there have been many good, holy and pious people, I do not dismiss their goodness or holiness—but I also don’t dismiss the fact that we, good and holy people, have failed to create an alternative.

I fear that very few people take seriously the so-called “Independent Catholic movement” in the United States. I fear that many times we don’t take ourselves seriously. Despite our personal holiness, and those of many fathers and mothers of the American Independent Sacramental Movement, we do not take this worthy cause seriously enough to dedicate the required amount of time, energy and resources to it. Truth be told, some 99% of us cannot afford to make ministry our full-time project. It’s a closed circle: Because our congregations are not our full-time projects, they don’t grow enough to employ full-time shepherds.

Independent bishops ordain new deacons, presbyters and bishops faster than they bring people to their own pews! They set aside educational and professional standards because, they say, “we need more priests and bishops to plant new churches!” I’m guessing that you would not go to a physician unless she had M.D. or similar initials after her last name. We cannot expect spiritual seekers to follow our clergy when many of them do not possess graduate—or at least undergraduate—degrees in theology. We have created a vicious circle, where our lack of time and resources multiplied by our miniscule size and our lack of growth painfully limit the time and the

resources we dedicate to our ministries. We have gotten so used to these dysfunctional conditions of the Independent Catholic movement in the U.S. that we do not dare to dream of something better, something more serious, something more substantive. The personal holiness and spiritual depth of so many of us allow us to substitute the inward growth of the very few, for the abject failure to attract many to our ministries. Because of our otherwise-worthy claim to focus on “quality,” not quantity, we have given up on leading all those disenfranchised Roman Catholics to our better version of Catholicism! We have accepted the fact that they will end up as “nones” or in some sleek, non-denominational church of “Saint Starbucks.”

I am fully aware of how harsh my words may sound. Please do not think that I dismiss anyone’s hard work, or that I do not value anyone’s spiritual depth or personal holiness. Don’t assume that I think less of small, home churches or tiny congregations that nurture their members and answer very real needs. I believe that there is room and a need for small groups and intimate ministries in every church and denomination. These are good and necessary things, and “small” doesn’t need to mean “bad.” Even big congregations know that they need to be balanced with personal outreach and one-on-one encounters. The inward growth of individual members is important in huge congregations. However, I don’t know of any Independent Catholic jurisdiction in the U.S. today where such a “dance” between big and intimate ministries exists. There is no balance because there are no big congregations in our movement! We do not have numerically-growing congregations. Instead, we all have decided to focus on small groups, chaplaincies, and, of course, weddings. There is no balance of big and small ministries in this lopsided reality.

While that diagnosis might sound harsh, please know that I’m formulating it with the utmost respect and affection for every single one of us. I know firsthand how painfully difficult and challenging this dream of ours is. However, I refuse to stop dreaming big and imagining the difference we can make in the lives of thousands of good people who are turned off or kicked out by the discriminatory policies of churches like the Roman Catholic Church. I refuse to accept the failures of our movement as the norm. And I refuse to join any group or jurisdiction that has given up on anyone taking us seriously.

I’m inspired to see that there are many other communities with vibrant ministries that find themselves in a similar predicament:

unwilling to compromise their dream and standards in order to belong to or to have a bishop. More and more of us are reaching the conclusion that there is currently no valid option for us to join or to which we might belong. Perhaps it will move us one day to do something about it – to come together.

I have a dream that one day at least some of us will refuse to tolerate this unbelievably fragmented and incoherent North American Autocephalous Catholic reality. What would it take for at least some of us to come together? What would it take to come together as a church that will compete with, cooperate with, and be taken seriously by the likes of the Vatican, Canterbury, Utrecht or Constantinople? What would it take for me to join such a hypothetical assembly or gathering (*ekklesia*)?

I have five conditions that must happen for me and our parish to join such a reality.

1. The most important condition of this hypothetical body is that it would be **a community-centered church that rejects clericalism** and is centered on community, not on clergy. This hypothetical, future body would be brought together into existence not by priests and bishops, but by communities, congregations and parishes coming together. If any deacon, priest or bishop wants to be a part of that future hypothetical body, they would need to be a part of a valid and quantifiable community of believers. I often joke with my parishioners that I need at least 12 people to be present on Sunday, so I dare to say that at least 12 lay persons per clergy would be needed for the clergy to be accepted into this future, hypothetical body. The ministry of ordained persons makes sense only when it is exercised in the context of church community. That's why those presbyters and deacons whose main ministry is taking place in one-on-one settings, which is good and holy ministry, need to belong to and gather for regular Eucharist with a congregation that will claim them and recognize them as their own. Deacons, priests and bishops have no point of existing without a congregation. Our one-on-one ministries are valid Monday through Friday, but that validity comes from coming together with a community for the Sunday Eucharist. Remember, though, that the first condition of this hypothetical vision is that it would be a community-centered, not clergy-centered, church.

2. The second condition might be controversial. It applies what might be called the Council of Constance principle. If you are not a church history geek, you may not remember that, in the 14th and 15th centuries, there were two and sometimes three “popes” claiming to be the bishops of Rome at the same time. It was the so-called Great Western Schism. One lived in Rome, one in Avignon, and one in Pisa, Italy. In 1414, the bishops called a council to resolve this division and separation among Catholics. They came up with a simple conclusion: The only way to end this situation required that all the “popes” be deposed and stop claiming to be popes. Only then, when there was no pope, could they elect a pope that would be an instrument and a sign of unity. **If we apply that Council of Constance principle to our fragmented version of Old/Independent Catholicism today, it requires us to say that if a bishop wants to join this hypothetical body, s/he must stop being a bishop and join as a presbyter.** After observing this movement for the last 16 years, largely feeling as an outsider to the movement—and it’s telling that I still feel like an outsider 16 years after my excommunication—I have come to believe that, with all due respect to the few bishops present here, bishops are the main impediment to unity and collaboration between various Independent Catholic communities. Like those “popes” and “antipopes” in the 14th and 15th centuries, the bishops caused the “Great American Schism” to exist for so long. The Council of Constance principle seems drastic, perhaps even too radical, but we have to start with no bishops in order to one day have a bishop who will truly be a sign and servant of unity. I want to share with you my experience in the Ukraine. When I was a young, idealistic seminarian, then 21 years old. My first missionary assignment sent me to the Ukraine with my recently-ordained friend, then 25 years old. Our job was to reopen a parish closed by the communists in 1945. No priest officiated thereafter, prior to our arrival in 1993. For more than 45 years, the community had no deacon, priest or bishop, and we thought we were “starting from scratch,” with no church and no believers. We went door-to-door, inviting people to our first mass. We ended up with a full house. For 45 years, people baptized their children and taught them the basics of Christianity without a single deacon, priest or bishop. The

church existed and survived for 45+ years without a single bishop, priest or deacon! That's why I propose the Council of Constance principle.

3. My third condition is that **this hypothetical, future body would be a synodal church, which means that all major decisions and elections always take place with full and active participation of both lay and ordained members, from the parish level, all the way to the top.** It's that simple. It's *our* church. In the 1990s, Austrians created the *Wir sind Kirche* movement, which means "We Are the Church." The Church is equally of lay and ordained persons, and *all* decisions have to be made together. If you listen to Pope Francis in the last two or three years, he's all about synodal governance as well.
4. The fourth condition would be that **this church would have serious educational and professional standards for its deacons, presbyters and bishops.** It's time that we take ourselves seriously, and that requires ordained members to obtain proper formation and education. Many of our priests are therapists and make a living by practicing therapy: They had to go to college, to get a degree and a license to become a therapist. If we require degrees and licenses for therapists, we must require degrees and licensing of clergy, too. Kathleen's story provides a great example of determination and what can be possible when we follow God's call. Our personal holiness and good intentions cannot replace or substitute for formal education and degrees. The next time that I hear of the consecration of a bishop without a master's degree in theology, I will excommunicate that bishop myself!
5. The church I dream of would be a church where all loving couples, with no regard to the genders of the spouses, could receive the benefits of sacramental Marriage. (You see that I am repeating myself: This was the same condition for me to go back to Rome!) This church cannot be a homophobic or sexist church. "Should we ordain women?" "Should we welcome LGBT persons?" "Should we celebrate same-sex marriages?" These would be "duh" questions: Of course, we would!
6. My final condition would be that **this church would need to dream big and not be shy about building up the kingdom of God, growing both in numbers and holiness.** There is no

contradiction between holiness and growth. We can do both! We will not stop dreaming or imagining ourselves as a valid option for thousands of Mexican people who leave the Roman Church every day. We will put our heads and hearts together – and we will be big!

This list is very subjective, very imperfect, and very far from exhaustive, but it gives you an idea of what is important to me and many likeminded colleagues. The absence of these conditions among currently-existing Independent Catholic jurisdictions is one of the main reasons why so many larger Independent Catholic communities persistently decline to join.

When Bishop Peter Paul Brennan came to me more than ten years ago, we met for over two hours. He said, “I should consecrate you as a bishop tomorrow!” At least 12 times since then, other bishops have said the same – if only I joined them. They say, “You need a bishop. You need a jurisdiction. You can’t survive on your own!” There is a reason why large communities aren’t joining jurisdictions. Consider the positions of Father Mike in Brooklyn, Father Jayme in Austin, Father Lawman and Father Kevin in Louisville, the community of *Spiritus Christi* in Buffalo, the Community of Saint Peter in Cleveland, and so many others that we don’t hear of because they’ve stepped away from the Independent movement. Many of us see the Independent movement as toxic and too fragmented. We, at Saint Stanislaus, have not been able to find the group that would embody the above-mentioned ideals. I pray that one day we will.

What would you add or remove from these lists – both in terms of returning to Rome or wherever you came from, and in terms of us coming together? I do not have all the answers. But only by coming together can we make these lists better and eventually make this dream of diverse unity come true!

Reflections on “What Would It Take? *Sine Qua Non* Conditions of Autocephalous Unity”

“I’ve always had my doubts about the structure of the Independent Catholic Church, since many bishops have no clergy and many clergy have no following at all. It’s a real problem. Bringing the hierarchy together is difficult: Everyone wants to keep their titles and what they have. Moving forward, though, we need to have structures and guidelines.”

Rev. Roy Gómez
Austin, Texas

“For me, it is less about having followers, and more about having community. My vision is community-centered. You can be a bishop without a parish, but you have to belong to a community. There’s nothing wrong with Father Joseph being a police chaplain, but he has to have a eucharistic community that claims him and says, ‘He’s one of us.’ As clergy, we’re not doing this on our own.”

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

“I don’t feel that bishops necessarily have to give up their titles so much as approach others in a spirit of equality and with an open mind.”

Gene Thompson
Winter Park, Florida

“We all hear of meetings of bishops, like the Catholic Bishops Forum in Saint Louis last week. They always end with handshakes, smiles and a group picture, but they don’t become part of something larger. It’s hard to untangle them from their jurisdictions, and, once you’ve had a jurisdiction, it’s painfully hard to say that you will not have it in an hour because you’re going to be part of something bigger.”

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

"I was never born into the Roman Catholic Church, so I would never 'go back' to it. I do visit the church in Pennsylvania where I was baptized and the Lutheran church in Buffalo where I used to be active. In terms of agreement with these principles, I'm highly educated, but not in theology. It seems that the proposed plan would strip me of being able to preside. I don't believe that those who preside at the Eucharist need a degree. Not all the apostles were highly educated, and theology degrees are difficult. Depending on where you get your degree, you may be taught things that others don't believe."

Rev. Linda Pilato
Las Vegas, Nevada

"Maybe it's a good step for us to unify our training for clergy, so that we're all sharing the same information and have a greater likelihood of being equally trained."

Gene Thompson
Winter Park, Florida

"I recognize that I speak from a very privileged position: In Europe, higher education, like healthcare, is free: I can go from kindergarten to a Ph.D. for free! The best universities are public universities, and they're free. I realize that education is expensive and not readily available here in the States."

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

"I grew up Roman Catholic, serving mass at a big, Latino community, but every time I hear stories of people being mean or abusive or not meeting the needs of others—excluding those parishes that are doing the work to take care of people—it confirms why I won't go back to the Roman Catholic Church. I believe that the church doors should be open to all people in need. I don't think about going back to "Mother Church." I'm more interested in doing the work of Christ's followers. I don't knock those who are inclined to be part of jurisdictions, but that's something I just don't need. Let's focus on our work and the sacraments—and let's keep our doors open and let everyone in!"

Rev. Ángel Lugo
Ridgewood, New York

"My conditions for unity include authentic, community-focused ministry and allowing for diversity without being rigid. Here in Las Vegas, we're in dialogue with another community about reciprocity between clergy, so that we can cover one another's needs. I'm the only clergy here, so it would allow them to assist us. They have a morning mass, and we have an evening mass, so it would allow people to attend either service. I think there are possibilities for coming together, being basically "on the same page," and accepting each other's catholicity.

Most Rev. Thomas Abel
Las Vegas, Nevada

"I might take issue with #4: 'Personal holiness and/or good intentions cannot replace or substitute for formal education and degrees.' To me, that's very limiting. Where in the Bible does it say that you have to earn a master's degree? One of the people I've learned the most from religiously is Father Roy, who worked at a burger joint. That principle strikes me as out of touch. If you can go to college, you're fortunate, but not everyone can."

Stephen Rodríguez
Austin, Texas

"There's a difference between education and formation. Formation provides us structure in our prayer life and a structure to express ourselves in a Catholic way. I left the Roman Catholic seminary after my first year theology, but then I took classes at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and studied under a bishop who provided me good information for my future ministry. I'm not opposed to degrees: I have an S.T.L. [licentiate in sacred theology], but that doesn't mean that I'm better than anyone else."

Most Rev. Thomas Abel
Las Vegas, Nevada

"During and after the Vietnam War, all Roman Catholic churches in Vietnam were closed and went underground. Underground priests were ordained with no degrees, but they had formation. It's important for bishops to examine candidates for ordination. Some bishops don't hesitate to ordain others, so that their number of clergy grows, but then the clergy don't have gifts and talents as leaders, and some clergy end up in unacceptable scandals. I agree that we need

continuing formation and education. I learned a lot from the monastery and seminary, but I don't have a master's degree to hang on the wall. I feel that education is important, but, at the same time, having a higher degree without humility means nothing."

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

"Many Roman Catholic dioceses have formation programs for deacons that don't result in degrees. I went through a three-year formation program in the Diocese of Orlando, and Richard Rohr was one of my instructors, but I never received a degree at the end of those three years. Also, we need to make sure that no one on any abuse registry serves as a member of the clergy in our movement. There are jurisdictions that permit this, despite being listed on this registry."

Most Rev. William Cavins
Winter Park, Florida

"There's not enough time for the necessary things to happen for us to be able to go back to Mother Church. It takes eons for things to change in the Roman Catholic Church, so it's just not a reality in our lifetimes. Pope Francis says wonderful things, but there are many things that he can't act on. He can say wonderful things, but the reality is that the Roman Catholic Church is not going in that direction. He's a bright, flittering thing in the wind, and he's wonderful to hear, but he is not the Roman Catholic Church. I gave up the idea of reconciliation with Rome a long time ago, and I have no qualms with that. The Roman Catholic Church does not need us, and I feel sad for the people who think there is a chance of some reconciliation. We need to find our connection with God somewhere else. All roads do not lead to Rome, and Rome is only one road leading toward God. Rome is the distant cousin that I don't want to visit because I don't like the way they keep their living room. I just don't want to go there. I don't want to see my drunk uncle anymore. I don't want to argue with my cousins anymore. I don't want to deal with them anymore. I love them, and I'll be ready to help them in a heartbeat when they reach out, but I'm also glad that they live in another state! Let people 50 generations from now think about what it'll take to go back to Rome, because it'll take that much time. The more productive question for us is, 'What would it take for us to come together?' That's reasonable. Bishops' egos are a big thing keeping us apart. I like the Council of Constance

principle: Have the bishops set aside their hold and their claims! Each bishop says, 'It's my ball, and you can't play,' and each time bishops get upset, they start a new group. Their egos get bruised, and they run in separate ways. They splinter, and they splinter, and they splinter. That doesn't need to happen – and that's the biggest frustration for me in Independent Catholicism."

Rev. James Morgan
Las Vegas, Nevada

"I was raised Pentecostal and was never Roman Catholic, but when I hear you guys, I wonder, 'Wow, what did they do to you?' I've been hurt by what Pentecostals believe and teach, but to think that you guys are so hurt, that's painful to me. It literally hurts to hear how you preach love, but how isolated and alone they made you feel."

Sister Gillian Navarro
Brooklyn, New York

"What would have to change? The fundamental, dogmatic teaching of the Roman Church. How can you say, 'These people are saved, but these people are not'? Until that changes, everything else is just fluff."

Rev. Karen Furr
Kingman, Arizona

"I've been in the Independent movement for 45 years, and Father Marek touched on a lot of the criticisms and disappointments that I've had throughout the years with our movement. It there's one disease that has infected our movement, it's 'miteritis.' Too often, bishops aren't elected; they take it upon themselves to be consecrated bishops and to start their own 'empire.' It happens time and again in our Independent movement. 'Independent' is an apt name for us, because we're all independent of each other. If we are going to come together, we need to put a moratorium on all future consecrations unless everyone who joins this association agrees on these bishops. The Ecumenical Catholic Communion still has two regions without bishops: the Southwest and the East Coast. It seems that we should continue to discern bishops for those regions, but perhaps with some endorsement by other bodies that join us. We can't keep consecrating willy-nilly bishops."

Rev. Frank Quintana
Albuquerque, New Mexico

“We can say that about priests, too. There’s a funny saying in the 12-step movement: ‘All you need to start a new meeting is a resentment and a coffee pot.’ That really applies to our movement in a lot of ways, which has experienced a lot of fracturing over time. People get distressed, and they suppress it for a time, but there’s eventually a ‘crunch’ that makes them pack their gear and head out. In the ECC, we’re accountable to the entire communion, so we can’t tell people that a person they selected to become a bishop is no longer a bishop. I really value a return to the election of bishops, so, while I appreciate Marek’s idea that we throw all the miters into a ring—in a weird way, that might be the great equalizer—we have to respect that many of these bishops were elected by the people, and that cannot be dismissed or ignored.”

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

“As Marek went through his list, I was thinking of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and I found myself saying, ‘We do that. We do that. We do that.’ I’m really proud of the ECC and how thoughtful we have been in our 18 years of growing, learning and evolving together. When bishops from other jurisdictions and communities have come into the ECC, we recognize and respect the sacrament of the episcopacy, but not the office. ‘Once consecrated, always consecrated,’ but otherwise they have the same status as everyone else, unless they’re elected to office.”

Rev. Rosa Buffone
Newton, Massachusetts

“There are certain things that are beyond our control, with all sorts of ‘patriarchs’ and ‘metropolitans’ out there, but I hear Marek saying, ‘Let’s come together and do something about those things in our control.’ What I loved about Bishop Peter Hickman was his focus on building the ECC. I think all jurisdictions can emulate that and come together. Many of us want unity, but I’m not sure it’ll come if we seek structures first. Our focus should be more on communion. Even if Rome did everything that I like, I would not go back today. I don’t think we should suppose that most of us want to go back to where we left. We left for a reason.”

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

“We need to start by broadening our definition and understanding of Catholicism. We need to stop thinking in the ‘box’ of the Roman Catholic Church, in which many of us were raised. We need to start reimagining and re-envisioning what that means. When we broke away from our Roman Catholic parish 15 years ago, we embraced the diversity of the early Christianity of the first 300 years. We loved the idea of individuation in unity—not in uniformity—the ability to express Catholicism in our unique way. When we joined the ECC, we ‘conformed’ and had to pull in the reins a little bit. The beauty of the Independent Catholic movement is its diversity. I haven’t come across a lot of people who aren’t ‘qualified,’ but I know they exist. I love visiting other Independent Catholic churches and seeing how they celebrate the liturgy, how they express themselves, and what they’re doing ‘out in the streets.’ That diversity should be okay.”

Rev. Rosa Buffone
Newton, Massachusetts

“There’s no enticement for me to ever go back to the Worldwide Anglican Communion. There is nothing they can offer me that I can’t find spiritually within the Independent movement. I, too, think it’s presumptuous to believe that any of us want to go back. One of the things I appreciate is that there is a massive disparity of education within the Independent Sacramental Movement. I’m not interested in insisting that people have M.Div.’s from certain divinity schools. I agree with Rosa: If we looked only at the first 500 years of the Church, and of the Church fathers and mothers of that time period alone, there would be enough basis to call ourselves Catholic until the end of time. That presumes that our bishops and priests are aware of those documents. There’s a lot of extreme ignorance in our movement. They have pieces of paper that look like degrees, but they don’t know the basics of our faith. In our bible study the other week, we were talking about ‘the quick and the dead.’ Not a single adult with a college degree knew that ‘the quick’ means ‘the living.’ Talk about things that divide us: We’re all at such different levels of understanding with such different understandings of our history. How is it possible for us to even have conversations on scripture or Church history! I appreciated hearing Marek flesh out the things that I’ve been hearing him say for as long as I’ve known him.”

Rev. Michael Angelo D’Arrigo
Madison, Georgia

The 21st-century Phoebe Experience

Part 6

Mother Karen Furr
Kingman, Arizona

As I sat in the chapel this morning, I thought about what I wanted to say. I can give you my life history, which would take all day and probably half of tomorrow. I've done everything from firefighting to making Thomas' English Muffins®, from cab driver to therapist. But this morning, I was reflecting on who I am in the context of our movement. After billions of years of creation, our life journeys have brought us here, and this is no accident or surprise.

What has brought me here? First, my faith, which was born of trial, of compassion, of great love shown to me, and by me toward others. A journey of adventure, of wonderment, of mystery and mysticism. Through my entire path in this life, I've come to understand that what brings me here is my understanding that we are all one. For me, these are not merely words of a prayer from Saint John: "Lord, make them one, as we are one" (Jn. 17:21). For me, it's a reality. There's no separation: My experience is your experience. The scenarios may be different, but what's important is the similarity of our experiences. We are all brought here by call and by vocation. That, for me, is so important. Community is so important. We have that here, and it's tangible. In one of our small-group conversations yesterday, one person shared the pain and suffering experienced at the hands of a previous church, and another person, who had never heard the story, cried tears of love and gratitude for the presence of that person. Compassion is so important.

Our histories are so diverse, and yet so similar. Our ways of being are so diverse, yet so similar. What we're called to by the Holy Spirit is so diverse, and yet so similar. All our paths are one. There is no separation. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God" (Gen. 1:1). Nothing—no spiritual path, no persuasion, no thought—came into existence

that did not first come through that Christ consciousness. And that's what makes us one: That consciousness is one. That's what brings me through my whole life to this place today. It's not the things I've done or haven't done, the things I wish I did or didn't do. It's the unity of God that brought me into this place today – and I so celebrate that! It's a yearning that I have experienced my entire life. It's that unity of oneness that draws me into groups like this.

That started years ago. One of the most profound liturgies I was ever part of never included a presiding priest. It was a group of sisters who came together to share bread in the context of the liturgy. That's where my vocation to the priesthood started. We all have similar experiences of the things that brought us into our own paths, to our own ordinations, and to this group this weekend.

The Holy Spirit is within you. The Holy Spirit is your teacher, your guide. "Ask, and you will receive" (Mt. 7:7). "When you want to commune, go in your closet, shut the door, and commune with that Wisdom within" (Mt. 6:6). She dwells within each of us, uniting all of us and drawing us into the love of this group. I see that love in you, and I've heard it in our discussions during these last few days.

I want to talk about inclusion. When Jayme asked if I minded talking about my experience as a woman in our movement, I asked, "As opposed to what?" When we talk about "including women," we fail to recognize our oneness, and we delineate who is included and who isn't. There is no separation, no disconnection; we are all one. If there's any inclusion, it's the inclusion of our oneness, of who we are. It doesn't matter if we are men, women, gay, lesbian, bald or with good hair, blue eyes, green eyes or brown eyes. When we come to a place where we stop such categories, we really experience the power of oneness!

I am a priest. I don't need to say "I'm a woman priest." I'm a priest. We are priests.

If you're interested in what I did back in 1975, let me know, and I'll have that conversation – but the important thing that really touches my heart is that I see the kingdom of God in this group!

Roots & Branches: The Forces Shaping our Movement

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni
Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

I'm coming to you from my office, which nests in an ELCA Lutheran Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, which is also where the Charis Community prays. We are on Dakota land, so I honor all the elders and all indigenous people who have prayed on this part of this continent for generations before we arrived. I self-identify as a White, cis woman. I have immigrant roots: All of my grandparents came here from Ireland, so I'm very influenced by the fact that I grew up in a marginalized, immigrant, Roman Catholic and highly-ethnic experience.

Though I'm now in Minnesota, I'm not "Minnesota nice" – though I'm also not "Jersey nasty." As my Minnesota friends have observed, I'm direct. So if something I say puts you on the defensive, just be with it and see if maybe it's speaking to something within you. I'm a 39-year member of a 12-step program, and we always say, "Take what you like, and leave the rest" – which was actually one of the principles I used as a young adult when I came back to the Roman Catholic Church. I took what I liked, and I left the rest! I'm a presbyter in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and Charis is the first ECC church in Minnesota.

Today, I'd like to look at the vast trajectory of the tradition, to retrieve and reconstruct what will serve us. I have friends who are Reconstructionist Jews, and I love that term. They recognize that they possess a multi-millennia tradition, and they cull from it that which is lifegiving. They're letting go of that which is not, which theologians call the *adiaphora*: Everything that doesn't have substantial meaning can be looked at and left behind.

In this presentation, we'll explore the many threads that weave together to create identity in our movement. What exactly does it mean to be an Independent Catholic, an "Old Catholic," or an American Catholic? What does it mean that we exist in multiple jurisdictions with multiple self-understandings that go across an

enormous range, from “super-high church” to “very, very low church,” from centrist to marginal?

If you encountered the term “Independent Catholic” in conversation or through a newspaper article, you would probably do an internet search and find this definition of the Independent Sacramental Movement (ISM)—a label that we’ve been using for at least the two and a half years that I’ve been deeply engaged in interjurisdictional work: “The Independent Sacramental Movement is a loose association of individuals and micro-denominations that are not part of mainstream Christian denominations, like the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, or the Anglican Episcopal Church. The Independent sacramental movement possesses a broad spectrum of individuals, from those whose beliefs and practices largely resemble those of the mainstream denominations, to individuals who practice esoteric Christianity and non-Christian esotericism.”

The definition continues, and it uses one of Jayme’s favorite words: “Most clergy in this movement self-identify as autocephalous” — which means “self-governing.” It also notes that some of our bishops have pejoratively been labeled *episcopi vagantes*. Some people call us “tentmakers,” with other occupations to support our ministries. Others consider themselves “worker priests.” We have many different self-understandings and flavors!

This movement has a very broad spectrum of theology supporting it, which ranges from traditionalist groups with very conservative expressions, like Latin masses and all the accoutrement that go with that, to those who focus completely on sacramental justice and sharing sacraments with everyone.

Shakespeare gave us the phrase, “What’s in a name?” Many of us who are theologically-inclined push back on the descriptor “independent.” That term originated in the mid 1970s and was popularized by Bishop John Plummer in his 2005 work, *The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement*. That word is problematic, as are most of the modifiers we’re struggling with. It has now been applied to Independent Catholicism. Jayme’s chart, which shows the many “bubbles” within the “bubbles” of the ISM, is helpful in placing us in the broader context in which we find ourselves.

I would like to add some more descriptors for how we might think about ourselves. In my world, we are Ecumenical Catholics, who live in communion. Some of us are Apostolic Catholics. We are Ascension

Catholics, who happen to be allied with one another. There are at least 12 polities within our movement that use the term “Old Catholic.” We’re National Catholic, North American Catholic and American Catholic—at least 11 groups use that latter term. Some are Free Catholics. Many are Evangelical Catholics. Some are Celtic. Some are Polish. Six communities use the modifier Independent. We are Transformational Catholics, and we are Universal Catholics—which would mean that we’re “catholic Catholics!” We are United Catholics and Worldwide Catholics. If you’re hanging around Jayme, we’re Autocephalous Catholics. If you’re hanging around me, we’re Autochthonous Catholics—a word I first encountered in an underground gathering convened by Robert Blair Kaiser in Arizona some 16 years ago. Kaiser was the *Time* magazine correspondent at Vatican II. The experience absolutely transformed him. He liked the word “autochthonous” because it spoke to allowing the universal church to be indigenous—and that’s part of what we’re doing here in the United States as we shepherd an indigenous form of Catholicism in this movement.

There’s a video on YouTube of a naturalist in Arizona who describes what happened in a certain canyon over millennia. Initially, life was incredibly varied and diverse in that canyon, with little plants and animals and an incredible amount of organisms in competition with each other. Eventually, a certain natural selection occurred in the canyon, resulting in the emergence of dominant forms of life: The great pine trees and confers started taking over, and, bit by bit, they built up their body and wiped out the more diverse life within the canyon. For me, that is the perfect metaphor of what happened in the life of the early Church.

We talk about the “early Church” even while recognizing that the early Church was incredibly varied. It’s a problematic descriptor. When we use the term “early Church,” are we talking about the immediate, post-Pentecost community that was birthed out of a reigning monotheistic and highly-patriarchal religion, that had an all-male leadership body that we now see represented at the Council of Jerusalem, the description of which predates the gospels? Or, scooting forward a century, are we talking about a church with thousands of members, the church that we discover in the *Didache* and *First Clement*, with descriptions of the liturgy during a time of the flourishing of house churches, when people in the dominant culture—often women—opened their homes to large communities that were now

creating patterns and formulae for prayer, a church that was beginning to create offices in the form of the *episkopos* and the *diakonos*? Or, when we speak of the “early Church,” are we shooting ahead another 100 years, to the churches of Ephesus and Antioch, which had well-established bishops and presbyters? Or, are we talking about the post-persecution church that was expanding throughout the empire and began defining itself in terms like “dioceses,” which were imported from the empire? This, of course, was the church of the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. They gave us the unforgettable “marks” of the church: that the church is “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” Or, are we talking about the five great patriarchates that came after the Edict of Milan and the appropriation of Christianity by Constantine? (As an aside, he wasn’t baptized until he was on his deathbed, but he was quite savvy in realizing that, by aligning with the Christian community, he would have an advantage in the split within the Roman Empire.) If we think of our canyon metaphor, that’s when the “conifers” really gained steam and established themselves very, very well in the “canyon” — so well that they would flourish for almost 1,600 years.

Now we face another change in that “canyon.” In the video, the naturalist speaks of how the conifers became so tightly grown, causing such a depletion of the environment and the soil that they began to die off and fall to the ground. They decayed and became part of the earth, and there was a new flourishing of diversity!

When I was a young mom, I was nursing my first child during the fall of the Berlin Wall. She was eating constantly, so I constantly watched that amazing event on CNN: A system had hollowed itself from the inside out—a system that had become so fractured that people were empowered to begin taking down one of its most iconic representations. On some level, that is what has been happening—and continues to happen—in Roman Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council. We saw the launching of a new conception, a new way of being for the Catholic community, sadly poured into “old wineskins” that will eventually rot and burst (Mk. 2:18-22, Mt. 9:14-17, Lk. 5:33-39). We are witnessing the dying off of the great “conifers” of Roman Catholicism—to which many of us trace our roots. As Marek said, many of us love the Roman Catholic tradition. We value the Roman Church. I like to refer to it as my family of origin. And we now see the rigid pine trees crowding each other out, while more and

more people say, “I have to move on. This no longer represents who I am or what I believe. I need to find a new way!”

Imagine for a moment that you were a space invader on a spaceship from Mars, popping in on the churches across the range of our jurisdictions. What would you see? You would witness an incredible array of practices—about all of which do not reflect the early Church. Imagine, as this visitor, you were given a liturgical anthology to explain what you saw, perhaps the history of the Roman rite, which has had so many different expressions over time and place and cultural location. If you, the space invader, were to place some of our churches, some might sit very comfortably in the great monasteries of the Middle Ages. Some of us would look Tridentine. Some of us might seem like the Roman Catholic Church of the post-Vatican II 1960s, when we were awaiting the rewriting of liturgical books, and when there was more latitude across the globe to be creative in worship than perhaps at any other time. And, of course, you would also see a post-*Third Edition of the Roman Missal* crowd. In essence, we are “all over the map”—particularly in terms of how we understand what it means to be part of the reclamation of the early Church.

Not long ago, one of my colleagues in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion shared the regret that so many presbyters have been ordained in service of the ECC without really understanding Old Catholicism. The urgency with which that person felt that we need to be Old Catholic took me aback. Marek mentioned this drive by some in our movement to be recognized by Utrecht, as if some legitimacy would derive from our being named Old Catholic. So, I want to say something about that taproot.

The posture of the European Old Catholic commitment to separation came from condemnation. Rome overstepped, and faithful resistance of Roman Catholics was perceived as disobedience, at best, to heretical, at worst: “How dare you say that you get to elect the bishop? How dare you assert that the pope is not infallible?” This acting within the self-understanding of being condemned sits absolutely within the tradition of Hus, Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, and all the great reformers. All of them had an underlying impetus for separation, manifested in many different flavors, as the rejection of Roman practice, Roman teachings, and Roman domination. Many of us trace our apostolic lineage and our episcopal “genealogy” to that split in Utrecht or to the post-Vatican I exodus, which was tied to

governance. That said, I speak only for myself when I say there is very little about me that is Old Catholic.

In his opening comments, Jayme questioned the label “American Catholic.” One might say that the term “Roman Catholic” should be interrogated as well. By bringing geography alongside the word Catholic, we create an immediate problem. “Roman Catholic” is an oxymoron. The term “Roman” deals with special location and the limitations of culture, tracing itself to the split in 1054, by which time the patriarch of Rome had already cemented the dominance of his church. The other word, “catholic,” means “universal” and “inclusive.” To call oneself Roman Catholic is to put something that is neither universal nor inclusive against a word that is universal and inclusive. That calls into question whether any church in our day can call itself catholic.

The history of the Church always sits within greater social and historical movements of the times, and while Jayme is right—“American Catholic” is problematic—there is a distinctly American character that we bring to this international movement. So, I would like to use some of my time to highlight our religious and social experience on this continent.

We are distinct in our worldview and in the forces that shaped us. This makes us different from our siblings in Germany, Poland, England and all the other churches that call themselves Old Catholic. The impetus for the Independent Sacramental Movement in this country was not condemnation, but the deep conviction that, in many ways, the Roman Catholic Church got things right 50 years ago at Vatican II. The council’s many calls for change were directed by the documents of the council or were a function of the spirit of the council’s teachings. Many of us who now lead this movement believe that those changes were worthy of embrace.

You might wonder why I lift up Roman Catholicism when I just pointed out that there’s a good case for not speaking about “Roman Catholic” or “Roman Catholicism,” or of keeping the lineage of the Old Catholics of Utrecht in the foreground. Just as the Netherlands brought a particular national and historical consciousness, that was particular to their location, to leaving Rome, we, in the 21st century, bring more than 100 years of the evolution of our understanding in this location of what it means to be Catholic based on our national and social context. Our context is the diverse, immigrant, democratic, missionary church of North America.

In 1790, the Roman Catholic Church in America was one diocese, centered in Baltimore. Only one out of every 110 Americans was Catholic. Most of the early immigrants were Protestants who came to this land for religious freedom.

By 1808, the number of Catholics in America had increased enough to divide the country into five dioceses, adding New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Bardstown. The latter served the growing Roman Catholic community in the present-day territories of Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. As the 19th century progressed, more and more immigrants were Catholic, so that, by the end of the 19th century, there were 14 archdiocese, 69 dioceses, and three apostolic territories in the U.S.

The Roman Catholic Church in 19th-century America was not the church that we know today: It was highly socially-oppressed, completely politically-rejected, and it was overwhelmingly religiously-scorned by the dominant culture. As a result, Roman Catholicism was barely tolerated. Protestants saw the Catholic Church as a threat to American values. They believed that Catholics esteemed their allegiance to the pope over State, and, of course, they accused Catholics of “popery.” Anyone who lived through the election of John Kennedy, or even of Joe Biden, knows that our nation has not gotten past this concern about Catholics, though it has dramatically diminished since the 1960s.

During this growth of Catholicism in America, the First Vatican Council convened and was never completed. The episcopacy was not rethought, and the infallibility decision was cast after bishops fled upon the onset of the Franco-Prussian War.

While our European brethren were splitting and joining the Union of Utrecht, the number of U.S. Catholics tripled from 1860 to 1890. From 1900 to 1910, when the U.S. had only 76 million people, 8.2 million immigrants entered this country—predominantly Irish, Italians and Germans. That transformed the U.S. Roman Catholic Church, which became an extremely large body. Previously considered a marginalized sect, the Roman Catholic Church was a force with political power and size—some 12% of the U.S. population.

In 1884, the U.S. bishops convened in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore. For those of you who are over 60, that was the council that gave us *The Baltimore Catechism*! Like Vatican I, the council was unfinished—but, before the bishops dispersed, they discussed unions and the organizing of workers, ideas that were overwhelmingly

supported by working-class, American Catholics in the pews, who were looking to the Church for social leadership.

Another unfinished matter was the complaint that went before the plenary council on the oppression that many non-Irish Roman Catholics felt here in the United States. The Roman Catholic hierarchy in the United States became overwhelmingly Irish. The Irish are my people, so I'll speak plainly: They were domineering and controlling. They were accused of exerting emotional taxation without representation. They were autocratic. They did not embrace a long tradition of lay leadership, which was found in Germany and other European countries. They were oppressive, and they didn't want people praying in Polish or Italian or German. Thanks to these Irish bishops, there was an enormous, unresolved issue within the American Roman Catholic Church. Now, I should add that they did good things, too: They built cathedrals and schools, and they brought in tons of priests—but they were hard on the non-Irish.

Four bishops emerged in the United States who became known as the Americanist Party. They traveled to Rome and made the case for some of their issues. They received the charter for Catholic University of America—a showcase for Catholic higher education in the United States. They also received approval for the Knights of Labor, something we can be very proud of: Their lobbying in Rome for the working class spurred Leo XIII to write *Rerum novarum*, the landmark encyclical on the working class. They considered education as critical for raising up the Catholic community, not only to teach the faith, but also to empower its members to fully participate in the dominant culture.

I am sitting here in this office in Minnesota because of the wonderful efforts of Roman Catholic Church in its service to immigrants, including very goodhearted nuns who took a group of kids, who were my parents and uncles and aunts, and gave them a very fine education. Because of them, I stood on the lawn of Georgetown, with my immigrant grandmother crying, because she could not believe that, in one generation, she had come from being a servant woman in the castle of the Lord of Limerick, to standing on the lawn of one of the most elite universities in the United States.

In the early 1900s, the Polish National Catholic Church solidified. When the Irish cabal didn't answer their needs, they opened the door for Old Catholicism to enter the United States. As the century progressed, the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. also saw the

emergence of strong anti-fascist, communist and socialist voices, like Dorothy Day.

All of these events were happening, and then we came to the ecumenical council of Vatican II. As leaders of Independent Sacramental churches, we cannot ignore the three decades from the 1960s to the 1990s. Many of us bring that church's self-understanding and self-expression to our present ministries. Vatican II fueled our expectations, shaped our understanding, provided us energy and inspiration, and demanded that the institution be true again to Jesus' vision, particularly, as Pope John XXIII said, in relationship to the modern world.

In the 1930s, the U.S. saw the emergence of strong anti-fascist, anti-communist, anti-socialist voices, including those of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker; Fr. Charles Coughlin, the "radio priest" who unfortunately migrated into condemnation-worthy antisemitism; and the worker priest movement, which migrated from the docks of France to the mines, docks and jungles of other countries, including this one. The worker priest movement was discontinued by Pius XII in 1954.

The last thing I'd like to highlight before looking at the future and the way that we in the Ecumenical Catholic Communion are particularly shaped for it, is, of course, the extraordinary event of many of our lifetimes: the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, otherwise known as Vatican II.

Vatican II and its influence in the U.S. for the first three decades of its implementation cannot be ignored by the leaders of Independent Sacramental churches and the ECC because it is from the Roman Church's self-understanding and self-expression that so many of us spring. Theology geeks like to quote Prosper of Aquitaine and say, "*lex orandi, lex credendi*" the law of prayer is the law of belief. In other words, it is the very nature of our Christian prayer, particularly the Eucharist, that shapes our beliefs, forms our identity, and inspires our purpose.

It was the prayer that flowed from the Council, grounded in the life of the early Church, which was and is so critical to the self-understanding of Old Catholics. It fueled so many of our expectations and provided the energy and inspiration to demand that the Church align itself once again to Jesus' vision, this time in relationship to the modern world.

So, let's face it: Vatican II was almost sixty years ago. John XXIII called for it in 1959, the year I was born, and, as you can see, I'm no "spring chicken." We all have top-of-mind ideas about what changed with the council and its aftermath, which included a new code of canon law and a new catechism. But let's just quickly run through a few of the changes that are particularly salient for us.

The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* directly related the role of Scripture and tradition, affirming the value of scripture for salvation, while allowing Catholics to do scholarly study of the Bible.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* called for, in such a beautiful phrase, the "full, active, conscious participation" of the laity in the celebration of mass and authorized significant changes in the rites for mass and the administration of the sacraments.

The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today* acknowledged the profound changes humanity was experiencing, particularly in the wake of two catastrophic world wars and the emergence of nuclear warheads. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted: These are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." Could we say it in a more pointed or poetic way? I think not.

The very first work of the council was on the sacred liturgy, movement toward which had been bubbling for the 40 years leading up to the council's start. Vernacular languages were encouraged, especially for scripture readings at mass. Those readings themselves were expanded and the three-cycle lectionary was later produced. Eventually, in 1969, the *Novus ordo* mass allowed priests, for pastoral reasons, to face the assembly, gave the celebrant a variety of eucharistic prayers, restored the sign of peace to the entire congregation, and allowed for distribution of both the Body and Blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine.

Unitatis redintegratio declared the ecumenical movement a good thing, encouraged Catholics to be part of it, and referred to Eastern, Oriental and Protestant Christians as "separated brethren," rather than as schismatics or heretics.

There were interfaith breakthroughs. "The Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God," said *Nostra aetate*. The charge of deicide was unfounded. The new covenant is not possible without Abraham's stock. "The Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions," said *Nostra aetate*.

The council promulgated beautifully-articulated decrees on the pastoral duties of bishops, the ministry and life of priests, the education for the priesthood, the missionary activity of the church, the apostolate of the laity. Sisters, brothers and religious order priests were to do two things: rediscover the original purpose of their religious orders and adapt it to the modern world, said *Perfectae caritatis*. Even the question of modern media for social communication was addressed. At the time, that meant press, radio, TV and film. Through Zoom, I ask: Can you imagine what we would include today?

In *Dignitatis humanae*, the Church for the first time recognized the conscience rights of all people to freedom of religion, and declared it was the responsibility of states to protect religious freedom with stable laws.

The council called for reorganization of the curia and abolition of the *Index of Forbidden Books*. A council that was initially expected to be defensive was, in fact, a council with a stunning outward-looking view!

But for ecclesiology folks like me, the most central achievement was the reclaiming of a eucharistic ecclesiology. The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* upended the Church as first and foremost an institution with a ranked hierarchy, presenting it to the world as a sacrament, a sign and instrument of both a very closely-knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.

The Church was recognized as the people of God, the body of Christ. We become that Church when we come to the table.

The first few decades of living into that vision were, to be sure, lively and fertile. They were often chaotic and fractious. No less a figure than Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger wrote his first theological article condemning the changes of Vatican II within five years of the Council's close, leading quickly to the "reform of the reform" which led to the introduction of what I like to call the dreaded Roman Missal of 2011, a clunky translation with rubrics designed to undo the participatory vision of Vatican II.

Anyone in this movement who has not thoroughly studied the Second Vatican Council is really doing themselves a disservice: That Council—and *not* Old Catholicism—shaped so many of the people who come alongside us!

So, why this refresher course in American Roman Catholic ecclesiology? As any gardener would tell you, a plant only does as

well as the root system that feeds it. The roots are our anchor. Without them, the water, minerals and nutrients are not successfully transported. The roots can be as deep and long as the portion of the plant that is above the ground and significantly lighter than the tree's canopy.

As we look toward our collective future, we do have much to gain from recognizing the national groups that make up the Union of Utrecht, but we have an additional 100 years of experience of being Catholic in a particularity that comes from being a marginalized, immigrant church shaped by subjugation and Catholic social teaching, a church animated by the vision of the Second Vatican Council. We are products of our particularity.

Here are some of my thoughts about moving forward together.

Most mainline churches profess faith in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, which is where we hear the affirmation that the church is "one, holy, catholic and apostolic." Let's start with "catholic." The word "catholic" was first used by Ignatius of Antioch. He says, "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the universal church" – the catholic church. Let's face it: That was 90 years after Bishop Clement wrote that "the one Church is violently split up." Clement said that the ancient catholic church could only be one church – but we have never been one, not even since the beginning!

The word "catholic" has now taken on new meaning, after the split of 1054, when the majority became "Eastern Orthodox," and the people in the West became "Catholic" – and that's when we get the cementing of the idea of "Roman Catholic."

To truly be catholic, we would have to be one – and we're not. We'll never be one in this movement, and we'll never be one with Rome until we have eradicated all provincialism, sectarianism, racism, and all forms of exclusivism from the Church! Until we have eradicated these, we cannot truly say that we are catholic.

We keep looking back to the first four centuries for guiding lights. Last week, the Catholic Bishops Forum met in Saint Louis and looked at various marks of ecumenism composed by the Integral Church in the early 20th century and containing a fourth-century self-understanding of Church. We keep looking back at the fourth century in particular, with the hope of figuring out Church, with the belief that if we excavate sufficiently and look at all the dirt, we can figure out how to recreate it.

My assertion is that this looking back must be balanced with looking forward. It's likely better for us to jump into the future with open hearts—open to the possibility that God is always doing something new. “See, I do something new” (Is. 43:19)!

I turn to a concept from my Sociology of Religion course, which I think is very helpful in understanding the spirituality of people today and the reality of the many expressions of “little-c” catholic Christianity that we lead. It's a term derived from the work of French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. The word is *bricolage*. It describes the appropriation of pre-existing materials that are ready at hand to create something. What does *bricolage* look like?

I'll talk about my own spiritual *bricolage*, my own spiritual construction. What is my spiritual work? I do yoga: I have a meditation practice taught by the Ishayas of the Bright Path, that I do every day of my life. I'm a member of the 12-step movement. I hopefully practicing the third and eleventh steps every day. I'm Catholic: I care about the gospels, I listen to them all the time, and I study and preach them. My spirituality is a spirituality of service, grounded in my daily experience, living a life that is about attraction, not promotion. And I love nature: For example, I love taking hikes or going out into the Boundary Waters with my sweetie pie. So, what is my spirituality? Is it Catholic? Well, this piece is, but others—not so much! I have created a mosaic of spirituality that feeds my soul, and I will never let go of that. Some elements of my spirituality would have been condemned in my mother's generation; they would have been considered heretical. I have a friend who calls me a “hyphenated Catholic,” because sometimes I'm a Hindu-Catholic, sometimes I'm a Zen-Catholic, and sometimes I'm a Baptist-Catholic. I have a *bricolage*.

What's fascinating about *bricolage* is that it not only reflects our identity; it *constructs* our identity. According to Lévi-Strauss, *bricolage* not only reflects the constructor's, the *bricoleur's*, identity—it also *becomes* the construction of identity! The *bricoleur* brings together fragments, to piece together the sense of self and a sense of purpose, giving them new meaning through the interrelationships that are created.

In more conservative theological circles, this approach would be critiqued as syncretism. I would argue that religion and Christianity have always been syncretistic. It has always morphed and adapted to culture. It is always appropriated, redesigned and rethought.

I would argue that *bricolage* is our means of creating our identities as emergent Catholics, allowing us to meet the spiritual and religious longings of our time. As a *bricoleur* in the Independent Sacramental Movement, I might go to the early Church and claim some principles, like tolerance for diversity. I might also claim primary sources of identity, such as the early councils recognized in Old Catholicism. Then I might visit the “canyon” in the second wave, when the “pines” were triumphing, and I might say, “Wow, I like the codification of prayers!” I watched my grandmothers pray the rosary, and I have a profound piety directed toward the Blessed Mother, a deep spiritual expression that some might think is *adiaphora*. I get to retain it and have Our Lady of Knock!” As a *bricoleur*, I get to add elements to this mosaic from the particularity of North America. I don’t have to stop with the Old Catholic theologians of the 19th century. This has been a flawed experiment in democracy in this country, but I believe in it, and I have paired myself with a church community that is democratic. I’m also a Catholic who is deeply concerned about who is marginalized in our American Catholic experience. The Church embraced my grandmother in a time when signs in businesses said, “No Irish” and a German landlady told my grandmother, “We don’t want any of you dirty Irish here!” The Church provided sustenance for my grandmother and an education for my parents, aunts and uncles.

The American Church has been engaging culture in a very important way, leading us to be Catholics who welcome everything that expresses culture, including the non-binary of gender. Our culture is giving up these binaries and allowing us to open our arms and say that in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free person, cisgender or other (Gal. 3:28). Here in America, we have a beautiful historical record about the leadership role of women. Catholic women built hospitals, schools, universities and more. They led our community into the future. Some people diss the Sisters, but we are all standing on their shoulders.

It’s wrenching to make this point, but, now that we’re way out on the skinny “branches,” I have to add that we have also experienced how American Roman Catholicism has become more conservative, rigid, controlled, hostile, clerical and criminal. We have the potential to do some things in relationship to that. Personally, I don’t think there should be anyone serving as a priest in this movement who in addition to receiving pastoral and theological education has not

undergone a background check and a psychological check—or are we not willing to learn from what we just lived through? My colleague, Rosa Buffone, is leading a church in Boston due to the epic criminality in the Archdiocese of Boston. We need to learn from this dark chapter in American Roman Catholic life, and we need to set higher standards. We need to have documents and trainings to protect our children, among other things.

We have the potential to claim the fertility of Vatican II in expressing our embrace of culture. As Rome was sending out documents in the 1980s banning liturgical dance, John Paul II was enjoying liturgical dance in Africa! We need to allow culture to express our faith, and not allow rigid law to prevent that flourishing—including Zoom liturgies. The Holy Spirit is more wise, powerful, creative and fluid than any of us could ever imagine!

We also acknowledge ecumenical forces. A lot of us are nested inside Protestant churches. Here's the deal: We would be Protestant if it weren't for the history of the Netherlands, where those who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church called themselves Old Catholic due to how the Reformation played out in that part of the world. We are protesters, too, and, as I like to joke with Pastor Brian here at this ELCA church, "We are healing the Reformation one church at a time!"

Finally, we have the potential to live a vision of inclusion and to really ally ourselves with the other. Our *bricolage* includes all different types of spirituality, and we are able to stand with those who are battered by Islamophobia, misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia in this country, which is more visible than ever. We get to think. When I studied canon law and discovered the word *obsequium*—surrender of mind and will—my head wanted to explode! I knew I would leave the Roman Catholic Church before surrendering my mind. Fortunately, we are part of the one of the most thoughtful streams of Christianity. Look at what American Roman Catholic women who are theological scholars, like Elizabeth Johnson and Rosemary Radford Ruether, have given us!

We get to be bold, like the first Christians, who talked about transformative vision. We recognize that we stand on the shoulders of Old Catholics, but that we can also be the church that we are, laying claim to the forces that shaped us, including the integration of the stunning vision of the Church offered by Vatican II. And ultimately, since Jesus walked on the planet, we have been called to be faithful,

to trust that the Spirit of God and of Christ, which is breathed out on the Church, the people of God, is no less present and uplifting us today than at any time in the past!

Reflections on “Roots & Branches: The Forces Shaping our Movement”

“I kept hearing the word ‘*bricolage*,’ but, if I asked my grandmother what it is, she wouldn’t know. Instead of thinking of all these big, pretty words, we have to simplify it, so that folks like my grandmother can understand it. It may be the Hispanic man in me, but, at the end of the day, I’m ‘Catholic,’ and I’ll die a Catholic. I’m not ‘*bricolage*.’ If we use that word in our parishes, no one will know what we mean. We need to keep it simple. I like the word ‘inclusive’ and pushing the fact that we are not Roman Catholics—but I also wouldn’t say that I’m an ‘Inclusive Catholic’ or ‘Independent Catholic.’ I’m just Catholic. I was listening to a radio show the other day, where they were dissing on the Roman Catholic Church, and I had to change the station: They didn’t understand that there’s more than one Catholic church. ”

Stephen Rodríguez
Austin, Texas

“I love the term ‘inclusive’ because that’s what we are. Our challenge is that we’re talking about people’s self-identity. People create an image of who they are—and they don’t want to lose that image. We all face the challenge of how to represent our communities in different ways and be one.”

Rev. Roy Gómez
Austin, Texas

“I agree with Stephen: I’m ‘Catholic.’ I like going to church. I like the rituals and how the ceremony is the same in every church. Because the church reaches out into the community, I like the word ‘inclusive.’ That word opens us up to the whole community.”

Jordan Dickenson
Austin, Texas

“Growing up, I just heard the word ‘Catholic.’ I didn’t know there were different types of Catholics. When my brother married a Roman Catholic, she made it very clear that she was ‘Roman Catholic.’ I wondered, ‘As opposed to what?’ I didn’t know that there were other types of Catholics out there. I do not like the word ‘independent’

because, as soon as you tell someone you're an Independent Catholic, , they ask 'independent of what?' I love how Father Jayme introduces his congregation as the only inclusive Catholic church in Austin. That sounds so welcoming, and it doesn't make it sound like you're away from the Roman Church in a bad way. It sounds like we've taken Catholicism to the next level. It opens an opportunity for us to explain who we are. 'Oh, you allow women?' 'You allow gay people?' Disenfranchised Roman Catholics are often excited to learn that I'm a female deacon. They say, 'Seriously? In a Catholic church?' We need to use words that are positive and are understood by people who don't have a college education. Sometimes I have to tell Father Marek, 'People aren't going to understand that word. It's going to go right over their heads. You need to say something a little bit lighter than that!'"

Rev. Donna Nachefski
Saint Louis, Missouri

"I lived with Greek Catholic priests in Israel, and they don't use the word 'Roman' in the Middle East. They are known as 'Latin' Catholics, distinguished by their language and rite. Until now, I've had a predilection for 'Independent.' I take pride in what that word means to me, as an American. It's not a contrast to Rome, but a way of saying 'American.' 'Inclusive' is very attractive as a descriptive adjective, but it still doesn't give me identity: I would use it to describe who we are, but not as our identity. We continue to search for the words that capture our identity. It bothers me that we don't appreciate the richness of who we are, as a line of churches that goes through Utrecht, but not simply through Utrecht. There's a whole tradition of being Catholic that is ancient and distinguishable, of which we're part. What truly distinguishes us is that we are synodal Catholics."

Most Rev. Leonard Walker
Kingman, Arizona

"There's something to be said for making our language accessible and 'sellable.' Trish highlighted the immigrant quality of Catholicism in this country. There was not a single Catholic in this country who can't say, "My grandparents and ancestors were not immigrants." We are all children, grandchildren or great grandchildren of immigrants!

That's a great value of our Catholicism in this country: We are a country of missionaries and immigrants!"

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek
Saint Louis, Missouri

"At Saint Marguerite's, we're discussing an article by Anthony Padovano, who writes of early American history and how laity were very involved in the Church at the time of James Carroll, but then Rome suppressed that because they don't believe in democracy."

Louise Rauckhorst
Henderson, Nevada

"There was a story in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, where a parish shared homilies in German, and the Irish bishop said, 'You can't do that. You have to have the homily in English! If not, I'll build a church in your shadow.' They refused, and the bishop built a church, literally right across the street, with English homilies. Imagine that show of power by an English-speaking, Irish bishop! It boggles the mind to think how prejudiced and segregated churches were back then. Chicago was segregated, too, with churches for the Irish, the Polish, the Italians and the Germans."

Most Rev. Thomas Abel
Las Vegas, Nevada

"Today it's the Hispanic culture and the English-speaking culture. The Hispanics have their celebrations in their language and culture a few blocks away, where they're comfortable, and we don't mind that. I want to pray in my own language, not in someone else's language. We automatically separate ourselves by culture."

Mother Kathleen Jess
Kingman, Arizona

"What struck me about Trish's presentation was the concept of our spirituality as a mosaic. I do it as well: a little of this, and a little of that, and it all comes together – and I'm still adding pieces in!"

Most Rev. William Cavins
Winter Park, Florida

"Since we all create our own *bricolage*, my question is how to combine our *bricolage* with that of others. How do we combine them, especially when they don't match? How do we bring them together into one church? How do we distinguish what we have in common and things we're willing to adjust? It might be necessary for churches to share what is necessary versus the things they like, so that, as a group, we can try to find our matches in our full movement."

Gene Thompson
Winter Park, Florida

"It's like a big jigsaw puzzle: We each need to find the pieces that make our picture."

Mother Kathleen Jess
Kingman, Arizona

"I like the analogy of the canyon and the use of nature to describe us. There was so much that Trish offered: I need time to reflect on it. The languaging is important. When I was a sister, we had meetings after meetings to try to define who we were, and I would sit through those meetings thinking, 'Why don't we just live it?' Every description of us that I heard today was exclusionary, and I know that they're not intended to be. Why don't we just call ourselves Catholic? Why do we have to have an adjective attached to who we are? It's a rhetorical question, and I don't have an answer to it."

Karen Furr
Kingman, Arizona

"We've reflected a lot on nomenclature, but Trish's talk made me reflect on our ecclesiology and where we come from. My experience, like hers, was not Old Catholic. My background is more in Vatican II and its unfolding, its understanding of inclusiveness, and its 'rebranding' of what the Church is and should be doing. As Extraordinary or Independent Catholics, that's the kind of Church we're building in our movement as we try to understand the mission of the Catholic Church in 2021."

Most Rev. Martin de Porres Griffin
Sacramento, California

"We're in a new paradigm, and we can't try to formulate who we are based on old ways of describing us. We sell ourselves short. I think the Spirit is asking us if we're willing to appreciate our foundation and history, but not let it define who we are today and in the future. Because of the dynamics of the new paradigm, it cannot rest on the thought processes and definitions of the old paradigm. I believe we're in the time of the Second Coming and must ask ourselves how we're going to be the Second Coming in a way that renews the totality of us and that doesn't hold on to processes that no longer fit. It's a huge challenge. I'm rooted in linear thinking, but we're not in a time when linear thinking works anymore. We don't live in a linear world, and neither does the Spirit. It's an evolutionary process of exploring how to creatively bring the Spirit into our work."

Rev. Karen Furr
Kingman, Arizona

"The fact that many of us have gone through a 'breakup' with our Mother Church, to use Father Marek's term, significantly shapes our identity. I grew up in a Roman Catholic monastery. I left the seminary and became an Independent Catholic priest. Part of our identity is that we love unconditionally. Clergy of the Roman Church teach that God loves unconditionally, but become hypocrites when they speak of conditions. We need to challenge ourselves to love unconditionally and not put conditions on our love. We have to stop saying, 'In order for you to do this, you have to do that.' Let's simply go back to love. Let's love. I rewrote a book for my pre-Cana classes, and I ask, 'What do we mean by love?' For me, it's very simple: True love is unconditionally giving all our heart. As a child, I learned that God is love, but, as I started going out into parishes, I heard message that God is hatred and punishment and that there are conditions to God's love. That love/hate relationship with God drove me away. We can't preach love from the pulpit then turn around and be hypocrites. When COVID hit, Roman Catholic priests criticized me for taking care of people, and I wondered, 'Don't you teach people to love others?' When a 16-year-old boy commits suicide, and the priest preaches from the pulpit that the boy is going to hell, where is the compassion in that? It's sad. We need to preach and practice unconditional love. Let's not be hypocrites. Let's not be Pharisees!"

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

"Words and verbiage are important and can be exclusionary. Karen did a talk at one of our synods on the power of words. The words we choose to describe ourselves are really, truly important. Our words represent us. We have to ask ourselves what power we want to put out into the universe when we describe ourselves."

Rev. James Morgan
Las Vegas, Nevada

"I think about how we might translate some of these words in Vietnamese. In Vietnamese, we simply say that we are Catholic. If I add a word before 'Catholic,' people will ask, 'What do you mean?' When I say in Vietnamese that I'm an Independent Catholic priest, I have to explain that we're self-governing and that, even though we have our own jurisdictions, we are independent from Rome. That makes sense to people."

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

"I really loved how Trish wrapped up her talk. It was so succinct and inspiring. I really like the concept of *bricolage* or convergence as a label for my own practice. I wonder, though, does it run the risk of association with 'cafeteria Catholics'?"

Rev. Michael Nicosia
Denver, Colorado

"Are we 'cafeteria Catholics'? People have used that word to marginalize post-Vatican II Catholics and to give the impression that we are heterodox. Massimo Faggioli, a professor at Villanova, coined the term '*gelateria* Catholic.' He's Italian. So, let's be '*gelateria* Catholics' and use that as an artful way to open ourselves to creativity and change."

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

"I've said it a million times: The Church is Baskin Robbins. There are 32+ flavors, and not everyone loves chocolate, but everybody loves ice cream! What is wrong with being a 'cafeteria Catholic' or a 'cafeteria Christian'? I'm pretty sure Jesus was a 'cafeteria Jew'!"

Rev. Michael Angelo D'Arrigo
Madison, Georgia

"I would like to propose what Bishop Peter Hickman, our founding presiding bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, once said to all of us vicars at a meeting: 'Why do we even use the modifiers? Aren't we really just all Catholic?' We have different flavors, but it's all ice cream. We're all different variations of roses. Why can't we just say we are capital-C Catholics, and not just small-c catholics? Let's stop modifying and chopping ourselves into small categories. In her Phoebe talk, Karen just talked about how we are one. I get tired of all the modifiers. I embrace all of the adjectives and modifiers that were presented here. We are the 'new creation' of Catholicism. We are all of it!"

Rev. Rosa Buffone
Newton, Massachusetts

"The aspiration to be appreciated and loved by those outside our movement is not an issue for me. We're part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We're all part of the Church of Christ. We are Catholic. I really appreciate what has been said about modifiers; they are helpful in explanations. It's always a question of how much we foreground those explanations in the labeling of our identities. In the same way that I think it's disingenuous for somebody who's not connected to Utrecht to call themselves 'Old Catholic' — because that can mislead people — I think it's very important for me at some point to use a modifier to let others know that I'm not Roman Catholic. I don't want to mislead them. I don't think I'm hearing, though, that we should literally name ourselves 'Bricolage Catholics.'"

Very Rev. Scott Carter
Ashland, Oregon

"I love Old Catholic theology because it gives me answers from outside the tradition in which I was raised. What will profoundly change me from this talk is the idea of *bricolage* as a way to explain who I am. I take elements from the African-American experience and the Orthodox Catholic experience. With *bricolage*, I don't have to commit myself to one expression, but can instead try to unite a divergence of expressions. I love the term 'reclamation' as well."

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

"I do a majority of the mentoring for folks who come into the Convergent Christian Communion, so, for a really long time, I've been pushing Phyllis Tickle, an author in the Episcopal Church who's known for her book on Emergent Christianity. I typically tell my mentees, 'Ignore the Protestant pieces.' After this talk, though, I'm thinking that those of us who previously self-identified as 'Independent Catholics' are really Emergent Catholics. We are the Catholic Church of the future. The Church of the future is emerging in us right now! Maybe we should reframe who we are in terms of Emergence, since it's all about the future!

Rev. Michael Angelo D'Arrigo
Madison, Georgia

"When I hear the language of 'emerging' and 'moving on' and 'evolving,' I wonder if we discount our elder members. I know that we want to reach out to the young people and bring them in, but let's not discount our seniors who have been in this movement for a long time. I've been in this movement for 45 years. Pluck wisdom and insight from us. We still have a lot to offer!"

Rev. Frank Quintana
Albuquerque, New Mexico

"A very sad truth in my community is that I don't know what God wants Charis to be. I pray every day, asking God to reveal this to me. One of the possibilities is that our little community in Minnesota is a hospice for true believers in Vatican II, a way for people who love Church and community to pray really well as we're all aging. Maybe that's what Charis is going to be. Can I accept that? Could I say that, if we become that for the next 15 to 20 years and we all go home to God having loved, served, prayed well and supported each other, maybe that's what we were supposed to be? Or, is God trying to do something new that we're part of? I value and deeply love the elders in my community. This community would not exist if it were not for those folks who were grounded in our big, very progressive, Roman Catholic Church, who lived a different model, even though it was outside canon law, and who will not give that up without a fight.

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

"I think very profoundly that we have something to share with unchurched folks. I see so many folks who are trying to find God in new ways. Many have never experienced the sacraments. My younger nieces and nephews are not ready for doctrinal stuff. In our focus on former Roman Catholics, we forget that there are seekers who are looking for something that we can offer. We need to be like Jesus, constantly saying, 'Come and see. Come and see!' (Jn. 1:39)."

Most Rev. David Strong
Tacoma, Washington

"After I got ordained, I discovered that we are builders in this movement. We are entrepreneurs. I had my own company for many years, and I was the executive director of two non-profits. Part of the reason I didn't fit into the Roman system was I wanted to lead and build – and you can't do that as a woman in the Roman Church, even as a woman theologian. After finding this movement, it's been so much fun, and I've collected a circle of clergy colleagues whom I value so deeply."

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

Concluding Words

Before concluding this gathering, all present were invited to share a “check-out.” Below are some thoughts that were shared.

“I hope that we continue the conversation on what we have in common and what we can agree on despite our diversity.”

Most Rev. Thomas Abel
Las Vegas, Nevada

“This time together has been more like a retreat than a conference. I leave refreshed and with great information. I also appreciated the deep, awesome challenge issued to us by Marek. Every day I see so many people who used to be Catholic: If we could unite, we could do better!”

Rev. Joseph Dang
Denver, Colorado

“I give thanks to God for this opportunity to share the wealth of knowledge, experience and diversity that we have – and to commit to walking this journey with one another!”

Most Rev. Martin de Porres Griffin
Sacramento, California

“As a lay person, these last three days have been awesome. I’ve been like a sponge soaking in all the conversations around me!”

Stephen Rodríguez
Austin, Texas

“As one of the few laypeople here, it’s an honor and privilege to be among all of you. I put you all on a pedestal as special people – but y’all are real people, and I have never laughed so much. I feel really special and really humbled.”

Rebecca Saenz
Austin, Texas

"It's wonderful to have lay people here—because the reality is we're here because of you. As clergy, we are not special people; we *are* you. We are all "in the same boat" together, and we are here to serve you."

Rev. James Morgan
Las Vegas, Nevada

"This experience has helped me to see how we are greater than any one of us. We are part of something larger than ourselves! We can't just resort to our little corners and do what we do. We need to be stretched by encounters like this."

Mother Kathleen Jess
Kingman, Arizona

"In his book, *Islands and Bridges*, Father Libardo Rocha uses the analogy that our movement is comprised of numerous 'islands.' He asks how we might build bridges among these 'islands.' For me, the greatest joy of this gathering has been seeing the building of bridges!"

Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias
Austin, Texas

"I'm left with the image of how all islands are connected under the water. We're all part of the same archipelago! We are diverse, and each 'island' contains different 'plants,' but we are all one."

Rev. Karen Furr
Kingman, Arizona

Appendix A

Participants in “Saints in Sin City”

Most Rev. Thomas E. Abel

Santo Niño Catholic Church
Catholic Church of America
Las Vegas, Nevada

Rev. Dr. Marek Bożek

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish
Catholic Church
Saint Louis, Missouri

Terry Ann Caballero

Holy Family Catholic Church
Austin, Texas

Most Rev. William Cavins

Abiding Presence Faith Ministries
A Parish of the Reformed Catholic
Church
Winter Park, Florida

Rev. Joseph Dang

Catholic Apostolic Church
International
Denver, Colorado

Jordan Dickenson

Holy Family Catholic Church
Austin, Texas

Rev. Anjun Factor

Santo Niño Catholic Church
Catholic Church of America
Las Vegas, Nevada

Rev. Karen Furr

Our Lady of the Angels Catholic
Community
Reconciliation OC
Kingman, Arizona

Rev. Roy Gómez

Holy Family Catholic Church
Austin, Texas

**Most Rev. Martin de Porres
Griffin**

American Catholic Church,
Diocese of California
Sacramento, California

Mother Kathleen A. Jess

Divine Savior Catholic
Community
The National Catholic Church of
North America (TNCCNA)
Kingman, Arizona

Carmen Lim

St. Marguerite Faith Community
Henderson, Nevada

Rev. Mike López

Missionary Benedictines of the
Poor
All Saints Priory
Ridgewood, New York

Rev. Ángel Lugo

Missionary Benedictines of the
Poor
All Saints Priory
Ridgewood, New York

Hon. Rev. Dr. Jayme Mathias

Holy Family Catholic Church
Austin, Texas

Rev. Marianne Melchiori

All Saints Priory
Ridgewood, New York

Rev. James P. Morgan

St. Marguerite Faith Community
Reformed Catholic Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

Rev. Donna Nachefski

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish
Catholic Church
Saint Louis, Missouri

Sister Gillian Navarro

All Saints Priory
Brooklyn, New York

Rev. Linda Pilato

St. Marguerite Faith Community
Reformed Catholic Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

Louise Rauckhorst

St. Marguerite Faith Community
Reformed Catholic Church
Henderson, Nevada

Stephen Rodríguez

Holy Family Catholic Church
Austin, Texas

Becky Saenz

Holy Family Catholic Church
Cedar Creek, Texas

Gene Thompson

Abiding Presence Ministries
Winter Park, Florida

Most Rev. Leonard Walker

Divine Savior Catholic
Community
The National Catholic Church of
North America
Kingman, Arizona

Rev. Annie Watson

Saint Stanislaus Kostka Polish
Catholic Church
Saint Louis, Missouri

Virtual Participants in “Saints in Sin City”
(through Zoom)

Rev. Rosa Buffone

Holy Spirit Catholic Community
Ecumenical Catholic Communion
Newton, Massachusetts

Very Rev. Scott Carter

Pilgrim Chapel of Contemplative
Consciousness
Catholic Apostolic Church of
Antioch
Ashland, Oregon

**Rev. Canon Michael Angelo
D’Arrigo**

Agape Fellowship of Greater
Atlanta
Convergent Christian Communion
Madison, Georgia

Most Rev. Alan Kemp

Ascension Alliance
Gig Harbor, Washington

Rev. Michael Nicosia

Ecumenical Catholic Communion
Aurora, Colorado

Rev. Frank Quintana

St. Oscar Romero Catholic
Community

Ecumenical Catholic Communion
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Rev. Dr. Trish Sullivan Vanni

Charis Ecumenical Catholic
Community

Ecumenical Catholic Communion
Eden Prairie, Minnesota

Most Rev. David Strong

Spirit of Christ Catholic
Community

Missionaries of the Incarnation
Tacoma, Washington