

Mourning a loss, celebrating a legacy

As most of you may have heard by now, we lost our editor, Helen Hull Hitchcock, to a sudden and brief illness in October.

Helen was not only the founder/president of Women for Faith & Family and my boss, she was also my mother.

When an ordinary issue of *Voices* would go out, she would work on her column last, to give context to all of the articles appearing in that edition. She had not yet written her column for this issue when she became ill. She asked me to bring her computer to the hospital but I told her that her only job was to rest; the column could wait.

And wait it has. I've had a difficult time trying to weave together the threads for this issue.

On the one hand: celebration. Thirty years is a major accomplishment! On the other: there is loss, sadness.

When we began working on this issue we asked some bishops to share a few words with us. I'm so grateful that my mother got to read many of these letters as they arrived. It meant so much to her to be of service to the Catholic Church, and hearing from bishops how much WFF's work helped them was very special to her.

I cannot tell the history of Women for Faith & Family adequately or accurately. The early days of meeting and planning often took place around my parents' dining room table when I was still in grade school.

So I will let my mother tell WFF's story; starting on page 4 we're reprinting her column from an issue of *Voices* that commemorated the 25th anniversary of Women for Faith & Family.

I would like to share instead a bit about my mother personally. She and my dad met in New York in 1966, and they were married in Saint Louis less than a year later. They bought a house here, where they raised my three sisters and me. Married for nearly 48 years, in the same house for nearly 48 years. Tradition, loyalty, family ... all were so important to my mom.

She was tremendously creative and multitalented: she could paint and sculpt and draw (a family friend recently told us he still has a little sketch she made of him, using a burnt matchstick on a napkin. I've interspersed a few of her other sketches throughout this issue.) She could sing and make jewelry and play just about any musical instrument she got her hands on (when we were little kids she would sometimes play her mountain dulcimer for events at 19th century museum houses.) She could make a perfect piecrust and sew and spin and knit (when we had a big fluffy Samoyed dog she spun his hair and used it in her knitting; I still have a pair of mittens made from some of it.)

There was nothing she couldn't do if she put her mind to it, and when she converted to Catholicism in the early 1980s she was fully committed. She and some like-minded friends worked together to draft the Affirmation for Catholic Women and after that her path was clear.

Fast forwarding a bit: in working on the issues surrounding the family and women's roles in the Church, my mother became concerned with language and the liturgy, and this led to her working with a few others to found Adoremus Society for the Renewal of the Sacred Liturgy (adoremus.org).

Almost since the beginning of the existence of Adoremus, its fortunes and that of Women for Faith & Family have been intertwined: sharing space (first in my parents' basement, now in a little office a few miles away), sharing staff (technically we're all Adoremus employees on loan to WFF to produce *Voices* and the website), and sharing an editor/publisher, Helen Hitchcock.

So it's impossible to say right now what lies ahead for Women for Faith & Family, in part because the future of Adoremus is also in flux. We are a bit rudderless for the time being. Both organizations have governing boards who are very concerned about the future and preserving the work that has been done so far. But this was such an unexpected loss, of someone who was so absolutely integral to both organizations, that it will be very difficult to find a way to fill the roles that she played, particularly in the way we are structured at present.

All of this is to say that I hope this isn't our last issue, but the possibility is there that this may be, or it may be the last issue for a while. You will hear from us again, one way or another, after decisions have been made, and we know what comes next.

In the meantime, if you have internet access I hope you visit our website often — wf-f.org. We have great resources there, including a liturgical calendar and sections for Advent and Christmas. If you are on Facebook or Twitter, please look for us there as well. We will look forward to your visits!



Hilary Hitchcock
Assistant Editor

WFF's vice president, Sherry Tyree, sent some of the responses she got to the news of Helen's passing.

Those from the members of our board of directors and editorial board were particularly thoughtful.

Helen Hull Hitchcock leaves behind grown daughters, grandchildren and her husband, Dr. James Hitchcock. In addition she leaves behind a host of friends whose lives are so much the better for having known Helen. As one friend wrote, "Helen was such a gift to the Church and such an articulate spokesperson for Catholic women. She will be missed terribly by those of us who looked to her for truth, inspiration and courage."

The tributes and prayers continue to come in.....

Sherry Tyree

This hasn't sunk in to me yet. I can hardly believe it's possible. What a hole in my life — in our lives. May she be welcomed and made glorious in Heaven, may she be blessed forever. In Jesus' Name....

Julianne Wiley

This is devastating news. Helen is one of the few people I consider irreplaceable. She was a great mentor to me as well as a good friend. I remember when I stopped reporting for the *National Catholic Register* after my editor left and I became too busy as a home health nurse. Helen immediately asked me to write for *Voices*. When I told her I was too busy with work, single motherhood, etc. and only wanted to do my email lists and some occasional freelance work, she told me that I needed to write regularly and that I wouldn't have the discipline to do this unless I wrote for *Voices*. She was right, as usual.

Nancy Valko

She was always so strong, a light in the darkness, encouraging women not to be intimidated by the loud feminist voices and to be true to the authentic feminine vocation of mother, teacher and woman of faith.

Mary Ellen Bork

Helen's death leaves us all terribly bereaved. God will reward her for the great and good work that she has done, for her faith, her example, her courage, and the warm charity she showed to all. Helen had patience and great good humor, and was a wonderful companion. She spoke on controversial issues — the role of women in the Church, the debates on abortion and the sanctity of human life — with conviction and with knowledge, always teaching the full Catholic message and never with anger or with ill will to those whose understanding was less than hers or who opposed the Church.

I remember with gratitude the wonderful hospitality given to me by the Hitchcocks when I was in St. Louis, the house full of books and music, wonderful meals around the family table, and

conversation so interesting and so exciting that it was extremely hard to finish the evening and accept the necessity of going to bed ... a family united in faith and in affection, with a welcome that was a joy for every guest.

Helen leaves us with a vision of Christian women's authentic role in the Church and in society: forward-looking, active, joyful in adherence to the Catholic Faith and the consistent and unchanging teachings of the Church, and keen to evangelize.

So many of us will be remembering Helen before God today, giving thanks for all that she taught us, and accompanying her with our prayers as she goes to meet the Father.

Joanna Bogle

Helen Hull Hitchcock was a true Daughter of God. I recall a visit to her home, early in my association with Women for Faith and Family, where she showed me a stained glass window in the little room set aside for her prayer. Everything Helen did for the Church began with prayer.

Helen's love for the Church was fierce. It could never be business as usual in the Hitchcock household when the Church was maligned. Helen had a warrior's heart and feared no battle to defend Holy Mother Church.

Helen Hitchcock inspired so many of us. She taught me the value of taking action, no matter how great the odds against victory — because the Victory is in God's hands, not ours. She is irreplaceable.

May God shower the Hitchcock family with consolation.

Mary Jo Anderson

Helen Hull Hitchcock was one of the most remarkable persons that I have ever known. I have valued her friendship and leadership for more than 30 years. She was an amazing witness to the faith and a true evangelizer.

Her many gifts and talents, her great intelligence, her leadership and her insights into the nature of the crises, (especially the feminist crisis) facing the Church and the culture provided a light in the darkness for so many. She loved truth, goodness and beauty and knew that the foundation of all these essentials was found in the Church founded by Jesus Christ.

Of her life, she could truly say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (II Tim 4:7)

Margaret Whitehead

My heart is heavy, such a wonderful mother, wife and champion of the Catholic faith. I will miss her on so many levels. I am sure Jesus will open His arms wide for her.

Cynthia Haehnel

Women for Faith & Family – 1984-2009



by Helen Hull Hitchcock

Catholic Women Affirming the Faith for 25 Years

[Editors's note 2014: I have done very little editing here, keeping most of it as it was in 2009. So some mentions of current activities, etc., are now out of date.]

IT IS NOW 25 YEARS since the day in September 1984 when six St. Louis women gathered around a dining room table to discuss a response to the American bishops, who had asked to hear from Catholic women before writing a pastoral letter on “women’s concerns.”

We had concerns. We were deeply concerned about the impression given in the media that most Catholic women felt alienated from the Church and dissented from essential Catholic teachings — on issues ranging from abortion to ordination. We were also aware that feminist theology had influenced many Catholic leaders. So our concern was increased when well-known feminist theologians were appointed as consultants to the Bishops’ Committee on Women, and when the committee announced its intention to gather information through “listening sessions” to be held in all dioceses of the United States.

We were concerned that these “listening sessions” would not give the bishops an accurate picture of Catholic women — in part because only a small minority of Catholic women would be able to attend them. Also, questions posed at the sessions (such as “how do you feel marginalized and alienated by the Church?”) seemed designed to elicit disaffection and complaints, and to discourage participation from women who supported Church teaching or who were critical of any aspect of feminism.

What could we do? How could we convey to the bishops the real truth about Catholic women — that the vast majority of Catholic women in all states of life did not feel oppressed by the Church, but quite the opposite? In fact, the Church is the source of true human freedom — in particular through her constant teachings on the intrinsic value of all human life, on the unique role of women in forming future generations, on the central place of the family in society, and on the responsibility of all Catholics, women and men, to uphold and transmit this liberating truth of Jesus Christ embodied in the Catholic Church.

Several of us had been thinking about this since we first heard of the bishops’ proposed project.

The result of our discussion that September afternoon? We decided to circulate the Affirmation for Catholic Women, a statement of fidelity to Catholic teachings on marriage, family, abor-

tion, ordination, and related issues. We wanted to make it possible for Catholic women who accept the teachings of the Catholic Church to give concrete testimony of their faith to the bishops.

In the beginning we envisioned this as simply an ad hoc effort to provide a means whereby the voices of ordinary Catholic women could be heard. However, the response to the Affirmation statement was so immediate and so strong that we soon realized that many women were depending on us for much more than this, and our work began to expand rapidly.

Perhaps Women for Faith & Family had appeared at a propitious time — as a brief review of the historical context may reveal.

What was going on, and why we needed to act

In the years following the Second Vatican Council, two events — Pope Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which reaffirmed the Catholic Church’s opposition to artificial birth control, and the US Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision on abortion — caused a great deal of attention to be focused on Catholics who rejected the Church’s teaching. Both secular and Catholic media publicized the dissent of influential Catholic theologians and academics from Church teachings that had always been regarded as essential to Catholicism.

The Catholic press was dominated by Catholic women theologians and journalists and feminist activists who were at odds with the Church over a wide spectrum of issues they regarded as oppressive to women. Church-sponsored workshops resembling feminist consciousness-raising sessions proliferated, and many women’s religious orders suffered radical identity crises and a heavy loss of membership.

That many of the most vocal women espousing these views held positions of influence within the Church’s official structure and on university and seminary faculties lent credibility to their claim that half of the Church — the female half — was bitterly angry at the “patriarchal” Church, deeply resentful of “oppressive” Catholic teachings, and in open rebellion.

With few exceptions, Catholic women who described themselves as “feminist” held opinions on social issues — including abortion — that were indistinguishable from those of secular feminists. Women who did not subscribe to this view were commonly stereotyped as ignorant collaborators in their own victimization, against equality for women, and as “anti-feminists.”

This was made dramatically clear in October 1984, when a full-page ad appeared in the *New York Times* sponsored by Catholics for a Free Choice, stating that the Church’s condemnation of the “direct termination of pre-natal life [is not] the only legitimate Catholic position,” that “a large number of Catholic

theologians hold that even direct abortion, though tragic, can sometimes be a moral choice,” and that public dissent from the Church’s “hierarchical statements,” even by priests and religious, “should not be penalized by ... religious superiors, church employers or bishops.”

The ad was signed by 96 individuals, a majority of whom were women, including nuns and prominent theologians who described themselves as feminists.

The *New York Times* statement made it clear that there was a fundamental and irreconcilable chasm between Catholic belief and contemporary feminism’s advocacy of abortion “rights” for women. It was well known that thousands of Catholic women were leaders of a growing movement that opposed abortion; so it should have been obvious that most Catholic women were equally opposed to feminism’s vigorous support for abortion.

Yet feminist Catholic women continued to present their views as representing Catholic women collectively.

Several factors may have made their claim believable, among them: 1) the success of Protestant feminists in achieving their goals (e.g., the Episcopal Church had approved both ordination of women and “choice” on abortion in 1976); 2) the strong influence of feminists on the programs and policies of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; and 3) the public support given by a few American bishops to feminist critics of the Catholic

Church who demanded ordination and more decision-making power within the Church as a matter of justice to women.

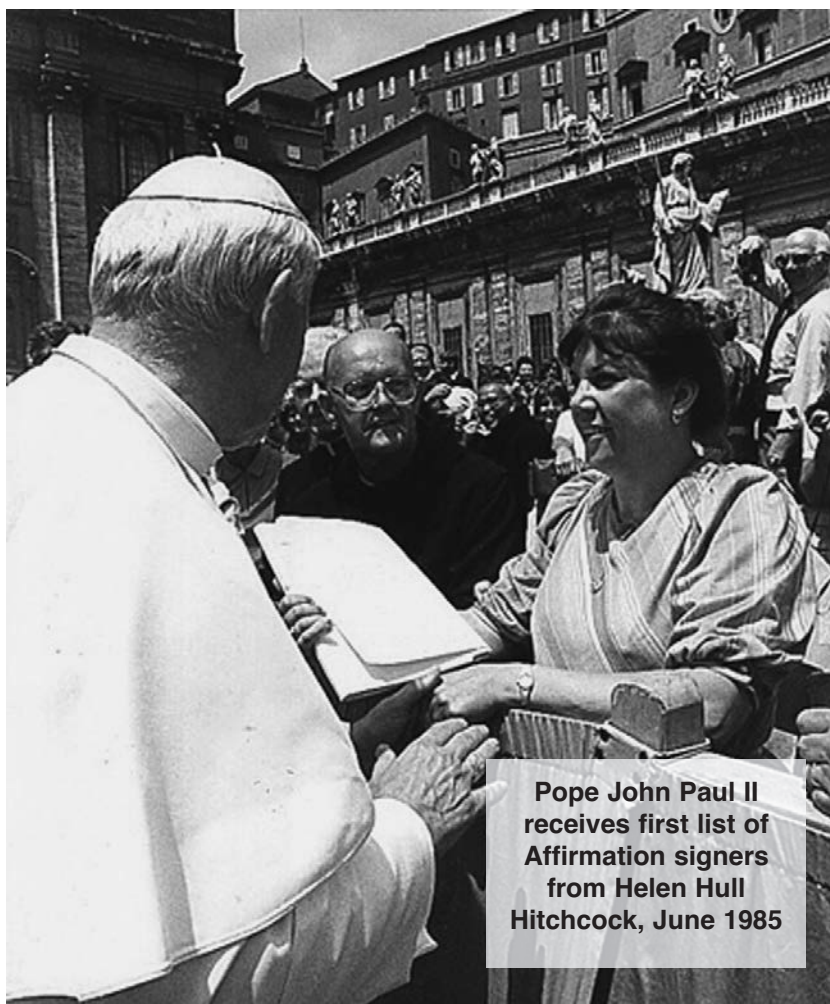
It was apparent to many Catholic women that a new definition of feminism had emerged, one that was no longer compatible with their most deeply held beliefs. At the time that the US bishops began their work on the pastoral letter on women’s concerns, there had been no effective critique either of feminists’ charges against what they termed “the oppressive patriarchy” of the Church or of their claim to speak for all Catholic women. Indeed, the bishops’ decision to write a pastoral on women was the result of consultations of several bishops with feminist activists and theologians. One can easily see how the appearance of the *New York Times* ad (and a second one that followed a few months later) could have the effect of galvanizing many pro-life Catholic women into action in defense of their faith.

Catholic Church becomes countercultural

Women for Faith & Family thus came into being within a climate of cultural opposition to religious beliefs in general, and within the particular aura of highly publicized dissent within the Catholic Church — notably among those who held influential positions in Catholic institutions and in women’s religious orders — from even the most essential Catholic teachings. This situation remains largely unchanged a quarter-century later.

Because the conflict within the Church has so often revolved around women’s issues (from social issues such as “reproductive rights” to internal Church issues, including liturgical roles for women and so-called “inclusive language” in liturgical translation); and because it is women, especially religious professionals and sisters, who are often the Church’s most severe and vocal critics, Women for Faith & Family has continued its efforts to amplify the voices of women who affirm the truth of Catholic teaching and accept the Church’s authority, in the hope that this may support and encourage bishops and clergy as well as other Catholics. We also hope to assist and encourage Catholic women to accept their responsibility — as women and as Catholics — for the transmission of the faith.

In less confused and conflicted times, a “countercultural” effort such as this would have seemed puzzling indeed. Affirmation and acceptance of Catholic teaching would seem to be implicit in the very word Catholic; but we can no longer assume that Catholics do affirm Catholic teaching. People now employ modifiers such as conservative or liberal before the word Catholic, even though these are politically loaded terms that cannot accurately be applied to religious belief. Still, most Catholic “conservatives” would agree that there is much to conserve in the Catholic faith, that active conservation of even the most essential elements of Catholic belief and practice has become necessary in an atmosphere of hostility to any religion that claims to be objectively true — and to Catholic religious truth in particular.



**Pope John Paul II
receives first list of
Affirmation signers
from Helen Hull
Hitchcock, June 1985**

WFF's response...

The organization of Women for Faith & Family was established for the following purposes:

- To aid women in their continual efforts to deepen their understanding of the Catholic faith;
- To aid faithful Catholic women in their desire for fellowship with others who share their faith and commitment; and
- To serve as a channel through which questions from Catholic women seeking guidance or information can be directed.

Although our outreach is primarily to Catholic women, both lay and religious, we have always encouraged participation by men in our various efforts to address both religious and social issues involving women and the family.

Our concerns extend to the application of Catholic teaching in contemporary life, and thus to all aspects of the Catholic faith, including religious life, liturgy, and doctrine.

Thus our first project: the Affirmation for Catholic Women, intended as very simple, straightforward means for Catholic women to make their fidelity to the Church and its magisterium (teaching authority) visible and effective.

We had drafted the Affirmation during the summer of 1984. At the September meeting mentioned earlier, we decided to have a couple hundred copies printed, and we began to circulate it among friends and colleagues (many of whom we knew through their pro-life efforts), hoping to gather a few hundred signatures that could be sent to the bishops who were responsible for the "women's pastoral." We invited people to reproduce the Affirmation and send it to others, and asked that the signatures be returned to us, where they would be recorded.

The response was overwhelming. Women made photocopies of the Affirmation and sent them to friends. (Remember, this was in the pre-internet days when photocopying machines were usually found only in the local post office, and e-mail didn't exist!)

Remarkably, in January 1985 our hastily rented post office box began to overflow — not only with signed Affirmations but with thousands and thousands of letters from Catholic women from all walks of life — single, married, mothers, teachers, religious. We began to receive our mail in bags. Why the amazing response at this time?

Only a few weeks after Women for Faith & Family began to circulate the Affirmation, on October 7, 1984, the infamous Catholics for a Free Choice—sponsored *New York Times* ad appeared. Several of the ad's signers, women religious, appeared on the then-popular Phil Donahue television show. We sent a

telegram to Donahue to tell him there is another point of view among Catholic women that should be heard. He invited us to appear on his show in January. We did, and were able to get several faithful sisters to appear with us and to be in the audience. These events evidently hit a nerve.

— By March 1985, we had received four thousand signatures to the Affirmation for Catholic Women, and we sent a copy together with a list of its signers to the Bishops' Committee on Women.

— In June 1985 I presented a list of ten thousand names of Affirmation signers to Pope John Paul II in Rome — and also met

AFFIRMATION FOR CATHOLIC WOMEN

By signing this affirmation women pledge their loyalty to the teaching of the Catholic Church. The names will be forwarded to the Pope.

Because of the assaults against the Christian Faith and the family by elements within contemporary society which have led to pervasive moral confusion, to damage and destruction of families and to the men, women and children which comprise them:

Because we adhere to the Catholic Christian faith as expressed in Holy Scripture, the Nicene, Apostolic and Athanasian Creeds, in the early ecumenical Councils of the Church, and in the continued deepening of the understanding of the revelations of Sacred Truth to the Church by the Holy Spirit through the teaching authority of the Church and of the Successors of Peter, Apostles:

Because we wish to vocations and our duty as Chr with these authentic teaching instruction of Our Savior Jesus His mother;

Because we are cognizant women to witness to our faith is important to the formation families and of humanity, we

4. We accept and affirm the teaching of the Catholic Church on all matters dealing with human reproduction, marriage, family life and roles for men and women in the Church and in society.

5. We therefore also reject as an aberrant innovation peculiar to our times and our society the notion that priesthood is the "right" of any human being, male or female. Furthermore, we recognize that the specific role of ordained priesthood is intrinsically connected with and representative of the begetting creativity of God in which only human males can participate. Human females, who by nature share in the creativity of God by

1. We believe that through affords us distinct physical a to participate in the Divine natural function of childbearing capacity for nurture, instruction which qualities are necessary women to witness to our faith is important to the formation families and of humanity, we

2. We believe that to attempt to subvert or deny our distinct nature and role as women subverts and denies God's plan for

3. We believe that through affords us distinct physical a to participate in the Divine natural function of childbearing capacity for nurture, instruction which qualities are necessary women to witness to our faith is important to the formation families and of humanity, we

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which took for
granted the distinct roles for men and women in the family and in
society and affirmed that Christian education must impart
knowledge of this distinction: "In the entire educational program
[Catholic school teachers] should, together with the parents,
make full allowance for the difference of sex and for the particular
role which Providence has appointed to each sex in the family

with Cardinal Edouard Gagnon, then-president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, who strongly encouraged our efforts.

— In August Women for Faith & Family was invited give our testimony to the Bishops' Committee on Women. We presented a list of about 17,000 Affirmation signatures to the bishops. Sherry Tyree and I gave a presentation based on thousands of letters we had received and answered questions from the bishops and their women consultants.

— In late 1985 the Affirmation project was extended by the spontaneous efforts of Catholic women in Canada, Australia, England, and the Netherlands.

— By October 1987, when the Vatican held a Synod on the Laity for the world's bishops, we had received approximately 10,000 letters from women expressing their personal concerns about their faith and problems within the Church, so we decided to prepare testimony based on these letters for the bishop-delegates to the synod.

At a public press conference held during the synod, Cardinal

Gagnon received, on behalf of Pope John Paul II, a copy of our printed testimony, along with a current list of Affirmation signers' names. About 30,000 names from the US — plus Mother Teresa of Calcutta and all her Missionaries of Charity — were on this list. Nearly 10,000 additional names came from the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, England, and Canada. The story was featured in several daily newspapers in Rome. On October 24, 1987, it was on the front page of *Avvenire*, the Italian bishops' conference newspaper, which every bishop at the synod received.

The Affirmation was soon translated into seven languages in addition to English (French, Spanish, Italian, Polish, German, Dutch, and Chinese) again, by spontaneous voluntary efforts.

An updated list was presented to Pope John Paul II in 1994, the International Year of the Family, and in 1999 then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger received a further updated list on behalf of the pope.

We continue to receive new signatures regularly. More than 50,000 Catholic women in the United States have expressed their fidelity to the Church in this way. About 10% of the Affirmation signers are women religious, many from troubled orders. Signers represent all ages, all states in life (single, married, mothers, religious), and all educational and economic levels. They include homemakers, professional women (doctors, nurses, lawyers, university professors, writers, teachers, etc.), women whose work is in their homes, and women with full- or part-time employment outside the home.

The response to the Affirmation for Catholic Women is evidently without precedent. No petition of dissent in the postconciliar era, including the highly publicized statement of dissent from *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, has attracted comparable response. This phenomenon becomes particularly significant in the light of

the explicit nature of the Affirmation and the grassroots means of its circulation.

The expansion of WFF and the broadening of our apostolic activities

What began as a simple and direct way to show Catholic women's support of Church teachings about women and family quickly grew beyond this relatively limited goal. Response to the needs of women led to a continually expanding set of initiatives. It soon became apparent that the original aim of Women for Faith & Family — to communicate information from Catholic women to the bishops — was only one means of serving the Church and women.

From 1985 until 1999, WFF sponsored annual conferences featuring bishops, priests, and men and women scholars. In 1994 Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, president of the Pontifical Council on the Family, addressed the conference. Pope John Paul II sent a message and gave his apostolic blessing to each of these conferences. For several years, these conferences were held jointly with the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, an organization of women religious, in the belief that closer ties between religious and lay women would be mutually encouraging and helpful (the Consortium dissolved in 1992 when the Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious was formed.)

Our publication, *Voices*, began as a newsletter in 1985, as a means of communicating with Affirmation signers, other organizations, clergy, religious, and bishops. Since 1989, when we got our first computer, all production has been done in-house, except for final printing. In 2001 *Voices* became a quarterly journal with a new editorial board, and expanded its contents to cover a wide range of subjects — from bioethics to liturgy — that affect

women, families, and others. *Voices* often features excerpts and summaries of papal encyclicals and apostolic letters, prayers and devotional material, and reports on the meetings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which we have attended as press since 1987.

In addition to *Voices*, we also produce prayer cards and leaflets for devotions, such as the Novena for the Protection of the Unborn. In 1989 we published the first of two family sourcebooks, *The Family Sourcebook for Advent and Christmas* and *Family Sourcebook for Lent and Easter*. The books suggest ways of observing the Church's liturgical year in the home, the "domestic church."

WFF first launched our web site in 1999 — wf-f.org — and in the





Cardinal Ratzinger receives new Affirmation list and Family Sourcebooks from Helen Hull Hitchcock in 1999

past 10 years it has expanded into a major resource for Church teaching and Catholic practice. During 2009 the website averaged 23,000 hits per day. In addition to an online version of *Voices*, there are many other useful resources on the WFF website. Expanding on our family sourcebooks idea is the Liturgical Calendar, featuring prayers and devotions for feasts and holy days throughout the Church year. This section is extremely popular, particular around major holidays. Issues of medical ethics comprise another section, “Medicine and Morality”; and a section on “Catholics and Politics” that includes relevant Church documents and statements of individual bishops has proved helpful to many.

Women for Faith & Family also issues occasional public statements and responses on matters of importance in the Church and in society. Such statements provide a useful means of communicating the concerns of women, and also serve an educative function vis-à-vis the media. One early example is the Statement on Feminism, Language and Liturgy, originally issued in 1989. Most recently, in April and May 2009, we issued statements on stem-cell research and on “conscience regulation” in health care reform. WFF’s current and past statements are all accessible on our website.

While a national presence to support the Church and the teaching efforts of our bishops continues, Women for Faith & Family is also committed to working effectively on the local level and encouraging other Catholic women to do so. In addition to

working with other groups for common efforts (e.g., life issues), we are sensitive to the desire on the part of many Catholic women for a doctrinally reliable and spiritually nourishing source of companionship and mutual support that local groups might provide, and we have developed suggestions and resources for this. (See “Suggestions for Parish/Local Groups” at wf-f.org/Meeting-suggestions.html).

For the past two years WFF has held days of recollection in St. Louis, led by Bishop Robert Hermann, which focused on papal teaching — on *Mulieris Dignitatem* in 2008, and on the Gospel of Life, *Evangelium Vitae*, in 2009.

Need for action, evangelization continues...

As we observe the 25th anniversary of the founding of Women for Faith & Family it seems a good time to review where we’ve been and what comes next. What we originally thought would be a short-term effort has expanded into a movement of Catholic women with a multifaceted program and many responsibilities.

Many things have changed. The nine-year process surrounding the “women’s pastoral” ended in 1992, more or less in a whimper, when the effort to issue it as an official document of the US bishops was disbanded. Confident predictions in the 1980s that women would certainly be ordained as Catholic

priests “by the end of the decade,” then “by the end of the century,” are now history. Efforts to push liturgical reform further toward a do-it-yourself form of worship have failed.

Yet much remains monotonously the same. It is still the case that some Catholic leaders and Catholic theologians and Catholic journalists are as vocal in their opposition to fundamental Catholic teachings as ever. Dissent from magisterial teachings of the Church persists — even deepens and hardens — despite repeated statements from bishops and popes reaffirming the unchangeable truth about the intrinsic value of all human life.

In spite of the continuing challenges, however, considerable luster has by now worn off the “revolution” of then-youthful dissenters and liturgical reformers of two or three decades ago. The former Young Turks are now either retired or approaching retirement from their influential positions within venerable Catholic institutions or religious orders. Orthodox Catholic movements, on the other hand, though often ignored and on the margins, have proliferated and their persistence in witness to the truth is continuing to reach many. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994-95) had a major energizing effect; and the new Missal and other recent reforms in the liturgy are sources of much encouragement and hope for the future.

Our duty — to witness

What has Women for Faith & Family achieved in its 25 years? Were we successful even in our initial modest goal? Yes and no. The controversial “women’s pastoral” was never issued

as a pastoral letter of the US bishops, although some of its recommendations, such as advocating “nonsexist” language in the liturgy, remained.

The current Vatican investigation of US women’s religious orders — the “apostolic visitation” and doctrinal investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious — is a sign that the problems caused by radical feminism’s challenge of perennial Catholic teaching were never resolved.

An early example: during Pope John Paul II’s 1979 visit to the United States, he was publicly confronted on the matter of ordination of women by Sister Theresa Kane, the official representative of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Thirty years later, some women religious still regard the Catholic Church as “beyond patching” — the title of a 1991 book by Sister Sandra Schneiders, reprinted in 2004. (She explains: “the title, *Beyond Patching*, is deliberately ambiguous. By it I want to suggest, first of all, that the old garment is beyond repair and only a thoroughgoing reform of the church can respond adequately to the feminist critique”, p. 4.)

Sister Sandra, a member of Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and longtime professor of New Testament Studies and Christian Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California, has denounced the forthcoming visitation as “a grand-jury investigation,” and “an unwarranted surprise attack” by the Vatican (*National Catholic Reporter*, August 17, 2009.)

Some women religious who now consider themselves “post-Christian” continue to remain Catholics in good standing, and

their jobs, whether as seminary professors or as Church bureaucrats, have remained secure.

One modest achievement with which Women for Faith & Family might be credited is that it is now impossible for dissenting feminists to claim convincingly to speak for all Catholic women. Too many voices contradict this. Our best continuing effort, however, may be our daily, unglamorous labor of helping Catholics to understand their faith better, in praying for them and encouraging them in prayer and study in order that they might equip themselves for the arduous job of transmitting their precious (and, especially for younger Catholics, unexpected) gift of faith to others — to their children and to their children’s children.

Ours will certainly continue to be difficult, exhausting work, as “women’s work” so often is. Nevertheless, as with many other things women do out of love, it is through this labor that we may hope to contribute things of irreplaceable value — to our own families and to the world. Furthermore, we must continue — even if we are unlikely to hear ourselves praised for our labors.

Because we believe that the liberating truth of Christ is embodied in the Catholic Church, it is our simple, basic duty as Catholics to witness to it, to defend it, and to transmit it as best we can — with God’s help.

Heaven Hull Hitchcock

September 2009





Women for Faith & Family P.O. Box 8326 St. Louis, Mo. 63132

Volume 1, Number 1

WOMEN FOR FAITH AND FAMILY NEWSLETTER

August 1985

"Women of the entire universe, -- you to whom life is entrusted at this grave moment in history, it is for YOU to save the peace of the world."

-Exhortation to Women

Pope Paul VI - Second Vatican Council

AN OPEN LETTER

Dear Friend in Christ,

When a group of women met, last September, to discuss the possibility of providing an opportunity for Catholic women to express unity with the Church, her teachings, and with the Holy Father, we felt certain that there were many women who would wish to join us in this effort. The unanimous decision of this group of friends sitting around a dining-room table, was to circulate, as best we could, a statement of faith called the AFFIRMATION FOR CATHOLIC WOMEN. With the help of an anonymous donor, we had several hundred copies of this document (which was written by one of us) printed and began mailing them to people we knew.

We did not anticipate, then, the flagrant challenge to the Church in the form of an advertisement in the New York Times sponsored by "Catholics For a Free Choice", nor the unprecedented media attention which would be given to "dissident Catholics" (especially women) in the ensuing weeks and months. And, although it is really not surprising, we did not anticipate the response our efforts would bring. We knew, however, that there surely were many more women who, like us, would welcome the opportunity to make an explicit statement of their Faith. The fact that the Bishops' Committee on the Pastoral Letter on Women had particularly asked for testimony from American Catholic women made this kind of effort seem especially timely.

Within a few weeks, our mailbox was overflowing. Not only with signatures to the AFFIRMATION and requests for more copies, but with letters -- some offering encouragement and prayers, but many, also, expressing particular concerns about elements within our society which undermine and weaken both the Faith and our families.

By March we had a list of 4,000 signatures to send to the Bishops' Committee for their hearings on the Pastoral held in Washington. A few weeks ago we were able to present a list of 10,000 names of women who had signed the AFFIRMATION to His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. As this is being written, we have over 17,000 signatures from women to present to the Bishops' Committee at the hearings to be held late in August in Chicago.

Your response, your signatures, your letters, your prayers, and your efforts to collect signatures to the AFFIRMATION has already given much encouragement to many people -- to other women, who sometimes feel isolated and discouraged in the face of so much confusion in the Church and in the society -- and to Bishops and priests, who need to know that the majority

of Catholic women do not feel "oppressed" by the Church, and that, far from being "beaten down" by the "patriarchy", we draw our strength and spiritual energy to meet the daily challenges of our lives (whether we are married or single, young or old; whether or not we have jobs outside our homes; whether we are Religious or lay women) from the Catholic Faith and the perennial Truths which that faith teaches.

Your letters and telephone calls also indicate that there is a great desire for continually deepening our understanding of the Catholic faith, and to communicate with others who share that faith and commitment. One response to this expression is to bring women together at a conference which might both enhance our faith and provide opportunities for Christian fellowship. After much prayerful consideration, we decided to sponsor such a conference. Information about this meeting will be contained in this NEWSLETTER.

The NEWSLETTER itself is an effort to help to provide a channel of communication and information to those women who have participated with us in this effort. You have done the work, and you should also know how things are going.

We still do not know what the future holds for the organization, WOMEN FOR FAITH AND FAMILY. We have been asked by Cardinal Edouard Gagnon, Pro-prefect for the Pontifical Council on the Family, to continue the collection of signatures to the AFFIRMATION at least until late in 1986, when a synod on the family will be held. There may be other ways in which such an organization can be of use to the Church. We have neither the funds nor the personnel, at this point, to launch yet another Catholic organization which has officers and regular meetings. We will do what we can, praying continually for guidance from the Holy Spirit, and are willing to work in a way which is consistent with the example of love and devotion set for us by Our Lady.

WOMEN FOR FAITH AND FAMILY is yours, and those of us in St. Louis who are taking care of the clerical work connected with the distribution of the AFFIRMATION and collection of signatures have been encouraged -- often inspired -- by your active witness to the Faith.

Please pray with us, dear friend in Christ, that His will be done in all our efforts.

Sincerely in Our Lord,

Helen Hull Hitchcock
Helen Hull Hitchcock
for WOMEN FOR FAITH AND FAMILY



Francis Cardinal Arinze

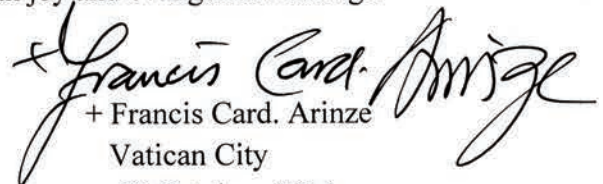
IN WITNESS TO JESUS CHRIST
(Message to Women for Faith and Family)

As your organization WOMEN FOR FAITH AND FAMILY gets set to celebrate its 30th anniversary, I write to share your joys and hopes. From my reading of your quarterly publication, I have learned to admire your aims and contributions.

There is no doubt about the importance of the contribution which women make and can make to the good of the family, the society and the Church. The mother, the sister, the wife, the consecrated woman and the woman leader in society, politics, culture and in matters religious, are appreciated by anyone who realizes the indispensable role that women can fill.

As Catholic women you have an important contribution to make in witnessing to Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in society. The world of today offers you many opportunities and also challenges which you cannot ignore.

As you celebrate the 30th anniversary of your organization, I wish you ever clearer conviction of your role, continued dynamism in witnessing to Christ, and perseverance in living your Catholic faith with joy and evangelical courage.


+ Francis Card. Arinze
Vatican City
18 October, 2014.





Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office of the Archbishop
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

September 23, 2014

Dear friends,

Alexis de Tocqueville, that early and very shrewd observer of our nation's life, saw that democracy in the United States worked because of the prevalence of religious faith, and "it is the woman who fashions mores." Over the nearly two centuries since he wrote, women have taken on many public leadership roles he could never have imagined. But his words are still true: Women are the key to the moral course of American life, and they exercise their influence most deeply within the family.

For the past 30 years, Women for Faith and Family (WFF) has done extraordinary work in providing witness, guidance and organizational strength to Catholic wives, mothers, daughters and women leaders in the professions. It's been a privilege to watch its service to the Church grow and mature. I'm grateful for all WFF has achieved and the support it has constantly shown for the work of the Gospel in our families and in our country's public square.

May God bless everyone involved with Women for Faith and Family on this important anniversary, and be assured of my prayers, good will and friendship, now and always.

Gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,


Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia



ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

September 18, 2014

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Women for Faith & Family, I am pleased to offer you my greetings and best wishes. I would like to join you in giving thanks to God, who inspires every good work and guides its progress in ways that accomplish His will and build up His Church.

Anniversaries are a time for remembering and giving thanks for the many people who have built a tradition of faith, love and service in your organization. Since your founding three decades ago, you have sought to help women understand the Catholic faith more thoroughly and witness to it more faithfully. Your mission to provide women with information about the Church through *Voices* and other publications is a blessing, as is your circulatory statement, *Affirmation for Catholic Women*. As you look to the future, may Women for Faith & Family continue to lead many to grow in their faith and help them share their faith with others.

May God bless you as you seek to help each other faithfully embrace the teachings of the Church. Thank you for your lives of faith. You and those you love are in my prayers; please keep me in yours.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.
Archbishop of Chicago



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

October 27, 2014

Helen Hull Hitchcock
Director
Women for Faith and Family
P.O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Women for Faith and Family,


Greetings in Our Lord Jesus Christ!

Allow me to congratulate you on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of your founding! It is an important milestone and you should be justifiably proud of the good work done over the last three decades.

Throughout salvation history the Holy Spirit has raised up faithful women who have changed the world for the better, from Deborah, Judith and Esther to the Mother of Our Lord. Following in the footsteps of these chosen vessels, the work of Women for Faith and Family remains as necessary today as it was in 1984.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, model for all women and for all believers, intercede for the members of Women for Faith and Family, and guide their efforts for another 30 years!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ 
+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
Venice in Florida

FJD/mm



MOST REVEREND ALFRED C. HUGHES

ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS

7887 WALMSLEY AVENUE

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70125-3496

September 18, 2014

To the Women for Faith & Family:

As you celebrate 30 years of service to the Church and wider society I write to express my deep appreciation for the faith that motivates you and the life of family that you serve. Your witness to what it means to be women of the Church, formed and inspired by the Lord and responding to the special vocation which is yours, is a great source of inspiration to me.

May you continue to bring your unique genius as women to the life and service of the Church. May God bless you abundantly.

Sincerely in the Lord,

Most Reverend Alfred C. Hughes
Archbishop Emeritus
Archdiocese of New Orleans

ACH/pea



Archdiocese of Louisville

212 EAST COLLEGE STREET • P.O. BOX 1073 • LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY 40201-1073
(502) 585-3291 • FAX (502) 585-2466

OFFICE of the ARCHBISHOP

September 19, 2014

Ms. Helen Hull Hitchcock
Women for Faith & Family
P.O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Helen:

May God bless you!

Congratulations to Women for Faith & Family as you celebrate 30 years of supporting women who seek the grace of Christ in a lively commitment to their Catholic faith and to their families. This celebration is especially timely in light of the upcoming Synod on Challenges Facing the Family in the Context of Evangelization.

Pope Francis calls us to renew the family and to seek to accompany those who are wounded in their family life in light of the Gospel and Church teaching. Thanks to Women for Faith & Family for leading the way in these efforts.

Women for Faith & Family was founded in 1984, just three years after St. John Paul II uttered the famous and prophetic words in *Familiaris Consortio*: "the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family" (#75). Since that time, we have built upon that teaching with the United States Bishops' document, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*.

My prayer is that Women for Faith & Family remains vibrant and faithful for decades to come.

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

Most Reverend Joseph E. Kurtz, D.D.
Archbishop of Louisville



The Roman Catholic
Diocese of Phoenix

400 EAST MONROE, PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85004-2336 TELEPHONE (602) 257-0030
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 19, 2014

Women for Faith & Family
P.O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Members of Women for Faith & Family:

As you celebrate your 30th Anniversary this year, I wish to express my gratitude for your faithfulness to the Church and her teachings. What began in a dining room in St. Louis in 1984 has grown into the international organization that exists today.

In today's challenging cultural climate, Women for Faith & Family provides mutual support for Catholic women who, attacked by secular agendas that blind the eyes of many to the profound truths of our faith and shackle women to disordered choices, sets them free to live truly fulfilling lives that are consistent with God's divine plan for creation. I am also grateful for the publication of *Voices* and the content that is available on WFF's website. The availability of these recourses is a great blessing not only for women today, but for anyone who is seeking the truth about what the Church actually teaches and how choosing to walk in the way of Jesus enriches the lives of women who, like the women who provided for the needs of Jesus during his public ministry, have chosen to follow Him.

May the Lord continue to bless the work of Women for Faith and Family and may its message reach the many women today who are confused, or have been misled by other voices that proclaim a message that is contrary to the Word of God that found perfect expression in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and continues to be faithfully proclaimed throughout the world today by His Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix



Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop Emeritus of Philadelphia
928 Westmoreland Boulevard
Knoxville, TN 37919

September 25, 2014

Mrs. Helen Hull Hitchcock
Director
Women for Faith and Family
P. O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Mrs. Hitchcock,

I was happy to receive your letter informing me that Women for Faith and Family is observing this year its 30th anniversary.


On this joyful occasion I join willingly with all those who will be acknowledging the many achievements of the faithful Catholic women who have been working together over a period of three decades to live in accordance with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as they endeavor to follow the teachings of the Church and exemplify the role of women in the Church and in society. God has blessed the many efforts made to serve the Church in faith and love, to promote the family and to advance the cause of human life and human dignity.

Women for Faith and Family has shown deep interest in the life of the Church and of society. During these years you have done well to strive to foster the sacred liturgy of the Church, as well as being involved in other important issues.

On my part I ask the Holy Spirit to grant his gifts abundantly to all of you and to continue to make fruitful the contribution to the mission of the Church of Women for Faith and Family.

May our Blessed Mother intercede for you and be close to you as the Cause of your Joy.

Sincerely in Christ,


Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop Emeritus of Philadelphia



ARCHDIOCESE OF MIAMI

Office of the Archbishop

September 22, 2014

Helen Hull Hitchcock
Director
Women for Faith & Family
P.O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO, 63130

Dear Mrs. Hitchcock:

It is with great joy that I write to share in your celebration of the 30th anniversary of Women for Faith & Family. Please allow me to congratulate you on such a wonderful occasion and relay my best wishes to all the members and staff of Women for Faith & Family, as well as the readers of *Voices*.

On this very special anniversary, I pray that you may continue to bring the Light of Christ to our society. May the next 30 years bring an abundance of blessings upon you and your colleagues, as you continue to aid women in their efforts to deepen their understanding of the Catholic Faith.

The witness of faithful Catholic women is so necessary in today's world. Count with my prayers as you continue to serve society through the Women for Faith & Family.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Thomas Wenski
Archbishop of Miami

9401 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami Shores, Florida 33138
Telephone: 305-762-1233 Facsimile: 305-757-3947



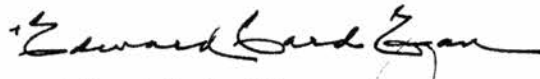
September 29, 2014

My dear friends in the Lord:

It is with great pleasure that I extend to you my heartfelt congratulations on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the founding of Women for Faith and Family. Thanks to my dear friend, Helen Hull Hitchcock, I have been kept abreast of your work at every step along the way and have never ceased to marvel at your wise and skillful promotion of Catholic teaching regarding marriage and the family. Your publications are always both attractive and compelling, and your statements and letters never fail to inspire. Be assured of my prayers that you will continue to be a powerful force for all that is good and holy over the years that lie ahead.

Trusting that you will always feel free to call upon me for any assistance I may be able to provide, I am

Very truly yours in Christ,


Edward Cardinal Egan
Archbishop Emeritus of New York

Mrs. Helen Hull Hitchcock
Women for Faith and Family
P.O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO 631130



100 N. 62nd St.
Omaha, NE 68132

ARCHDIOCESE of OMAHA

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Supported by the Archbishop's Annual Appeal

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402.551.4212 (FAX)
www.archomaha.org

September 30, 2014

Helen Hull Hitchcock
Women for Faith and Family
P. O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Helen,

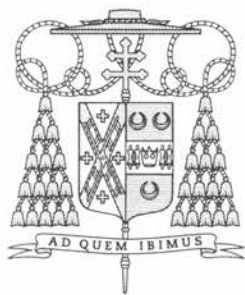
I am happy to learn that Women for Faith and Family is observing its 30th anniversary this year. Congratulations to you and those who have collaborated with you over these years.

Never have the voices of faithful Catholic women been more important in the life of the Church. The witness of women to the sanctity of marriage and the central importance of family life is needed now more than ever.

Your good work will be in my prayers, as you continue to cooperate with God's grace to build up the Body of Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend George J. Lucas
Archbishop of Omaha



OFFICE OF THE CARDINAL
1011 FIRST AVENUE
NEW YORK, NY 10022

October 1, 2014

Ms. Helen Hull Hitchcock
Director
Women for Faith & Family
P.O. Box 300411
St. Louis, MO 63130

Dear Ms. Hitchcock,

Congratulations on the 30th anniversary of *Women for Faith & Family*. What a testament of faith this milestone is! Your commitment and dedication to assisting Catholic women in their efforts to provide witness to their faith, both to their families and to the world, is commendable and greatly appreciated.

As the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops prepares to discuss the challenges facing families, there is great hope that the riches of Catholic teaching, including the beauty and mystery of women, will emerge. Now is a great time for women to reflect on how eloquently our Catholic faith speaks about their dignity and vocation, and your organization is well-positioned to assist them in this task.

It is significant that Pope Saint John Paul II quotes the closing message of the Second Vatican Council in *Mulieris Dignitatem* with, "That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling." I see this being accomplished in the work and initiatives of your organization. Not only do I applaud your past and current work, but I strongly encourage you to continue serving as a dynamic voice for the world, to hear, particularly women.

Ms. Hitchcock, be assured that I will pass your materials on to our own Family Life/Respect Life Office here in the Archdiocese of New York as they encounter many women in their daily work. Most importantly, please know that, as you continue in this vital work of evangelization, I will keep you in my prayers.

With prayerful best wishes, I am,

Faithfully in Christ,

Timothy Michael Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York



DIOCESE OF RALEIGH

Office of the Bishop

7200 Stonehenge Drive • Raleigh, North Carolina 27613-1620 • (919) 821-9731 • Fax (919) 821-9755

October 7, 2014

Ms. Helen Hull Hitchcock
Director of Women For Faith & Family
PO Box 300411
St. Louis, Missouri 63130

Dear Ms. Hitchcock,

Congratulations on the 30th anniversary of *Women for Faith & Family*! Your ministry of supporting women in strongly upholding the teachings of the Catholic Church is so vital in our Church and society today. Please know of my gratitude to you and my encouragement to all those involved with you in your efforts to support family and the "Domestic Church."

May our Blessed Lady intercede to her dear Son for you and *Women for Faith & Family*, especially during this month of October in which we celebrate the Holy Rosary and all the many efforts to respect life.

Sincerely in Christ

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Raleigh

With my prayerful support.



My dear Sisters in Christ,

Please allow me to thank you for your steadfast and courageous witness to the Faith of Christ! Such a strong cadre of faithful women willing to engage the culture of death through prayer and action is exceedingly vital to the New Evangelization.

In today's world, as we encounter the many trials that come, we are often tempted to allow fear to settle in our hearts, replacing the Christian Hope which should animate our lives. But as we experience those temptations and seek for strength, we should look to Mary. As I have said in the past, Mary is Our Lady of Hope, she's the Mother of Mercy, and she is the greatest warrior against evil. She is all three, and more.

In the first place, when we think about hope we should think about Mary. She staked her whole life on the hope of something that could never have been proven to her. She staked her whole life on the truth of something that she could never understand. She was asked to offer a "yes" only on faith, and she rooted her hope in that. And that's the kind of hope we need now, because what we can understand leads to discouragement.

Mary is also the Mother of Mercy. We really need mercy in this world today, in a desperate way. This world of ours says, "Do whatever you want! You get a free pass on everything. There is nothing that's right or wrong anymore, just go ahead!" Yet, that same world is merciless when people do what is politically incorrect. When it actually comes to something that crosses the line of political correctness, there is no mercy. There is no mercy. So we need the Mother of Mercy desperately—the one who carried Mercy in her womb.

And evil is just growing, and growing, and growing all around us. We need the warrioress, the great warrior against evil, who is Mary. She is the one charged with crushing the head of the ancient serpent with her feet. She's the one through whom joy at the conquest of evil, the joy of the Resurrection, shines forth.

So, all that we see around us, in terms of the turmoil of the world, should be a reminder of how important it is to go to Our Lady every day.

The world is suffering in so many ways, and Mary serves as an example and as a conduit directly to her Son, who offers all that the world lacks. She's Our Lady of Hope, she's the Mother of Mercy, she's the warrior who crushes the head of the ancient serpent. We need her in our life, acting in those capacities every blessed day, and we need strong women for faith and family, with and like Mary.

Congratulations on 30 wonderful years! Thank you for all you continue to do and to be. Praised be Jesus Christ!

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert Morlino
Bishop of Madison

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

Diocese of Madison • 702 S. High Point Road • P.O. Box 44983 • Madison, WI 53744-4983

Phone: 608-821-3001 • Fax: 608-821-4552

Should a Pro-Life Person Become a Nurse?

by Nancy Valko, RN



RECENTLY I RECEIVED AN EMAIL FROM A nurse friend asking if I could reply to a letter from a student nurse. Unfortunately, this student nurse's concerns are common, and I've often wondered how many wonderful pro-life people have been intimidated from pursuing a medical career because of such concerns and so many media outlets' bias against the pro-life movement.

Because of the urgency, at first I replied to this student with suggestions about specialties that had few if any ethical conflicts, such as same-day surgery clinics and pro-life doctors' offices.

But then I realized that this reply missed the real issue: Is it worth it to become a pro-life nurse? So I sent this student my revised reply.

Letter and Reply

The following is this anonymous student nurse's letter and my reply:

I am a nursing student with big questions. I am 100% pro-life — anti-abortion in ALL cases, anti-birth control, anti-euthanasia, anti-sex change, and the like. Is there any hope for me in the culture of death nursing field? I've emailed a few right-to-life folks. They tell me that there is a desperate need for pro-life nurses. I would agree, but, from the anti-life demeanor of some bloggers, becoming a nurse seems akin to being thrown to the lions. So, my question: what area of nursing can I move into that does not demand that I do things that I absolutely will not do?

*Some nurses say that a nurse **must** take care of **all** patients and their **every** medical need and that a nurse could become "disbarred" if they dare refuse to care for someone. I don't want to sacrifice any more of my family's time by finishing this degree if I end up getting fired everywhere I go or having to hire a lawyer to defend my pro-life, God-given conscience! I have a family to support financially. I am very, very concerned. I have to pay for this fall's classes by the end of the month or else I'm out of the program.*

Do you have any advice for me? Am I being too over the top about the whole thing? I don't know what the "real" nursing world is like.

My reply:

I've been a pro-life nurse for 45 years working in hospice,

intensive care, general medicine/surgery, oncology, dialysis, and home health, along with some other jobs both paid and volunteer. I never wanted to be anything but a nurse.

I've just retired this month from hospital nursing but not from nursing itself. I've taken courses to become a legal nurse consultant mostly to become a more effective pro-life advocate.

I have never regretted becoming a nurse.

When I started in the 1960s, all medical professionals were on the same page except for oral contraceptive pills, which were just being developed. Back then, the focus was entirely on helping patients. I went to my first job interview not even knowing what I would be paid or what benefits were available. I just wanted to help relieve suffering.

When I started as a registered nurse in 1969, the camaraderie was amazing. We were all so dedicated and willing to do anything to help. We were inspired by TV medical shows like *Medical Center*, *Marcus Welby, MD*, and others that portrayed medicine as a vocation and even ministry. And we lived it.

When the American Academy of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (now the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists) in 1965 quietly changed the definition of the beginning of life from fertilization to implantation in the uterus, things began to change rapidly. This was done to allow contraception to become not only legal but also promoted as a beneficial development.

By 1973 when *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal, I was a 23-year-old intensive care unit nurse and the decision was a shock to all of us. A few doctors and nurses thought it might be okay since we all thought abortions were only done in very early pregnancies. Besides, the abortion promoters told us that women would go for help more readily instead of to "back alley" abortionists. We were told that with such help, more women would have the support to have their babies.

However, abortion was soon promoted as a positive good and a women's right issue. The traditional ethic that was the bedrock of our medical professions — of never harming or causing the death of our patients — was undermined.

But I was unaware of all this (the facts about abortion and contraception) when I left nursing temporarily in 1976 to raise my children. However, I was still a nurse and the volunteer opportunities were a way that I could still be involved. This was

one of the happiest times of my life and I knew I was still a nurse.

However, in 1982 I learned firsthand how awful things had become when my baby Karen was born with Down syndrome and a critical heart defect. At the same time there was a national case involving a baby with Down syndrome who had an easily treated problem with his esophagus but the parents — on the advice of their OB/GYN — refused the routine surgery because they said their son would be better off dead. The baby died of starvation and dehydration about two weeks later. I was very upset and wondered what had happened to medical ethics during the time I was away from hospital nursing.

When my Karen was born, I came face to face with what is rightly called the culture of death when I was offered — even encouraged by some — to refuse surgery for my daughter and just let her die. As I told her cardiologist, “When exactly do her constitutional rights kick in? She’s not even a ‘fetus,’ for God’s sake!”

The cardiologist immediately backtracked and said he would do everything to save my daughter’s life. I knew he was a good man but I could never completely trust him again. What frightened me the most was that he and so many of the doctors and nurses involved with Karen had been seduced into a “better dead than disabled” mentality. I finally realized how much medical and nursing education had changed and a lot of that was due to the deterioration of ethics starting with contraception. Young doctors and nurses were no longer being taught sanctity of life but rather quality of life.

My daughter Karen finally made me a committed pro-life advocate.

Eventually I saw even utilitarian economics become a growing part of medical ethics. That’s why we have such issues as in vitro fertilization, assisted suicide/euthanasia, and organ donation problems.

I went back into hospital nursing in 1989 when I suddenly became a single mom and the sole support of three children. However, things had changed radically. Nurses were being laid off and I found that my volunteer pro-life work was frowned upon by many.

However, I didn’t give up, and instead of talking about pro-life topics, I set my sights on being the best nurse possible. It worked.

As time went on I got on ethics committees where I could make a difference by talking about cases from a traditional ethics/natural law perspective, which is really the basis of pro-life health care. My fellow nurses eventually decided I was a good nurse even if I didn’t agree that abortion should be legal. I was even able to help a fellow nurse who was considering abortion get more information and she eventually had a healthy baby — and her first girl.

I was also able to advocate for my chronically ill, terminally ill, elderly, and disabled patients. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn’t, but I knew that at least I tried and I saw some minds and hearts changed in the process.

Only once was I threatened with firing in a situation where I could not “opt out” but I knew my rights. This is where groups like California Nurses for Ethical Standards (ethicalnurses.org)

and the National Association of Pro Life Nurses (nursesforlife.org, where I am a spokesperson) can help. In that case, not only was I not fired but my stand helped a whole floor of other nurses say no — in unison — to a doctor who ordered something unethical.

So my point is not that it is easy to be a pro-life nurse. My point is that it is a privilege and a mission to be a pro-life nurse!

I ended my reply by giving this student my email address and home phone number.

Conclusion

The culture of death is big and intimidating but I believe that the vast majority of doctors and nurses do want to give the best care to their patients. Sadly, between groups promoting death issues like abortion and euthanasia with the help of a sympathetic and biased media and the deteriorating ethical standards taught in many medical and nursing schools, many doctors and nurses are unaware that there is a better philosophy of health care. Too many think that *legal* automatically means *ethical*. We need to help educate them, not just with words but with truly excellent and patient-safe health care.

The situation will continue to be difficult because culture of death supporters know that if enough doctors and nurses refuse to participate in their agenda, their movement is dead. Long ago, I resolved never to become angry or criticize people for their views but I also resolved to be steadfast on the front lines of the battle between killing and caring. Although the episode of my attempted firing could have ended differently and I actually did not expect the positive outcome, I was willing to lose my job rather than participate in a deliberate death decision.

Conscience rights are crucial, especially in today’s world. We need strong conscience rights on all life issues enshrined in law and in practice to protect ethical health care providers and their patients.

In the end and despite the occasional difficulties, I can attest personally that it has all been worth it and that I am truly blessed to be a pro-life nurse. 🌹

Nancy Valko, RN ALNC, a contributing editor for *Voices* and long-time advocate of ethical and patient-safe health care, writes the regular “Bioethics Watch” column for *Voices*. A registered nurse since 1969, she is a spokesperson for the National Association of Pro Life Nurses, past president of Missouri Nurses for Life, and past co-chair of the St. Louis Archdiocesan Respect Life Committee.

Hunger Tames

by the Reverend Jerry J. Pokorsky

IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW (14:13-22) the Lord miraculously multiplies the loaves to feed the multitude. There is an obvious echo of the feeding of the Israelites in the Old Testament with manna, “the bread from heaven.” More apparent, in light of the Last Supper and the Paschal mystery, is the foreshadowing of the Blessed Eucharist, the “the Bread that comes down from heaven” to satisfy man’s spiritual hunger in the new and everlasting covenant. However, there is also some revelation here of the necessity and dignity of basic human physical hunger.

It is occasionally observed that the reason there hasn’t been any serious or chronic civil unrest in the United States is because of the continuing abundance of relatively inexpensive and good food. In the main, hunger in America is normal and cyclical in our lives, like the sunrise and sunset. Only in exceptional — and usually dysfunctional — situations is hunger chronic and a problem in America. And even here the problem is more of a nutritional dysfunction, a “hidden hunger” often resulting in problems like obesity rather than that of debilitating hunger and starvation — as found in many other countries. Today we sometimes pervert the natural impulses of hunger with our obsessions with diets and our too-hasty acceptance of the latest fashionable food taboos. Even at the physical level we respond to the same food very differently when we’re really hungry than when languidly munching out of boredom.

But the natural cycle of hunger is a very useful sensation for many reasons, including a sign of spiritual hunger in need of fulfillment. Hunger directs our attention to immediate needs: nourishment and bonding. God has given a newborn a remarkably piercing cry that cannot fail to get attention. An infant’s nighttime squawking is designed to awaken (usually) mom (as dad rolls over and puts a pillow over his head). As a result the child not only gets fed, but begins a lifetime of precious bonding with mom and, eventually, dad. Hence the demands of hunger are indispensable in forming a proper life, living in community as intended by God (cf. first two chapters of Genesis).

Normal hunger should have the effect of promoting a sense of healthy dependence upon others. After all, Jesus Himself says, “Give them some food yourselves.” The delivery of food doesn’t just happen. The food chain extends from farm to grocery store to the household, for food preparation. An infant depends upon mom to deliver the goods; children gather around the supper table expecting to be fed, dependent but feeling entitled to their

meals, as mom and dad provide for them.

A generous and joyous spirit responds to these demands. Even a master chef at a five star restaurant (know any?) must be generously attentive in responding to the demands of human hunger — not only to be successful, but for his own self-respect and self-worth.

Contrary to the mythology of “rugged American individualism,” a sense of dependence on others — honest, proportional, and reasonable — is necessary for the cultivation of virtue. (Perhaps this is the reason human childhood is so long compared with other species. And maybe it’s partly to give self-centered new parents the opportunity to grow up and grow out of their self-centeredness too.)

Hunger, when satiated, should also give rise to the virtue of gratitude in those being fed. This is evident when family members thank mom for a delicious meal, or when a restaurant customer sends a message, “My compliments to the chef.” It’s hard to judge the exact state of mind of a relaxed baby in the arms of mom after a feeding, but there seems to be a hint of gratitude in its tiny demeanor (at least mother can be grateful for the child’s sleepy eyes). Wise parents teach their children gratitude for a nice meal by reinforcing a need to say, “Thank you!” And good parents never neglect the recitation of the prayers before meals and after meals expressing a recognition of dependency and thanks for “these Thy gifts.”

Such is the natural cycle of hunger having profound spiritual effects: dependency, community, generosity and thanksgiving. A true self-giving generous spirit based on a sense of gratitude (sublimely, “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving”) is the result of the normal cycle of human hunger. Christ in the Blessed Eucharist, after all, satisfies a hungry heart as we rejoice in thanksgiving and respond in generosity. So turn off the television (for good?), wash up, say your prayers, and come to the family supper. And don’t miss Sunday Mass — under penalty of mortal sin unless you have a good and sufficient reason. Without the cultivation of gratitude, a dangerous and all too common entitlement mentality becomes entrenched and stunts true moral development.

It’s that basic. ☺

Father Pokorsky is pastor of St. Michael Church in Annandale, Virginia. He is a member of the executive board of our “sister” organization, *Adoremus Society for the Renewal of the Sacred Liturgy*.

Pope Francis and Women

by Joanna Bogle

POPE FRANCIS HAS MUCH IN COMMON with his immediate predecessors, and one particular aspect of this is worth highlighting. Along with Popes John Paul II and Benedict, he grew up assuming it was normal and natural for both men and women to have access to full education, to vote in elections, to train for professions, and to hold public office. And, like Pope Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict, he understands and teaches the importance of marriage and of motherhood, the complementarity of the sexes, and the deep significance for the Church in all of this.

As pope, Benedict spoke about the importance of women's influence and responsibilities in the Church, devoting a whole series of talks to great women saints. He highlighted the specific intellectual gifts of Catherine of Sienna and Hildegard of Bingen, among others, noting that they combined these gifts with practical skills, strong leadership, and a sense of service to the Church. John Paul II spoke of the specific "genius of women," by which he meant not that women were brainier than men, but that they bring a certain and very specific quality to their work.

So it is in this tradition that Pope Francis speaks about women in the Church, and with the naturalness and good humor that have become his trademark. At a major gathering of Catholic women in Italy, he emphasized "the indispensable contribution of women in society, in particular with their sensitivity and intuition toward the other, the weak and the unprotected." He said he has been heartened that "many women share some pastoral responsibilities with priests in looking after persons, families and groups" and added a hope that "the spaces for a more diffuse and incisive presence in the Church be expanded." And he spoke with wisdom and common sense about the central role of the family: where we learn to live with others, to give and receive love, and to build something civilized.

Catholic women can certainly hold positions of responsibility and spiritual leadership in the Church and in the world, and have done so down the centuries — from women in statecraft and political influence (Jadwiga of Poland, Hedwig of Bavaria, Elizabeth of Hungary) through abbesses and teachers, visionaries and mystics (Hilda of Whitby, Teresa of Ávila, Catherine Labouré, Marguerite-Marie Alacoque, Faustina Kowalska) through martyrs and witnesses (Margaret Clitherow, Josephine Bakhita) to missionaries and pioneers (Mary MacKillop, Madeleine Sophie Barat, Teresa of Calcutta). And all have drawn inspiration from Mary, the woman at the core of all human history.

Pope Francis has inherited a Church that has become familiar with scenes of young men and women cheerfully gathering in vast numbers at World Youth Day and similar events, identifying themselves with the Church via a range of new movements, pro-life organizations, and localized groups. They tend not to see Catholicism as hidebound or stuffy and indeed seem to accept the notion of the complementarity of the sexes as taught by the Church: pressure for female ordination belongs to an older generation.

The Church does not consist only of priests, but of families, religious communities, youth organizations, parishes, and lay-led movements such as Focolare, the Neocatechumenate, the Emmanuel Community, Youth 2000, and innumerable prayer groups and rosary circles, youth groups, pilgrimage groups, social action groups, and more.

Pope Francis spoke to this reality when in response to a question about female cardinals he said "I don't know where this idea sprang from. Women in the Church must be valued not 'clericalized.' Whoever thinks of women as cardinals suffers a bit from clericalism."

He gets it. 🌹

***Joanna Bogle**, a contributing editor of Voices, writes from London. She is a well-known author and journalist, who writes and lectures on issues of the Catholic faith, and appears frequently on the radio.*



The New Challenge for Women: Restoring the Culture of Marriage

by Donna Fitzpatrick Bethell

FOR THOSE OF US WHO REMEMBER 30 YEARS AGO, there might be a temptation to think of those times as the good old days. It might be like the time I went biking without my glasses. All edges softened and colors melded gently. It was like riding through an Impressionist painting. But with a better focus, 1984 was anything but halcyon.

The very year evokes images from George Orwell's novel and there was a certain amount of notice in the press about the failure of the Orwellian dystopia to materialize. This was willful blindness, as the gulag flourished and much of the world suffered from totalitarian regimes and the Evil Empire. President Ronald Reagan was still being ridiculed for using that term and he had not yet called on Mr. Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall.

It would be five more years before Otto von Hapsburg would invite leaders from both sides of the wall to come to a picnic on the Austrian border with Hungary. People began to cross that border and within a few months the Iron Curtain became untenable. I returned from a news-free vacation early that November and thought that the radio in the taxi was broadcasting some sort of fantasy drama. But it was real. The wall was being torn down and Mr. Gorbachev, to his everlasting credit, did not send the tanks to stop it. The enormity of the shock is a measure of how great the evil had been, but we were living with it in 1984 and many thought that there was no alternative.

Conditions in the Catholic Church in the United States were also not so good. Catholic education was either fading at the elementary level or severely compromised at the college level. Our liturgy had been refocused on us, now arranged in a closed circle facing a priest who was forced into some degree of performance. The greatest musical patrimony in the world had been chucked out for something more "relevant," which meant banal songs instead of the psalms that were still in the Missal but largely ignored.

Humanae Vitae, Pope Paul VI's encyclical restating the Church's doctrine against artificial contraception, had been issued in 1968. After a brief flurry of protest, the dissidents decided simply to ignore it and bishops tacitly agreed. Our bishops were more interested in writing pastoral letters on the economy or world peace than attending to actually teaching the Faith. The Faith itself had been reduced in many minds to social justice.

It was those conditions that prompted the small but significant counter-punch, *Voices*. The Faith still informed many lives with the power of sacramental life and the graces of prayer.

Catholic women were living the challenges of the working world and the hidden glories and struggles of home and family. And many of these women needed a place to voice their thoughts and experiences and to be encouraged and guided.

Women are the hearth-keepers. It is they who bear and raise children with the faithful protection of the father and husband. Normally women are oriented toward the home and men are more active outside the home. Social trends in the last few decades have had at least one good effect in highlighting the importance of men's participation in children's upbringing, but that has been true mostly when the man is actually in the home.

On the other hand, women have become more active outside the home. A great deal of this has, unfortunately, come at the behest of feminists who thought it was necessary to denigrate marriage and child-rearing in order to free women for their full economic and personal realization. But there is a role for women outside the home that does not shortchange the indispensable role of nurturing children; the realization of that role by many Catholic women has been a blessing for the Church and society.

Yet, even with these improvements, a fundamental problem for the Church and society was and remains attacks on the family. The foundation of a family is a marriage between a man and a woman who are committed to each other to have children and raise them in an exclusive and enduring relationship. So the elements of marriage and family are a man and a woman, fertility, exclusivity, and indissolubility. This kind of marriage alone provides a solid foundation for society, giving more than it takes.

These are the elements that have always been recognized and protected by Catholicism. They are based on the instruction of our Lord, natural law, and common sense. The erosion of these boundaries over the last 60 years has provided copious evidence of the dysfunction and unhappiness that result from any other arrangements. So we can now say that science also supports these elements.

But we have often neglected to talk explicitly about these characteristics of marriage and to teach them to our children. Our pastors have been reticent to the point of dereliction of duty while the general culture has raged against them. So we have to learn to talk about marriage again, to understand why all its traditional characteristics are necessary, and to explain them to others.

Thirty years ago, the great menace to the Catholic Church and many nations was persecution and aggression from atheistic Communism, which directed its attack principally at private

property and political and religious freedom. The Church was a bulwark and thanks to Saint John Paul II and determined political leaders that threat was largely defeated. But even while it persisted, Saint John Paul II was thinking deeply about the threat of the moral disintegration of the family. He spent five years of general audiences from 1979 to 1984 in expounding the theology of the body, which he called a commentary on Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*.

In a nutshell, the theology of the body teaches that masculine and feminine are complementary and that complementarity alone can be fruitful. Our bodies themselves teach us this. The union of a man and a woman requires a mutual self-giving that bears fruit in the child. This is an image of the Trinitarian life in which the Father gives Himself to the Son and the Son returns all to the Father. Their interchange of love is the Holy Spirit. All life, both spiritual and biological, derives from the loving gift of self and the reception of the gift of another.

To understand marriage as a mutual gift of self is to understand why it must be open to fertility and encompass an exclusive and indissoluble relationship. To block its fertility is to withhold part of the gift, while to try to give to a third person or to end the relationship is to retract the gift. This is a deeply personal understanding of marriage, going beyond the merely contractual and establishing marriage as a sharing in the divine power of creation and an imaging of the Trinitarian life. The dynamic of the gift means that the parties are living, changing, transforming, always becoming under divine grace who God intends them to be. It is not a process that either could accomplish alone. It is a process that involves the whole persons as embodied spirits and spiritual bodies, working in both the natural and supernatural spheres.

The development of the theology of the body was a prescient, not to say prophetic, work in the midst of the Communist attacks that seemed to be about something else. But in fact all forms of socialism have had a common thread of attacking the family. Denial of property rights, restriction of religious and political rights, and the aggrandizement of the state must necessarily interfere with the integrity and health of the family. The Soviet Union may have collapsed almost 25 years ago, but all of the elements of materialistic socialism have continued to advance. They have become the partners of the moral disintegration that has been hollowing out the West since even before the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Our culture in North America and Europe is on a continuum with the 1960s and is actively subverting each of the elements of marriage. Let's go through them one by one, so that we can recognize how the integrity of marriage relies on each of them.

Fallen man hates restraints, and so he strains against the bond of marriage. This is the one question about marriage that was put to our Lord because Moses had allowed a man to put away his wife. Although adultery certainly existed and also contraception and abortion, no one thought to propose to Jesus that these be approved. But they did ask about divorce. Jesus answered definitively: "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" So they are no longer two, but

one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man put asunder." (Mt 19:4-6)

Yet we have now come to the point that the option of divorce is a given — an escape hatch in case things don't work out. There is even some question whether many young people today, having little or no experience of intact marriages, are even aware of what is involved in making the necessary commitment.

The natural consequence of dissolvable marriage is that many people don't bother to get married at all. But they still have babies, and 40% of births in the United States are out of wedlock. Most of Europe is even worse. It is becoming unusual for children to grow up in a home with both biological parents married to each other. Single parenting, nearly always by the mother, is an almost sure path to poverty and other childhood and adult problems. Meanwhile the fertility rates drop and populations age. The US fertility rate is just below replacement level, which is 2.1 children per woman. The European Union is at 1.55, with Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland all below the average.

The next element is faithfulness of the partners to one another. Exclusivity in marriage, or rather its violation, provides the fodder for entertainment and celebrity cover stories. Yet a recent survey of 40 countries by the Pew Research Center found that infidelity in marriage was disapproved by high percentages almost everywhere (pewglobal.org/2014/04/15/global-morality). Even France, with the lowest score, came in at 48%.

It seems that as long as the marriage lasts, the partners expect fidelity. There is an innate sense of betrayal and rejection when fidelity is violated. When one has given what is precious, a unique gift, to another and the other has spurned it, the wound to the person is deep and lasting. This is a powerful witness to what marriage is, for all the theorizing and social liberation. Without fidelity, fertility becomes an unacceptable risk and indissolubility a lie. Perhaps this is one positive point on which to build in talking to young people about what they should expect and demand of themselves and a marriage partner.

Next, fertility. Fruitfulness is the natural result of marriage and the joy of the husband and wife. To block fertility is to close the couple upon themselves, to stunt the mutual gift, to seek domination of life and to reject life when we should be receiving it. It is a kind of mutual infidelity, where each partner chooses himself or some other perceived good instead of the other. It freezes the marriage in place, opting for the known *status quo* instead of the unknown possible. In a sense it dissolves the marriage because it blocks its natural development.

Married or unmarried, fertility rates are falling. Nations and continents are not replacing themselves. Among the areas in trouble are the United States, Canada, Europe, China, Russia, Australia, and Japan. The reason is evidently not lack of sexual activity but the near universal use of contraceptives and abortion. Or, rather, those are the means. The actual causes are loss of hope, or economic insecurity, or lack of self-restraint, or unwillingness to make the sacrifices required to raise children. As Cardinal Ratzinger said, we are seeing the refusal to choose and create a future. China, of course, has pursued a disastrous and coercive one-child policy since 1979. We are already in uncharted territory and demographers think that some countries are

approaching a point of no return, where the decline in numbers coupled with aging will make recovery impossible. Somehow, the population bomb we were threatened with 30 years ago seems to have imploded rather than exploded.

Finally, marriage is between a man and a woman. Thirty years ago, we already had no-fault divorce, abortion, contraception, adultery, and a rise in out-of-wedlock births. What we did not have was the claim that marriage is possible between two men or two women. It is hard to think about. The mind boggles and one wonders where to begin to explain why this is wrong. To put it somewhat crudely, it's wrong because you can't unlock a lock with another lock. You don't put one electric plug up against another and expect anything to happen. Man and woman are complementary, they complete one another. They are not supposed to be alike.

Pope Saint John Paul II explained it when he described Adam surveying and naming all the animals and then concluding sadly that there was none like himself. How did he know that? He could see it. So God made him a helper, one like himself, but different. "'Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.'" What could be more intimate? "For this reason a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This is simply not possible except with a man and a woman.

Same-sex "marriage" lacks all the attributes of marriage. Obviously it cannot be fertile. Social data tell us that it is rarely exclusive and its proponents want the same easy access to divorce that everyone else has. So they are taking an already debased model of marriage and knocking the last leg from under the stool.

In millennia of legal tradition, both church and civil law have required that a marriage be consummated to be valid. That is because the physical union of man and woman is essential to marriage. It is what differentiates the relationship from friendship. It is the gift that speaks with the body of the deeply personal commitment to the other. Now we are told that marriage has no requirement for consummation because it is not about two persons joining to produce children and forming a stable bond to nurture those children. Marriage is about being with the person you love, at least now, and doing whatever you like for your gratification. But then why limit it to two people? Why not two men and a woman or three women and a man? Indeed, approval of polyamory is rising. They just have not yet asked for state licensing and marriage benefits.

Actually, there is an awful logic at work here. There is a natural golden triangle of marriage, sex, and children. But we began

to dismantle it: sex without children, sex without marriage, children without marriage, children without sex (in vitro fertilization), and marriage without children. Who would have thought it possible or desirable or even thinkable to have marriage without sex, true sex? That is breaking the last bond. To accept it is to accept that marriage is meaningless because it has become a completely unlimited set of all possible combinations of any number whatsoever, optionally fruitful, nonexclusive, and dissolvable at will: in other words, no definition at all.

But that is where we find ourselves in most Western, formerly Christian, countries in 2014. We have come a long way since 1984, most of it in the wrong direction. Pope Francis has recognized the crucial role of the family and its dire condition. He has called both an extraordinary synod and an ordinary synod to address the issues. That is important, but the bishops are not going to turn this around. We need their leadership and the sound formation of priests to teach the truth, but it will not get better until the laity engage the battle.

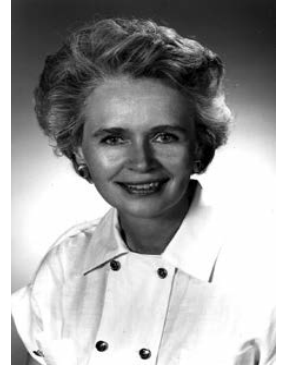
We have fallen under the tyranny of judges who have cancelled the votes of the people in order to impose the new order. The only way back is through a sustained effort, like the right to life, and that will require that enough people understand exactly where pseudo-marriage has to lead. The days of the revolutionaries just asking for tolerance are over. They want submission. It is all a part of the same battle: to strip the public square of our values and to impose theirs. It is not true that we can't impose our values on someone else. It is unavoidable: *someone's* values will be imposed.

We must provide the counter examples. We must begin our own "long march through the institutions" to take back our culture through education, politics, commerce, entertainment, and religion. Now is the time to turn and fight. Now is the time to be bold and confident about stating our values and reclaiming our culture. This is the only hope of preserving marriage and the family. Without healthy families, there is no future. 🍷

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Anniversary Reflections

by Mary Ellen Bork



AS WOMEN FOR FAITH & FAMILY celebrates 30 years, the challenges of the 1980s are still with us and, if anything, have become more imbedded in political and educational institutions. With increased hostility the purveyors of relativism have become more anti-Christian and aggressive in their attempts to marginalize the Church and its message. Helen's inspired efforts to focus on the "hinge" issues of women, faith, and family and the Church's teaching in these areas are even more important today as society proposes all kinds of fantastic definitions of women and their role, faith, marriage, and family, as if their proposals are more acceptable, more reasonable, and even more just than traditional views. Those who hold to the Church's view and speak up are considered troglodytes or "knuckle-dragging cultural fossils" as my husband was once dubbed. He considered that expression a badge of honor. The cultural support the Church once knew is eroding quickly and the tendency to despair is strong.

We have to resist this insidious temptation, which is not new in the history of the Church. Saint Paul speaks of all of his many troubles in his letters to the Corinthians and says he has confidence in God because the work he is doing is given him through God's mercy. It is the work of God in our time to teach the young the truth about human sexuality, the nature of faith, and the view that family needs a mother and a father. It has become more difficult because the underlying metaphysical vision of reality no longer informs these areas of our culture. We have been slouching towards Gomorrah for quite a while. It has not helped that many of the schools and colleges that formed older generations have closed or changed under the influence of the secular culture and no longer present the fullness of Catholic teaching.

The vision of human flourishing that we as Catholics cherish has to be shared in new and compelling ways. It was the vision of Vatican II that the laity must be more actively involved in witnessing to their faith and it is clear that they are needed to speak in a hostile culture. With fewer institutional resources we have to be committed to the effort to continue to educate ourselves and deepen our understanding of these issues and find new ways to reach out to those who often lack a strong formation in Catholic thought. That can only happen with the support of small, believing communities.

Pope Benedict XVI once predicted that Christians in the

future would be living in smaller communities in a highly secularized society, one ruled by relativism. It is happening: our experience of Catholic culture is often found in small groups, reading groups, prayer groups, Catholic professional groups like the John Carroll Society, parish activities, and devotions. We are not drawn to these groups as a retreat to a comfort zone but rather as an oasis of the shared vision of reality and truth that confirms our faith and helps us to grow spiritually.

Parishes can play a large role in educating and supporting adults and children and encouraging their spiritual growth. From these small communities come people with new initiatives to reach out to young people and fallen away Catholics looking for real spiritual wisdom. My own parish, St. John the Beloved in McLean, Virginia, is an example of a thriving community serious about spiritual growth. We even have evangelization through barbecues, parish celebrations connected with anniversaries and feast days, as well as adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and beautiful liturgies. Several other groups that are growing are Endow, Imago Dei, Women Speak for Themselves, Catholic Information Center, Lumen Christi, and many others. Some of these efforts are cultural and some are directly teaching and inspiring young mothers and fathers.

Those of us who have been privileged to live in the period after Vatican II should take up the teachings of Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict and make them better known because they speak to the needs presented by a secular culture — ideas like the culture of life and building a civilization of love and theology of the body. Saint John Paul II and Vatican Council II often taught that Christ reveals man to himself.

This profound orientation to life can help people discover that they are made for great things, deeper things than mere material flourishing. As Michael Novak recently wrote, human beings are called to higher aspirations than political freedom and possession of wealth... "Full human flourishing means striving toward beauty, nobility of soul, purity of heart, and great moral deeds." Reminding people of the place of virtue and spiritual striving today is like singing a song on a cold dark night. Some will hear it and be reminded of the deeper truths that should guide their lives. We have to be those singers and reach out to moderns who have lost their way.

Ultimately, it is only in Christ that people can live out their

deepest personal calling. C.S. Lewis says the Jewish psalmists were “ravished by moral beauty” and that is why they loved the law and studied it constantly. They loved going to the Temple and singing the praises of God. Christ is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets and is Himself the moral beauty that the world longs for. Our small initiatives and efforts — to bring Catholic teaching especially to the young — are, like the mustard seed, a real contribution to the Church and to society. We need to continue what Helen affirmed all these years so that John Paul’s teaching about the importance of Christ will bear fruit.

“Christ sheds light on man’s condition and his integral vocation. Consequently, ‘the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly — and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being — must, with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter him with all his own self; he must ‘appropriate’ and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deeper wonder at himself.’” (Splendor of the Truth, #8) ☪

Mary Ellen Bork, a member of the editorial board of *Voices*, is a freelance writer and lecturer on issues affecting Catholic life and culture. She serves on the Advisory Board of the School of Philosophy, Catholic University of America, and Christendom College. She is on the Susan B. Anthony List, and the Chesterton Review. For several years she has facilitated groups studying Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body. She is doing research on Catholic leaders during the English Reformation and 16th-century Catholic religious leaders. Her articles appear in the *National Catholic Register*, *The Washington Times*, *Voices*, and *The New Criterion*. Mrs. Bork, wife of the late Judge Robert Bork, lives in McLean, Virginia.



30th Anniversary of Women for Faith & Family 1984-2014

by Margaret Whitehead

I AM SO GRATEFUL TO HELEN H. HITCHCOCK and her friends in St. Louis who stepped out in faith in 1984 to defend the truth about the unique gifts and talents that women bring to marriage, to family life, to the Church, and to the world, and to affirm our allegiance to the teaching of the Catholic Church in these areas.

For 30 years, Women for Faith & Family has been a gift to all of us who seek to live and promote the real truth about women in the unreal world of confused messages that abound in the world today about men and women and about sex and marriage.

Women for Faith & Family has been a blessing for the whole Church, including our Church leaders. It has been a reliable bulwark in the spiritual and cultural battles against errors and distortions that undermine our basic sense of reality and truth.

I am honored to have known and worked with Helen as she led this amazing and much needed effort to engage women with their unique talents and voices in this spiritual, intellectual and moral battle.

Margaret Whitehead is a member of the *Voices* editorial board and a long-time educator.

Maternity and Divinity

by Donald DeMarco



MATERNITY BRINGS TO MIND A QUARTET OF VIRTUES that a mother possesses in a pre-eminent way: *creativity, tenderness, enthusiasm, and godliness.*

Creativity

József Cardinal Mindszenty, the courageous defender of the Church during the Communist occupation of Hungary, had an exceptionally strong affection for motherhood. In his book *The Mother* he penned an eloquent tribute to all mothers, emphasizing their particular closeness to God: “The most important person on earth is a mother. She cannot claim the honor of having built Notre Dame Cathedral. She need not. She has built something more magnificent than any cathedral — a dwelling for an immortal soul, the tiny perfection of her baby’s body. The angels have not been blessed with such a grace. They cannot share in God’s creative miracle to bring new saints to Heaven. Only a human mother can. Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any other creature; God joins forces with mothers in performing this act of creation... What on God’s good earth is more glorious than this; to be a mother?”

Despite his own priesthood, Cardinal Mindszenty would no doubt agree with a proverb of Spanish origin that “An ounce of mother is worth a ton of priests.”

Tenderness

If Adam and Eve regarded God the Father as austere in some way, the generations have honored Mary as more tender and, therefore, more accessible. Nathaniel Hawthorne expressed this sentiment rather beautifully in *The Blithedale Romance* when he wrote: “I have always envied the Catholics their faith in that sweet, sacred, Virgin Mother who stands between them and the Deity, intercepting somewhat His awful splendor, but permitting His love to stream on the worshipper more intelligibly to human comprehension through the medium of a woman’s tenderness.”

Saint Augustine noted that this special motherly tenderness can be found even among ordinarily ferocious animals. As he remarked in *The City of God*, “What tigress is there that does not purr over her young ones, and fawn upon them in tenderness?” It is the very vocation of a mother to avoid harshness in favor of that gentle tenderness that falls softly on and comforts the soul.

Enthusiasm

The concept of “enthusiasm” fascinated the Ancient Greeks. The world could not possibly be a place, as Democritus conjectured, that is nothing more than an uncountable number of atoms appearing in an infinite variety of configurations. How can one account for enthusiasm, that is, the spiritual capacity to find excitement and joy in lived experiences? Enthusiasm is an activity of the heart that cannot be explained away by matter. People have doubted many things: virtue, truth, knowledge, and even love. But no one can doubt the palpable reality of enthusiasm. Our modern world still bears a connection with this Ancient Greek insight. The word enthusiasm in the Greek language is *enthusiasmos*, which, in turn, is derived from *entheos*, which means “god-possessed” or “God-inspired.” The Greeks believed that a human being can breathe in the life of God, that one can be a conveyor or transmitter His spirit. They believed that the human could be a receptacle for the Divine. One of their words for life, *zoe*, refers not to life that throbs within the individual, but to life that can be shared with others. This notion of life was an indispensable basis for the Christian notion of God’s life, or grace, which can be shared by all of us, and with Mary and all mothers in a special way. Mary’s life with her Son is *zoe* raised to a pre-eminent level.

Godliness

According to a Jewish proverb, “God could not be everywhere, so He made mothers.” This is a fine, enduring sentiment. I do think, however, that by reversing the statement we come closer to the truth: “God could be everywhere and proved it by creating mothers.” This image is consistent with the American novelist William Makepeace Thackeray’s remark, in *Vanity Fair*, that “Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children.”

A mother is not a substitute for God, but acts more like a medium that transmits God’s beneficence to others. One might object, of course, that fathers also do this. This is true enough. But there is something of special privilege about the way a mother reveals the presence of God. It is as if she had had, in some mysterious way, a face-to-face experience of God. This claim may be more plausible if we understand Mary’s role as the spiritual prototype of all mothers.

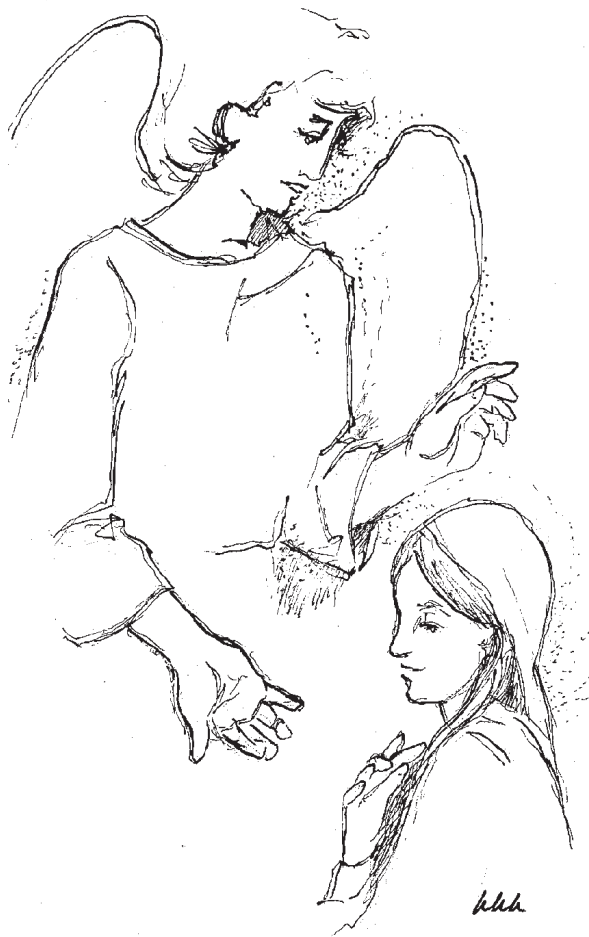
As pope, Benedict XVI made the following comment about Mary: “She, who had preserved in her heart the secret of the divine motherhood, was the first to see the face of God made man in the small fruit of her womb.”¹ The notion that Mary was the first human being to see the face of God is both startling and illuminating. As the spiritual role model of all mothers, something of this experience enters into both the essence of her motherhood and that of all other women who have ever given birth to a child.

If maternity is undervalued in today’s world, one might do well to consider the qualities of creativity, tenderness, enthusiasm, and godliness that mothers can possess in a most extraordinary way. ☪

NOTES

¹ From Pope Benedict XVI. Homily for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1, 2010. Online: vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20100101_world-day-peace_en.html.

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Non-Negotiable

by Sheila Liaugminas

OVER THE PAST FIVE DECADES, the world has gone through radical changes in every area of life. Mass populations have gained great access to information and lost the sense of its meaning. Nations have lost their borders and become what Chicago's Cardinal Francis George calls "communities on continents in conversation."

But people can't have a conversation when they don't speak the same language or understand the words as a minimally basic reference point. Even if they're all speaking English. Even if they're all living in the United States of America.

Words can define, or distort and divide, and they're currently at the heart of this divided country. We don't know how to talk with each other, apply critical thinking skills, carry ideas through to their logical conclusions. We don't know how to presume good intentions, defend a position with reason, or disagree with civility.

The lines are drawn. Rights and wrongs are more strongly asserted and fought over than they have been in a long while. But who drew those lines and who declares what's right and wrong, based on what authority? There are as many questions as answers. But the good news is that there are answers. The moral compass of a nation may be broken, but at least there is one in the world, and for purposes of this discussion, in a nation founded on Judeo-Christian ethics written into its founding documents, ingrained in its people, and woven into the fabric of their common life.

This discussion is my new book *Non-Negotiable: Essential Principles of a Just Society and Humane Culture*. It has been forming since a little girl encountered segregation in the Deep South and became a little activist for social justice without knowing that such a term existed.

It grew in my intellect and experiences as a student in the age of revolution and as a journalist for a major secular news-magazine, television network, and assortment of magazines in an era of liberal dominance of each, and of academia. It even conquered the Catholic Church, wrung through a false interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. The world was turning upside down and inside out.

But some things, I knew, were still immutable truths. I just kept my head down and went forward, confused and yet searching for the truth. Always searching for the Truth. Because I knew

it was there and could be found.

Which gets back to the moral compass in the world and this nation. Chesterton said, "There are an infinite number of ways to fall, but there is only one way to stand." With the truth he found in the Catholic Church. Which is no doubt why so many rail against it.

So the inspiration to finally write the thing forming over a lifetime came when, having a number of other book ideas on my mind, a young scholar with an abundant library of his own, asked if I had a book (or could refer one) on "what the Church teaches on the essential life issues and why." Yes, of course, I said. But neither of us could locate one, or just that one, anyway.

So I wrote it.

But if it were to be "what the Catholic Church teaches on abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, marriage, religious liberty" or something like that, it would attract ... whom? Hopefully, the crowd of Catholics who don't avail themselves of that teaching in broader form written time and again by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, or other episcopal bodies in other regions. Preaching to the choir is not my intention.

But then again, (a) even the choir has to know its music, be on the same page, learn it, practice it, bring it into harmony, and give it full voice in its full beauty; and (b) voicing truth with clarity and charity can touch those beyond the choir who hear it.

You can't unring a bell

So voices beyond the Catholic Church and beyond our time collectively had to tell the human story that transcends time and relative cultural values. It had to be all about human dignity at the center of everything.

It begins with Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, goes through the United Nations crafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the great Civil Rights Movement and the most soaring messages of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), the personalism of John Paul II, the new humanism of Benedict XVI, the culture of encounter of Pope Francis, human rights social activist turned great scholar Father Richard John Neuhaus, evangelical leaders Dr. Timothy George and Chuck Colson, and others. While also giving voice, as impor-



tant additions, to the liberal feminist Naomi Wolf, and Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, a former “leftist lesbian professor” who “despised Christians” and then “somehow became one.”

They speak about humanity and human dignity and rights, and I speak only as an author drawing together the collected wisdom on immutable truths that transcend the ages and hold societies together. Dr. King wrote in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*:

Because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century BC left their villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid. Moreover, I am cognizant of this interrelatedness of all communities and states ... Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

He wrote that to fellow clergymen who should have known better than to condemn him and his movement for their human rights activism. But it resonated far beyond its intended addressees, and still does to this day.

And yet, here we are, living in a “culture of death,” as John Paul called it; a “dictatorship of relativism,” as Pope Benedict called it.

Last year, Pope Francis gave an address at a Wednesday audience, citing his predecessor. “We are living in an age when people are rather skeptical of truth,” he said. “Benedict XVI has frequently spoken of relativism, that is, of the tendency to consider nothing definitive and to think that truth comes from consensus or from something we like.... The truth is not grasped as a thing; the truth is encountered.”

Pope Benedict said often that we live in an increasingly secular culture with no reference to God, which is key to the message of the book.

In this environment, he warned, tolerance has degenerated into indifference toward permanent values.... If truth does not exist, Benedict said many times, then mankind cannot distinguish between good and evil.

The introduction posits that over the ages, religious leaders have warned of history repeating itself if we don’t learn its

lessons, and also of the dangers of an elite class redefining humanity, freedom, rights, and even religion. We are there, with abortion as “choice,” euthanasia as “compassion,” redefinition of marriage as “equality,” and religious restriction and conscience violation as “church/state separation.”

The ending of the book is really a beginning:

Because we’re in a pivotal point in history in which we have to make bold choices about what our principles compel us to do to protect and advance what we believe.... Being a bleeding heart doesn’t mean holding a particular political persuasion, but it does mean making tough decisions about time and talent and resources well spent, at the service of others, according to a moral code and a well-informed conscience.

It means using words honestly; speaking clearly, charitably, and unapologetically; and engaging the culture in the public arena of ideas, with a reference to first principles that shape a free, just, and moral society. It evades political labels. It is the cause of preeminent human dignity. With so many slogans and unexamined premises slung at ideological opponents intended as conversation stoppers, the book is intended to be a conversation starter. And hopefully, an opening to a culture of encounter. 🍷

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Marriage and the Family Are in Crisis

by Pope Francis

On November 17, 2014, Pope Francis addressed a colloquium being held on the theme "The Complementarity of Man and Woman in Marriage." This translation is from Vatican Radio.

Dear sisters and brothers,

I warmly greet you. I thank Cardinal Muller for his words with which he introduced our meeting.

I would like to begin by sharing with you a reflection on the title of your colloquium. "Complementarity": it is a precious word, with multiple meanings. It can refer to situations where one of two things adds to, completes, or fulfills a lack in the other. But complementarity is much more than that. Christians find its deepest meaning in the first Letter to the Corinthians where Saint Paul tells us that the Spirit has endowed each of us with different gifts so that — just as the human body's members work together for the good of the whole — everyone's gifts can work together for the benefit of each (cf. I Cor 12). To reflect upon "complementarity" is nothing less than to ponder the dynamic harmonies at the heart of all Creation. This is the key word, harmony. All complementarities were made by our Creator, because the Holy Spirit, who is the Author of harmony, achieves this harmony.

It is fitting that you have gathered here in this international colloquium to explore the complementarity of man and woman. This complementarity is at the root of marriage and family, which is the first school where we learn to appreciate our own and others' gifts, and where we begin to acquire the arts of living together. For most of us, the family provides the principal place where we can begin to "breathe" values and ideals, as well to realize our full capacity for virtue and charity. At the same time, as we know, families are places of tensions: between egoism and altruism, reason and passion, immediate desires and long-range goals. But families also provide frameworks for resolving such tensions. This is important. When we speak of complementarity between man and woman in this context, let us not confuse that term with the simplistic idea that all the roles and relations of the two sexes are fixed in a single, static pattern. Complementarity will take many forms as each man and woman brings his or her distinctive contributions to their marriage and to the formation of their children — his or her personal richness, personal charisma. Complementarity becomes a great wealth. It is not just a good thing but it is also beautiful.

In our day, marriage and the family are in crisis. We now live in a culture of the temporary, in which more and more people are

simply giving up on marriage as a public commitment. This revolution in manners and morals has often flown the flag of freedom, but in fact it has brought spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Evidence is mounting that the decline of the marriage culture is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills, disproportionately affecting women, children, and the elderly. It is always they who suffer the most in this crisis.

The crisis in the family has produced crisis of human ecology, for social environments, like natural environments, need protection. And although the human race has come to understand the need to address conditions that menace our natural environments, we have been slower to recognize that our fragile social environments are under threat as well, slower in our culture, and also in our Catholic Church. It is therefore essential that we foster a new human ecology and advance it.

It is necessary first to promote the fundamental pillars that govern a nation: its non-material goods. The family is the foundation of co-existence and a guarantee against social fragmentation. Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's development and emotional maturity. That is why I stressed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* that the contribution of marriage to society is "indispensable"; that it "transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple" (n. 66). And that is why I am grateful to you for your Colloquium's emphasis on the benefits that marriage can provide to children, the spouses themselves, and to society.

In these days, as you embark on a reflection on the beauty of complementarity between man and woman in marriage, I urge you to lift up yet another truth about marriage: that permanent commitment to solidarity, fidelity, and fruitful love responds to the deepest longings of the human heart. Let us bear in mind especially the young people, who represent our future. It is important that they do not give themselves over to the poisonous mentality of the temporary, but rather be revolutionaries with the courage to seek true and lasting love, going against the common pattern: this must be done. With regard to this I want to say one thing: Let us not fall into the trap of being qualified by ideological concepts. Family is an anthropological fact — a socially and culturally related fact. We cannot qualify it with concepts of an ideological nature, that are relevant only in a single moment of history, and then pass by. We can't speak today of a conservative notion of

family or a progressive notion of family: Family is family! It can't be qualified by ideological notions. Family has a strength of its own [per se].

May this colloquium be an inspiration to all who seek to support and strengthen the union of man and woman in marriage as a unique, natural, fundamental, and beautiful good for persons, families, communities, and whole societies.

I wish to confirm that, God willing, in September of 2015, I will go to Philadelphia for the Eighth World Meeting of Families.

I thank you for the prayers with which you accompany my service to the Church. And I pray for you, and I bless you from the heart. Thank you very much! ☺



Have we lost the idea of natural law “written in the human heart”?

by Rita Joseph

Global survey on marriage and the family, examined in the preparatory document Instrumentum Laboris (Vatican, 2014) for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family, finds that “very few responses and observations demonstrated an adequate ... understanding of the natural law.”¹

NATURAL LAW IS “LAW WRITTEN IN THE HUMAN HEART” (Rom 1:19-21; 2:14-15). Truth and goodness, the invisible things since the creation of the world, can be clearly seen, known, revealed, and perceived through the things that are made. Saint Paul understood that even “the Gentiles who don’t have the law [through religious revelation of God’s commandments] do by nature the things of the law ... in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts among themselves accusing or else excusing them.”

So what is “the natural law”? It is a universal moral law, the moral imperatives that we can discover through observation of nature, not just through scientific (statistical/sociological) research of cause and effect but also through intelligent objective observation of the ultimate (teleological) ends of everything. Natural law discovers and establishes for all human beings the fundamental design and purpose in our existence, thereby enabling our humanity to flourish.

Indeed, all our fundamental human rights are based on this natural law that is available to all human beings. Natural law makes possible reasoned discussion, negotiation, and consensus on our human rights. As is explained in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, our human rights “need” to be founded on reason and natural law and it is this foundation that makes possible rational dialogue across all cultures and religions.

We come to discern natural law through coming to know who we are. It is in looking at ourselves in the ordered world of creation that we learn to see our moral obligations to ourselves, our families, and our communities. Through observation and reason, and guided by conscience, we can know and respond to the call of truth and goodness, those inherent principles of the natural law that are written in our hearts.

As human creatures we can come to know both what we ought to do and what we ought not to do by studying ourselves in a world ordered wonderfully and exquisitely to human flourishing. And even more than this, we come to perceive goodness, we

recognize truth, in contemplation of the natural order. “For from the greatness and the beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of the Creator” (Wis 13:5).

Reason confirms that natural order is neither mindless nor random

With our gift of intellect, we can perceive order; in wonder, we explore the beauty and truth in that order; and with our gift of reason, we can affirm that such order can be neither mindless nor random. Humbleness remains our only truly rational response to this awesome natural order displayed in our tiny blue world spinning in a vast purposeful swirl of stars and moons, planets, and galaxies in the vastness of an amazing universe. Our only rational honest response is always a humble appreciation and respect for this order, this beauty, and this truth that makes human life on earth not only possible but good. In humble admiration of creation, we learn an awed reverence for the Creator.

Women no less than men are creatures of intellect and free will. However, free will is not to be confused with what we might call “willfulness without the restraint of reason.” The natural law requires a dignified governing of our free will by our intellect and our conscience. The absurd ideologically driven lie that Catholic women are constrained by a mindless obedience to the commands of sexual morality invented by a bunch of childless old men in the Vatican has done regrettable damage.

It is time for all Catholic women to reclaim our inherent dignity and worth and to proclaim the truth: that the commands of morality are universal natural law-based truths that every intelligent human being, irrespective of sex or religion, is called to discern objectively and to freely embrace and impose upon ourselves for the common good — our own good and the good of others.

With our intellect we search for truth and find purpose in our existence and in our natural morally ordered relationships with others. We possess both the capability and the duty to understand our obligation to uphold the human dignity and worth of every human being through freely, intelligently, and conscientiously recognizing the natural moral laws and accepting the reciprocity of our human rights and corresponding duties. Pope John XXIII, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, observes:

Every basic human right draws its authoritative force from the natural law, which confers it and attaches to it its respective duty. Hence, to claim one’s rights and ignore one’s duties, or only half

fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other.

Natural law written in the human heart — it is the heart that creates duty

In an age of unprecedented moral confusion, women especially have been duped by an extreme feminist ideology that has elevated autonomy or self-determination to the false status of an absolute women's right. We have been persuaded to build a house called women's rights while tearing it down with our abrogation of duties, such as the duty to protect and nurture our unborn children, the duty to respect our own bodies — including respect for our fertility by eschewing contraception and sterilization, the duty to refrain from disordered sexual relations, and the duty to be faithful in marriage.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* discerns that we fail to see that our autonomy in human freedom is “necessarily tied to an objective order in the nature of things.” We misunderstand *natural* in the term natural law, placing too high a value on “the realization of personal desires”:

The responses and observations also show that the adjective “natural” often is understood by people as meaning “spontaneous” or “what comes naturally.” Today, people tend to place a high value on personal feelings and emotions, aspects which appear “genuine” and “fundamental” and, therefore, to be followed “simply according to one's nature.” (*IL 22*)

Our autonomy, however, is limited by duty to ourselves and to others. This should not be a duty imposed from the outside but a duty that springs from the deepest and truest desires of our heart — to love and be loved — and can therefore be joyfully and freely embraced.

It is the heart that creates duty. It is love that enables duty. It is loving God, loving each other, loving our neighbors as ourselves, that prepares and equips us to do our duty even at the sacrifice of self-interest.

So what are the first principles of natural law?

Put simply, there are five fundamental self-evident principles of natural law, five inherent duties, identified by Aquinas as deeply and irrevocably embedded in our human nature:

1) To do good and avoid evil

In applying this principle to our human right to marry and to found a family, we can confidently perceive that it requires husband and wife to love, cherish, and protect each other and their children, faithfully and unselfishly. To avoid evil, it is a natural law imperative that husbands, wives, and their children are to resist lying, cheating, hating or harming each other, abandoning responsibilities, and breaking promises.

We may not do evil even that good may come of it. We may not use any human being as a means to an end. This rules out commissioning children through artificial means such as in vitro fertilization and surrogacy. It rules out also the deliberate artificial creation of motherless and fatherless families to sustain the pretense of “same-sex marriage” and “marriage equality.” Genuine marriage is an indissoluble good — we may separate

where conditions are truly intolerable or threatening; but we may not have sexual relations with another or remarry while one's separated spouse is still living.

2) To preserve life: suum cuique — protection for what is one's own

In applying this principle to the human right to marry and to found a family, husbands and wives and children undertake the human rights responsibilities to protect for each other the right to life, liberty, and security of person. For parents this includes *inter alia* the duty to preserve and to protect the lives of their unborn children and those already born; and for parents and children, the duty to preserve and protect each other from suicide or assisted medicalized suicide (euthanasia). This principle is, moreover, recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.
(*Universal Declaration 3*)

No one may destroy that right, nor deprive any human being of that right, nor transfer that right, nor renounce it — that's what inalienable means.

Human beings cannot be deprived of the substance of their rights, not in any circumstances, not even at their own or their mother's request.

It is this principle that forbids invention by society and the State in norms or laws that remove human rights protection from unborn children at risk of elective abortion and from persons at risk of suicide, assisted suicide, or euthanasia.

Government and society also must honor the inherent dignity and integrity of every human being and every family:

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.
(*Universal Declaration 16-3*)

3) To procreate through sexual reproduction, a good to be supported and favored, and what threatens it to be avoided

In applying this principle to our human right to marry and to found a family, husbands and wives are to procreate responsibly, being respectful of each other and of the natural integrity of their reproductive gifts of self to each other.

What practices now threaten responsible and respectful procreation through sexual reproduction? The *Instrumentum Laboris* enumerates contraception, abortion, procedures of artificial procreation such as in vitro fertilization, and the manipulation of human embryos, as well as same-sex unions.

Fertility is a natural good to be protected — it is not to be deliberately rendered dysfunctional or to be wantonly destroyed. Our bodies should not be artificially reprogrammed to incapacitate exactly what a healthy reproductive system is designed specifically to do.

Marriage between one man and one woman and restriction of sexual intercourse to within marriage are the age-old protective measures that in general have ensured the most secure environment for raising children — each child being ensured the right, as far as possible, to be raised by his or her own mother and father.

4) To live in community

The right of men and women to marry and to form a family is critical to our ability to be able to live prudently, securely, peacefully in community:

Everyone has duties to the community...
(*Universal Declaration 29-1*)

Those duties include being faithful to one's spouse and upholding as far as possible every child's right to know and be cared for by his or her biological parents. Our natural duties freely and willingly undertaken in our marriage vows are solemn ones and not to be reduced to provisional "if I feel like it" prevarication. As the *Instrumentum Laboris* explains:

The relativization of the concept of "nature" is ... reflected in the concept of stability and the "duration" of the relationship of marriage unions. Today, love is considered "forever" only to the point that a relationship lasts.

Adult duties reach beyond what we owe our own children, to all children who are in need or at risk of harm. It is a natural law imperative that we freely and willingly sacrifice some of our own autonomy, our precious individualism, to build and maintain solidarity, especially with the most vulnerable in our community.

5) To exercise our intellects to search for truth, to reject falsehood, to dispel ignorance

In applying this principle to our human right to marry and to found a family we need to examine honestly and rationally the ideological conditioning that has been set in place to accommodate a "right" to same-sex "marriage" (so-called marriage equality), a woman's "right" to abortion, and a "right" to have a child through artificial means.

In general, faithful Catholics who responded to the Synod for the Family survey recognize the natural-law basis of marriage and the distinction between the sexes:

The responses point to a general belief that the distinction between the sexes has a natural foundation within human existence itself. Therefore, by force of tradition, culture and intuition, there exists the desire that the union between a man and a woman endure. The natural law is then a universally accepted "fact" by the faithful, without the need to be theoretically justified. (*Instrumentum Laboris*)

Regrettably, however, many respondents (other than "the faithful") don't accept the natural law as a unique system of reference:

... from an emerging point of view, drawn from a widely diffused culture, the natural law is no longer to be considered as applicable to everyone, since people mistakenly come to the conclusion that a unique system of reference does not exist.

Our natural law duty to exercise our intellects to search for truth, to reject falsehood, and to dispel ignorance has been gravely neglected by the wider society.

Identifying and rectifying our mistakes

Clearly, our education systems and our legal systems have failed us in their duty to teach and support fundamental truths

about marriage and the family.

The demise of the concept of the natural law tends to eliminate the interconnection of love, sexuality and fertility, which is understood to be the essence of marriage. Consequently, many aspects of the Church's sexual morality are not understood today. (*Instrumentum Laboris*)

We have failed in our natural law duty to educate children and adults to reject falsehood (especially when it is couched in the new manipulative "rights" language). We have failed to dispel ignorance of genuine rights and duties and failed too in our responsibilities to establish and maintain legal systems that protect marriage and the family.

Some responses ... point to a willingness, on the civic level, to recognize so-called "multi-personal" unions between individuals of different sexual orientations and sexual identities, based simply on personal needs and on individual and subjective necessities. In short, this tendency accentuates the absolute right to personal freedom without any compromise: people are "formed" on the basis of their individual desires only. What is increasingly judged to be "natural" is more of a reference-to-self only, when it comes to their desires and aspirations. This situation is heavily influenced by the mass media and by the lifestyles of some people in sports and entertainment.

Perhaps our greatest failure at the present time lies in our feeble efforts to reject the "gender equality" falsehood of extreme feminism and to dispel the ignorance of those who continue to be fooled and damaged by these inane but aggressive ideologies.

When it comes to moral law we are our own worst enemies. Under the cunning tutelage of the Evil One we have misused reason and abandoned first principles to affirm our own willfulness, to wit: "My body, my rights" and "Two people of the same sex who love each other have a right to marry." We have compromised our search for the truth. We have embraced popular ideology. We have suspended reason and replaced it with sentiment that cloaks our desire with a pretense of authenticity.

We have rejected the real world with its inherent moral principles as too hard or unfair or inhumane (summed up in nonsensically incoherent phrases such as "war against women" and "denying marriage equality"). We have assented to an ideologically reconstructed world where the natural law-based "interconnection of love, sexuality and fertility, which is understood to be the essence of marriage" is eliminated as antithetical to what some call our lifestyle choices.

It is now our duty to confront these ideologues, to reveal to them the often unintended negative consequences of these choices.

To dispel ignorance — education in natural law principles

Ideological and cultural propagandists who want to force the Church to endorse their favorite sins as "rights" are growing in political power and social influence.

Given the lack of reference to the natural law by many academic institutions today, major complaints result from the extensive practice of divorce, cohabitation, contraception, procedures of artificial procreation and same-sex unions. Other complaints against the natural law come from the poorest areas and those least influenced by western thought — especially some African states — which cite the

phenomena of machismo, polygamy, marriages between teens and preteens, and divorce in cases of sterility or a lack of a male heir, as well as incest and other aberrant practices. (*Instrumentum Laboris*)

We shall of course continue to encounter fierce organized resistance to educating in the truth — it is not uncommon these days for expression of natural-law truths to be denounced as hate speech. Hostility to moral truths continues to be whipped up by the mainstream media. Anyone who speaks out against the absurd dogmas of “marriage equality” or “reproductive justice” for women is likely to be systematically intimidated and stigmatized.

Persuading ourselves that what we would not like to be true is false or doubtful?

But as Pope Pius XII warned, our knowledge of natural-law truths is not enough to ensure we lead truthful lives:

Though human reason is, strictly speaking, truly capable by its own natural power and light of attaining to a true and certain knowledge of ... the natural law written in our hearts by the Creator; yet there are many obstacles which prevent reason from the effective and fruitful use of this inborn faculty. For the truths ... are translated into human action and influence it, they call for self-surrender and abnegation. The human mind, in its turn, is hampered in the attaining of such truths, not only by the impact of the senses and the imagination, but also by disordered appetites which are the consequences of original sin. So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful. (*Humani generis*, 561)

To this ignoble end, many Catholics have succumbed to popular ideology and to mischievous arguments that challenge genuine moral laws on marriage and reproduction as abusive and discriminatory, as violations of spurious new rights, as cruel and lacking compassion, and as denying equality for all human beings.

These dishonest arguments serve to generate enough doubt about the universal applicability of the moral law that even Catholics are turning to what Pope Benedict XVI called the dictatorship of relativism, which denies that there is an immutable, inherent, and inalienable moral law written in every human heart.

Too many Catholics accept civil law based on legal positivism as morally right

A core problem confronting us here is that in many of our institutions and media there is no longer an honest search for truth. Arrogance has crept in and we deny that there is any higher authority than the positivist law we make and remake for ourselves. The *Instrumentum Laboris* identifies this critical fault line:

... much attention is given in the responses to the fact that what becomes established in civil law — based on an increasingly dominant legal positivism — might mistakenly become in people’s mind accepted as morally right. What is “natural” tends to be determined by the individual and society only, who have become the sole judges in ethical choices.

Many academics, politicians, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals have grown arrogant in their uncritical

embrace of popular ideology, stubbornly refusing to learn from history. It seems that memories of the disastrous results of legal positivism as the basis for morality in Nazi Germany have been erased. Does no one remember the dangerously defective nature of a moral law answerable only to the ephemeral and ever-fluctuating will of governments and the people?

After World War II, the nations of the world came together and declared that “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind” (*Universal Declaration* preamble). In a moment of grace, the drafters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights saw the light of truth, that human rights are inherent and inalienable, that they are based on a small number of fundamental principles that are common to all societies, philosophies, and faith systems, and that are recognized to be universals — “permanent principles” that are not subject to change with each new ideology or opinion poll or democratic vote. And so the whole architecture of modern international human-rights law was rebuilt on a deontological basis, on natural-law principles.

At the Nuremberg trials the utilitarianism of the Nazis’ positivist laws that clothed atrocities in lawfulness was rejected and condemned. The drafters of the Universal Declaration also rejected the legal positivism that had emerged in the 20th century. They saw clearly that legal positivism had proved hopelessly inadequate to protect vulnerable human beings from shifting laws that were fabricated to advance popular new ideologies.

They saw the victims of untethered morality and they pledged “never again!”

Indeed, the drafters of the Universal Declaration recognized that human rights are logically antecedent to the rights enumerated in various systems of positive law and are held independent of the state. Human rights, they agreed, pertained to man as a human being and could not be alienated; they “constituted a law anterior and superior to the positive law of civil society.”² One of the chief drafters of the Universal Declaration, philosopher Charles Malik, affirmed thus:

A careful examination of the Preamble and of Article I will reveal that the doctrine of natural law is woven ... into the intent of the Declaration ... dignity and rights are natural to our being and are not the generous grant of some external power. (New York, November 4, 1949)

Urgent need to correct misunderstanding of the basis of human rights

As explained in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, human rights need to be founded on reason. Natural law responds to that need and makes possible rational dialogue across all cultures and religions. Lack of respect for the natural law results in perverse behaviors that increasingly demand legal accommodation:

Generally speaking, the notion of “human rights” is also seen as highly subjective and a call for a person to self-determination, a process which is no longer grounded in the idea of the natural law. In this regard, many respondents relate that the legal systems in many countries are having to make laws on situations which are contrary to the traditional dictates of the natural law (for example, in vitro fertilization, homosexual unions, the manipulation of human embryos, abortion, etc.)

In a homily to Catholic members of the Bundestag in 1981, Cardinal Ratzinger debunked the myth of the state as “a do-it-yourself paradise.” He also warned against the deliberate misinterpretation of “objective reason” as a value-free objectivity, independent of morality and God:

To genuine human reason belongs the morality that is fed by God’s commandments. This morality is not some private affair; it has public significance. Without the good of being and doing good there can be no good politics.

Natural law — the wisdom of little children

The *Instrumentum Laboris* calls us to restore the concept of the natural law in a more meaningful manner in today’s world.

We can all praise God for this gift of wisdom of the heart:

... Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do”. (Lk 10:21)

We need to become as little children to rediscover reverence for truth. Pope Benedict has said: “Truth is a person.” Indeed, Jesus said: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6) and “the Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30).

So whenever we seek what is true, we draw closer to the person of Jesus. To search, to find, to teach, and to defend the truth

is not just a natural law duty but a human privilege and an honor. Each time we speak the truth, each time we take a stand for the truth, we delight the Father, and with the tenderness of a father’s love for His little ones He lifts us up and we touch the face of God. ☺

NOTES

¹ The Relation of the Gospel of the Family to the Natural Law, Part I Chapter III, of the Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization.

² United Nations, Official Records of the General Assembly (GAOR), Tenth Session, Annexes, (1955) A/2929 Chapter III para. 6.

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Mealtimes Prayers for the Christmas Season

THE MEALTIME PRAYERS FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON are traditionally said from Christmas Day until January 6, or the Epiphany. On Christmas Day the candles in the Advent wreath are changed from purple and rose to white. Families may wish to light the four white candles just before the mealtime prayers are said.

Before Dinner

V: All the ends of the earth have seen, Alleluia!

R: The salvation of our God, Alleluia!

V: Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

R: The Lord our God has made His light to shine upon us.

V: Lord, have mercy upon us.

R: Christ, have mercy upon us.

V: Let us pray:

All: Our Father...

V: Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ our Lord.

R: Amen.

After Dinner

V: The goodness of God our Savior has appeared. Alleluia!

R: Not by the works of justice which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us. Alleluia!

V: A sanctified day has shone upon us, Alleluia!

R: Come ye nations and adore the Lord, Alleluia!

V: Let us pray. Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the new birth in the flesh of Thine only begotten Son may set us free whom the old bondage holds under the yoke of sin. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

R: Amen.