The Francis Blindspot

The day Pope Francis was elected is a memorable one for many Catholics, myself included. Watching our new pope walk out on to the balcony of the Vatican and bow to the crowd left me in tears. It seemed in Pope Francis we would have a leader who recognized the full humanity of every person in the community; and in asking the people for their blessing, he acknowledged the role we all play in the ministry of Jesus.

Named Time Magazine’s Person of the Year, boasting an astronomical approval rating of 90% among American Catholics, and more than 12 million Twitter followers, Francis has taken the papacy to a new level. People around the world continue to be mesmerized by his acts of kindness and mercy. His commitment to social justice for the poor, simplistic living, welcoming message to persons of all faiths, and proclamation “Who am I to judge?” is refreshing to say the least. Nonetheless, this does not mean Pope Francis does not have blind spots, nor that we do not have a responsibility to remind him of them.

While I have great affection for Pope Francis and recognize his papacy as the most progressive in my lifetime, the Vatican tradition of marginalizing women continues under his watch.

new theology of women saying, “it is necessary to broaden the opportunities for a stronger presence of women in the church.” However, to date little has occurred and he continues to romanticize the role of motherhood as did his predecessors.

There are clear issues with such a romanticization. To begin with, there are many women who are unable to bear children, or who are not called to the role of motherhood. What does this mean for these women? Are their lives less important?

Also reinforcing the Catholic view that women’s roles exist in the home is Francis’ ongoing use of the doctrinal term “complementarity” and his insistence that it is an “anthropological fact.” This clearly indicates a conservative foundation of his view on marriage. Such a claim holds that women and men have different roles with men outranking women. While I want to acknowledge that Pope Francis did state “the role of women in the Church is not only maternity, the mother of the family,” his ability to articulate that role is yet to be seen.

Likewise, it is interesting that Pope Francis does not acknowledge the role motherhood plays in leading to poverty for women. Lack of education and healthcare and adhering to the idea of “complementarity” leave women in a position to suffer in poverty more than any other group. Because of their “traditional” roles and the patriarchal structure of family dictated by the Church, women learn to put themselves last in every situation including basic care and rights.

Addressing reproductive health and wellness is critical to the pope’s goal of prioritizing the needs of those living in poverty. Data well demonstrate that two-thirds of low wage jobs are held by women. In addition, women are more likely to head single parent households. Family structure and poverty are deeply intertwined with nearly 40% of single mothers impoverished. Women disproportionately cover the costs of contraception spending approximately 70% more than men each year. Lack of healthcare and high costs of contraception contribute to a lack of reproductive health services for women. As a result, women living below the poverty line are five times more likely to experience an unintended pregnancy which leads to significant consequences for childbearing outcomes.

Gina Messina-Dysert’s, PhD, reflection continued on page 4
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Letter from the Executive Director

“What do you think of the Pope?”

I am asked this question often and my answer depends on the day. On many days, I find the warmth and pastoral approach Pope Francis expresses so heartening that it is enough to bring me to tears. On most other days, I feel that Pope Francis offers a kinder version of the status quo. While some individuals point to the Pope’s symbolic gestures and declare them revolutionary, I pray with my children at night wondering what will be the Church in which they grow up.

Will the institutional Church change in time to welcome my daughter’s call to official leadership and decision-making in the Church should she experience that call?

Will my son’s loving relationship be honored by the institutional Church should he grow to fall in love with someone of the same sex?

**I think this must be every progressive Catholic parent’s dilemma. Do we make deeper roots in the Catholic tradition with faith that change within the institutional Church will happen or do we seek out another spiritual path that is already a welcoming and inclusive place?**

With the Pope’s much-anticipated visit to the United States later this year, this edition of News & Notes features analysis of Pope Francis by feminist theologian Gina Messina-Dyert. While Pope Francis has called for greater influence of women in the church, the official teaching and approach to the lives of women remains the same.

These are exciting and challenging times for progressive Catholics. As we look to the future, we realize there is a new Church emerging. This is happening because everyday Catholics - out of love for a faith they know can be better - continue to stand for inclusivity, equality, and justice. As always, I am honored to be on this journey with you.

Sincerely,

Jim FitzGerald

What to do with blind spots

Call To Action’s inclusive family prayer cards are available to members. If you’d like some for personal use, email us at cta@cta-usa.org with your full name and mailing address.

Inclusive Family Prayer Card
Confronted with Injustice, Catholics Respond

Across the country, Catholics are working to build a more connected community wherever injustice and pain are present. The power of people coming together to listen and witness truly is what makes us Church!

At the World Meeting of Families this September, a group of courageous pilgrims will witness to the presence and gifts of LGBT families in our worldwide Church. World Meeting of Families is organized by the Vatican to “celebrate the family, the sanctuary of love and life,” and attracts hundreds of thousands of participants. The fourteen families participating under the Equally Blessed banner will spend the week listening and talking with other families and sharing their love and life as parents, partners, grandparents, husbands, daughters, and most of all, loving Catholic families.

In California, a parish and school community took action when they saw their girls being discriminated against. Letters, a petition and an effort to reach out to leaders in nearby parishes made sure their cause got national attention - and the ear of the Archbishop. Their pastor’s ban on altar girls became national news and has become part of a wider effort to hold Archbishop Cordileone accountable for his misguided policies in the diocese.

Racism is an injustice that affects all of us and our Maryland chapter is committed to recognizing and dismantling systematic racism and its everyday effects. The chapter’s diverse, 30 member “Racial Justice Circle” has met for training and authentic dialogue for nearly a year. Now, the Circle is ready to send its members to parishes throughout the state to facilitate honest listening and dialogue about racism. In addition, the chapter has been involved in events to lift up the voices and experiences of Black and Latino/a Catholics in Maryland. Their vision of healing and understanding has helped their chapter grow in faith and in numbers, and has inspired new energy for creating a truly welcoming Church.

Sometimes, community arises when we see an injustice and look for ways to right it. In April, Call To Action co-hosted a first of its kind event for workers and advocates who are disturbed by some of the ways our Church treats its employees. The weekend brought together workers and local organizers with the staff of a diverse range of national organizations to create new and powerful connections. Together, they looked at the many impacts of morality clauses, discriminatory firings, and spiritually unhealthy workplaces and began to create a strategy. The wisdom in the room was impressive and the energy to create a more justice-filled Church was truly inspiring!

Learn more about the JustChurch program online at cta-usa.org

Postcards for the pope are arriving everyday! Grab a postcard from your area, write a note about your Catholic family, send it to us, & we’ll deliver it to Pope Francis.

More info: cta-usa.org

For complete media coverage, visit: www.cta-usa.org/media-center

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While Pope Francis has called for women to have greater decision-making powers in the Church, he has made it clear that the door to priesthood is closed for women. Likewise, he has made statements that are contradictory to such an objective: “It is necessary to broaden the opportunities for a stronger presence of women in the church. I am wary of a solution that can be reduced to a kind of ‘female machismo’ because a woman has a different make-up than a man. But what I hear about the role of women is often inspired by an ideology of machismo.”

Furthermore, calling women “the strawberries on the cake” is demeaning and refuses to acknowledge the gifts women bring to the Church and the larger global community. Instead, it highlights the prevailing idea that male theologians are valued for their individuality whereas female theologians are thought of as adding a “feminine touch.” Such a statement tokenizes women.

Although Pope Francis did bring an end to the Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR, as Sarah Posner explains, “the pontiff has done little to challenge the status quo on matters of sex and gender, keeping U.S. Catholic nuns firmly under the control of the Church’s male leadership.” According to Mary E. Hunt, “pushing back against unjust authority can work, but it does not change the fundamental power equation.”

In February 2015, the Vatican held the four day conference, Women’s Cultures: Equality and Difference. Interestingly, there were no women at the table; although women were asked to submit 1 minute videos stating what it is like to be a woman. According to Kate McElwee, Executive Director of the Women’s Ordination Conference, “Overall, this exercise shows us how clumsy the Vatican can be with anything to do with women.” There is no doubt that Pope Francis is making advancements for the Church. He has humanized the papacy, brought widespread attention to the exploitive economic system, and welcomed many back to a position of faith. However, Francis is yet to acknowledge the exploitive patriarchal system that exists within the Vatican causing the ongoing marginalization of women. Nor does he recognize the direct connection between poverty the oppression of women. Nonetheless, I believe in a feminist ethic of risk - one that demands that we remain optimistic and continue to work towards positive social change. This means we must remind Pope Francis of his blind spots. In doing so, we will help pave the way to the future of a Church that honors the individuality and gifts of all rather than a select few based on gender.

Gina Messina-Dysert, Ph.D. is Dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies at Ursuline College and Co-founder of Feminism and Religion (feminismandreligion.com). She is also the author of Rape Culture and Spiritual Violence (Routledge, 2014), and co-editor of Feminism and Religion in the 21st Century (Routledge, 2014) and Faithfully Feminist (White Cloud Press, 2015). Gina can be followed on Twitter @FemTheologian and her website can be accessed at ginamessinadyser.com.

Francis Blindspot, continued

In Memoriam ~ Robert McClory

On April 3, 2015, Call To Action lost a brother in faith and a founding member of Call To Action. Robert (Bob) McClory’s work for church reform and renewal inspired many to get involved in the movement, and his books, articles, blog posts and energized talks have helped many of us continue to work for a just church. He will be missed for his insights, his ability to captivate an audience, and his terrific wit. He is survived by his wife Margaret, daughter Jenny, daughter-in-law Sarah and granddaughter Rosie.

At his funeral, Jenny shared Bob’s “First Commandment for Living:” Thou Shalt Be Open, Creative, and Not Afraid. Call To Action will try, old friend. May we live up to this commandment every day!

For more information about chapters, visit: www.cta-usa.org/chapters
Want to leave a legacy? Remember Call To Action in your will. Contact Jim at jim@cta-usa.org

CTA participated in this spring’s Equally Blessed meeting at the Walker Center in Boston

CTA & Dignity USA staffed a booth at the Creating Change Conference

CTA member, John Meehan, gave witness at Selma’s 50th anniversary remembrance

**Call To Action IN ACTION**

Bob Henieman gave a toast at the Founding Generation party in Chicago

Teach acceptance efforts continued to push back against “morality clauses”

CTA community celebrated as mandate against women religious lifted

20/30 young adult Leadership Team gathered at the Cenacle in February for yearly planning retreat

CTA and other organizations hosted the first ever Church Worker Justice Strategy Retreat in Chicago in May.

Members, chapters, & communities attended women’s ordination celebrations

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20/30 Community Offers Online Book Discussions

The Call to Action 20/30 Community has launched a monthly series of online book groups on family. 20/30 members Sarah Holst and Katie Jones will be hosting conversations on chapters that explore the diversity of family life and community for young progressive Catholics. These conversations are hosted online and all are welcome to join. The 20/30 online book groups are exciting and supportive conversations. This series will creatively explore expanding boundaries and blurring borders of what “family” means in the lived contexts of members of the 20/30 group. The book groups will use chapters from books that examine traditional ideas and assumptions, view Catholic thought through anti-oppression lenses, and expand on ways to build communities and practices of inclusion. Monthly conversations about these chapters will be held on Google Chat. These are safe spaces to bring your experience, identities and faith wherever you are on your journey.

Please lend your voice and help us engage in conversations that are grounding and inspiring in the face of this riotous, messy, and sacred work of working for justice in our church and world.

Email Katie at katie.anne.jones@gmail.com to register for a group and receive an invite to Google chat. Email Sarah at sarahhalost@gmail.com if you would like a copy of a chapter in PDF form. All conversations are held from 7:30-8:30 CT.

Past sessions (in case you want to catch up!) and future sessions include:

**April 23 - The Pigeon: Purity and Impurity**, Chapter 1 of Consider the Birds by Debbie Blue

Theologian Debbie Blue leads us in a joyful examination of what it means to be alive by reminding us that the “dove” in the Bible, our symbol for the Holy Spirit, is just a pigeon by another name. We will start the series by using Blue’s provocative guide to the Birds of the Bible to remind us to be open about what we imagine as Holy.

“There’s something about the story of God becoming human, entering the body fully, touching all over everything unclean—that would seem, if anything, to free us from the need to pretend anything—to pretend we’re anything other than what we are.” (Page 18)

“The Pigeon: Purity and Impurity” will set the stage for us to be authentic with one another, to honor one another’s journeys, and to be ready to do some more holy turning in the coming months.

**May 28– “Women’s Theological Work”, Chapter 2 of Truly Our Sister by Elizabeth A. Johnson**

In a world where the Vatican commonly overlooks amazing women theologians and theology by women, it is fitting that we read Elizabeth Johnson’s ideas about Mary. Many of us have different experiences with the Mother of God, and Elizabeth Johnson opens it up for discussion. Can we see Mary as meek and humble and a role model while we work for full equality of all genders?

Elizabeth Johnson puts an exciting and empowering (and deeply rooted) spin on it. “More than a biological reality, being a virgin indicates a state of mind characterized by fearlessness and independence of purpose...we can learn from the virgin Mary to live from our own centre, our own roots, in independence, and not in one-sided alienating dependence.” Thus, Mary’s virginity functions as a symbol of autonomy, signaling that a woman is not defined by her relationship with a man.” (Page 31)

Join us for examining what it means to have this historical, poor, woman of color as our sister and advocate.

**June 25 – “Lifting the Cup” and “Wearing the Alb and Stole”, Chapters 16 and 17 of “Pioneer Priest” by Father James Callan**

How do we support those who are moving outside the box to take a stand for justice, inclusion and equality in the Catholic Church? Through reading the story of Rev. Mary Ramerman and her journey to Ordination with Spiritus Christi Church in Rochester, we will connect with the context and history of what it has meant to work for equal gender representation in leadership in our church. We will talk about the challenges Mary faced, how church is changing, what that will mean for us, and how we can support one another as we live into our individual and collective callings.

**July 23 – “Poets, Musicians and Magicians: Prophetic Black Artists of the New Creation”, Chapter 7 of Hope and History by Vincent Harding**

Art plays a big part in reform work and revolution. This month we let the artistic and prophetic voices of the Black Freedom movement take us “to the water”. We will talk about our experiences of doing Racial Justice work in the Catholic Church and consider the ways that art could be used in our own movement of ever-expanding the definitions of family and familial love.

“…Consider the fascinating connections between a liberating art and liberation politics, to reflect on the role of artist as democratic teacher, to explore the inner relationships that tend to exist among such significant elements as these: the revival of popular participation in the political process, the opening of new, creative vistas in the arts, the inevitable emergence of unheralded creator-warriors who arrive from unexpected places (“Can any good thing come of Nazareth?”) or Newark?)…” (Page 105)

**Aug 27 - “Confronting Historic Injustice”, Chapter 7 of Ambassadors of Reconciliation: Volume II by Elaine Enns**

“One of the most demanding, yet transforming, tasks of restorative justice and peacemaking today is to revise and remember the past, uncovering a fuller, more inclusive truth, and listening to the voices of those left out.”

We remember that the ways which we tell stories inform who we believe to be included our families. In a world where the body of Christ has often been divided from itself, it is important to tell the stories that have been covered up. In this chapter, we will examine how Lawrence Hart and Nelson Johnson are working in their separate contexts to heal this family by burying the dead and reconciling the living. We will discuss how their reconciliation work applies to our own communities and contexts.

**Sept 24- Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology by Patrick Cheng, Chapter TBA**

**Oct 29- Immigration and Families, more information TBA**
Vision Council Steps Forward

For most of Call To Action’s history, its national Board of Directors remained a self-perpetuating entity where board members selected future board members. In order to make Call To Action’s governing body more transparent, inclusive, and accountable, the entire Board of Directors resigned at its June gathering. Taking office in the board’s place is a Vision Council consisting of members directly discerned from CTA’s leadership groups as well as at-large members surfaced for specific skills required by the council.

Representatives on the Vision Council include: Delfin Bautista and Christa Kerber from the 20/30 community, Caryl Callsen and Kathleen Schatzberg from chapters, Amy Sheber Howard and David Saavedra from the Anti-racism Team, Lui Francesco, Becky Schwantes-An, Rosa Manriquez, Debra Nell Brittenum, and Marian Fredal as at-large members.

Incoming Vision Council members met with Call To Action’s Antiracism Team, outgoing Board Members, and CTA staff to begin the foundational work that will reinvent Call To Action for the future.

Join the conversation!

Share your ideas.

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2015 Call To Action
Conference - Milwaukee
November 6-8

Register before the JULY 26 discount deadline!

Change of Address / Contact Information

If you've changed your mailing or email address, phone number or other primary contact information, please let us know so we can keep in touch.

Changes can be emailed to edits@cta-usa.org

Thank you for your assistance in keeping our records current.