



NEWSLETTER CHRISTMAS 2023



Dear CWC Members,

We send you warm greetings of peace and joy for the Christmas season! We remember with sadness people who live in conflict zones, and pray that Christmas will be an opportunity to give lasting peace a chance.

We are happy to inform you that five of our Catholic Women's Council (CWC) Executive and several of our network members were present in Rome during the October Bishops' Synod to remind the Synod delegates, through a number of events, about the concern in the grassroots Church, for equality and recognition of women's dignity.



Women's Ordination Conference began with three events. The first was a prayer vigil held in the Basilica of St Praxedes, during which women shared their stories of pain suffered in the Church. The second event was the unfurling of a giant banner "ORDAIN WOMEN" in front of the Vatican; and the third event was a silent march from the Church of St. Mary Magdalene to the Castel San Angelo in front of the Vatican, holding banners calling the attention of the Synod to recognise the equal discipleship of women as practised by Jesus.

In the second week of the Synod, CWC women, who could make it to Rome, from Spain, France, Switzerland, Germany, Australia, India, South Africa, Guatemala, Colombia, and Italy gathered for a very active discussion on women as featured in the Instrumentum Laboris. A few men joined us as well. We were happy to also have three women from the Bishops' Synod join us - Japanese Sr Filo Hirota, Iraqi Sr Carolina and Swiss delegate, Helena Jeppesen-Spuhler.



Sr Filo, who is a member of the Synod Preparatory Commission and a non-voting member of the official Synod, informed us of the cordial and friendly atmosphere that prevailed in the Synod Hall. Bishops asked that their first names be used instead of their titles; and so that they would be less conspicuous, most were wearing suits instead of their official dress. Sr Carolina said how free and comfortable she felt to speak with the bishops and even to assert her point of view when needed. Ms Jeppesen-Spuhler said she was impressed that women were being very frank and strong in expressing their opinions on topics being discussed. Each day Synod members joined new discussion groups so there was a good cross-pollination of ideas. Even Pope Francis was part of the round table discussions.

The major points that emerged from our round table discussions were the call for:

- women to be recognized as equal to men in positions of leadership, decision making and ministry;
- the end to assigning masculine gender to God;
- the use of inclusive language in church liturgies, scripture and documents;
- the end to corruption in diocesan marriage tribunals;
- the end to violence against women in the Church, and to devaluing their contribution to the Church;
- a renewed theology and anthropology of person that is informed by the discoveries of science.

On 11th October CWC celebrated a liturgy of Lament, Resistance and Healing, to acknowledge all women through the centuries who have suffered abuse, erasure and denial of their vocation to serve in the Church. Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWP) collaborated with us by sharing their space with us for this liturgy. We also had a film forum about the film “Women talking”.



Our member organisations Allianz Gleichwürdig Katholisch, the Swiss Catholic Women's Federation and the CWC called on women to symbolically step into the shoes of women. Walking in the shoes of women who have experienced discrimination, abuse or exclusion in the Catholic Church, but also of women who live their vocation at great risk, moves us. The [#Walkinher shoes](#) campaign reminded us that synodality is measured by whether the destinies of unnamed and unseen women are heard.

In the months leading up to the October 2023 Synod, network member Root & Branch created a network of groups, which included many of our own CWC members, called “Spirit Unbounded” (SU). From 8th October through to 14th October, SU held an online and two live events entitled Human Rights in the Emerging Catholic Church. 115 speakers, most of whom were women, and representing a wide spectrum of the People of God from across the globe, shared their views. For the first five days the talks were virtual while the last two days were virtual and live from Bristol, UK and Rome, Italy. This is the link access for the talks <https://www.gr8events.ie/sales/index.php?event=1361>.

The two key note speakers were Sr Joan Chittister OSB and Dr Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland, who spoke from Rome to a packed hall at the Casa Bonus Pastor, just behind the Vatican where the official Synod was taking place.

Sr Joan spoke on Discipleship. “What the people really need is COMMUNITY, not patriarchal clericalism. They need DISCIPLESHIP!” But, she asserted, “We need to understand the nature of discipleship, recognize the true signs of discipleship, and be willing to give ourselves over to what discipleship demands now.” She reminded us that “to follow Jesus is to follow the One who turned the world upside down, even the religious world!”



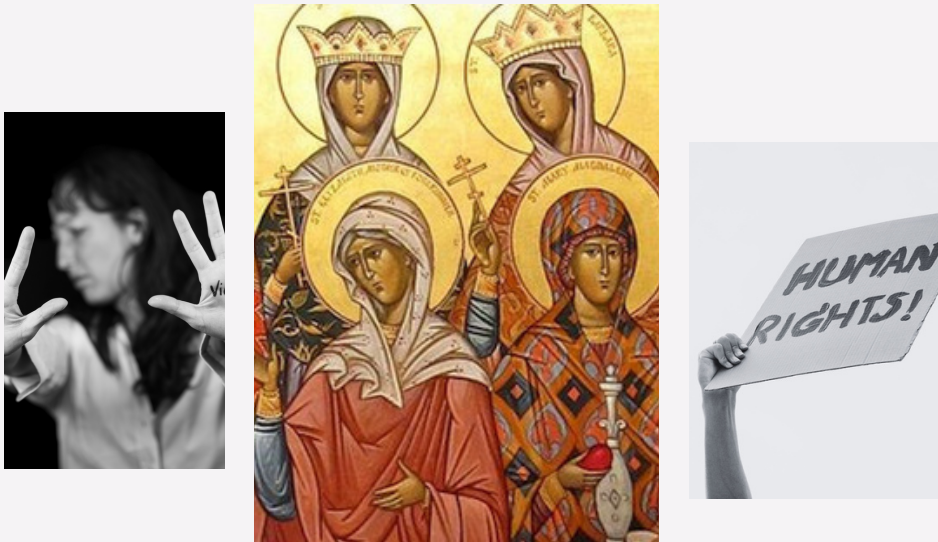
Dr McAleese asserted that we are where we are today because, “the Catholic Church which should be and could be an exemplar of equality and respect for human rights is not. Instead, the only faith system to have representative status at the United Nations, a key influencer of laws, attitudes and cultures on five continents, is languishing in a deepening credibility crisis precisely because it has failed to reform an out-dated internal structure of governance, teachings and laws in which inequality is embedded, in which the human rights of members are routinely restricted.”

A final event was a demonstration, led by our member “We Are Church”, held right in the centre of St. Peter’s square late one evening, taking the police by surprise! Wearing bright yellow T-shirts printed with “EQUALITY for ALL - Women, Laity, LGBTQ+, Married” they sang a song ‘Equality’, composed by their Director, Colm Holmes. The following days they held their hybrid biennial general assembly recommitting themselves to support Pope Francis in the Synodal process for renewal towards equality.



November 25th - December 10th

In November 2023, our Executive requested our network members to organise activities during the United Nations **16 days of activism against Gender-Based Violence**, particularly against women. Our focus being “Violence suffered by Women in the Church”, we felt it was important to call the attention of the People of God and our leaders to the fact that women are deprived of their basic human right to equality in the Church. We also need to highlight those teachings that do violence to women, such as women’s complementarity to man, the Marian and Petrine principle and the notion that women cannot image Christ in priesthood, thus giving women a secondary status not only in the Church but also in society and the family, causing them to be victims of Church, social and domestic violence. We believe that women, including religious women need to speak up about their abuse in the Church. If there is any way in which CWC can help bring women’s stories of violence to the attention of leaders in the Church we would be happy to help. Please write to us at info@catholicwomenscouncil.org.



We congratulate our network members for their dedication and commitment of time, and for their advocacy and activities, towards obtaining equality for women in the Church.

We thank those theologians who gave of their time and expertise to our Zoom sessions during 2023.

We are already planning our programme of Zoom listening sessions for 2024 ahead of the second phase of the Synod. We will keep you informed about the schedule of these sessions.

In closing, we wish you, your families and organisations every blessing during 2024. May the peace that Jesus gives reign in our hearts, our families and in the world.

CWC Executive