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'And the church is about to turn'

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NCR Today

Yesterday, a friend sent me a copy of a great hymn, "The Canticle of the Turning." It's a hopeful hymn with an Irish folksong melody. The refrain, addressed to God, goes like this:

*My heart shall sing of the day you bring,
Let the fires of justice burn.
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near
And the World is about to turn.*

So I began to think: What would it mean if we sang, "And the church is about to turn"? As we approach the beginning of 2013, it seems appropriate to ponder that question.

Of what do we dream? The "fires of justice" would have to mean, first and foremost, building a church that welcomes authentic dialogue and begins to establish lay councils with real authority in dioceses throughout the world as well as at the Vatican itself. That sense of churchwide collegiality would begin -- just begin, mind you -- to fulfill the promise of Vatican II.

It would inaugurate a new effort to deal anew with the sex abuse crisis, calling to account those who covered it up, as well as the perpetrators of abuse.

It would also mean inaugurating a process to bring true gender equality to the life of the church, in all its ministries and offices. It would welcome a married clergy. It would initiate a churchwide discussion on the realities of being gay, lesbian or transgender in today's world. It would welcome a dialogue of Catholic women and men on controversial issues of sexuality and reproduction.

It would mean an end to the Vatican war on LCWR and American nuns. It would mean seeking dialogue

with theologians who have new ideas, not condemning them.

And it would mean a wholehearted engagement with those of other faith traditions, seeking alliances that champion justice for the poor, peace in the world and environmental sanity in dealing with climate change.

OK, this sounds like a pipe dream, but it's a new year. We have to hope and dream.

And of course, I could go on, and many of you readers can add your own hopes and dreams. What would "the church is about to turn" mean for you in 2013?

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