

Webathon Day 4 Update 2: conversation in our church

Dennis Coday | Apr. 24, 2013 NCR Today
Webathon 2013

Updated 2:52 p.m. Wed. April 24: We just received another anonymous challenge grant. A reader will match the next \$500 that come in on the webathon. [Act on it now.](#) [1]

The \$5,000 challenge grant from Joan and Bob McGrath was matched by midday Kansas City time. Thanks to all of you who have been so generous. The Webathon is half over, and we're halfway to our \$100,00 goal.

[In her video](#) [2], which I hope you just watched, Jamie Manson talks about this time in our church as being "an important time of conversation in our church." She's got that right. It has been a very long time since I have found people enthusiastic to talk about the Catholic church. And *NCR* is in the thick of it.

There is an eagerness and hopefulness about the church right now that definitely did not exist a year ago. Some people are calling this the "Pope Francis effect." I'm hoping that eagerness stays with us for some time, but I have to admit that I'm guardedly optimistic, trying -- [as Heidi Schlumpf cautioned](#) [3] -- to keep expectations in check.

You know what I mean. For every story about Pope Francis taking the bus instead of the limo, there's a story about his reaffirming the reform of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. He has clearly taken the stand for the poor, but as Jamie Manson points out in [her column today](#) [4], when "women account for 70 percent of the global poor, half of all pregnant women lack adequate prenatal care, and two-thirds of the world's illiterate population is made up of women," Pope Francis would do well to re-examine what seems to be the church's default suspicion of feminism.

That has to be part of the conversation in the church, too. *NCR* will do its part to add to that conversation, to be a forum for "the voices of those who otherwise might remain voiceless," as Jamie Manson says.

My hope in Francis lies in the scholarly work about the Second Vatican Council by Jesuit Fr. John O'Malley, professor of theology at Georgetown University and author of *What Happened at Vatican II*. O'Malley writes about the "unintended consequences" Vatican II set in motion.

A quote from another Jesuit's work, Fr. Mark Massa's *The American Catholic Revolution: How the Sixties Changed the Church Forever*, succinctly paraphrases O'Malley's thesis for me:

No matter what the (essentially conservative) intentions of the person who originally called that council (Good Pope John XXIII), or of the overwhelming majority of Catholic bishops who approved the reforms of the council, events in history have their own logic. After the actual experience of change on the ground, the unsettling new historical consciousness unleashed by the council's reforms could not be stopped by anything so simple as an appeal to the intentions of the

council's participants, or to some purported "law of continuity" within the tradition that existed above the realm of historical experience. (Page 14)

The symbols that Francis is wielding -- plain liturgical garb, celebrating Mass with the gardeners and the maids at Casa Santa Marta -- speak to the world in powerful ways, perhaps in ways that he himself has not yet recognized.

Francis has started us on a new leg of a journey. *NCR* will be following along. I hope you'll join us. [Please donate now.](#) [1]

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[1]

<https://npo.networkforgood.org/Donate/Donate.aspx?npoSubscriptionId=1001385&code=NetworkforGood>

[2] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xdTJGGoAEs>

[3] <http://ncronline.org/news/people/great-not-too-great-expectations>

[4] <http://ncronline.org/blogs/grace-margins/pope-francis-women-and-chauvinism-skirts>