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Deborah Rose-Milavec holds a sign for the Feminism and Faith in Union event.  
(Courtesy of FutureChurch)



by Maria Benevento

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Faith and feminism are a natural pairing, say members of a coalition that is inviting Catholic men and women and their interfaith allies to combine religion and activism on Jan. 21.

"If you believe all men and women are equal in the eyes of God, you are already a feminist of faith," said Lizzie Berne DeGear of [The Women Who Stayed](#), a ministry of St. Francis Xavier Parish, a Jesuit church in New York. "It's really not more complicated than that."

The upcoming event, called [Feminism and Faith in Union](#), was initiated by The Women Who Stayed. It is an attempt to combine the spirit of the [Women's March](#) with the spirit of the "wonderful eucharistic community" at their parish, said Berne DeGear. The group has planned an interfaith blessing followed by a march from Union Square to their church for an inclusive Mass.

[FutureChurch](#), [Call to Action](#) and the [Women's Ordination Conference](#) signed on to co-sponsor the event and helped develop resources that groups around the country can use to plan an inclusive Mass, a liturgy service or a march.

One suggestion is inspired by the plan for the Mass at St. Francis Xavier. "The priest who will be presiding will actually at the homily offer five minutes of silence in solidarity with women's voices that have been silenced for so very long in the Catholic Church,"\* said Deborah Rose-Milavec, executive director of FutureChurch.

A packet of materials provided by the coalition also includes woman-centered prayer intentions, copies of the day's readings with inclusive language, a script for a liturgy, and templates for signs. It also strives to clear up misconceptions about feminism with statements like "Feminism isn't just for females" and "Feminism is inclusive and empowering. It is NOT anti-male."

According to Berne DeGear, misconceptions are all too common, and can also be directed at people of faith.

"Feminists are not angry women trying to oust men from power, and faith isn't about memorizing and applying doctrines," she said. Rather, "faith and feminism come together most strongly in any individual or community who are asking themselves,

'How do we live in justice?' "

Kate McElwee, executive director of the Women's Ordination Conference, also spoke of a strong connection between Catholicism and feminism. "My Catholicism is completely informed by my feminism and that's why I'm able to stay in the church and do the work that I do," she said.

Both Berne DeGear and McElwee were inspired by what McElwee called "all of the energy that came from the women's marches globally last year."

McElwee described the marches as "really a communion experience" and said it has been "enriching to work with secular feminist groups."

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Berne DeGear, who summed up the purpose of Faith and Feminism in Union as "good news," said the event was inspired by the "wonderful experience" that about 100 members of her parish had on their trip to the Women's March last year as well as by reflection within their faith community.

"We pray a lot in our community, and in our ministry — we stay open to the Spirit and this is where we have felt called," Berne DeGear said.

Rose-Milavec mentioned [#MeToo](#) as another secular movement that has inspired her organization's work.

"Just as the #MeToo movement came through organically and people just were attracted to it and wanted to tell the story, I think Catholic women have been wanting a space like this for a very long time and I'm hoping this will provide and invite them into that kind of space where they can not only tell their story but celebrate the kind of church that we are becoming and want to become," she said.

While the event in New York is the only one definitively planned so far, McElwee said she knows some of the coalition's members will be carrying Catholic-themed signs in women's marches that weekend. Her organization is co-sponsoring a march in Rome.

When Rose-Milavec spoke with NCR Jan. 10, the campaign had only been officially launched a few hours before, but she said they had already heard positive responses

from priests and others.

"I think it has real traction and I think this is the moment for it. I do think that people will participate at one level or another and will really sort of lean into their Catholic roots. That story needs to be told more widely," she said.

*\*This article has been edited to remove part of a quote that incorrectly stated that a woman would preach at the Mass.*

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