From the Editor | January 15, 2026



Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

This issue of *The MAST Journal* was planned eleven months ago. Because of Sisters of Mercy founder Catherine McAuley's unwavering commitment to women through education, healthcare and social services, the Editorial Board believed it was again time to dig more deeply into theological thought and reflection upon the need for and value of the ministries Catherine initiated. At the time of the Board's planning, the Church was still in the midst of the Synod and Board members felt a strong sense of hope that, in these gatherings the voices of women from across the globe would be heard and heeded within the Church we love.

It would be disingenuous to ignore the Vatican's September 2025 release of the

Petrocchi Commission's report on women deacons because it has caused consternation and confusion among those who desire a fuller inclusion for women in the Church. The report seemed to rule out admitting women to the diaconate. However, the document also seemed to leave the door unlocked or even open a crack when it states that continued discernment is needed. Colleen Dulle in *America Magazine* (December 12, 2025) notes that the theological differences within the commission focus on whether the diaconate is primarily a step to priesthood or for ecclesial ministry. The commission concluded its puzzling report by stating that the discernment needs to continue.

In retrospect, it may have been prescient of the Editorial Board to solicit the excellent articles in this issue. We are called to persevere, to continue both study and discussion on the role of women in society and the Church. May these articles aid you in that process.

Members of the Editorial Board and the Mercy Association of Scripture and Theology (MAST) which publishes this Journal are still adjusting to the loss of our "indefatigable" sister and colleague Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM, who died suddenly in April 2025. Eloise was the co-founder of MAST and the long-time editor of *The MAST Journal*. **Julia Upton, RSM**, our long-time colleague and current editor, captures Eloise's spirit in the opening article of this issue on women. At the same time, she gives eloquent testament to Eloise's passion and zeal in furthering the role of women in Church and society.

Jennifer Reed-Bouley, professor of theology at College of Saint Mary in Omaha, Nebraska, is known to many of our readers for her excellent presentations, especially assisting in deepening our knowledge of and love for the Mercy charism. Reed-Bouley's article provides a solid theological case for the necessity of women's leadership and voice within the Church. Her explication of Catholic social thought evidences the same spirit that the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas express in their critical concerns, always pursuing the common good. Reed-Bouley notes that the Church's Synod on Synodality (2021-2024) offered both frustration and hope to women seeking to express their full baptismal commitment within the Church. The analysis presented in this article urges us to continue to pursue Mercy's commitment to women's role in the world. It does so with reality, passion, and hope.

Phyllis Zagano, adjunct professor at Hofstra University and internationally-

recognized expert on the role of women in the Catholic Church, is familiar to our readers. Dr. Zagano, along with her editor at the journal *Pastoral Review*, graciously granted permission of an article published in the spring of 2025 (Vol. 21 Issue 2). The article provides the reader with a meticulous historical account of the Synod on Synodality's treatment of the request from Synod participants to address women's role in the deaconate. Zagano notes that, while the Synod received kudos for transparency, the work of the Synod's commission regarding deaconate did not always evidence such lucidity. The Petrocchi Commission, charged to continue the study and make a recommendation to the Pope, said "no" to women's deaconate "for priesthood" in September 2025. However, it seemed to equivocate stating that "the issues relating to the ordination of women as deacons remain open to further theological and pastoral study." The question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue." Dr. Zagano's study – as well as her clarion call to turn to female saints, theologians and mystics for strength and guidance – are particularly apt today.

Women have been serving as lectors and altar servers for decades, so it was surprising to some that Pope Francis in his January 2021 motu proprio *Spiritus Domini* officially changed canon law to allow women to be formally instituted in these roles. **Mary Ann Clarahan, RSM**, a theologian whose studies focus on liturgical practice, offers *The MAST Journal* readers an in-depth analysis as to why. Clarahan honestly asks, is this "too little, too late" or is this an opportunity to move forward with "courage and grace" in the process of building the Church?

As the demographics of women religious including the Sisters of Mercy shift, one might reflect upon their ability to influence within the Church, especially in local churches. **Doris Gottemoeller, RSM,** corresponded with Mercy Sisters across the Americas who work in various Church settings. Gottemoeller invites us to enter into conversation with these sisters and the larger issue at hand. Not only does she name the ministries that engage these sisters, she also explores more deeply the WHY of what they do. What she finds is that their ministerial zeal is rooted in their foundational vocation to Mercy and to Catherine McAuley's commitment to involve women religious in the mission of the Church in the world.

Mary Haddad, RSM, is the President and CEO of the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHAUS). In this capacity, she and her outstanding staff operate approximately 600 hospitals and 1,600 long-term care facilities across the country,

serving 1 in 7 U.S. patients daily. Keenly aware that she follows in the footsteps of courageous and innovative women, Haddad shares the stories of some of these pioneers. Sisters of Mercy are represented along with other women of "ceaseless commitment and energy." Truly, Catholic health care would not exist were it not for the zeal of these women. Haddad traces the journey of these innovative women religious who not only cared for the poor, sick and dying, but advocated for justice within boardrooms and government centers across the United States. Though some may not have lived to see the fruit of their work, these women worked tirelessly to put structures in place to ensure that their work would continue as the healing ministry of Christ.

Victoria Vondenberger, RSM, is a canon lawyer who has worked at the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Tribunal – an official court of the Catholic Church operating under Canon Law — for 35 years, serving as a canonist and later as the tribunal director. Her field is one that is largely staffed by clerics, so she has often found herself as the only woman at the table in Church discussions. Her article, almost autobiographical and reflective in nature, shows the ways in which her past experiences and ministries drew her to this field. Vondenberger highlights the particularly feminine – and Mercy – characteristics that have sustained her over the years as they simultaneously enhanced the Church ministry in which she is engaged.

An outstanding historian, author and chronicler of the Mercy story, **Mary Katherine Doyle, RSM,** offers a compelling book review of *Courage and Compassion: Sisters of Mercy in the American Civil War* that invites the reader to pick up the book right away. The book was written by Paula Diann Marlin, RSM, and published in 2024 by Palmetto Publishing. Doyle demonstrates how Marlin's book contributes to the body of history documenting Catholic sisters' work during the war. Marlin describes areas where battles took place and demonstrates the ways in which culture and understanding shaped the nature of the sisters' service. The Sisters of Mercy who served the sick and dying soldiers on battlefields belong to the same congregation who today continue to advocate for people who are sick and dying by working for quality and compassionate care and social justice efforts addressing the root causes of suffering.

The MAST Journal Editorial Board hopes that you both enjoy and benefit from the wonderful articles in this issue of the Journal.

Yours,



Patricia Talone, RSM
Interim Editor of *The MAST Journal*