



Why Women's Ministry Part ½:

The Apostle to the Apostles

Mary Magdalene: A Model for Women's Ministry

Objective:

Provide a foundation of scripture and church teaching that supports the role women play in ministry and provide a scriptural model of ministry through Mary Magdalene.

Key Themes:

- We are each called to participate in the apostolic and missionary activity of the Church
- God created woman for specific purposes among which is to be a helpmate to man
- Mary Magdalene serves as a valuable role model of the ways we are called to serve the church and our chaplains

Key Passages:

- Luke 7:37-38
- Mark 16:1-8
- Luke 8:1-3
- John 19:25
- John 20:11
- John 20:15-17

Ladies will be able to:

- Explain how through their BAPTISM they are called to participate in the work of the Church
- Explain how the Church has expressed the value and importance of women's ministry through various documents
- Understand how we are called, through our creation as woman, to be a helpmate to man, including our chaplains
- Provide a framework for the various activities they are called to perform in their ministry work

Activities:

- Women will consider how the characteristics of service and rebellion differ
- Women will use Ignatian Contemplation prayer to walk in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene and identify her various ministry activities
- Women will hear from a priest on best practices for working with priests or brainstorm ways they can support their priest

Send Off: "Outreach is How We Reach Out!"

Each woman will receive a Mary Magdalene prayer card and a sample of perfume to remind them that they are called to follow the example of Mary Magdalene and be the fragrance of Christ in all their activities.



Set up notes/Supplies:

- Have a large writing space available to note the examples of ministry the women see in the scripture passages about Mary Magdalene
- Have perfume samples and Mary Magdalene prayer cards for each woman
- Consider having incense or room fragrance in the room at the start of the presentation

Greeting/Icebreaker: Being the fragrance of Christ

Luke 7: 37-38

Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he (Jesus) was at table in the house of a Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him as his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment.

Proclamation/Discussion:

The theme for our time together has been reach in, reach up, reach out as we see Mary Magdalene do at Jesus' feet in the garden. We have spent time over the past days reaching in through Insights Discovery to learn more about ourselves. We have spent time reaching up in prayer and worship and learning how ground ourselves in our faith. Today, we will follow our guide once more to see how she models for us the act of reaching out. We will also explore what our holy Catholic church teaches about our call to ministry.

We are going to use Jesuit contemplation, or imagination, prayer as we read pieces of scripture about Mary Magdalene today. For some of us, this will come very naturally. For others it may be a bit more of a struggle. Don't get discouraged; trust that the Holy Spirit will open your heart, mind, and ears to what He is calling you to experience.

As we read the passages from scripture, put yourselves in Mary Magdalene's shoes. Try to imagine what she felt, what she saw, what she heard and smelled. As we read these passages, we will reflect on Mary's acts of ministry.

(Read the scripture passages very slowly to give participants time to put themselves in the scene. If you want, provide a little background for each passage.)

Mark 16:1 -8

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the



entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up they saw that the stone had been rolled back; it was very large. On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothes in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold, the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

In this one short account of the morning of Christ's resurrection, we see Mary Magdalene doing so many things we are called to do in our ministry. What things do you see her doing that we do in our work in our chapels, in our regions, at the worldwide level?

(Allow for open discussion for five minutes. Possible answers might include: grieving with her community, performing acts of mercy and service, focusing her attention and her heart on Christ, overcoming challenges, trusting. Affirm answers, write down key words/actions on your board or notepad and close the conversation.)

This is but one example Mary Magdalene provides to us of women's ministry. We are going to explore several more examples later, but first we are going to dig a little deeper into what scripture and the Church teaches about our role as lay women.

The papal encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem*, written by Saint Pope John Paul II in the 1980's, explores and explains the Church's ideas about the dignity and vocation of women. In it, he establishes that from the beginning of creation women have been imbued with a God-given dignity.

Genesis chapter 1 verse 27 tells us, "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

In the very first chapter of the bible, we are told that not only did God create us in His image and likeness, but he created mankind in two very specific forms – male and female. In this, we see that woman and man are intentionally different, but both created to express certain things about the image and likeness of God.

In his "Letter to Women," written in 1995 for the occasion of the fourth World Conference on Women Pope Saint John Paul observes that "womanly insight enriches the world's understanding and helps make human relations more honest and authentic." And though he is very cautious in his writings to point out that we should not simplify the characteristics of women to stereotypes of femininity, he notes that by design woman was made to be sensitive, intuitive, and generous and focused on relationships.

With these things in mind, we begin to see that when God created woman and man, He had a plan and a purpose for us.

Let's immerse ourselves in the life of Mary Magdalene again.



Luke 8:1-3

Afterward he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

Here we see Mary Magdalene modeling ministry for us once again.

(Allow for open discussion for five minutes. Possible answers might include: accompanying others on their journey, giving of themselves and their time/talent/resources, living in community. Affirm answers, write down key words/actions on your board or notepad and close the conversation.)

We saw Mary Magdalene and the other women doing some very specific things here – they were providing for Jesus and the apostles. While many biblical scholars agree that this probably means that these women were providing monetary resources, some also believe that they may have been helping with domestic duties as well – truly serving Jesus and the apostles. We can also imagine that during these travels she met people with whom she shared her faith and her experiences with Jesus.

All these things are part of the plan that God had from the time of creation for us. The church gives us more details about that plan in its teachings on the sacrament of baptism. Paragraph 1268 of the catechism tells us, “Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers.” The following paragraphs go on to explain that because we are part of this common priesthood, we “are called to be subject to others, to serve them in the communion of the Church,” and that we must “profess before men the faith <we> have received from God through the Church and participate in the apostolic and missionary activity of the People of God.”

We definitely see Mary Magdalene “serving others in the communion of the church” and we see a very literal example of her participating in the apostolic and missionary activity of the early church – how much more closely can one do that then by traveling with the apostles themselves?

So, now we have seen that by our very creation and through our baptism, God has invited all people to participate in His work. Let's focus a little more narrowly on what this means for us as women.

For this we have to look no further than the model Jesus provides in the gospel. Jesus' treatment and inclusion of women throughout the gospels may not seem, at first glance to be anything out of the ordinary, but when viewed through a historical lens we see that he was downright radical. Women, in His time, did not participate in the public life of the Jewish faith. Jesus bucks this tradition and demonstrates woman's inherent dignity, and vocation corresponding to this dignity, time and again.

Think back to the passage about the sinful woman anointing Jesus' feet. The verses that follow that tell of the reaction of the Pharisee in whose house Jesus was visiting. He was appalled that Jesus would



interact with such a sinner, but we can imagine that he is equally horrified that a woman would be so bold as to act in this way in public.

Jesus shows no such horror here or elsewhere in the gospels. As we read we see Jesus speak to women, heal women, share His message with women. Women are among the followers of Jesus who travel with Him. They testify to things He has done and said and their testimony leads to conversions.

Let's take a look at Mary Magdalene once again.

John 19: 25

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

What does she show us here about ministry?

(Open discussion. Possible observations – being present, being there at the difficult times, being with others in their suffering. Conclude open discussion with the fact that sometimes ministry, especially in our military communities, is going to be tough. Affirm answers, write down key words/actions on your board or notepad and close the conversation.)

In “Mulieris Dignitatum” Saint John Paul II points out that “women were in the forefront at the foot of the Cross, at the decisive moment in Jesus of Nazareth’s whole messianic mission. John was the only Apostle who remained faithful, but there were many faithful women.”

We see here perhaps one of the reflections of those particularly “womanly” attributes given to us by God at our creation. Perhaps there are some tasks, some roles that God intended woman to play.

When we take all of this together – our creation, our baptism, the example set by Jesus – we can come to the same conclusion Saint John Paul II did later in that great encyclical, “It is obvious,” he wrote, “that women are meant to form part of the living and working structure of the church.”

So, what does this part we are meant to play look like?

We’ve seen several examples of ministry in the scriptural references to Mary Magdalene that we have explored. Let’s look at another example.

John 20:18

Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and what he told her.



(Open discussion. Draw specific attention to how Mary Magdalene announces the resurrection to the apostles. Affirm answers, write down key words/actions on your board or notepad and close the conversation.)

This is huge! Pope Benedict reflected on this in his February 14, 2007 general audience, “Women at the Service of the Gospel,” saying, “The Gospels then tell us that the women, unlike the Twelve, did not abandon Jesus in the hour of his Passion. Among them Mary Magdalene stands out in particular. Not only was she present at the Passion, but she was also the first witness and herald of the Risen One. It was precisely to Mary Magdalene that St. Thomas Aquinas reserved the special title, “Apostle of the Apostles...”

When Mary Magdalene realized that Jesus was missing from the tomb, she didn’t immediately begin sharing that news with everyone she met. She rightly went to Simon Peter. And when Jesus appeared to her, she once again took that news, the good news of the resurrection, straight to the apostles.

Like Mary Magdalene, we are called in our ministry to be an apostle of the apostles. Who are the apostles among us?

(allow for answers)

Right! Our chaplains!

In the creation story we are told that woman was created to be a “helpmate” to man. This holds enormous meaning in terms of our relationships to our husbands, but the church understands this to mean more than in that specific relationship. Man and woman were made to help one another and one of the ways we do this in women’s ministry is to follow Mary Magdalene’s example and serve our priests.

Pope Saint John Paul II emphasized this in his Holy Thursday letter to priests in 1995 when he asked them to reflect on the ways women are co-workers in the apostolate, a kind of help women are called in Genesis to give men.

So, Mary Magdalene has set for us an example of how we are to be in service to our priests, but what does this look like in our chapels today?

(If possible a brief question and answer session with a priest chaplain is ideal. Perhaps ask that priest to reflect on ways he has been helped by women in the past and some of his ideas on the best ways for women’s ministry to work with and for their chaplain. If no chaplain is available, allow time for small group discussion on the best ways to work with chaplains. Encourage the women to keep this to a broad and positive scope – this is NOT the time or place for a complaint session about a “difficult” chaplain. Wrap up the discussion with some input from each small group.)



The Church in her wisdom has provided us with many other resources that discuss the role of women in the work of the Church. Let's take a look at some of those.

We have covered a lot of ground today, walking in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene and hearing what scripture and our church fathers can teach us about our role in the work of the Church.

Let's go back now to all the lessons we learned from Mary Magdalene today, what can we draw out as five key takeaways:

(Ask for input, but guide the conversation toward these five basic ideas:)

- **She was focused on Jesus** (St. Francis de Sales points out that we never see Mary Magdalene anywhere but at the foot of Christ)
- **She allowed her faith in Jesus to change and direct her life** (She was healed, but her life also took a different path that it would have had she not followed Jesus, she obeyed when he told her to go to the disciples)
- **She lived in fellowship with her fellow believers** (we see her in groups with other women, with Jesus and his apostles)
- **She gave of herself and her time, talent and resources in order to follow Jesus** (she provided resources, anointed Jesus with her oils, spices; used her hair to wipe his feet)
- **She did the hard stuff** (she was there at the passion, at the confusing parts before the resurrection, she didn't abandon Jesus when the going got tough)

Application: Outreach is How We Reach Out!

Let's put ourselves in Mary Magdalene's sandals one more time. Imagine that you are in the garden, weeping and gazing into the empty tomb. What do you feel? You hear someone in the garden with you and turn to see the gardener. Are you startled that you aren't alone? Do you rush to him, desperate to find out if he knows what has happened to the body of Jesus? The man speaks to you...

John 20: 15-17

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher.

Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"



Over the past three days, we have explored how we must use a discerning mind and heart to reach in and know ourselves better. We have learned that we must reach up by grounding ourselves in our faith and in the sacraments to sustain our work.

But in this last passage from scripture Jesus tells Mary Magdalene, and us, that reaching in and up isn't all He wants from us.

Imagine it is you whose name Jesus says..."<use names of women in the room>, go to my brothers and tell them..."

He is sending us on our mission. Jesus wants us, each of us, to reach out and to go share the good news of the resurrection, of the gospel with the world, to be His fragrance in the world.

(Pass out blank "Outreach is How We Reach Out" forms)

As we have learned, we all have different gifts, talents, and charisms that we are called to use for the service of Jesus and the church. So, the ways we use those gifts will be different. Outreach and ministry for me will look different than it will for you.

This form identifies three places we are being called to serve – our home Catholic community or parish, the women's ministry in our church, and in MCCW. Please spend some time reflectively considering a concrete action you can take in each one of those areas.

(Provide concrete examples of what constitutes outreach)

Scripture tells us that we are to be accountable to one another. In First Thessalonians we read, "Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do."

We want to do this for you with these goals you are setting. I will be calling each of you in four or five weeks to see how you are doing, to encourage you and build you up. And we will be asking each of you to submit a BRIEF written after action report on your specific MCCW outreach within the next two months.