

# MISSION INTENTIONS

APRIL 2023-2024

We pray that the dignity and immeasurable value of women be honored in every culture, and for the end to the discrimination they experience in different parts of the world.

## Country Focus: India

In recent decades, India has been making progress toward equal rights for women. Indian women are allowed to vote, work, and can receive an education if their family can afford the cost of schooling. Recently, India also passed a law mandating that all of its state legislatures and its



lower house of Parliament have at least 33 percent of seats filled by female representatives. However, like many countries, India is still working to ensure that all women living within its borders have full equality. Women struggle to own land, some families cannot afford to educate their daughters, and child marriage is still practiced, due to poverty.

The Catholic Church has long advocated and worked for the rights of women in India. Catholic agencies such as Catholic Relief Services provide education for Indian women, and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India works to protect the human rights of women. Let us join the Holy Father in prayer this month and pray for women worldwide to be honored.

## Leading to Knowledge of the Faith

Pope Francis, like many previous popes, has long supported the rights of women. He has spoken several times encouraging women's equality and human rights. In his homily at St. Peter's Basilica on Monday, January 1, 2024, he said, *"Every society needs to accept the gift that is woman, every woman: to respect, defend and esteem women, in the knowledge that whosoever harms a single woman profanes God, who was 'born of a woman.'"* Speaking to reporters on the papal plane, November 6, 2022, he stated *"A society that erases women from public life is a society that becomes impoverished"*. We will learn more about what the Church teaches about women's rights on the second page of this newsletter.

## Saint Spotlight

## St. Brigid of Kildare - Feast Day February 1st

St. Brigid of Kildare knew what it was like to be a woman who was not valued. Brigid spent her early years living in slave quarters. When Brigid was about 10 years old, she was returned to her father, a local lord. Even though she was his daughter, Brigid was not considered a full member of the family because her mother was a slave. Brigid therefore had to work as a servant in her own father's house.

Brigid did not let this stop her from living her faith, which she learned from her mother. Brigid kept giving her father's food and other possessions to the poor, even though it annoyed him. She also told her father that she wanted to spend her life serving God instead of marrying. She stubbornly refused to marry all the suitors her father arranged for her. When he



realized she would not change her mind, he granted Brigid her freedom. Although Brigid was now free to live her life for God, there were still some obstacles she had to overcome. In 5th century Ireland, there were no convents for women. So Brigid, along with seven of her friends, formed their own monastic community for women in Kildare. Brigid also began traveling throughout Ireland establishing other religious communities for women.

Brigid was a leader of monastic development in Ireland, and of the evangelization of the country. Kildare became a place for spiritual pilgrims, and Brigid is said to have given spiritual advice to many clergy and some future saints. She is the only female patron saint of Ireland, and the first Irish woman to be recognized with an Irish public holiday.

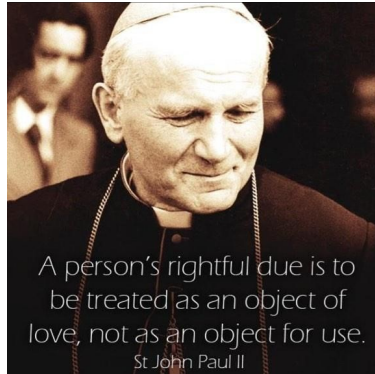
## Formation for Life in Christ

The foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching is the theme of *life and dignity of the human person*. As has been mentioned often in this newsletter, ***all human beings have a fundamental right to dignity because they were made in the image and likeness of God***. That truth applies equally to men and women.

Many Church documents and popes have spoken in defense of the dignity of women, especially in recent decades. This defense is grounded in the ministry of Jesus himself, who taught, healed, ate and spoke with women and men alike. As St. John Paul II explained in his 1988 apostolic letter Mulieris Dignitatem, (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women), “It is universally admitted...that *in the eyes of his contemporaries Christ became a promoter of women’s true dignity*...At times, this caused wonder and surprise, often to the point of scandal: ‘They marveled that he was talking with a woman’ (John 4:27), because this behavior differed from his contemporaries” (Mulieris Dignitatem, no. 12). By his actions, Jesus confirmed the dignity of women (Mulieris Dignitatem, no. 13).

But merely recognizing the human dignity of women isn’t enough. Societies must also take “concrete

steps to see that they thrive; including both short-term assistance with immediate needs and longer-term efforts to address barriers and injustice” (Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, or Charity in Truth, June 29, 2009, no. 6). It goes without saying that violence against women should never be allowed. Societies should also work to make sure women have equal pay and opportunities. As Pope Francis wrote in his preface to the book More



Women’s Leadership for a Better World: Caring as the Engine for Our Common Home, “I like to think that if women could enjoy full equality of opportunity, they could contribute substantially to the necessary change towards a world of peace, inclusion, solidarity and integral sustainability.” The

Holy Father has himself appointed women to Vatican positions traditionally held by men; in 2022, he assigned the first women to serve on the committee that selects bishops. In 2021, he appointed Sister Rafaella Petrini as the Secretary General of the Governorate of the Vatican City, making her the second in command at the Vatican; and he has increased the overall number of female employees at the Vatican by more than 300. “Every time a woman comes to do work in the Vatican,” he said in a 2022 press conference on the papal plane, “things get better.”

## Celebrating the Mystery

Some women, like St. Brigid of Kildare, receive the special call to religious life. This means that their vocation is to give themselves and their lives completely to God. Many women fulfill this call by joining a religious community.

Women who are considering becoming a religious sister go through a process of formation, just like men who are discerning a call to the priesthood. When women are ready to join a religious order, they take public vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. These vows indicate that they are giving themselves totally to God and will spend their lives serving him according to their community’s charism, or unique gift of the Holy Spirit. To learn more about religious life, [click here](#).

### Teaching Prayer: Intercession of the Saints

Everyone who is baptized is a part of the Body of Christ, whether they are living or dead. This means that even though the saints are no longer with us physically, we are still in communion with them and can ask them to intercede for us in prayer. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the Saints’ intercession is “their most exalted service to God’s plan” (no. 2683). For a prayer asking some holy women of God to pray for us, [click here](#)

## Threads of Empowerment—Caritas India [Click Here](#)

- ✚ In the video link above, Caritas India shares how it helps local women. How does Caritas’ work allow these women to be a part of their community?
- ✚ How can you help those living on the margins of society become part of the community?
- ✚ How does protecting those who are marginalized spread the Gospel message?