Columns
Spirituality



Some members of the Community of Magdala after our summer retreat (Courtesy of Magda Bennásar)



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One year later, yes!

It's been more than one year since 19 people began an adventure. We were a combination of laywomen, former religious, religious women and a couple of men (one of them an ordained religious) — all inspired by Mary Magdalene's love and inner authority.

Like in the Sanctuary of Sainte-Baume, dedicated to Mary Magdalene in France, we all feel that together we are like a sacred beautiful space in the wilderness of our lives. We together are a place that people can join, participate and find a way of healing and growing, of learning and sharing.

We celebrate life in different ways, walking in faith and community with new people and with those living in poverty, and together we try to offer the sacraments of life, one by one: experiences of new baptism, or of finally understanding communion, or receiving the teachings in an adult way — or accompanying with grief when our elders pass away.

A few weeks ago, a group of us were in our summer retreat, some virtually from their own countries. One day we received the news that the father of one of our sisters in Bogotá, Colombia, was in his last hours, so we prayed. A few hours later, we were told he was struggling against dying, so the whole group stopped everything, and Gloria guided us in an Indigenous chant to accompany the dying person. Soon, we were told he had peacefully joined the other side.

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It was a moment of grace, with our sisters in Bogotá bodily present to the process, and the 14 others chanting and praying, and Ruah did the rest.

Magdala is a group of people open to new ways of creating community.

Is this a new form of ministry? For us both — Carmen and myself, members of Sisters for Christian Community — it is.

In us, two charisms are merging: the "prayer and ministry of the word" of our former community and the charism of the Sisters for Christian Community: "May all be one." In between, there has been a long search in the dry desert of a quasi-medieval

institutional church in Spain.

Two milestones have marked the progress of the community: when the two of us became challenged by the reality of the planet, and then discovered the Sisters for Christian Community — an open and inspiring religious community, whose ecumenical and egalitarian character is mirrored in Magdala's community.

These two factors go hand in hand in impacting and reshaping our present being and commitment.

The Community of Magdala has been growing and increasing in depth and in number. Our language is Spanish, honoring and enjoying the different expressions of the Castilian, Argentinian, Colombian and Mexican — sometimes a bit confusing but always fun, creating jokes and laughter during our numerous Zooms and sharing!

Some influential events have included our study of the Gospel of Mark from a feminist perspective, and periodical retreats and sessions of meditation and prayer. We often use the *lectio divina* method, as a way to be guided into a more loving form of a personal relationship with an evolving God, always new and surprisingly present.

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We have also been applying the theological reflection method for the written reflections we all periodically share. It is a total gift to read each other's insights from such different perspectives. The days we all receive one of the written reflections it becomes the word for prayer that day.

Who are the members of Magdala? When we invited people to get to know our new community through our webpage, the first person that signed up was a young Salesian priest from Argentina. It was funny because, with our feminist outbursts and criticism of the institution, we were being challenged: And there he is, always present, humble and funny, working closely with the poor.

We include some women committed to education, from first grade to university level. They are married, intelligent and in love with life; they always bring reality to the fore with stories that make us all get in touch with life.

There are also a few religious women, full of energy, working in education or in the formation of their religious community. One is studying theology in Bogotá.

Another is a physician from Spain — a woman in love with her profession, who risked her life in the COVID-19 pandemic. She was infected herself but shares energy and joy — wanting to make her commitment to a religious life in the heart and hands of the Community of Magdala.

Another former religious from Mexico is about to renew her commitment in the community. To be faithful to her calling with Indigenous people in Veracruz, she had to decide whether to go back to her former community or continue, alone, with her ministry. Accompanied by all of us, she decided to take the risky step to be prophetic and bold.

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We have a few recently retired women, educated, sharing their giftedness with vision and energy. One — a former religious with a wonderful voice and guitar — a natural, self-trained composer, enriches our retreats with the music she creates with the inspiration of the previous retreats.

There are two powerful Argentinian women: one a former religious and chemistry professor, brave enough at 60 years old to step off a train that, according to her perspective, was about to derail. The other one is brand-new in the community, sharing her early retirement ministering to the poorest of the poor in the city of Buenos Aires.

Then there is a young man from Spain, living and working in Brussels, fully engaged in changing the world and his friends with whom he shares his deep insights — most of the time around an abbey beer from Belgium. Sure, Jesus would enjoy it too!

Some free-spirited women are engaged and committed to heal, to walk with people in serenity and wisdom. They are sharing goods and skills with mostly migrant women — and lately, with displaced Ukrainian women and families.

Some of our members have serious political commitments. One is a bank executive who struggles to bring a woman's perspective to an impersonal, rigid and very influential world where money makes a difference. She is struggling but enjoys being one of the first women in such a position.

We are grateful and delighted to follow Mary Magdalene's inspiration to be part of reality and try to improve it; first of all, by improving the way in which we experience life and daring to consider how we can make this world a better place.

Magdala is a "melting pot" whose perfume we dare to follow — and we love it. We all are full of hope and possibilities, very grateful and enlightened by each other. It is a treat from the Spirit-Ruah.