Blog
Religious Life



Dodgers logo signage changed for LGBTQ+ Pride Night during the MLB game between the New York Mets and the Los Angeles Dodgers on June 3, 2022 at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, California. (Newscom/Icon Sportswire/Brian Rothmuller)



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I couldn't believe what I was reading. On the same May 18 Google alert with a story about Catholic nuns in Japan and South Korea deciding to help foster and develop a "culture of listening, dialogue, discernment, care, and peace" in both nations, were several stories about the Los Angeles Dodgers dropping plans to honor the "Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence." I could feel the outrage starting to burn within as yet another group that denigrates Catholic sisters stepped into the media spotlight.

After strenuous objections from several Catholic groups and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Florida) the Dodgers initially decided to not present a "Community Hero Award" to the "Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence," described on their website as a "leading-edge Order of queer and trans nuns," though they are neither nuns, and sadly, not "leading-edge" at all. I'm not going to waste my time or yours repeating the disgusting things that were recounted in the article as their "acts," nor, contrary to our usual practice, are we linking to the group's website.

Now to add insult to the injury, the Dodgers said May 22 that they decided to "reinvite" the so-called "Sisters" and apologized for initially disinviting them. The Dodgers bowed to pressure from LA Pride and the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, which said they supported the group and wouldn't attend Pride Night because of the decision.

A CNN story and others noted the charity work that the group had performed during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, for breast cancer survivors, and for promoting safe sex practices. The website says that the work of its members, which claims chapters in several states and countries, "includes ministry, education and entertainment."

According to CNN, "The group also clarified its members' identities and religious themes: 'We are queer nuns serving our people just as nuns of other cultures serve theirs. We are not solely male; our membership includes all genders, religions, and romantic affiliations.' " The group's press release posted on its website initially blamed pressure from "religious conservatives" for the Dodgers' decision to withdraw the award.

Adding to the controversy is the fact that the president of the Catholic League, Bill Donohue, who released a statement saying the Dodgers' decision to honor the group

was "anti-Catholic hate speech," has also been quoted as saying homosexuality was unnatural and making ignorant remarks about people dying of AIDS, according to CNN. There sadly seems to be plenty of bigotry on all sides.

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Silent amid all the controversy are, of course, real Catholic sisters. Characteristically, they have stayed out of the fray. Yet I'm baffled and dismayed as to why it is somehow OK to so grossly insult and parody women who do so much good in the world. This controversy appeared just weeks after Global Sisters Report published an article about a still-simmering controversy over a play in Kerala, India, that also insulted nuns.

I don't presume to speak for Catholic sisters, but after more than seven years as editor of Global Sisters Report, I've had enough. It's bad enough when "the media" portrays women religious as somehow infantile, or in keeping with stereotypes and tropes from movies, as dimwitted, or featuring a sly, conniving mother superior. But the decision by a major league baseball team to honor an organization that since 1979 has based its existence, its very identity and so-called "acts" on disparaging women who dedicate their lives to serving others, has gone too far.

"Sister" Rosie Partridge, listed as the so-called "abbess" of the San Francisco group, is quoted in the organization's press release as saying that their "ministry" is real and that their "use of religious trappings is a response to those faiths whose members would condemn us and seek to strip away the rights of marginalized communities."

I'm trying to overcome my anger and "channel my inner sister" as we non-sisters at Global Sisters Report like to say. In the spirit of educating the ignorant, I want to take this opportunity as a "teaching moment" to inform the members of this group and others that they are grossly misinformed.

Catholic sisters are not clergy and so they are scarcely "representatives" of the Catholic Church. Moreover, Catholic women religious do more to assist those in marginalized communities than many realize. They do so quietly, and without denigrating others in the process.



The May 19 homepage of Global Sisters Report (GSR screenshot)

Week after week, Global Sisters Report reflects the varied and creative ministries of Catholic sisters. On May 19, as just one example, our homepage carried articles about sisters in India working to help women who are caught in the life of being devadasis, or temple dancers; about Vietnamese sisters supporting people with mental illness; of sisters in Rwanda providing affordable treatment for children with hydrocephalus and a question-and-answer interview with peace activist Sr. Jeanne Clark, a member of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Amityville, New York, who has published her first book at the age of 85 and whose protests at the Pentagon and nonviolent resistance to the Trident nuclear submarine at times led to jail terms.

I'll assume that those who grossly parody real sisters have not read about the Sisters of Our Lady of Fatima of Pune who minister to the transgender community in India. Or of the dedication of Sr. Luisa Derouen, who began ministering among the transgender community in 1999 and, according to her author bio in Global Sisters Report, "has been a spiritual companion formally and informally to about 250

transgender people across the country."

They probably haven't heard of the hundreds, no, thousands, of Catholic women religious who minister to those with HIV/AIDS in countries around the world. And they surely haven't bothered to read the poignant, heartfelt columns written by sisters and the stories we've featured in our "Hope Amid Turmoil" series about the courageous Catholic women religious who serve in war-torn countries and strive to create peace in a world obsessed with violence. Or about the Catholic sisters who have paid with their very lives honored in our "Women of Faith: Honoring Catholic Sisters Killed in Service in Africa" memorial pages.

They most assuredly don't realize — as many Catholics don't understand this either — that women religious get minimal support from the "institutional" church. Catholic women's congregations are self-supporting and self-sustaining, relying on donations or their own enterprise for funding.

I also found myself wondering where the women's organizations were in decrying how these Catholic sisters were being insulted and parodied? Why was it only Catholic groups denouncing this? Too often, Catholic sisters are not included in broader women's initiatives, although ironically, so many of their ministries are focused on empowering women in the U.S. and around the world.

I'd like to invite the so-called "Sisters" of the San Francisco drag group to consider a few suggestions: Donate some of the money you raise to support Catholic sisters ministering to transgender and LGBTQ communities. Drop the disgusting parody — it's beneath you, and after 40 years, the time for such has passed, if there ever was one.

For the L.A. Dodgers, whoever thought this was a good idea should have some sensitivity training. No doubt there are some Catholic sisters who would be happy to inform and educate them about a way of life they love and in which they ask for nothing more than to serve God by serving others and to live out the Gospel message of Jesus to "care for the least of these."

Moreover, there are plenty of ministries that Catholic sisters have in the greater Los Angeles and southern California region that both the Dodgers and the members of the drag queen community could support. I eagerly await the day when real Catholic sisters will be honored by the Dodgers or other major league baseball teams for the good work they do.