

# Joan Chittister

## “God and the Evolutionary World”

Episode 36 (transcript of audio) of The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity  
[EvolutionaryChristianity.com](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com)

**Note:** *The 38 interviews in this series were recorded in December 2010 and January 2011.*

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**Michael Dowd (host):** Welcome to Episode 36 of “[The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity: Conversations at the Leading Edge of Faith](#).” I’m [Michael Dowd](#), and I’m your host for this series, which can be accessed via [EvolutionaryChristianity.com](#), where you too can add your voice to the conversation.

Today, [Joan Chittister](#) is our featured guest. [Joan](#) is a [Benedictine Sister](#) and author of [more than forty books](#). She serves as [co-chair of the United Nation’s Global Peace Initiative of Women](#) and is [a regular columnist for National Catholic Reporter](#). Her most recent book, [Uncommon Gratitude](#), co-authored with the Archbishop of Canterbury, [Rowan Williams](#), reveals a phase of reality that can only be experienced in a state of gratitude.

In this conversation, Joan and I discuss “God and the Evolutionary World.”

**Host:** Hello, Joan Chittister, and thank you for joining this conversation on evolutionary Christianity.

**Joan:** I’m glad to be here, Michael. It’s a major question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, of course.

**Host:** I certainly agree. I have been asking all of my guests at the start to please share with our listeners just a little of your testimonial—the highlights of both your faith journey and your embrace of this amazing universe as revealed through science. And then, if you feel moved to recount any particular experiences that either carried you deeper into your own faith or helped you become more welcoming of science.

**Joan:** When we talk about the faith journey, in my life it began at a very early age. My father died when I was three. At that moment, the whole notion of dealing with an unpredictable life became a kind of a hallmark of the assumption that we don’t get to a point where life is always sound, secure, under our control—that God is not the magic act in the sky— that things happen to you whether you would want that or not.

I became one of those devout [Roman Catholic](#) children in a Catholic school who learned from the sisters—who were, of course, always above God; the sisters came first, God came second *[laughter]*—and somehow or other, I believed every word that came out of their mouths

and saw in them both piety and strength, both commitment and service. It was a magnet for me. I saw them as very good women, holy women, strong women in a society that did not then celebrate the strength of women.

You won't be surprised to know that I entered the monastery at the age of sixteen. I've been in that particular monastery ever since, literally all my life. The importance of that is an understanding that I spent a good portion of my life in a pre-[Vatican II](#) theological world, and then I was confronted with a period in my life when it became very clear that [theology is not static](#). Theology develops; it was developing right under my faith. I began in my late twenties, early thirties to develop with that. I began to understand that theology—good theology—is more about questions than it is about old answers. It became a really dynamic experience of the spirit of God, alive and fresh in life now.

Having said that, I can honestly attest to that kind of open-souledness in me and my community during those years and in women religious in particular, I think. I became fascinated by the parallel, but perhaps incompatible, notions—at least as defined by some circles—of science itself. On the one hand, we are learning things that never crossed our minds in any kind of formal education. On the other hand, we are asking questions that up until that time had been considered closed, if not final. I found the dynamic of those two issues life-giving, grace-giving, exciting. I was not frightened at any level by any of it. I could feel—literally feel—a new presence of God that was fresh and open and beckoning. There was more!

There was more to this spiritual life; there was more to learn; there was more to be; there was nothing to fear. I began to move into this area always asking the parallel theological questions: *What does that mean to me and thee? How does that compare to what Sister told me? How does that compare to the symbol system that itself is a demonstration of theology in our lives?*

I found myself in some positions in the order, such as prioress to the community, where I felt it required me not to *answer* questions, but to enable the group to *ask* them. Remember, I had a PhD in [communication theory](#) and [social psychology](#), and so I saw leadership as an obligation to help the group to ask these questions—to be willing to face what was coming before it got there, so that you were prepared to deal with it when it happened. That's really the whole faith story. It's a story that's incomplete, but it is a story that I believe deepened my faith—deepened it in personal ways, in ways that I could never have foreseen. It took the catechism and blew the lid off that kind of thing, and left me face to face with a God who was tomorrow and not yesterday.

**Host:** I love the way you phrased that. Joan, I've got to say, I love your passion, and it leads me to want to ask you to go a little deeper into the questions. From an evolutionary standpoint—[from what God's been revealing through science, through evidence](#) (also [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#))—what are some of the juiciest questions that you found for yourself, and with others, that are the most provocative or opened a new fertile territory for discovery or for conversation?

**Joan:** The big one—and there’s nothing new about this question—the big one is: If what science tells us about evolution is what they call ‘settled science’ —meaning it’s everything they really know at the present time and would be prepared to change if and when they saw anything else, but all of the science is tested—that evolution is basic to the nature of nature, *then who is God now?* If this is the way nature really works (and we know that and have some hard evidence that this is true of the physical world), then what does that say about what had been our definition of God?

And then, what does it say about the purpose of my life? I knew what it was in second grade: keep the rules, keep the rules. Whatever you do, you are walking life over a fiery pit on a razor’s edge. And you don’t have much chance, kid! Fall one way or the other, and it’s over.

What if there’s no fiery pit? What if God doesn’t have a little black box on my life with a set of rules inside of it that only God knows and that I’m supposed to go through life figuring out? Who is this God? And what’s that relationship to me in my life? I think those are the major questions that I deal with spiritually on this issue.

**Host:** Yeah. It’s also in my experience that those are the questions that are pretty much front and foremost for so many religious people—Catholic, Protestant, liberal, conservative. One question is: *How does this evolutionary understanding of reality, that we gain through a whole range of sciences, enhance or expand or enrich or challenge or threaten or shift our understanding of God, God’s nature, or how we relate to God?* And then, as you say, then the other question is: *How does that impact my understanding of my own purpose—my own calling—my own role in this larger body?* I’d love to hear you say a little bit more in terms of from your own journey, your own understanding, and what you share with others. How has this evolutionary understanding expanded or deepened or enriched your understanding of God? And how has that crystallized your own sense of your purpose?

**Joan:** I believe that history and experience will confirm the fact that it’s our *idea* of God that is the measure of our spiritual maturity. In other words, it isn’t *belief* in God that’s unique to us. All peoples of all eras have all found their way to God as an answer to the unanswerable in life. Belief is not unique; it’s universal. I’m not spiritually better because I believe in God. The least educated peasant in the most remote part of the planet believes in some kind of god. It’s not belief that’s unique. It’s the kind of God that I believe in personally—privately—that has something to do with my own spiritual development.

For instance, if I believe in a god of wrath, then I’m functioning in large part out of fear. If I believe that there may be a god but that God is totally indifferent to my life, then I’m indifferent to God’s life—and my spiritual life, therefore, is at best, mechanical. If I believe in God the magician, if I believe that God is the one who makes red lights turn green when my schedule demands it, then I have a notion of God that is not personal, its functional. If I believe that God is only lawgiver and that God is judge, then I find myself in a situation where my relationship to God is more defensive than personal.

If I believe that God is the manipulator of the universe that I must manipulate in order to get through life, then I'm talking about something like "merit theology." *How do you get to heaven?* You go to mass so many times a year. *How do you get to heaven?* You don't eat meat on Fridays. *How do you get to heaven?* You say so many rosaries. *How do you get to heaven?* You keep the rules; you jump through liturgical hoops. You figure out the rules of the game. You make sure you have all of them and do them perfectly.

What's the problem with that? Most of us function exactly there for most of our lives. The problem, spiritually, is that law-keeping doesn't necessarily provide much of a sense of meaning in life. Did God mean anything for my life, except keeping a set of rules? And whose rules are they? And who decided? Where did those rules come from?

If God is a god of wrath, that doesn't have much to do with love. Where is this God of love that the scriptures talk about? If God is the local magician, then is anything predictable? Is anything found? Is anything worth doing? On the other hand, if I'm remote to God because God is remote to me, what am I left with? What is the definition of this God? It's God the potentate, God the puppeteer, God the persecutor: the one who's testing, the one who's teasing. Most of all, God is the mighty male in which no sense of womanhood exists. A wag wrote once, "First God created us, then we created God."

The fact of the matter is, all of those things are just graven images of ourselves. That is just myself—my human self—writ large: the God of power, the God of irrational rationality, the God who tweaked and moved and pressed and prodded and monitored and watched. Those make mockeries of the God of scripture: the God who is the fullness of life and wants fullness of life for us, the God of love, the God who was present, the God of whom the psalmist says, "I have heard the cry of my people and I mean to release them, so I'm sending you to Pharaoh to say: 'Let my people go.'" Those two images of God are simply not compatible with the God of scripture—until evolution.

Suddenly, evolution (which they tell us is the nature of nature—and therefore, in a sense, life-creating, self-creating) gives us a whole new picture of who God is and who I am. Before evolution, keep the rules; but you had to figure them out. "God had a plan for you" we were told when we were young; but that plan was known only to God, really. You were to spend your whole life figuring out what the functions and rules were. Male or female—what were the rules for both of them? Slave or free—what were the rules for both of them? The rulers and the ruled—what were the rules for each of those? It became a game of cosmic dice.

Evolution left us with two big issues. We had to go back and look again at the traditional definition of Creation, the definition we had before science discovered for us this marvelous new notion of Creation. The traditional notion of Creation was that everything on Earth had been created separately, uniquely, individually, discretely. Evolution says, Creation emerges; it didn't all come finished.

When they began to show us drawings of the emergence of humanity from level to level to level to level to level, all of a sudden we now have two problems again. Are we really the best and last of all of this? Or is creation still emerging? Evolution says that creation is about the incomplete moving toward completeness. It is not about uniqueness. It's about ongoing

development that is itself, unique. So then you have a second question, don't you? The people who fear evolution and the science of evolution say: *Well, if you're going to tell me that's the way it is, then we're just spawned for nothing. There's no purpose. We're here for the sake of nothing and we have nowhere to go.* These are the people who began in the sixties—the late fifties and the sixties—when they saw this science emerging, who said God is dead; God is passé, and life is purposeless.

I can't say that. I don't think that. I think when you rethink the theology of Creation, you actually deal with the major problems—theological questions in a pre-evolutionary theology. There are theological problems with the traditional theology of Creation. The first is the origin of evil. The second is the nature of free will. The third is the nature of sin. The fourth is the whole question of the origin of life. Finally, the fifth is the enthronement of rationality—that only the rational elements of life have any sacred value on this planet. So you go back, for instance, to 1755 and [the great earthquake of Lisbon](#). Never had anything like it been seen. Thousands of people died. Lisbon was in a state of total shock—not just physical shock but spiritual shock. What had they done? What had they done that God would punish them like this? How could you account for this massive destruction of the innocent?

To this day, you can hear people say after a divorce: *'What did I do to deserve this?'* After the death of a child: *'What is wrong with me? How have I sinned?'* That lingering notion that God is the God who is out there making sure that we are properly punished or persistently tested to prove our faith. Now, evolution tells us that it is the nature of nature, for earthquakes to happen. We see it in tsunamis. We have certainly seen it [recently in Haiti](#). We know now that something we are not yet able to trace apparently, or to predict, is part of the natural order of things. Evolutionary theology says, "This seeding of life: God seeded life in the universe and allows it to work its way out naturally." If you and I build a seven-million-dollar house on a beach in Malibu, should we really wonder that we might suffer from floods? Or should we really get up in the morning and say, "What did I do that God would allow my house to be taken down in surges and waves?"

When we look at the question of free will in traditional theology, we have a real problem. If God really is all-knowing and God knows everything that's going to happen, how can you say we have free will? How can we possibly change that? And yet, in evolutionary theology, it is perfectly logical, I think, to argue that God gave free will to all of human life and all of nature so they could each become their best. So that we could make choices that are significant—not only for ourselves, but for others. What God knows is that we do have the right and the responsibility to do those things. The better our personal decisions in life, the greater Creation becomes.

In traditional theology, sin dooms you to eternal punishment and distance from the God of life. But the interesting thing is that in evolutionary theology, this whole notion of perfectionism simply disintegrates into dust and sand and fragments. Perfectionism is not of the essence of evolution. Nature doesn't work that way. We evolve through trial and error, through mistake, after mistake, after mistake—through adjusting to circumstances as they have developed in our lives—sin, error, mistakes. In [evolutionary theology](#) (also [here](#)), these become the patterns of

growth in life: that we can evolve into more tomorrow than we are today; we can learn today from today's errors; and we can adapt and adjust to that.

Traditional theology and theologians have argued about the maleness of God. They argued back from male sperm. Since male sperm, they said, was the life-giving dimension of life (before they knew anything about the ovum, incidentally), then the male—the mighty male—becomes the essence of the spiritual life. The notion of female life, as being as fully demonstrative of the glory and creative power and presence of God, gets lost for centuries and centuries and centuries. In fact, I get up every day hoping that we'll discover a little more of it. [Evolutionary theology](#) says that life is an embryo in the entire universe and grows up full of life, every dimension of life, and that all of it is of the essence of the life of God. So you can't enthrone rationality. You have a sacred obligation to every sacramental dimension of life—and that's the entire planet.

God in evolution becomes the God of ongoing creation—not a creative template or pattern or perfectionist model from the past. This is a God who has seeded all of life in the universe, who is letting that life work its way to God, including yours and mine. And who, as a result, is teaching us to learn from our own errors, to forgive and understand other errors, to do right and give justice, so that we are making our own world—that is God's world—according to the designs of God for it, which is the fullness of righteousness. We're allowed, and expected, and we must go right on growing all the way to the grave.

In evolutionary theology free will is key. We have free will—that's the problem. God has indeed seeded this universe with free will. The decisions we make are crucial. We can't sit back and let the politicians in Washington decide what this country and this world will be like. We can't just hope that nuclear weapons will go away and not destroy the planet. We can't sit in front of our televisions and “tsk-tsk” about children with big bellies who are starving. We have free will. We have a responsibility to go on creating God's Creation in the best possible world.

Sin has something to do with growth. We don't sin once and that's the end for us. We get up and do better the next day. Evil as we defined it is natural. We have to live with nature, not destroy it; and rationality is only a partial dimension of life. The decisions we make are universally significant. With evolutionary theology, we are co-creators of the universe. God is sharing God's power with us and providing everything that we need to make this world emerge in better and better forms. We become participants in achieving the fullness of life by selecting and adapting ourselves.

What I come out with at the end of evolutionary theology is growth versus perfectionism—a sense of ongoing creation instead of faith, participation in God's life, and God supports. God doesn't decide. God supports and stands by as we grow. Keeping the past is not what we're about—making the future better. So my theology of evolution is, evolution is both promise and possibility. It promises that we will keep on growing right up to the measure of the fullness of the spirit of God. And my possibility is that I can participate. I can become a better self. I can participate in making a better world, and together we can all grow into God.

**Host:** What you just articulated is, in many ways, how I see the essence of my own calling—which is to pursue [where my joy and the world's needs intersect](#), and in that process know that I am participating in the ongoing billions-of-years-old creativity of God. The degree that I work for justice and peace and sustainability—and humanity coming into right relationship with not just God in an abstract sense but God in an incarnate, embodied sense, in and through this entire body of life—I am embodying “thy kingdom come thy will be done on *earth* as it is in heaven.”

**Joan:** That's it! There's great moral responsibility in a theology of evolution. It is not an immoral or amoral view or life. It brings us to confront the ultimate immorality. That's huge. Without it, you can, of course, become a very self-defined holy isolate. All of this is somebody else's business; all of it is somebody else's regard. I feed my cats; I talk to the neighbors; I mow my grass; I ignore the rest of this stuff. It's all somebody else's business, and I deal with it by not dealing with it. I think that a theology of evolution demands more than that.

**Host:** Yes, I'm with you. One of the things I so appreciated about what you just said was that it reminded me of the significant impact of two of my 'sheroes'—two amazing women who have helped me think through some of this: [Sallie McFague](#) and her several books, [Metaphorical Theology](#), [Models of God](#), and [The Body of God](#), and [Joanna Macy](#) with her books, [World as Lover, World as Self](#); [Coming Back to Life](#); and [Thinking Like a Mountain](#). Both of them talk about just the absolute necessity of being conscious of our metaphors and models for our relationship to the Earth and to the body of life and to God—or however [Ultimate Reality](#) is imagined.

**Joan:** A lot of that kind of thinking about life and relationships has come out of feminist theology and feminist philosophy and feminist thinking that starts with the question: When is a human being not a human being? And when is life, life? What is life? And what does that have to say about the relationships between us? Frankly, it seems to me that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whatever question we start from is going to lead us into that matrix—back into that circle of the questions of relationship and the nature of life and the purpose of life.

It has been, you realize, a totally anthropomorphic, human-centered story of Creation. Somehow or other everything else was inferior to this creation of human beings. The purpose of creating them, according to this interpretation of the *Genesis* story, is to give them “power and dominion,” translated as, *You can have anything and you can do anything with anything if you are the top of the line, if you are the crown of Creation*. The male is presented as the crown of Creation, instead of realizing that when scripture says, “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” — *somebody just like me*, that is nature of our common humanity: that we're made for one another, not she for him.

Worse than that is the fact that we have, in a traditional theology, given very short shrift to the second creation story—the relationship story. We've chosen a stewardship story and called

it a power story—a dominion story. And we have put that over the second story—over the relationship story, the companionship story—which, incidentally, scripture scholars tell us was actually the first creation story and later got moved and this one got put in its place. In the relationship story in Genesis, I'm sure you remember, Mike, and most of your listeners: God brings all the animals to Adam for naming. The traditional exegesis of that, in a pre-evolutionary world, was that meant that God gave Adam power over all the animals. Naming gives power. I'm always fond of wondering if the people who hear that in our churches ever had children! And if they did, did they ever name them? and did they get any power over those kids by naming them? It doesn't make any sense!

Obviously, the story is saying, you weren't alone here. You have obligations. How do we show our relationship to animals? We name them. We name the animals we take into our families—the ones we take responsibility for, the ones that we treat like small children among us. These two stories have to be seen in concert, not separately—and one of them cannot be eliminated. It's a stewardship story *and* a relationship story that really completes this whole notion of evolutionary theology. We are responsible for our relationship to the rest of this Creation. And evolution says, *you must grow into it in such a way that you make it better*. The purpose of life emerges quite clearly: the purpose of our life is the co-creation of the world.

When you talk about Ultimacy—images, metaphors that are coming out of these great and wonderful writers and minds—they're calling us beyond ourselves. We have lived in ultimate self-centeredness for so long that we don't even see our destruction. The second purpose of our life is development—the development of the self, the development of the fullness of life in ourselves— so that we can begin to see these things.

The purpose of life, the evolutionary model tells us, is growth into God. We all—and all life, the scientists tell us—will eventually melt into God. That is the purpose of this planet. However many years it lasts, when it dissolves it will become something else. That's the mystery of God. The purpose of life is then the transformation of the self and the universe into God.

Evolution has been, for me, a phenomenal piece of spiritual life and theological insight. It gives us a God big enough to believe in. Not a magician god, not a puppeteer god, not a teasing god, not a mythical god—this is a God who has allowed for the co-creation of the world and that gives us the responsibility to create that world equal to the God who created such life. I'm happy, spiritually, to have lived during this time.

**Host:** I was telling somebody just a month ago that in the two and a half million years of human existence, there's no time I'd rather be alive than now. And of the six and a half, or close to seven, billion people that are alive on the planet, there's nobody doing anything I'd rather be doing than what I'm doing. The combination of those two things: to be living at this time in history *and* doing this work—promoting a sacred, God-honoring, inspiring way of thinking about the science-based history of the universe: I feel like I'm the richest man in the world, even though I'm (technically) homeless.



**Joan:** I want to say something to you personally, Michael. I don't know what it was in you or about you or as a result of your life that led you to start this project. I wrote a column yesterday, and I took this project as a model for the development of participation that we need on this planet at this time: enabling people—all people—to listen in on a discussion that is being honest, that is given more to questions and to the pursuit of ideas than to the recitation of footnotes and somebody else's answers. I want to thank you for that.

**Host:** I thank you. Why don't you say a little about that? I understand you are a columnist both for the [National Catholic Reporter](#) and, is it the [Huffington Post](#)? (I'm trying to remember where else have I read you.)

**Joan:** Yes, *Huffington* picks up some stuff. [I'm doing an article, thanks to you, that will go out today or tomorrow](#) called *Evolution and Me*. But I'm really talking about the model of [this project](#)—that it enables people to come into the questions that established institutions, by and large, are ignoring because they threaten the power structure and the life model that we've had, and they take away from all of our concentration on the past questions. Yes, we have a racist problem, but we all know the racist answer. We know we're wrong. We know that's wrong. Our newspapers, our basic communication media, are not dealing with this question. This is the question we need to prepare the world to participate in, because the answer to this question is the future of this world. I just wanted this opportunity to thank you.

**Editor's note:** Joan Chittister's column in *National Catholic Reporter* of 10 January 2011 is titled "Evolution Conference Invites Us All to a 'New Beginning'". It is accessible at: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/where-i-stand/evolution-conference-invites-us-all-new-beginning>  
Here are her HuffPost contributions: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sister-joan-chittister-osb>

**Host:** Well, thank you! In fact that leads me to want to ask you a question that will lead in a prophetic envisioning. Few people have been more engaged, not just in the *topic* of evolution and evolutionary theology, but in the evolution of the Church than you have. How can the institution that we call Christianity, that we call the Church, evolve so that it is truly a life-giving presence—a mutually enhancing relationship with this body of life? You been at the forefront of that for a long time, and so I'm wondering if you'd like to share a little bit about how you see the Church evolving? How do you see this institution that we call Christianity, or the Church, moving into the future in healthy ways.

**Joan:** Well, a lot of people just simply say, "The Church never changes; they never change; we don't change." Well, we *do* change, and we have *always* changed. The history of the Church is the history of change. The problem is that up until now, that history has been a slow history. It took us four hundred years after Martin Luther to admit, at the time of Vatican II, that selling relics was not a good business idea and that, somehow or other, we had made mistakes. We

don't have four hundred years on this one. We have got to be, as a Church, immersed in these ideas and sustained by the sacramental until the answers to these ideas emerge and develop a synthesis. That's why I never get discouraged. That's why I don't despair. Every morning we get up, we're changing. What's in our control is to decide whether we will engage with these questions—or we will go on stonewalling them as if we can make them go away. They're not going to go away. We're all now in this great Internet soup—from the Pope to the smallest altar girl—and we're all dealing with the same questions that are coming into our houses through our newspapers and our computers and our televisions every day.

These questions are going to get answered. In people's hearts those answers are coming very fast. The only question is: Will the Church be a loving guide through these issues, and itself grow in its own structure? I believe it will. I have no doubt that the Spirit is working in the Church as the Spirit is working in the world. It's not easy and we must all be faithful—faithful to the God who's calling us; faithful to the values when sometimes structures change; faithful to our ideals and our concerns; faithful to one another. Fidelity and openness, often seen as opposites, are the only way through this: fidelity to the ideals, fidelity to the sacramental, and openness to this emergence in an evolutionary world of new adaptations and new forms. It's going to be alright. It's in the mind of God.

**Host:** I'm not sure quite how to interpret that last statement—that's it's in the mind of God—because, then again, we shift into metaphor whenever we talk about that. But I *do* feel this deep trust, this deep gratitude for the contributions of so many thinkers in this series. I mean, just the nuns...it's amazing! I've been saying for decades, actually for probably two decades, that people have asked me where did this whole evolutionary theology, evolutionary spirituality movement begin? And I say, the Catholic nuns have been driving this thing for a couple of generations, or at least one generation. I learned about this from [Sister Miriam MacGillis](#) back in the mid-eighties. On this series we've got yourself and Sisters [Mary Southard](#), [Gloria Schaab](#), [Ilia Delio](#), [Gail Worcelo](#), and [Linda Gibler](#): some amazing radical nuns at the cutting edge of how Christianity is evolving. It's really quite exciting to me.

**Joan:** Oh, Michael, that's your only error so far. They're not radical; they're highly traditionalist—all of us. That's what got us where we are. We are not where we are because we don't believe in what we were taught. We are where we are because we *do* believe it, and we have seen it get bogged down. When you believe in the Holy Spirit, you can't decide what year the Holy Spirit stopped working. Think of it!

**Host:** Wow!

So Joan, would you like to share with our listeners any projects that you're working on or recent books that you want to draw attention to and how people can learn more about your work?

**Joan:** The best place to go is to [joanchittister.org](http://joanchittister.org). Our website is there and also much of the books that have been written and a lot of the CDs. The big thing that's going on right now—and it *is* big and I am excited about it (watch the website for this)—in three or four months, we're about to launch a new way to be a spiritual community in the tradition of St Benedict, for lay people. Within this very next year, I hope to be able to build a network of small intentional communities—lay-initiated, lay-driven—but all based on a spiritual tradition that is over 1,500 years old: [Benedictinism](#). Anything that has lasted for 1,500 years, that has sustained spiritual development of entire peoples and that still exists, is worth examining. How do we account for this? This wonderful document, full of nothing but spiritual growth and love and relationships and understanding, is still the basis for so much of the spiritual life around the entire planet. That's what we would like to share. I and [my community](#) are hoping to be able to make this transition to a new kind of lay Benedictine community life and to nurture it, to seed it, to sustain it. So that's the project. Keep your eyes open, it's coming.

**Host:** That's great! Joan Chittister, thank you so much for sharing your passion for this great work, your ideas, your enthusiasm, and your vision for an evolving Church with our listeners today here on the leading edge of faith.

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