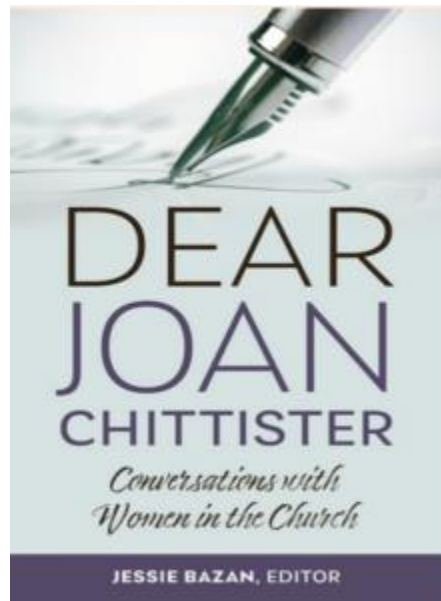


Discussion Questions

Dear Joan Chittister: Conversations With Women in The Church



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Introduction

PASSAGE

Pages 1-3

QUESTION:

1. What do the words “speak your truth” mean to you? Can you share an experience where you put those words into action?

On Sisterhood

PASSAGE

Pages 4-44

QUESTIONS:

1. How can we encourage more women to recognize each other as sisters?
2. How might sisterhood, as you experience it, “be both the gift and the beacon it is meant to be?”
3. Which saints have inspired and invigorated you and your spiritual journey?
4. Sister Joan reminds us that “it is important to know who our s/heroes are and what it is that binds us to them if we ourselves are to form a strong sense of self.” How has this been true for you? Explain.
5. How do you maintain your close and essential female friendships through distances, both physical and emotional?
6. How do you find truly “eucharistic sisterhoods” in ministry and in daily life?
7. Who are the women, the sisters, who support you? What gifts have women recognized and empowered in you?
8. Sister Joan writes that it is up to us to “call women together.” How

do you already call women together? What are some further creative ways that you might do so?

9. Sister Joan describes genuine support as “calm understanding, patient listening, emotional venting, rock-solid trust, genuine empathy, and yes, gales of laughter to break the tension.” Name and describe a specific time that you have experienced or offered such genuine support. What might you nurture in yourself to empower the capacity to offer this genuine support?

10. Write one question that you would like to ask one of the young women or Sister Joan concerning their correspondence “on sisterhood.”

ACTIVITY:

Write your own letter to Sister Joan or to a woman figure in your life about your experience of sisterhood (or your longing for it).

On Speaking Our Truths

PASSAGE

Pages 46-89

QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan describes adulthood as the time “when we have tested our childhood assumptions, edited them, and found the courage to speak a new truth honestly, respectfully, and prophetically.” Describe a moment when you knew this experience to be true for you.
2. What do you believe it would take for the global church to lament the suffering of creation? What human habits do you believe need to die to save the earth?
3. Who and/or what has been essential to your own path, your own discernment, toward your authentic self?

4. React, from your own experiences, to Sister Joan's belief that "community is what grows us, what authenticates our holiness, what carries us through periods of the spiritual life we might otherwise abandon if not for the support and model of those who have gone before us."
5. What has been the greatest challenge or hindrance to your speaking your truth? Who or what helps you to speak your truth?
6. When confronted with institutional abuse Sister Joan offers three options: resist it and take the consequences; resist in order to negotiate a mutual understanding; ignore the institution and go on without its approval. Have you taken one of these options? Explain.
7. "Suffering in silence when the suffering is patently unjust may only serve to increase pain for everyone else as well," writes Sister Joan. Examine that statement through the lens of your life. How have you responded to unjust suffering either to yourself or to others?
8. What did you learn about vulnerability, grief, and pain from Sister Joan's response to Lisa letter? (77-84)
9. List one way that you will speak up and call the institutional church, directly and honestly, to account, demanding change regarding its sin of sexism.
10. Write one question that you would like to ask one of the young women or Sister Joan concerning their correspondence "on speaking our truths."

ACTIVITY

Imagine you've been given ten minutes to "speak your truth wherever you please." Where would you speak it? To whom would you speak it? What would you say?

On Standing up to Patriarchy

PASSAGE

Pages 90-131

QUESTIONS:

1. Sister Joan explained “how we know that patriarchy is not over. Nobody talks about it in the past tense.” How do you define patriarchy? Where do you see patriarchy alive in our world? How does it impact you personally?
2. Scripture is filled with masculine language and troubling statements about women. How might we handle this in our parish communities? Or as Sister Joan challenges, how do we “turn the sentences into what they are meant to be about: men and women, equally?”
3. Sister Joan believes that in the church, when “standing up to the patriarchy” is done “persistently, honestly, not to upend a ministry but to balance it...real community” begins to unfold. Have you ever experienced this happen? Or can you even imagine what it would be like, look like, feel like?
4. Sister Joan offers a number of suggestions about “how we can enable women to preach.” Select one of her suggestions and describe in more detail what it might look like in your life. Or add to her list of suggestions other creative ways to empower women to “take on the mind of the minister.”
5. Have you ever claimed anger as Sister Joan describes its purpose: “to transform apathy and oppression into resistant anger, into holy action?” Explain. Just for fun, list all the times in the New Testament when Jesus was angry.
6. Have you ever stood up to the patriarchy? What was the experience like for you? When are the times when you have not been able to stand up to the patriarchy? What held you back?
7. Do you agree that the lay vocation has been dismissed by the

church? Do you see the same hope that Sister Joan voices: “It may well be the lay vocation that saves the church this time.” Explain.

8. Have you ever had to navigate a world in which you are not always welcome? Where do you find the courage to walk forward, even alone, and proclaim your truth, even to those who stood in your way?

9. From your experience of reading and discussing *Dear Joan*, respond to Sister Joan’s final challenge: “Remember it will be the step you take alone that gives the woman behind you the proof that it can be done. Then, finally, all the walls will fall down. For all our sakes, jump!”

10. Write one question that you would like to ask one of the young women or Sister Joan concerning their correspondence “on standing up to patriarchy.”

ACTIVITY

Imagine a Church without the effects of patriarchy. What would it look like? What is your vision of an “ideal” Church? What steps can be made here and now to help achieve that vision? Describe your vision in an “open letter” to the patriarchy.