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The Holy Spirit window is pictured through the Baldacchino in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Being a woman in the Catholic Church, a nun who insists on asking difficult questions and holding those in power to account for what they say and do, can make for a sometimes lonely and difficult life.

So, she has been asked more than a few times, "Why do you stay?"

(Unsplash/Massimo Virgilio)

There are a lot of components to that answer and they were gathered years ago into an essay for the magazine, Lutheran Women Today.

In the essay, one of the most requested pieces of her writing for years after it was published in 1996, she asks "how it is possible, necessary even, for me as a Roman Catholic to stay in a church that is riddled with inconsistencies, closed to discussions about the implications of them and sympathetic only to invisible women."

She answers in ways that are available only to someone committed to the institution in a creative way, tolerant of the church as a process that's never fully finished, and willing to hold both the institution and herself to account. It also is an answer available to someone who doesn't shy away from the conflicts that seem inevitable but also necessary if the process is to move toward a greater acceptance of women.

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In this conversation, she expands on certain ideas in the essay — that "the sexist church that I love needs women for its own salvation" and that "the church and women are sanctifying one another."

She has stayed for a long time — this year marked her 70th in the community of the Erie Benedictines — and she has no intention of leaving any time soon.

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