RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY
UT VITAM HABEANT

# Highlights

EASTERN AMERICAN AREA FALL 2026

## *Reflections on the Final Report on The Participation of* **Women in the Life and Leadership of the Church**

At the June 13 Area Day celebration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Sisters Catherine Vincie and Luisa Almendra presented their reflections on the Synod's Final Report of Study Group 5: The Participation of Women in the Life and Leadership of the Church. Sister Catherine noted the significance of the report as an ecclesial document which "put in writing" key issues regarding women's leadership of the Church. It is a step forward, but very cautious about actions that could be taken. She highlighted some "gems" in the document which emphasize women as vital members of the Church. Recognizing the signs of the times which indicate the alienation of women from Church, the document says the Church must address this problem. "There is a risk that failure to listen and address the present discomfort of many women could compromise the Church's fidelity to mission." (6)

The document notes the Spirit-inspired and "essential contribution of women to the evangelizing mission of the Christian community." (8) It states that Church history attests to the abilities and charisms of women as witnesses of faith, leaders of institutions and in parishes, theologians, and promoters of human dignity and social justice. It recognizes that in our own time women have been called and inspired by the Spirit to preserve and hand on the faith as community leaders in places with few or no priests and their presence in the roles of authority has not posed a problem. (30) Because they are bearers of charisms and baptized members, women possess the right to fuller participation in the life and governance of the Church.

Sister Luisa described the structure of the document and addressed the important issue of women's voices and models in ecclesial documents and the scriptures. She noted that in this document specific descriptions about women in the life and leadership of the Christian community were found only in the Appendix. The document itself quotes from the final document of the Synod on Synodality which "specifically recommended paying greater attention 'to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the drafting of official Church documents, giving more space to the contributions of female saints, theologians, and mystics.'" (FD par. 60)(4) The Lectionary is another example of where women's stories are neither included nor their importance emphasized. As a biblical scholar, she suggested that any study of the lectionary readings should not only acknowledge the stories of women but include an understanding of the way biblical authors from different periods show and hide women in the stories.

Sister Catherine explained the concept of power and authority as presented in the document, specifically the source of power and women's ability to exercise it. While noting that women and men are together "partakers of the same mission within an ecclesial context of communion" (21), the document distinguishes two powers:

a. the power derived from administration of the Eucharist, reserved to the ordained

b. the power delegated by the Roman Pontiff. It is through this delegation of power that Pope Francis and Pope Leo have appointed women to head curial offices and dicasteries. Such appointments would not extend to positions requiring Holy Orders. Sister Louisa commented that the Vatican is moving forward on the issue of women's leadership, if cautiously, and is setting an example. Hopefully, dioceses and parishes will follow this example.



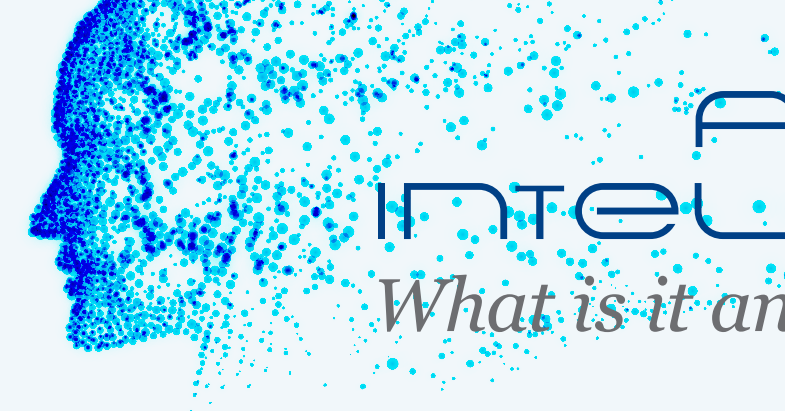
*Sister Catherine Vincie*



*Sister Luisa Almendra*

The need for discernment and openness to Spirit-led activity is evident in the document. "Wherever there is a need for evangelization, the Spirit has already bestowed a charism upon someone" (33), including women because the Spirit acts as it will. (34) The document is a step forward, putting in writing basic tenets for reflection and action on the issue of women's roles that cannot now be ignored.

*Sister Clevie Youngblood, RSHM*



# Artificial Intelligence

## *What is it and how to think about it*

*Signs of the Times*

**Artificial Intelligence** (AI) is changing the way we understand human intelligence as well as our relationship with machines/computers. Developing at an astounding rate, it may soon exceed our ability to understand what it can do and how it works. AI is an epochal change that is ripe with possibilities for both significant good and negative consequences. It is critical to consider the ethical questions of its development and use.

According to IBM, "Artificial Intelligence is technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem solving, decision making, creativity and autonomy."[1] The building blocks of AI are **computer hardware,** vast amounts of **data**, and **algorithms** that teach computers how to analyze and interpret data. There are levels of sophistication of AI that are changing almost daily. At the moment we can distinguish five stages of AI:

1) **Chatbots**, AI with conversational language;
2) **Reasoners**, human level problem solving;
3) **Agents**, systems that can take actions;
4) **Innovators**, that assist creativity (Artificial General Intelligence AGI); and
5) **Organizations**, AI that can do the work of an organization (Artificial Super Intelligence ASI).[2]

We are currently using levels one through three; level four (AGI) is expected to be developed by 2040; and level five (ASI) is a theoretical form of artificial intelligence beyond anything we can envision at the moment.

How do we think about such developments? Some ethical questions already have been raised within the technology community.[3] These include concerns about the development of the **hardware** (resource use, energy demands, noise pollution); the collection of the **data** used (whose data, who decides, what biases are involved); and the development of **algorithms** (who creates them, with what biases). Perhaps the largest issues are those that affect the understanding of the human person in relationship to machines (i.e., robots) and AI. We know that technology affects us at deep levels, and so it seems wise to consider gains and losses to humanity resulting from the development of these technologies. This is where we are brought to the question: just because we can do it, should we?

In recent years, through a standing committee of experts in AI development, theology, anthropology and the social sciences, the Vatican has engaged with the developments in, and issues of, AI. In addition, two major documents dealt directly with these issues: *Antiqua et Nova: on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*, by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Culture and Education, Jan 28, 2025, and Pope Leo's Encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas: on Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, May 25, 2026.

*Antiqua et Nova* provides an analysis of what constitutes the human person and human intelligence. It claims that "Human intelligence becomes more clearly understood as a faculty that forms an integral part of how the whole person engages with reality. Authentic engagement requires embracing the full scope of one's being: **spiritual, cognitive, embodied, and relational**." This understanding of human persons and their intelligence contrasts significantly with IBM's definition of AI and its implied anthropology. Questions arise about the substitution of AI for human intelligence: AI lacks embodiment, the spiritual dimension and emotional learning, and it is absent of the virtues that shape humanity's capacity for the true, the good and the beautiful.

Pope Leo's encyclical relies upon *Antiqua et Nova* and is grounded in Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST has six main principles: the common good; the universal destination of goods; subsidiarity; solidarity; social justice; and a preferential option for the poor. The application of these principles to the AI discussion has brought welcome insights into what AI can and cannot do in relation to human intelligence, as well as into the effects of AI on the common good, especially on the poorest.

Important questions have arisen regarding the power we give to AI to make decisions versus human agency and decision-making. Pope Leo builds on *Antiqua et Nova* adding that only a human being is truly a **moral agent** — a subject of moral responsibility who **exercises freedom** in his or her decisions and **accepts their consequences**. As a negative example, the US military released a study that of the hundreds of possible scenarios created for global "war games," 95% of the AI models used chose the nuclear option to settle a conflict. By using CST as a lens to view the development of AI, Pope Leo especially focuses on the relational nature of the human person and the effects of AI on the least of society.

I end with a short list of ethical questions on Artificial Intelligence raised by these two significant Church documents.

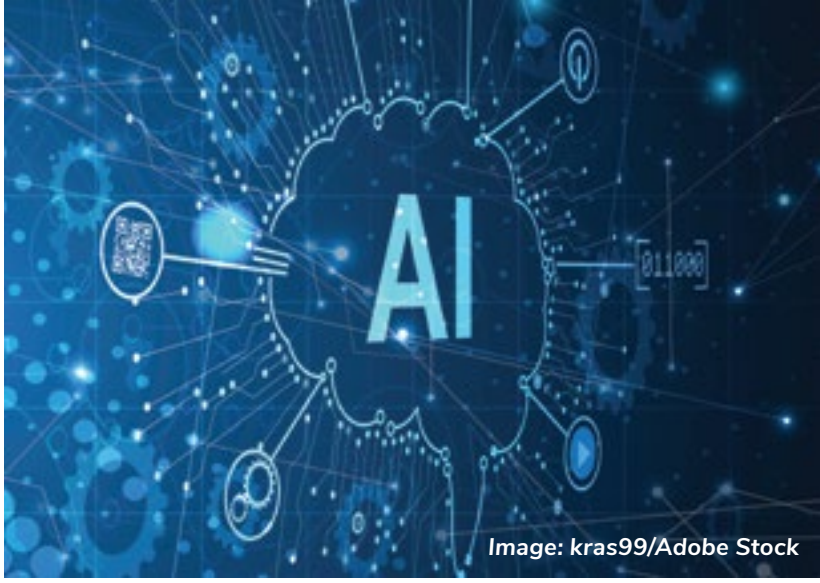


Image: kras99/Adobe Stock

### *What is AI's impact on human relationships?*

- Does AI enhance the dignity of human persons and communities?
- Does constant interaction with AI technology dehumanize us?

### *What is its impact on human agency?*

- Are we losing the capacity to make moral decisions?

### *What is its impact on war?*

- Is it biased towards peace and enhanced social relationships?
- Is making moral choices in war even possible with AI assisted weapons?
- Does it privilege the few?
- Do the poor pay the major costs of innovation?

We are enormously grateful that the Church and Pope Leo have entered into the world dialogue regarding AI. The Church and the Pope are using their moral capital to impact the development of what must be the largest technological change in human history. We await more discussion and further contributions by the Church on this crucial topic.

1. **https://www.ibm.com/think/topics/artificial-intelligence**
2. **Source: Bloomberg Reporting.**
3. **Tech Agnostic: How Technology Became the World's Most Powerful Religion, and Why it Desperately Needs a Reformation by Greg M. Epstein.**

*Catherine Vincie, RSHM*

# A CONFERENCE TO INSPIRE IN TIMES OF CHANGE

*June 26 - July 2, 2026*







The annual meeting that we in the Global Network of RSHM Schools most look forward to is the General Conference that takes place every other year. Different from the Heads' Encounter meeting, the General Conference offers opportunities to a wider group of lay leaders in our schools, not only to renew and create new friendships, but also to participate in group prayer services, presentations, and discussion/ planning sessions related to our mission, vision, and goals. The General Conference is a welcome opportunity for all participants, but especially those from schools that no longer have RSHM Sisters on campus or on their governance board, to get to know the sisters who are always welcome at our annual meetings.

The 2026 General Conference, hosted by Colégio Sagrado Coração de Maria in Lisbon, Portugal, lived up to our expectations. Paulo Campino, Head of this school, Sister Isabel Grangeon, Area Leader of Portugal, and I welcomed the representatives from 19 of our member schools, along with the largest group of RSHM Sisters ever present at a Network meeting. Having Sisters Coltrida Mooya, Teresa Nogueira, and Veronica Brand from the Institute Leadership Council as special guest speakers was an honor, and they gave us much to reflect on in presentations based on the Conference theme *"FORMATION THAT INSPIRES IN TIMES OF CHANGE - Identity, Commitment, and Global Transformation."*

Sister Coltrida, Institute Leader, opened the conference saying that Lisbon is a city of hospitality to many cultures, therefore, the perfect setting for our meeting. She mentioned the importance of the identity of each school, sharing an adage from Zambia: "One finger cannot pick out lice" - in other words, we need each other to get things done. Her prayer to Our Lady of Fatima was that this conference would enable the Global Network to form a powerful hand through networking, professional learning, and spiritual renewal. Sister Teresa's presentation traced the spirit of charism and unity inherited from the founders and the Institute's responses to ever-changing world needs through General Chapter initiatives. Sister Veronica's presentation reviewed the history of the Institute's call to justice. Her closing words were, "Youth are the key for the transformation of the world," followed by "How are our Global Network young people being called to get involved?"

Other speakers included Paolo Campino on "The Heart of the Charism;" Bishop Alexandre Palma on "Being a Catholic School - Designing New Maps of Hope;" Sister Catherine Vincie on "Artificial Intelligence and Catholic Ethics;" Octavio Carmo on "Humanizing the Digital; " and Isabel Capeloa on "Protagonists for Tomorrow." The Coordinating Committee led three strategic goal sharing and planning sessions to begin drafting a Global Network graduate profile and to choose the goal that each school or geographic area will work on during the coming year.

A Global Network meeting always includes activities that introduce us to the culture and tourist attractions of the host country. Each conference day opened with morning prayer in the chapel followed by students sharing their musical talents in the auditorium. We spent one delightful afternoon drifting down the Tagus River admiring Lisbon's architecture, and another one touring the historic castle in Sintra. Our day trip to Fatima was a highlight. After being welcomed to our school there by the students' choir, we were invited to lead the Rosary and attend Mass in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima.

Inspired and energized by our 2026 General Conference, now it's time to plan our 2027 Heads' Encounter in New York!

*Susan Kumnick,*
*Coordinator of the Global Network of RSHM Schools*

# Marymount School of New York's Inaugural Visit to the Zambezi Region



**This past March,** 10 students and three staff members from the Marymount School of New York (MMSNY) embarked on a transformative journey to the RSHM Zambezi Region, marking our school's first trip to this part of southern Africa. The expedition connected our students with RSHM Sisters and their ministries while also partnering with the Zambezi Elephant Fund for conservation education.

The adventure began in Choma, where the RSHM Sisters welcomed us with open arms and generous hearts. Over several days, students visited Kalunda Ka Maria School and St. Mulumba's Special School, experiencing firsthand the incredible work being done in these communities. At St. Joseph's Secondary School in Chivuna, we were greeted by students in blue plaid uniforms, like our own, who were eager to share stories about their lives, families and studies. They surprised us with a showcase of talent in a special assembly to celebrate our visit!

Before the trip, we learned that the deaf students at this school use American Sign Language with their studies — a language I studied in school. Our students spent time asking me signs and practicing in the airport and on the long bus rides in hopes of being able to connect with the students we met. The moment we arrived at St. Mulumba's they put their practice into action. What unfolded was a beautiful testament to human connection: students from NYC and deaf or blind students from Zambia started communicating through sign language, written notes, and with the help of translators. The patience, creativity, and genuine desire to understand one another transcended any language barrier.

Adding a special intergenerational dimension to our trip, our high school students carried three paper "Flat Stella" dolls, created by our Class I students. At each school, the girls photographed Flat Stella and shared stories about Marymount and life in New York with their Zambian friends. Upon returning home, the students visited Class I to share their adventures. Students also read a picture book about the wildlife we encountered on our journey. This creative connection brought our youngest learners and our most seasoned travelers together in their learning.

Each evening, the group gathered for prayer and reflection, processing the day's experiences together. Our program facilitator guided students through meaningful conversations about what they were seeing, feeling, and learning throughout the trip.

From Choma, the group traveled to Livingstone and crossed into Zimbabwe to witness the majesty of Victoria Falls. We had the chance to work with the Zambezi Elephant Fund whose representatives had visited MMSNY. They had provided information on elephant conservation as well as the local communities. An early morning game drive through Zambezi National Park offered us unforgettable encounters with elephants and other wildlife, deepening students' appreciation for God's creation as well as our responsibility as stewards of the earth.

The journey concluded with a visit to Johannesburg, where the group explored the history of Apartheid and the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Students bore long travel days, new foods, and experiences of the unknown, but they learned invaluable lessons along the way.

This year marked 100 years of Marymount School of New York and over 30 years of RSHM mission work in Zambia. Looking forward, we pray this is the beginning of a stronger relationship between our Marymount New York community and our friends and RSHM Sisters in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. The seeds of service and solidarity planted during this trip will continue to grow, inspiring future generations of Marymount students.

*Faith Yusko*
*Religious Studies Department*
*Marymount School of New York*

# A Heart for Africa – Sister Florence Reilly



Sister Florence Reilly (affectionately known as Sister Flo) has travelled an incredible journey from Ossining, NY, where she was born and the Washington Heights section of Manhattan where she grew up, to the novitiate in Tarrytown, to California, then to Africa for many years, and finally back to Tarrytown.

After attending Incarnation School and the Academy of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Park Terrace, Florence worked at Maryknoll before entering the RSHM in Tarrytown. In 1954, she was missioned to California (then a Vice Province) where she taught civics, history, and religion. These were challenging years, for she was allowed to read only newspaper articles selected by the superior, and she had to explain to parents why the actual Communist Manifesto was distinct from the hysteria of the McCarthy era. This would not be the first time Florence had to challenge a system.

In 1967, Florence was missioned to Marymount College in Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia. The years from 1964 to 1979 involved a civil war among the Rhodesian white minority-led government of **Ian Smith**, militant African guerilla organizations, the army of **Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union** (ZANU), and the **Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army of Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union** (ZAPU). Eventually, a compromise was reached by the government of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, the government of the United

Kingdom, and Mugabe and Nkomo's united **"Patriotic Front."** In 1980, Zimbabwe's independence was established with Mugabe as the first prime minister.

While St. Killian's Mission was located in the thick of this conflict, resulting in its closure in early 1976, Marymount – which was a bit farther away, yet still experienced some bombardments – continued until the end of 1976. On one occasion, when the students had, fortunately, returned home, the school was hit several times, breaking every window. Sisters Denise Osterhaus and Florence had remained and Flo scrambled through an outside hallway to ensure that staff in another part of the building were safe; indeed, they were, as Sister Luisa Gonzalves had everything under control.

Florence, Denise and Veronica Brand, RSHM, remained in the country, but lived in 3 separate areas. From 1976 to 1979, Flo lived in accommodations made possible through Marymount connections. She engaged in several ministries, among them establishing a diocesan office to assist with the relocation of those fleeing the war, work which expanded when the ecumenical group Christian Care asked her to work on the national level. In 1980, when Zimbabwe attained independence, Flo collaborated with the diocese, the UN, and Christian Care to assist refugees in locating relatives, and to provide them with health care, transportation, food, clothing, and shelter.

After the war, she taught at St. Joseph's Mission School outside of Mutare and then, for 11 years, at the government-funded teacher training college. Unfortunately, the college experienced financial corruption, including missing social funds. One student even tried to blackmail Florence into passing her! Florence was entrusted with addressing the corruption and overseeing the finances. She was also able to travel to many rural areas to evaluate the teachers, an opportunity to see many parts of the country she would not otherwise have visited.



*L to R: Sister Florence and Sister Coltrida*

While working at the college, Flo also did research to establish the RSHM Zambezi Region, working with Philippa O'Sullivan, RSHM, a sister from Zambia, to join Zimbabwe (sisters from the Eastern American Province) and Zambia (sisters from the English/Irish Province). The region formally came into being on January 6, 1996, and was named after the Zambezi River which runs between the two countries. The Zambezi Area now includes a number of African sisters who have since entered the congregation. After retiring from the college, Flo served as treasurer of the new region for three years.

In 2003, Florence returned to Tarrytown, working in the province finance office and serving as co-coordinator of Marymount Convent. Subsequently, she returned to Zimbabwe for a time to coordinate a major project training adults and educating children suffering with HIV. In 2008, when Florence again encountered financial corruption, she recommended closing the project for a month and reopening with new staff. However, although the project followed her recommendation, the corruption returned. Frustrated by this, she decided to resign and return to Tarrytown. Once back in the US, she worked at the Provincial Center and led communion services at the Church of the Magdalene in Pocantico Hills. She now resides at Marymount Convent.

Thirty-seven years spent in Africa stays in one's blood, and Flo speaks of her experiences there with immeasurable warmth and appreciation. She still keeps in touch with colleagues and students through Facebook and visits with them when they come to the States. No doubt, they treasure her equally, and the RSHM are indebted to her for many years of ministry in Zimbabwe and her role in the creation of our Zambezi Region.

*Joanne Safian, RSHM*

# Highlights Puzzle: *They Also Serve*

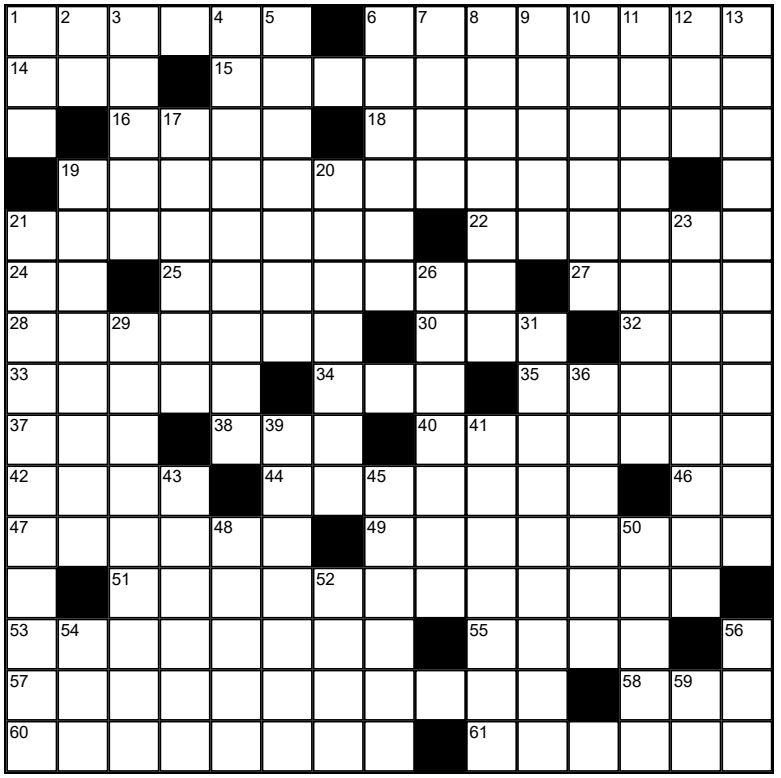
* Themed clues are functionaries at religious services.
Answers are posted at: **www.rshm-east.org/category/newsletter**

## Across

1 *Reader
6 Coast of Asia nearest to Hawaii
14 ___-mo
15 Lubrication for a flyswatter
16 ____monia
18 *One who gives the sermon
19 Nurse's hours in the Intensive Care Unit, briefly
21 Counterpart of Alpha, Inc.
22 Bone doctor, briefly?
24 Osteoarthritis, abbr.
25 Georgia Tech Open Association, abbr.
27 Abbr. for feminine saints in Paris
28 Founder of the Heinz company
30 Judge on the field, abbr.
32 St. Vincent's Eve, abbr.
33 Second largest city in Portugal
34 Tic-___-toe
35 *One who walks the aisles
37 Also known as, abbr.
38 New Mexican Empire,abbr.
40 Henry prior to Henry V
42 Actor Gregory ____
44 Play participant's identification
46 Opposite of SW
47 Actress _____ Dahl
49 *One who leads the service
51 Word-for-word opposite of "Evens close borrow'
53 Hint, frequently a disparaging one
55 Informal goodbye
57 Certain simian youngsters
58 There are 12 in a yr.
60 Senior states, briefly
61 Doctor of Dental Surgery not available, briefly

## Down

1 Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds
2 High train, briefly
3 Police criminal expertise, briefly
4 Surgery, perhaps
5 Alums may gather at one
6 Moral principles
7 Building block of a molecule
8 Not just anyone
9 Works very hard
10 Mr. Gore defeat, briefly
11 Consequently, I clammed up
12 Internet information Services, abbr.
13 *One who carries the cruets
17 Bit of gold
19 "I make folks laugh..."
20 Tennessee Aztec, briefly
21 Sayings co-parental with "Ooh mama mias"
23 Cleaned shrimp
26 Task for a Senior, briefly
29 Human Resources Administration clones, briefly
31 Playful spot in the sea?
36 Eating plan for elders, briefly
39 Ms. West sulk, informally
41 Reserved a house online
43 Kenya-Ethiopia duct, briefly



45 Toilet paper packs
48 Notre Dame Elder Housing Authority, briefly
50 DNA month, briefly
52 One Dynamic Learning Environment, abbr.
54 National Public Radio, abbr.
56 'is' in Paris
59 'Where' in Paris

*Bea McMahon, RSHM*

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