

The church's one foundation

by [Bonnie Thurston](#) in the [July 13, 2022](#) issue

Unable to see verdant forests  
for mangled, ecclesial trees,  
most of my companions  
have abandoned the church,  
not rats, but certainly escapees  
from a rusty old ship,  
with a treasure in her hold  
undiminished by its often ugly,  
always precarious, commanders.

To the sailors who remain,  
not confident, but at least  
hopeful she isn't going down,  
who still stoke old boilers,  
and swab slimy decks,  
St. Benedict offers counsel:  
Be prudent in your cleaning.  
In scraping off the rust,  
don't break the fragile vessel.

Appreciating mature beauty,  
long faithful seaworthiness,  
old sailors, like astrolabes,  
still chart direction by the stars.  
Their night watches taught them  
the sun will rise from the sea.  
They show their shipmates how  
to be held in a crumbling conveyance  
by the foundling Love in her hold.

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[Jon Mathieu](#), the *Christian Century*'s community engagement editor, joined [Bonnie Thurston](#) in conversation about her poem.