

THE PRICELESS GIFT OF CHRISTMAS: A (VERY) PERSONAL REFLECTION

by Karen B. Lenz

It is Advent, 2003.

And once again we quiet our lives and hearts in joyous anticipation as the Child of Bethlehem, He who would be called the Prince of Peace, draws near, as He has done every Advent for the past 2000 years, to once more be born among us.

Among us—in a world fractured by violence at every level; a world neither friendly to nor protective of its children. Our world, this Christmastime of 2003, is under siege by smart bombs armed with depleted uranium and smarter missiles and rockets which can be fired from shoudler-mounted launching pads and biological weapons which can be mailed in a Christmas card—and always, behind every confrontation or escalation, the looming nuclear threat. It is a world where fields are planted with landmines in place of corn and beans, and children risk life and limb in what should be care-

free play; a world whose holiest shrines too often resound with the staccato sounds of gunfire instead of pealing church bells and calls to prayer.

And the violence and oppression are hardly restricted to global political affairs. In the church that bears the Child's name, the same largely self-appointed leaders who preside at heart-breakingly beautiful Christmas liturgies (when I was young, long before I became Catholic, I thought that midnight mass on Christmas Eve might be enough reason to convert) are complicit in an ugly and tangled web of misused power and abuse. Children (like the Child), have been—on a hitherto unimaginable scale—sexually abused; women (like Mary, to whom God entrusted the rearing and nurturing of His very Son), are routinely and casually denigrated and denied

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		MISSION STATEMENT - <i>As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.</i>

THE HIDDEN COSTS OF THE CRISIS: AN ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS

by Marian Ronan

Since January 2002, when the *Boston Globe* "broke" the story of clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston, narratives of molesting clergy, victimized young people, diocesan incompetence and betrayal, Vatican incomprehension and homophobia, new Catholic activist groups, episcopal resignations and appointments, legal indictments and settlements, as well as a clergy protest and a prison murder have rained down upon American society. Recently a number of commentators, all of them white males, have begun to offer interpretations of the situation. In this article I propose an alternative analysis, one that highlights some of the hidden costs of the crisis.

At the heart of my interpretation is Gayle Rubin's argument, in her classic feminist-theoretical article "Thinking Sex," that sexual minorities in the US exist in relation to one another; what happens to one influences what happens to the others. If we think of these groups as concentric circles, the outer, most despicable circle is pedophiles. From there we move through the prostitute circle, the transsexual, transgendered circle, the gay/lesbian circle, the heterosexual but divorced circle, the single woman's circle, the circle for married women, and in the center, the ideal, the circle for heterosexual married men (but in Catholicism, celibate males inhabit the innermost circle). Pedophilia crises, Rubin suggests, are inherently reactionary. Intensifying the hatred and denunciation of pedophiles worsens the situation of the other sexually abject groups whose circles abut theirs. It's

a kind of domino theory of sexual oppression.

Many of us will be repelled, even outraged, by an argument that attempts to associate us in any way with pedophiles. At some point it would be useful to consider the theo-ethical implications of identifying entirely with the innocence of victims and never with the sinners in this and other situations. But ethics aside, total identification with the innocence of victims may cause us to overlook threats against our own well-being hidden within the discourse of the current sexual crisis.

Rubin's theory suggests that the current crisis should worsen the situation of women and gays in the church. Regarding gay and lesbian Catholics, we note that the Vatican and the hierarchy quickly tried to blame the crisis on homosexual priests. The resistance to this move by Catholic groups and in the press was gratifying, but public denial will have little impact on what happens in parishes and seminaries in coming years. Here in northern California it is widely believed that the new far right-wing bishop of Oakland, a trustee of Ave Maria University, was appointed to clean out the ostensibly gay-friendly Catholic seminaries in the Graduate Theologi-

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CORRECTION

The film review of *Anchoress* which appeared in the last (September-November) issue of *Equal wRites* was incorrectly attributed. The review was written by Mary Jeremy Daigler, RSM, who is a member of the national WOC Board of Directors.

We regret the error.

HIDDEN COSTS OF THE CRISIS

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cal Union. The Vatican and the American hierarchy are also currently reversing years of ecumenical progress by encouraging schism in the Episcopal Church USA over the recent election of a gay bishop.

There is equal reason to be concerned about the impact of the crisis on the situation of women in the church. Consider, first of all, that the crisis itself is highly gendered, focused primarily on the molestation of boys and young men. Experts tell us that the majority of sexually abused young people are female, and we have reason to assume that many more clergy have crossed professional/pastoral boundaries with women parishioners than with underage males, but the particular crisis that captures our attention is highly male-identified.

Then there is the relegation of women's issues to the far background because of the seriousness of the crisis. Women are certainly active in Voice of the Faithful and SNAP (Survivors' Network of those Abused by Priests); by some reports, SNAP membership is 50% female. But the bulk of clergy sexual violations against women in the church is against adult women; only 5% of clergy sexual abuse against children and young people is reported to be against females. And there is currently very little sympathy for adult women in American culture, as the recent election of the breast-grabbing Arnold Schwarzenegger makes clear. Voice of the Faithful's decision to distance itself from "gender" issues in the face of the far more serious threat to innocent, primarily male, children is strategic but deeply troubling.

Equally striking is the dominance of male voices in the conversation about the clergy sexual abuse crisis and the related overall crisis in the American church. Already in 2002, the three dominant voices in trade publishing on Catholicism were those of white males, Garry Wills, James Carroll, and George Weigel. More recently we have a revision of Eugene Kennedy's *The Unhealed Wound* focused on the sex abuse crisis, and Peter Steinfels' *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*.

Since the second edition of *The Unhealed Wound* intends to focus on the crisis in the priesthood precipitated by clergy sexual abuse, it is perhaps unfair to complain that the book is almost exclusively about men. But this is the nature of the crisis: it forces us to attend ever more closely to priests and bishops. Kennedy uses the grail myth to argue that the "institutional church" has emasculated priests, taken away their sexual potency, just as the Fisher King of the grail myth had his genitals run through with a spear. Underlying Kennedy's argument is a fuzzy-minded distinction between the (bad) "institutional church" and a (good) spiritual/mystical church to which Kennedy and the rest of us liberals presumably belong. This division between institution and spirit is the same binary between body and mind or spirit that has shaped western civilization to the detriment of the "carnal" classes, women, homosexuals, and Jews.

Peter Steinfels' *A People Adrift* is a far better book than *The Unhealed Wound*, and so what Steinfels says about women is more significant than Kennedy's disappointing effort. In a chapter titled "Sex and the Female Church," Steinfels examines the history and implications of the church's position on contraception and homosexuality, and then discusses Catholic feminist theology and women's ordination. Steinfels acknowledges the movement for the equality of women as a development of world-historical dimensions (275). Some will consider his proposal that women be or-

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ained to the diaconate and admitted to the College of Cardinals progressive; in point of fact, he is well to the right of the majority of American Catholics on ordination, and thanks to John Paul II's policies, the Vatican may be expected to continue its practice of excluding even mildly liberal white male celibates from the College of Cardinals well into the future.

But it is Steinfels's treatment of Catholic feminist theology that reveals his contempt for the women's movement in the church. First of all, Steinfels tells us that Catholic feminist theology is fluid, amorphous, and unfixed, difficult to reconcile with anything remotely continuous with Catholicism and maybe even Christianity. "Much Catholic feminist thought," Steinfels writes, "is relatively uninterested in the whole question of differentiating what is compatible with Catholic Christianity from what is not, and at present is under-equipped to do so" (280). Though in other parts of the book Steinfels deals in great specificity with male Catholic figures like Cardinal Bernardin, Bishop Wilton Gregory, and even the pastor of a local parish here in Berkeley, the only "Catholic feminist theologian" he mentions by name is Mary Daly, who hasn't identified herself as Catholic in decades. Too bad for Elizabeth Johnson and her feminist systematic treatments of those most Catholic of topics, the Trinity, Mary, and the Communion of Saints. Similarly Steinfels bases his critique of feminist theology on one event, Women-Church Convergence's 1993 conference in Albuquerque at which participants were confronted by indigenous women for appropriating their rituals. He never makes any reference to WOC, though WOC is much more directly concerned with renewing the Catholic tradition than WomenChurch Convergence ever was. Steinfels's second criticism of Catholic feminism is that it is mar-

ginal; it does not speak to or for the vast majority of Catholic women in the pews. Though Catholic feminists can surely do a better job of talking with women in parishes, Steinfels here ignores the survey research of Adair Lummis, Allison Stokes *et al*, showing that a plurality of Christian women involved in feminist spirituality is also active in parishes and congregations. When you read *A People Adrift*, consider whether the many SEPA/WOC members who are active in parishes and in the movement for women's ordination are represented at all in the black/white division Steinfels constructs. Steinfels' tactic here must be seen for what it is. Since rank and file Catholic women by and large do not write books, and since Catholic feminist theologians (whoever they are) are out of touch with them, Steinfels himself becomes their voice. This is true as well of the other aging white male writers—Carroll, Wills, Kennedy, O'Brien, *et al*, who have taken center stage of late. Their works draw very little on women's scholarship or experience. In the face of a crisis of such towering proportions as the one facing our church, it would surely be graceless for Catholic women to complain about such a small matter.

*Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In *American Feminist Thought at Century's End*. Edited by Linda S. Kauffman. Blackwell Publishers, 1993.

Marian Ronan is at work on a book, Sexuality and Mourning in US Catholicism: Voices of the Postwar Generation.

PRICELESS GIFT OF CHRISTMAS

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the opportunity to offer their gifts to Him within the context of the official church; persons of certain sexual orientations—and just what was the sexual orientation of the fully human Jesus, anyway, and who says so—have been treated with a cruel insensitivity.

And even as our hearts yearn for the peace of the reign of God—of God's kingdom, or kin-dom, as it has become fashionable to call it today—which the Child came to bring, we cannot help looking around and wondering just why it hasn't happened yet, why Christmas hasn't worked before.

The failure, I think, is not in the Gift—the Child will be born again and again right on schedule. No, I suspect the failure lies in our inability to recognize and welcome Him. We need not even wait until December 25—for the Christ is born every year, every day, everywhere there is no room for Him in the inns and high-tech delivery rooms and mansions of the affluent.

And all that this Gift of immeasurable worth requires of us is that we pause long enough in the midst of our so-busy holiday schedules to notice that He whose birth we are preparing to celebrate has already come, and, noticing, lay aside our differences and disagreements, suspend our personal and group agendas, long enough to bid Him welcome—by creating a world, a church, a neighborhood where no child is ever intentionally killed or maimed or orphaned or enslaved, where children are never routinely and even casually abandoned or starved or physically abused.

When we have done that—and perhaps only then—it will be time for bell-ringing and carols, for feasts and good fellowship and re-joining. Because then, you see, Christmas will finally have worked.

Addendum: There is I think a lesson for those of us active in the woman's ordination movement in the recognition of the boundless inclusivity that is one of the most precious gifts of Christmas.

The struggle to effect the radical change that is required in how the (all-male) hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church views and treats women does not belong to us—white, middle-aged, college-educated, financially comfortable, (mostly) women—alone, and as long as we conceive of it that way, I doubt that we have a chance of success.

We need to stand squarely alongside all the women oppressed and neglected and mistreated by the church today—in Third World countries, American inner cities and even in convents and parishes in fashionable suburbs, and offer our assistance and support.

It is sheer folly to proclaim that our meetings and conferences are open to everyone and expect women engaged in sometimes desperate struggles for survival to pause and join our often painfully convoluted discussions of our agenda. We who insist that the priesthood of women should be recognized need to stop shuffling our papers and priorities long enough to act like priests and go where we are needed, advocating for our less fortunate sisters and their children, and personally helping to provide food and housing and medical insurance and access to educational opportunities that should be the birthright of every child in this the twenty-first century after the birth of Christ.

And then, when the women of the church—rich and poor, educated and illiterate, young and no longer young—join forces in the service of the children (and all of our futures) we will become a mighty unstoppable force that no hidebound ecclesial institution in the world will be able to resist.

God bless us, everyone.

Karen B. Lenz, editor of Equal wRites, lives and works at the Philadelphia Catholic Worker.

HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN

*There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in—Leonard Cohen*

*That life is so designed,
its most intimate beauties
to be made from brokenness:
From light broken, this carnevale;
from bread, companions;
from trust broken, the grace
of falling and being
forgiven? Yes
forgiven.*

*From a life a heart a spirit broken,
the unlooked-for surge of spring,
this easter.*

*The breath cut—and cut—and cut by grief
by its own reckless faith continues.
The very word, broken, is a fall in the dark
arrested by the firm hand of a friend:
kin*

*in our human condition:
Divided. Imperfect. One.*

...Cassie MacDonald

*Cassie MacDonald, a member of Sacred Heart Parish,
Camden, compiles the calendar for Equal wRites.*

LET'S TALK: THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

ABOUT THIS DIALOGUE

by Peg Murphy

The ordinations on the Danube these past two years and Rev. Drs. Raming and Mueller's visit to Philadelphia in May inspired some serious thinking about where the women's ordination movement is and where it should be going. It is, of course, a very large project and cannot be completed by one person or even the thirteen regulars at core committee meetings. The questions that are before us need a wide-ranging dialogue. They need all of the combined intelligence, experience, skills and abilities of those who support the cause. What is presented here are my thoughts on the subject and lots of questions. We invite your input to refocus the questions, perhaps, and formulate answers. Call us, write us, e-mail us, or come to a core committee meeting. This is a critical moment in our history. We need your active engagement.

The ordinations of the Danube Seven last year and of two women bishops this past summer were the latest in a long history of ordinations of women to priesthood in modern times. Prior to these Austrian ordinations, many Catholic women were already ordained. Some had been called and ordained by their communities of faith; others had been ordained in other denominations. The difference

between these and the Austrian ordinations is that it is uncontested that the bishops performing the Austrian rites were in the line of succession from the apostle Peter. Rome excommunicated the women, claiming the ordinations were invalid, using the same arguments that were refuted by its own theologians decades ago. It noted that one of the bishops who ordained the Danube Seven was schismatic but that fact does not invalidate the ordinations. Though we don't know the names of the bishops who ordained the two female bishops, it has been confirmed that they are in communion with Rome. Their names are being kept secret to avoid retaliation from the Vatican.

For women called to ordination by their communities of faith or ordained in other Christian denominations, the question of apostolic succession is likely of little importance. The church dismisses such ordinations as ineffectual and bars these women from functioning as priests within the institutional church. Thus, apart from those who are practicing ministers in other denominations, many support themselves and their families with other salaried work and function as priests in their downtime. Indeed, some have to keep their ordinations quiet in their places of work for fear of retaliation

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PERSONAL WITNESS THE KEY

by Cecelia Johnson

I accept your invitation to a dialogue, (*Equal wRites*, Sept. 03). While I am as confused and angry as anyone about the dead wood in the Catholic church, I have been graced with good fellowship in a New Jersey parish a mere 20 minutes from my home in Philly. Good liturgy and education are priorities there.

If there is a master plan for new life in the church, it eludes me. Many of us thought Vatican II was the launching pad for liftoff. But heck, I have tried to bring about meaningful change. Today,

the plan for me is personal witness.

Education of the laity will bring a new church into being. Growth in community based on Scripture and service is the seedling of the new church. An educated laity and new forms of ministry can bring a collapsed church together. Let's be prepared because of what Peter Steinfelds writes in *A People Adrift*.

"Catholicism has indeed barricaded itself into so intricately constructed an edifice that one could not remove a stone here or an arch there without imperiling the whole structure." (p.37)

Cecelia Johnson is a published poet and author of three books.

AWAKENING CHRISTIAN WOMEN: A PLAN OF ACTION

by Marge Sexton

The time has arrived for the "average" practicing Catholic to be challenged by the prophetic vision of the Women's Ordination Conference. Until now, even though polls have shown that the majority of Catholics believe in the ordination of women, most church-going Catholics have not taken the issue seriously enough to support it vigorously.

The Women's Ordination Conference should shift its focus toward planning a campaign that would educate Catholics about gender inequality in our church and awaken them from the slumber of indifference.

Protests and prayer vigils, billboards and letters to the editor have not worked. These actions underscore our marginalized status: while men gather inside for the "real" work of the church, the powerless women of the WOC plead, cry and pray for power that men do not intend to share. Yes, we should continue to protest, pray and lobby, but we must enlist more supporters and truly believe that we can dramatically change the hierarchal structure. Lacking support and momentum, we are only a minor fringe group unable to attract minimal media attention. Should another generation of women

resign themselves to futile prayerful protest outside the cathedral?

We must develop new, creative ideas to earn the support of mainstream Catholics. I propose two distinct, although inherently related, ideas for consideration.

The first is that we plan methods to educate Catholics about the unequal treatment of girls in our church and the empowerment of our young Catholic sisters-in-faith. In October the Vatican directed that bishops cannot require priests to use female altar servers. The recent leak of a document from Rome which stated that the use of girls as altar servers is a liturgical abuse sends a clear message to priests worldwide. The message is that the church wants to prevent girls from serving on the altar, as the hierarchy considers them unfit to do so.

To counteract this outdated attitude, we should address the issue of female altar servers. Even the most conservative Catholic is moved at the sight of her daughter serving at the altar, yet some parishes blatantly discriminate against female altar servers, relegating them to secondary roles. The church does not encourage priests to embrace gender equality, and as the majority of priests are older men who are set in their ways, they, too, should be approached directly but gently and invited to change their ways. Even so-called priests of integrity (supported by such groups as Voice of the Faithful) work and pray for more vocations for boys. They mentor boys, but not girls, in (male) priestly ways. As women, we

must take up the task of mentoring ten- to sixteen-year-old girls, the future women of the church.

We will need patience and time to accomplish this. Time passes whether we act or not, so we must begin now, trusting that our efforts will succeed in the future. Many parishes have token altar girl representation while reserving the best liturgical opportunities for boys. Pastors and parishioners, satisfied with such token change, offer it as proof of new opportunity for girls.

An ideal place to begin is in dialogue with female altar servers and their mothers about their parish experience and the distribution of altar server tasks at their parishes. Many mothers, inordinately grateful that their daughters are permitted to serve in a way denied them, may not wish to be seen as troublemakers for fear their girls will suffer. For this reason, we should avoid confrontation and approach these women with genuine love, respect and, above all, sensitivity. Further, they deserve to know that a Vatican document is circulating that forbids altar girls (except in unusual circumstances) and we need to be prepared to provide them with the necessary documentation.

The next approach for consideration is a new look at the issue of the church's lost gifts: the service of the countless Catholic women who have left the church to be ordained in other denominations. When God called, they could not permit an institution to prohibit their service, thus stifling the work of the Spirit. Has anyone ever attempted to ask those women about their call to ordination? Did they leave the church in frustration with its treatment of women or did they leave in response to their call, or both? How outrageous that we passively allow our sisters to leave! While we protested outside the seminary, they answered the call and began ministering to communities who welcome and celebrate their gifts. We cannot allow today's girls to walk away, as so many have, into the arms of churches that will honor their call to serve.

The Women's Ordination Conference should commission a national, qualitative study of formerly Catholic women ordained in other churches to survey them about the nature of their call to service, their decision to join other denominations, and their work. Such a survey would document the loss of women's service when there is a critical dearth of men in priestly vocations.

WOC should engage marketing or social scientists skilled in designing surveys and analyzing them. There may even be grants available through private foundations to help fund such research. From the results of these questionnaires, public relations and advertising professionals can extrapolate a positive, easily understandable message to convey to practicing Catholics. We must advertise the fact that the Catholic church has lost hundreds, even thousands of women to other traditions, a tragic loss for us and a gain to other denominations.

If women relinquish the role of victim, band together, and plan a course of action, we can win ordination of women within the tradition—even sooner than we expect. First we must communicate our message. Imagine a billboard depicting a woman holding up bread and wine, announcing:

Sophia Romano, Pastor
St. Anne's Episcopal Church
One of 5,320 former Catholic women
Who left to be ordained in other traditions

Sponsored by the Women's Ordination Conference

Wouldn't that be a powerful image?

Marguerite Sexton is founder and president of Journeys of the Heart, a nondenominational ministry service which provides legal wedding and sacred union ceremonies and other ritual for unfiliated people. She is also an active member of St. Vincent dePaul Parish in Germantown.

SEPA/WOC GRANT SUPPORTS JANUARY SNAP CONFERENCE

Through the generosity of Donna Gentile O'Donnell and the Franklin Health Trust, SEPA/WOC is helping support the Mid-Atlantic Regional Meeting of the Survivors' Network of those Abused by Priests—SNAP—on January 31, 2004, at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church. We encourage all WOC members and supporters to attend for our own information and to stand in solidarity with those abused.


"Holding the Criminals Accountable" is the theme of the meeting. SNAP says, "One of the best and most healing gifts we can give to all survivors is to do whatever is needed to change the laws and get the justice system to do a better job at investigating the crimes of clergy sexual assault and prosecuting the perpetrators." In addition to the keynote speaker, unannounced at deadline, a panel will address building alliances with groups who share similar legislative and judicial agendas. Other ways of holding the criminals accountable will also be explored, especially those that promote healing. "Breaking the silence on a personal level" is "as crucial to individual survivors as changing the legislative and judicial system." A trauma therapist will respond to survivor stories, and support/discussion groups for survivors, allies, and others will conclude the day.

For details and registration information about this full-day meeting, consult SNAP's web site <http://www.snapphila.org> or contact Marie at 215-424-4524. The \$15 fee includes a Philly-style lunch.

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For information about women's ordination, and updated information about SEPA/WOC activities, check out our website: www.sepawoc.org.

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IN THE NAME OF BARBARA...

by Mary Byrne Hoffmann

This was the summer that two Catholic women priests were ordained bishops on the Danube. The summer that the Episcopal church threatened to fall apart over gay clerics and same-sex marriages. The summer that the Supreme Court struck down its own prior ruling limiting consensual sex between adults. The summer that priests in Milwaukee began to unravel the priesthood as we know it with a challenge to celibacy. It was also the summer that my friend, Barbara, died in a bright yellow cabin deep in the Catskill mountains.

For over ten years, Barbara fought cancer by many names. She won a lot of battles. Came back out of that corner ring, drained and depleted by chemo and transplants, ready an' rarin' to get on with life—one round at a time. There were times, you won't be surprised, when she wanted to just go. No mas! Lights out. Set me free. But, in the end, it wasn't her call. That much she knew and she obeyed.

Two days before my husband and I were setting off for vacation (including a stop in Rochester for the FCM Conference), Barbara left a message on my voice mail. "Hey, I've been thinking about you. Things have changed around here. I'd love to talk to you." When she said the word "changed" there was a slight hip-hop laugh in her voice. The layering of laughter over some of the most horrific facts of life was Barbara's trademark recipe for survival. It was a social commentary in itself. Just enough cynicism to make you think. Just enough chortle to caution you not to think too much. Take it seriously, her laughter said, but get over it because there is something else right behind that. But this time the laughter was too sad. Barbara was calling to tell me that she was dying—finally.

I imagine that right next to the moment when it becomes imminently clear that you are indeed going to die is the moment when you know that someone you love is in her last days. There is no way to prepare for the utter starkness. Everything you know about life, everything you know period, compresses into this one tiny space from which there is no escape. A dot in the universe that has had your name on it since day one. It's the kernel of our truth. And in that kernel, there is absolutely no room. Not for negotiation. Not for tantrums. Not for tears. Not for comfort. Ain't nothing happening in those first moments except this. You've hit the wall. Death. Boom! The truth is we die.

As I was wallowing in morbidity, it was clear that Barbara was beyond that first moment. When I called her, she was snuggling into the kernel and waiting. She'd had her tantrums and tears to no avail. One month earlier, the doctors had given her two months and Barbara was now at peace with the ultimatum. No longer living life burdened by the specter of the inevitable end, she knew a freedom that I envied. Why was I surprised that this woman who made me laugh from places I never knew existed was now making me laugh about dying?

A few days later, I visited Barbara on the way upstate. We sat on her screened-in porch overlooking the lush green hills of the Catskills. Barbara, who from her artist's soul had always prepared something humble to look and taste exquisite served only a pitcher of cold water that afternoon. Even then, more so now, as I resurrect that day over and over again, I am comforted by the image of us sitting there surrounded by an abundance of all things living—the dogs playing in the yard, the birdsong in the background of our laughter, a pitcher of water on the table. One week later, Barbara

would refuse even the water, letting us know that she was moving on. But on that summer's day she was still there, pouring water, talking about death.

My friend, the itinerant photographer, left me one last picture of her. She is sitting on the porch, frail and balding. Her voice is fading and scratchy. She does not want to talk about good times or old friends, about the reckless lives we led in tandem, the endless laughs we shared regardless. They are already part of another realm. She is completely immersed in the present moment of dying and in doing so is radiantly alive. She is telling me that it will be hard to leave the night sky. Every time she looks up at the stars, she wonders if this is her last time. She is counting stars, not days. She is making art.

A few days after Barbara died I went to the seashore that she loved to just sit with my friend. I remembered that right before she died, she had spoken of her regrets, the things she would never do, the person she would never be. She was not a famous photographer. She had never married or had children. She spent the last 20 years selling art prints on college campuses for six months a year and then retiring to live simply on the land she loved for the rest of her year. It was a very humble life. But it was her life and she lived every moment of it. She was a great friend. As my son's godmother, she caught my son when he fell through my net. She left a gallery of photos to friends and family that bear witness to her brave soul. And in her laughter, she was the finest of lovers. Every time we convulsed in laughter, I fell in love with life all over again. That is her gift, our joy, her legacy. Nothing was lacking. In her insistence on being exactly who she was and nothing more, she lived her life to the fullest.

In this summer of so much controversy over how people love one another in a world wracked with the violence of hate, I think of what Barbara's life has taught me. That what you leave behind as hope is the courage of your attempt to be who you are and to pass along what you have been given. I see through her laughter to the other side of our insane need to legislate love in order to contain life's throbbings. Her fearless heart illuminates the cold fear of those who are daunted by the lustiness of living. Blindsighted by the very things that they have so mercilessly repressed for millennia, the church patriarchs have mistaken sex for love. The twisted irony of such repression is almost funny. Certainly crazy. Mostly, immensely sad for the suffering it continues to cause, for the joy it steals from lovers.

In the light of Barbara's death, it seems so simple. It really is about love after all. And love will not be constrained by fear. In the end, it will out itself. Faithful women will answer the call to be priests. Committed people of homosexual orientation will answer the call to union. Courageous priests will answer the call to unloose love's bindings. Because it is love and love alone that beckons us forth to be who we are born to be. If we do not answer the call, we are making a mockery of the Lover who created us. Barbara's intrinsic obedience to live her life to the fullest in face of great odds is all I have to go on right now. It has sobered me up to the only truth that matters: We are wired not to miss out on our lives and are obligated to love in the face of any fear—within or without—that thwarts that divine-bestowed destiny. The only response to the "no" of the love legislators is the resounding "yes!" of the lovers—all of us.

Barbara Blake Thompson died on August 1, 2003 at the age of 49 surrounded by her mountains and family.

NATIONAL COR GROUPS MOVING AHEAD

by Regina Bannan

Last year, Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference (SEPA/WOC) became a member of national Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR). Being in touch twice a year with leaders of reform groups in this country and abroad is exhilarating for me. I hope to bring someone else from SEPA/WOC's core committee at the end of April next year. But I thought I'd report the highlights from November's meeting in Milwaukee, here.

One benefit is the in-service training that is always part of the meeting, though this time it was conceived as a dialogue. We heard from the Survivors' Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) founder, Barbara Blaine, Milwaukee leader Peter Isely, and Wisconsin leaders of SNAP and Voice of the Faithful (VOTF). The day of the meeting the new Archbishop of Milwaukee, Terrence Dolan, announced changes to the procedures about sex abuse, so it was a very exciting time to be there.

SNAP explained to us its position of making public all names of perpetrators; the group feels it begins the process of healing for the victims and brings other victims out. SNAP focuses on the "child or vulnerable adult" and reported on one study that found only 2% of accusations to be false. I did not get the details on that, unfortunately. Isely, especially, argues that, for the good of the profession, all guilty members need to be identified. Like other "guardian professions," priests need "unimpeded access" to clients, which depends on public trust based on the truth. "Is my priest offending?" is a rational response," he argues. Knowing for sure is crucial to the health of the church. Because bishops have the most power, "they have the most moves," and should ensure responsible transparency. Other guardian professions have developed procedures for responding to accusations, sometimes with private investigation but always with public results, to preserve professional standards.

COR also heard from Sue Archibald, president, and Honey Weiss, southern regional coordinator, for The Linkup. This ecumenical organization assists "victims/survivors/thrivers" of clergy sexual abuse, including at the Linkup Farm, a resource and recovery facility being developed outside of Louisville, Kentucky. Weiss gave examples of abuse and the counseling they provide in the Mobile diocese. The Linkup also calls churches to accountability. The group tends to get support from the churches because they dialogue with them in the hopes of educating the leadership to their responsibility. Archibald, an Air Force veteran and survivor of abuse by a military chaplain, concluded her presentation by saying that the problem in the Roman Catholic church would not be solved until women are ordained, celibacy is optional, and laity participate in governance. Both women are Catholic.

Chris Schenk of FutureChurch discussed women deacons; the Vatican document seems to be lost right now, perhaps a good sign that its distortions of history have been recognized. FutureChurch and CTA have been organizing national action around the optional celibacy issue in response to the Milwaukee priests; some of the women behind that were at the meeting. Chris also reported on the various changes being made and resisted in response to GIRM, an appropriate acronym (slightly rearranged) for the new liturgical directives.

"Seven Sacraments for all" was the way the immediate past president of Dignity, Pat McArron, argued for gay marriage; that certainly resonates with my WOC soul. In response to the CDF attack on "homosexual unions" this summer, new president Sam Sinnett presented a resolution for COR to ask bishops to stop preaching

Representatives from several of the groups (including SEPA/WOC) of COR/Philadelphia-Catholic Organizations for Renewal—stood with signs in silent witness outside the Cathedral of Ss. Peter and Paul during the procession of archdiocesan seminarians and priests and visiting bishops and cardinals which, accompanied by much fanfare,

preceded the October 7 installation of Archbishop Justin Rigali of Philadelphia.



against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) rights for fear that they encourage violence.

Bishop Peter Hickman of the Communion of Ecumenical Catholic Communities was enlightening about the various "Old Catholic" churches in the US; his group of twelve churches is applying for membership in COR. Jim Callan and Mary Ramerman of Spiritus Christi reported on the changes and continuities on their fifth anniversary. Some ministries have been spun off, some continue at Spiritus, and a few remain at Corpus Christi. Their membership is up from 1100 to 1500 and their contributions continue to be remarkable at \$13,000 a week, of which \$2000 goes right away to the poor.

Maureen Fiedler and Anthony Padovano reviewed the history of the international church renewal movements, leading up to current efforts to prepare for the inevitable conclave. John Sheehan and Mary Lou Hartman of ARCC presented a request to call for a new General Council. "Prevent the transmission of death, not the transmission of life" was the slogan Jon O'Brien used in describing a sign-on urging the Vatican to change its position on distribution of condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS.

National WOC had some changes to announce. In order to be good stewards of the donations WOC receives, the group is consolidating offices, and all WOC business operations will be moved to Fairfax, VA. Genevieve Chavez will step down as national coordinator and Joy Barnes will step up. Genevieve will be greatly missed, but she has done remarkably well at focusing the energy and mission of WOC. Joy can assume leadership with a sense of direction as well as with the experience she's gained with Genevieve and Erin Hanley, who left this summer for personal reasons. Joy is ready to move beyond the challenges of the Young Feminist Network and the grassroots work she's been doing for the last three years. I have immense confidence in her and know she'll be able to continue to draw young women to our cause.

Regina Bannan teaches at Temple University and works on the SEPA/WOC core committee, Philadelphia COR, and CCS.

SEPA/WOC AMONG SIGNERS OF "DEAR CARDINAL" LETTER

SEPA/WOC was among the 14 groups and 710 lay Catholics, nuns, and priests who signed the following open letter to Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican-based Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which was sponsored by Catholics Speak Out, a church reform program of the Quixote Center of Brentwood, MD.

The letter, "A Statement of Solidarity and Support for Women Called to Ordained Ministry," was printed as a paid ad in the Nov. issue of the *National Catholic Reporter*.

The text of the letter follows:

Dear Cardinal Ratzinger,

For at least forty years women have been knocking on the closed doors of the Vatican fathers, seeking full equality in the beloved community as disciples of Jesus the Christ. During this time, every argument put forward in opposition to the ordination of women—theological, traditional, and modern—has been refuted.

Today we, the People of God, understand—just as our spiritual forebears in the early church understood—Paul's teaching of the radical equality of all the baptized before God. The lowliest of the lowly, slaves and women, flocked into the early church understanding that no matter how they were trampled upon in this world, God loves each one of us equally and without favor, and bestows gifts upon us without regard to class, race, or gender.

We understand that the representation of Christ comes about not by reason of gender but solely by the inner change of the person by the power of the Spirit. We believe that the future of the Roman Catholic Church is firmly bound by the question of women's treatment in the church. Thus, we speak out as a matter of conscience.

We recognize the full equality of women within the church. We affirm that the Holy Spirit may call whom She will. We affirm our sisters who are called to serve the church as ordained ministers. And we declare that the seven women ordained on June 29, 2002, are our sisters in Christ, called by the Holy Spirit. We do not—we cannot—accept their excommunication.

We urge you, dear brother, to be reconciled with God's Spirit of love that seeks to communicate not excommunicate. Like the woman before the unjust judge (Lk. 18, 1-8) God's Spirit is summoning our faith community to lay aside the structural sin of discrimination and to welcome women to the fullness of ministry. We invite you to join with us and share the welcoming.

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS: LESSON OF THE CTA CONFERENCE

by Regina Bannan

Everything was perfect at the Call to Action/Philadelphia Conference on Saturday, October 18, at Collenbrook United Church in Drexel Hill. Larry DiPaul and Judy Heffernan wove the eucharistic liturgy throughout the morning. Linda Panetta of School of the Americas Watch/Northeast-based at the Jean Donovan House in Overbrook—reflected on her work and the witness of the church against political violence. Jim Plataras led the singing, which was so robust that main speaker Robert McClory began his remarks by saying that, based on the singing, he thought he was in a Protestant church—which was just a sample of his subtle wit and thoughtful presentation. His analysis of the structural aspects of Paul's ministry clarified the epistle, *Galatians 2*. Read it if you haven't recently. Paul is absolutely certain of his mission even though he is an outsider, so sure he confronts Peter to his face and eventually is recognized as an equal apostle—as I now will be reminded when-

ever we are outside our own cathedral basilica. Insider and outsider, equally honored.

McClory, a journalist and long-time national CTA activist, detailed why he stayed in the church as a faithful dissenter for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual reasons. He buttressed his rational advice to church leaders with superb examples, including the refusal to ordain women. Guess which one he used our cause to illustrate: "You cannot settle a dispute by repeating one side of an argument." "You cannot ignore an idea whose time has come." "You cannot insist on the absolute rightness of present teaching when you've been wrong about similar issues in the past." "You cannot issue definitive teaching and ignore the experience of the people involved." McClory encouraged all Catholics who dissent to find a group that nourishes them, regularly, as well as to read, pray, serve and act.

To that end, CTA/Philadelphia is planning a follow-up meeting on Saturday, December 13, at Collenbrook United for all interested in taking further steps. Contact CTAPhiladelphia@comcast.net to be e-mailed information; everyone is welcome. Or phone 215-345-1176.

A LITTLE HOUSEKEEPING OF OUR OWN

If you share our commitment to the cause of women's ordination, and could spare a few hours every now and then, we could use your help!

Equal wRites currently needs an advertising manager to solicit and coordinate paid ads; as well as writers, typists and proofreaders.

Interested? Call editor Karen Lenz at 215 232-7823.

We would like to thank Magda Eliasova for hours of technical support for this issue of *Equal wRites*, and Cassie MacDonald for continuing to assemble the calendar.

Winter Schedule Spirituality and Healing Workshops

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compiled by staff

DID YOU KNOW?

SOUNDS GOOD

Can you guess the author of the following quote? (Answer appears at the end of this article on p. 11.)

"The war of the powerful against the weak has today more than ever before, created profound divisions between rich and poor. The poor are legion! Within an unjust economic environment—marked by significant structural inequities, the situation of the marginalized is daily becoming worse...It is above all the poor, the young and refugees who are the victims of these dramatic cases of inequality...In addition, women in many places are demeaned in their dignity as persons, victims of a hedonistic and materialistic culture."

Or of men.

JAMES PATRICK SHANNON, RIP

Former Bishop James Patrick Shannon, whose meteoric rise to the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church ended when he withdrew from the active ministry in 1968 in reaction to the anti-birth control encyclical of Pope Paul VI, died this past summer at age 82.

Shannon, who was the spokesman for US bishops during the final session of Vatican II, spoke out freely on issues like civil rights and the Vietnam War, and continued to offer pastoral counseling services to hundreds up until his death.

His 1998 autobiography, *A Reluctant Dissenter*, was reviewed in *Equal wRites* a year or two ago, and we promptly received a warm and supportive note thanking us for the review. Shannon is, to our knowledge, the only author reviewed in these pages who ever said thank you. May he rest in peace.

(thanks to *Bread Rising*, October, 2003)

DANCING OR ALTERNATIVE INSTRUMENTATION

From a St. Vincent Parish group e-mail communication—by WOC friend Barbara Bekker—this response to a news article about the new liturgical guidelines being drafted by the Vatican to crack down on abuses in the mass including the use of altar girls excepting when an unspecified "just pastoral cause" exists; lay homilists usurping the role of priests; and practices such as dancing and applause during mass:

"I think you are getting too worked up over the morning headline of 'Vatican May Frown on Altar Girls, Other 'Abuses.' First of all, one sign of impairment is not even knowing whether you are frowning or NOT, and I think this is certainly symptomatic. Perhaps we should withhold judgement or diagnosis until the Vatican can make this fundamental decision regarding its affect.

It strikes me that linguistics is at the center of the controversy, and the key issue is whether we are employing the appropriate words to convey to the Vatican who our liturgical players and liturgical customs are in their own euphemisms. Based on recent history, they have had far more experience with 'altar boys,' for example, so perhaps we rename our opposite sex servers 'neophytes,' 'concubines,' or something similar that the Vatican can better relate to...

Of course we should concede that dancers have no place in our liturgical celebrations and profess that we have none. As of today, I suggest they become members of the choir who make music with their feet. Their movement is simply alternative instrumentation.

Applause is not an issue either as long as we explain it as rhyth-

mic self-gratification which afflicts people who have been in church 90 minutes and have an anticipatory glad-handing response or tell them it's tics.

Finally, instead of maybe frowning on altar servers and other abuses, I think the Vatican needs to smile more!

A RIGHT TO THE SACRAMENTS

"A church without sacraments is not the Catholic Church. History will not treat kindly those bishop-administrators who have a positive knack for spending down their authority on non-sacramental rites. Such actions only widen the gulf of confidence that cracked open like an earthquake fissure between them and their people after their misjudgments in handling the sex abuse problems of the clergy. Many bishops are, of course, fundamentally administrators, very nice men but unable even to make the connection that should be easy for them. Canon law says that Catholics have 'a right to the sacraments (c. 213).' **How could they not understand that they have an obligation to provide them?**

Their ill-informed decisions will one day be regarded as on a par with Marie Antoinette's infamous 'Let them eat cake.'

(from an article by Eugene Kennedy in the *Prairie Messenger*, Sept 5, 2003)

WEB SITES

EDUCATION FOR JUSTICE

A new web site sponsored by the Center of Concern offers subscribers a number of resources and downloadable educational materials related to Catholic social teaching. For more information, www.educationforjustice.org.

FOR WOMEN CALLED

A new web site sponsored by Bishop Sharon Hurt of the Contemporary Catholic Church seeks to provide information and guidance on ministerial options for women who are called to ordination.

Candidates contacting the site will be screened and if appropriate, provided with contact information for jurisdictions and bishops willing to test their vocation. Diversity will be encouraged

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DID YOU KNOW

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within the legitimate bounds of the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church," according to the group.

The address of the Mary Magdalen the Apostle Catholic web site is: www.catholic-women-priests.org.

MEN WHO WEAR DRESSES

Long-time women's ordination activist Marge Sexton, of Hollywood, PA, wrote the following letter to the editor of *Metro*, the Septa newspaper, in response to a column by Thom Nickels on Cardinal Rigali and the church's attitude toward homosexuality:

"I believe that the Catholic church is currently in a state of grave sin with regard to its treatment of gay people and its refusal to ordain women. I will continue to hold Cardinal Rigali in my prayers as I find it ironic that men who wear dresses believe that gay people and women are inferior to them!"

Her correspondence was printed in the "letters" section of *Metro*.

FEMALE CONFESSORS?

British Bishop Vincent Malone has gone on record suggesting that Roman Catholic women be authorized to administer the sacrament of reconciliation—not primarily because of the current shortage of priests, but in order that penitents have a choice between a male and female confessor, according to an article by Benedictine Andrew Britz in the Sept. 10, 2003 *Prairie Messenger*.

"It is not difficult to conceive of circumstances in which a female minister could more appropriately than a man be the receiver of the humble confession that opens a soul to hear the glad words of the Lord's forgiveness," Bishop Malone wrote.

(from *Bread Rising*, October, 2003)

JUST ASK FOR DAISY

The following singles ad appeared in the *Atlanta Journal*:

SINGLE BLACK FEMALE seeks male companionship, ethnicity unimportant. I'm a very good looking girl who LOVES to play. I love long walks in the woods, riding in your pickup truck, hunting, camping and fishing trips, cozy winter nights lying by the fire. Candlelight dinners will have me eating out of your hand. Rub me the right way and watch me respond. I'll be at the front door when you get home from work, wearing only what nature gave me. Kiss me and I'm yours. Call (404) 875-6420 and ask for Daisy.

Over 15,000 men found themselves talking to the Atlanta Humane Society about an eight-week old black Labrador retriever.

Men are so easy.

WE AIN'T GOT NOTHING ON THOSE LUTHERANS

The president and dean of chapel at Lutheran Valparaiso University and three Missouri Synod Lutheran pastors have expressed "sincere repentance;" for their parts in an interfaith September 11 memorial prayer service.

The five were admonished by the denomination's Praesidium, a governing group which includes the synod's president and five vice-presidents, for offenses including "syncretism," or participating in a worship service in which non-Christians take a leading role, and "modalism," an ancient heresy that says the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but simply three modes by which God reveals Himself.

(From the Nov. 10 2003 *LCMS News*)

Wonder what their take is on dancing and applause?

RE: NOT SPEAKING ILL OF THE DEAD

The family of a recently-deceased 80-year-old man is suing both the priest who said his funeral mass and the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico, charging that the language Father Scott Mansfield used defamed the deceased.

According to the AP, the priest, a former disc jockey who was known as "Hubby Dean," said: "The Lord vomited people like Ben out of his mouth to hell." The priest has been transferred to another parish.

(*High County News*, Sept. 1, 2003)

Some of us are diplomats; others are straight talkers.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER (WHO ARE WE TO TALK?)

Rev. Wiera Jelinek of the Reformed Evangelical Church of Poland was recently appointed a pastor, the first in the country's Protestant minority—150 years after the first Reformed woman was ordained in the United States, according to Ecumenical News International. "I know reactions will be mixed, since there are positive and negative voices everywhere, but I hope women especially will approve," she said, "As for the effect on ecumenical relations, I won't be able to say for up to another 20 years."

Tune in right here for that update.

PRIESTLY EXCHANGE

In 1998, according to a Rutgers University report, out of 14,188 Episcopal priests in the United States, 536 were former Roman Catholic priests. On the other hand, according to an article in the *Davenport Messenger*, the ranks of Roman Catholic clergy included 100 former (married) Episcopalian clergy.

(from *Focus on Future Church*, summer, 2003)

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BELGIAN CARDINAL: NO REASON WHY NOT

"Two of my substitutes are women. I therefore cannot see why a woman could not lead a Catholic congregation." Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Brussels, is quoted as saying in the *Katholiek Nederland* website.

"Today the power structure within the church is male, but it does not necessarily have to remain that way," the cardinal said, adding, "Even if the church is clearly male in its composition...we do not refer to 'Our Father the church,' but to 'Our Mother the church.'"

AFFRONT TO MARRIAGE

The following editorial reaction to the decision of the Episcopal Church USA to approve the appointment of an openly gay man, Rev. Gene Robinson, as bishop of New Hampshire, was printed in the August 16 edition of the *Los Angeles Times*:

"The actions taken by the New Hampshire Episcopalians are an affront to Christians everywhere. I am just thankful that the church's founder, Henry VIII and his wife Catherine of Aragon, his wife Anne Boleyn, his wife Jane Seymour, his wife Anne of Cleves, his wife Katherine Howard and his wife Catherine Parr are no longer here to suffer through this assault on our traditional Christian marriage.

(Thanks to Eileen DiFranco for passing this along.)

•The author of the quotation in the first "Did You Know" item is Pope John II in "Pastores Gregis," an apostolic exhortation to bishops, delivered on Oct. 16, 2003.

CALENDAR, CARDS DEPICT SCENES OF WOMEN IN EARLY CHURCH

The 2004 calendar, "The Archaeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church 300-1500 AD," of archaeologist and biblical scholar Dorothy Irvin, with color photographs of ancient depictions of women deacons, priests, and bishops, is now available, along with notecards, a new-this-year Christmas card, and book-marks.

Dr. Irvin says: "I am convinced that our ancestors in the faith—both men and women—left these records behind not only to express their belief and practice in that moment, but also to encourage us by leaving doors open for solutions we might desperately need in later centuries. My goal is to make our neglected history as ordained women more widely known."

The calendar, available in English, French and German, includes a special bibliography for each picture which is \$10. For information: irvincalendar@hotmail.com or write Dorothy Irvin, 1360 University Ave. #463, St. Paul, MN 55104

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About This Dialogue

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from the institutional church.

For some women called to ordination, being ordained by a bishop in the line of succession from Peter is very important. Ordination by such a bishop has been the mechanism the church has used to indicate who is or is not a member of the family. Once ordained in this manner, if a priest does not continue to be obedient to Rome, he remains part of the family—just positioned outside the door, awaiting either his repentance or Rome's change of heart.

Since Rome did not take issue with the credentials of the bishops who ordained the women priests (saying only that they were schismatic) or the manner in which the women were ordained, arguably the Austrian women priests and bishops are members of the family (alas still waiting outside the door).

When attempting to change what is, it is easy to be paralyzed by the sheer number of options and tasks that appear before you. Sometimes you have to back off and figure out where best to expend your limited energy and resources.

In the women's ordination movement, some feel it is very important to continue to work towards changing the institutional church's position on this issue. Some view ordaining women as a matter of justice; some want to set the record straight and refute the theological underpinnings of the church's position that boils down to viewing women as defective males who do not receive the same type baptism as men. Some believe our mission to advance the rights of women to ordination and to full parity in decision-making in the church is part of the larger task of reforming and/or resuscitating a moribund institution that is crumbling from within, unable to renew itself by facing up to its errors. For these members, nudging the church to allow ordained women in the door is in line with their overall goal of renewal.

In addition to issues of equity and the need to confront the heretical teachings regarding the nature of women, there are practical implications for seeking acceptance of ordained women within the institution. For women priests themselves, acceptance by the institution opens a myriad of ministries and opportunities to do what they are called to do, i.e., serve spiritual needs of people in a spiritually starved society. Acceptance by the institution would allow them to function in their ministries with the staff, facilities, resources and salaries suitable to their work.

Further, we are a sacramental church and hardly a week goes by that there is not some news story about the critical lack of male priests and the consequent lack of availability of sacraments. There are women already educated (some already performing the work of priests) who could fill that need. Perhaps it is time to push harder for acceptance of female priests because the faithful are not being spiritually fed. However, whether there is or is not an adequate number of male priests, is not the fundamental consideration in the question of whether women should be ordained.

What is the key to galvanizing the laity to push for the acceptance of women priests? Probably the most powerful way to get women priests accepted or, rather, demanded, is to give Catholics the opportunities to see women priests in action. Many Catholics have never (or hardly ever) experienced a liturgy that was thoughtfully prepared, celebrated from the heart and truly communal. The feminine aspects of God have been so lacking in our church that what passes for liturgy is often without spirit and without heart.

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women could offer Eucharistic celebrations on a regular basis, there is a good chance that Catholics would begin to see what is possible—liturgy that feeds the soul and inspires us to live better lives. But where and how do we start? Do we have the resources to establish sites that can be staffed by women priests for weekly or monthly or quarterly liturgies? Should we make that a priority?

The Women's Ordination Conference has worked for decades to educate and energize the laity around this issue, yet the vast majority of Catholics remains quiescent—unwilling to speak out on behalf of equal opportunities in ministry for people of both sexes, much less demand reform on a broader scale. How do we make Catholics understand the importance of this issue to the health and future of the church and society?

We now have two women bishops ordained in the line of succession from Peter, who can validly (though from the institution's view, illicitly) ordain other women. We have small faith communities who have called and ordained women priests. We have women with master's and doctoral degrees in theology who could be ordained in any of the ways described above if they so choose. At this point in our history, the tradition of ordination for women (that was in place in the early church until the time the church was Romanized) has been restored. This is so even if we have to wait awhile for Rome to recognize the legality of these ordinations. However, this newly restored tradition needs nurturing.

How do we nurture the restored tradition? Women who are called to ordination must be identified, guided, given assistance in discerning the nature of their call and helped financially with any additional education or training that may be required. Just getting the word out and educating women regarding the possibilities will be a struggle as we are a small and poorly funded group. Once identified, then what? Guided to the type of ordination they desire. Then what? How do they get to function as priests? We live in a credentialed society. How do we set up or assist in the setting up of programs that ensure that women priests have the credentials they need to get the positions they want to do the work for which they were called? Will Catholics help us? Will foundations come to our aid? Can we get scholarships?

Changing from what is to what should be is never easy and the task can seem insurmountable. However, as we all know, change happens for ourselves individually and for large organizations through small things we do every day—as long as we make decisions with our goals in mind. What are the small things we can do to keep us pointed in the right direction?

We can and should support those women already called and ordained by communities of faith or in other denominations. We can create opportunities for them to minister. We can remember them when opportunities arise to lead liturgies or administer sacraments. We can defend them when they are attacked for following their vocations.

We can look at our publications and handouts and how we speak to people outside the movement about where we are. We have to decide if we are still supplicants, going hat in hand to the institutional church for permission to be ordained, or are we now able to stand up straight, have the courage of our convictions and acknowledge that we don't need that permission. Because of the women (and men) scholars who have created an irrefutable body of work

showing that there is no basis for denying women ordination, we know that permission has been denied for illegitimate reasons. We are on firm ground. Do we believe it? If so, let our thinking and our language reflect it.

There is a confluence of events that may assist us in our struggle: the lack of male priestly vocation, the child/adolescent abuse scandal, the abuse of power scandal, the disgust at the princely lifestyles of our prelates and pastors while parishes are being closed. Is the Holy Spirit bringing this stiff-necked bunch to their knees? Most thinking Catholics know this church has lost its way. The lack of women at all levels of working and decision-making in this church is in my view a major part of the problem. An institution denigrates half of the human race to its peril.

The Women's Ordination Conference, to its credit, has not linked the sex/power abuse scandals to the issue of female ordinations. In my view, it should not do so now. However, some Catholics, who had turned off their brains *vis a vis* the church, have begun thinking again. How do we educate them that the church's treatment of women is a central part of the problem? The debasement of women flows from the same erroneous notions of what it is to be human and sexual that have polluted the church's thinking for centuries and which must be changed. One of the most visible symptoms of this problem is the church's refusal to ordain women.

We can wait for change to happen or help it along. If we decide to help it along, we need to focus our energies and resources and use them to our best advantage since we don't have so many workers in the field and many of those workers are getting along in years. Somehow, we (or others) have to continue to do the spade-work with the institutional church. When (not if) it has its change of heart and acknowledges the full humanity of women as fully capable of imaging the Christ, if our work is fruitful, there will be women priests (lots of them) waiting just outside the door. My hope comes from the firm conviction that we are right and that the mistreatment of women in our church and elsewhere cannot be allowed. If this is God's work, it will prevail.

Peg Murphy is a retired attorney and educator and member of the SEPA/WOC core committee.

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Book Review

Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights. Rosetta E. Ross. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. Photographs. 283 pp. \$23.00

Reviewed by Regina Bannan

Sometimes you wonder why an editor chooses a book to be reviewed. Why this book, for example, for this audience? *Witnessing and Testifying* is a collective biography of a group of black women activists for civil rights, some of them historical: Sojourner Truth and Nannie Helen Burroughs; and some contemporary (at least to me): Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Way DeLee, Clara Muhammad, Diane Nash, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson. How can their stories relate to struggling for women's ordination in the Catholic church?

Well, you know Marian Ronan. First of all, she'd like white Catholics to become more familiar with African-Americans. How many of the above names do you recognize? Fannie Lou Hamer and Sojourner Truth? Clara Muhammad—Elijah Muhammad's wife, of the Nation of Islam? The others were hardly slouches, but they never became as well-known as their achievements warranted. Ross presents them as everyday women, but they are everyday just like us—enacting their convictions in their time without fame but, generally, with real effectiveness.

Secondly, Marian would want us to think about how Rosetta Ross focuses on the religious sources of these women's political activism. I suppose it's never happened to you, but lots of people put down American activists for women's ordination because we're influenced, supposedly, by feminism, or secular feminism, or radical feminism, or some other feminism alien to Catholic tradition. Could the radicalism of the Gospel not be a source?

As most of us did, these black women began with their faith and started questioning the injustice they saw around them. They were compelled to act from the depths of their souls. While some of them abandoned the churches that formed their values, they all spoke of these values with a fervor and intensity, a clarity and a moral purpose, that characterizes religion as much as politics.

I'll use one example, Diane Nash. I vaguely knew her name as a leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the early 1960s, but, until this book, I did not know she was Catholic. Ross argues that Nash conceived of segregation as sinful; her first exposure led her to this very Catholic position: "I came then to see the community in sin." She got involved with civil rights in 1959, as the movement was exploring nonviolent tactics. "I developed it (nonviolence) as a way of life," she said later. Not that she hung back: she confronted Martin Luther King when he wanted the Freedom Riders to stop (and they didn't) and she went to jail when she was pregnant after marrying another activist. She got the mayor of Nashville to integrate lunch counters by asking the bottom line question: "Do you feel it is wrong to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of their race or color?" She was always self-confident but sometimes afraid:

I made a deal with myself. I'd take five minutes during which I'd make a decision that I was going to either put the fear out of my mind and do what I had to do, or I was going to call off the sit-in and resign. I really just couldn't function effectively, as afraid as I was. And I found the courage to put the fear out of my mind and keep functioning.

Nash was a woman leader in a movement that had real conflicts over gender issues; her integrity was the source of her strength. Ross concludes her treatment of each of these women with an examination of their religious and moral principles. Nash, she argues, had an understanding that mutuality was required in all relationships. If it was missing, this "radical evil" could only be redeemed by "radical love"—and radical action. "The enemy is always attitudes, such as racism or sexism; political systems that are unjust; economic systems that are unjust," she believed—never a person.

Is this useful for us? In addition to those already discussed, there are eight other women portrayed in *Witnessing and Testifying* who share a religiously-based activism: charismatic leaders and community developers, mobilizers and organizers. Further, Ross uses four black women theologians, Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores S. Williams, Jacquelyn Grant, and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, to explain how the activists fit into the larger black religious tradition. While these sections of the book often felt somewhat forced to me, I appreciated learning more about this group of "first generation womanist scholars." All these black women present the central lesson of *Witnessing and Testifying*: to be inspired but not contained by the churches. Cooperation is good but not sufficient.

Regina Bannan teaches at Temple University and is a member of the SEPA/WOC Core Committee.

National Women's Ordination Conference Membership Application

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Day Phone _____ Evening Phone _____

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☐ \$40 Regular ☐ \$50 International ☐ \$20 Student/Low-Income

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Signature (Credit Card Payments Only)
WOC, P.O. Box 2693, Fairfax, VA 22031-0693

CALENDAR

Centers for Spiritual Growth and Support

The Franciscan Spiritual Center in Aston, PA, is a contemplative place of simple beauty, respectful of creation, and reflective of the Franciscan values of hospitality, mutuality and Gospel living. Programs are holistic, ecumenical, collaborative in nature and supportive of nonviolence. The center provides accommodations, space for spiritual direction, prayer, study, art and exercise on a beautiful, handicapped-accessible campus. Clare House offers a quiet place for contemplation, guided retreat weekends and directed prayer. For more information, call 610-527-4813 or e-mail fsc@osfphila.org.

Kirkridge is a retreat and study center rooted in Christ close to the earth where people of diverse backgrounds find community and experience the transforming power of the Spirit for personal wholeness, reconciliation and justice in the world. Retreatants understand that the life of faith requires not only action to transform the world toward greater shalom, but also the cultivation of a deep spirituality to sustain that compassionate action. Programs this winter include the Peacemaker Training Institute for young people, sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation; The Beloved Disciple: A Retreat for Gay and Bisexual Christian Men; and Praying With Icons: An Introduction to the Eastern Orthodox Tradition of Multidimensional Prayer. For more information, call 610-588-1793 or e-mail kirkridge@fast.net. Kirkridge is located at 2495 Fox Gap Road in Bangor, PA.

The Lourdes Wellness Center, a ministry of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegheny, New York, is sponsored by Our Lady of Lourdes Health System.. The Center hosts a wide variety of wellness workshops, offering programs on yoga, meditation, feng shui, hypnosis, aromatherapy, guided imagery for pain management, Feldenkrais method, reiki, shiatsu and reflexology. The Lourdes Wellness Center is on 900 Haddon Avenue, Suite 100 in Collingswood, NJ. Please call 856-869-3125 for information, or check the web site at www.lourdeswellnesscenter.org.

Mary's Vineyard welcomes people of all faiths. All those alienated from the traditions of their upbringing will be given opportunities to continue their search for meaning. Although primarily focused on the needs of women, the center will be open to all who have accepted the responsibility to form and care for future generations and who desire to share their burdens and joys with others. Join Mary's Vineyard this winter for meditation workshops the first Saturday of each month; Peace Prayers on the 11th of each month; Sat Sang teachings and meditation on the first Monday of each month, plus programs on the Liturgy of the Hours, Native American spirituality, and the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. For information about upcoming programs at Mary's Vineyard, please call 856-428-5495 or check the web site at www.marysvineyard.org. Mary's Vineyard is located at 1812 Haddonfield-Berlin Road in Cherry Hill, NJ.

At **Pendle Hill**, education is envisioned as the transforming of people and society. Programs offer the resources and time for integrated spiritual, intellectual and personal learning. Guests come to Pendle Hill to study, learn more about Quakerism, seek an experience of community living, deepen prayer and spiritual life, or discern a future direction. Come to Pendle Hill for one of their winter weeklong programs, including Playback Theatre: Community as a Process of Change; Ecology and the Soul; Meditation Weekend for Educators; An Introduction to Islamic Mysticism; Healing the Hurts of Racism; and Writing as Contemplative Practice. The Pendle Hill Forum presents Walking the Way of Peace with weekly lectures on Thursday evenings and retreats on themes of nonviolence and reconciliation. For more information on any Pendle Hill programs, call 610-566-4507 or check the web site at www.pendlehill.org. Pendle Hill is located at 338 Plush Mill Road in Wallingford, PA.

The **SSJ Center for Spirituality** is a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill rooted in the charism of unity and reconciliation. In a spirit of hospitality, the center welcomes individuals and groups for spiritual direction, retreats, and other opportunities for deepening one's relationship with God, self, and all creation. For more information on these and other programs, call 215-248-7231. The SSJ Center is at 9701 Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill, PA.

Temenos, an outreach ministry of the Swedenborgian Church, is a nonprofit conference and retreat center where people can come for spiritual growth, education, personal and social transformation, and mutual support. It exists to facilitate renewal and transformation in human lives in the Swedenborgian spirit of inquiry and personal growth and the belief that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life. Programs are open to persons of all spiritual traditions and the sacred space of Temenos is also available for private individual retreats and for groups wishing to reserve space for their own programs or events. Visitors are welcome at worship Sundays at 10:30 a.m. at the Farm House Chapel on the Temenos grounds followed by a spiritual discussion group at 12:15 p.m. Come to Temenos for ongoing Yoga classes on Mondays and Thursdays. Come for winter healing practices, including Qi Gong and drumming, chanting and healing journeys called From Heart to Heart on the last Saturday of the month. For information on these or other programs call 610-696-8145 or e-mail programs@temenosretreat.org. Temenos is at 1564 Telegraph Road in West Chester, PA.

GROUPS WORKING FOR PEACE, JUSTICE & EQUALITY

ANCHOR (A Nondenominational Community Harvesting Our Resources) is a group of Christians committed to living their faith creatively and reflectively. Its mission is to engage in the holistic exploration of contemporary spiritual/religious/moral issues. Communal prayer days, one each in the fall and the spring and discussion groups, also one each in the fall and spring address relevant topics of religious and social concern. The "Universe Story" study group meets on the third Wednesday of the month, September through May, 9:30 am-11:30 am. Discussions focus on the interface between science and faith, with an emphasis on ecology, cosmology, and the increasing urgency of mutuality, sustainability and justice from a planetary perspective. For particulars on any of the above programs, call 215-233-4929 and request a calendar of events.

The **Brandywine Peace Community** continues its peaceful resistance to the manufacture of weapons by Lockheed Martin and to the war in Iraq. Join the community for a monthly potluck supper and program on the second Sunday of each month, 4:30 pm, University Lutheran Church, 3637 Chestnut St., Philadelphia (bring a main dish, salad, or dessert to share.) For information, call 610-544-1818 or e-mail brandywine@juno.com.

Call to Action/Philadelphia, a group committed to church renewal, serves southeastern Pennsylvania, south Jersey and Delaware. For information on organizational meetings and programs, call 215- 345-1176.

COR/Philadelphia (Catholic Organizations for Renewal) is a coalition of individuals and groups, including SEPA/WOC, sharing a commitment to a renewed church. All are most welcome to attend planning meetings. Information: 215-232-7823.

Dignity Sunday Liturgies are on Sundays at 7 pm at St. Luke and the Epiphany Church, 330 S. 13th St. in Philadelphia. The church is wheelchair-accessible. For information on liturgies or other Dignity programs, call 215-546-2093.

The House of Grace Catholic Worker is part of an on-going faith-based, peaceful response to the current state of war. Join the house for Mass on the first Monday of each month at 6:30 and a Bible study of the *Book of Acts*, meeting on the second and fourth Monday of each month at 7:30 pm. Contact the house for details: 215-426-0364.

The Philadelphia Catholic Worker hosts a liturgy and potluck every Wednesday at 6 pm at 430 W. Jefferson Street. The Philadelphia Catholic Worker is a community striving to follow in the footsteps of Dorothy Day. A newsletter, "Common Life," is available upon request. For information, call 215-232-7823.

SEPA/WOC (Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference) invites all interested to join monthly core committee meetings at 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia. Information: 215-545-9649

Women of Faith, a ministry of the Metropolitan Christian Council, is an ecumenical community in the Greater Philadelphia area that celebrates women's gifts in Christian ministry and seeks justice and equality for all women in church and the broader society. Women of Faith endeavors to foster Christian unity through worship and education, bringing together persons from diverse cultures and backgrounds for mutual nurture, support and service to the larger community. Join Women of Faith for a monthly potluck supper. For information, contact the Metropolitan Christian Council at 215-836-7784.

To submit information to the *Equal wRites* Calendar, please contact Cassie at 215-467-8898 or email kgalalelo2001@yahoo.com.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Dignity Liturgy on Sunday, Dec. 7, at St. Luke and the Epiphany Church, 330 S. 13th St., Philadelphia, with Karen B. Lenz, homilist.

A Call to Reflection, Prayer and Action sponsored by Call to Action/Philadelphia—a morning of Advent reflection and action planning to contribute to building up God's Kingdom in our time. Saturday, Dec. 13, 9 AM-12:30 PM, Collenbrook United Church, Drexel Hill, PA. To sign up, or for information: 215 345-1176.

Martin Luther King Day of Direct Action sponsored by the Brandywine Peace Community at Lockheed Martin, Mall and Goddard Boulevards, Valley Forge, PA on Monday, Jan. 19 at 12 noon. Information: 610 544-1818.

SNAP (Survivors' Network of Those Abused by Priests) Conference, "Holding the Criminals Accountable," Jan. 31, at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church. For information: 215 424 4524.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Mark 10:46-52

Jer. 33:14-16

Zeph. 3:14-18

Is. 9

Ps. 89, 96

by Judith A. Heffernan

It's Saturday Oct. 26th. My Scripture Reflection for *Equal wRites* is already eleven days overdue. I'm looking for inspiration, and then I hear the Gospel.

Bartimaeus calls out for Jesus and many rebuke him, telling him to be silent; but he keeps calling out all the more! (He was irritating to some!)

I am reminded of Genevieve Chavez, National WOC director, who described to Demetria Martinez of NCR, three areas of ministry that WOC will embrace as we approach our thirtieth anniversary: the ministry of irritation, the ministry of walking with women called and the ministry of ecclesial disobedience. (It should be a challenging two years!)

This reminds me of the Call to Action conference on Faithful Dissent which Robert McClory began by reading for us from *Galatians*. Paul wrote, "When Peter came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, as he was clearly in the wrong."

McClory recalled for us that Paul was an outsider, but his minis-

try was such that in time he was accepted. Also he worked harder than the others—and he recorded his reflections and experiences!

Advent is approaching. A season of reflection, change and prayer.

I remember Jim Plastaras saying in *Equal wRites* that faithful dissent is about fidelity of conscience in the pursuit of truth and justice; and this work requires a personal investment of time and energy.

Further, we need to share openly and envision collaboratively with good humor and mutual trust.

So let us pray with Archbishop Romero: "May we provide the yeast that produces effects far beyond our own capabilities." (Romero also reminded us that no one is obliged to obey an order contrary to God's law and that we are called to stop oppression.)

Let us pray with the Danube Seven that our acts of prophecy will herald a fundamental leap within the church.

Christmas is coming. We pray the Advent readings, psalms and antiphons.

God is our justice. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Forever we will sing the goodness of God. Shout for joy, be glad and exult with all your heart.

Amen.

Judy Heffernan has a Master of Divinity degree from a Catholic seminary. A member of the Community of the Christian Spirit, she is an original member of the Women's Ordination Conference.

FINE POINTS

SUBSCRIPTION: To receive *Equal wRites*, send a contribution and your name and address to our treasurer, Marianne Jann, 49 Driscoll Drive, Ivyland, PA 18974. We deliberately did not set a specific fee because we wanted people to feel free to contribute what they felt they could afford: \$5, \$10, \$15, or more. If that's really impossible for you, just send your name and address and we will start your subscription.

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MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *Equal wRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be March 2004. Final deadline for submissions is January 15. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122 (215) 232-7823.

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