

**“Gender, Gospel & Global Justice”
Women’s Ordination Worldwide Third International Conference
September 18, 19 and 20, 2015
Marriott Conference Center
1201 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107**

**REGISTER NOW AT:
www.womensordinationworldwide.org**

EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
Vol. XXXII No. 2	JULY 2015 - OCTOBER 2015
WRITES	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>

**WOMEN’S ORDINATION WORLDWIDE
CONFERENCE
REGISTER NOW!**

Let’s let an unlikely source, the poet, Siegfried Sassoon, open our celebration of the imminent Women’s Ordination Worldwide Conference:

Everyone Sang

*Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on - on - and out of
sight.*

*Everyone’s voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will
never be done.*

How uplifting was that? How promising!

We believe the Women’s Ordination Worldwide conference, **September 18, 19 and 20, 2015** in Philadelphia will more than match up with the uplift and the promise.

Consider the featured speakers:

Teresa Forcades, nicknamed “Europe’s most radical nun”, a Catalan physician, a Benedictine sister and social activist.

Her international reputation includes her writings on misogyny in the Roman Catholic Church.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, feminist theologian, writer, and Stendahl Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School. She is credited for coining the word “kyriarchy”.

Mary Hunt, feminist theologian, author, co-founder and co-director of the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER).

Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Ph.D, president elect of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States. **Shannen Dee Williams**, historian of the United States and the black Catholic diaspora.

Theresa Kane, Mercy sister, who issued a public plea to Pope John Paul II calling on him to include women in all ministries of the church.

Tina Beattie, British theologian, writer, and broadcaster. **Patricia Fresen**, South African writer and Roman Catholic theologian who was excommunicated and expelled from her Dominican order following her ordination as a Roman Catholic Womanpriest.

Roy Bourgeois, social justice advocate, Noble Peace Prize nominee and founder of the School of the Americas (SOA) Watch who served as a Roman Catholic priest for forty years until he was expelled for refusing to recant his support for women’s ordination.

Jamie Manson, writer and nationally recognized media commentator on issues related to LGBT Catholics, young adult Catholics, and women in the church.

Christine Schenk, CSJ, founder and executive director emerita of FutureChurch.

Phyllis Zagano, Catholic scholar and lecturer on contemporary spirituality and women’s issues in the church.

Kate Kelly, Mormon feminist and human rights lawyer who was excommunicated for starting the LDS Ordain Women

continued on page 2

WOW Conference continued

Movement.

Asra Nomani, feminist activist and author of *Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*.

Maureen Fiedler, Ph.D, Sister of Loretto and host of Inter-faith Voices on public radio.

Barbara Blaine, founder and president of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), a national advocacy group for survivors of clerical sexual abuse.

Kristina Keneally, liberation theologian, Catholic feminist and former Australian politician who was the 42nd Premier of New South Wales.

Christina Rees, well-known writer, broadcaster, and public speaker, member of the General Synod of the Church of England and chair of Women and the Church (WATCH) which recently won its campaign for women bishops.

Tony Flannery, Irish Redemptorist priest and writer threatened by the Vatican with excommunication for his support of the discussion on women's ordination.

Mari Steed, the daughter of an Irish birth mother sent to live and work in one of the Magdalene Laundries where she was forced to give Mari up. Mari was adopted by a suburban Philadelphia couple and as an adult found her birth mother and told her story.

Maeve O'Rourke, lawyer and advocate with the Justice for Magdalenes campaign.

Ursula King, internationally renowned scholar on spirituality, interfaith dialogue, women, and religion.

Genny Dumay, Filippino Good Shepherd Sister and grassroots activist, who advocates for indigenous people and marginalized women.

Christine Fernando, Sri Lankan sister and tireless advocate working to end violence against women.

Paul Collins, Australian historian, broadcaster, and religious writer who resigned as a Catholic priest in 2001 due to a dispute with the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith over his book.

Consider how easy it is to register:

\$300 (through July 31, \$350 after) which includes all conference workshops, opening event reception, morning and afternoon breaks **and** the academic seminar, a once-in-a-lifetime theological-driven experience offered during the day on **Friday, September 18**.

Consider the reasonable the room rate:

WOW has negotiated a special reduced rate* at the Philadelphia Marriott Hotel at \$159 per room per night, plus tax. Opting to share a room is even cheaper. WOW will match you up with another delegate. The rooms are large with two double beds in each.

**Note: Some people are contacting the Marriott directly to reserve rooms and missing out on the discount. Be sure to book using the online booking form operated by NIX.*

Consider helping others attend:

We all believe that the exclusion of women from ordination in the Roman Catholic Church reinforces the oppression and poverty of women and girls around the world. We want to include some of those who cannot afford to travel to our conference. WOW has set up a solidarity fund to help with travel costs. Please help someone to get there by sending in a generous donation to WOW. See website for details.

Consider furthering our success:

1. Pray.
2. Register!
3. Donate air miles.
4. Organize a vigil calling for women's ordination at your local cathedral and distribute flyers for the conference.
5. Tweet about the conference or mention on other social media.

PAPAL VISIT IN SEPTEMBER WE WANT OUR VOICES HEARD!

Some witnesses calling for the ordination of women in the Catholic church are being planned for the Pope's visit on September 26-27 and for the World Meeting of the Families conference September 22-25. Please mark your calendars for:

Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference Witness: "Love is our Mission - A Church for All"

At the end of an inspirational conference it will be good to have somewhere to take our enthusiasm. WOW asks all to join together in witness after the "Gender, Gospel, and Global Justice" conference closing ceremony. On **Sunday, September 20 at 3 pm** WOW will be co-hosting a vigil with other Catholic reform groups in the city of Philadelphia starting at the Cathedral of Saints Peter & Paul. We will celebrate the impending arrival of Pope Francis to the U.S. and join together to pray for a successful visit.

Note: WOW has negotiated an extended special rate of \$159 for a limited number of rooms in our conference hotel (Marriott Downtown) for Sunday night so please book your room as soon as possible as they are selling out fast (direct price is \$299 per room).

Watch for other witnesses, events or actions currently being planned by Catholics Organizations for Renewal and other groups posted at our website sepaowoc.org.

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CHURCH REFORMERS EXPLORE BELIEFS ABOUT EUCHARISTIC CELEBRANTS

If you look at this picture carefully, it says it all. The communion table has been prepared; the candles are lit; the music player sits in the back ready to accompany prayerful voices.

But the bread sits in stillness, unreceived; the wine glistens in sunlight, untasted. The chairs are empty.

No one waits to receive these sacraments. There is no reason to wait.

There is deep heartbreak here, manifested in a table full of blessing and grace undelivered and unaccepted. Many of us who have been advocating for women's ordination in the Catholic church for years and years may be past that heartbreak by now. We may have already gone through the stages of outrage, frustration, disappointment, disillusionment and are now devotedly dedicated to change and speaking out about it.

But we may also want to be mindful of those who are beginning the discernment about women's role in the church and priesthood, who are just starting the journey we have all been through for what seems so very long. We may have a profound responsibility to listen to their voices, their fears, their concerns and pain, for it was once – and maybe still is – our own. I write this because I sometimes feel as if *EqualwRites* only “speaks to the converted,” and that we “converted” have gentle lessons to learn as well as powerful witnesses to offer.

Let me put the picture in perspective. The table above was one set for a Mass to be celebrated at a four day gathering of International Church Reformers in Limerick, Ireland this spring. Kate McElwee, writing in the Women's Ordination Conference blog *The Table*, explained why the Eucharist was never delivered.

The conference for the most part had been going along smoothly, she noted, and had given her and the others at-

tending the chance to know and support each other and to understand more fully the grassroots movements of church reform they each represented. The presence of so many reform-minded priests was especially encouraging. With this in mind, when the attendees gathered to discuss the details of a Mass to be celebrated at the gathering, Kate decided to suggest, respectfully and gently, that they also consider the possibility of a woman as co-president.

In her own words: “...what came of this question was an intensity and a raw pain, a brokenness, that I am not sure I have ever witnessed in such a broad spectrum.” Some expressed fear of their bishop and of excommunication; some saw it as a possible betrayal of their responsibilities to reflect the beliefs of the communities and constituencies they led; some were angry the issue was even being discussed, that it had changed the whole tone and focus of the conference. Others, however, reflected deeply and personally on their own ambivalence and the pain it was causing, on loving their work as priests, for example, and fearing being too reckless and yet not wanting to be cowardly either; others wondered what their efforts in reforming the church meant if they were not willing to do this; still others just expressed anger and sadness at their own indecision and even at the church.

Tony Flannery, who had been in attendance, wrote in his blog: “I suppose I can say that the issue of women's place in the Church surfaced... in a way that was far deeper than anything I have understood up to this. And it created enormous dilemmas for most of us sitting around. There was a great deal of hurt, sadness and tears, with many people clearly wrestling with their own conscience and coming face to face with their fears in a very open way. One of the consequences was that we were unable to celebrate Eucharist together, as we had planned, and instead had a prayer service. But that bald statement does little justice to the level of sharing that went on, and to the reasons why we felt we could not proceed.”

The Eucharistic gifts, therefore, were never delivered and the hurt was profound. But as Kate reflected: “A very insightful prayer group formed after our conversation and prepared a prayer ritual for us, using bread and wine as symbols that we would not partake in together. One theme that ran through the entire conference was the power of a broken heart, Parker Palmer's idea of ‘breaking open’ of hearts. **What became clear is the hearts of our church are broken, breaking, divided, and in pain.** I pray when we break open, we open to hold the whole world. I believe, as Christians, this big, broken, open heart is how we know and find God.”

The Gospel readings in mid-June speak to the long wait for all the seeds to grow, for all the fruit to ripen, for all the flowers to blossom and make the garden radiant, for the world to embrace all of God's gifts to us. Respecting those sprouting seeds, that slowly ripening fruit, those unfolding flowers, the struggle of so many to see the multitudinous gifts of God, is both a remembrance of our past struggles and an inspiration for our future mission – and on how gently and respectfully we may need to proceed.

Ellie Harty is co-editor of *EqualwRites*.

CELEBRATING MARY MAGDALENE AND HER GOSPEL



On Sunday, July 19 at 9 a.m., we will gather with the St. Mary Magdalene Community to celebrate the gifts of this amazing benefactor/saint to our lives. We all know her story – and its misinterpretations – through the years, but most of us know less about the actual *Gospel of Mary*, until the late nineteenth century, a lost apocryphal text.

In July of 2007, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) website published this summary of the *Gospel* which we pass on to you as you prepare for the Mary Magdalene feast day. We can see in this one woman, the affirmation of the insight and infinite gifts of all women.

You might think that at the very least Mary would be recognized as an apostle - one of the early missionaries who founded the religion - as she seems to meet all the criteria set out in the Bible.

The reason why she is not perhaps lies in another long lost apocryphal text. In a Cairo bazaar in 1896, a German scholar happened to come across a curious papyrus book. Bound in leather and written in Coptic, this was the Gospel of Mary.

Like the books found at Nag Hammadi, the Gospel according to Mary Magdalene is also considered an apocryphal text. The story it contains begins sometime after the resurrection. The disciples have just had a vision of Jesus.

Jesus has encouraged his disciples to go out and preach his teachings to the world, but they are afraid to do so because he was killed for it, and they say “if they killed him, they are going to kill us too”. It’s Mary who steps forward and says: don’t be worried, he promised he would be with us to protect us. It says she turns their hearts toward the good and they begin to discuss the words of the Saviour.

In texts like the Gospel of Philip, Mary was presented as a symbol of wisdom. However in the Gospel of Mary, she is the one in charge, telling the disciples about Jesus’ teachings.

At this point Peter asks Mary to tell them some things that she might have heard, but which the other disciples haven’t. She says “Yes, I will tell you what has been hidden from you”. She talks about a vision she had of Jesus and a conversation that she had with him. As the Gospel tells it, Mary then relates the details of this conversation, which is to do with

spiritual development and the soul’s lifelong battle with evil.

At this point controversy arises, and Andrew steps in and says “well, I don’t know what the rest of you think, but these things seem very strange to me, and it seems that she’s telling us teachings that are different from the Saviour.” Peter then chimes in and he says, “Are we supposed to now all turn around and listen to her? Would Jesus have spoken privately with a woman rather than openly to us? Did he prefer her to us?”

Matthew defends Mary and quells Peter’s attack on her. In the text, Peter’s problem seems to be that Jesus selected Mary above the other disciples to interpret his teachings. Peter sees Mary as a rival for the leadership of the group itself.

Peter need not have feared. Most people think of Peter as the rock upon which the church was established. He is the main or major disciple figure, and Mary Magdalene is a kind of side figure in the cast of characters.

One of the absolutely fascinating things about the Gospel of Mary is it really asks us to rethink that story about Christian history: did all the disciples get it? Did they really understand and preach the truth?

Perhaps the Gospel of Mary was just too radical. It presents Mary as a teacher and spiritual guide to the other disciples. She’s not just a disciple; she’s the apostle *to* the apostles.

We pray:

As we honor the courage of Mary Magdalene, let us remember that she was no different from us; that she was flesh and blood and fully subject to the tensions and conflicts of her own time. Let us likewise recognize, as she did, the persistent voice of the Holy Spirit who calls us out of our silence. May we listen closely to that voice, follow its commands, and surrender ourselves to God’s will, recklessly abandoning our self-concern, and joyfully embracing the challenge of a sometimes difficult road. We ask for the blessing of courage through the intercession of Mary Magdalene. Amen.

**St. Mary Magdalene Community
Mass schedule**

Every Sunday at 9AM

Drexel Hill United Methodist Church

McBurney Chapel

600 Burmont Rd

Drexel Hill, PA 19026

We have one satellite:

**Second Saturday of the month at St. Luke’s UCC
Church, 125 North Main St.,
North Wales, PA 19454 at 5PM.**

For information contact emdifranco@aol.com

A WOMAN PRIEST'S JOURNEY

By *Ellie Hart*



Imagine being in first grade and having your teacher, a nun, take you into the church, introduce you to the tabernacle, and explain to you what it meant. Then imagine knowing, from that moment, this is exactly where you wanted to be in life. Judy Heffernan, M.Div. and Catholic woman priest felt the call to priesthood at that young age and it never left: "This is where I needed to be and all I wanted to be. I had no idea how to answer that call; I just knew I would."

On May 11, 2015 we are happy to report Judy celebrated the 35th anniversary of her ordination. She really had become what she had always wanted to be, and the walls of the established church did not, as feared by many traditionalists, come a'tumbling down!

We wanted to tell Judy's story partly because her journey was difficult, and we wanted you to see how much harder it was than it needed to be given the resistance of the leadership of the religion she loved. We also wanted to tell her story because it is so inspirational and hopeful. She began a groundswell that in its latest manifestation this spring saw seven new women ordained as Roman Catholic Women Priests swelling their ranks to 208 to be added to the numbers of so many other women, like Judy, who felt and answered the call and were ordained as priests by their own communities. Yet, sadly, we still need a Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference to focus on and publicize the issue of women's ordination, and we still need to celebrate outside the church of which we thought we were a part the gifts and call of so many women. We need the hope that Judy's story brings.

In the progressive days after Vatican II, optimism about including women in holy orders was high. Judy, along with four other women (still significantly outnumbered by men) was allowed to study for a Masters of Divinity at a Catholic Seminary. "All the priest professors and the sisters were very supportive of us, the students more wary but curious and wanting to learn from us. Our studies, focusing on a more open, liberal interpretation of church doctrine and tradition, were both inspiring and made perfect sense." Judy graduated full of enthusiasm and re-dedication to her dream of eventual priesthood "only to find I wasn't even allowed to be a lector in my own parish church!"

She persisted by applying to be a teacher of religion in the Catholic schools. "When the interviewer heard of my background, he decided to conduct the rest of the interview in the elevator on his way out. My carefully considered replies to his questions elicited only 'Yes...but...s.' I never heard from

him again." Instead, she became an early childhood educator in the Philadelphia School District, "each day wishing I could turn right to be a priest at St. Cecilia's rather than left to the public school."

Meanwhile, in that very church, as Judy put it: "I felt I was becoming a raisin rather than a grape on the living vine in my own parish." Fortunately she had heard of an alternative community and on her first visit was enraptured by the lovely liturgy, dialogue homilies, prayers from the heart, and inspiring music. She was also surprised by the presiding priest, who knew of her pioneering work with Philadelphia Taskforce for Women in Religion and later the Women's Ordination Conference, coming up to her and apologizing for the Catholic Church's stand on women's ordination. Next week she was even more surprised when a child went up to that same priest and called him "Daddy". This community believed that just because a priest could not say Mass at the official church once he married did not mean he could not preside and be valued there.

Judy left her parish church and joined the Community of the Christian Spirit. This act led eventually to an even greater surprise. In her own words: "In the Summer of 1979 our pilgrim church community met in a beautiful grove. If it rained, however, we were to go to our indoor location in another county. Well, pilgrims come from all directions, and one Sunday it happened. The wine, musicians and priest celebrant were inside at one location where it was raining. The bread, music papers, Liturgy planner and most of the pilgrims were outside at another where it was not. Upon realizing what had happened, the planner walked toward me, 'Judy, will you lead us?' The community, very aware that I had always wanted to be a priest and that I had a Master of Divinity Degree from a Catholic Seminary, agreed with the planner and together we prayed the Eucharist. It was a moving experience for all of us. A few weeks later, that priest who had been inside that day was our celebrant again. The theme of the Liturgy was 'Liberation'. He told all of us that he could not celebrate a Liturgy about liberation when women are oppressed in the church. He then said that we had the power to begin to heal the brokenness and asked the people to join him in inviting me to the altar with him."

"I heard clapping and people saying, 'Go ahead, Judy!' I couldn't believe this was happening, and, at the altar, with a twinkle in his eye, he said to me, 'You have been called now. Any other ceremony will only affirm what has already happened!' From that day on, women's ordination was a real issue which was not ignored by the community. Almost nine months of serious reflection followed. In the spring we had a summary meeting and vote. The vote was overwhelmingly, but not unanimously, YES! The community decided that justice demands it, we must claim the ancient tradition of the community choosing its ministers, and we must act prophetically and go forward to Vatican III."

"The day of formal ordination came, Mother's Day, May 11, 1980. Prayer, laying on of hands, song, embracing, celebration. For a long time the questions: Is it right; what if active waiting was a better choice than a prophetic act of collective courage for justice sake; yet, none of us who is an active member ever doubts the moral certitude of the valid ordination of a woman by the community; none of us feels that

continued on page 6

WOMAN PRIEST'S JOURNEY continued from page 5

Jesus denies his presence because the celebrant is a woman, none of us doubts that someday women's ordination will be normative in the church universal. We trusted in the Spirit and took the risk in hope. These 35 years have been nothing this little Philadelphia Catholic School girl had ever expected."

Her 35 years of priesthood was also often difficult. "I realized priesthood was a lot harder than it looked!" Some people left the community because a woman was presiding. One was a cherished friend's mother who told Judy, "I have nothing against you personally, but I won't be able to go here anymore." It was heartbreaking, but even those leaving were gracious. Judy saw her role as priest "to be a good celebrant, to make the Eucharist real in our daily lives, to be available for people when they needed me." But she immediately realized this was a group effort. "I had been called by a community of which I was a part. I was not always presider but I was always a community member. I knew that the true power of the Spirit was through the community, not one person."

Would she ever consider ordination within the church should it ever be condoned? "All I ever wanted to be was a parish priest. I would never leave Community of the Christian Spirit, but if I could do both, I would accept this. I welcome the church's blessing, but I have already been ordained."

CURRENT MEMBERS OF CCS REFLECT ON JUDY AS PRIEST

Regina Bannan -

I think Judy is the perfect match of calling and personality. She is infinitely kind and welcoming; she really is able to see people's uniqueness and contributions, especially revealed at funerals. Judy plans beautiful liturgies and meaningful prayers. She is uncompromising about what she believes in. So she promotes community and exercises leadership. It's hard to say how I felt at communion; I remember how exhilarating her first mass was, in a classroom where we were meeting at the time. I was very involved in the discussion preceding. I absolutely felt this was the right decision for the community and for Judy. For me, ordaining women has always been about justice, and it would have been unjust to deny Judy the opportunity to serve. And then she was so good at it. Judy is too humble, in my not-so-humble opinion. Remembering that time and even until today, she considers herself the curate to the other priests we have (over the years male, mostly married). She is the pastor, whether she wants to be or not. She is the one who is always there, who pulls things together,

who arranges the schedule and major celebrations. I see the presiders as individuals, not gendered persons, at this point.

Roberta Brunner -

We discussed having a women priest and knew many holy women in CCS (Community of the Christian Spirit) and MMS (Medical Mission Sisters). We considered ordaining Judy as a justice issue, and in May 1980 we called Judy to be our priest. To me the most significant and essential issue of this decision is the fact that Judy is one of us. She comes to liturgy even when she is not the celebrant. She brings her many talents, humor, and blessings to us every time we are together. She is especially gifted in creating meaningful prayers and memorial liturgies. She has cared for us and our families in the last moments of life, and always is there to share both our joys and sorrows. Now after 35 years, we are a small intentional Eucharistic community, and we trust our members to make prayerful decisions with us. We do not spend time and energy on trying to make decisions for those who are no longer our members. We know we are responsible for our own spiritual/religious experiences, and we search together for the holy and share blessings along the way. We welcome others to join in our journey and share their blessings with us.

Marianne Tucker -

First a little background on me: When I was in second grade and received my first Holy Communion my mother said to me, you won't be on the other side of the Communion rail again until you get married. Even then I asked myself why? I attended an all female Catholic high school and was active in the liturgical music group and sometimes in the sacristy. The principle and a few teachers were male, but all the leadership positions were held by women and girls. Males served at Mass. It was the '60's and our female teachers stressed that we could be anything we wanted to be ... except a priest. I saw how mean spirited and out of touch our parish pastor was and it looked and sounded like hypocrisy to me. My poor mother, in somewhat of a panic that I would "lose my religion," researched and found the Medical Mission Sisters and we started to attend Mass there, along with many others. Again, the leadership was female. Eventually the Philadelphia hierarchy told us we could not attend Mass there any more. We all left so as not to get the sisters in trouble, but we stayed together as the Community of the Christian Spirit. Some went back to their parishes but many stayed. We had male priests only, but there were women in all the other roles. One Sunday, I and another young women were vested and served on the alter as deacons.

Community of the Christian Spirit

Committed to peace and social justice, CCS welcomes you to join in our Sunday morning celebrations, liturgies in the Roman Catholic tradition which explore Scripture and contemporary readings.

For information, call Roberta Brunner or Margaret McLaughlin, (215) 572-5623, or write P.O. Box 353, Abington, PA 19001

Enter Judy. She did not ask us to ordain her, but it became clear that many people thought it unfair that she could not be ordained because of her sex and nothing else. It was a long and hard process to come to the decision to call her to ministry, and it caused people to leave the Community ... including my mother. That was harder for me than ever making the decision to ordain Judy. For me it was a joy when she led her first mass, first served communion and preached her first sermon as a priest, with everyone joining in. Each of our priests for CCS is different and I agree and disagree on different subjects with all of them, I love hearing different points of view nevertheless. I guess I'm a product of my experience and education but women as priests is a natural for me.

Tom Tucker -

Endless Hope, dogged determination, and seeker of justice: that is the core of the Judy Heffernan. She is the woman we've come to love as a friend, a confidant, and as a priest. When the Community of the Christian Spirit ordained Judy as priest, it did not feel like a transfer of power or authority had taken place, but a public recognition of what had already (and possibly always) been the core of what made Judy a special member of the world. Yes, there were some members of the Community that could not make that step from what they perceived as "traditional values", but most of us recognized the ordination as a long overdue, inevitable occurrence.

Is it "different" having a woman, rather than a man, celebrating the Eucharist? In most ways, no; but having Judy is very different than having anyone else. She is one of the best composers of prayerful poetry and homilies that I have ever encountered. When she celebrates, you can feel the joy she has for what she is presenting. And she rarely fails to artfully focus the liturgy on some pertinent topic. Was it difficult for me personally to accept a woman celebrant? No. Having been involved in church reformation and alternate liturgical activities since my teenage years, I was more than ready for the change. Hopefully, soon, so will the rest of the Church at large.

Magda Elias -

Birth...living one's life...death.

I always claimed life was defined by death. And since I am old enough to have experienced deep loss, I judge effectiveness of those helping me through the difficult times, as well as the joyous ones, by how well they usher me through those painful times and help me understand that "...there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain..." (Revelations 21:4)

I still recall the priest of my intentional community, Rev. Judith Ann Heffernan, saying a funeral service (not mass, by choice, to be inclusive to all her family and friends) for my wonderful friend, Karen Lenz, about six years ago. As she stood in front of our friends and acquaintances, affirming life that had meant to me so much personally, Rev. Heffernan put me gently on the path of mourning. If she had done nothing before, or since, or will do nothing else ever again, Rev. Heffernan has served me greatly. I am deeply grateful. And the official church has been impoverished by rejecting that.

Living one's life: in the fall of 1998, Karen, who loved me even then, was napping on the second floor of a house where I was working on a school assignment on an old desktop

computer. Not willing to let me walk home by myself, Karen stayed with me. At 3:30 a.m. I finally finished. I woke her up. I told her I would be waiting on the first floor. She, half-asleep, shoeless, slid on top of the stairs and ended up on the landing, jammed, twisted, and unconscious, against the front door. I found her.

The following spring, Rev. Heffernan was asked to celebrate a mass of thanksgiving at the house. At that time a group of volunteers we affectionately called The Saint Louis Nine were finishing their spring break week of service. We planned to give thanks for their incredible talents. But most of all, our friends and I were going to give thanks for Karen being alive and well. At the end of the mass, one of the St. Louis Nine asked Karen whether the piece of bread he just ate truly constituted communion and the mass a "real mass." I, severely annoyed, snapped: "Weren't you there?" I am deeply grateful to Rev. Heffernan for that celebration. And the official church has been impoverished by rejecting that.

Birth: although I do not claim remembering my actual entrance into this world, I do claim remembering my spiritual birth(ing). While living at the Catholic Worker in Philadelphia, I encountered being challenged about my faith, about my understanding of Scripture during our weekly mass celebrations. And so many times, Rev. Heffernan arrived at the house with her peace candles, her dove, pictures, her highlighted articles, purple stole, offering me a different path for consideration. I have experienced many a sacred moment. I was birthed into my faith. I am deeply grateful to Rev. Heffernan. And the official church has been impoverished by rejecting that.

In times of loss, in times of jubilation, in times of tiredness or lack of inspiration, Rev. Judith Ann Heffernan stepped in and brought her unique vision of God to share on our journeys together.

So, here is my own declaration, Wittenberg! Although the official church has not only questioned your authenticity but also denied you and your family and those people who ordained you thirty-five years ago the primacy of *their* spiritual consciousness, I hereby proudly join them, my almost entire life time later, Judith Ann Heffernan, on my own free will, in selecting you to be my priest. Hallelujah, let it be so! AMEN.

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REFLECTIONS UPON MY MOTHER'S FUNERAL

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

My 86 year-old mother just passed away. She moved away from the "Old Sod" of Port Richmond to a new community and could no longer attend Mass due to her age and infirmities, so she never joined a parish in her new neighborhood. She originally had wanted to be buried from her parish of origin, but my experience at funerals there was less than satisfactory and I didn't want to subject my family to what can only be described as disrespect.

After finding a local parish which was willing to bury her, I wondered if I would have to "ask Father" about a eulogy since no one knew her at this parish and she was a woman worth knowing.

The good news was that I didn't have to "ask" because the parish "permitted" eulogies. The bad news is that I should not have had to worry what "Father" thought about eulogies. After all, Beau Biden had five of them at his very Catholic funeral. A funeral is about the deceased, or at least it should be, as was Biden's funeral, and not about the power a priest has to make decisions that could adversely affect the deceased family in a traumatic time.

I began thinking about male clerical power a couple of weeks prior to my mother's death. Her death only served to flesh out my ideas.

Many people I know have told me that they remain at their local parish because it is their parish, and not the priest's and so they simply cannot and will not be moved. I used to think that way too until a beloved communion rite at my former parish was arbitrarily changed by a directive from above, even though the parishioners felt that the former way was a far better reflection on who they were as a community. Sadly, the priests became the mouthpieces of the bishop rather than the advocates of the people and the rite changed at the Fathers' behest.

It became clear to me at that time that as much as people might regard the parish as their own, it really belonged lock, stock, and barrel to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia which literally held the life of the parish in its powerful, episcopal hands.

Sadly, closing parishes that belong to the people and the community is no longer an unusual occurrence anywhere, anytime in the Catholic world. With a flip of a hand often covered in bejeweled gloves (paid for by the faithful), the men who think they act in the image of Christ have closed down vibrant parishes that were filled with people every Sunday along with parishes that care for the poor because it is a good business practice to cut one's losses and run. Thus, the church speaks the language of CEO's rather than the language of Jesus who said that following him required sacrifice.

While lay people are expected by the Fathers to sacrifice for the church and by extension to God by giving until it hurts or having children until it kills or bankrupts them, the Fathers, almost all of whom who live lives far removed from the perils and uncertainties of lay life, are not willing to make the same level of sacrifice for their people. Instead, the Fathers follow the way of Wall Street rather than the Way of the Cross. Compare the vast urban landscape studded with shuttered

Catholic churches with the Fathers' nicely padded bank statements, their expensive digs, and their fancy vestments. This, along with expensive PR firm, attorneys, and insurance agencies.

Aside from the very few people who either occupied their parishes or reformed elsewhere without their bishops' permission, the majority of the people meekly left their beloved parishes while continuing to petition another, greater "Father," the pope, to keep their parishes open. In the vast majority of cases, the Father in Rome doesn't even bother to respond to his own people.

In the area of parish life and death, as in every other area, the Fathers hold every possible card and continually prove to the laity that they are the boss. Most foster a "Father, may I" mystique. The desires and needs of the people are moot, their power as a community essentially non-existent.

A couple of years ago, the Fathers decided that the language of our prayers at Mass had to match up with some stilted and senseless Latin translation. I sat at my mother's funeral and listened to the tortuous prayers from the new liturgy that interfered with my own prayer, and wondered- instead of praying- why God is only with my spirit and not with the rest of me. What's with Jesus and this roof business? What does the priest have to use a "Jeopardy" word like "consubstantial" in a prayer when a more simple word would do?

I frequently read stories or heard stories from parishioners who talked about how a new Father comes into their parish and runs roughshod over everything, disbanding parish councils and forbidding the presence of female altar services and readers. I've heard people worrying for weeks whether a new pastor will be a good fit or wreck their parish. This is not an idle worry. Parishes revolve around Father and his needs and his wants and his ideas and his feelings about obedience to a largely clueless bishop. The people never have any recourse because the bishop always supports his man with the collar.

It shouldn't have to be this way. People who are seeking to be a community of love under God should not have to worry about anything; the leadership style of the priest, the liturgy, or the manner in which people are married, baptized, or buried. They should not have to worry if they will be accepted. They should not have to worry about a priest disiniviting them from the table of God.

Instead, a parish should be what Martin Luther King called, "a beloved community." A beloved community is based upon equality, not power and unquestioning obedience because power can never provide the foundation for love. A beloved community listens to the stories of its members and bases its theology upon the needs of God in people rather than upon platonic ideals that do not and never have existed anywhere on earth. A beloved community does not condemn. Instead, it looks into its own heart of hearts and seeks transformation there before looking outward. A beloved community aligns itself with precepts of justice for everyone and does not rely upon antiquated rules. A beloved community does not shut out one half of its membership from presiding at the altar.

There is no room for fear or worry in a place where everyone is loved.

Unlike the funerals back in Port Richmond, my mother's funeral went ok. No one was hurt or embarrassed or felt disrespected. However, the priest never called me prior to the funeral mass and so he didn't even know the names of my father or my mother's children or grandchildren. He knew nothing at all about my mother and in his homily, talked about his own mother.

I was worried that he would make the announcement that only Catholics who are in good standing could receive communion, but he didn't do that, for which I am eternally grateful. And the eulogy went really well.

But, in the end, I felt as if my family and I just had to settle for something that was far less than what could have been. And that, I think, is the story of the Catholic Church. We are content to wait for the Fathers who are in no hurry or mood to change anything anytime soon. We take what they dole out to us. Even as mature adults we play the game, "Father, may I" and think it's normal. We even forgive the many egregious trespasses the Fathers inflict upon us by omission and commission. We settle and we dream and we hope of a better time that is nowhere near coming to fruition. And we think we are really the church when the rug could be pulled out from under us in one hot minute with absolutely no recourse.

And so, the kin-dom of God remains at a distance as we tinker about the edges, console ourselves with our faithfulness, and fret and worry and hope and pray for times that are not going to change any time soon.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco (*Roman Catholic Womanpriest*) is an ordained priest and co-pastor of a community in Philadelphia.

HELP SOLVE A WOMEN'S ORDINATION MODERN DAY MYSTERY!



It's a bit difficult to see our faces in this photo of our 2015 Holy Thursday witness at the Cathedral of Saints Peter & Paul in Philadelphia this April. But how menacing could we possibly look?

And yet, two years in a row, people, in protest to our presence, often in our faces, have held up signs and/or chanted in groups: "We love the priests!"

Can anyone help us solve the mystery of why they think we don't? Can anyone explain why a huge banner saying "OR-

DAIN CATHOLIC WOMEN" somehow translates into "We hate – or at least don't love – priests"? Doesn't it say we want anyone who feels so called to be allowed to be a priest in the Catholic church? Why does the addition of a gender somehow transform the message into something so negative as the absence of love?

To figure this out, maybe we should examine some possible clues:

- We are standing singing and praying *outside* rather than inside the church
- We are honoring *women* as well as men who have contributed to church reform
- We are *expressing no fear* for the survival of the church or our community or the world itself if women are ordained as priests
- We are not being obedient to hierarchical commands
- We are not being cowed by possible excommunications
- We are not paying homage to the men only who receive the holy oils inside
- We are not responding to outrage with anger but with singing and reverence
- We have not gone away for over thirty years

Okay, maybe there are some more suspicious signs.

We do sing "We Shall Overcome." Maybe that makes some people believe we want women to replace men altogether. (Is that what some majority citizens thought in the '60's about Black replacing White when we sang this in support of civil rights? Actually, come to think of it, yes.)

We do chant "We Shall Not Be Moved" which could lead some people to believe we do not love current priests enough to let them fully command our thought processes and actions. (Do we love *anybody* that much?)

We probably don't look humble or grateful enough for what was sometimes, admittedly, a beneficent gender monopoly. (But we *are* appreciative; in fact, that's just the kind of democracy in the church we want to create.)

Or maybe we should just admit that, despite all of these clues, we are, in the end, still clueless, failing to see how love so easily translates as hate rather than vice versa.

We have not solved the mystery of the signs and chants. But they have pointed out something very important: We are not getting our message out in a way that allays fears and engenders hope. Who are these sign makers and chanters? We invited the group that chanted in protest to us two years ago to join us in prayer. The leader answered with an emphatic "No". How can we reach them and let them know who we really are? Do you have any clues?

Parish Matters
by *Marian Ronan*

The Spirit's Tether: Family, Work, and Religion among American Catholics, by Mary Ellen Konieczny. NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013. Paperback, \$29.95. 249 pp.

The Shared Parish: Latinos, Anglos, and the Future Of U.S. Catholicism, by Brett C. Hoover. NY, NY: New York University Press, 2014. Hardcover. \$49.00. 237 pp.

These days, the parish is not exactly the focus of attention for many progressive Catholics. Some of us may belong to a parish, but more of our energy goes into reform groups like Call to Action, SEPAWOC, Dignity, etc. And small faith communities are often—though not always—at the center of our spiritual life.

Nonetheless, parishes influence the identities of many of the sixty-seven million Catholics in the United States. In 2014, in fact, there were 17,483 U.S. parishes. And as two recent books suggest, we can learn a good deal about the American church from studying them.

In *The Spirit's Tether*, University of Notre Dame sociologist Mary Ellen Konieczny examines the impact of participating in one or the other of two Catholic parishes in an unidentified Midwestern city. She does so to cast light on ways in which parish beliefs and practices underpin the polarization that she and other scholars believe characterizes contemporary U.S. Catholicism. Drawing on interviews she did at both parishes over nearly two years concerning the subjects of marriage, family, and work, Konieczny argues that while secular political attitudes and elite discourse contribute to the culture wars in the U.S., “polarization is also constituted among Catholics through local level social processes.” (8)

Konieczny identifies a number of divergent beliefs and in the two parishes that she studies as expressed in metaphors for church, worship practices, and convictions about marriage and family. At “Our Lady of the Assumption” the first of the two parishes studied, the primary metaphor for church is “family,” with God the Father and the priests of the parish at the head of the church and husbands the head of a family. (My use of quotation marks indicates the likelihood that the author is not using real parish names). At “Assumption” clergy and members place major emphasis on natural family planning, opposition to abortion, and having large families; mothers, whenever they are financially able, stay home to raise the children and leave their secular careers behind. Worship is formal, and priests at “Assumption” hear confessions seven-teen hours a week, including throughout Mass.

At “St. Brigitta,” on the other hand, the primary metaphor for church is community, and clergy and members place great emphasis on equality and social justice. Though there are several different forms of worship at “St. Brigitta,” Konieczny describes the Sunday Mass celebrated in the parish gymnasium, with lay readers (including former priests), a dialogue homily, popular music, and kids playing games at the edges of the gathering. She also interviews those who attend the “gym Mass”: members hold a range of opinions regarding abortion

and birth control, and even when mothers stay at home for a period of time to raise kids, they still identify with their careers or professions, and families where parents both work struggle to attain the proper work-family balance. Konieczny concludes from her analysis of these two selected parishes that attitudes and practices in parishes make a significant contribution to polarization among contemporary U.S. Catholics.

In the second parish study, *The Shared Parish*, Brett Hoover, an assistant professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, explores the complex relationship between two groups within one Catholic community, Latino and Anglo Catholics in the Midwestern parish of “All Saints” in the “Diocese of Port Jefferson” (Both of these names pseudonyms, in the interest of privacy). Hoover documents and analyzes the specific ways in which these two groups do and do not interact and why this matters.

In the first three chapters, Hoover recounts the history of “All Saints,” from a tiny Catholic parish in a Protestant town beginning in 1860 to the contemporary ethnically mixed parish he studied, and the various methods Anglo and Latino/a Catholics there use in their interactions with one another. He then explores different approaches to the idea of “unity” in each group. His description of the impact on the Latino community of the Anglo pastor’s washing his Chicano concelebrant’s feet during the Holy Thursday liturgy is deeply moving.

In the final chapters, Hoover explains that various more “Protestant” approaches to analyzing interculturalism in Catholic parishes don’t really work because Catholics don’t just “choose” their parishes; they “share” them. They do so because they are Catholic, something that motivates each group to negotiate and interact with one another. Finally, *The Shared Parish* explores visions and practices that move communities beyond what sociologists call “cultural encapsulation,” or perhaps, “polarization.” These include the U.S. bishops’ use of the term “multiculturalism” in place of the once-preferred language of “assimilation” or “the melting pot.” Even more effective, Hoover suggests, is for leaders to draw on the theology of communion, in which parish members can understand that they are celebrating the same Eucharist despite doing so in different languages. Such a transformation involves not just a change in thinking, but the modeling by leaders of different feelings, rights, and obligations.

It’s tempting to compare these two studies and to come down in favor of Hoover’s. This is so because of the “ideal types” methodology that Konieczny uses to consider “Assumption” and “St. Brigitta.” “Ideal types,” invented by sociologist Max Weber in the early part of the twentieth century, focuses upon and simplifies two extreme examples of a social group so as to highlight the differences between them. Critics say this contributes to polarized conclusions. So Konieczny, in effect, uses a polarizing method to explain polarization in American Catholicism, a circular process.

Yet it would be a pity to dismiss *The Spirit's Tether* on these grounds, because the author does, in fact, use a multi—or at least bi—disciplinary approach, integrating ethnography into her sociological analysis. And the interviews on which she bases her argument about parishes and polarization are, in themselves, quite interesting. A conversation on a particular subject between Konieczny and one or more members of

“Assumption” and then “St. Brigitta” begins each chapter. Konieczny also uses parts of interviews to illustrate her arguments throughout the chapters. Although marriage, the family and work are not my favorite topics, I was quite intrigued, for example, by the experiences she describes of various couples negotiating work, family life and belief in the twenty-first century.

It’s a pity, though, that the author uses such rich material to illustrate what seems to me an unhelpfully binarized conclusion. Surveys indicate that only two percent of U.S. Catholic women use natural family planning, so at least some differences between Parish A and Parish B are perhaps better described as those between a tiny minority and a much, much larger group within the American church rather than between opposite poles.

Hoover’s methodology, using ethnography, sociology, Latino/Latina studies and theology, is far better suited to contemporary complexity and results in a richer and more helpful study than Konieczny’s. And, paradoxically, by introducing communion as a tool with which to approach differences between ethnic groups, Hoover suggests a solution to the problem with which Konieczny is primarily concerned but which her method seems to reinforce.

Lest I seem totally unbalanced in my preference for *The Shared Parish*, let me say that I consider it a limitation of both studies that they consider only parishes in the Midwest. I wonder what each author would make of my parish here in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn where the population is a third Caribbean, a third Haitian, a third Latino, and two percent white, and where Pentecostal Catholics and Our Lady of Guadalupe devotés march with feminist theology professors and other professionals in a massive People’s Climate March?

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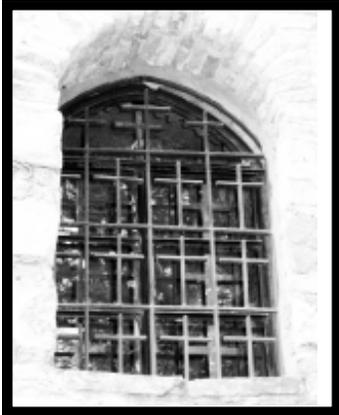
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MARY’S WINDOW

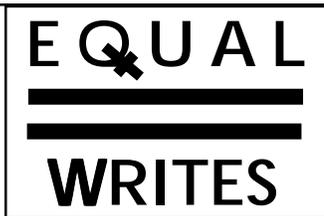
This is the window of the house in Turkey purported to be where Jesus’ mother Mary went to live sometime after his death. Note the bars on the windows: They are in the shape of crosses. Note the darkness inside: It would be as difficult to see out as to see in. Note, with even greater sadness: This is the kind of house created for the woman the Church most reveres. Finally, please note Ulla Gudmundson’s comment below.



“... I can’t help wondering whether the Catholic reverence for Mary, ‘more important than popes, bishops, priests’ according to Pope Francis, might not have served as an alibi not to make room in the Church for living women. “Woman” is an abstraction you can safely talk of. Living women you can and must talk with. They may even argue back.”

Ulla Gudmundson, Swedish ambassador to the Holy See (quoted on *FutureChurch* website.)
Photograph by **Maggi Ruth Boyer**

WE CAN’T BLAME THE MAIL CARRIER!
...but we can blame the computer (much more fun) if you did not receive your March 2015 edition of *EqualwRites* on time. We are so sorry for the glitch.
If you still have not received the March issue, please go to our website: sepawoc.org, click on the link at the bottom, and you can read the issue in its entirety.
We will also have copies for you to pick up at the SEPAWOC table at the Women’s Ordination Worldwide Conference!



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SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Acts 2: 1-11 There were devout people from every nation filled with the Spirit

By Judith Heffernan, M.Div.

Recently I attended a Liturgy in a little chapel with about 20 other people while visiting some special friends out of state. It happened that it was the feast of Pope Saint Martin I, the last pope to be martyred. Our celebrant shared that around 600 AD there was a difference of opinion going on about the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Ultimately, the Emperor issued an edict saying this topic could no longer be discussed!

Well, Pope Martin then decided to convene the Lateran Council to discuss it, and got himself arrested, tortured and exiled for not following the emperor's edict. Martin died from complications to his health from such brutal treatment.

The priest celebrant then commented how sad it is that edicts like this are still being issued—like the one that prohibits the discussion of the ordination of women!!! He added that he has always felt that people who issue edicts preventing the discussion of anything are really not in their right minds!!

MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *EqualwRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be October 2015. Final deadline for submissions is September 21. Send to eharty43@yahoo.com or mail to SEPAWOC P.O. Box 52046, Philadelphia, PA 19115.

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I thanked him afterwards for his courage in speaking out. (And sadly, I feel I cannot even mention where I was in order to protect him from censure!)

Courage in speaking out... Jim Callan preached on women's ordination at his First Mass 40 years ago, and continues to preach: in the face of discrimination and injustice, we can never again be silent. Theresa Kane preaches: the vision for women to be included in all ministries is our burden and our gift.

People of Courage will be speaking out at the WOW Conference in Philadelphia. We hope you will be there to listen, share, speak out, pray, celebrate and proclaim... we are one in gender, gospel and global justice.

Does it matter that you come? Remember what Robert Kennedy said in South Africa in 1966—that it is from numberless, diverse acts of courage that history is shaped. Each time we stand up for an ideal, we send forth tiny ripples of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, these ripples build a vast and mighty current... Yes, it matters that you join