

MISSION STATEMENT - *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.*

***The St. Mary Magdalene Community celebrates Mary Magdalene's Feast Day
Sunday, July 19, 2020 at 9am.
Everyone Welcome In Person or Via Zoom***

**MARY MAGDALENE
CELEBRATION**

SUNDAY, JULY 19

The Mary Magdalene celebration this year will be hosted both via Zoom and in person at the home of Caryl Johnson, 465 Lynbrooke Rd. Springfield, PA 19064 on Sunday, July 19 at 9 am.

Caryl has a large, shady back yard where we can practice social distancing. Her bathroom will be available for use. In-person participants should plan to wear a mask during the entire time. Each should bring his/her own lawn chair and bread and wine. There will be no singing and no sign of peace beyond a hand wave. Each person will serve communion to him or herself with the bread and wine brought from home. Unfortunately, we will not be able to extend hospitality unless we get a green light from the governor.

If all goes well as far as Covid virus restrictions, we also hope to present the Mary Magdalene 2020 Award to Dr. Shannen D. Williams in person after communion.

To participate by Zoom, email Eileen DiFranco at emdifranco@aol.com before July 18.

**Non-Racist...Anti-Racist: This is Our Stand and
Our Challenge
By Ellie Harty**

I am sure we who are white do not know how to begin to express how sorry and sorrowful we are.

Father Bryan N. Massingale, theology professor at Fordham University asks us to start with this:

*What to do next? Nothing. Sit in the discomfort this hard truth brings. Let it become agonizing. Let it move you to tears, to anger, to guilt, to shame, to embarrassment. Over what? Over your ignorance. Over the times you went along with something you knew was wrong... Stay in the discomfort, the anxiety, the guilt, the shame, the anger. Because only when a critical mass of white folks are outraged, grieved and pained over the status quo — only when white people become upset enough to declare, "**This cannot and will not be!**" — **only then will real change begin to become a possibility.***

Shannen Dee Williams, assistant professor of history at Villanova University and our 2020 Mary Magdalene Award Winner, speaks out for all of us at this time in calling for our own Church to practice and demand justice:

If the Catholic Church is truly invested in the flourishing of the entire human family, then it must finally make racial justice a leading priority. It must also begin to understand what African-Americans, especially women, more than any other group foresaw and fundamentally understood in 2016: The violence of white supremacy is never exclusively reserved for black people but always imperils all. If this is not understood, history has already made clear that we will be here again or somewhere much worse.

She challenges us to do our part:

Challenge racism in Catholic spaces and call for a change. Make black and brown Catholic history mandatory in Catholic school curriculums, religious formation and seminary training. End discriminatory and anti-black hair policies in Catholic schools. Hire black and brown Catholics in leadership positions in church institutions. Adopt an anti-racist praxis in your Catholic organization.

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Non-Racist...Anti-Racist: *Continued from page 1*

Finally, Fr. Massingale asks us to heal the very core of ourselves:

Finally, pray. Yes, racism is a political issue and a social divide. But at its deepest level, racism is a soul sickness. It is a profound warping of the human spirit that enables human beings to create communities of callous indifference toward their darker sisters and brothers. Stripped to its core, white supremacy is a disturbing interior disease, a malformed consciousness that enables white people to not care for those who don't look like them...This soul sickness can only be healed by deep prayer. Yes, we need social reforms. We need equal educational opportunities, changed police practices, equitable access to health care, an end to employment and housing discrimination. But only an invasion of divine love will shatter the small images of God that enable us to live undisturbed by the racism that benefits some and terrorizes so many.

And let us all say, "Amen."

Ellie Harty is co-editor of EqualwRites.

COR – 2020: Initiatives! Reactions! Actions! **By Regina Bannan**

Are you astonished by the pace of change this year?

What was important at the Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR) meeting in late April? The personal challenges of COVID-19: lost jobs, sick relatives, fortunately no virus deaths. Zoom. Shared prayer. Cancelled events, like the worldwide Catholic Women Strike in May. Like James Carroll and Richard Gaillardetz not in Boston. Reduced staffing and contributions as the economy shut down. A decision to organize local listening sessions about the pandemic and the closed churches.

About the same time, Cardinal Dolan of New York and President Trump – and many others – talked on the phone, ostensibly about Catholic education on one side of the call, but with a political purpose on the other. And that purpose became the news. Headlines suggested that Dolan promised to deliver the Catholic vote to Trump because of his opposition to abortion.

COR immediately shifted, not to be political, but to raise up other issues central to Catholic social justice teaching. New events were organized by Zoom. In addition, previously scheduled ones assumed greater urgency. Allies with similar concerns were roped in.

May 8: Call To Action(CTA) organized a phone zap for COR. On a Zoom together, 80 people called or emailed their own bishops and the four progressive bishops to say they are “deeply concerned that the bishops of the United States are aligning with President Trump.” Some conservative bishops replied (“petty”) which CTA counts as a win, but more of a win is the interest expressed by a few other bishops.

May 25: You know what happened next. George Floyd was killed by the police. Protests and looting grew slowly around the country, reaching a crescendo that again changed culture and politics. COR actions continued, and at least four bishops went on the record to criticize Trump’s photo ops at Episcopal Church and a Knights of Columbus shrine in honor of John Paul II. I love numerical coincidences.

May 31: Benincasa, an intentional community in New York, and FutureChurch called for Catholic leaders to support immigrants with prayerful Vespers. Lilian Medina Romero of WOC gave one of the stirring reflections; these young leaders all spoke from their experience with communities of the documented and undocumented.

In addition, in May WOC celebrated Vocations Sunday. WeAreChurch USA/International, including SEPAWOC, supported the candidacy of Anne Soupa for Archbishop of Lyon in France. FutureChurch brought together Chris Schenk and Theresa Kane to explore Theresa’s life of faithfulness and challenge. Women Erased, Future Church’s course on scripture and liturgy, began and continues through July.

June 6: CTA’S Convergence went on via Zoom. The success of the Re/Generator program was evident; the three cohorts demonstrated new leadership by their organizing and participation as part of the 120 who came to learn movement strategy. Kate McElwee of WOC presented on direct action centered around what happened in Rome last year, and other COR and CTA leaders who talked about lobbying, education, and alternative communities were similarly inspiring. More information at cta-usa.org.

In addition, in June NETWORK and CTA mounted a phone bank to influence Congress to move forward on releasing prisoners in danger because of COVID-19. CTA-Chicago organized a panel on Women’s Ordination. At this writing and depending on Philadelphia lockdown rules, SEPAWOC plans a silent witness at the Archdiocesan ordinations June 20.

Women-Church Convergence developed an open letter to Catholic voters from progressive feminist Catholics that is elsewhere in EqualwRites. If you need a refresher course on Catholic social justice teaching, here it is. Marge Cooper represents SEPAWOC to this coalition which is also a member of COR.

In addition, in July SEPAWOC is presenting the Mary Magdalene award to Shannen Dee Williams.

You can find all these online. You will get notice of them – and a lot of other things, I must admit – if you join our listserv. Email sepawoc@sepawoc.org and I will add you. I have been in contact with more young people than I have since I left teaching at Temple in 2013. If you are looking for a surge of energy in the second half of this monumental year, join with these COR groups.

Regina Bannan represents SEPAWOC to COR, where she serves as membership chair.

Editorial Staff of EqualwRites
A Publication of SEPAWOC

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Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan,**
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My Catholic/Christian Eco-feminism

By Marian Ronan

I became involved in Christian environmentalism almost by accident when I joined the Grail, the international Catholic laywomen's movement, in 1965, my senior year in high school. The Grail had come to the U.S. in 1941 and began working almost immediately with the Catholic Rural Life Conference, a precursor to the Back to the Land movement. I began spending summers on the Grail's 365-acre organic farm in southwest Ohio and eventually lived for four years as part of the community there. Older members were reading Teilhard de Chardin's reflections on the Noosphere, and Thomas Berry, the geologist-author of the *Universe Story*, led discussions of his work. At one point I was even in charge of the chickens, though I found them hard to reason with.

I was always an urban type at heart, however, so I returned to New York in 1983 and undertook graduate studies in religion, focusing primarily on gender and literary theory. Then, in 2001, as a professor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, I had occasion, again almost by chance, to participate in a week-long program on the world water crisis led by Maude Barlow, the Canadian water activist. Barlow said something to the effect that a billion people didn't have access to clean water at that time, three billion wouldn't by 2050, and with the way things were going, by the end of the century, there wouldn't be any clean water at all.

Barlow scared the daylights out of me. I began teaching courses on Christian ethics and the world water crisis to seminary students and organizing them to gather signatures on a petition to ban plastic water bottles. One Good Friday I preached a sermon on Jesus' words "I thirst" in a Seven Last Words of Christ service at the biggest black Baptist church in Oakland, proclaiming that the world's thirsty were expressing themselves in the words of Jesus.

By the time we returned home to New York City in 2008, and I accepted a research appointment at the multi-racial New York Theological Seminary, I had concluded that climate change and the world water crisis were virtually the same. I began working with the Grail's national and international climate action groups and publishing articles and reviews about climate change and the wider environmental crisis.

Also, because of my appointment at a majority African American seminary, I became particularly concerned about environmental racism, the way that climate change and other environmental degradation does vastly more harm to people in the Global South, and to communities of color here in the U.S., than to white Europeans and Americans. With my husband, who is also a seminary professor, I have co-taught several courses on environmental racism and preaching, to prepare students to address the climate crisis in their churches. Many of these students were astounded to learn of the racial dimensions of the climate crisis because they had previously experienced the environmental movement as comprised of privileged white people who love polar bears and wilderness.

The works of Robert Bullard, the founder of the U.S. environmental justice movement, and Peggy Shepherd, the head of We Act for Environmental Justice here in Harlem, have been extremely important in these efforts.

I have also been strongly influenced in recent years by research on the deep relationship between capitalism and climate change, as elaborated in Andreas Malm's *Fossil Capital*, for example, as well as in the works of Ian Angus, Jason Moore and Nancy Fraser. But I am inclined to agree with the distinguished Bengali writer, Amitav Ghosh, who argues, at the end of *The Great Derangement*, his study of the cultural factors underpinning climate change, that the world religions have the greatest potential to change global attitudes and actions regarding the climate emergency. This is so, he suggests, because they are already organized, and in some cases, speak with a centralized voice.

The primary example, for Ghosh and for me, of religion's global impact on the climate emergency is, of course, Pope Francis's 2015 environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. Now let me be clear here: as a Catholic feminist for forty-five years, I have spent much of my life criticizing the monarchical governance structure of the Catholic Church. Imagine my astonishment when I was invited to speak about a papal encyclical in several different socialist settings!! I am beginning to think that a centralized religious organization with a globally recognized leader isn't, in some circumstances, entirely bad.

My writing, teaching and activism have also been strongly influenced by the works of two eco-feminist theologians, the Catholic feminist, Elizabeth Johnson, and the Protestant process theologian, Catherine Keller. Johnson is perhaps best known for her 1992 work *She Who is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. In that book, Johnson argues that God/Spirit-Sophia is mediated through the entire natural world, not only through human history. Then, in her 2007 book, *Quest for the Living God*, Johnson dares to assert that God suffers, because God's Spirit dwells all throughout a suffering creation.*

Johnson expands this vision of the God who suffers in her 2014 book, *Ask the Beats: Darwin and the God of Love*, in which she delineates the relationship between Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the Nicene Creed. Since all species suffer in the process of evolution, the logic of incarnation extends divine solidarity from the cross to all creation. This God whose love continuously sustains and empowers the origin of species is a suffering God who is in solidarity with all creatures dying through endless millennia of evolution from the extinction of species to every sparrow that falls to the ground.

The fissures that underpin the climate crisis are a primary concern for Catherine Keller, too. While Johnson connects God and creation through the cross, Keller draws on process philosophy/theology as well as Paul's letters to delineate, in place of a transcendent sovereign who wills human dominion and radical antagonism, a persua-

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My Catholic/Christian Eco-feminism

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sive God, enfolded within all creation. But while earlier process theology stresses an overall oneness of God with the universe, Keller draws on the Christian mystical tradition to invoke an apophatic God, a silent cosmic creator, in whom we are all one. Since human beings are enfolded with the rest of creation in this divine mystery, we are called to a loving agonism—struggle—with one another toward the emergence of a new, messianic possibility.

Keller's theology draws on a re-envisioning of evolution, and in particular, the work of the revolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis, in which species evolve through collaboration rather than competitive "survival of the fittest." Such a science-based reconfiguration of hierarchical theology demands from us all a recognition of the deep intersectionalism between the human and extra-human elements of creation. In some respects, this shift to a new science moves Christian eco-feminism even beyond Elizabeth Johnson's interweaving of Darwin and the suffering God of love and has profound implications for contemporary politics as well as the planet and the Christian tradition. Keller's latest book, *Political Theology of the Earth*, does a remarkable job of exploring these implications.**

What has perhaps influenced my thinking more than anything else is Keller's insertion of the silence of God into the heart of the cosmos. A number of Catholic feminist and liberation theologians, including Ivone Gebara and Elizabeth Johnson, have drawn on the apophatic, mystical tradition to connect this God of unknowing to the relatedness at the heart of reality. Keller goes on to envision a messianic contraction, an utter transformation emerging from the heart of this divine silence in which the entire cosmos is enfolded. For me, this vision of God has replaced the transcendent God at the heart of the theology in which I was educated and which far too often underpins Christian attitudes toward the current planetary crisis.

Thanks to Johnson, Keller, and others, it is this vision of a compassionate and persuasive God in whose transformative silence all creation is enfolded that will, I trust, energize my eco-feminist writing, teaching and activism in the months and years to come.

*Marian Ronan, "Theologian's Work Connects God, Women and Creation." *The National Catholic Reporter*, April 22-May 5 2016, <https://marianronan.wordpress.com/2016/04/22/the-ecofeminist-theology-of-elizabeth-johnson-a-review/>

**Marian Ronan, review of Catherine Keller's *Political Theology of the Earth*. *The National Catholic Reporter*, September 6-19, 2019, 28. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/theologian-catherine-keller-sees-path-apocalypse-transformation>

This article appeared, translated into German, in FAMA, the Swiss feminist-political-theological journal, in January 2020, 12-13.

Marian Ronan is Research Professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary in New York City and author or co-author of seven books, including Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail Movement (Apocryphile Press, 2017). She attended the first Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit in 1975 and has been active in SEPAWOC since the 1990s.

Please continue – or start – donating to SEPAWOC and for *EqualwRites*. We are so thankful for your support and affirmation which we need especially now.

Also, SEPAWOC is grateful to the family of Patricia Anne Diehl, a long-time donor whose family designated us for memorial contributions. We will miss Pat's enthusiasm and encouragement, and our sympathy is extended to her family and friends.

Finally, please keep checking our website. Not only can you view or review all the *EqualwRites* issues but other news, too.

You will see a new donation option: PAYPAL! Whatever is easiest for you - the attached envelope or now online through Paypal, we are so grateful for any way you can help.

A Momentous Anniversary for Our Own Amazing Judy Heffernan By Regina Bannan

Judy Heffernan celebrated the 40th anniversary of her ordination to the priesthood with members of several communities, near and far. Members and friends of the Community of the Christian Spirit, which carried out this then-audacious action on May 11, 1980, were able to attend from Arizona and Wisconsin as well as from Montgomery county and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Members of St. Mary Magdalene, Palmyra, a RCWP parish where Judy also celebrates liturgies, came from various South Jersey towns. Members of Southeastern Pennsylvania WOC came from Chester and Bucks counties, and the national WOC was represented by Kate McElwee from Rome – that Rome – and Erin Saiz Hanna, from Rhode Island. The previous week, Diann Neu of WATER shared the liturgy from Maryland, to Judy's great delight.

All of this gives you some insight into who Judy is. She delighted in everyone who came. Judy is beloved, not only for her 40 years of creative liturgies, but for her humble joy in the people she loves and serves. A sample of her style is the introduction to the new edition of WOC's Liberating Liturgies. Her only regret about the unique celebration by Zoom is that she could not hug everyone there.

Judy's loyalty to WOC and to the cause of women is unquestioning. When she writes her Scripture Reflections for SEPAWOC's publication *EqualwRites*, which she has done in every issue since it began 35 years ago, she often alludes to the history of the movement. Uncompromising peace advocate, Judy has increasingly been preoccupied by national politics and works all of her causes into the readings she chooses.

For all those years, Judy has been a worker-priest. After a diocesan school refused to hire this woman graduate of an Indiana seminary, she became a center director for the School District of Philadelphia's early childhood program, a survivor from the Rosie the Riveter era when public schools served the young children of women working in the war industries.

Proudly, Judy is also a Golden Griffin, 50 years out of Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. We expect to celebrate the 50th anniversary of her ordination in 2030. Will we be sorry when we no longer have to Zoom to bring us together from so many places?

Regina Bannan is the President of SEPAWOC.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Over the years, we have received so many notes, words of encouragement and – we say blushing – compliments from you. We cannot tell you how important these are to us and how much we cherish your unfailing support and kindness. Modesty has always kept us from reprinting them, but, please, keep them coming! We are printing here an excerpt from a letter from Bud Bretschneider. It has a more lengthy commentary on our writings and includes some criticism which we appreciate, too.

Catholics want better Church leadership. All Americans want better civic leadership. In America both are in crisis. But perhaps the coronavirus will help us to better recognize that we have to have the long view. Even a cursory study of millennia of History demonstrates the slow but gradual development of civilized society.

Revolutions have rarely accomplished their desired result. Bringing our humanity to the fullness of its potential is a tedious and messy process, which we barely comprehend. SEPAWOC serves to raise the consciousness of our community and this is good. I appreciate the insights offered by Ellie Harty, Regina Bannan and others.

Eileen DiFranco's articles reveal too much anger and frustration. To bash Nelson Perez (newly installed Archbishop of Philadelphia) as he begins his leadership of Philadelphia is not helpful. I certainly have no great expectations of him. Yet, I would like to try having dialogue with him. I have written to his predecessor Charles Chaput many times during his tenure and never got a response to my comments: mostly 'ad hominem' attacks.

The tide of history is on the side of women. Cardinal Gracias publicly acknowledged the hierarchy's prejudice against women. We must work in the spirit of Jesus to fill our hearts with Love, not fear and hate.

Thank you, Bud.

If you have a letter or comment, we would love to hear from you at either SEPAWOC, P.O. Box 52046, Philadelphia PA 19115 or ellieharty65@gmail.com.

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Ministry, Spirituality, and the Environment An interview with Reverend Alison Cornish

From the Editors: This issue of EqualwRites, thanks to our cadre of amazing writers, contains articles focusing on, of course, ordination and leadership of women in the Catholic Church, but also on the environment and spirituality and the role of women shaping discussion and action. Whether called eco-spirituality or ecofeminism, we are proud to espouse both. Serendipitously, the narrative of our interview below with Reverend Alison Cornish merges all these issues beautifully. She is not an ordained Catholic priest, but her life and work and the gifts she brings as an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister show us just how much we are missing.

What Reverend Alison Cornish said at the end of her interview with co-editors, Mary and Ellie, poignantly summarized the journey to ordination she and so many women have undertaken – and, bless them, hope to take: When you choose ordination, “You follow the path of the resistance that can be endured and seek the way that opens to you.”

To discover the way that opened to her, we tried to ask the questions we thought you might have asked Alison yourself: How would you describe your journey to ministry and ordination? How was your ordination received? What has been the impact on your life and the life of your community? Was your gender an obstacle or hindrance in any way and, if so, how did you overcome this? How does your environmental work connect with spirituality and ministry; how do they inform each other? What wisdom would you like to pass on to women considering ministry and ordination? To those considering connecting the spiritual and environmental justice and mission?

Alison began, “I don’t know if I really had a ‘Road to Damascus’ kind of moment in choosing ministry.” Then she reconsidered, “Yes, I did after all. It came when I visited Genesis Farm in New Jersey and met Sister Miriam MacGillis. It was there I became intrigued by the deep connection of spirituality and the environment. I began reading the works of Thomas Berry and others and in 1999 decided to go to seminary to focus my ministry on the state of the world environmentally.” Alison had previously earned a degree in historic preservation, but her true passion lay in her activism on behalf of the earth and its resources. After that fateful visit to Genesis, she was determined to turn her avocation into a vocation. She entered Andover Newton Theological Seminary (which is now part of Yale Divinity School) and almost immediately established an environmental ministry on campus. “Only two or three voices were addressing the issue at the time.” As she studied, she also put her background in historic preservation to practical use as Director of Green Seminaries, a Luce Foundation funded program to aid seminaries in earning “green” certification because of changes they made to their buildings, mission statements, and ministry placements.

Her subsequent own placement in ministry proved almost “heaven – or earth - sent”. She secured a position as minister at her own Unitarian Universalist (UU) church on Long Island, the one she had attended since she was a child. In securing this position, she did encounter some gender bias, the subtle, patronizing kind that can be as frustrating and hurtful as the more blatant version Catholic women often endure. “UU ministers get their authority from the people they serve”, she explained. “I asked the Director of Ministry how he thought I should go about serving the congregation in which I had grown up. He gave me a ‘there, there, dear’ answer: ‘Just minister as if you’re their daughter or granddaughter. You don’t really need authority.’” Alison: “He would not have said that to a man!”

Unitarian Universalists have been ordaining women, often wives and husbands together, since the 19th Century, and so Alison was not an aberration. Her progressive Protestant seminary had enrolled more women than men since the 1980’s. “But,” she admitted, “women don’t get sent to the large congregations; they are paid less; they are assigned more often to educational positions.” This, however, is changing. “We had the first woman president of a denomination. Progress is happening even at the highest levels.” All of this was not true when her mother applied to the ministry in the 1940’s and was rejected because “they did not want to invest in someone who was just going to get married.” In an ironic twist, her mother, who had always thought she was a UU, was, in fact, Jewish and, as a Holocaust survivor, received victim’s compensation. It was this money that funded Alison’s own ministry, “I used it so that I could be used by it.”

At her own church community, “because they knew me,” Alison was allowed to experiment. She integrated more and more environmental perspectives into sermons, talks, social justice actions, community education. “I connected Good Friday with crucifixion of the earth and Easter with the need for its resurrection. Our church worked to become a certified Green Sanctuary Community and model for other communities.” After nine years as minister, she felt she had to leave. “Neither the congregation nor I were growing because we had become comfortable.” She believed she had made some unique contributions as a woman and environmentalist, “but the new ministry there is focused on African-American issues and needs and is bringing insights that I could not.”

Her next position with Partners for Sacred Places brought her to Philadelphia. Their mission statement describes them as a “non-sectarian, nonprofit organization focused on building the capacity of congregations of historic sacred places to better serve their communities as anchor institutions, nurturing transformation and shaping vibrant, communities.” It was a perfect fit ... until one more perfect came along.

In 2015, Alison joined the staff of Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light to “serve in this non-profit in ministry, weaving spirituality and action with an overall environmental focus.” Again their description of what they do was a perfect match for Alison: “PA IPL is the Penn-

**Good News “Step by Step”
By Regina Bannan**

From the editors: Regina Bannan sang out to us in her May 30 post in The Table with good news we would like to pass on!

“Step by step the longest march can be won, can be won

Many stones can form an arch, singly none, singly none

And by union what we will can be accomplished still

Drops of water turn a mill, singly none singly none.”

This labor song by Waldemar Hille and Pete Seeger uses lyrics from a miner’s union in the 1860s. I love the simple complexity of the lyrics and I especially love these singers whose purpose is to teach the song. I hope you’ll sing along because there’s a lot to sing about.

Competence and humility are words that come to mind in reading The Tablet’s story about Marianne Pohl-Henzen. She’s been appointed by her bishop in Switzerland “to succeed the present episcopal vicar” for part of the diocese. What struck me was her statement: “However, as the last three episcopal vicars were all only part-time episcopal vicars and I did a lot of their work, it will hopefully be a lot easier for me now and easier for the faithful and the population to accept me.” Of course, she did a lot of their work and now she’s been given the job, just not the title and not the sacramental responsibility. The title was enough to cause a tizzy among the Church Militant crowd, but she feels that the bishop is trying to “promote women in the Church.”

Journalist and biblical scholar Anne Soupa has taken that one step further by suggesting herself as the next Archbishop of Lyon in France. La Croix International says that officials in the Archdiocese of Lyon told them that they do “not want to dismiss the ‘symbolic’ character of Soupa’s initiative, which is aimed at promoting the place of women in the Church.” Soupa herself is quoted as saying “there is an ‘intellectual laziness’ in the way bishops are chosen. ‘As the pope invites us to do, it is appropriate to dissociate governance from ordained ministry.’” Maybe when women are managing enough of the church, administering the sacraments will seem like the next step. The officials note that their chief financial officer, “number two,” is also a woman. I find all that extraordinarily positive coming from the chancery.

The first profile in a new La Croix International series about women is of Lala Meïta Soumahoro Koné, a Catholic feminist in Africa. Last February Koné participated in the #RealAfricanWoman campaign. “Through lots of humor and irony, it challenged the stereotypes about African women. The initiative got a lot of attention and revealed a new generation of Afro-feminists who are outspoken and very active on social networks,” Sarr writes. Knowing about Catholic women involved in efforts like this in many places around the world is so encouraging.

NCR’s article about the ordination of Shanon Sterringer by the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests in Austria last August was also hopeful. Sterringer served 22 years at her parish. Her pastor – and mentor – says, “She was like an associate pastor here. I mean, she just did it all within the scope of what she was able to do and just transformed this place beautifully.” Sterringer wore her alb on the altar there, and says, “Seeing a sanctuary that’s not just full of men forms people. There’s always a desire first to bring about as much positive change as you can within the fold.”

Mother's Day, 2020
By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

The Scripture Readings for the day were Hosea 11:3-4, Revelation 12:1-2, Luke 18:1-8.

It has been a glorious spring in spite of the pandemic and our confinement to our quarters. First it was the yellow and red tulips and the purple hyacinths, then the indescribable smell of lilacs, the glorious azaleas. The flowering trees are turning a soft green that deepens in color as it matures through the summer. The grass is also green. The exuberant weeds, my nemesis, are popping up along with the flowers. Contrary to the song in Carousel, in our area it was May, and not June, that was busting out all over.

This year, we've seen another side of spring as cities and populated areas have been shut down by Covid. Has anyone seen the video clip of wildlife returning to the empty streets of major cities all over the world? There was a kangaroo hopping through the empty streets of Adelaide in Australia, seals romping in front of a shuttered mall in Chile, a croc walking along an empty patio in South Carolina, monkeys in public swimming pools in Mumbai, lions on a private golf course in South Africa, and sheep playing on a merry-go-round in a playground in the United Kingdom. It's kind of a "who left the dogs out" moment.

But we know who let the "dogs" out. It was the pandemic. The pandemic has made a lot of us see and perhaps understand for the first time that humanity shares this earth with the coyotes who are roaming the area below the Golden Gate Bridge in California and the rhino chasing a customer away from a snack stand in Nepal.

The presence of the wild animals in human spaces rubs our noses in our own importance. If the human race disappears for some reason, nature will go on basically without missing a beat. Nature doesn't need humans at all. In fact, all of nature, the animals, the earth, the seas, the atmosphere, would benefit from our absence. Taming nature is not part of nature's repertoire. It appears only in ours. We might be able to live without fossil fuel or our devices or our lawn fertilizers, but we can't live without clean water and clean air and flowers and trees. Neither can our fellow creatures. You might call it, borrowing words from another musical, "the circle of life."

The so-called primitive religions recognized and honored the circle of life. The Greeks believed in water nymphs, the Celts, in holy trees, the Irish, fairies. American Indians believed that the earth itself was so holy that no one could actually "own" it. For them, an injury to the earth was a cardinal sin. It is from the Greeks that we get the idea of Mother Nature, Gaia, the personification of the earth. In Rome, she was as Terra, the earth. In ancient Greece, an oath sworn to Gaia was the most binding of all oaths.

stamp out the worship of what it deemed were false gods even as they replaced them with a pantheon of their own. The God of the Christians and the Jews was a living God, the one true God while the gods of the pagans were nothing but powerless graven images or bits and pieces of nature whose worship was meaningless - to Christians and Jews anyway. No one ever bothered to ask the pagans whose gods unceremoniously replaced what they believed. The victorious Christians with their belief in the one true God never quite grasped the idea that all people have a piece of the truth about the vastness we call God.

That one true God got harnessed to the power of empire and marched across the world, wreaking havoc wherever it went. The gods of nature, most particularly Mother Earth, got lost in the power shuffle. According to Genesis, human beings owned the world and everything in it. They got to name what was valuable and what was not. Mother Earth was only valuable for what could be done to her or extracted from her. Mother Earth, unlike God their Father, was not a living God.

We must look at the wreckage around us; the degraded environment, the waterways running with toxic chemicals, the poisoned skies, the mass extinction of species, the rising seas and now the corona virus that has killed over 100,000 in America and wonder, my God, is that really what you wanted us to do when you supposedly gave human beings made in YOUR image dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, over the cattle, the wild animals and every creeping thing on earth? My God, what have we collectively done!

As you know, I changed all of the readings to reflect the observance of Mother's Day. The lectionary readings did not lend themselves to observance, so I chose ones that did. The first reading is not as familiar as it should be although I recall one of my kids singing a song in first grade called, "His Banner Over Me Is Love."

The woman in Revelation, our second reading, is usually believed to be Mary. However, this image, the woman clothed with the sun, crowned with stars, standing upon the moon while actively giving birth is my very favorite, indeed, my only image of God, a God who is continually in the act of creating the heavens and the many earths and everything in them. Her Body extends across the lengths and heights and depths of the universe, into the deepest blackest hole and the biggest exploding nova. Spiraling galaxies trickle through her open and outstretched hands. This birthing, star-dusted God would not have given dominion to one part of her creation over another. Everything is precious in Her sight.

One small but important part of her sacred Body is the world, our world. To stretch a metaphor, even if it might sound sacrilegious, whatever we do to that Body which includes all of us, the animals, indeed, nature itself, we do to Her, our birthing God. We are one in being with

Christianity, like Judaism before it, did its very best to

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Mother's Day, 2020 *Continued from page 8*

this vast, unimaginable God, in whom all things are/were/will be made world without end.

A long, long time ago, I had to learn the catechism. The first question in first grade was "Who is God?" The answer was: "God is the supreme being who made heaven and earth." The second question was, "Where is God?" The answer was, "God is everywhere." I took those answers to heart to the point of being jokingly called a pantheist in high school by one of my religion teachers. The teacher's opinion did not change my mind. Indeed, God is everywhere.

I now recognize myself as a panentheist because I believe that the divine has left Her fingerprints upon the entire universe. God really does pervade everything and everybody. Pantheism is true as well. Reality is divinity. In God all things are sacred and beloved. Nothing is other. Nothing can be permanently cast into darkness. In times of trouble, the hands that hold the galaxies will also hold ours.

As we human beings continue to pave paradise and put up a parking lot and kill trees to the point where we have to put them in a museum and charge a dollar and a half to see them, we need to remember to whom we belong and from whence we came.

It was the many sun-clad God who labored and gave birth to us through the firey furnace of Her incomprehensible love. If there are creeds, they will fall short of the mark. If there are scriptures, they cannot tell the whole story. As Paul wrote, we can but see through this glass

darkly with our human eyes. Established faiths are only guides. They can never be or tell the whole story.

Because the whole story is God, the vast unknowable spread above, below, and within us. We are part of that whole; the other part of it is everything else: the trees, the bears, the ants, the coral reefs, the glaciers, the rain forests, the whales. We forget this or ignore it or break our chains of love with it at our peril and the peril of the entire world.

Like the persistent woman in today's gospel, we must repeat our message of the holiness of the earth and its necessary salvation until everyone realizes that we have only one body to wound - all of us and this beautiful planet earth otherwise known as Mother Nature, our Mother, our God. This is not New Age stuff. It is the substance of things hoped for and the future of our grandchildren and great grandchildren. We must say it over and over again. Put it on a banner. Wave it over our heads. Everything is beautiful. Everything is holy. Everything is God. Praise Her by honoring her Body in whom we live and move and have our being.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest, member of the Mary Magdalene Community, the SEPAWOC Core Committee and regular contributor to EqualwRites.

Ministry, Spirituality, and the Environment An interview with Reverend Alison Cornish

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sylvania affiliate of Interfaith Power & Light, a national religious response to the threat of climate change. We see climate change as a moral issue, one that demands a response from people of faith."

Alas, this June she ended her position there as well, relocating to care for her aging mother. "I am taking a sabbatical to center mom in my universe of faith and climate. She is welcome to take up as much space as she needs and I'll see what is leftover and go from there."

What can Alison's story say to Catholic women pursuing ordination and to those who love and support them? We thought the very fact that she centered on such a momentous cause, such a critical issue as the environment, and inspired the church community to learn, grow, and act with new insights may have made a big difference in her being accepted and having an impact. She also used the medium she loves most - facilitating - to effect change: "I love creating opportunities for others to have spaces to move into and experiences to explore that bring enlightenment and meaningful transformation for them. That, to me, is true ministry."

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We Will Have No Real Wins without First Acknowledging our Sheroes

By Jacquelin Agostini

Eight years ago I found a \$1.99 bargain book on my Kindle called "In Her Own Right: The life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton." Why didn't I know this amazing woman? Elizabeth started me down the road to learning and teaching Women's History.

Women's History Professor Gerda Lerner says that patriarchy has been around for 4,000 years and that women were kept second class by being denied education and left out of history books. I took a look back at my own education. My 1964 Glassboro State yearbook vividly shows an all white male faculty while most of the students were white females. I eventually went on to earn two Master's Degrees and a Ph.D. (1991), and I can count on one hand my female professors even though I never really noticed at the time.

I asked my Early American Women class students what the women who fought so hard for women's rights had in common. They recognized that these women were all very spiritual. They blazed a trail toward the 19th Amendment by channeling their spiritual power. One of the most important groups of spiritual women leaders were the Quakers.

On January 3, 1793, on Nantucket, settled in 1659 by ten original Quakers, Lucretia Coffin Mott was born. This island was the center of the whaling industry, and the men sailed as far as China while the women operated the farms and shops and ran the affairs of the island.

Lucretia's parents, Thomas Coffin (whaler) and Anna Folger and her maternal grandparents were island farmers. A disabled daughter Sarah was born in 1790, then Lucretia in 1793. Her mother eventually had three more daughters and a son. Lucretia functioned as the oldest and grew into her mother's chief companion and helper, caring for her younger siblings. Yet, by the time she was four, she spent four hours a day in school because Quakers believed in equal education for girls and boys. Lucretia grew up in an environment where women took charge and were very independent.

Eventually she married James Mott in Philadelphia where they raised their family. She became a leader in the abolitionist movement and was a respected Quaker minister. The Quakers not only believed in equal education for females they believed that the light of God came to men and women equally. Furthermore, members of Quaker meetings recognize a level of spirituality in a member and raise that person to the title of minister.

Another woman named Elizabeth Cady was born 22 years after Lucretia in Johnstown, N.Y. on November 12, 1815. Her father Daniel Cady was a landowner, a prominent lawyer and judge and her mother Margaret Livingston was only 16 years old when they married. When Elizabeth was born she was the eighth child with only two older sisters and one older brother still alive.

Elizabeth grew up in a home, called the Cady mansion which had twelve servants.

When Elizabeth was 11 years old, her only brother Eleazar (20) returned from Union College ready to study law with his father, but died suddenly. Losing his only son was a devastating blow to Judge Cady. Elizabeth recalled seeing her grief stricken father by her brother's casket. She climbed on his knee, he putting his arm about her and thinking of the wreck of all his hopes in the loss of a dear son, and she wondering what could be said or done to fill the void in his heart. He heaved a sigh and said: "Oh, my daughter, I wish you were a boy!" Throwing her arms around his neck she replied: "I will try to be all my brother was."

Elizabeth had access to her father's library and often participated in discussions with his law students. She excelled and graduated from co-educational Johnstown Academy in 1830 and went on to Troy Female Seminary founded by Emma Willard to provide a vigorous academic education for women. But when she graduated in 1833, there were few vocations open for women.

In 1840 she married abolitionist Henry Stanton. For their honeymoon they journeyed to London for a World Abolitionists Convention where the Motts from Philadelphia were elected Delegates. The Convention refused to seat women, even official delegates like Lucretia. Being excluded led to Lucretia and Elizabeth talking about women's rights which they vowed to do something about when they returned.

They came together again on July 13, 1848, in the small town of Seneca Falls, New York. Over lunch with two other Quaker Women, they decided to call a Women's Rights Convention. On July 19 and 20, the Convention was held in Wesley Methodist Church. Elizabeth led the writing of the Declaration of Sentiments (16 in all) modeled on the Declaration of Independence. She recognized that to have any power women needed the right to vote.

300 people showed up for the Seneca Falls Convention. After heated discussion and with the support of Frederick Douglass, the only black person in attendance, they voted to include the Right to Vote in the Declaration. 100 of the 300 present signed the Declaration. Many more Women's Rights Regional Conventions were to follow in New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. In 1851 Elizabeth met another Quaker woman in Seneca Falls, Susan B. Anthony. Theirs became a fifty year friendship that would change the world. They worked tirelessly for women's rights with many ups and downs, and they complemented each other. Elizabeth was the thinker and Susan was the doer. Susan even had a room in Elizabeth's house so she could help with the children.

Susan B. Anthony eventually became history's face of the Suffragist movement while Elizabeth fell into rela-

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We Will Have No Real Wins without First Acknowledging our Heroines *Continued from page 10*

tive obscurity. Elizabeth's crime was likely "The Women's Bible". She led a committee of 26 women to write Biblical criticism that challenged the orthodoxy that women should be subservient to men. The Women's Bible was published from 1895 to 1898. Many in the Movement, however, were not ready for this audacious attack on patriarchy.

Black women also provided a powerful spiritual impetus for the movement. Isabella Baumfree was born a slave around 1797 in New York State and nicknamed Belle by her parents. Slave parents were loving but lived with the painful reality that they could lose their children very young. Belle was only 4 years old when she saw her older brother and younger sister sold and taken away.

It was illegal for a slave to learn to read or write. However, slave owners did allow slaves to attend religious services and the Bible was one book they heard read on a regular basis. Belle remembered her mother saying, "My children, there is a God who will aid and protect you."

Belle was 9 years old when she was first sold away. As a child she experienced what it was like to move from one bad situation to the next. When Belle was 28 years old, the state of New York abolished slavery for anyone born before 1800. Belle could earn her freedom, but she had a long, hard struggle as she tried to free her own sold away children. She went to work for a Quaker family and with their loving support she grew in her freedom. She attended the Methodist church and she became known for her faith-filled prayers and original hymns.

At 45 years old, she believed God had called her to preach. She threw a few meager possessions in a bag and set out to travel trusting that God would provide her with people to take her in. At the first house she was asked her name. Belle said Sojourner, remembering the words from John II, "it has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth just as your father commanded us."

What is your last name? She answered: "The only master I have now is God and his name is Truth. Sojourner Truth is my name because from this day I will walk in the light of God's truth." She not only traveled to preach at religious meetings, but she courageously spoke out against slavery and for women's rights. In 1850, the first National Woman's Rights convention was held in Worcester, Massachusetts. One of the speakers was Sojourner Truth who was now one of many black women who fought for justice and freedom for all women.

Lucretia Mott died in 1880, Sojourner Truth in 1883, Elizabeth Cady in 1902, and Susan B Anthony in 1906, all fighting for women's rights for 86 years. Susan B Anthony was proud to be passing the torch to a new generation.

It wasn't until 1980 that The Women's Rights National Historical Park was established in Seneca Falls and the Harriet Tubman National Historical Park on January 10, 2017 in Auburn, New York. In 1913 the new generation's quest was spearheaded by New Jersey's Alice Paul.

As you pursue Women's Ordination, you are standing on the shoulders of giants, and you have a responsibility to know their stories.

Jacquelin Agostini, Ph.D has a Master's Degree in Religious Studies from La Salle University and doctorate from Temple University. She teaches Women's History at the Life Program at Rowan University.

She

She is the one who sings her song
When evening comes and day is done
She holds my hand on lonely days
When she sighs, the prairies sway
Crickets hearken to her voice
To temper midnight's sleepless void
The wind, too, hears her overture
The mountains bow and welcome her
She counts the stars and names each one
And grants all pleas and dreams far flung
Would you pretend to know her mind
And fathom life and death divine?
She shines a light on the forgotten
Sides with the lowly and downtrodden
She decrees there is no slave nor free
All are one as all must be

Mary Tarantini from the Community of the Christian Spirit in Palmyra writes poetry.

Book Reviews

Why Religion? A Personal Story. By Elaine Pagels. HarperCollins. 255pp.

Reviewed by Maureen Tate

Elaine Pagels is a well-known scholar and author of several popular books on Scripture and the History of Religion, among them: *The Gnostic Gospels*; *Beyond Belief*; and *Revelations*. Currently, she is a Professor of Religion at Princeton University and is the recipient of several prestigious fellowships, including a MacArthur “genius grant” Fellowship.

I was intrigued by the title as well as Pagels’ purpose in writing this book. *Why Religion?* is a personal account of Pagels’ journey to come to terms with the tragic events of her young child’s death and the death of her husband shortly after. I assumed someone of her academic stature, reflecting on questions of ultimate meaning in the face of death and grief, would reach a neat conclusion about why religion matters personally and in society, where issues of religion are often a source of conflict and where dogma is easily contradicted by science and rational thought. Pagels does not answer these questions once and for all, nor does she do my work for me. Rather, she studies the role of religion through the lens of her own life events and leaves the reader with much for further reflection.

My first take away is that Elaine Pagels is a fascinating woman who has led a most interesting life, calling to mind the movie character, Forest Gump, who always seems to be in a particular place when something momentous is happening. Pagels was born in a stoic and scientifically oriented family in which religion was considered foolish superstition and myth. In high school, she is invited to a Billy Graham gathering where she encounters Evangelical Christianity and is “born again”, an experience that opens her religious imagination. She is inspired by Grahams’ preaching against racism and poverty and his emphasis on God’s unconditional love. She is increasingly drawn to experiences that present a spiritual dimension. However, her evangelical perspective is challenged when she struggles to come to terms with the sudden death of a boyfriend from a car accident. It just so happens that in the same car is another close friend, Jerry Garcia, leader of the later famous band, The Grateful Dead.

Upon entering Stanford University, still distracted by grief, she is drawn into activism against the Vietnam War. She later applies to the Doctoral Program at Harvard in the study of religion but is first rejected because she is a woman. Pagels redirects her energy to advanced studies in Greek and Latin and a year later is accepted to Harvard. It so happens that Harvard was one of only two U.S. universities permitted to work on the translation of “secret” gospels, yes, the Gnostic Gospels, discovered in 1945 in the Egyptian village of Nag Hammadi. Pagels was excited to be directly involved in the translation project. While attracted to the emotion and poetry of religious language, she enjoyed the freedom of the secular academic environment, without an overlay of dogma, to study why religious traditions still matter and why many insist that theirs must be the right one.

Pagels reconnects with a friend from Stanford who later becomes her husband. She recalls his challenge to her about her studies, asking “Why religion, of all things? Why not something that has an impact in the real world?” She admits asking herself the same question, presuming it is likely the same quest that has led him to study quantum physics. They are similarly engaged in essential work of the imagination, seeking fundamental truth and meaning. The author notes that her husband is writing his book about *Cosmic Code* at the time she is writing *The Gnostic Gospels* and they joke that they should write a joint book – “The Cosmic Gospels” or before *The Gnostic Code*. I find the potential of such a book intriguing and amusing. One can only imagine their dinner table conversations!

Their marriage provides Pagels entree to a national community of physicists who are exploring elemental particles and the origins of the universe and, who gather every summer for work and relaxation in Colorado. Here they just happen to be neighbors of a Trappist Monastery where she forms a lasting friendship with a monk, Thomas Keating, who was becoming well known for his work in reviving a Christian tradition of contemplative prayer.

Pagels is informed that she is a recipient of the prized MacArthur grant. The couple share many academic work adventures that take them to Russia, The Middle East, and Africa. They socialize with theologians, historians, artists, and physicists. I am fascinated by all of the interconnections in Pagels’ story and appreciate how the author integrates so many perspectives and her rich life experience into her ground breaking scholarship.

Nevertheless, heartbreak intrudes. They give birth to a son who is diagnosed with a fatal heart condition. Knowing he will die young, but not when, they privately carry the fear and grief for what will come. At this point in the narrative it is difficult to keep up with all that transpires: the adoption of two children; the death of their son around the age of four; and the sudden death of her husband in a tragic hiking accident about a year later. Within a span of a few years, Pagels copes with unimaginable grief while caring for two young children and becoming the sole support of the family. This is the heart of the book and the telling is riveting. Pagels writes beautifully about her experience of death and subsequent feelings of rage, guilt, despair and anxiety. There is significant detail that is rich but never too much.

Throughout her personal story, the author discusses questions that arise around particular events and periods of her life. These questions drive her scholarship, and it becomes apparent that her explorations parallel the subjects of her published works. She wants to know how

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Book Review *Continued from page 12*

religion has helped communities deal with issues of sexuality, evil, suffering, and death. She is interested not only in how Christianity deals with these issues but other religious traditions as well. Her continuing work with gnostic gospel texts stimulates new interpretations that appeal to her imagination. Her research suggests that one prominent view, that Jesus died as atonement for the sins of humanity, is countered by the witness of others who profess a loving God, encountered within the self, who is the source of love and connection among all human beings.

Pagels' scholarship, and direct access to the "secret gospels" and other ancient manuscripts of the period, shifts her assumption that religion is about what you believe. Rather, in religion, she finds an experience of imagination, metaphor, poetry, music, and art that serves to open up multiple paths of academic inquiry and spiritual growth.

At times, the book shifts somewhat suddenly from personal story to explorations in scriptural interpretation and research on religious themes. On the whole, you can see how Pagels' academic work continues to build the case that religion has a huge impact on the world, especially on issues such as sexual identity, justifications for war, and views on the meaning of suffering and death. This is not an abstract issue for the author. Pagels engages in this theme as a personal quest to resolve her anguish over the death of her son and husband. She finds that the religious stories people continue to tell, having emerged from communities trying to address these same ultimate questions, still have universal resonance. She probes what these stories meant to the people of the past and is driven to know how they are speaking to people today, as she recognizes that some have become, for her now, a source of healing.

Why Religion? was an engaging read. The author's story, and quest to discern the import of religion in modern times, is informative and insightful. I chose the book hoping to find a persuasive argument for why religion still holds meaning at a time when many opt for the language of "spirituality". While I feel more comfortable with the image and process of spiritual search, I admit, like Pagels, an attraction to the religious imagination and appreciate the impact of religious culture at the personal level and in society. Her expose on the origin of texts and her interpretations of scriptural passages, both canonical and newly discovered, provide fresh insights.

As indicated in the subtitle and introduction, this is a deeply personal story and Pagels writes descriptively about the circumstances before, during, and after the events surrounding the death of her son and husband. This work can be read on many levels. Readers who have likewise survived great tragedy and grief, will resonate with her sense of dislocation and the range of emotion she articulates. Those interested in Pagels' academic work will be impressed once again by the depth and breadth of her thinking. As a story of spiritual quest, love, loss, and healing, it is genuine and compelling.

The title is provocative. Why, indeed, does religion still exist in the twenty-first century? How can the study of religion have a positive impact in the real world? *Why Religion?* is not trying to answer a question about belief. It is the author's process of finding meaning, hope, and healing in the wake of personal tragedy. In rereading Biblical books and ancient texts through the lens of her trauma, and probing the questions that arise in that context, Pagels unearths important connections that open up for her, once again, the possibility of life after death.

Maureen Tate is a member of *The Grail* and the *SEPAWOC Core Committee*.

We celebrate the Earth. We Celebrate *Laudato Si'*. *By Ellie Harty*

We celebrate men who are so often the proclaimers, the heard, the empowered. And we, even more fervently, celebrate the women and all genders who speak to us in their own powerful voices which are often not heard and not heeded. We need all these diverse voices to be equal in power to wake us up so that we forever celebrate, cherish, and consecrate the earth and its creatures with gratitude and love.

Pope Francis: I call on the world to dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet...: ...if we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder ... our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters... So long as we are in touch with "wonder and awe" we recognize a continuing revelation of the divine in the smallest and largest forms within nature. Hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Joy Harjo, first Native American Poet Laureate of the United States:

Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.

Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them, listen to them. They are alive poems.

To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.

And we say, Amen.

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Scripture Reflections

Summer 2020

Romans 8:26-28; Ps 85:9-10

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Once in a doctor's waiting room, I found an issue of *Time* totally devoted to the annus mirabilis--the amazing year--of 1968. The power of 1968 changed our lives profoundly - and here we are in 2020, in the midst of profound change once again.

Evelyn Underhill, an early 20th century English Anglo Catholic and pacifist, wrote that God is always coming to us in the Sacrament of the Present Moment...even this present moment of pandemic and violence, of love and loss, of grief and rage, of healing and change. I remember very early in my nineteen years of Catholic education, learning about aspirations- short prayers from our hearts, when we struggle to find words.

Now as I reflect on our Liturgical readings for this season, aspirations rise from the depths: "The Spirit of God turns our groans into prayer...For those who love God, all things work together unto good...Truth shall spring out of the earth; kindness and truth shall meet, justice and peace shall kiss".

I am also praying the aspiration prayer of commitment I heard Donna Edwards (U.S. Representative from Maryland, 2007-2018) proclaim in tears: "I am tired, I am ex-

hausted, but I am not willing to give up the hope and the fight."

How do we live out this commitment now? Adele Halliday has written "What I Need from White People Right Now" and tells us she needs us to be pastoral and prophetic... to pray, listen, preach and protest. She reminds us that we come from a tradition where prophets name truth. She reminds us that the Spirit is poured out on us and is prompting, urging, moving among us who are wounded - soothing, comforting and encouraging. Adele tells us she needs us to partner with God in actively doing the work of justice...and implores us to please, do something for God's sake, for all our sakes...it is a matter of life and death.

By the way, I looked up aspiration and one translation is "to breathe"...as echoes of "I can't breathe" pound in our heads. So, let us pray and protest and help change the system "until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream!" Have hope for "the times they are a-changing."

Judith Heffernan is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit and the SEPAWOC Core Committee.