

	EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
Vol. XXXIV No. 2		JUNE 2026 - NOVEMBER 2026
	WRITES	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.

MARY MAGDALENE, A SAINT FOR OUR TIMES

Mark your calendars for:
Sunday, July 19 at 9 am,
Drexel Hill United Methodist Church,
McBurney Chapel, 600 Burmont Road, Drexel Hill, PA 19026.

In these, it seems, ever more troubling times, of eroding of individual – and especially women’s - rights, injustices, war and suffering throughout the globe, we need to be with Mary Magdalene: remembering her experiences, listening to her words, accompanying her at the foot of the cross, and then joining her in the joy of the resurrection and its promise.

Please join us in honoring Mary Magdalene’s life and legacy at our annual St. Mary Magdalene Celebration with the Saint Mary Magdalene Community.

WE ARE STILL HERE! **A Reflection on WOC50** *By Maureen Tate*

It was a pleasure and privilege to attend the recent 50th Anniversary of the Women’s Ordination Conference in Detroit. I was in college 50 years ago when I learned of the first conference from a Christian Brother friend and spiritual mentor who had attended. I was a religious studies student at the time and had no doubt that ordination for women was only a matter of time, and certainly in my lifetime. So much was changing in the early 70’s regarding women’s rights and opportunities. The Church was also changing. As part of a progressive Catholic youth movement in Philadelphia, I participated in a post Vatican II model of Church and was excited by the changes in the Church, possibilities for lay participation and leadership, and the Church’s role in the modern world, especially pertaining to social justice issues.

Over the span of 50 years, my excitement waned and was replaced by frustration and anger that, faced with undeniable scholarship regarding women’s religious leadership and authority in the early church, as well as clear testimony of women coming forward professing their call to ordained ministry, the Vatican became ever more entrenched in its refusal to consider women’s ordination. From the days following the first conference, women and men have been organizing and advocating on this issue. Many left parishes and formed alternative small eucharistic communities where women were full participants. In Philadelphia, local leaders Judy Heffernan, Regina Bannan, Arlene Swidler and many others formed what we now know as SEPAWOC. I have been fortunate to journey with the SEPAWOC community for more than 40 years and have felt supported and inspired by their courage, creativity, and commitment in advancing a movement for a renewed priestly ministry.

When the 50th Anniversary Conference was announced, I didn’t hesitate to register. My thoughts about ordained ministry have changed and deepened over the course of time. I have continued to study, have attended women led liturgies, participated in a Women-Church community, and cheered the expansion of the Ro-

man Catholic Womenpriest movement and other reform movements. I also continue to attend mass at my local, more traditional parish where I have deep roots. I find that my life as a catholic feminist is often challenging, complicated and full of contradictions.

I wanted to be in Detroit because I needed to be with my people. After all these years, I needed to experience the joy and certainty of a community where the priesthood of all believers is celebrated and a lived reality. I wanted to be in a space where women speak unapologetically that they are made in God’s image, where all are truly welcome at the table. And I met many others who were there for similar reasons, more than 200 of us.

WOC50 was well planned with a mix of ritual, play, learning, sharing and celebration. What a blessing it was to be in the presence of accomplished and inspiring theologians, activists, liturgists and movement leaders. While the movement continues to struggle with issues of racial and class diversity, I was happy to meet younger women who feel ownership for the movement and who bring new perspectives from their generation, especially regarding the intersectionality of race, class and gender as it manifests in church reform assumptions and efforts. I have so much gratitude for those who resourced the program and for the exposure to new thinking and scholarship that continues to stretch my understanding of what is at stake. I can only imagine how alive the Church would be if it welcomed women’s gifts and full participation. What a global force for justice and peace it could be!

As it happened, the WOC opening ritual occurred on May 22, the 32nd anniversary of Pope John Paul II ‘s Apostolic Letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, the encyclical declaring that the ban on women priests should be definitively held. What followed the publication of this encyclical were determined efforts by Church hierarchy to squelch discussion and activism on this issue that included excommunications, banning of theologians from teaching and writing, and even expelling priests and sisters from their religious congregations. The anniversary of the encyclical did not go unnoticed by WOC conference planners who provided a stack of encyclicals and invited participants to shred them to create confetti to release at the close of the opening ritual.

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WE ARE STILL HERE! A Reflection on WOC50

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The closing liturgy on Pentecost was especially meaningful. We celebrated Eucharist seated around circular tables where we anointed each other with oil and blessed and shared the bread and wine together. The homily by Dr. Nontando Hadebe offered a fresh understanding of the original Pentecost event, clarifying that the Spirit was not just given to 12 men as individuals and Mary, the mother of Jesus. In fact, it was given to the community, as a whole, who included other followers of Jesus as well. We were reminded that we too are in continuity with that community as we carry the Spirit forward.

So many of the major addresses and contributions by panel participants were noteworthy. However, Fordham theologian, Dr. Natalia Imperatori-Lee, who addressed the assembly on the opening evening, shared a comment that became a mantra of sorts throughout the conference. Noting the anniversary of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, and the subsequent years of punitive measures and admonitions to those advocating for women's ordination, she observed that not only did the encyclical not succeed in closing down support for women's ordination, it galvanized women and men to work even harder to advance the movement for a renewed priestly ministry. Despite all the obstacles we have faced, we should remain steadfast and hopeful that 50 years and counting WE ARE STILL HERE!

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

HOLY THURSDAY WITNESS A LITURGY OF REMEMBRANCE AND CELEBRATION *By Joan Aspan*

I was invited to join SEPAWOC in 2025 by Kathy Gibbons Schuck, RCWP. As a member of the Saint Mary Magdalene Community in Drexel Hill since the pandemic, I had heard about SEPAWOC through Kathy and our other Roman Catholic WomenPriests— Eileen McCafferty DiFranco and Caryl Conroy Johnson. I attended the SEPAWOC Holy Thursday Witness in the Spring of 2024 with other members of the Saint Mary Magdalene Community, where I was struck by the fervent expressions of hope, joy, and expectation that infused that gathering. Kathy invited me to join SEPAWOC in the summer of 2025. And when a team of members was assembled to create the liturgy for this year's Holy Thursday Witness, I enthusiastically got involved.

I grew up in the 1960's in a Chicago suburban parish that embraced Vatican II. My Mom's brother, Father Tom White, was ordained a priest in 1959 and served in a nearby parish; he enthusiastically embraced the changes that the Second Vatican Council promoted. He encouraged us to fully participate in the new liturgy structure. All through middle and high school, I involved myself in school and parish liturgies. I especially remember a Holy Saturday liturgy where my brother got to be an altar server. But the other five of us (all girls) were not allowed to remove the cloths which had been placed over the statues of saints while another altar boy vigorously rang the bells. We simply were spectators in the front pew with our parents. This was unacceptable to me, even as a 5th grader.

As a student at Saint Mary's College at Notre Dame, Indiana, I found myself enticed by the beautifully crafted liturgies the Campus Ministry team prepared each week. We students were encour-

aged to participate and lead; I was involved in liturgy and music preparation for many Masses and prayerful celebrations there. I spent my senior year as a soprano in the Notre Dame Chapel Choir, witnessing the spiritual thoughtfulness that composer David Isele and director Sue Seid Martin gave to each Sunday's liturgy at Sacred Heart Chapel. I earned my music degree, became a cantor in every parish I lived in, and continued doing that throughout my career as an elementary music educator. So, when asked to pitch in for this year's Holy Thursday SEPAWOC Witness, I felt called to draw on my experience.

Our liturgy planning committee was led by Maureen Tate; Ellie Harty, Pat Romagna, and I contributed. With Maureen's adept leadership, we formulated a rough draft based on the past few years' Witness liturgies. We met on Zoom and tossed ideas around. As the new kid on the block, I asked for suggestions and direction from the others and got great insight from them. I was not aware of the names of "heavy hitters" in the SEPAWOC movement, but Maureen, Ellie, and Pat supplied me with history and names. Their contributions aided my tweaking of John Becker's "Litany":

Theresa Kane, pray with us. Brother Bart, pray with us.

Donna Quinn, pray with us. Shelley McBride, pray with us.

Thomas Gumbleton, pray with us. Mary Byrne, pray with us.

Pat Walsh, pray with us. Darlene Ketterer, pray with us.

All you holy men and women, pray with us.

Karen Lenz and Marge Cooper, pray with us.

Dick O'Malley, pray with us.

Jim Callan, pray with us. Dorothy Day, pray with us.

Arlene Swidler, pray with us. Anthony Padovano, pray with us.

Gaile Pohlhaus, pray with us. John Shelby Spong, pray with us.

All you holy men and women, pray with us.

As we sang, I sensed a deep and abiding peacefulness, a sense that these people who had come before me, before my time in Philadelphia, had courageously plowed the pathways that brought us all to the place we're in now. I was and continue to be humbled by their example and their legacies.

Our theme, "Now is the Time", was expressed from the onset of the Witness. It increasingly resonated with me as I heard many voices around me answer the call "*We look back in time . . .*" with the response "*Now is the time!*" Each of the declarations, citing the women who gathered at the foot of Jesus' cross all the way up to the women ordained as Roman Catholic WomenPriests in 2005, reinforced my awareness of this need, this desire for fulfillment of women's vocations to the priesthood.

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Perceptions, Perspectives, Possibilities!

Insights from WOC 50th Anniversary Conference

By Ellie Harty

I thought I had found it: The perfect Catholic Church - at least for me. The community (congregation) and the priests were energetic, engaged, innovative, creative, inspired and inspiring. Liturgies sparkled with music, dance, gesture; homilies excited, provoked, celebrated, and challenged because people from diverse races, economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and sexual orientations influenced them. Women were leaders of prayer and sometimes homilists. People remained standing until everyone received communion, and the priest was always served last. We received the Eucharist through real bread baked by community members and then wine separately. Church ritual kept traditional elements, thereby connecting us with all other Catholic churches throughout the world and the ages, but mixed in fresh, expansive, new voices and ways of expressing the Spirit, thereby creating new relevance and vision.

Well, that changed – or at least a significant part of it. Music stayed but dance virtually disappeared. Only the priest gave the homilies. Women ceased to be leaders of prayer. By strong suggestion bordering on decree, people knelt to focus on their own prayers during communion rather than standing as people of the resurrection, as one body nourished and nourishing together. The priest was always served communion first, and bread and wine became a dry white wafer.

What was going on? How did we get on an escalator going both backwards and definitively down? Thanks to some perspective gained from the speakers at the 50th Anniversary Women's Ordination Conference Convention this May, I now have a clearer concept of why these and many other changes happened, and I also have a better idea of what the hope for our future might be in light of - or in spite of - those changes.

Here is one main insight I gained from conference speakers, Natalia Imperiori-Lee, Theresa Delgado, Mary Hunt, and a variety of expert panelists of different ages, genders, nationalities, and backgrounds: The Church hierarchy, fearing a dangerous *unity* was happening (one in which all gifts from all people were expressed, endorsed, and celebrated) countered with a worldwide demand for *uniformity* instead. It was exactly that, uniformity, conformity, I had seen imposed on my own once vibrant parish.

The following further comments along the same lines are from my notes taken during the WOC sessions (Please read the full content of each presentation soon to be available on the WOC website for more details and clarifications.) One speaker cautioned us about the Church's touted 'Age of Synodality' communal discernment process, encouraging us to question: Whose voices were heard at the Synod sessions and whose were suppressed? Whose ends did, and does, the process serve? Have the dissenting, angry, questioning voices only been brought out in the open so suppressors and repressors know better whom or what to target for future containment? Is the current emphasis on uniformity (which is, in essence, a false form of unity) the means of that suppression?

As far as women's issues, more questions arose: Does the modern Church really think it has softened its paternalism through its doctrines of complementarity and other binary separations, e.g. its bride/bridegroom metaphors? In its stress on male apostolicity as an argument against placing women in leadership and priesthood, has it hollowed out Jesus' true message by making apostolicity

about gender rather than mission? And here is what I found a particularly tough question to answer: What about the inclusivity we tout as a main goal? Isn't inclusivity gained within a still hierarchical, paternalistic, authoritarian Church just putting a coat of paint on a building that is not fully accessible for all? Women's ordination cannot be just about inclusion in a Church that continues to do harm.

What kind of Church, therefore, and what kind of priesthood do we want? Here is a digest of some ideas the speakers put forth: How about one that radically identifies with those on the margins, including those it has put there? And how about one that does this not as virtue signaling but as sacred obligation? How about one in which women are not only at the altar but one where the altar itself is reimagined? How about one in which we dismantle the structures imposed through internal and external imperialism and, instead, see power and authority dwelling in the Spirit moving in the people of God? The women's ordination movement has always been about more than women as priests; it has been the about bringing forth the full dignity and worth of all humanity in the world we live in, one in which gifts have not first been sorted by gender before being distributed.

Many who spoke on reforming or reimagining the Church or creating something entirely new also gave sage advice for the present and the future: Tell and retell our own stories; send out the descriptions of innovative parishes or home churches or Eucharistic communities who have made – or attempted to make – structural change, and then dissect and discuss what happened and why. They are our maps; let's use them.

I described one such structure, my old parish - to which I occasionally return and cannot help but love – and mourn - because it, for the best of reasons, i.e. protecting its very existence for those who still feel enriched there, gave in to imposed uniformity. I have had to turn to some new models for inspiration, energy, and hope: two Eucharistic communities and one led by a Roman Catholic Woman Priest, and, of course, SEPAWOC and WOC. Their message for me is: We are trying out the new; we are on the alert for more ideas; we are looking for signs of progress as well as areas to liberate; we are witnessing a new church for a new day; our numbers are strong, our persistence legendary, and we still believe in the brightest of futures.

Ellie Harty is co-editor of EqualwRites.

We hope you will continue to support our mission:

As always, we appreciate your faithful support. Your encouraging words and financial donations have enabled SEPAWOC to advocate for the full inclusion of all into the Church body. We have included an envelope if you wish to send a check. There is a link at our website, Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, that provides a direct link to PayPal if that is your preference.

Please note our New Address:

SEPAWOC
P.O. Box 27
Lafayette Hill, PA 19444

THE MEMORIES FLOODED IN!
WOC's 50th Anniversary Conference
By Judy Heffernan

When our beloved *EqualwRites* editors asked us to write a reflection about the WOC gathering in Detroit, I said I would be happy to do that- as soon as I stopped crying! Well, so much for that plan! Now at the deadline, I write this with tears of gratitude, amazement, joy and love still flowing.

When our beautiful iron bird took flight to Detroit, I thought of James Carroll's story about his experience of hearing a pilot make the announcement to prepare for a possible crash landing. When the problem was corrected, and the flight landed without any trouble, he said to the flight attendant on the way out, "The rest of your life is all extra now!" She replied, "It was all extra to begin with!"

Then WOC memories flooded in... In 1975 when I was 29 years old, on my way to Detroit, for the first WOC conference (before WOC had a name!), carrying the dreams of a lifetime, knowing for sure women were called to ordination. I sat beside Arlene and Len Swidler, keynote speakers in Detroit, who had spent their entire adult lives teaching, writing, reaching out and dialoging with everyone, including church leaders, about equality in ministry, including ordination.

And now here I was 50 years older, able to go to celebrate WOC's glorious anniversary. Just like the first time, I was able to go because of the care and support of my loving family of relatives and friends. I was astonished that I lived to see this day, a life that was all extra to begin with.

Every time I write the *EqualwRites* Scripture Reflections from this day forward, I will probably share something with you from this 50th anniversary gathering...so for now I will just say that I wish everyone who doesn't understand "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion" had been there with us in Detroit.

There were young and old, women and men, beautiful colors blending, different dreams, different experiences...all of us together...praying, singing, dancing, listening, learning, sharing, and always, always, honoring each other near and far...blessing the past, celebrating the now and leaping with faith and trust into the future...together as one family, one Bread, one Body.

We SEPAWOC-ers were so happy to be in Detroit together; I had promised we would pack you in our suitcases- and you really were there with us. Caring people from wondrous places told us of their appreciation of SEPAWOC's dedication to the mission of WOC and our long-haul faithfulness.

May we continue to trust in the guidance of the Spirit and grow in wisdom and grace together as one family, gratefully celebrating our lives that were all extra to begin with.

Judy Heffernan has been with WOC since its inception and we are so blessed she persisted – and encouraged us to do the same – for 50 years.

**A 'Newbie's' Reflections on WOC's 50th
Anniversary Conference**
By Theresa Goggin Roberts

After attending WOC's 50th Anniversary Conference, I went to the gym, where a woman struck up polite conversation on the walking track. "How was your weekend?" We lapped the track for the next hour, discussing women's ordination and her doubts as a lifelong Catholic. Now, we both eagerly anticipate our next discussion about the divine feminine and more.

My journey to Detroit began over thirty years ago during my son Frank's First Reconciliation Mass. He pointed to an altar of five men and asked, "Why aren't there any lady priests up there?" At that moment, I felt any answer would diminish women. This drove me to deconstruct my cradle-Catholic teachings, explore various paths, and ultimately become ordained in an interfaith tradition. Last year, life led me back to Catholicism, thanks to three extraordinary RCWP: Kathy Gibbons Schuck, Eileen McCafferty DiFranco, and Caryl Conroy Johnson of the Saint Mary Magdalene Community in Drexel Hill, PA—just a few miles from where Frank first asked his question.

With the gracious welcome of the SMM Community, I boarded a plane to add my voice to the call for ordination justice, believing this biased doctrine underpins many global injustices often dismissed as "God's will."

In Detroit, I was thrilled to find a remarkable group of vibrant, joyous women and men, all leading with open hearts. Throughout the weekend, every panel and workshop featured experts, visionaries, and global allies willing to share their wisdom. (Not to mention my fellow attendees!) Perhaps most poignant was meeting the women who stood for this justice in 1975. As a teen then, I sensed the inequality in my Church, but lacked the words. Each one of you is my real-life "she"ro.

I was moved to tears watching this community laugh, dance, and pray together. After awards and more dancing Saturday night, Pentecost Sunday arrived with a sea of red-clad, recharged folks, gathered to listen and pray before returning to their lives. But the work continues, and every voice is needed.

That's the message I took away: every voice and call matters. To all who gathered in Detroit, both physically and spiritually, and to every voice that came before, thank you for speaking through me on the walking track. Keep talking. People are listening.

Theresa Goggin Roberts is a member of the SMM Community. Her passion for peace has led her to ordination justice after serving sixteen years on the board of the End Violence Project.

CONNECTIONS

My Reflection on the WOC 50th Anniversary Conference
By Pat Romagna

I was actually nervous about the trip but could not put my finger on why. Perhaps it was because I have heard of all of the amazing things the presenters and participants have done and continue to do. They have laid the ground work and trudge on despite the risks, overt clericalism, and the "PAPAL NO". My first full day I met up with people I had not seen in over a decade, people I never met before, and people who were before that day just names mentioned in articles, talks, and conversation.

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ON TO THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS

A Reflection on WOC's 50th Anniversary Conference

By Regina Bannan

I have six highlights to report about my experience at WOC's 50th anniversary gathering in Detroit May 22-24.

1. On opening night, Board President Gail DiSabatino asked various groups to stand and be acknowledged: people who had been present in 1975, who had served on staff or Board, who were on WOC lists, etc. I was blown away when I realized that about a quarter of the attendees were still seated and only rose to "your first experience with WOC" – and tremendous applause. I could see this because Mary Hunt and I were standing in almost the last row of the crowded chapel. We had joined Judy Heffernan, who was to sit there before her prayer about "WOC Beginnings" in the opening ritual.
2. Throughout the meeting, I realized that many people I met were part of small faith communities and worshipping with women priests. Nobody was asking how these diverse leaders were ordained or whether the Eucharists were valid. This is a big change over 40 years, I would say, based on Judy's memories of the 1985 conference.
3. But I also found acceptance of traditional religious experience. At a dinner outside, two women at my random table shared that they were each researching the rosary. Wow, I said; SEPAWOC and others organized by Eileen DiFranco have said the rosary outside the Philadelphia ICE office every Friday afternoon since February 2025. I described the way Pam Carunchio intersperses the sorrowful mysteries with news reports each week, and how a small community has been created from people all over the region. I think there was such intense interest because it was so unexpected in the context of WOC.
4. One of the side altars was "A Place of Holding." The description said "May you feel embraced in the silence ... and held by the Earth, by Sophia, and by the Body of Christ surrounding you in this place." The chapel was so crowded I never made it over there to sign the book, but that just added to the feeling of being really held in this assembly.
5. Adding to that feeling was Natalia Imperatori-Lee's excellent keynote address. Look for it when the proceedings are published. What continued the feeling of being held for me was that Imperatori-Lee cited SEPAWOC's own Marian Ronan. Marian's efforts to identify concerns at the turn of the 21st century like middle-class bias and the centering of white women's experience brought out in the open a discussion that continues today.
6. The last night, I was thrilled to present a special award for a Lifetime of Faithful Witness for Equality and Justice to Dolly Pomerleau, one of WOC's founders and

a Board leader for many years. In 1975 Dolly also co-founded the Quixote Center, and equality and justice are intertwined in all she has done. Both movements collaborated on this surprise award. I'll put more about Dolly on the SEPAWOC listserv after WOC releases its recapitulations. I was tempted to go on and on here – but, like the anniversary itself, it's over, and on to the second fifty years.

Regina Bannan is the President of SEPAWOC.

HOLY THURSDAY WITNESS ALITURGY OF REMEMBRANCE AND CELEBRATION

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Our songs throughout the Witness served to bring us together spiritually as well. Though I intended to be the song leader, there were so many instances where I was led by the enthusiastic and prayerful singing of the people gathered for the Witness. Everyone seemed to know the songs— "Sing a new Church", "Sing of a blessing", "We shall not be moved", "We are called", "Siyahamba", "We shall overcome". The Spirit was present in that community of believers. Their faith, hope, and love created a bond of positive good will that many on the street commented on and supported with a "thumb's up" or kind words as they passed by our gathering space in Philadelphia's Sister Cities Park, across from the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul.

As a new kid on the SEPAWOC block, I was humbled to be a part of the 2026 Holy Thursday Witness. I experienced the presence of the Spirit among all the women and men who came out to witness and advocate for the ordination of women. After 50 years, the Women's Ordination Conference has made considerable progress during the papacies of six popes— but so much of what women contribute to the well-being of the Church remains to be recognized for what it is— clear and solid leadership guided by the Holy Spirit. Thus, we all say, *NOW IS THE TIME!*

Joan Aspan is a member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee, musical leader and educator.

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A Publication of SEPAWOC

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SEPAWOC FEATURED BOOK

12 Steps to Mindful Aging

Described by Authors: Marguerite Herrmann Sexton and Patricia Herrmann Conroy

Our book, *12 Steps to Mindful Aging*, grew from our own deepening awareness of the things in life that matter most to us as older women, listening to our inner wisdom, and writing with joy and intention.

The inspiration for *12 Steps to Mindful Aging* began with the Breakfast Club, a close-knit group of four lifelong friends: Marge, Patricia, Linda, and Joanne. Our friendship, spanning more than 70 years, was deepened by annual retreats at the Dominican Retreat House, where the Dominican Sisters served as spiritual mentors. As young wives and mothers, their post-Vatican II spirit and tender care for us were balm to our souls.

In the early 1980s, we discovered Joe Klass's book *12 Steps to Happiness*, which adapts the traditional 12 steps for anyone seeking a more mindful life. Inspired by it, the four of us formed a monthly discussion group and spent a year reflecting on one step each month.

Over the years, while our lives brought both joy and hardship, our spiritual paths evolved. Patricia became a Quaker and joined Abington Friends Meeting. After a time away from the Catholic Church, Marguerite joined St. Vincent DePaul Parish in Philadelphia, founded Journeys of the Heart, an inclusive ceremonial ministry, and later became an associate of the Medical Mission Sisters. Our two faith traditions, perhaps not surprisingly, share many core beliefs, such as the unity of all and validating each person's own spiritual path. Our deepest common spiritual belief holds that each person has within them their own Inner Wisdom.

Through our middle, then later stages of life, we searched for thinkers to keep us grounded. We revisited favorite authors for insights. We read authors such as Carolyn Myss (*Anatomy of the Spirit*), Eckhart Tolle (*A New Earth*), Joan Chittister (*The Gift of Years*), Pema Chodron (*The Places that Scare You*), Gary Zukov (*The Seat of the Soul*), Elizabeth Johnson (*She Who Is*) and others, along with using The First Egalitarian Translation of *The Inclusive Bible* by Priests of Equality (Published 2009) for our own scripture study.

In a 2024 phone conversation, our Breakfast Club friend Linda mentioned that she had reread Joe Klass' *12 Steps to Happiness*. The same book that had guided us years earlier no longer spoke to her in this season of life. That insight prompted us to search for more relevant resources that addressed the realities of aging. Klass' reflections, which we had once found so meaningful, no longer aligned with our longing for an approach that would support a vibrant and challenging old age. We longed instead for guidance shaped by strength, gentleness, and joy. Upon realizing that there no such resource available, we saw an opportunity to create for others what we needed ourselves.

We two sisters lived near each other for most of our lives. As little girls and even as teenagers, we shared a bed in our family home, and for more than 50 years as adults, we never lived more than a mile apart. Aging, however, brought necessary change, and now we live an hour apart from each other. Technology keeps us gratefully connected. To write our book, we met weekly on Zoom. Our first task was to reimagine and rewrite each of the 12 Steps with our own needs and those of our peers in mind. Working independently and together, we completed the book in about a year.

We reimagined each step together with our changing needs in mind. After a month of revising the steps, each of us chose six to develop further over the next four months. The work involved writing, editing, research, and revision. Though demanding, we stayed motivated by our commitment to the project. From this process emerged a 12-step philosophy shaped for older adults. We came to see it as an accessible approach to aging, a spiritual framework inclusive of all beliefs while not at odds with any.

When we finished the manuscript, we felt we had created something uniquely meaningful—not only for ourselves, but for others as well. Believing it was meant to be shared, we submitted it first to a well-known national publisher. Although they did not accept it, they warmly encouraged us to move our project forward. With some research and with Eileen DiFranco's encouragement we found our way to Emergence Education Press in Philadelphia. Their vision states: *Emergence Education is dedicated to a new understanding of ourselves and the world we live in.* We knew at once it was the right fit and were delighted when they agreed.

In *12 Steps to Mindful Aging*, each brief chapter centers on one step and shares a person's story to inspire hope or joy. A blank page at the end of each chapter invites readers to reflect, take notes, or meditate on that step.

Below are our reimagined *12 Steps to Mindful Aging*. Readers familiar with the traditional 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and other recovery programs will recognize a similar rhythm, but with a different focus—one rooted in gentle guidance and self-acceptance.

STEP 1: Accept the changes of aging, while understanding there is inherent dignity in the aging process.

STEP 2: Identify your own Source of Wisdom and trust its intelligence.

STEP 3: Rely upon your Source of Wisdom to sustain you through the changes that aging brings.

STEP 4: Honor the complexities of your past experiences, forgive yourself, then others.

STEP 5: Share these complexities with a trusted companion.

STEP 6: Accept our experiences without judgment and expect to be safely led by your Source of Wisdom.

STEP 7: Be confident that Your Source of Wisdom will empower you with the strength and courage to fully embrace your present reality.

STEP 8: Reflect upon the goodness of people in your life, those from the past and those around you now.

STEP 9: Express gratitude to those people whenever possible.

STEP 10: Be mindful to care for your physical and mental well-being and seek support as necessary.

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STEP 11: Cultivate an ongoing relationship with your Source of Wisdom, seeking awareness, honesty, and guidance to navigate this sacred time of life.

STEP 12: Having experienced the process of attaining deeper peace, seek to model that peace for others.

Marguerite Herrmann Sexton is a resident activist at the Philadelphia Protestant Home. She is the founder of Journeys of the Heart ceremonial ministry and recipient of the 2024 SEPAWOC Mary Magdalene Award.

Patricia Herrmann Conroy is a member of the Phoenixville writers' support group, Scribe Sisters. She is an avid birdwatcher who shares her love of nature and birds on her Birds 'n' Words blog.

CONNECTIONS

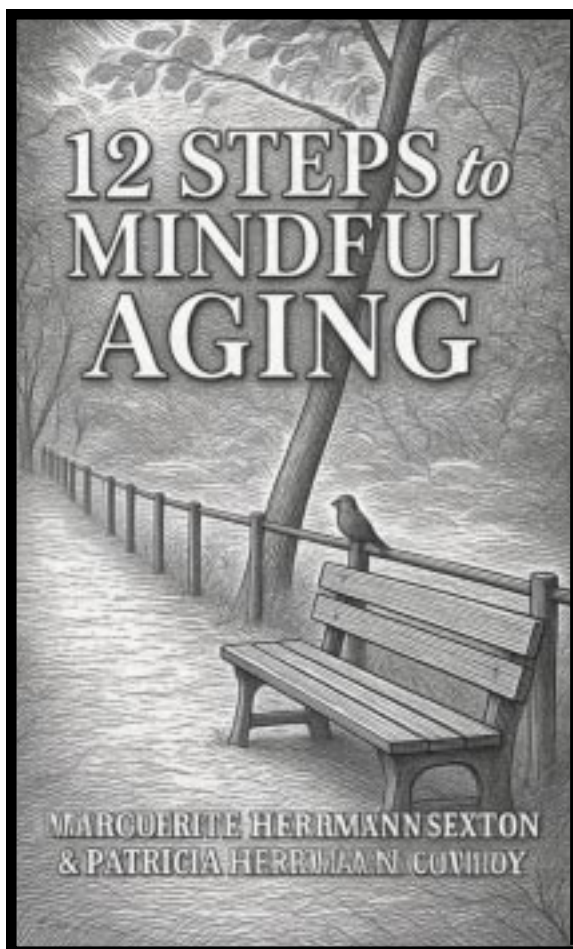
My Reflection on the WOC 50th Anniversary Conference

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I was overwhelmed and inspired by the diversity of the attendees and the multitude of ministries and small faith communities from across the country and the world. Each group expressed their faith in their own beautiful way. Not everyone is the same. We were not called to conform but to serve. It's a big church and all are welcome. There's always room for more.

I heard something during the conference that gave me clarity. I did not hear it during a panel or workshop. During the closing liturgy, Jocelyn Sideco, one of the conference panelists was at my table. I mentioned my historical research of finding the names of those that fought in the American Revolution whose names had been forgotten through the centuries; the poor and people of color. People deserve to be remembered. I also spoke of my experience of working in a nursing home and being unable to find a priest to come and give last rites to a dying resident despite calling multiple parishes. Jocelyn pointed out that my ministry was working with the marginalized and forgotten. I had never made that connection before.

Pat Romagna is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit and the SEPAWOC Core Committee.



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Scripture Reflections

Matthew 14: 13-21; 2 Corinthians 13: 11-13
By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

We are now in the Liturgical Season called "Ordinary Time", but we have come to know that no time is ordinary. It is all gift.

This Gospel to be proclaimed in August is the story of the only miracle recorded in all 4 Gospels. The background was that Jesus learned His cousin John had been killed and Jesus went by boat to grieve in a remote place.

However, the crowds followed Him on foot, and when Jesus saw them, He had compassion on them and healed the sick. It was getting late, so Jesus invited all to stay and eat with Him; there seemed to be little food available, but everyone was fed and were happy sharing together.

On Holy Thursday this year I attended a Methodist Liturgy (in a church that welcomes a Catholic Community to use their church for Liturgies throughout the year). The Pastor

welcomed all to Communion, and I wondered how I would have felt if she had said, "Only Methodists may come to Communion", as that congregation may have heard if they had attended a Diocesan Catholic Church.

This Gospel invites us to re-imagine and re-commit to what is possible: compassion, healing, feeding the hungry and welcoming all to share together the Bread Jesus offers.

The messages of this Gospel were certainly the heart of the wondrous Liturgies during WOC50 and the experience of WOC50 is surely described in 2 Cor. heard this year in the light of Pentecost: Rejoice together sisters and brothers, honor one another, encourage one another, choose peace and greet each other with a holy kiss!

Let it be so.

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