

YOU ARE INVITED TO

A Celebration of the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala

Sunday, July 18

Mass at 9 am (Eileen DiFranco, RCWP presiding)

followed by conversation and refreshments

Community of St. Mary Magdalene

Drexel Hill United Methodist Church

600 Burmont Road • Drexel Hill, PA 19026

The celebration is co-sponsored by SEPAWOC and the Community of St. Mary Magdalene. For more information, contact emdifranco@aol.com

EQUAL

**Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women
and Men in the Philadelphia Area**

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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: Apostle to the Apostles

By Aileen Hayes

Jesus said to her "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'." Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," (John 20: 16-18).

When he had risen, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told his companions who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe." (Mark 16: 9-11)

Mary Magdalene is a leader of the Church who is surrounded by mystery and misconception. There is no mystery that she was the first messenger, the first one to bring the "gospel", the good news, of the Resurrection of Christ to the disciples. This is plainly shown in all four of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I have chosen to quote John and Mark in particular because they are more exact in describing the role Mary Magdalene plays. The account in the Gospel of Mark is especially timely for those of us trying to reawaken the power and importance of the role of women in ministry at all levels within the Church. Mary Magdalene, quite a notable companion and supporter of Jesus Christ and his mission, brings the founding message of Christianity to Christ's closest followers. I believe it is imperative to note that Mark specifically uses the word "first". Jesus the Risen Christ appeared FIRST to Mary Magdalene.

Looking back on this moment and reading about it in the Bible, we, as faith filled, time traveling bystanders, welcome its pro-

fundity and abiding beauty. Mark tells us that the disciples, those involved in Christ's life directly, reacted in disbelief. They did not believe this strange message from an obviously grieving woman who was an intimate of their Lord. The Gospel of Mary Magdalene, one of the Gnostic gospels, states that Peter in particular did not react very warmly to the message the Magdalene was given the honor of bringing. In this text Peter says "How is it possible that the Teacher talked in this manner with a woman about secrets of which we ourselves are ignorant? Must we change our customs, and listen to this woman? Did he really choose her, and prefer her to us?" There is a tone of jealousy and machismo entitlement to this reaction. Further along in these writings, Levi responds to Peter and says "Peter, you have always been hot tempered, and now we see you repudiating a woman, just as our adversaries do. Yet if the Teacher held her worthy, who are you to reject her?...Let us grow as he demanded of us, and walk forth to spread the gospel, without trying to lay down any rules and laws other than those he witnessed."

To me, this statement of Levi in the Gnostic Gospel of Mary Magdalene is the message Christ was trying to say in having Mary Magdalene as the first bearer of Christianity's greatest message of hope. This is the message we carry with us, as men and women who are trying to change the Roman Catholic official view on Women's Ordination. We refuse to forget the power of women in ministry as our "adversaries" do. We lift up and honor the fact that Christ thought Mary Magdalene, a woman, worthy of being the first to hear and share the good news of the Resurrection. Who are we as a Church to reject that? Jesus Christ, our Lord and God has demanded of us to grow and reach out and spread the gospel without trying to create rules and laws that go against his own words and actions.

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A Reflection on *Caritas in Veritate*

By Maureen Tate

Recently I was asked to give a parishioner response to a presentation on the most recent papal encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth, Pope Benedict XVI Encyclical Letter, June 29, 2009). I was honored and pleased to do so, even once I realized the considerable length of the document! However, I had heard and read positive commentary on the encyclical and particular praise for its emphasis on economic justice, challenging the excesses of global capitalism and its concern for the environment. As one involved in popular economic justice education, I looked forward to reading a supportive faith based perspective. I did find much good in the letter but also a serious flaw that will come as no surprise to readers of *EqualwRites*. Given its length and breadth, there is much more to reflect upon in *Caritas in Veritate* and much will be written. Suffice it to say that the following reflects my personal reading and reaction.

The encyclical inspires and challenges on many levels. From a personal and family perspective, I love the image that the family is "the primary vital cell of society". It has always been our family commitment to find ways to direct the love we have for one another to the world outside our home. This being said, I could not ignore that the Church and this document continues to define "family" in most restrictive ways that feel at cross purposes with the essence of charity in truth.

As a parishioner, I want to consider how we live gospel values and confront injustice and disparities within our own neighborhood. As U.S. citizens, who participate in a global community, the encyclical clearly challenges us to address the reality of our own privilege and abundance as well as our country's actions and influence as a "super power". At an even more fundamental level, it challenges us as members of the Mystical Body. As I read the document, I was reminded of a time when I participated in a faith sharing group in Nicaragua and we reflected on the passage of "the one body and its many parts". It was powerful to read that passage then in the midst of dire poverty. I found that *Caritas in Veritate* reaffirms, in no uncertain terms, that when Haiti, Afghanistan, Congo and Darfur are hurting, we are all hurting. It calls us to be attentive to that suffering which is also our own. We, as the Mystical Body of Christ, also suffer and this is the most profound meaning of the common good.

Charity, in the document defined as love received and given, is the heart of the Church's social doctrine, the principle that gives real substance to personal relationships with God and

others, a principle not only of micro-relationships but also macro-relationships - social, economic, and political. As recipients of God's infinite love and mercy, we must give freely of what we have been given. But what does this mean? The truth that we are in relationship with God who is love means that we are instruments of grace, weavers of networks of charity. Through us love is received and poured out, one to the other. *Caritas In Veritate* goes so far as to say that working for justice is not enough as it is simply the minimum measure of what we are called to do. Charity, rather, goes beyond justice and the realm of rights and duties. It requires us to be in relationship with the other, to enter into a deep desire for the good of the other. It is about more than giving money to a cause. Common good really does mean the "good of all of us", not just those closest to us but all of society and at the broadest level. In this encyclical, to work for the common good is not an option but a "requirement of justice and charity".

It is impossible to avoid the cultural challenges that this document presents for us as U.S. Christians. "Every culture has burdens from which it must be freed and shadows from which it must emerge". As U.S. citizens we participate in great wealth and are on the plus side of the vast disparities that exist across the globe and we are well aware of the inequalities in our own country where the top 10% wealthiest of households own 70% of all wealth. The encyclical also asserts that the environment is pure gift to us as created beings. Yet we use a disproportionate amount of the world's resources and have historically undermined the economic stability of other cultures in our pursuit of resources. Consumerism is not just a personal issue but has socio-economic and political implications. Individualism presents another challenge for us as U.S. citizens and as a community of believers. We value individual rights and have expectations for individual responsibility. We seek personal salvation. We obsess about personal worth and personal security. Yet, if we take to heart the challenge to strive for the common good - how are we called to the common? What would it mean for us to shed our emphasis on individual well being and fulfillment? How can we be challenged to look at strategies for justice that are a collective response?

A major concern of the encyclical is development, both economic and human development. Development is considered not only a matter of right practice and more equitable sharing of goods and services but more fundamentally a matter of the heart, the genuine desire for the common good in which we recognize ourselves in the other. Development should be a true expression of love for the other, closely bound up with our understanding of the human soul and the development of

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the whole person. The encyclical emphasizes that fulfillment of human potential only makes sense in relation to something greater than our human reality. We are not just physical creatures who exist side by side but we participate in the ultimate loving relationship with God, the one who loves each one. This raises the issue of development to another level, human development understood as vocation, one of solidarity with the other who, like us, is an expression of God's love. Development requires recognition that the human race is a single family, working together as a true communion, in which we take the gratitude and affirmations of the Eucharist into the world. The development of peoples, human ecology, is further inescapably linked with environmental ecology. What is good for human systems is good for the environment and vice versa.

Caritas in Veritate builds on the earlier encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of People), incorporating the reality of globalization which contributes the perspective of a "civilization of love". In the awareness of globalization, charity is not naïve or "an added extra" to human knowledge and work. Rather, charity is integral to the true development of peoples. The letter takes a most radical stance that a sustained commitment is needed to "promote a person-based and community-oriented process of worldwide integration that is open to transcendence". Globalization opens up "the unprecedented possibility of large scale redistribution of wealth on a world wide scale." Now, that is a radical vision, though I have yet to hear anyone accuse Pope Benedict of being a communist. The Christian ethical perspective to "feed the hungry" and the moral imperative that flows from that, if we really took it to heart, would transform the world. What would it require of us at a personal level and at a systems level? Globalization must be about more than economic systems. It must be relational, oriented toward communion and reciprocity. Our Christian responsibility is to humanize economic and political activity, to build that civilization of love, and ultimately to participate in building the community of God.

Given all of the merits of this encyclical, there is at least one major flaw that was not only personally disappointing, but I believe a grave omission with respect to its intent. It will come as no surprise to readers that nowhere in this entire document is there a consideration of women! Of course the language remains predictably non-inclusive in its consistent and insistent use of the proverbial "man" and "mankind" in which women remain invisible. However, this is not the worst of it. To fully comprehend the degree of omission, it is important to understand that *Caritas in Veritate* is broad in its reach and, in sections, goes into great detail on issues pertaining to the cause of justice on behalf of the common good; the development of human potential; the role of nations, speculative global finance, the role of businesses and non-profits in addressing inequities; models for just economic development like micro-finance, fair trade, and collectives; migration of peoples, advances in technology; the role of labor, supports for the family, etc. Yet, it totally ignores the particular aspect of the human development of women and how barriers to their development impede the development of peoples! Women are absent from consideration of the common good, globalization, economic development and poverty. Yet the feminization of poverty, the reality that women are disproportionately poor in most societies, is well documented and growing.

One could easily write off the document's ignorance of the condition of women as the predictable consequence of a clerical culture devoid of women's physical presence, leadership, scholarship and consultation. But it is even more egregious to purport to write a treatise on development and be oblivious to all of the recent scholarship and international strategizing on poverty and development that are directly concerned with the well being of women and children! There are many issues here, but most relevant is that all of the latest thinking and work of institutions who are addressing issues of global economic disparity and development of peoples in poor countries, in particular, acknowledge that the absolute key and most successful strategy in effective economic development is improving the rights and education of girls and women.

"If you educate a boy, you educate an individual, but if you educate a girl, you educate a community." So reports Greg Mortenson, the renowned author of the best-selling book *Three Cups of Tea*. It is now commonly accepted that investing in the well being of women with respect to their human rights, education and maternal health care is the very best way of improving family well being, community development, financial security and stewardship of environmental resources. Donor organizations, as well as the UN, find that women, unlike men, are far more likely to prioritize the well being of their children and their community which has greater impact beyond the household itself. As primary agricultural workers women have more potential to impact food production, education, the environment, community health and family financial security. Micro-finance has proven particularly successful with women who tend to be more responsible in managing limited financial resources and protecting family interests.

Caritas in Veritate prioritizes the family unit as the "primary vital cell of society". However, it entirely fails to acknowledge the significant degree to which physical and psychological abuse of women is most often perpetuated at the family level in many cultures, with this abuse often rooted in a gross distortion of religious values. It does not address the gender issues between men and women that continue to undermine human development and continue to be one of the biggest threats to families across cultures. Moreover, I believe that this encyclical missed an important opportunity to look beyond matters of procreation and address the many other gender issues that prevent the full development of women and contribute to the dehumanization of men. The continued wide-scale, abhorrent occurrence of rape and butchery of women in Congo, Darfur, Middle East and other places, as well as sex trafficking, domestic abuse and enslavement of women and girls, indicate not only the victimization of women but the

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Editorial Staff of *EqualwRites*

A Publication of SEPAWOC

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Women in the Lectionary—Where Are They?

By Mary Whelan

In 1969 a new lectionary was approved by the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship which determined the Biblical readings for use at Mass. This resulted from the Vatican II call for a revision of the lectionary used in the Roman Rite since 1570. While "many more books and passages of the Bible were made available to Catholics through scripture readings at Sunday and daily Mass....careful analysis....reveals that a disproportionate number of passages about the women of the Bible have been omitted." (*Women in the Bible and Lectionary* by Ruth Fox, OSB.)

In addition to the fact that women are not presiding at Mass and that liturgical language is gender biased (e.g. God is a "He"), this lack of inclusion of the women's stories is just another example of the invisibility of women in the church. To be invisible is to be demeaned, without rights, without value. It is frightening because it is so calculated by the men in power. "The Bible sacralizes a patriarchal social structure, founded on an andocentric view of God and humanity, and is chiefly preoccupied with stories of men." (*Amnesia in the Catholic Sunday Lectionary* by Regina A. Boisclair) While the Bible does include "female images for God and provides accounts of many women in the unfolding stories of Israel, Jesus and the early Church" their presence in the lectionary "could better balance the story in the heads and hearts of Christians." (Boisclair) If Jesus did not exclude women from salvation history, why does the church continue to do so?

How do we address the transformation of "a well-meaning but flawed worship that witnesses to a subtly sexist God rather than to the God-Beyond-All-Names"? (*It's Not All About Eve: Rediscovering the feminine faces in the Bible* by Sr. Chris Schenk)

In 2006 *FutureChurch* began a campaign in preparation for the October 2008 World Synod of Bishops with the theme "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." "[N]early 20,000 paper and electronic postcards were sent to church leaders and synod delegates...[P]ackets of materials containing lists of women biblical scholars and extensive documentation of the 'amnesia in the Lectionary' about biblical women leaders [were] sent to twenty-five English-speaking bishop delegates." (*FutureChurch* website) Proposition 16 could be described as a positive outcome. In it the synod recommended "that an examination of the Roman lectionary be opened to see if the actual selection and ordering of the reading are truly adequate to the mission of the Church in this historic moment." (*FutureChurch* website) Sister Chris Schenk met with six synod bishop-delegates, and an encouraging response has been received from Fr. Anthony Ward, SM, under-secretary at the Vatican Congregation for Worship and Sacraments, as well as three other synod council members.

For more information about this ongoing project, I refer you to the website www.futurechurch.org. Read the articles I have cited which are available at that site. Become educated on this issue, and use relevant resources in your personal study and prayer and small faith groups. Many books

and articles have been published but two that have been helpful to me are *Women's Bible Commentary*, edited by Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, in which each book of the Bible is introduced and summarized by women scholars with additional commentary on those that have particular relevance to women. The second book is *Women's Stories from Scripture for Sundays and Festivals: Remembering the Women*, compiled and annotated by J. Frank Henderson.

Mary Whelan is the co-editor of *EqualwRites*.

MARY MAGDALENE AWARD WINNER

SEPAWOC President, Regina Bannan, proudly presented this year's Mary Magdalene Award posthumously to Karen Lenz for her many years of devoted service to women's ordination, SEPAWOC, this newsletter, and for her invaluable service to the poor at the Peter Claver Catholic Worker House.

Regina spoke glowingly of Karen's ten years as editor of *EqualwRites* and her service on the SEPAWOC Core Committee for the same period. "She made prophetic contributions to SEPAWOC through her remarkable writings and her radical vision." Karen was also the initiator of the Mary Magdalene Award, given to women and men of courage, that she was now receiving, and she was the organizer of several Holy Thursday witnesses at the Cathedral. Karen led Catholic Organizations for Renewal/Philadelphia as an extension of her work for WOC, and she was active in many other organizations, including the Brandywine Peace Community. As Regina summarized beautifully, "She lived charity with all the force of her personality – and that is the greatest virtue of them all."

The Mary Magdalene Award was established in 2007. It is named after St. Augustine's "apostle to the apostles," the female follower of Jesus who has been misrepresented and whose pivotal role in the early church was marginalized for centuries. For these reasons, Mary Magdalene is considered by many to be the patron of women, particularly those claiming their rightful place, in the Roman Catholic church.

Come worship within a discipleship of equals!

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WOMEN OF THE BIBLE: RUTH

By Jim Platsaras

Most of the women of the Jewish Scriptures hold derivative roles; Sarah is the *wife* of Abraham, and Hagar is the *mother* of Ishmael. They are not the central characters in the narrative. Ruth is one of the few exceptions. The Book of Ruth is one of the 'historical books' of the Jewish Scriptures. It comes after the Book of Judges since the story is introduced as taking place "*in the days when the judges ruled [Israel].*" We are told at the conclusion of the story that Ruth was in fact King David's great grandmother (and consequently, an ancestress of Jesus). Ruth was a person in the Davidic genealogy, but the details of the story may be largely a product of the storyteller's imagination.

Most modern scholars date the Book of Ruth to the post-exilic period, circa 500 B.C.E. The Book of Ezra (10:2ff) describes in heart-breaking detail how the post-exilic community focused on the foreign wives as the root cause of their troubles. They were told:

Solomon was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Even the great Solomon, beloved by his God, was let into sin by his foreign wives. (Neh 13:26)

The remedy proposed by Ezra was not forced conversion – foreign wives, renounce the religion of your ancestors and accept the God of Israel – but rather a full-scale ethnic cleansing. Under threat of forfeiture of property, the men were compelled to send away their foreign wives **together with their children.**

The author's protest against the xenophobia of the community of his time is presented as a story from earlier and kinder times dealing with a Moabite woman named Ruth. This woman had been welcomed into the Israelite community and would prove herself to be a model of the **steadfast love** (*hesed w' emeth*) that Israel saw as the most prominent characteristic of its God. It should be noted that Ruth was not just a foreigner; she was a Moabite! The Moabites, though distant kinsmen of Israel, were held in particular opprobrium:

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt. (Deut 23:3-4)

As the story opens, Elimelek, his wife Naomi, and their two sons had fallen on hard times. Having sold their family land, they moved to Moab from Bethlehem because of a famine. The two sons married Moabite women, but Naomi was soon overwhelmed by calamity. Her husband died and then the two sons, leaving the three women childless widows. As Naomi prepared to return home, she urged her grieving daughters-in-law to go back to their fathers' house, remarry, and have children. *Orpah* finally acceded to her urging and returned to her people, which was the only reasonable thing to do. Ruth, her other daughter-in-law, against all reason and without any prospects for the future, insisted on leaving her own country to follow Naomi:

Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, there will I live. Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God. Wherever you die, I will die—there will I be buried. (Ruth 1:16-17)

What was the motivation for this extraordinary dedication and selflessness on Ruth's part? Was it a bond between two women who had suffered together through successive family tragedies? Or had Ruth, though only a neophyte to Israel's faith, really understood the meaning of *steadfast love*?

The Book of Ruth is not a man-woman romantic love story in the genre of the Jacob and Rachel story (Genesis 29). The marriage of Ruth and Boaz is in every sense of the word an arranged marriage. We may assume that love followed after, but it is not part of the story. (It should be noted that God, rather than Naomi, is the one who arranges the marriage.) When Ruth nestled next to the sleeping Boaz on the threshing floor, the motive pure and simple was to provide security for her mother-in-law and herself, and to raise up an heir to Naomi's family. Boaz is also quite clear about this. Boaz had spoken kindly to Ruth when he first found out who she was:

"All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" (Ruth 2:11-12)

When the startled Boaz awakes, he does not berate Ruth as being a self-interested 'gold-digger' but praises her for her loyalty:

"May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich." (Ruth 3:10)

There is an unspoken contrast throughout the story between the considerate way in which Ruth was treated, and the heartless treatment being meted out to foreign wives in the author's own time. When Ruth first arrived in Bethlehem, she did what most poor people did. She said to Naomi: "Let me go and glean among the ears of grain." This was an example of the Law's special concern for aliens, orphans, and widows:

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. (Deut 24:19)

No such consideration was given to foreign wives and their children in the post-exilic community. They were simply sent into exile.

If Boaz had married Ruth 500 years later, he would have been obliged to marry the widow of his childless deceased brother with the firstborn child treated as that of the deceased brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). Boaz was under no such obligation but the spirit behind the Law was that next-of-kin should offer to serve as *go'el*, or protector-redeemer to widows and orphans. The same held true for distress sale of family property which well-off kin were to redeem to keep it in the family. Boaz took the role of protector-redeemer, issuing instructions that no one harass or insult Ruth as she gleaned in his field. He took pains to follow established custom so that he could marry Ruth honorably and restore Naomi's family land. Five centuries later, Boaz would have

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FENCES AND GOOD NEIGHBORS

By Ellie Harty

We were traveling East on Route 10 through El Paso, Texas. As I looked to my left, I saw the outline of the American City, tall buildings sparkling silver and gold, the very metals that had backed up our monetary system for decades guaranteeing our value in the world. It is a city that may have pockets of poverty, but it looked very tall and very rich from the highway. Like so many American cities, it also looked beguiling, as if one could not help but build a prosperous, a golden, future there. Then I looked to the right and saw Juarez, Mexico. Climbing up and down hillsides were small houses and shops and grids of dusty streets. It looked so humble, so poor next to its towering neighbor. Nowhere else I had ever been had I been able to see so starkly the third world shouldered up against the first. It is a city that may have pockets of wealth, but my heart went out to the poor of Juarez with all that glitter, all that promise, in their face every day.

That promise, of course, is what drives thousands of immigrants to cross the border illegally. They cannot come legally because of stringent requirements. They are desperate for work thanks in no small part to NAFTA and CAFTA and other exploitive economic practices by us, their wealthy neighbor, that left them unable to stay on small farms and compete against, for example, cheap subsidized U.S. corn and other products. And so they make a journey most of us can hardly imagine to have the kind of promising future we've had all our lives (whether we've taken advantage of it or not). If we're companies looking for cheap labor or families waiting for loved ones, we welcome them. If not, we respond in degrees of emotion: well-wishing, empathy, worry, wariness, fear, hostility, emotions that also carry over to those who have been here, undocumented, for years. It's the fear and hostility that most worries those of us advocating for humane, just, immigration reform, for it's fear and hostility that build walls, like the one currently erected on our Southwestern border, like the one that we sometimes construct within our own hearts.

There is, however, a remedy to that fear and hostility, and perhaps Robert Frost explains it best in his poem, "Mending Wall." The poem begins: "Something there is that does not love a wall." Something, in fact, "sends the frozen-ground-swell under it... And makes gaps even two can pass abreast." That "something" breaks the wall and turns its fallen boulders into "loaves" or "balls" on the ground, things that nurture or give pleasure, and trying to use them to rebuild the wall "will only wear our fingers rough with handling them."

The poet goes on to ruminate about his neighbor on the other side of the wall: "He is all pine and I am apple orchard./My apple trees will never get across/And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him..." The neighbor has a famous retort: "Good fences make good neighbors." The poet, however, ponders that reply, "Why do they make good neighbors?...Before I built a wall I'd ask to know/What I was walling in or walling out./And to whom I was like to give offense./Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

That something is, I believe, our basic human sense of community, of justice, and of hospitality. Graced with that sense, there are people, including Fr. John Dear, ministering to immigrants on desert trails, bringing water, food, first aid, and setting up tents where the weary can rest on their journey. There is the New Sanctuary Movement telling the individual immigrant's stories to promote understanding and empathy, hosting gatherings where people can grow to know and understand each other, and organizing visitations to those in detention where their undocumented relatives dare not come. There are those protesting and publicly advocating for fairness and justice, including, I'm proud to say, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, and Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform and many others.

We who do not love walls can join with those above. If, however, instead of building or tearing down fences, we are actually on the fence about the immigration question, we can become educated. Doris Meissner, Senior Fellow, Migration Policy Institute, wrote an extremely enlightening article in the April 30, 2010 *Washington Post*, "5 Myths About Immigration – A Challenge to Everything You Think You Know." The myths include: 1. Immigrants take jobs from American workers; 2. Immigration is at an all-time high and most new immigrants come illegally; 3. Today's immigrants are not integrating into American life like past waves did; 4. Cracking down on illegal border crossings will make us safer; 5. Immigration reform cannot happen in an election year. Read and ponder, as Frost did.

If you are convinced by all of the above that the message in immigration reform is clearly asking us to tear down walls, I urge you to think about how these walls, physical and psychological, particularly affect women. They are the ones forced to live in poverty with husbands and fathers far away, or forced to leave their own children behind, sometimes for years, while they work in a distant country, or, worse yet, forced to take those children with them, risking their lives

THANK YOU NOW OR WHEN!

Thanks so much to those who contributed to SEPAWOC in response to our short article in the last issue of *EqualwRites*. We paid for that issue and for this with those funds. But if you didn't respond, consider yourself responsible for our next issue – we won't be able to publish it without lots of help. Or to continue our web site, www.sepawoc.org. To make it easier, we've enclosed an envelope addressed to our Treasurer, Bernard McBride, at SEPAWOC, PO.Box 27195, Philadelphia, PA 19118. That issue will be when we thank you, too. Regina Bannan, President

and the lives of their family by crossing and re-crossing borders into, let's face it, both a physically and psychologically hostile land.

According to research by the Urban Institute, an estimated 41% of undocumented immigrants are women (in fact, its publication, "Undocumented Immigrants: Facts and Figures" concedes that figure may be artificially low since women often stay in homes and are especially difficult to count). It is a population too vast, too vulnerable, and, I would say, too valuable to wall out – or to wall in. An article, "US: Immigration Policy Harms Women, Families" posted June 24, 2009 on the Human Rights Watch web site, maintains that the way they are detained and level of care they receive in detention centers inflicts "needless suffering" on women. They are sometimes torn from their homes as children watch and then subjected to "extreme temperatures, inadequate nutrition, medical staffing shortages and long delays for critically needed health care." As Frost reminds us, we need to think about not only what (or in this case whom) we are "walling out" but whom we are "walling in" and under what conditions.

Fear and hostility are strong opponents, and they gain their strength from our darker impulses. Frost describes his neighbor as he works to rebuild the wall: "I see him there,/Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top/In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed." He goes on more chillingly, "He moves in darkness as it seems to me,/Not of woods only and the shade of trees." We don't want to move into that kind of darkness, where the people who come to us as economic refugees are walled out, turned away, forced to live in fear and hiding, detained indefinitely, or sent back to live a life in poverty with no redress. We are not stone savage armed people; we do not love walls. We are just not that kind of neighbors. Are we?

Ellie Hart is the co-editor of *EqualwRites*.

Mary Magdalene: Apostle to the Apostles

Let us not forget this female leader in Christian ministry. Let us celebrate her and honor her place as the first woman or human to hear the message of the Resurrection and the first one to start the chain that brought that message to us. The Feast Day of St. Mary Magdalene falls every year on July 22nd. SEPAWOC and the Community of St. Mary Magdalene are co-sponsoring a celebration this summer (July 18 – see the invitation on the first page) as are communities across the country. I urge you to join us in standing in solidarity with the Magdalene on her feast day. If you can't make it to an event, hold a prayer service of your own, or read the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection and thank God for women in ministry and pray for the day when our Church will let Mary Magdalene share the good news again!

Aileen Hayes is a member of SEPAWOC.

A REFLECTION cont. from p.3

disturbing dehumanization of men as the perpetrators of such evil.

In conclusion, I took some comfort in the document's recognition that evil, disparities, and injustice are not finally under human control. "Truth is greater than we are". Hope is an

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important element and its source is faith. Because of Jesus we know that injustice, violence and death do not have the last word. We know that in God all things are made new. Gratefully, with hope placed appropriately in God, we are not the last word and development does not depend on us. It does not depend on me. This too gives me comfort and hope in the struggle.

Maureen Tate is a member of The Grail and participant in SEPAWOC activities.

BOOK OF RUTH cont. from p.5

been forced to send Ruth away or forfeit all his property.

The most likely meaning of the name Ruth is "friend." Ruth, from beginning to end, is presented as the loyal friend. Ruth does not heroically risk her life to save her people like Esther or Judith. She is not the initiator of the action like Rahab and Tamar. (Naomi lays out the plan of action to connect with Boaz; Ruth follows her advice.) Ruth is not falsely accused by wicked men as happened to Suzanna. Ruth meets only with respect and kindness. But her portrait stands. There was no more loyal friend in all of Israel than the Moabite, Ruth.

Jim Platsaras is the author of *The Witness of John: A Study of Johannine Theology and The God of Exodus and the Creation and Covenant.*

Book Reviews

***What Was There For Me Once: A Memoir* by Margaret Brennan IHM. Novalis, 2009. 191 pp. Paperback. \$19.95.**

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

From its title you might conclude that *What Was There for Me Once* is a nostalgic tour of times past by a sweet old nun. Do not be taken in. As the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II approaches, assessing what happened there, and what it means, is one of the most important tasks twenty-first century Catholics face. You could do a lot worse than check out Sister Margaret Brennan's reflections on same.

Born into a "financially comfortable" Catholic family, Brennan entered the Michigan IHMs after college, in 1945, and moved quickly into leadership, first in sister formation and then as General Superior. This career track might have produced a traditional, rule-enforcing nun had it not involved Brennan early on in the Sister Formation Conference (SFC). SFC was a national organization that emerged in 1954 in response to the exploitative denial of adequate training to the vast majority of sisters teaching in Catholic schools. Through SFC, leaders of women's congregations began meeting together for the first time, recognizing they had similar problems, and developing programs that would instill critical thinking skills into the Catholic sisters of the future. Thanks to the SFC newsletter alone, sisters of all ages were reading the new theology before Vatican II. Brennan's subsequent involvement in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (at that time the Conference of Major Superiors of Women) was equally liberating; by 1972, she was LCWR president, reflecting from experience on contradictions between Vatican II collegiality and patriarchal hierarchy.

Readers will find in *What Was There for Me Once* all manner of delicious recollections, including of the meeting Brennan and some of her sisters had with Thomas Merton to solicit his advice on the spiritual renewal of religious life; Dom Helder Camara's impact on the IHMs and the LCWR; and Brennan's encounter with, and capitulation to, the sure-as-steel Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Women's ordination activists will welcome chapters on the influence of the women's movement and feminist theology and spirituality on sisters and the Church.

What interests me most in Margaret Brennan's memoir, however, is the thread of reflection in it concerning tensions between spiritual growth and anger at the institutional church. This theme is most apparent in the fourth section of the memoir, "Seeing and Then Seeing Again," in which Brennan moves to the Jesuit Regis College in the Toronto School of Theology after many years in IHM leadership. During a sabbatical and then twenty-four years of teaching in the Regis "Integration for Ministry" program, Brennan struggles with her own tendency to want, quickly, to "do" something about the controlling, often brutal actions of Vatican authorities. Some of this,

she reflects, has to do with her American temperament, which contrasts strikingly at times with that of her more "wintry" Canadian colleagues. She notes, for example, that she "never heard" Gregory Baum "speak negatively about the Church or about his painful experience with Rome that resulted in his leaving the priesthood. He sometimes said that Catholics would be less angry with the Church when they stopped looking for the 'perfect mother'."

But even more, *What Was There for Me Once* presents the inclination toward conflict and anger as a spiritual challenge that faces us all and offers resources for dealing with it. In reflecting on the renewal of her own congregation, for example, Brennan highlights the IHMs' decision at that time to participate in the House of Prayer movement, establishing places of retreat and renewal on their property, not so as to escape the world, but in service to it. At another point she recalls that during a particularly contentious chapter meeting during the renewal process, the delegates agreed to recess for some weeks, during which time everyone was to make a directed retreat before regathering for further decision-making. Yet during her time at Regis Brennan concludes that, despite all the insights into feminist theology that she was claiming and teaching, her own "relationship to God had not fundamentally changed or been challenged"; she had avoided facing the fear that necessarily comes with a new vision: "Who and where is God for me now?"

For Brennan, this realization launches a long and difficult exploration. I was especially moved by her narrative of meditating, at the age of 77, on John 21:18, in which Jesus tells Peter that "when you grow old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will put a belt around you and take you

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where you would rather not go.” She remarks, “...how and what and where the Church and my congregation and I should be is an almost daily preoccupation that I can easily mistake for zeal.”

Do not take from what I have written that by the end of her memoir Sister Margaret Brennan has become a passive, unthinking Catholic. In one of the final chapters of *What Was There for Me Once*, about her life in retirement back in Michigan, Brennan notes that Church leaders in her diocese are still avoiding the key question of personnel, except to restate that celibacy is not optional, the question of the ordination of women is closed, and that married men should consider the diaconate.

The final pages of Margaret Brennan’s memoir are not a clarion call to battle, however, but a reflection on a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins about mortality and grief. She writes:

In the fall years...after many seasons of lived experience, we are able to name that deepest sorrow from inner springs: false expectations and unrealistic dreams. “It is Margaret you grieve for.” The poem is a reminder to claim yet again—over and over—“the one thing necessary.”

This may seem a somber conclusion, but, for Margaret Brennan, as she tells us, it is quite the opposite.

Marian Ronan blog, An American Catholic on the Margins of World Christianity, <http://marianronan.wordpress.com>.

***Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America’s College Campuses* by Donna Freitas. Oxford University Press, 2008. 328 pages. Hardback. \$24.95.**

Reviewed by Karen Trimble Alliaume

Donna Freitas is assistant professor of religion at Boston University and a prolific author, with (at last count) four non-fiction books, several young adult novels, and very many articles and posts across a range of publications, from the religion webzine *Beliefnet* to *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Christian Century*. She is also a young Catholic, with a Ph.D. in religious studies from Catholic University in Washington.

Sex and the Soul is based on Freitas’s survey of 2,500 students at seven colleges—Catholic, evangelical, public and private—and interviews with 111 of them on the subject of religion and sex. Based on this research, Freitas divides these seven campuses into two categories: the evangelical schools, and all the rest. The latter she designates “spiritual” because of their large population of “spiritual but not religious” stu-

dents—people hungry for making sense of their lives, including their sex lives, but finding few if any useful resources in their religious traditions.

According to Freitas, the strength of the evangelical colleges is that religion and sex are explicitly connected there both in public conversations, the schools’ cultures, and in students’ own lives. There was, however, little “wiggle room” for dissent from the dominant mores, or even for making mistakes. One of the “heroines” of *Sex and the Soul* turns out to be Cara Walker, a young woman at an evangelical college who did have premarital sex with a boyfriend and then takes a long time to integrate this experience. Eventually, however, she becomes a “born-again virgin.” As such, instead of being ostracized as might be expected, she becomes a source of sexual wisdom to her peers.

Whatever the limitations Freitas finds in evangelical schools, the problems experienced by students at “spiritual” colleges—including the Catholic ones—are worse. Indeed, at these schools there seemed an almost complete disconnect between religion and sex. Instead “hook-up culture”—casual unplanned sexual activity with minimal other communication, and little connection with romance—was widespread. Most of the Catholic students Freitas interviews, as with those on secular campuses, find religion useless because they either do not know the church’s position on sexuality or because they find it meaningless, irrelevant, outdated: “just don’t” and/or “you can’t if you’re gay.” Students who know enough to disagree with church teaching on sexuality are likely to jettison religion altogether.

The stories Freitas tells are compelling, drawing as they do on the experiences of a wide variety of students in both categories of schools, although not many of them successfully integrate their religion and spirituality with their sex lives and questions. Freitas’s analysis of the reasons for this situation are also illuminating: on the one hand, students in “spiritual colleges” fear rejection if they don’t play by the rules of hook-up culture. On the other hand, in Catholic schools at least, those in leadership fear that programs that might help students deal with their sexuality will bring shame to the institution by suggesting that students there have sex before marriage in defiance of Catholic sexual teaching.

Sex and the Soul has many strengths. It is highly accessible in both methodology and style to college students Freitas is clearly committed to serving. Parents, grandparents, and others will also find that it sheds considerable light on the new and complicated world today’s college students inhabit.

Karen Trimble Alliaume is Associate Professor of Theology and Co-director of the Women’s Studies Program at Lewis University.

Scripture Reflections

Feast of the Transfiguration August 6th

Luke 9:28-36

By Judith Heffernan, M.Div

Every year on the way to the SEPAWOC Witnesses on Holy Thursday and Ordination Day, I want to turn around and go home; this year I thought of our beloved Karen Lenz telling the story of her mentor, afraid for Karen's well being when going to witnesses, saying, "Instead of going, can't you just write a Letter to the Editor?" Yet every year- now some thirty years of witnesses- during our prayer and singing, sharing and embracing, I also think of the words from the Transfiguration Gospel—"It is good for us to be here!"

Reflecting on those thirty years of why it has been good for us to be here has been very powerful. This year we gave special thanks for all those who have worked- and are working- for justice and equality in the church.

Among these is Christine Vladimiroff, OSB who is retiring from her leadership position in the Erie Benedictines. Christine respectfully refused the Vatican's request to prevent Joan Chittister, OSB from addressing the *Women's Ordination Worldwide* gathering in Dublin. *Call to Action* presented Christine with its award for courage. At the ceremony, Christine reflected that these are dark days in the church, but, together, we are capable of setting things right. We must be personally committed to show another way...to raise significant issues in the halls of the powerful, because if we withhold our truth, we have silenced ourselves!

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AFFILIATION: *EqualwRites* is published by the Core Committee of the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter of the Women's Ordination Conference. We are inspired by, but independent of, the national office of the Women's Ordination Conference.

She asked us to bring with us the values of inclusive participation, mutuality, compassion, shared decision making and a generosity of spirit in prayer and action, all the while being aware that cynicism is not a virtue. (Not an easy call, huh?)

Recently, I was present at a reading by Lois Moses, poet, performer, school founder, lawyer, psychologist and all around great person, and I knew her poem could encourage us in our call: "...and they jumped into the water..., and cried freedom!"

P.S. August 6th is also the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. On August 6th, 1976, during the Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia, Dorothy Day encouraged those who had come to hear her speak at the Convention Center to please leave and go witness for peace outside the Cathedral. Dorothy was terribly distressed that there was to be a Liturgy at the Cathedral honoring the military that very day. She asked that we go and pray for peace, forgiveness for the horror, for an end to all war and nuclear weapons, and to witness to military and church leaders that there are other ways to solve our problems. This year especially, let us pray for John Dear, S.J., who recently was banned from Kansas because of his support for women and for peace. Further, the Archbishop of New Mexico, where John lives, notified him that he will remove John's priestly faculties, unless he promises never to protest at Los Alamos nuclear weapons facility on August 6th -or ever again.

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

MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *EqualwRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be October 2010. Final deadline for submissions is September 15. Send to eharty43@yahoo.com or mail to SEPAWOC P.O. Box 27195, Philadelphia, PA 19118

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