

	<b>EQUAL</b>	<b>Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area</b>
Vol. XXXI No. 2		JUNE - OCTOBER 2013
	<b>WRITES</b>	<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b> - 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.

*From the editors:* In this issue, several authors tackle a very interesting question inspired by Garry Wills' new book, *Why Priests?*. Given that our newsletter is published by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, answering – or at least discussing – this question seemed critical! Maureen Tate starts us out by reviewing and delivering thought-provoking comments on the book itself; Carl Yusavitz, a resigned canonical priest, adds further insights as does Roman Catholic Woman Priest, Eileen DiFranco. Our President, Regina

Bannan, calls attention to an upcoming presentation by Helmut Schuller, an Austrian priest who will speak about his fellow 400 priests in good standing who have signed "An Appeal to Disobedience". Other writers, reviewers, and, in this issue two poets, add their own observations, commentaries, and wisdom about this and varying other subjects. Judy Heffernan rounds out the issue with one of her ever-thoughtful reflections on *Ordinary Time* that is not so "ordinary" after all.

## **Why Priests? A Failed Tradition**

by Garry Wills

### *Review and Commentary by Maureen Tate*

I approached Holy Week this year feeling apprehensive and somewhat adrift. In the past year we witnessed offensive Vatican actions against our Catholic sisters, accomplished theologians, and courageous priests.

As I entered into the Paschal Triduum, I tried to put aside such distractions to encounter once again Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. I wanted and needed to go back to the source because little else made sense. How did we get here? How did we get to Chrism masses and liturgies where priests, supposedly representing Jesus, refuse to wash women's feet? To a place where fewer men each year are anointed and imprinted with a special character authorizing them to do holy things, say sacred words and mediate the presence of God? How did we get from Jesus' inclusive ministry of love and forgiveness to the recent papal conclave with all of its glitz and fanfare? Something has gone terribly wrong.

It seemed a good moment to pick up Garry Wills' new book, *Why Priests?: A Failed Tradition*. It was surely a question I was asking and a conclusion I have gradually conceded. Here was a book, I thought, that would settle things once and for all, and I anticipated a tidy, concise treatise on the flaws of the modern priesthood, a call for reform and inclusivity, and an inspired vision for authentic church community and worship. What I actually read was a scholarly exploration of the philosophical underpinnings of sacrificial theology and transubstantiation, an extensive review of the New Testament Letter to Hebrews, the unpacking of Melchizedek mythology and discussion of table fellowship as eschatological meal! It was not the book I expected to read but one I needed to. It's not that my original expectations were not met, because they were, indirectly, although I was challenged to engage with the scholarship to draw my own perhaps obvious conclusions.

Wills opens with questions many of us have asked, "Why did the priesthood come into a religion that began without it and, indeed, opposed it?" Without it, "would there have been belief in an apostolic succession, the real presence in the Eucharist, the sacrificial interpretation of the Mass, or the ransom theory of redemption?" Furthermore, the answer to the problem of fewer priests is "not trying to be more inclusive re women, gays, or married priests. The problem is the priesthood itself and the answer to the problem of fewer priests is: no priests." While his conclusion is straightforward, the path he takes the reader down to get there is less so.

The author logically begins with the early followers of Jesus whose principal activity was the communal meal, a meal of thanksgiving, of which the whole meal was considered sacred. He observes that in the whole New Testament, of all the ministries inspired by the Spirit, not one is a priest. There is no mention of priests or priestly duties we have come to recognize such as confession, confirmation, presiding, consecration or Eucharist. The body of Christ was understood to be the body of believers. Table fellowship was non-hierarchical and the early Christians lived in memory of Jesus by serving one another. There were leaders with a variety of names appropriate to their role but nary a priest until the Letter to Hebrews.

Wills undertakes a long and exhaustive analysis of the Letter to Hebrews, considered a later addition to the canon of the New Testament that was eventually added to Paul's letters, although modern biblical scholarship uncovers evidence of another unknown source. It alone reintroduces notions of priesthood and sacrificial theology once associated with Jewish sacrificial rites. Wills notes that "Early Christians had abolished the priesthood. The Letter restores it -- in a new light, but one that underlines the basic dignity of the priesthood in all its forms." The Letter includes one of only two mentions

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## Why Priests? *continued from page 1*

of a priest, Melchizedek, in all of Scripture, the other just a short reference in Genesis. It thus seems quite a stretch that the Roman Church roots a tradition and lineage of priesthood in what Wills uncovers as a mythology of Melchizedek.

The Letter to Hebrews relates Melchizedek to Jesus, who represents a new type of sacrifice, one understood to be “the sacrificing priest and the victim being sacrificed.” Wills undertakes a full exploration of the assumptions underlying the cult of sacrifice and its applicability to Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. I believe he successfully challenges a prevailing view that Jesus had to die to save us from our sins. Personally, I had rejected atonement Christology as unjust, repulsive and not befitting a loving God. It raises uncomfortable questions as to what is being sacrificed, for whom, to whom and to what end. What image of God is implied? Therefore, I found Wills’ treatment of this subject illuminating. He readily explores the implications of such questions as: How could we worship a God who orchestrates the killing of God’s own son, especially when contrasted with the sacrifice of Isaac who was spared? How do we reconcile Jesus as sacrificial victim with our abhorrence of human sacrifice? If God wants or needs sacrifice, do we believe God has needs or that we can barter for something we want? If Jesus’ death is ransom for our sins, who is demanding the ransom? Is it reasonable that one should be a scapegoat for many? Can the injustice of Jesus’ death right some fundamental injustice?

Wills counters the emphasis on Jesus as sacrifice by picking up threads of a tradition rooted in Augustine’s theology that has prevailed despite the prominence of atonement theories of redemption. He notes that Augustine “was always less interested in the passion than in the Incarnation ... the great saving mystery was the fact that God became man ... He lowered himself to raise us ... The Incarnation is God’s way of harmonizing the universe”. God becomes one with us in Jesus who broke free from death and takes us with him, sharing an intimacy with humanity, even in death.

That the early Christians veered toward a sacrificial theology and away from the primacy of table fellowship is critical to understanding why priesthood represents a failure in the Catholic tradition. The communal meal was a “celebration of the people’s oneness at the ‘one altar.’” If there were any divisions in the community it went against the “one body”. No one was set apart or above another. This understanding of the oneness of the body of believers as participation in the body of Christ is reinforced throughout The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles and is central to the experience of Jesus’ followers.

Only the Letter to Hebrews takes the leap to correlate Jesus’ death with earlier traditions of ritual sacrifice where a priest, as mediator, had power to do certain actions on behalf of the people to effect a particular result. As the view of Jesus as sacrificial victim took hold, the communal meal became less focused on the body of believers as the body of Christ and more intensely on the elements of bread and wine as the real presence of Jesus. As in other sacrificial traditions, a priestly class arose who were designated with special powers to utter special words over elements that only they could transform into a worthy sacrifice for our salvation.

I will leave it to those more philosophically inclined to grapple with Aquinas’ explication on the mystery of the change of bread and wine into body and blood. However, as Wills observes, despite Aquinas’ attempts to explain this mystery, the average Catholic does not understand it, resulting in, what he terms, a “fetishizing of the Host”. The sacred body and blood, once consecrated, cannot of course be deconsecrated, which has led to all kinds of bizarre strictures about protecting, storing and handling consecrated hosts to the point that the Host has become an object of devotion, whether or not a Mass is celebrated or a community is gathered!

Furthermore, our whole sacramental system is similarly set up to reinforce the priest’s privilege and mediation in accessing God’s grace. Wills reviews the dubious Scriptural origins of the sacraments and their development which actually took many centuries and did not even coalesce as the sacred seven until the twelfth century. The Eucharist, however, is the core of this sacramental system. It is the power to do a certain action that transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ that makes the priest special. If you eliminate the idea of Eucharist as a sacrifice that only the priest can do, then there is nothing else special about the priest.

Wills recommends Augustine’s alternative affirmation that the body of Christ is the community of believers gathered who together recognize the body of Christ in each other. Augustine did not believe in the “real presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist but claimed “that what is changed in the Mass is not the bread given out but the believers receiving it.” This makes a huge difference and refocuses the issue of “presence” from the Host, serviced by a priest with consecrated hands, to the people gathered who are the body of Christ.

The developing role of priests, as a marked and privileged class with unique powers to mediate God’s presence and

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## From Cultic Priesthood to a Priesthood of all Believers: A Personal Journey

By Carl Yusavitz

On July 2, 1972, I was ordained a Roman Catholic priest by a bishop I had never met. Apparently, this man believed the “superiors” of my religious order that I was suitable candidate for priestly orders and I remain grateful for those decisions. However, since then, I have come to a radically different understanding of what happened to me that day. But first, a bit of personal history, at what followed my ordination...

After faithfully serving the Church as a celibate priest for nearly 10 years, profound loneliness finally took its toll on my wellbeing, and I wisely asked for a canonical leave of absence from both my priestly ministry and my life as a vowed “religious”.

As I look back on that decision, actually the “fruit” of years of therapy and spiritual direction, what I was struggling with was the question I had been avoiding for years: Did I believe that God created me (or any of us, for that matter) to be miserable? Or asked differently, as does the Quaker writer Parker Palmer: *“Is the life I am now living the same as the life that wants to live in me?”*

Trying to answer that question has been my spiritual quest for 68 years. My separation from canonical priestly ministry moved me into something of a “desert experience” in my spiritual journey but eventually led me into another community of believers who witnessed to me a very different understanding of “priesthood,” something more akin to what we all share through Baptism and profession of faith. I did not know it at the time, but when I resigned my canonical priesthood, a small civilization died within me and, sadly, I was unable to mourn its passing in the community that first ordained me.

As I look back over the years, I now realize that I was struggling with the classic work of mid-life spirituality – reconciling what other people told me I was with my current experience of self.

Garry Wills’ latest book, *Why Priests? A Failed Tradition*, got me thinking about all of this yet again. Although Wills sees priesthood as a failed tradition, I see it as largely a misunderstood tradition.

1. Why does the Roman Catholic hierarchy still cling to a cultic and magical understanding of priesthood? By cultic, I mean the collapse of pastoral care into sacramental administration and by magic, I mean the attempt to “localize” divinity into Eucharistic bread.
2. Why does the Roman Catholic hierarchy still attach celibate male hegemony to their understanding of priesthood? By hegemony, I mean the reduction of apostolic succession into a mechanical and gender-defined process, with barely a nod to the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit.

I understand that these are complicated questions, both to formulate and answer. Wills, however, does a terrific job

trying to do both with honesty and curiosity. For him, the hierarchy’s understanding of priesthood is far from a “settled” issue. In fact, he asks the reader to explore how those in power in the church use fear and intimidation to control the priesthood narrative, ignoring Jesus’ clear example and admonition about the exercise of power and authority in his name, as in Matthew 20: 25, Luke 22: 25, or 1 Peter 5:3. However we understand the term, priesthood as a class of self-serving clergy who manipulate and reserve rituals deemed necessary for salvation to themselves is a tragic misinterpretation.

I believe that priesthood is a vocation we are all called to and that it emerges from our Baptism. If we were infants, promises were made by others on our behalf, the same promises renewed by us as adults each year during the Easter Vigil. In that, we are all called to participate in the “priesthood” of Jesus Christ, as in 1 Peter 2:5.

Priesthood, then, is a common vocation we all share. As Martin Luther once wrote, “We are all priests, one to another,” even though we may decide to set aside certain individuals to preach, preside at Eucharist, or represent the whole Body of Christ in visiting the sick or caring for the stranger. The realization of our common priesthood helps us experience and re-imagine ourselves, others, our world, and our future differently. Akin to falling in love, we experience our common priesthood as a vocation, like someone is “calling” to us, trying to reach us, calling us out of ourselves to serve others in Christ’s name.

My own spiritual journey from a cultic understanding of priesthood to a priesthood of all believers led me to a church that celebrated this common priesthood through service in Jesus’ name. In a sense, I was called out of my church home, so that I could see it and return to it differently. Today I am gratefully part of an independent Catholic community, that meets every other Sunday, to listen to and share personal reflections on our sacred texts, celebrate a common Eucharist, rotate coordination, presiding, and hospitality, and decide together about where our “collection” goes.

People ask me, “Do you miss ‘Father this and Father that?’ ” Not really. I have two great children, so I finally know what it means to be a father. What about the special way people used to look at me or think that I was “cut from a different cloth” than they were? Again, not really. Actually, I have come to understand that this attitude can lead to the unhealthy boundaries, self-absorption, and the pathological behavior we know as the sin of “clericalism” today.

For me, my journey in and out of a cultic understanding of priesthood has sharpened my own appreciation of vocation as a gift – something not earned, but offered to us by another...however we experience or name that other. Far removed from what happened to me in 1972, I now belong to a community of believers who know each other and are known by each other as sisters and brothers who share and celebrate a common priesthood.

*Carl Yusavitz is Director of Pastoral Care and Clinical Pastoral Education at Penn Foundation, a behavioral healthcare ministry of the Mennonite Church in Sellersville, PA.*

## A DIFFERENT KIND OF PRIEST

*A Response to Garry Wills' Book Why Priests?*

*by Eileen DiFranco, RCWP*

Many of my sisters in academia have been less than enamored of the women priest movement. There is a good reason for this disenchantment. The institutional model of the male priesthood, with its emphasis upon pride of place, its separation from the life of world as lived by the People of God, its insistence upon a divinely ordained authority and supernatural sacrificial ability is not something anyone should seek to emulate.

Garry Wills presents this boilerplate as the image of the male priest in his book, *Why Priests?* Priests, he wrote, have made a long journey away from the people and into the basilicas and ornate garments which seem to mark them for holiness that cannot and should not be shared by regular folks in the pews. All this sacred fru fru, Wills writes, obscures the bounty of God which scripture describes as pressed down and overflowing into our laps- without any type of mediation from a priestly caste.

That is not the type of priesthood Roman Catholic Womenpriests seek to emulate. This is the priesthood that many of us witnessed from the other side of the altar for most of our lives, and we have rejected it.

While the priesthood provides many avenues for men- and now women- to overestimate their importance and authority, it is always dangerous to paint any group of people with a broad brush. It is also dangerous to assume that women will march in lock step with what has become a failed male priesthood. Sadly, many women theologians – along with Garry Wills- have not adequately examined the women priest movement, preferring instead to make assumptions about the priesthood RCWP hopes to model.

One very important factor that women theologians and Wills have not considered is the pastoral aspect of priesthood. While I completely agree with the premise that there is no need for a priest mediator to link up people with the grace of God, I have found that many people are, as yet, not ready for a leaderless faith community. As Paul writes, there are many gifts in community life. Leadership is one of them.

That being said, the women priest movement respects the many gifts in our members. In our community, St. Mary Magdalene, we are completely egalitarian. There is no pride of place for the priest. I am a member of the community who can make no decision unless it is made in the context of a community vote. Our pulpit is open to members of the community who have the gift of preaching. Our altar is open for members to preside if I cannot attend. In my life away from the community, I am a school nurse in a Philadelphia public school where I am intimately acquainted with the grief of poverty. Consequently, the title by which I most regularly addressed is "Nurse." Most people don't even know that I am a priest. I don't wear a collar and don't use a title.

So why the title of priest? That's a good question. It is only in

the last half century or so that we Catholics have felt empowered enough to study the priesthood from the outside and offer any sort of evaluation. It is only in the last decade that we have been able to see that there was a sordid side to the priesthood. As we move away from the uncomplimentary picture of the priesthood painted by Wills and examine the myths that have grown up around it, perhaps we will come to the conclusion that the word "pastor" is a much more appropriate term.

*Eileen DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest at the Saint Mary Magdalene Community.*

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*Mass at 9am*

*Drexel Hill United Methodist Church*

*600 Burmont Avenue*

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**Mass schedule**

**Every Sunday at 9AM**

**Drexel Hill United Methodist Church**

**McBurney Chapel**

**600 Burmont Rd**

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**We have two satellites that meet on the second weekend of the month:**

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## It's the Polity, Stupid

By Marian Ronan

Thirty years ago last fall I enrolled in a Master of Divinity program in a Protestant seminary here in New York City. It's not as if I had never met a Protestant before; on one side of my family, Catholics had married Protestants for three generations. So I grasped that there are differences.

Most of my relatives were standard mainstream Prots, however—Methodists, Episcopalians, the odd Presbyterian. But New York Theological Seminary is majority Black, so what I encountered were lots of Baptists, as well as Pentecostals and independents. Pretty different in many respects from UMCs and Episcopalians.

One aspect of the NYTS curriculum that fascinated me were courses that the various Protestant churches required of their ordination candidates—denominational history and polity courses: Baptist History and Polity; Presbyterian History and Polity; Methodist History and Polity.

I had practically never heard the word “polity” before, so I looked it up: “A form or process of civil government or constitution. From *polis*, city.” So each denomination has a different governance process and structure, much the way nation-states do. I was particularly taken with the polity of Baptist and other congregationalist churches because it's so different from ours. The congregation hires and fires the minister and owns the property. There's usually some kind of umbrella organization for all the churches in a particular region, but the local congregation has almost all the power.

Since the election of Pope Francis, there's been a lot of speculation about whether various changes are in the offing in our own Roman Catholic denomination. A few weeks ago I got an email from the head of the New York chapter of Call to Action with links to two articles discussing such possible changes. The first was an article in the British Catholic newspaper *The Telegraph* reporting that: “Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez Maradiaga of Honduras said he was backing more posts for women after the Pope named him this month to lead a task force of eight cardinals from around the world to reform the Roman Curia, an alleged hotbed of intrigue, infighting and corruption. The cardinal's comments, made to *The Sunday Times*, were backed by Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi on Sunday.”

The second, in the *National Catholic Reporter*, reported that a “Vatican official responsible for the sainthood cause of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador announced Sunday that the cause has been ‘unblocked’ by Pope Francis, suggesting that beatification of the assassinated prelate could come swiftly.”

Both of these developments sound promising. I myself am especially hopeful that the possible beatification and eventual canonization of Archbishop Romero signifies a reversal of John Paul II's vicious repression of liberation theology, a theology that is at the heart of my faith.

But some of us are old enough to recall that there was also a

great deal of hope during the reign of Pope John XXIII. “Good Pope John,” unlike his predecessor and his successor, went to great lengths to save European Jews during the Holocaust and introduced significant changes into the Catholic church by calling Vatican Council II. Yet Pope John XXIII's successors, especially Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI, undermined and reversed many of the changes introduced by their predecessor and the Council he called. In point of fact, as Benedictine Father Anthony Ruff announced with astonishment after the Vatican trashed the translation of the Roman missal on which he and others had labored for ten years, the Roman Catholic Church is an absolute monarchy. But at least in secular absolute monarchies, the son or daughter of the previous monarch may have some faint inclination to continue the parent monarch's policies. In a celibate absolute monarchy, the next guy (I use the term advisedly) can reverse previous decisions with the wave of his wand. Maybe the Vatican and the hierarchy place as much stress as they do on the unchanging truths of the Catholic faith precisely to obscure the arbitrary reversals that the church's absolute monarchical structure allows.

All of this leads back, of course, to the question of polity. The Second Vatican Council taught that the laity as well as the ordained are “the people of God,” and many of us believed it. Had we taken a course in polity at seminary, we might have asked what changes in the church's governance structure would underpin this theological pronouncement. Instead, we continue to fixate on the color of the smoke coming out of the Vatican chimney and hope against hope that the new guy will treat us a little better than his predecessor did, though we know that everything he does can and may well be reversed by the monarch who follows him.

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## Mrs. Jesus and Mr. Mary

By Eileen DiFranco

The scene is a traditional courtship scene. A handsome stranger rides into town. The first thing he sees is an attractive woman standing in the sun near the well. Their eyes meet while everything else melts into the background. Time stands still. They exchange words that each has never shared with another human being. The handsome stranger usually has some hitch in his background that made him go on a long journey far away from his own folks. The woman usually has some quirk as well.

Usually they make a great couple and the next thing we read is that the handsome stranger has asked for the woman's hand in marriage. They ride off into the sunset, happily ever after.

But not in the story of the woman at the well in the Gospel of John. The scene is the same; the setting at high noon, the bright sunlight, and the immediate attraction between two human beings. However, Jesus doesn't want a wife and the Samaritan woman doesn't need a husband. Instead, Jesus wants an apostle and so reveals himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman. The woman, who addresses Jesus without servile fear, gladly accepts his commission to preach the good news that the Messiah had arrived in Samaria. The woman, whose name we never learn, was given the same directive received by Mary Magdalene, "Go tell." She is the only character-male or female- in all of scripture who is recorded as having converted an entire town.

In his many exchanges with women-Mary Magdalene, with Mary and Martha of Bethany, the woman at the well, the women in Luke who traveled with Jesus, and woman caught in adultery-Jesus is clearly not interested in finding a wife. And none of the women is recorded as wanting to be Mrs. Jesus. Instead, their interactions remain business-like; all are more interested in the kingdom of God than they are in each other.

While the annals of the church ascribe Jesus' behavior to the fact that he was like us in all things except sex, they also use sex as a two-edged sword, casting all human beings, including Jesus, in terms of sexual essentialism all the while insisting that the expression of sex be regulated almost to extinction. The simultaneous fixation on and suppression of sex by the church has led to all sorts of weird theology.

Thus, the strangest idea to emerge from the church's historical sexual dysfunction is its reliance upon the nuptial imagery of Jesus as bridegroom as the pre-eminent symbol of God's love to the exclusion of other, equally powerful metaphors. In other words, the church has reduced the munificent love of God for the world to a finite and often problematic relationship, given the status of women in most parts of the world. The church has blithely ignored the fact that in most areas of the world in most times women were sold by their fathers to the highest husband bidder without any regard to love on either side. In spite of this inconvenient truth, according to current church lingo, Jesus, the man immune to sex, loves the church as a bridegroom loves his bride.

The expression of this church defined nuptial love between Jesus, the bridegroom, and the church, his bride, is downright peculiar. According to the tortured logic of the bridegroom image in "Mulieres Dignitatem," John Paul II wrote that Jesus as messiah reveals himself less as the man who sacrifices his life for his friends, but more as a groom who gives his body and pours out his blood for his bride upon the altar, a rather bizarre and ghoulish understanding of love, courtship, and marriage. The Eucharist, the late pope wrote, is the "Sacrament of the bride and groom, where Christ unites his body with the church." If John Paul II is correct, then what is going on during the Eucharist is more akin to the kiss of the spider woman than it is a memorial of our redemption.

In his letter, "The Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World," John Paul II fleshes out his metaphor. "The messianic wedding took place on the cross when the blood/wine of the New Covenant poured from the side of the crucified Christ."

Hans von Baltasar, a favorite of John Paul II, has more to say about the actions of the priest during the celebration of the Eucharist. "What else is the Eucharist but an endless act of fruitful outpouring of his (the priest's) whole flesh such as a man can only achieve with a limited organ of his body?" "The priestly ministry and sacrament are a passing on of seed. They are a male preserve. They aim at inducing in the Bride her function as a woman."

This is pretty sexy language for a group of men who eschew sex and regard Jesus as a completely sexless human being. It also muddies the picture of Jesus, the preacher of the kingdom of God, who, during his life, was busy empowering his followers to be apostles rather than encouraging them to be spotless brides whom he intends to "marry" spiritually.

Sadly, the church has sanctioned the image of Jesus demanding spiritual "brides" to the point where nuns actually wear wedding gowns and wedding rings when they profess their vows. While today's sisters are a breed apart from those in the past, the image of a bride who is subservient to her divine "husband" has perpetuated the myth of female dependency. Sister, like Mrs., apparently needs a man to look out for her. Those sisters throughout the ages who tried to slough off the bride metaphor to become the apostles Jesus intended have incurred papal disapproval sometimes to the point of excommunication. The cloistered nun "married" to Jesus who spends her entire life praying in the convent or the veiled nuns who take care of men like the pope and the bishops – literal images of Jesus – in their private residences or in retirement remain the clerical ideal woman.

The virgin mother of God is also an ideal woman, a Stepford mother/wife, humble, pure and lowly, an icon of priests. According to John Paul II, Jesus, who is portrayed as loving his mother to distraction- although gospel evidence indicates otherwise- did not "ordain" his own mother to the priesthood.

Mary is honored by clerics more for what she is believed not to have done rather than for anything she did – never having sexual relations. This belief is based upon what the church "knows" about Mary even though it comes from a non-canonical gospel, "The Proto-Evangelium of James." John Paul II claimed that Mary had to consider the threat that even

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## HOLY THURSDAY AND ORDINATION DAY 2013

### Of Witnesses, Protesters, and Outcasts

By *Ellie Harty and Mary Whelan*

We always like to see our crowd swelling outside the cathedral on Holy Thursday.

This year there were about thirty of us on a splendid March day, singing, praying, chanting, lively but respectful we think, and always a little bit sad that, for over thirty years, we still have to be here, still have to do this.

Then, suddenly, there was a group of perhaps ten or twelve more alongside of us - a good thing you would have thought, and it would have been - if they hadn't been protesting us!

"We love our priests! We love our priests!" an especially enthusiastic leader and a group of girls (and later some men) shouted over our songs and prayers. One of our women priests answered, "Thank you!" but we suspect they didn't hear, nor would they have gotten the point if they had. They obviously thought we were anti-priest and were loudly countering whatever we said and did. In fact, when one of our group later asked the girls if they might want to be priests when they got older, one replied, "Ew. We're not men!" As we said, they just didn't get-or want to get - the point. Though perhaps one or more of these young women will ponder this new idea of women being priests-a seed may have been planted!

We did not want to lose our own focus, however, that we were witnesses to what could be, rather than mere protesters of what is. Our Mary Magdalene award winner, Gaile Poulhaus, was the first to suggest we go speak with them and suggest that perhaps we could pray together. Some of us did, inviting them at least to join us in song, the very appropriate St. Francis Prayer: "Make me a channel of your peace." Singing that together would have been profound. As their leaders glared, some of the girls looked embarrassed saying they really couldn't sing with us. It was poignant when we sang it and they remained in their disapproving silence. No one would tell us what inspired - or provoked - them to be there. We continued our witness and they continued theirs, side by side, but very far apart.

Ordination Day on May 18 had its own sadness - and beauty. This is the day when, once again, we stand across the street from the cathedral and celebrate Mass conducted by a woman. Only seven of us showed up. Perhaps it was the number - so few for such an important undertaking. Perhaps it was the special poignancy and resonance of the Mass itself. Perhaps it was the priests passing by the one open door in the back of the Cathedral, quickly glancing at, and then away from, us. Perhaps it was Judy, our priest, so eloquent. Perhaps it was all that making us feel especially like outcasts this year. Forsaken by a church we once loved - or maybe still do - from which we cannot turn away even as it turns away from us.

Then something quite small but wonderful happened. One of us there felt the physical need to sit down, and the only seats were away from our improvised altar which we had centered precisely in front of the cathedral. We continued the Mass for a bit and then stopped. This was not right. The

church we love is about inclusion. We picked up the hand wrought cross, the stoneware chalice, the plates of home baked bread (and gluten-free crackers), the picture and artifact and linens and moved it all over to our seated participant. Then we continued to say Mass.

If anyone cannot come to the altar, we will take the altar to them. The message was, and continues to be, given. And received?

### PRIESTS MATTER

#### *A Message from SEPAWOC President Regina Bannan*

Priests matter. Priests matter now. Elsewhere in this issue of *EqualwRites*, you'll read about the question raised by Garry Wills in his new book, *Why Priests?* Whether or not priesthood is *A Failed Tradition*, as Wills' subtitle suggests, priests matter now. As much as we might regret it, power resides with the ordained clergy in this hierarchical church.

For instance, a parish priest in good standing in Austria, Helmut Schuller, matters a great deal. He and others have gathered 400 similarly-situated priests and deacons who signed an "Appeal to Disobedience." You can read the whole document at [http://www.pfarrer-initiative.at/unge\\_en.pdf](http://www.pfarrer-initiative.at/unge_en.pdf), but you will be interested to know that the last of seven points says "WE WILL take every opportunity to speak up publicly for the admission of women and married people to the priesthood. These would be welcome colleagues in ministry." And their mission is not so far from Garry Wills': They champion the importance of the local faith community and the laity in church life.

Schuller is coming to the United States this summer for a tour sponsored by various groups in Catholics Organizations for Renewal (COR), and we are delighted to announce that he will be speaking in **Philadelphia at Chestnut Hill College at 7 pm on Friday, July 19**. Put this on your calendars now, and tell your friends, especially your priest friends. A committee is working on arrangements as I write this in mid-May. We know this is Philadelphia and priests might not be willing to come to a big open meeting. We still want to have it - laity need to support such courage. I keep thinking of SEPAWOC's NunJustice meeting last October and how many sisters attended. I would love to use the theme of PriestJustice and see as many priests unafraid. But if you know of priests who are supportive but don't want to come to this, email me [reginab317@gmail.com](mailto:reginab317@gmail.com) and tell me your name. I'll be in touch with more possibilities as events develop. Tell priests about it. And I want to be sure to mention that we invite order priests and those from Camden and Wilmington and anywhere else. Various Philadelphia organizations are represented on the committee; you are welcome to join us. Email me that, too.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/23/world/europe/with-new-pope-spotlight-returns-to-mild-rebel-priest.html> is a very good article on Schuller, published in March, soon after Pope Francis's election. The last sentence is " 'It's about church from below,' he (Pope Francis) says, lifting his palms upward from the table, a gesture quite literally uplifting, 'or church from above.' At that he presses downward. There is no question on which side he comes down." If this church from below is the church you believe in, come July 19 to discuss how to make this church come alive in this country.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Soulstice Rising 2013

it is so predawn hidden cave black  
it has been lost-and- lonely dark far too long  
long enough.  
it's time for morning melting chasm-blasting change  
shimmering shards,  
sun gouging early morning weeping women's eyes.  
past angels, it's time for tombs to crack  
and wombs to spill their power  
Open.  
Breathe again.  
it's time for fire to blast the space  
of love and loss and flight.  
we're way past ordinary time here.  
it's time for true ascension  
(no assumptions here)  
Women.

**By Sister Char Pavlik**

**Sister Char Pavlik** is the co-director of *Angelspring Farm Wellness Retreat* where she provides psychotherapy and spiritual guidance. She teaches music therapy at Duquesne University and enjoys a good laugh and a great time.

### Message to a Young Brother

Yesterday was the feast of Saint La Salle.  
Yesterday was the 27th anniversary of my being sober.  
Yesterday, one line from the song, *Yesterday...* "There's a shadow hanging over me" no longer applied.  
Yesterday the shadow was lifted.

I finally figured out:  
Our local community is the center of my Religious Life  
But *not* the center of my Spiritual life.

The center of my spirit is in  
Sanctuary of Peace  
Tuesdays Listening Group  
My prayer groups  
The Catholic Worker St. Francis Inn

With the poor.  
With the lonely.

As you embark on a new stage in your Religious Life,  
I hope it does not take you 62 years to figure it out.

...Or... Maybe it should. :-)))

**By Br. Bart Schlachter**

### Archbishop Allows a Female to Play Football—Are We on the Slippery Slope?

In March, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput decided to allow 11 year old Caroline Pla of Doylestown, PA to play football in Philadelphia's Catholic Youth Organization next season. Due to an oversight she had played the previous two seasons. Chaput appointed a panel including coaches, medical experts, and pastors to review the request that she be allowed to continue playing. The panel decided to uphold the current ban but Chaput rejected their recommendation and sought counsel from "additional sources" according to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 15, 2013) and was influenced by such factors "as the expectations of parents and coaches, legal issues, and the stances of other CYO leagues around the country." He was also influenced by the hundreds of letters he received. Caroline learned a valuable life lesson: "If there's something you don't like, you can change it. In the end, it can turn out the way that you want."

Now I can indulge myself in a fantasy moment. I would substitute the word "ordination" for the word "football." Then I hear myself reading Caroline's quote to the media. Let's face it, theologians do not see a reason for barring women, the public has an expectation of it and we have written hundreds (thousands?) of letters. It could happen, right?

### Loving the Church in a Male-way

The *Catholic News Service* reported on a statement issued by a papal theologian, Father Wojciech Giertych, explaining why women cannot be priests. We include this because it is an argument we have not heard before. "Men are more likely to think of God in terms of philosophical definitions and logical syllogisms, a quality valuable for fulfilling a priest's duty to transmit church teaching." (Okay, this one we have heard before.) This is the new part: "Although the social and administrative aspects of church life are hardly off-limits to women, priests love the church in a characteristically 'male way' when they show concern about structures, about the buildings of the church, about the roof of the church which is leaking, about the bishops' conference, about the concordat between the church and state." Maybe if more priests had been thinking about the plumbing and heating there might not have been so many abused children! Is this yet another tactic to take the focus off some men behaving badly? I do not know. How else to explain such nonsense?

### Archdiocese Offers Sports Therapy to Gay Men at Camp Courage

We seem to have a sports theme going here. I learned from our local NBC news station that in May, 2013 St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia hosted Camp Courage, a voluntary program that encourages gay men to lead chaste lives. Once again, women are not included, but that might be a good thing.) Run by *Courage*, an international organization, the idea is that "if men let go of the anxiety and shame they may have felt playing sports as a child, it will help them resist gay urges." "A lot of these guys that are struggling with the same sex attraction have some of this as the root

*continued on page 9*



**Why Priests? A Failed Tradition** *continued from page 2*  
grace, has had devastating consequences for our faith community. It is a long way from a communal meal celebrating the body of believers as the body of Christ, to one holy man with the ability to act upon bread and wine, with or without anyone present, to effect a change in substance of material elements, that become the real presence of God who remains in the Host. What a journey—from life giving community to corralled heavenly host! Could the followers of Jesus imagine such a thing? Jesus save us! And, I believe he does, not as sacrificial lamb, but in the sense that his words and actions must once again become our primary model of holiness—our way, our truth, and our life as a Christian community.

Recently, theologian Mary Hunt wrote a piece reminding us that theology has consequences. Although I found Wills' book heavy reading, I appreciated learning more about the theology that has shaped our liturgical tradition and brought us to our current quandary. An all male priesthood has done, and continues to do, real violence to our "one body" in reinforcing division and keeping Catholics at a distance from one another and the Jesus of the Gospels. Wills writes that "holiness can be a form of power. Everything around the priest proclaims holiness." It is no wonder that these men, set apart as special, have come to see themselves as exceptional and privileged. If we put aside the heavy overlay of sacrificial theology at the core of our central liturgical rite and reaffirm the body of Christ as encountered in the one body of believers, we do not in fact need priests. There is no vocation problem. There is no women's ordination problem. What does remain is the problem of our divided "body". We must be about the business of healing a much-wounded body of believers if we are truly to be the body of Christ for the world.

*Why Priests?* is a significant work and it is difficult to do justice to all arguments that Wills advances to reach his conclusion. The book takes many surprising and obscure theological detours which eventually circle back to the primary theme. I came to appreciate the internal logic that finally brought me to his conclusion that no, we do not need priests. I tend to agree. But we do need Eucharist. We need to gather in community to give thanks, to experience that we are, together, the body of Christ and to celebrate "God breaking into human life" even today, through us. May we continue to move forward, drawing strength and vision from one another, as one body.

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

**Mrs. Jesus and Mr. Mary** *continued from page 6*

divine impregnation and obedience to God posed to her vow of celibacy before she agreed to be the mother of Jesus.

Mary, the virgin/mother is, according to John Paul II, "the friend, companion, guide, and confidant of priests." Priests must, "accept God's gift (of celibacy) in self-giving and follow her example as faithful virgins." Indeed, John Paul II, the Vicar of Christ, dedicated himself completely to Mary as expressed in his motto, "Totus Tuus," or "totally yours," a veritable Mr. Mary. At one point he intended to declare Mary

as "co-redemptrix" with Jesus, her son. Indeed, he wrote that Mary represents "the union between mothers and sons."

Several questions need to be asked. First of all, do mature men offer themselves "totally," that is, body, mind, and spirit to their own mothers? Do grown men have "intimate" relationships with their own mothers? And finally, how does an intense relationship between a priest and a woman who has no counterpart in the real world affect his relationships with flesh and blood women?

We don't know if Jesus had a wife. We do know that Mary had other children besides Jesus. Scripture records this, even if the siblings of Jesus get explained away by the church as cousins or step-children. In the end, having an active sexual life at some point in his life would not have diminished the vocation of Jesus. Jesus could have had a wife and still been Jesus. Mary could have had a sexual life with her husband that produced a number of children and still been Mary.

What we do know is that over the course of the last two millennia, the church has spent far more time perseverating on sex than it ever did upon the primary concern of Jesus—the kingdom of God. The vision of the kingdom, where all God's children have their own home under their own fig tree with their families living in peace, does not need to be populated by dutiful virginal brides of Christ or celibate husbands/sons of Mary, but rather by strong women and men called to be apostles, agents of change.

Jesus did not care that the woman at the well had multiple husbands. He cared that she had heart enough to imagine his vision of the kingdom of God and preach it to the waiting world.

**Eileen McCafferty DiFranco** *is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest and part of the St. Mary Magdalene Community.*

**Did You Know?** *continued from page 8*

cause of their disorder," said coach Mark Houck. This must have worked for one man who was quoted, "When I play sports, it connects me in a way that's deeper than sex. In that sense, it repairs, you know, what I think was missing." Hm, not even gonna comment on that.

If you want to go to a truly scary website, check out <http://couragec.net>, definitely not for the faint of heart. *Courage* has more than 100 chapters worldwide and offers a 12 step program. Step one: We admitted that we were powerless over homosexuality and our lives had become unmanageable. Since they can't "pray the gay away" maybe our archdiocese would focus its time, energy and (our) money in a different direction: change the homophobic policies that hurt LGBT persons, their families, friends, all of us. Oh, yes, and how about some attention to fixing the problem of and the hiding of sex abuse among its priests? Now that would take **COURAGE.**

### A Women's Place

"It is past time for women to take their rightful place, side by side with men, in the rooms where the fates of peoples, where their children's and grandchildren's fates, are decided."  
*Hillary Clinton*

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## Book Reviews

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***Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church.* By Mary Jeremy Daigler. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012. 216 pp. \$75.00. (For 35% discount order at [www.scarecrowpress.org](http://www.scarecrowpress.org) with promotion code 7F12DAIG)**

*Reviewed by Marian Ronan*

An astonishing aspect of getting older is having something you consider a part of your life turn into an object of historical research before your very eyes. This, I suspect, will be the experience of many Catholic women's ordination activists when they curl up with Jeremy Daigler's new book, *Incompatible with God's Design*.

Daigler is the author of *Through the Windows*, a study of the higher education ministry of the Sisters of Mercy in the U.S. and is Visiting Scholar at Mt. St. Agnes Theological Center in Baltimore. *Incompatible with God's Design* is the first published history of the U.S. Roman Catholic women's ordination movement.

*Incompatible* begins by laying out a number of the controversies concerning women's ordination—from institutional opposition on the right to progressive opposition on the left. It also details the history of some of the movement's European and American predecessors, including the international St. Joan's Alliance, founded in 1911, the first Catholic group on record to advocate women's ordination. In perhaps her most memorable chapter, Daigler tells the story of Mary Lynch, leader of the U.S. movement for women deacons before the movement for women priests got underway. In her historic 1974 "Christmas letter," Lynch raised the issue of women priests. This letter stimulated the planning of the first Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit in 1975 and the foundation of the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), the national group that has spearheaded the U.S. drive for women's ordination since 1975.

In other chapters, Daigler addresses the role of Catholic sisters in the U.S. movement—nuns, we learn, were not its founders—and the roles of a number of Catholic priests and bishops who have supported women's ordination over the years. A further chapter details the history of WOC.

Daigler's reflections on the international dimensions of the movement are also informative. Over the years, the Vatican and the hierarchy have attempted to marginalize the call for women's ordination by suggesting that it is an elite, western phenomenon. Daigler explores the ways in which groups on other continents have influenced the U.S. effort, including Women's Ordination Worldwide. She also introduces Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP), an organization launched by the ordination to the priesthood of seven Catholic women on the Danube River in 2002. Since then, RCWP has grown

to include two hundred priests and bishops and their congregations. *Incompatible* concludes with a discussion of the problems the women's ordination movement confronts as it enters its second century.

As is often the case with studies of living social phenomena, those involved in the events Jeremy Daigler examines may disagree about the facts and her interpretation of them. Overall, however, *Incompatible with God's Design* is a genuine contribution to the history of the U.S. Roman Catholic women's ordination movement and provides a foundation for the studies I hope will follow it.

**Marian Ronan** is EqualwRites book review editor. Her new book, *Sister Trouble: The Vatican, the Bishops, and the Nuns*, will be available on Amazon this summer.

**Incompatible**  
**with**  
**God's Design:**  
**A History of the Women's Ordination**  
**Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church**  
**--Mary Jeremy Daigler, author**

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**Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future** by Gary Macy, William T. Ditewig and Phyllis Zagano. New York and New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2011. Softcover \$14.95. 104 pp. plus back matter.

Reviewed by Mary Jeremy Daigler

Two volumes published recently on women and the diaconate will be of special interest to readers of *EqualwRites*.

In *Women Deacons: Past, Present and Future*, a slim but jam-packed little volume, three theologians display intense focus and provide readers with a convenient and readable resource concerning the history of women's ordained diaconal ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. The book is a chronological arrangement of three essays — one by each author. Gary Macy covers the past, William T. Ditewig the present, and Phyllis Zagano possibilities for the future. The claims of each are substantiated by ample footnotes. Deniers would be hard-pressed to present clear and cogent arguments in the face of this abundant scriptural and historical evidence.

The authors raise thought-provoking questions throughout. In the first essay, after considerable discussion of the long-lasting diaconal ordination of women in the Eastern Churches contrasted with the shorter life it had in the West, Macy asks: *Why* was it so strong in the east and *why* was there a dramatic decline over time in the numbers of women ordained to the diaconate?

Ditewig, in his essay, reminds the reader that language is not the only element of Church externals that has changed over the centuries. Among many other matters, the theological meaning and pastoral function of terms such as “ordination” have changed. The “minor orders” have disappeared, and those that remain have significantly changed their “job descriptions.” Ditewig also strongly urges maintenance of the distinction between diaconate and presbyterate in order to clarify the two ministries' qualifications (even as to gender).

In the third essay, Zagano provides a brief summary of the two prior essays and counters comments often heard in the Church such as: “There's no need to change the Canon Law about ordaining women to the diaconate, because they are already doing the work of deacons.” She quickly points out the fallacy of that approach and notes the deacon ministries that women are *not* allowed to do. In addition, she reminds readers of the long-taught principle of “the grace of office” that comes through the sacraments, enhances the particular ministries, and is not accessible to the un-ordained.

The second volume, *Women in Ministry*, covers a trinity of topics under the overarching theme of “emerging questions.” With clarity and force, Zagano, the sole author, focuses on a) women and the church, b) Catholic women's ordination, and c) the question of governance and ministry for women. With regard to each, she concludes that the discussions begun at Vatican II are unfinished because of the “determined resistance of the hierarchy to share power.” On the subject of Catholic women's ordination, the author reaches over into the history of those Eastern Churches recognized by the RCC

as in the line of “apostolic succession.” She notes the inescapable necessity of the Vatican's recognizing their ordination of women to the diaconate, lest it insult the theology and practice of these churches. The section on governance and ministry for women is strong especially because of its simplicity, paring argumentation down to common sense and documentation of existing long-standing affirmative legislation and practice.

These two books are complementary in content and can be used either separately or together, particularly with persons preparing for diaconal ministry (whether transitional or permanent), by directors and instructors in diocesan diaconate programs, students of church history, and all those interested in the process of change in Catholic church ministry.

*Mary Jeremy Daigler* is the author of *Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church*. New York: Scarecrow Press, 2012. (For 35% discount order at [www.scarecrowpress.org](http://www.scarecrowpress.org) with promotion code 7F12DAIG.)

### Our Past, Present and Future

I often look through previous issues of *EqualwRites*, and marvel at our rich history of participation in the effort to renew the church, a history that has been documented in Jeremy Daigler's new book *Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church*. We celebrate those who came before us, those who are still on the journey with us and welcome those who more recently joined us-grateful for all. It has always been a collective effort.

Because of the generosity of those who support this effort, whether it is financial and/or being present at our witnesses and programs, we are able to continue to be the voice and presence of the Women's Ordination Conference in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

We stand in the present moment facing the future which depends on all of us. I believe with all my heart that we are poised at the “tipping point” which Ellie Harty described in our last issue of *EqualwRites*! If you have supported us financially in the past, thank you. We are including an envelope for your convenience if you wish to continue to support us or to contribute the first time. These are crucial times for those who wish to see change in the church.

# SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 14

Lk 10:25-37

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

We are now in the Liturgical Season known as “Ordinary Time,” but, as I get older, I realize no time is ordinary!

This always reminds me of James Carroll’s story of having a very close call on an airplane. After his life flashed before his eyes and the plane landed safely, he exclaimed to the flight attendant, “Our time is all extra now!” She thoughtfully replied, “It was all extra to begin with!”

Many of us, as we gratefully reflect on our lives in 2013, may remember the sixties as foundational and see 1963 as particularly transformational for us. Fifty years ago Vatican II had just begun, John XXIII wrote *Pacem in Terris* the year he died, the Civil Rights Movement was stirring consciences, four children died in a bombing at a Birmingham church, and John Kennedy was assassinated. John Dear, S.J. writes in *NCR* that he has been pondering the 1963 Civil Rights Campaigns. Part of the Birmingham Campaign was the Children’s Crusade. Thousands of children marched and prayed and sang. The first day the firemen were ordered to use the force of their hoses on the children, they complied with the orders. The second day, the firemen refused; they couldn’t bring them-

selves to hurt the children again. Martin Luther King later said that he saw and felt in Birmingham, even with all the sorrow, the real power of nonviolence.

Those of us involved in any freedom movement have learned that all are intertwined, especially when I read King’s words that we don’t know what’s going to happen, but we’ve got to make that leap of faith!

When I hear the Gospel of the Good Samaritan this summer, I will remember that King’s last sermon, “I’ve been to the Mountaintop” also was a reflection on “The Good Samaritan”. King tells that the Jericho Road was a dangerous place, and it was natural to ask, “If I stop and help, what will happen to me?” However, Jesus calls us to ask, “If I don’t stop to help, what will happen to the one in need?”

As we think about those in need this summer, let’s remember Joan Chittister’s reflection in *NCR* that, according to UN statistics, two-thirds of the world’s hungry, illiterate and the poorest of the poor are women...and all of them ignored, rejected and omitted from the official language and official theological development of the Church. It is simply impossible to be really committed to the poor and not devote yourself to doing something to change the role and status of women.

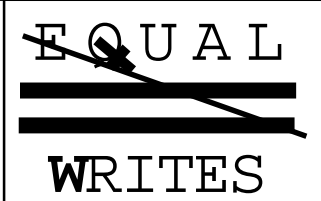
**Judith Heffernan** is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit and SEPAWOC Core Committee.

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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.

**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 2013. 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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