

*Because Sometimes True Fidelity Lies in the Courage to Dissent*

## JOIN US AS WE WITNESS FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN MINISTRY

Holy Thursday  
April 13, 2017 11:00 AM  
STANDING TOGETHER  
FOR WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Ordination Day  
May 20, 2017 9:00 AM  
EUCHARISTIC LITURGY  
LED BY A WOMAN

18th & Race Streets  
(Near the Cathedral of Saints Peter & Paul)  
Philadelphia, PA  
For Information, 215-545-9649

E Q U A L

Vol. XXXIV No. 1

W R I T E S

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

MARCH 2017 - JUNE 2017

**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.

### Come for your Daughters and Granddaughters!

By Maureen Tate

Our Holy Thursday Witness this year will be April 13, 2017, 11:00am at Sister Cities Park across from the Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul 18<sup>th</sup> and Race Streets, Philadelphia.

Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined, when I was in my twenties advocating for women's ordination, that the Church I loved and who inspired future work and commitments, would remain steadfast in its rejection of the full baptismal promise of half of its members, by virtue of gender. I was patient then, thinking it was just a matter of time until the Church, "in its infinite wisdom", would appreciate what all other aspects of society were coming to as a new awareness regarding women's potential and equality. As I immersed myself in theological studies and extensive feminist scholarship, I was certain my Church would take to heart the implications of long standing sexism and patriarchal worldviews and embrace the full participation of women for the future health and vitality of the Church.

Now, at the wizened age of 63, I realize how I seriously underestimated the forces of sexism, patriarchy and clericalism that have a grip on our religious tradition and leadership. As a mother of three daughters and grandmother of two young granddaughters thus far, I struggle with the legacy I will leave of a Church that denies their full personhood. I do not see a future in a Church that our daughters are rejecting in large numbers because there is no place for them. If our daughters are missing, where is the next generation of Catholics to come from? When I consider my own daughters, nieces, daughters

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### ANNOUNCING OUR MARY MAGDALENE

AWARD WINNER FOR 2017

JUDITH A. HEFFERNAN

By Regina Bannan

This year, SEPAWOC will present the Mary Magdalene Award, acknowledging courage in standing up for women in the Roman Catholic Church, to Judy Heffernan. Generally when the award is given to local members of the Women's Ordination Conference, it's to those who have withdrawn from active work for a variety of reasons, including calamity in my case. But that's not going to happen to Judy; she has only missed one Core Committee meeting in all these forty years, and we pray she will miss any calamities.

No, Judy has been the heart and soul and inspiration for all those touched by SEPAWOC. Most of you know her from her last-page Scripture Reflections in *EqualwRites*. Those of you able to contribute have received personal thank-you letters since Judy has been our secretary. Every year, Judy has been the celebrant at the Ordination Day Eucharist in Sister Cities Park, and she is a presence at every witness we have held or supported. Whatever event draws progressive Catholics in the Philadelphia area, Judy is there, especially if women are the focus.

Judy's story has been acknowledged in these pages before, on the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of her 1980 ordination by the Community of the Christian Spirit (See the June 2015 issue of *EqualwRites* in the archives on our website.). She has served as one of CCS's celebrants since then, and is now also assisting at the Mary Magdalene Community in Palmyra, New Jersey. Judy is a proud alumna of

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## **Daughters and Granddaughters**

*continued from page 1*

of friends, and their friend circles, these young women are already missing. Women have traditionally been the ones to carry on the faith tradition within the family and are the backbone of our parishes, working in a variety of lay ministries. Can there be a future for the Catholic Church without the women? While Church leaders wring their hands over the shortage of candidates for a male, celibate priesthood, their patriarchal blinders do not enable them to imagine a more dire scenario.

It does not appear the male leadership of the Catholic Church has come to terms with this future that the rest of us see so clearly. If they cannot face these realities, what is our responsibility as the Church? What is at stake and what can we do to ensure a Church for our Daughters?

Come stand with us and give witness once again...for yourself, for your daughters, granddaughters and all the young women in your life who may yet be the future for a renewed Church.

Don't forget to join us also on **Ordination Day, May 20 at 9am** for a Eucharistic Liturgy led by women. The liturgy will also take place at Sister Cities Park across from the Basilica. Let us continue to model an inclusive liturgy where all are welcome at the table.

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

## **Mary Magdalene Award** *continued from page 1*

Chestnut Hill College and St. Maur's Catholic seminary in Indianapolis at which she earned a Masters of Divinity at a time when the seminary opened its doors to women to further their mission of educating those underserved in ministry. Judy felt a call to priesthood from an early age and was involved with Mary Lynch at the meetings that led to the formation of the national Women's Ordination Conference in 1975, and ever since. She was active in the ecumenical Philadelphia Task Force on Women and Religion, some of whose members were among those ordained in the Episcopal Church in 1974. Judy is a very effective speaker, telling her story at colleges and conferences, and I encourage you to invite her if you have a group that would be interested.

Judy has been a model Worker-Priest. For years she was employed as Head Teacher in an Early Education Child Care Program of the School District of Philadelphia. She has spent her retirement years as "Uber Judy," taking all manner of friends and relatives to medical care and the airport, including dogs to parks and recreation. Her devotion to Othello is legendary, as is her mastery of slot machines and the lottery. She has been a peace activist since the 1960s and a political activist in the 21st century.

If you love Judy, come to SEPAWOC's Holy Thursday witness on April 13 at 11am at Sister Cities Park, across from the Cathedral in Philadelphia. We owe her this recognition for her years of caring so greatly about women's ordination - and for each of us.

**Regina Bannan** is the President of SEPAWOC.

## **A Church for Our Daughters**

*Would it be stone-clad?  
With some rocks left over  
For throwing or thrusting?*

*You sinless go first.*

*Would it be stone-packed?  
Bricked up for the letting  
Some in or kept out?*

*You sinless go first.*

*Would it be stone-laden?  
Rigid and roughened  
To halt and to harrow?*

*You sinless go first.*

*Would it be stone-brazed?  
Patched over and plastered  
To catch us, entrap us?*

*You sinless go first.*

*Of  
Course  
We  
Don't  
Want  
Stone  
Clad  
Walls.*

*Our daughters weep against them.  
Our daughters pound upon them.  
Our daughters run away.*

*Sinners and sinless,  
Please be my guest:  
Tear  
Down  
These  
Walls!*

*Replace them with -  
Oh - I don't know -  
A garden?  
A labyrinth?  
A prayer?*

*Or a well!  
For the women and Jesus  
And men and God's creatures.*

*.  
A well  
Where we'll dip in and drink and become  
So drunken on sacredness  
We'll build a new home.*

*And our daughters will lead us,  
Christ-like, they will lead us.  
And our daughters will follow us.  
All stones left unturned.*

*You sinless go first.  
We'll follow - or lead?*

*by Ellie Harty*

## THE JANUARY 21<sup>ST</sup> WOMEN'S MARCH SOME REFLECTIONS

I wasn't there; not in Philadelphia, Washington, New York or Boston, which were getting a lot of media attention. Tom and I had to work, doing a puppet show at the Westfield Library in Westfield, N.J. Westfield is nestled in the triangle made by routes 95, 287 and 78 and has a population of just over 30,000. We've performed in that area many times and it seems to be a pretty diverse community. We had finished our show, had packed up and were ready to leave by around noon. The roads were all backed up and we couldn't figure out why. Finally we rounded a corner to see the police had blocked the road and there was a sea of marchers and signs, even a few pink hats ... in Westfield, N.J.! The marchers waved and we waved back and waited patiently until the police opened the road. There seemed to be several hundred marchers, certainly not the hundreds of thousands who showed up in the bigger cities, but there in Westfield, N.J. and it turns out many, many smaller towns and cities, the people still wanted their voices heard, wanted to band together against tyranny and for our freedoms. I cried. Maybe I was there.

Marianne Tucker

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*Saturday, January 21, dawned into a cold, damp, and drizzly day. This matched my reluctant feelings. I shy away from crowds and here I was going into a huge mob. Luckily, I was accompanied by two neighbors which encouraged me to continue. The train platform was packed (on a Saturday!) by the time we arrived. More and more people crowded in as we waited for the train. The crowd consisted of excited women of all ages, lots with gray hair, some with their young ones, and many high school and college students. Many men could also be seen among the crowd. Numbers of women wore a pink knitted hat as their banner for the day, their excitement encouraging. Their spirits were at such a high level that I was less afraid of being in such a large group.*

*Getting off the train, we merged into the tidal wave of humanity flowing to the JFK Parkway destination. Just getting to the march was a march in itself. People were already at the location while new train arrivals kept crowding in, crowding in, and crowding in. Inch by inch the purposeful throng moved forward. Many people carried creative signs of protest that indicated the cause for which they were concerned. Everywhere we looked, there were signs providing entertainment and conversation. Quite creative and some crude, but all protested loudly and clearly! Just by looking at the signs, one could see how varied the issues are. Everyone in the crowd was supporting every other person present.*

*Good spirits reigned supreme throughout the event. As crowded as we were, no one was angry with anyone else if they bumped elbows and/or backpacks as they tried to move forward. No one was angry with the signs which blocked their view. People shared snacks and laughs. No little children were crying. Mothers (and/or fathers) carried the tiny ones on their backs or in strollers. The walking continued, all roads leading to and merging with the Parkway. The march was scheduled to begin at 10*

*am but actually, the size of the crowd had made it start earlier. At 12:30, people were still crowding down the street; still thronging up from the train platforms as they kept arriving into town. The march lasted well into the afternoon. Then we went home to see all the other crowds marching all over the world in solidarity of protest, for recognition, for people's rights.*

Margaret Cooper

...

The Women's March from my living room chair: My closest advisors suggested strongly that I not go to the march — how would I get there, how long could I last — so I didn't go. It's the only major leftish march I have not attended in D.C. or in the place I was living since the mid-1960s; that was painful. I watched on TV and tried to get NBC10 in Philly to send photos to MSNBC so I could see my friends here. That didn't happen. I was very happy to hear many of the speeches in D.C. and to see the crowds around the country. This movement will continue with so many young people and young families participating. And then my niece from Milwaukee sent me a wonderful purple and pink pussy hat so I am ready for the next demonstration!

Regina Bannan

...

*I have so many moments to remember from the Women's March this January, but one actually relates to our very own Church – in a positive way, too. I'm one of those easily chilled sort, and so while waiting to begin marching, I looked for a place of - shall we say, sanctuary? - for those out in the cold (literally and figuratively). And I found just that inside our very own Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul! I don't know if it was on purpose for the marchers or for some other purpose, but the Basilica door was open; inside it was warm and serene, and, if the man who smiled and greeted me is any indication, very welcoming. He could see I was there for the march; I told him I just needed some warmth for a few minutes, and he gave me just that, plus a smile and encouragement to stay as long as I wanted. Sometimes it is amazing where we find the words we so long to hear. Hope seemed everywhere that day.*

Ellie Harty

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Finally, Mary Hunt on the website Feminist Studies in Religion brings it all home in her article, *Women's Marches As Spiritual Practice*:

At first blush, the role of religion was relatively minor... What brought people together was not a particular dogma or doctrine. Rather, it was vision and hope lived out in multiple ways a la feminist spiritualities that do justice...

Progressive religious groups were out in force as banners and signs revealed. But the real story, in my view, is the more generalized spiritual sense of the marches that reflects a more diffuse, but no less effective, source of motivation. Some of it is reactive—against the threats to Obamacare, in opposition to discrimination against immigrants, in horror at the greed and profit taking, and struck by the fact that Trump's environmental policies will almost certainly exacerbate climate change. But most of the spiritually rooted values are affirmative—wanting health care, quality schools, safe drinking wa-

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## THE PINK HAT

*By Marianne Tucker*

The February 6, 2017, cover of Time Magazine showed a hand crafted pink hat with a shadow behind it; the shadow that looked like a cat. It seems an unlikely and even uncomfortable symbol for a resistance movement, but a symbol nevertheless. To me, the women who proudly wore and continue to wear this hat are owning their bodies and body parts, owning their political beliefs and standing up for freedom of speech, among other freedoms. They are possibly putting themselves in danger from the hate that is unleashed by the campaign and administration. They are visible. Some of the hats were created by the wearers but many others were created in bulk by people who could not attend any of the marches due to illness or geography. They wanted to be there in some tangible way. Enough people were making these that there was a shortage of pink yarn for awhile, imagine that! I found the view of pink from the air to be inspiring. These cats have claws and hopefully we'll keep sharpening them. Now, do I have any pink yarn in my stash?

**Marianne Tucker** is a professional musician, puppeteer, member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee and an avid knitter. See: <http://tuckerstales.dot5hosting.com/TMTUCKER.HTM>.

## WE MARCH IN HOPE

*By Mary Whelan*

Soon after November 9<sup>th</sup> I learned about the Women's March that would be held the day after the inauguration. I knew I would be joining in. I did not know what to do with my emotions at that point and I have always been told that walking is good for whatever ails you, and I was ailing. I read this quote in the *New York Times*: "The Women's March...is an apt metaphor for the moment: movement as primal scream." That scream was lodged deep within me—and would be expelled through my feet! The best part was that I would not stand or walk alone!

As it turned out I did not get to D.C. but marched in my adopted "home town" with 50,000 other men, women, and children. I felt the love that day and have carried it with me ever since. (I will mention that my son and his girlfriend marched in D.C.—so proud of them). I felt the spirit as soon as I got on the train to Center City, joining a standing room only crowd in our railroad car, some people wearing their "meow hats". We immediately became a mini community—all ages—as we talked and laughed and exchanged stories. I absorbed the festive mood as we walked from the train station and as we neared the other marchers it was electrifying. It was so crowded that we "marched" as if we were a single organism.

I read the following quotation on Facebook, shortly after the Womens' March was announced, which captured the spirit of the day for me and made me want to join in: "We stand together in solidarity with our partners and children for the protection of our rights, our safety, our health and our families—recognizing that our vibrant and diverse communities

are the strength of our country." From the first words of the inaugural address through the weeks that have followed, I have heard so much negative and threatening language. I wanted to be associated with positivism and resolve and hope—the march provided that for me.

I have decided I need one of those pink hats because I have a feeling we will be marching again in the coming months. Just an FYI: It is almost impossible to find pink yarn online! That indicates how many hats were made! But I persisted until I found a bright pink skein.

I am writing this on February 20<sup>th</sup>, Presidents' Day. The inauguration was exactly one month ago today. Since that day I have heard, read and seen way too many things that disturb me greatly. So I will end with my favorite new quote which offers the hope, hope that I gained in walking on January 21st. Who would ever think I'd be thanking Mitch McConnell for this? This "works" for me as I will witness in political marches and in front of the Cathedral on Holy Thursday. This will be my strength: "She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted." No higher compliment could be given to Elizabeth Warren (to whom the quote was originally directed). We marchers, believers and activists will persist. Of that I am convinced.

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

### Editorial Staff of EqualwRites A Publication of SEPAWOC

Editors: **Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan**

Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan, Marian Ronan**

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ter, equal opportunity in housing and employment—for everyone without exception. There is a groundswell against war and torture. Climate change is taken seriously and racism is abhorred. Women, LGBTQIA people, and immigrants are outsiders no more. Such spiritually based commitments are by their nature general and visionary...Abortion emerged as a potential wedge issue that this time did not finally divide. Happily, people, including some Catholics, who are uncomfortable with legal reproductive options some women choose, embraced the larger justice agenda without focusing narrowly on one issue...This approach to living with discomfort in order to move forward is not a sign of cheap relativism, but a hallmark of feminist spirituality. Without abandoning one's beliefs, it is possible to pass over the rigid, narrow foci that have kept patriarchal ecumenical and interfaith efforts from succeeding. It is not a sign of rampant secularization, but evidence of reasonable and responsible religiosity; it is a sign of better forms of spirituality, which are expressed by embracing a shared vision of human flourishing and cosmic harmony.

## **WE MAY BE PUSSIES BUT WE'RE NOT PUSSIES!**

**By Ellie Harty**

This may betray my age, but I have to admit, I hate those pussy hats that people wore to the Women's March. I know it's to put a new powerful spin and redefinition of a word traditionally used to degrade, debase, and denigrate women, but those old associations reactivate old wounds, at least for me. I still feel the breath knocked out of me when someone, even with the best of motivations, calls me a pussy. I like cats, but I don't want to be characterized as someone who hisses, scratches, attacks, bites, or plays with her prey and then kills it. Even worse, I don't want to be labeled as "pussy" in the other sense of the word, as someone who lacks courage, is too afraid to take risks, who runs from confrontation, who gives in. We really need a new word.

Refashioning something, a word - or, hmmm, a church? - I guess could revitalize it, at least temporarily but is unsustainable for the long run. The Catholic Church, which we have known in the past and sometimes still see, for example, has been patched and repatched - but revitalized? - not so much. Someone - I think it was Richard Rohr - pointed out that you can repair, refashion, or plaster over something for only so long before it either collapses under the weight of those additions or starts to look like a decrepit, decaying, unrecognizable version of its former self. The Catholic Church has been trying to plug holes, recaulk cracks, duct tape leaks, shore up walls forever, but old scars still show through. Old wounds still reopen. Furthermore, all that endless repairing is so exhausting, so draining, while building something new could be so energizing. And we really do need a new Church.

A good deal of our focus this year will be on just that, a new church, "a church for our daughters" and what that would look and feel and be like. Its construction would definitely not be a task for the defeated, the disillusioned, or the drained, and it would definitely not be for *pussies*. It would instead be for, okay, I'll say it, those empowered PUSSIES, imaginative, practical, idealistic, energized, doers. Perhaps "PUSHIES" would be a better word? Or is that too aggressive? Too nasty? Too hard to make into a hat? Let us know what you think. Really.

Although I'm not sure what a "church for our daughters" would look like, I have seen its foundations everywhere - in political marches, in Holy Thursday witnesses, in inspiring conferences, events, speakers, in articles, books, and blogs, and - dare I say? - even in newsletters! New construction is taking place everywhere we look. We know what we want because we already see it.

We certainly saw a version of the unified effort to build a better America in the January Women's March. What spirit! What energy! What hope in the power of people connecting to effect change for the future while still championing the gains of the past! While there, in the midst of my rhapsody, I even imagined these women, men, and children showing up at Holy Thursday witnesses all over the world, with their signs and their songs, and their boundless enthusiasm asking our church, as they were asking our country, to affirm and protect equal rights - and equal rites - for all women.

Then a hard head-knock of reality hit me. With the Catholic Church, we are not dealing with a democracy, with governance by the people through the people's elected representatives. How much more difficult it is to influence change in a church like ours when there are few, if any, options for bringing pressure to bear, especially via people's marches, letters, calls, etc. When you have a job for life, you can just put on your headphones, close down your mailbox, and drown out the noise. No wonder people's protests under dictatorships seem so especially fierce, the people storming, surging, refusing to back down. What courage, what fortitude they have!

It goes without saying (although I will), we who work for justice and inclusion in ministry for all in the Catholic Church have more in common with those who are challenging dictators than those challenging the democratically elected. Fiercely storming and surging will probably get us nowhere, but refusing to back down, courage, fortitude - now we're talking resources we can use.

The website for the *Indivisible* movement had a brief list of recommended tactics for resisting oppression and getting our voices heard. When I tried to apply them to doing the same within the Church, I was at first discouraged. Could these really work in a dictatorship as well as in a democracy? And if so, how? See what you think:

### **Diversify your tactics**

As the author points out, marches and parades (and witnesses in our case) are just one of many options. They are effective in reflecting numbers in the movement (or persistence through the years). But he quotes an army officer to make a point: "Marches and parades (and witnesses) are, in effect, symbolic gestures." They can recruit and inspire, but we need to do much more.

### **Plan**

We're pretty good at this, but perhaps not always as coordinated in our local, national, or worldwide efforts as we would like. As the author says, "Anyone good at planning — and protest needs to be planned, as carefully as a war — knows to start with the goal and work backward. What specific change is being sought? What steps are needed to get there?" I would add: and all of us need to communicate and work together.

### **Pull out the pillars**

"All leaders rely on the loyalty of important groups in society. The job of a protest movement is to pull out the leader's essential pillars of support — turn his most influential supporters into opponents." Have we done enough in this area? How could we do better?

### **Focus**

The Women's March movement is now suggesting one action to take each week. Should we do the same?

### **Get off-line and show up**

Start with Holy Thursday, April 13 and Ordination Day, May 20!

### **Create an inclusive brand**

In relation to the current political actions, the author says: "This means finding a theme that can work in red states." Can we find one that works with conservative Catholics and their supporters, too? A most challenging challenge.

### **Promote hope, not fear**

"'Progressives normally win battles when they are able to put future and hope in the center of the debate,' said Srdja

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**Excerpt from *How to Keep Your Parish Alive When Your Bishop Declares It Dead***  
(To be published this spring)  
**By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco**

There are two very obvious ways of keeping many parishes open that the bishops have rejected outright as they choose instead to inflict turmoil and disarray on parish communities - calling back the thousands of priests who decided to marry and were summarily tossed out of the priesthood - and ordaining women. Not to do so further entrenches the hierarchy in a mentality of scarcity while ignoring the blessings that would pour down overflowing into their - and the laity's - laps and solve a good portion of the parish closures.

Sadly, former Pope John Paul II actually found the idea of women priests so repugnant and repellent that he actually forbade Catholics even to talk about it under pain of ecclesiastical sanctions. Priests and bishops who mentioned women's ordination - even indirectly - were removed from ministry posthaste with a zeal not shown towards those who had sexually abused children. The Vatican directed the investigation of women religious orders for alleged support of women's ordination, and many lay people who publicly supported it were either threatened with the loss of their jobs or denied communion. On the other hand, bishops who covered up the sexual abuse of minors were never made the target of a papal investigation.

Pope Francis, who packages his new wine of mercy in the old wineskins of misogyny, has sadly followed suit, speaking out of both sides of his mouth as he tries to honor women while simultaneously barring them from ministry. During his pontificate, priests like Roy Bourgeois and Tony Flannery remained banned from ministry for supporting the vocations of women. As a result of this obduracy, the ordained, the religious, as well as the laity, remain fearfully silent, a silence that not only aids and abets an unjust practice but also contributes directly to the closing of the next wave of parishes.

In the summer of 2016, Pope Francis called together a panel to study the possibility of ordaining women to the diaconate. This commission is comprised of six women and six men. Two of the women are nuns, and all of the men are ordained priests. The overseer of the commission is an archbishop.

Although the apostle Paul clearly writes of the Deacon Phoebe (and the Apostle Junia) in his Epistle to the Romans, which predates all of the gospels, Francis remains unconvinced. He wonders if the church still needs to clarify the question of women deacons in spite of Phoebe's presence in an epistle that all Catholics acknowledge as "the Word of God." (The Greek word deacon that Paul uses is the same word used in Acts 6: 4 by Luke to describe the male deacons who preached the word.) Instead, Francis has fixated upon the question of whether female deacons were ordained in the same manner as the male deacons when in reality, very significant numbers of biblical scholars have made the point

repeatedly that no one was ordained in the modern sense in the New Testament. Other scholars such as Gary Macy have written that in medieval times, men and women WERE ordained in the same type of ceremony. Macy is one among many who have documented the ordination of women. Francis has ignored all of them.

While the commission studies the possibility of women deacons in a commission weighted down by clerics who have everything to lose by admitting women to Holy Orders, Francis continues to support Paul VI and John Paul II's prohibition of women's ordination to the priesthood. Thus, Francis' call for a "deep theology" of women rings hollow to the ears of women. A deep theology of women written by women has existed for at least forty years. Francis has either chosen not to read this truly deep theology of women or he doesn't like it and would prefer one written by clerical men that will, in the end, toe the party line of no women priests, ever.

Faced with ongoing parish mergers and the decreasing numbers of priests, eleven very brave priests in Cologne, Germany, wrote an open letter stating the obvious about the future of priestly ministry, and by extension, the future of the church. "We urgently need to forge ahead with courageous initiatives on the question of the admission of women to the priesthood. It makes no sense continuously to ask the Holy Spirit for vocations while at the same time excluding women from priestly ministry." (Christa Pongratz-Lippit, "German Priests: Open the Priesthood to Women, Make Priestly Celibacy Optional." *National Catholic Reporter*, 1-13-17.)

Pew research has found that 68% of Catholics approve of women priests and 72% support married male priests. (Pew Research Center, "U.S. Catholics more hopeful than expectant of changes to church teaching". 3-12-14) The bishops ignore these facts by proudly and obstinately pronouncing that the church is not a democracy. Instead, they prefer to honor their own anachronistic monarchial ideas which directly results in the slamming of door after door in the faces of the faithful to prove their point.

As the late scientist Marvin Minsky, who discovered artificial intelligence wrote, "You never really understand something if you only understand it one way."

This slash and burn policy of closing parishes willy nilly, which is replicated in every single diocese in the United States as well as in Europe, suggests that the bishops are far more intent on preserving the priesthood than they are in providing the Eucharist. Consequently, the Eucharist will become in-

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**St. Mary Magdalene Community  
Sunday Mass at 11:30am  
Epworth United Methodist Church  
501 Morgan Avenue • Palmyra, NJ 08065  
Sunday Mass at 9:00am  
Drexel Hill United Methodist  
600 Burmont Road • Drexel Hill, PA 19026  
For information contact Eileen at 267-258-6966**

## **From Catholic To Univarian Universalist: My Journey By Linda C. Wisniewski**

*Editors' note: In this issue, we have been focusing on creating a "church for our daughters". Linda's article reminds us of our difficult past and why we, who stay, need to work harder and those who left continue their support and encouragement.*

In my seventy years on this planet, it seems to me it's always been hard to be a woman: before I was born, and now, with the results of the U.S. presidential election upon us, for quite some time after I am gone. It's hard not to be pessimistic and tired of the struggle for equal rights, in society and in our religious institutions.

I was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church in 1946, and left the church in 1969 when I married a non-observant Jew in a courthouse in Buffalo, New York. Since then, I became a member of the BuxMont Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Warrington, where I raised both my sons in a community where they were encouraged to respect women as equals and to search for their own answers with open minds and loving hearts. Still, even today, I miss the beauty and ritual of the Catholic Mass. The music, the pageantry, the meaning handed down over centuries is beyond compare. But I can't experience the parts I love without the parts I cannot accept. For some of the reasons why I left the Church, I offer the following excerpt from my memoir, *Off Kilter*.

*My church called women's bodies "occasions of sin." My classmates and I wore veils and frilly white dresses to our first Holy Communion. We pretended to be little brides, the veils an ancient symbol of our purity.*

*In church, women were behind the scenes, doing the cleaning and cooking. Even last summer, my eighty-year-old aunt had church altar cloths in her dryer when I called. She had to cut the conversation short, because, she said happily, they'd have to come out and be ironed soon.*

*I don't understand her happiness at serving a church with men in charge, men who tell her to worship another man suffering thousands of years ago. For too many years, I watched my mother suffer.*

*On Holy Thursday, she took Betty and me to walk on our knees down the long center aisle of the church, our heads covered with kerchiefs. On our knees, we were humbled and subdued. At the end of the aisle, we kissed the feet of the tortured victim nailed to the cross. What God, I wonder, wanted this?*

*Humility and humiliation are close cousins. Now, words I've heard somewhere resonate deeply: What if we could worship a woman giving birth instead of a man dying? (This idea comes from Riane Eisler's book, The Chalice and the Blade) We spent so much time, back then, in the background, in a woman's world. Why must our worship also be a man's domain?*

*My mother always slept below a crucifix on the wall above her bed. On holiday visits, uncomfortable, I joked about it to my husband as we prepared to sleep in her room. If it happened now, I would take it down while I was there. Yes, I affirm his message of love and compassion; he was one of the greatest teachers of all time. But I'm always uncomfortable with this death display. I don't understand it. What loving God demanded torture as payment for our humanness, our imperfection?*

*The veil I wore so long is lifted now, but in the early years all this was hidden. White socks and shoes; ugly green school uniforms that fell below the knee; white dresses with little veils; little brides of Christ, our hair covered. What ancient, pre-Christian ritual did we follow, '50's Catholic girls rehearsing womanhood? On our knees, in itchy clothes, subservient, bowing our heads to tinkling bells; the smell of incense in our little girl noses as the heavy old priest walked by, swinging gold on a chain. Little altar cloth washers and ironers sat still in the pews, silent, waiting to breathe. Waiting.*

Still waiting, aren't we? My hope is that we continue the struggle, for only when women take their places beside men as equals, in church and in society, will all be as it was at the Beginning: free and open to grow into fullness and beauty.

**Linda C. Wisniewski** is a former librarian and writer for literary magazines and anthologies including the Bucks County Women's Journal, the Bucks County Herald and the Chestnut Hill Local. Linda's memoir, *Off Kilter: A Woman's Journey to Peace with Scoliosis, Her Mother and Her Polish Heritage* was published in 2008.

### **WE'RE PASSING THE HAT!**

**...Asking you once again to contribute to SEPAWOC so that we can publish *EqualwRites*, host events and witnesses, and continue to champion equal rights – and rites – for women everywhere.**

**We welcome any amount! Please use the pre-addressed envelope for your convenience.**

**And, by the way, if you want to envision the hat we're passing as pink, that's just fine with us!**

**LGBTQIA Catholic Community of Philadelphia  
(LCCP)  
By Seth Jacobson**

*Editors' note: We were delighted to hear about LCCP and honor their request to partner with them and them with us in advocating for a more inclusive Catholic Church. We asked Seth Jacobson to tell us more about the organization and himself.*

LCCP aims to organize LGBTQIA Catholics who desire and demand a more inclusive Roman Catholic Church. We challenge oppressive church structures, teachings, and leaders through discursive and non-violent direct action, while also providing resources and support for those who have been marginalized by the Church.

We meet on Thursday evenings from 6-8 PM at the Camac Center in Center City, Philadelphia. Our meetings are designed to combine community building, spiritual reflection, and advocacy/organizing work. We welcome LGBTQIA (including allies!) Catholics and former/ex-Catholics. We can be found on Facebook at 'LGBT Catholic Community of Philadelphia' or through [LGBTCatholics.philly@gmail.com](mailto:LGBTCatholics.philly@gmail.com).

Consistent with our desire to challenge oppressive church structures, teachings, and leaders, we would like to strengthen our impact through intentional and collaborative partnerships with other progressive Catholic groups throughout the region. We would like to support their initiatives and projects and hope that they might also support ours (i.e. show up for each other). In doing so, it is my hope that our groups might collectively expose and strengthen the voice of progressive Catholics in our Church.

One immediate way that I believe our groups can come together is through a collective demonstration/vigil/march designed to voice our frustration and opposition to Archbishop Chaput's 'pastoral guidelines' found at: (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2016/07/07/archbishop-chaputs-pastoral-restrictions-are-a-losing-strategy/>). A number of LCCP's members would like to begin organizing such a demonstration. Michael Rocks, President of Dignity Philadelphia, expressed an interest in collaborating in this effort and believes that other (non-LGBTQIA) progressive groups might join us given the broad scope of the guideline's hostility. LCCP will host an organizing meeting on Thursday, March 30th at 6 PM to discuss this initiative. Any individuals or groups interested in participating/collaborating can email LCCP at [LGBTCatholics.philly@gmail.com](mailto:LGBTCatholics.philly@gmail.com).

A few words about me: I was born and raised in West Philadelphia. My mother was a non-practicing Catholic and father a non-practicing Jew. Growing up, I found religion - and the Catholic Church in particular - to be hostile toward the LGBTQIA community. Inspired, however, by the inclusive nature and social justice orientation of the many Sisters of Saint Joseph and the Jesuits that I came to know during my young adult years, I became a Roman Catholic while an undergraduate at Chestnut Hill College. Since then, I have been quite active in the Church and its ministries. In addition to my

work with LCCP, I was the co-founder of a vibrant and inclusive Young Adult Catholic community in Philadelphia.

**Seth A. Jacobson, MS.Ed** is currently a full-time PhD Candidate at Drexel University, studying Educational Leadership and Policy and Assistant Editor of the Journal of Special Education Leadership.

**TREASURER'S REPORT**

SEPAWOC Financial Statement for  
Calendar Year 2016

Beginning balance (1-1-16)	\$2420.42
Revenues (donations)	\$6589.00
Total	\$9009.42
<b>Expenses</b>	
Printing	\$3790.00
Postage, permits	715.00
Mailbox rental	70.00
Memberships	275.00
Bank Fees	5.00
Bank correction	35.00
Total Expenses	\$4890.00
Ending balance (12-31-16)	\$4119.42

Prepared by Mary Whelan

**SEPAWOC on FACEBOOK**

Yes, we are now on Facebook. Go to SEPAWOC and request to join. We will make announcements and post pictures of our events. And, of course, you can share your thoughts with us.

And do not forget to check out our website [SEPAWOC.org](http://SEPAWOC.org) where you can view our history, read announcements of our upcoming events, access *EqualwRites* and have all your questions about women's ordination answered!

AD

## WANT TO FEEL A SURGE OF HOPE? READ ON!

*The following are some excerpts from the article, Catholic Women's Equality Requires A Shift on the Night Watch, by Nicole Sotelo writing for the Young Voices Column in the online edition of The National Catholic Reporter, January 5, 2017. First, we love to hear from "young voices"; second, she is so inspirational, telling us something we all need to hear:*

"One hundred years ago, Jan. 10, 1917, was a cold Wednesday morning. There was nothing exceptional about the day and that's important to note. Women's history isn't made in exceptional moments. It is often made by the long striving of a woman who has called together some friends for a cup of tea and their conversation leads to freedom, whether in society or the church.

I don't know if tea was brewed on this particular January morning, but I do know that after much discussion by Alice Paul and other suffragists in preceding weeks, a dozen women of the National Women's Party met at their headquarters in Washington, D.C. They picked up cloth banners and marched across Lafayette Park to stand in front of the White House.

Once unfurled, passersby read the homemade signs: 'MR. PRESIDENT, WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE' and 'MR. PRESIDENT, HOW LONG MUST WOMEN WAIT FOR LIBERTY.' Indeed, women had been waiting for generations.

At the time, nearly 70 years had passed since the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had passed away. A new generation of women had entered the movement, one that was seemingly slow in progress. Having failed to secure a federal amendment for equal suffrage, women now campaigned state by state in an arduous bid for freedom, in addition to ongoing federal lobby efforts...

By August of 1920, the right for women to vote became law. This Tuesday marks the 100th anniversary of the White House protest, one of the many paths that cleared the way toward that law.

I recall this story because it is one that we need to hear this year as Catholics. The struggle for a woman's right to vote in civil politics may be over, but the struggle for a woman's voice in church polity is still very much alive.

The suffragists' story gives encouragement to those who suffer today. The Vatican and other Catholic officials may not lock people up, they do try to lock people out. The Vatican has issued official excommunication decrees against a handful of women involved in the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement and threatened self-excommunication against the rest, something that the women themselves reject. Countless priests, scholars, and others like Roy Bourgeois, Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Rosemary Radford Ruether suffered professional consequences as a result of their support for Catholic women's equality.

*continued on page 11*

## **WE MAY BE PUSSIES**

**BUT WE'RE NOT PUSSIES!** *continued from page 5*

Popovic, an organizer of Serbia's anti-Milosevic campaign, who now trains democracy movements around the world." Amen!

### **Delegitimize, with facts**

For example, don't we have proof positive that Phoebe was a deacon in the early church? I'm just sayin' ...

### **Build on small, concrete actions**

"If you never have any small victories you can amplify into bigger ones, people will drop off." We need to *know* when we are winning and publicize it.

I remember the conductor on the train we took to the Women's March in Philadelphia sang to us over the loudspeaker: "Power to the people!" He rocked it and he was right. We always have the power. We can do this. Put on your pink mitres and let's go!

**Ellie Harty** is a co-editor of EqualwRites

**Excerpt from *How to Keep Your Parish Alive When Your Bishop Declares It Dead*** *continued from page 6*  
creasingly unavailable to the People of God because of the ongoing and unstoppable priest shortage unless something very different happens in the very near future.

By placing the continuance of the celibate male clergy above the survival of the church itself, the hierarchy has diminished its mission, focus, and identity as their actions cause increasing numbers of Catholics to walk away from church. The Great Commission in Matthew tells us that we - all of us - are to make disciples who will carry out Jesus' mission of love. This mission cannot be accomplished by contracting or eliminating the presence of those who would do this.

As Christians, we know that God, our Creator, makes all things new. Therefore, we have to listen to what He/She is saying as the world turns and we move on to another page of history. In spite of the willingness of the People of God to try something new in order to keep their parishes alive, the church continues to pride itself on intransigence, thus deliberately ignoring the wisdom that lies in the voice and vision of the

People of God who recognize the hand of God in change long before the bishops in their close-minded brotherhood do.

The hierarchy's refusal to seek out alternatives to the unsustainable celibate male model coupled with their non transparent use of money denies the working of the Holy Spirit who always chooses to fix things in unusual and non-traditional ways. The Spirit is speaking through the voices of the People of God and not through the group-think of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

As always, the Spirit watches and She waits. There are signs and portents that She is at work. When necessary, the Spirit moves. She is moving right now.

**Eileen McCafferty DiFranco** is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest and member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee.

## **World Day of Prayer**

This is a prayer from Women's Ordination Worldwide to be said March 25<sup>th</sup>, the World Day of Prayer for Women's Ordination.

*God of the Universe, long ago you spoke through an angel to your servant, Mary, who opened her entire being in response to your creative Word. In the gift of that Word she carried Christ in her womb and into the world. Today you are speaking through your Spirit in the hearts of women around the world, inviting them to be Christ bearers to serve in the Sacramental Priesthood of the Church. They have heard you; and, like Mary, they hunger to respond with their entire being. Give courage and freedom to them and to the citizens of your church, both women and men, to open and embrace the sacred space that will make their priesthood a living reality in today's world, which waits in need of the gifts they are called to bring to your table. AMEN*

## **Community of the Christian Spirit**



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

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

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## **Book Reviews**

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***Chicago Catholic Women: Its Role in Founding the Catholic Women's Movement*, by Donna Quinn. Chicago, IL: Lake Claremont Press, 2016. Paperback, \$22.00. 250 pp.**

*Reviewed by Regina Bannan*

Years ago, someone said to me that every good idea about women's ordination had already been done or at least been thought of by Donna Quinn. *Chicago Catholic Women* makes that obvious. Quinn chronicles the twenty-five years of this organization, from 1974 to 1999 when they disbanded, which Quinn correctly characterizes as courageous.

I wanted to review this book to see parallels with SEPAWOC, but I am most impressed with the differences. First, staff CCW employed Quinn and others over the years. Whatever funding they had enabled them to have an office and the kind of regular events associated with institutions: annual dinners, frequent programs, etc. That enabled the second difference: social justice activities from anti-racism demonstrations to job training to women's centers, often grant-funded. I was most impressed, even before Quinn listed them, of the number of programs CCW spun off/birthed (Quinn's word), from Generations for pregnant teens to Mary's Pence. A third difference was their far greater connection with the Archdiocese itself: actually meeting with Cardinal Bernardin and obtaining responses from other leaders, usually negative. CCW identified and acted on current issues affecting women and girls in the church from analyzing the number of women employed to advocating for girls as altar servers; they saw some changes. Fourth, a liturgical community sharing Sunday Woman-Church liturgies at the building. In Philadelphia, it seems to me that many involved in SEPAWOC are part of small-faith communities, but not the same one.

The subtitle, *Its Role in Founding the Catholic Women's Movement*, suggests what I think will be most helpful to those new to working for women in the Catholic church. If you can get past the lists of people who were present at meetings, you will find clear explanations of issues as they arose and histories of why and how organizations were started and actions taken. Quinn had a hand in many, from the national Women's Ordination Conference to Woman-Church Convergence. To those who are not new to this movement, it's fun to look at who was there at various meetings and what they said. There are many quotations from documents and presentations; my favorite is funny, from Sue Hyatt, one of the Philadelphia Eleven about John Paul II: "He had been told he should step on the ground and kiss the women, and instead he kissed the ground and stepped on the women."

This is a very personal book, with references to family and her own history. Quinn is still a member of the Sinsinawa Dominicans, though she does not use "OP" as author. You could be confused by many stories about the National Coalition of American Nuns, for example, and wonder how that activity meshes with CCW. But why? Anyone who writes a memoir, which this really is, gets to tell the story her way.

SEPAWOC is talking seriously about gathering its papers into the Urban Archives at Temple, and Quinn's book inspires me to think that we could also do a collective history from various points of view, because each of us has a different story. Wouldn't that be fun?

**Regina Bannan** was president of the Women's Ordination Conference in the 1990s.

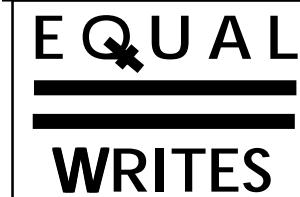
### **Want To Feel a Surge Of Hope? Read On continued from page 9**

The suffragists' story reminds us that change happens. After last year, when Pope Francis reaffirmed the finality of the ban against women's ordination when asked by a reporter, it is heartening to remember that President Wilson once said something similar when asked about women's suffrage. While Wilson was still governor of New Jersey, he responded in a letter to a Vermont newspaper editor, "I must say very frankly that my personal judgment is strongly against it. I believe that the social changes it would involve would not justify the gains that would be accomplished by it." Of course, he later championed the cause.

Moreover, the suffragists' story needs to be retold because it offers hope. Remember that the women one hundred years ago had no idea that they were on the verge of victory. They only knew that they were not yet free. And so they stood with their banners, perhaps for the sake of justice in their own lives. Blessedly, they were standing for us, too.

I only hope that we Catholic women and allies can do the same for future generations of the church. Whether it is midnight or close to dawn on the journey to justice, only heaven knows. What I do know is that we are needed to take our small shift on the long night watch for Catholic women's equality.

May we all put in an hour, or maybe two. So when dawn comes, whether this year or a hundred years from now, we will have done our part for the generations after us."



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**AFFILIATION:** *EqualRites* 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.

## Scripture Reflections

### Lent / Holy Thursday

#### Isaiah 61, Luke 4

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Lent...I think of a mosaic of meanings. Lent, a time of reading, reflection, dialogue, repentance, prayer and giving. For me, all of 2017 has been a soul-wrenching, solemn Lenten Season.

In *The Prophet in You* Joan Chittister writes that we should remember that the prophets were discouraged by the present and weary from trying but still chose to follow and proclaim the truth. She writes that struggle, passion, tears, vision, courage and fidelity are all part of the gift of prophecy, and she challenges each of us to embrace our call to be prophets—and be transformed!

I just read of the famine in Africa now affecting 11 million people, and I see the Holy Thursday readings. We hear from Isaiah and Luke: The Spirit of God is upon us. We are anointed...to bring good news to the poor...proclaim liberty to captives...share sight with the blind, and let the oppressed go free!

**MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE:** If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *EqualRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be June 2017. Final deadline for submissions is May 15. Send to ellieharty65@gmail.com or mail to above address.

**ADVERTISING:** Advertising helps us support *EqualRites* and helps you find people who support us. Our ad rates are \$25 for one issue, \$60 for three issues. To place an ad contact mewhelan@comcast.net.

I love Holy Thursday and I love our Holy Thursday and Ordination Day Witnesses for justice and equality in the Church. We pray, sing, listen, share, celebrate and hug. We may have begun as strangers, but we became a community of friends—and this community always has room for YOU!

The last time I was on the Parkway for a witness was January 21<sup>st</sup>. I hurt so much, I didn't know if I could do it, but I tried. I stood on the steps of the Cathedral (whose doors were open and heat was on!) looking out as waves of people kept coming from every direction. Women and men, girls and boys of every beautiful color and age gathered in hope and respect, committed to inclusion, equality, justice and peace. A genuine care for one another was tangible in the crowd. It was not only uplifting for me, it was healing and rejuvenating.

**Judith A. Heffernan** is our 2017 Mary Magdalene Award winner.