

Because Sometimes True Fidelity Lies in the Courage to Dissent

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

Holy Thursday
March 29, 2018 11:00 AM
STANDING TOGETHER
FOR WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Ordination Day
May 19, 2018 9:30 AM
EUCHARISTIC LITURGY
LED BY A WOMAN

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

EQUAL

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

Vol. XXXV No. 1

MARCH 2018 - JUNE 2018

WRITES

MISSION STATEMENT - *As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.*



Here we are, ready for the Women's March this year.

Hope you can read the "Ordain Women" banner and signs we carried.

We marched for women's leadership in the church.

We started from the steps of Philadelphia's Cathedral of Saints Peter & Paul.

Now it's time to witness in front of that same church.

We will not give up our call for women's full inclusion in the church.

We will persist.

For we believe:

"One step won't take us far; we've got to keep on walkin'

One word won't take us far; we've got to keep on talkin'

It's that everlastin' gaining

Without wimp'ring or complainin'..."

JOIN US. PLEASE.

**ANNOUNCING: THE MARY MAGDALENE
AWARDS FOR 2018**

By Regina Bannan

This year, the Core Committee of Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference decided to give two Mary Magdalene Awards: one to the "team": **Darlene Ketterer, Marguerite Groves, and Patricia Walsh**, and one to **Jim Clay**.

The "team," **Darlene, Marguerite, and Pat**, came to the Women's Ordination Conference together and have stayed faithful all these years. They were there at the beginning of *EqualwRites* – you remember the "Did You Know" humor column Marguerite originated and wrote (she could find humor in institutional failures and foibles) if you've been around long enough. Always supported by their husbands, they have been among the most creative attendees at Holy Thursday witness, Pat bearing a cross, Darlene engaging the priests processing inside, waving at anyone who glanced in our direction, all three making posters. All mothers. All workers. All deeply committed to their parishes – and to all of us in WOC.

Darlene died this year. Pat and Marguerite helped plan her funeral mass and addressed Darlene by name in the readings. Family and friends mentioned Darlene's commitment to women in the church in their memories – these annual excursions, even with oxygen tank, were central to Darlene's identity. This "team" continues in a new way, we believe, and we want to recognize all three women for their commitment to SEPAWOC and their prophetic witness through the many changes in their lives.

Jim Clay brings a new t-shirt to every SEPAWOC Holy Thursday and Ordination Day witness. We can't wait to see the message he's chosen – as Dignity/Philadelphia waits for the inspirational messages, "Munchies," he posts regularly. Jim works on their Sunday evening liturgies, and we suspect he has guided contributions our way over many years as well as guiding Dignity to select women as celebrants. "Hello, Regina" – anyone who has received a phone call from Jim can hear the particular drawl of his greeting – and then you'll find out that Jim has an idea for working together, again. Part of a large family, Jim has made another at Dignity and yet another at SEPAWOC with his loyal witness.

The Mary Magdalene awards will be given on **Holy Thursday, 11 am March 29**, in Sister Cities Park opposite the Cathedral. Please come and honor these courageous "apostles to the apostles."

Regina Bannan is *President of SEPAWOC*.

**HOLY PERSISTENCE: ORDINATION DAY
MASS AT THE CATHEDRAL**

Thirty years we've been there. Thirty years and counting. Talk about persistence. Holy persistence.

For over thirty years, we've stood outside the Cathedral of Saints Peter & Paul in Philadelphia attending a Mass said by a woman.

We've stood outside in heat, in rain, in wind, in bright beautiful daylight.

We've stood as a people left out of the all-male ordination going on in comfort within.

We've been joined by passers-by, Cathedral attenders, homeless people.

We've been cheered and we've been jeered.

Yet we've stood in holy persistence.

We've stood in faithfulness to justice, to peace, to the inclusion of all God's people in this holiness.

Please stand and persist with us.

**Ordination Day Mass and Witness
Saturday, May 20th at 9:30am
Sister Cities Park across from the Ca-
thedral of Saints Peter & Paul
Philadelphia, Pa.**

Spiritual Director

**Kathleen Aquino Cleaver
M.S.W., M.A. in Spiritual Direction
& Holistic Spirituality**

**E. Mt. Airy, Philadelphia, Pa
267-297-6036**

**KathleenACleaver@gmail.com
www.kathycleaver.com**

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

“THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS” – A GREAT PLACE TO START?

By Ellie Harty

What on earth **am** I talking about, you well may ask. Happiness: that shallow, ephemeral, fleeting condition? And as a place to start what? A new church for a new day? Come on.

And yet, “come on” is exactly what I am asking us to do: come on a journey of envisioning the kind of church a full inclusive ministry and leadership might create...and I’m starting with what brings happiness, or, more profoundly, fulfillment and joy.

We, who work and witness and for women’s ordination, have a most serious intent: To remedy a monstrous injustice perpetrated by a huge and hugely influential international institution. But we also work and witness because we envision the powerfully positive transformation that might – that will – occur when that inclusion happens. The fact that we don’t all have the same vision makes it even more exciting. We will need nothing less than the full, inclusive community to dream and bring it into being.

As part of that community, I’m going to start with a vision of what brings happiness. I was inspired in this by an article in the November 2017 issue of *National Geographic* entitled “The World’s Happiest Places”. Not to keep you in suspense, they are: Costa Rica, Denmark, and Singapore. The places themselves are important; immigrants to these countries who arrived in deep distress carrying their suffering with them, soon reported the same happiness level of those who were native-born. Article author, Dan Buettner concluded: “Seemingly their (new) environment alone accounted for their increased happiness.”

Recreating aspects of those environments in our own church, therefore, I thought might bring the freshness and inspiration we need as we grapple with the great questions of life, death, meaning, and God’s will.

Costa Rican society stresses and promotes “feeling joy every day, health, faith, family” by helping people make daily choices that favor time with friends they can count on, a strong faith life, and emphasis on family and community involvement. Interestingly, unlike many Latin American and other countries across the world, Costa Rica historically elected teachers and educators as leaders, those who were not bound to, or oppressed by, “corrosive colonial institutions” and, thus, led the population into an upward spiral of well-being and a preservation of their true heritage. What if our church hierarchy was made of the same stuff, rather than caught up in its own smothering entrenchment? What if our church, while acknowledging and comforting the suffering, did more to promulgate joy and well-being as its antidote?

Denmark has placed its civic emphasis on “trust and community”. The history of this is enlightening: “Denmark’s societal evolution may be traced to the Second Schleswig War, in 1864,...when Denmark lost a quarter of its territory to

Prussia.” The author quotes Danish sociologist, Peter Gundelach: “With that defeat, we lost our ambition to be a world superpower. It humbled us. Our government began to strengthen our national identity and build inward instead.” This focus has led the country to ensure its residents’ lifetime health and well-being needs were covered, which “enable people to live a purposeful life better than anywhere else.” Over 40% of the population volunteers for civic groups, recognizing that helping others helps themselves. What if our church lost its ambition to be a superpower dictating to its subjects and instead became a champion and facilitator of our living our lives as true children of God, with all of us, all genders, leading the way? What if our church humbled itself and focused on both inward enrichment and outward service, on enhancing purpose-filled lives?

The final example, Singapore, is a bit more tricky – or maybe not. There the emphasis is on finding happiness through pride of accomplishment. When Singapore gained independence in 1965, its leader, Lee Kuan Yew stressed ancient Asian values in the society he forged: “harmony, respect, and hard work”. Interestingly, the newly formed country rewarded all those who tried to work, at no matter how mean a job, with living wages and subsidized healthcare and housing. In this multi-ethnic nation, he guaranteed freedom of religion and education for all. Hence, there are no racial or ethnic divides in the country. Although they may strive for material success and work long hours, Singapore’s people are also highly philanthropic; they are committed to respecting others and themselves and have created a culture in which people take pride in their values, in achieving their goals, and in having a sense of belonging. What if our church paid more attention to its values in an ever-evolving world? What if it regained our respect and helped us to be more respected as we help it become more respectful? What if it fostered a new sense of belonging, of justifiable pride in its mission and its whole community, including women and others who are marginalized by ancient traditions and lack of foresight?

We don’t need to live in Costa Rica, Denmark, or Singapore to achieve our own happiness, fulfillment, joy, purpose, pride of accomplishment, supportive, caring, sustainable community. I would argue we don’t need to flee to other denominations, religions, or secular options either; we probably do not even need to start our own small outcrops of church, although that has its own joys and rewards. We really may have all we need right here in our own church if we can pressure, cajole, protest, persist long enough to bring it all to the forefront.

That is the beginning of my vision. How about yours?

Ellie Harty is co-editor of *EqualwRites*.

Editorial Staff of *EqualwRites*
A Publication of SEPAWOC

Editors: **Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan**

Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan,**
Eileen Di Franco

TWENTY-ONE CENTURIES OF IDIOCY OR HOW CLUELESS MEN FOUNDED A SEXIST CHURCH

By Eileen DiFranco

A long time ago in an unknown scriptorium in ancient Turkey, a man well versed in both Greek and Aramaic put his pen down in exasperation. Although his religious faith was Christianity, his thought processes were honed in Greek philosophy. This meant that Aristotle and Plato influenced his translation of what became the New Testament as much as did Jesus and Paul.

Incorporating prevalent cultural mores into one's religious worldview always comes with consequences. We can see these consequences today in the promulgation of the gospel of prosperity and in the "me and my personal savior Jesus against the world" so present today among 21st century evangelicals. In this revisionist version of the gospel, Jesus' demand that his followers care for the poor and the weak, lynchpins for Jesus' kingdom message, is buried under human defined conditions of worthiness. In this modern interpretation of the good news of Jesus, the poor must help themselves.

The ancient Israelites also worried about the cultural mores being imported into Jerusalem by their Greek conquerors. It was not that Greek ideas were bad or wrong; they were just very different from Jewish thought and practice. The more religiously conservative feared that Greek philosophy and practices would change their relationship with Yahweh. Their fear was well-founded and written down in the Book of Maccabees.

The early Christians who used the Hebrew Bible as the basis for their New Testament did not share this fear as Christianity grew up in a Greek world. Thus, the early Greek speaking "Fathers" of the church had no problem expressing God and theology in terms of platonic ideals. In fact, a later church father, Thomas Aquinas, chose to "synthesize" Aristotle, rather than Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, and Micah, with Jesus. This proved to be a great leap away from the Jewish faith of Jesus and a God who always stood with the weak and the poor regardless of civil justice and worthiness.

Let's return to our scribe who was trying to translate the Hebrew word *qodesh* into Greek. The word *qodesh* was used exclusively by the Jews to refer to Yahweh and all things divine. How was our scribe to express this concept in Greek? Rather than using the Greek word, *hieros*, which means, "filled with divine power," this particular scribe chose the Greek word, "hagios" which contained the attributes of purity and chastity, concepts that were never part of the Hebrew definition of God.

As a result of the influence of mistranslations and Greek philosophy, the early Christians lifted the mighty Hebrew God, the creator of the universe, whose strong right arm defended orphans and widows and whose nostrils flared with anger when justice did not flow like a river, out of the world the divine created and placed Him (they believed God to be male) into a different realm, a more perfect, idealized kingdom very different from the one announced by Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. This Greek ideal God, sort of like

the many gods on Mt. Olympus, looked down upon humanity and demanded personal holiness as a criterion for entrance into the divine realm rather than action on the part of the poor. This personal holiness now included sexual purity and chastity which the Greek version of God promulgated by the largely Greek fathers of the church found far more compelling than Jesus' kingdom message of love, justice, and peace on earth.

Along with inserting Greek philosophy into the Christian faith, the church fathers also had no problem adopting the Aristotelian assertion that women were misbegotten, deformed males without authority. All these cultural biases the fathers of the church happily named theology, thus enshrining prejudice against half of the population of the church as an article of the Christian faith. The mistranslation of Hebrew words like *qodesh* into *hagios* put the "strawberries on the cake" of institutional church misogyny. Only the sexually pure and chaste could now be holy and pleasing to God.

As a result, women became the feared "other," inferior, and unclean. Many theologians like Origen and Tertullian and Jerome and a whole host of brother clerics throughout the ages painted one half of the human race as horrors to be avoided and despised rather than fellow human beings to be loved and cherished. Some women went to extremes to avoid being "temptations" to men and thus endear themselves male clerics and their male god. Paula, Jerome's friend who left behind her minor children to follow him never bathed or washed her face. Rose of Lima disfigured herself with acid. Catherine of Siena starved herself. The church went to great lengths to portray the torture and grisly deaths of "virgin martyrs" who preferred to die rather than losing what they considered to be the essence of their faith in Jesus, their virginity, about which, in the end, Jesus said absolutely nothing. And men ruled the church like men ruled the world, the latter basing their system of laws upon the outlandish, unbiblical assertions of church men who exerted themselves in a herculean, hierarchical fashion to keep women humble, subservient, and powerless. Thus, the framework of the Christian faith became less the gospel of Jesus and more a male developed tradition and magisterium born of an alien culture that insisted upon female inferiority.

Living in this male dominated world headed by a male god with male enforcers had dire consequences for a sex that was regarded fit only for reproduction and service. Birth control became verboten, even as mothers died from too frequent childbearing. Death in childbirth was, according to church fathers, women's just dessert for tempting Adam and causing the fall of the human race and by extension, the death of Jesus. A woman's divinely ordained job was to bear children, even if it killed her.

This belief has only been slightly modified by the modern church fathers who continue to believe in the concept of a Father God and outmoded Greek thought, which includes the inferiority of women. Retaining their privilege to affix labels, overt prejudice has been renamed complementarity, an unscientific notion where women are now assigned a "genius" by the men. In other words, the church men still want the women to know their rightful place, at home as wives and mothers, lest they lose that special genius assigned to them by centuries of clueless clerics.

TWENTY-ONE CENTURIES OF IDIOCY OR HOW CLUELESS MEN FOUNDED A SEXIST

CHURCH *continued from page 4*

Living in splendid isolation in what they regard as an ideal, even sinless institution far away from an unforgiving world where the realities of bad health, war, famine, sexism, and racism stalks too many of God's beloved children, these clueless clerics have made and continue to make decisions that are catastrophic, especially for women and by extension, their children. Even Pope Francis, regarded by many as harbinger of change, seems to have no clue about the origin of poverty even as he bemoans it. 66% of the world's poor are women and they are poor because of the type of male prejudice promulgated and enforced by religious authorities like the Catholic Church. Francis seems to think that a "deep theology of women" developed by these same clueless clerics will mitigate this.

This is the patriarchy, a deep dark, ancient evil that has sent its tentacles into every aspect of life, most particularly into the life of the Roman Catholic Church, which unlike some other Christian faiths, has refused to exorcise it. Many view the patriarchy as being benign and quaint, something to be tolerated; its many foibles overlooked because it does provide some perks, like salvation if you obey the rules and don't question the men in charge. (If you don't, you get excommunicated, your salvation gets taken off the table.)

But do not be misled by what the men endearingly call Holy Mother Church. She is a man-made institution that eats her daughters alive. The patriarchy has constricted and ruined the lives of countless women. In spite of her hospitals and her charities, she is the architect of gender-based poverty. In spite of Jesus' directive to love all neighbors as self, she is the enforcer of two millennia of brutal prejudice. She acts with violence against alleged infractions of their laws, unless the perpetrator is a clueless cleric.

To paraphrase the prophet Jeremiah, "They have treated the wounds of their sisters carelessly, crying 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace. They acted shamefully, they committed abominations; yet they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush."

Truth has a tendency to be regarded as violence or anger because it is so stunningly painful to behold. However, the evil of the patriarchy cannot be broken to believers gently. In the end, there is no kind way to explain the missives of Origen, Tertullian, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and their heirs, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis I and a long line of clueless clerics who have willfully perverted the gospel in order to preserve male superiority and their unbiblical version of church.

However, there is hope in what appears to be a hopeless situation where male clerics insist that the case is closed against the ordination of women and its extension, the equality of women in the church. The late Walter Wink wrote that the powers are good. The powers, including the church, have fallen. And most importantly, the powers can be redeemed.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest and Member of the Mary Magdalene Community and SEPAWOC Core Committee.

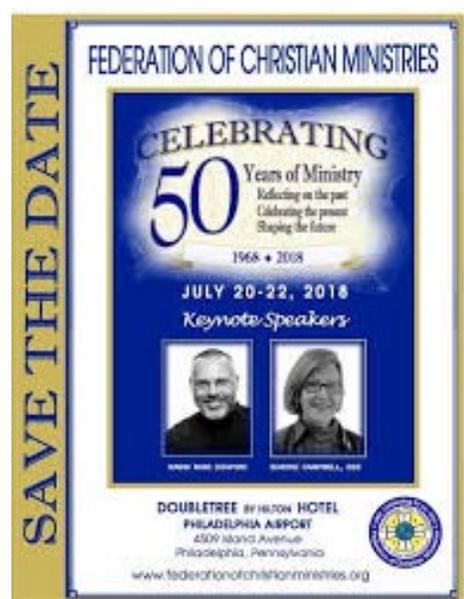
SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO ON A WINTER DAY

Coming in July – yes, there will be a July, we promise! – is what looks to be an exciting conference offered by SEPAWOC and WOC's very avid and faithful supporters in the Federation of Christian Ministers (FCM).

This organization of individual ministers and faith communities will celebrate **50 Years of Ministry** by hosting keynote speakers, Rabbi Rami Shapiro and our own esteemed Sr. Simone Campbell as well as offering a rich variety of workshops on topics like: *Centering Prayer: The Deeper Connection*; *End of Life Care (including a Doula Approach to Diverse Population)*; *Transgender Support*; *God's Cocktail: Addiction, Faith and Hope*; *Diversity and Spirituality in FCM Communities*; *Spiritual Health & Interfaith Care that Nurtures Healthiness (from a Chaplain's Perspective)*.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro, award winning author of over 30 books, will present *Four Points, Five Questions: Ministry in the Second Axial Age*, a focus on four core teachings and five key questions of every spiritual quest to address concerns of the emerging independent spiritual seekers of any religion or none. **Simone Campbell, SSS**, renowned justice activist, nationally prominent speaker, executive director of NETWORK, and organizer of "Nuns on the Bus" tours highlighting social justice issues, will discuss *Faith and Witness in the Public Square*. She will focus specifically on the questions we need to answer in order to be effectively engaged in times of chaos: Where are we nurtured? How do we respond? Where do we act?

The conference begins on the evening of Friday, July 20 with an opening celebration. Both keynote addresses and all workshops are all on **Saturday, July 21**, and the conference ends Sunday morning with an interfaith service and regional meetings. All events are, very conveniently, at the Doubletree at the Philadelphia Airport, 4509 Island Avenue. You can regis-



CATHOLIC CHURCH RENEWAL ORGANIZATIONS LAUNCH NEW INITIATIVE

In case you missed this announcement, which came out on December 21 on the Women's Ordination Conference and other websites during the very busy holiday season...

Catholic organizations announce new initiative, #CatholicToo, to create space for women to share their stories about the effects of sexism and misogyny within the Church and to take action to end it.

Fall 2017 brought heightened awareness to the rampant sexual harassment and abuse perpetrated by powerful men in entertainment and politics. Women in the Church also have haunting stories of their own abuse suffered at the hands of ordained male clerics, protected for too long by a Church hierarchy that normalizes gender inequality and silences victims of clergy abuse.

#CatholicToo invites Catholic women to bear witness to the wounds of patriarchy, and calls all Catholics to reject sacralized sexism and gender inequality in all forms within the Church. Allies and faith communities are asked to use #IWill and #WeWill to name their specific intentions to help change Church culture from one that affirms patriarchy and sexism to one that is inclusive, believes and respects women, and treats women as equals created in God's image.

Actions in response to clergy abuse of women include: #IWill confront patriarchy and clericalism and ask difficult questions. #IWill break the silence on abuse and subordination of women. #WeWill make our Church a sanctuary for survivors and silence breakers. #WeWill practice radical inclusion and transform our liturgy and prayers to affirm all people.

"Telling our stories, telling the truth about women's experience of abuse in the Church," says Deborah Rose-Milavec, Executive Director of FutureChurch, "is a crucial step that must be undertaken if we are to transform our Church into an institution that reflects and honors the presence of God in all human beings."

"When we bear witness to victims and survivors, we open the possibility for God's wisdom to lead us," said Zachary Johnson, Executive Director of Call To Action.

Kate McElwee, Executive Director of the Women's Ordination Conference, adds: "We cannot move forward dissolving patriarchy and creating a Church that truly welcomes and values all, if we don't bring these stories of systemized oppression into the light. #CatholicToo is a space for healing, a space for celebrating courage, and resilience, and a place of hope where the vision of creating a Church rooted in justice for all remains real and present."

To learn more, visit www.catholictoo.org.



A RENEWED CHURCH FOR OUR DAUGHTERS, SONS, AND US AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG CATHOLICS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN!

ANNOUNCING CALL TO ACTION'S 20/30 PROJECT FOR MENTORING AND LEADERSHIP with applications available now.

In CTA's own words:

The 20/30 Project for Mentoring and Leadership aims to cultivate young leaders (ages 20-39) who live in the paradoxes of Catholic identity. We recognize that our faith is the source of holy, unique, and revolutionary potential for personal and common good and at the same time is the source of unreconciled (and often unacknowledged) oppression and injustice, specifically for LGBTQ people; people of color, women, and lay people throughout the world.

This new program will bring together young visionaries and change-makers across the country to support and inspire one another as part of a cohort, each discerning and initiating a project that puts faith into action for social justice. Each Young Leader will be paired with a mentor to accompany them as they explore how their Catholic faith and personal gifts and passions intersect with the social needs around them.

Young Leaders in this cohort will:
Connect with an inspiring and supportive community of peers across the country. Receive mentorship from an elder in the movement. Participate in a 3-day retreat in Minneapolis and CTA's National Conference in San Antonio, TX, all travel and lodging expenses paid.
Be part of a national movement working to transform the Church and the world. Receive a \$600 stipend.

The Retreat: May 17-19, 2018 in Minneapolis, MN
This is where the Young Leader Cohort will gather for the first time and start scheming and dreaming about projects! You'll connect with like-minded young Catholics, explore Catholic social teaching, analyze dominant power structures, study methods of social change and practice contemplation and action.

The Project: May-November
Over this 6-month period you'll put your faith into action, developing a project you're passionate about related to Catholicism and social justice in your local context! Don't worry, you'll have lots of support with monthly mentor check-ins and video calls with your cohort and the Program Coordinator. For projects that require more resources, Call to Action will help connect you with a network of donors and volunteers eager to support meaningful action.

The Reconvening: November 9-11, 2018 in San Antonio, TX
The Young Leader Cohort will reconvene at Call to Action's 2018 National Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Here you'll share your learnings and efforts from the past six months with your fellow Young Leaders and the broader Call to Action community. You'll plug into an even wider network of

continued on page 7

CTA APPLICATION *continued from page 6*

like-minded Catholic change-makers to continue deepening and expanding your faith-rooted justice work.

Applicants must:

- Be between age 20 and 39
- Have a passion for social justice and their Catholic faith
- Be committed to LGBTQ equality, anti-racism and anti-oppression
- Be creative, passionate, and appreciate humor

Go to cta-usa.org for more information and to apply.

TREASURER’S REPORT

SEPAWOC Financial Statement
Calendar Year 2017

<u>Beginning balance</u> (1-1-17)	\$ 4119.42
<u>Revenues</u>	
Donations	6375.00
Revenue from ads	120.00
Amazon Smile	5.00
Total Revenues	6500.00
Beginning Balance + Revenues	10619.42
<u>Expenses</u>	
Printing newsletter	\$6397.50
Stationery	26.00
Postage, permits, mailbox rental	601.00
Banking –new checks	9.99
Bank fees	19.00
Memberships (COR, WAC, WC-C)	175.00
Ad for Irish Edition	80.00
Web page fee	99.50
Total Expenses	7407.99
<u>Ending balance</u> (12-31-17)	3211.43

Prepared by Mary Whelan

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

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Our mission statement says “As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry,” Whether you are a member of our core committee, participate in our witnesses on Holy Thursday and Ordination day, read *EqualwRites*, and/or contribute financially, all of these are important and necessary.

We are so grateful for your financial support. We again include the envelope to make it as convenient to contribute. Our annual report which appears in this issue indicates how the money is spent.

We rely on your ongoing gifts to make SEPAWOC a faithful presence in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

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Note this change in the date
 We know that some of you like to plan ahead. In that spirit we are announcing that the annual Mary Magdalene celebration when SEPAWOC joins with the Mary Magdalene Community in Drexel Hill for Mass will be held a week earlier this year, on July 15th at 9 a.m., at 600 Burmont Road, Drexel Hill, PA 19026. We will be reminding you again in our next issue of *EqualwRites*.

Resources

Are you searching for resources for your Lenten and Holy Week Services that incorporate women? FutureChurch.org offers Women and the Word, a downloadable packet for Lent, Holy Week, Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost (\$20). A more detailed description is available at the website.

WATER (Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual) offers a myriad of activities which are available to you without leaving the comfort of your home! Monthly WATERmeditations, WATERtalks – Feminist Conversations in Religion, and Ritual, Liturgy & Ceremony Planning/Resources can be accessed through phone participation. More information as well as instructions for registration are available at the website waterwomensalliance.org.

Book Reviews

***How to Keep Your Parish Alive* by Eileen McCafferty DiFranco (Emergence Education Press, 2017). 166 pp. Paperback: \$17.95.**

Reviewed by Maureen Tate

There is a lot of truth in this book. However, I admit the title gave me pause. Given personal experience with many situations and issues addressed, especially related to church in Philadelphia, I held preconceptions that the parish model may no longer be viable. I was curious to see how Eileen DiFranco would make a case for keeping them alive at a time when extensive research and polling data documents steep declines in church membership and participation, as well as trends among younger generations to not affiliate with any religious institution.

DiFranco recognizes these trends, acknowledging the seismic shifts in cultural, economic, political, and religious forces destabilizing many institutions as well as faith communities. However, she does not concede that the huge wave of parish closures that took place across the country in recent decades were necessary, morally justified, or faith centered. In fact, she names the behavior pattern leading to parish closures as a “grave sin”, akin to an “ecclesial version of the *Hunger Games*.” The author cites numerous examples of decision making processes, implemented by ecclesial authorities, to support this view. Time and again, processes resulting in parish closures demonstrated the hierarchy’s disregard for the laity, lack of transparency, clericalism, not too subtle racism, abuse of power, and subterfuge to accomplish their goals. This also resonates with my own experience of parish twinning with one parish discussed in the book and first-hand accounts from friends and family in other parishes. Many of these highly structured processes created the illusion of discernment among well-intentioned parishioners who were in fact set up to collude in drawing conclusions that were predetermined.

The author highlights, and rejects, the two most widely given justifications for parish closures, financial hardship and a shortage of priests, in other words, “finances and personnel”. Over several chapters, DiFranco makes short shrift of these excuses. She documents evidence of the Church’s vast wealth, lavish lifestyles of clergy amidst dire poverty, and parish property sales in hot real estate markets that netted further wealth. She paints a parallel scenario of the church’s withdrawal from poor and minority neighborhoods as the Church followed and abetted parishioner white flight to wealthier suburbs.

As many of us know, when a parish closes and buildings are shuttered, there goes the neighborhood. This author knows from personal experience working in some very distressed communities, that parishes are also about rootedness in time and place. In a discussion of the devastating effects of parish closures, I love what she says about attachment to place and community because it validates my experience. “There is comfort and a sense of belonging when looking at the stained-glass windows each week or seeing the same faces in the same pews each week. This experience is called community, a fragile, beautiful thing that takes years to build and many hours of painstaking work to sustain. To the bishops,

on the other hand, one parish is like another and, like a priest, is an interchangeable part that gets moved around at the bishop’s discretion.” Catholics are understandably sad, angry, and disoriented when their parish closes. They know that “parishes are very important neighborhood entities that provide the means for people to gather in community . . . It’s the place where people take their dreams, their hopes and wishes and place them in the heart of God.” It is no wonder that when a parish is closed or merged, the disruption is so heartfelt that so many never make a successful transition and simply walk away. And the community is often left to deal with the consequences of an empty hulk of a building that symbolizes further abandonment.

DiFranco unpacks the second excuse, the scarcity of priestly vocations, with equal force. Many readers of *EqualwRites* will readily embrace her arguments that the priesthood, as currently restricted to celibate males, is a prescription for scarcity. The magisterium’s intransigence on the issue of a truly inclusive priesthood is marked by deep misogyny and patriarchy, as well as a willful ignorance regarding sexuality and gender diversity. This mentality of scarcity, and the failure of will and imagination to address matters of finance and vocation, have serious implications for the ability of the People of God to access the Eucharist. This is a scandal, pure and simple.

The first few chapters offer a very sharp critique of developments surrounding parish closures. The compilation of examples used to debunk these justifications shows how outrageous they are and create a picture of the absurd. Along the way, I found myself appalled, appreciating that you can’t make this stuff up!

I found the first half of the book somewhat discouraging and heavy for its analysis and rebuke of the hierarchy who continue to fail the People of God in so many ways, largely because I accept the truth in it. In contrast, I found the second half inspiring and hopeful. The author is particularly succinct in writing about the origins of early Christian communities and the development of the Church over centuries. She attempts what she refers to as a “little snippet of church history” that I found quite effective as a segue to reimagining the “resurrected parish” as a more life-giving, Jesus-centered model of faith community that reclaims and reframes how we understand tradition. The author has a deep appreciation for the dynamics of the early Christian communities and she sparks one’s imagination to consider what might have been, or more to the point, what might yet be. We can imagine with more confidence that a shift to smaller communities, focused on reconnection with Jesus who inspired and continues to inspire communities of faith, love, and service, is in fact good news! We can get excited about new possibilities that are authentic expressions of what the church was as it formed and what we are called to today. Just as the Jews continued to go to synagogue, even as they were gathering elsewhere

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BOOK REVIEW *continued from page 8*

to remember Jesus in the breaking of the bread, we too can have our feet in the pews of our parish church, even as we explore alternative spaces where authentic community is possible.

The author repeats throughout a variation on the theme “Be not afraid”. Her starting point for reimagining parish community is the Church as the People of God, affirmed by Vatican II which “empowers people to act in God’s name . . . In *Lumen Gentium*, the church clearly proclaims that the people share in Christ’s kingly, prophetic, and priestly roles . . . ‘consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood’ in order that they might proclaim the power of God.” We do not need to fear the hierarchy as we seek change because the bishops are not the church without us. DiFranco draws very straight lines. If your idea about God requires “trickle down revelation” from the hierarchy, or you believe that the Church is a fancy building, that leads you to one model of church. On the other hand, if you view “God as Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us”, it takes you to a model of the People of God assembled. Of course! When put so starkly, the implications are clear.

Eileen DiFranco’s writing style is very imagistic. It can be harsh and blunt at times, expressing impatience and righteous anger. She does not mince words, but it is this directness that is not only provocative but prophetic. She is artful with a turn of phrase or use of metaphor that gets your attention and also amuses. Over and again I found myself thinking: Yes, that’s true! Well put! Good one! I found myself questioning why so many of us are “polite” when so much is at stake. One sentence, for example, that made me chuckle: “*However, the elephant in that tastefully decorated episcopal living room that tramps right through the thicket of pious publicity surrounding parish closures is, of course, the rapidly diminishing number of priests.*”

On the one hand this book assumes value in the parish model. However, the author is practical and recognizes she is writing to those of us who may be in that in between place where we see that what we have is no longer a good fit, but cannot yet jump to a new reality only now taking shape. The book ends with a listing of many Intentional Eucharistic Communities and shares insights on what has been learned along the way to encourage further movement and experimentation. Enough trail blazers have now paved the way that a book such as this is not only possible but necessary because the lived experience of such Eucharistic communities can be lifted up for others to follow.

In the Introduction, the author writes that “this book will offer a blueprint for those with courage to undertake . . . a journey pioneered by Jesus himself . . . to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God everywhere and by any means, in spite of religious authorities and regardless of the cost. Eileen DiFranco is a woman of courage and vision who has taken the personal risks to seek and build a renewed Church. She has suffered the consequences of condemnation from church leadership and others for responding to her call to the priesthood. As a Roman Catholic Woman Priest she has stepped ahead to create spaces where new and varied Intentional Eucharistic Communities are taking root and flourishing. She is providing leadership and encouragement for others to follow.

By the end of the book you may find yourself wondering why we are not all members of smaller Intentional Eucharistic communities. There is much here that challenges the reader to evaluate where we personally stand, what we have settled for, and how much more we are called to be as the People of God. This book forced me to question many of my hidden assumptions and to appreciate the communities of faith, love, and service that are our heritage and hopeful future.

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

COME, BE FED AT THE TABLE!

The Table is, of course, the site of the Women’s Ordination Conference blog (www.womensordination.org/blog). There you will be “fed” by, among others, two of our SEPAWOC members, President Regina Bannan and *EqualwRites* co-editor, Ellie Harty who both write regular weekly posts.

Tuning into the blog by going to the website, or, even more easily, signing up to have the posts come directly to you will help keep you informed of the latest in the struggle for women’s leadership and ordination in the church as well as related topics in church renewal.

Regina usually posts on Saturdays and more often concentrates, and provides extremely incisive commentary, on the very latest news and information. Ellie usually posts on Tuesdays and takes a more eclectic approach, weaving in aspects of our daily lives and experiences to commentaries on women and the church.

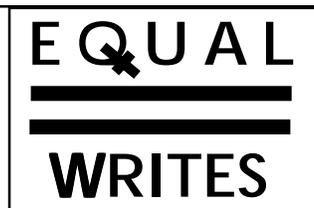
Just to throw out some of the intriguing recent topics: “Looking at Women: Data, Data, Data”... “I’m With HER”... “Deacons on my Mind”... “Roots and Wings” ... “Immigration and Ordination” ... “What Do We Value” and so we go on.

Both Regina and Ellie request and sincerely welcome your comments on anything they post. They believe – we all believe - the greatest wisdom comes from the whole community conversing and working together, feeding each other at an ever-expanding and nurturing table ... and *The Table*.



CONDOLENCES

The members of SEPAWOC express our heartfelt sympathy to Ellie Harty, co-editor of *EqualwRites*, on the death of her daughter, Laura Woods, following a long illness. Laura was a loving daughter, mother, wife, sister and friend. She will be fondly remembered by all those whose lives she touched. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family.



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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 July 2018. Final deadline for submissions is June 15. Send to ellieharty65@gmail.com or mail to above address.

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Scripture Reflections

Holy Thursday 2018

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Holy Thursday...a great feast...a celebration of Eucharist, ministry, community...and for the last thirty eight years, a celebration across from the cathedral...witnessing, praying, singing for equality, justice and women's ordination.

This year's witness will feel very different, though, as we have lost Darlene Ketterer, our longtime supporter, worker and friend. We know that Darlene, as Sojourner Truth proclaimed, did not die-she went home like a shooting star!.. and she will still be light for us.

And there sure was light at Darlene's Farewell Liturgy, planned by her lifelong friend and her special companions on the journey. We heard of Darlene's devotion to family, friends, parish and goodness. We heard of Darlene's ability to encourage people to come together...to share and search, learn and travel on the road to renewal. We heard of Darlene's faith and how the gift of Eucharist was her center, and we heard the celebrant from deep within thank Darlene for never abandoning him in his darkest night of the soul.

My heart was aching and smiling all through the Liturgy...but I couldn't hold back the tears anymore, when, for the first time in my 71 years, in a regular Catholic parish, I heard this prayer said out loud, "For all those working for equality for women in the Church...we pray!"

Darlene always delighted me with her surprises. Once at our Witness I was next to Darlene, and I noticed she was waving to a priest going into the cathedral. I thought how

nice she knew someone who smiled and waved back. Then Darlene waved to the next one...and the next one...hmmm...Darlene sure knows a lot of priests...yep, I realized that was just Darlene's warmth and courage and willingness to start a dialogue.

Even as Darlene struggled with serious illness, she persisted!...and came to our Witness carrying her oxygen...reminding me of Gandhi's quote that strength does not come from physical capacity, it comes from an indomitable will!

In reading about St. Blaise, I found that he is considered one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, a group of saints invoked as early as the twelfth century. SEPAWOC gives thanks for our own group of Holy Helpers-Darlene and her team-Pat, Marguerite and their three beloved husbands.

I spoke with Pat and Marguerite...they want me to tell you that Darlene was deeply loved and was the heart and soul of so much good work...and as the celebrant of her Liturgy said, "Darlene was the Book of Acts!"

The journey of a thousand miles really does begin with a single step. Darlene and Pat were inside at the Chrism Mass one Holy Thursday very long ago, and decided to come over and talk with us. Please come be with us this year...however you can.

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