

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

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

**Holy Thursday**  
**April 18, 2019 11:00 AM**  
STANDING TOGETHER  
FOR WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

**Ordination Day**  
**May 18, 2019 9:30 AM**  
EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY  
LED BY A WOMAN

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

	<b>EQUAL</b>	<b>Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area</b>
Vol. XXXVI No. 1		MARCH 2019 - JUNE 2019
	<b>WRITES</b>	<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b> - <i>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.</i>

**THIS IS HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN!**

**HOLY THURSDAY WITNESS**  
**APRIL 18, 2019 at 11:00AM**  
*Sister Cities Park, 18<sup>th</sup> & JFK Parkway*  
*(Across from Sts. Peter & Paul Basilica)*  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Remember that song from the Sixties, "Stop, in the name of Love!"? Don't you sometimes want to sing it, shout it, pray it, from the rafters of your heart, mind, and spirit when the Church perpetrates another injustice? Well, here is your chance: Holy Thursday 2019. April 18. 11am. Join us in singing, proclaiming more than shouting, and praying for inclusion, for justice, within our own Church. You can do something; you *are* doing something, just by being there.

**THIS IS HOW THE LIGHT GETS OUT!**

**ORDINATION DAY MASS**  
**SATURDAY, MAY 18 at 9:30AM**  
*Sister Cities Park, 18<sup>th</sup> & JFK Parkway*  
*(Across from Sts. Peter & Paul Basilica)*  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

On this day, at this outdoor Mass, we both lament the loss of the gifts of women to official Catholic ministry and celebrate what they already are and can be, with a liturgy led by a woman. We stand outside the Church praying our gratitude for the treasures all people can bestow on the faithful while others stand inside the Church affirming only men as having those treasures and sanctioned for bestowing them. This Mass is both poignant and uplifting, a lamentation and a rejoicing. Please join us. We need you.

**AND TO ALL WHO WITNESS, MAY THIS "ANTHEM," SING**

*"Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in"*

(Thank you songwriter, Leonard Cohen.)

## Announcing our Mary Magdalene Award Winner for 2019: Dr. Marian Ronan

It is so difficult to pay tribute adequately to Marian Ronan, our Mary Magdalene Award honoree this year, because there is so much to celebrate in her life and work for women, Catholics - and especially Catholic women - for her work in education and scholarly research, for her prolific publications including seven books, and for her ongoing dedication to environmental activism. If we just mentioned alone the number of insightful, profound, and witty articles and book reviews she has written for our own *EqualwRites*, the total would be astounding. We have been amazingly blessed by all that Marian has done for us and with us.

Marian describes herself as an “American Catholic on the margins” and from that viewpoint researches, teaches, writes, and offers presentations at conferences and workshops. She has taught contemporary Christian theology and American religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and as a Research Professor of Catholic Studies at the Center for World Christianity New York Theological Seminary. She has also authored the following books: *The Grail Prayer Book*, *Image-Breaking*, *Image-Building*; *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality*; *Wisdom’s Feast*; *Tracing the Sign of the Cross*; *Sister Trouble*; and, most recently, *Women of Vision* which focuses on sixteen founders of the International Grail movement of which Marian has been a part since the 1970’s and continues to champion.

We actually are extremely fortunate, for we will be able to sample her wit, wisdom, and insights very soon. She will be part of a distinguished panel discussing “How equality can flourish in a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-generational church: What does this church look like physically, spiritually, and doctrinally?” on Saturday, April 6 from 1-4 at Swarthmore College. All are welcome. Don’t miss it, and especially don’t miss Marian!

Finally, we love her own description of her personal life: “My husband and I live in the amazing culturally and religiously diverse Flatbush section of Brooklyn where you can walk in ten minutes from mosques to Orthodox synagogues to Pentecostal store fronts to Haitian/Chicano/Caribbean Catholic churches.” We should all be so fortunate.

Please join us to present the Mary Magdalene Award to Marian Ronan at our **Holy Thursday Witness, April 18 at 11am, across from the Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul, Philadelphia.**

### Editorial Staff of *EqualwRites* A Publication of SEPAWOC

Editors: **Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan**

Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan,  
Eileen DiFranco**

## Women Deacons – Lest We Forget

By *Regina Bannan*

Just about a year ago I wrote a post on deacons. Maybe the discussion begins every January. Not bad, like a liturgical anniversary or a dedicated month: Deacon Sunday, Deacon Month. Then on to other things.

It was NOT in Deacon Month but in May 2016 that the leaders of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) asked Pope Francis to consider women deacons. This apparently spontaneous request resulted in a commission to study the history of women deacons. A classic “assign it to a committee” or a genuine commitment? At least the nuns opened the discussion, and there are equal numbers of women and men on the panel, apparently a Vatican first.

This year two members of the commission kicked off Deacon Month when they spoke at Fordham University on January 15. One way NOT to do a report that’s dead on arrival is to speak out, but, oddly, they felt constrained about discussing the report itself, which they submitted to Francis just before the sex abuse scandal broke last summer. Theologian Phyllis Zagano and Jesuit Bernard Pottier talked about their research, which documented that women served as ordained deacons with varying duties at various times and places until about the Twelfth Century.

We already knew that, maybe with less specificity. Remember Phoebe? *NCR*, *Commonweal*, *America*, *Crux* and *LifeSiteNews* all have had significant articles summarizing this research and the theological questions it raises. But I must ask, “Is it good for women’s ordination?” as my late husband’s family and my friends ask, “Is it good for the Jews?” I think so.

Of course, some are horrified that the question of women deacons, not to mention priests, is even raised. Take the American Bishops. Please.

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### TREASURER’S REPORT

SEPAWOC Financial Statement  
Calendar Year 2018

<u>Beginning balance</u> (1-1-18)	\$ 3211.43
<u>Revenues</u>	
Donations	5405.00
Amazon Smile	11.67
Total Revenues	5416.67
Beginning Balance + Revenues	8628.10
<u>Expenses</u>	
Printing newsletter	5298.50
Postage, permits, mailbox rental	557.00
Bank fees	8.00
Memberships (COR, WAC, WC-C)	175.00
Ad for Irish Edition	80.00
CTA vigil	300.00
FCM ad	50.00
Quixote Center	100.00
Total Expenses	6568.50
<u>Ending Balance</u> (12-31-18)	2059.60
Prepared by Mary Whelan, Treasurer	

## An Inspiring Presentation for Lent, Easter, and Beyond!

Women Church Convergence and SEPAWOC Present:

*“How equality can flourish in a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-generational church: what does this church look like physically, spiritually, and doctrinally?”*

**Panel and Discussion**  
**Saturday, April 6, 2019**  
**1:00 – 4:00 PM**

Swarthmore Friends Meeting House, Swarthmore College  
12 Whittier Place, Swarthmore PA 19081

Program is free and open to the public. A donation of \$5 is suggested.

**Information and inquiries to: [sepawoc@sepawoc.org](mailto:sepawoc@sepawoc.org)**

Our distinguished panel will be moderated by **Mary Hunt**, feminist theologian and co-founder and co-director of the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER). Dr. Hunt is a Catholic active in the women-church movement, a lecturer, and prolific writer on theology and ethics, with particular attention to social justice concerns.

Panelists include: **Mariam I. Williams**, columnist for the National Catholic Reporter who explores life and culture at the intersection of race, gender, and Christian faith; **Marian Ronan**, Research Professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary and author of seven books, most recently, *Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail Movement*; **Kathleen** Grimes, Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics at Villanova University, regular contributor for the Women in Theology blog; **Sonja Spoo**, Associate Campaigns Director at UltraViolet, a national advocacy organization that drives feminist cultural and political change.

*Sponsored by Women Church Convergence (W-CC), a coalition of autonomous Catholic-rooted groups working to build just social and ecclesial structures with shared power for everyone, especially women and those whom church and society marginalize. W-CC amplifies diverse feminist, faith-filled voices.*

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### Women Deacons – Lest We Forget

*continued from page 2*

CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, decided to celebrate Deacon Month by releasing a survey that asked the bishops whether they believed that women’s ordination to the diaconate was “theoretically possible”: 41% did. But 54% said they’d consider implementing it in their diocese if the Vatican permitted it. I felt this encouraging, as well as descriptive of the leadership exercised by the top of the hierarchy here. Reeds blowing in the wind. I found articles in *NCR*, *America*, and *Crux* about this survey, so thanks to CARA, the pot is stirred again.

Most interesting, however, are two articles by *NCR* columnists. Zagano begins hers with a sentence that makes me almost as angry as the *LifeSite* story: “The question of women deacons has nothing to do with women priests.” Maybe the only way to get women in the diaconate is to present Facts – Zagano has six – that deal only with the deacons. But don’t put down the aspirations of others, and don’t ignore the main obstacle to this change: the fear of what’s next. Of course, we know any opening will be exceedingly difficult, and Zagano has been a persistent voice for deacons for years.

The second article doesn’t upset me quite as much, but it’s a catalogue of some of the difficulties I allude to above. Jamie Manson examines the various problems that could arise if women are ordained deacons. Will they be silenced as priests have been silenced if they support priestly ordination? Will they be assigned a “special,” lesser role, different from men

deacons? Raising these questions has to be done; they must be addressed as the process continues.

And I want it to continue. It prefigures what the struggle for the priesthood will be. A minor theme in both the Fordham panel and the CARA survey is women’s leadership. It’s now a cliché for every official document to support expanded roles for women in the church. That is not lost on the third panelist at Fordham, Dominican sister Donna Ciangio, Newark Archdiocesan Chancellor. She’s in real leadership and she’s not afraid to articulate the desire of the people for women’s ministry and preaching. I bet she’d join me in saying “do the real thing and ordain women.” Deacon Month is over.

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

### 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.

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## Maligning “Eve”: Using Genesis II To Denigrate Women

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

Christianity is a crystal ball held by stern-eyed church men gazing back at an impossible past that never could and never did exist. This world, which they claimed was established by an almighty and omnipotent god, was so very fragile that it could be destroyed forever by two simpletons named Adam and Eve who broke an arbitrary rule that made no sense. Who would ever think that a fruit tree could be so dangerous?

The god in this tableau then punished generations upon generations of innocent people- unto eternity- because two blockheads fell for a divine trick. The stern-eyed church men took it upon themselves to save these unfortunates from themselves by concocting a story that their bloodthirsty, vengeful god needed to be appeased by the blood of this god's child who would be tortured and sacrificed in atonement for the divine set up committed tens of thousands of years before he was even born. Only the actions of the church men could save all these poor unfortunates from hell or purgatory or limbo. This was, they claimed, god's plan, and only they could implement it.

The creation stories in the Hebrew Bible, or what Christians call the “Old Testament” were written by what became the Hebrew people to explain why their God should be worshipped over other powerful gods who were worshipped in the ancient Middle East. The gods of related people like the Babylonians and Assyrians shared some characteristics and early foundational myths with the Hebrews. To add to the confusion, the Hebrews had different names for God indicating different origins: El Shaddai (the breasted one) Yahweh, and Elohim. In several early bible stories, God is plural and refers to the divine self as “we.” In other stories, Yahweh had a consort, Ishtar or Astarte, who spend more time in the Jerusalem temple during the period of the monarchy that she spent out.

The creation stories hardly took place at what people might think is “the beginning” of anything largely because when people are in the beginning or the middle, or even the end of something, they don't really know where they are in the historical process. Time lines can only be accessed from the future. Who would have been around in the “beginning” to record anything when writing had not even been invented? To complicate matters, there are two stories of the creation in Genesis; one in chapter one, the other, in chapter two. Only the second chapter tells the story of Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, the snake, sin, and punishment. This is the only story read during the Catholic Mass because it is the only one that fits with the stern-eyed church men's idea of sin and salvation in which they, of course, play a major role. The first version records the loving actions of a Creator who fashioned the world and its inhabitants to reflect the goodness of the divine. The sentence, “It is good” appears eight times in thirty-one verses. The word “blessing” often accompanies the word “good.” Sin and punishment and working by the sweat of one's brow are not mentioned even once. The second version of creation the Eden also provides the church men with another set of assumptions that has wreaked

havoc throughout the generations. The church men assume that Adam and Eve are sexless beings in the garden because they are naked and thus do not understand the consequences of nudity, which is for them, unbridled sexual relations. Of course, various groups of people have lived quite happily in their naked state and consider it to be normal and natural and don't necessarily have sex any more than do people who are clad. And even if they did, who should care as long as it was mutual?

But the churchmen cared- a great deal. The church men perseverated over sex throughout the millennia, taking one line from Jesus' eunuch's comment and assuming that Jesus was virginal and thus requires virginity from his most dedicated followers. This fixation on sexual relations was preached almost to the exclusion of charity and love and the kingdom of God. As the alleged first woman, Eve provided fodder for this fixation. Her role in the second creation story enabled the church men to develop two sex- linked premises. First, Eve easily succumbed to the wiles of the serpent because of her innate, God-given, inferior nature, and second, Eve was the temptress who caused the “fall” of all humanity and the ensuing need for redemption.

The church men were happy to malign Eve unto the generations, certifying her as the main culprit in what is really a godless story. This vilification bore fruit for millennia and honed the preaching power of the early Church Fathers who cast all their stones at Eve as the incarnation of sin and inferior being. The second century theologian Tertullian went so far as to declare to the women who worshipped with him- his sisters in Christ- that because of their “filth” the son of God had to be sacrificed. There are few more horrible tales that have been labeled as salvation history.

The stern-eyed church men built upon this legend and the implicit violence in Genesis 2 by adding the myth of Original Sin to the mix. This idea was dreamed up by Augustine of Hippo who before his conversion, had two concubines that we know of, women who were essentially his sex slaves since their low social caste prevented the saint from marrying them. Augustine never really shook off his Manichean beliefs with their sharp demarcation of good and evil, light and darkness, flesh and spirit. Augustine used Adam and Eve to explain human nature and extent of sin in the world, claiming that sexual relations are the vehicle for the transmission of sin. Prior to engaging in sexual relations, according to Augustine, Adam and Eve were innocent- although not innocent enough not to want to eat the apple and be as wise as God.

Because of Augustine the stern-eyed men began to insist that every child- except for Mary and Jesus- was conceived and born into sin. The stern-eyed churchmen came to regard newborn babies as patients zero who spread the contagion of sin in the world. Because of their perinatal sinfulness prior to baptism, Thomas Aquinas speculated that babies who died without being baptized would never experience the Beatific Vision because this sin, in which they had no part, somehow rendered them dirty and unwelcomed by their god. In the promulgation of this speculative and fanciful doctrine, neither charity nor love prevailed as pre-term and still born babies were buried outside of consecrated ground causing their fami-

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## Why Are We So Mad At Each Other?...Or Why We Are So Mad At Each Other

By Ellie Harty

The January/February issue of *The Atlantic*, I think, has two relevant articles for our quest to place women in leadership and ministry in the Church – and why this pursuit is so frustratingly difficult. One is titled “Why Are We So Angry?” by Charles Duhigg and the other “The Global Backlash Against Women” by Peter Beinart.

Duhigg divides anger into three types: Ordinary, i.e. personal, moral indignation, and vengeful. I am tempted to dismiss his take on the first, the ordinary kind, because his conclusions – although definitely based on the research he cited – are, nevertheless, so foreign to my personal experience. According to recent research (see the article for details) people who express anger readily and frequently are more healthy and happy than those who do not. It seems as if, instead of making bad interactions worse, angry outbursts, as long as they are non-violent, actually help resolve differences, producing more honest interchanges, more willingness to listen, more inclination by participants to compromise and accommodate each other. “People reported that they tended to be much happier after yelling at an offending party. They felt relieved, more optimistic about the future, more energized.” Even those confronted reported feeling better, the recriminations they had to face actually enhancing their self-awareness and need to make changes.

That is not my experience with “ordinary” anger. To me, in fact, it always feels “extraordinary,” uncomfortable, unproductive, and unrewarding. It leaves a poisonous miasma behind, far from the relief, optimism, and energy the research indicates. Is that because I was raised female, I wonder? This article was written by a man. Maybe the description of anger and its results fit his world better. There’s food for thought.

I am more interested, however, in the second kind of anger, moral indignation, because that can be the most productive, has the most potential for doing good, and where I believe we fit in. There is a caution with moral indignation though – besides the warning about annoying in-your-face self-righteousness – in that, if the morally indignant believe their anger is not being heard, they can turn to the third type of anger: the quest for revenge and for inflicting destruction and punishment. I’m going to venture to say we are far too wise to go there!

Great leaders for social justice, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, to name a few, have shown us the effectiveness moral indignation can have: to rally people in the first place, to get the message across to the greatest numbers, and to spur action to correct injustices. When people protest only in their own interest, focusing on day to day complaints and sufferings – valid as they may be – they may lose hope and give up easily. When, however, they get behind, work for, and express outrage about the larger moral issue behind their distress, they see themselves as part of a greater, more meaningful, far-reaching movement and stay engaged and inspired.

The article used the example of Cesar Chavez as a master of using moral indignation to effect positive change. According to the author, he succeeded by making “his followers see their discontent as part of a larger story about right and wrong.” He also realized that people protesting injustice cannot see themselves as victims or they will, according to Marshall Ganz who worked alongside Chavez and recorded his words, “have no sense of agency, no sense of power. But when you tell them that we’re fighting an injustice or an offense to their dignity, they become angry and involved.” I sometimes worry that our specific cause, women’s ordination in the Catholic Church, may seem too small in light of other very prominent issues in the Church – and world. But then I realize, we *do* have to stress more urgently and consistently our *moral* outrage at the offense to our dignity – men’s, women’s, all genders’ dignity – by not only the hierarchy’s prohibition, but its unwillingness, with a turn of the back, with a slam of the door, to even talk about the prohibition. We *are* unheard because no one is “allowed” to hear us. No wonder we hear some say: Burn down the Church or let it implode. Unheard anger so readily can turn into that third vengeful, destructive kind where no deal is on the table ...if we let it.

The second article, “The Global Backlash Against Women” is not going to calm our raging hearts, for sure, but it does contain some relevant insights. Author, Peter Beinart, focuses on the political descriptions and ramifications of this backlash, but, of course, the Catholic Church is a political institution in its own right and much that is said applies to it and us as well.

He talks about the current right turns in governments, including our own, across the globe and uses our own right turn to make a critical point. Conventional wisdom says our current governmental shift is due to “a scream of rage from a working class made downwardly mobile by globalization” and/or “a backlash by white Christians who fear losing power to immigrants and racial and religious minorities.” Some other countries turning far right and oppressive, however, have booming economies and actually welcome immigration. Why are they making a similar shift? Well, it seems that all these cases actually do have one thing in common according to Beinart: “Besides their hostility to liberal democracy, the right wing autocrats taking power (Insert here: or in the case of the Church ‘keeping power’) across the world share one big thing, which often goes unrecognized in the U.S.: *They all want to subordinate women* (italics mine).

Are your teeth clenched yet? Beinart goes on to quote Texas A&M political scientist, Valerie M. Hudson, for an explanation of how and why this happens. It seems for millennia, men and their male leaders have formed a social contract: “Men agreed to be ruled by other men in return for all men ruling over women.” It seemed the most “natural” orderly way to proceed since men already ruled the domestic home and pretty much dominated everywhere else as well. As Hudson points out, “Women’s empowerment ruptures this order....” resulting, many fear, in a chaos, an “unnatural” reversal of all that has ever been. Thus, women’s empowerment on all levels must be quashed. We heard some of that sentiment in the last American election when many voters lamented the government’s policies and its leaders’ having

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## Maligning “Eve”: Using Genesis II To Denigrate Women *continued from page 4*

lies endless sorrow and worry that they and their dead babies would not be reunited in the afterlife. (The Protestant doctor who delivered my still-born great-uncle Richard told my great-grandmother that Richard took one breath before he baptized him, thus insuring Richard’s internment in a consecrated ground. Richard’s birth certificate which I was able to find, listed “Still Birth” as the cause of death.)

Church fathers and modern popes have written reams about the relationship between Adam and Eve and their ideas about god, building entire theologies upon mythological beings and the musings of a self-described, recovered sex addict. Where did these stern-eyed church men get all these crazy ideas? Although Augustine might disagree with me, I would suggest that the premise of sin and revenge did not come from God. However, Augustine, who had so many wonderful ideas about things other than Original Sin did write that whoever thinks he/she knows God or can describe God, or understands God, has no real understanding of God and is describing something else. The scenario of reward, punishment, sin and revenge aligns itself quite well with what has come to be the western ideal of justice, where the bad guys get punished and the good ones, rewarded. What is often omitted from this equation is that the attribution of guilt and innocence too often relied upon often arbitrary human defined principles of social caste, wealth, race, tribe, and gender and hardly upon the preferences of the divine.

Genesis 1 and 2, like the Babylonian Enuma Elish and the Greek Pandora’s box, are ancient faith reflections on creation and its flip side, the origin of evil in the world. While faith might, indeed, posit that a divine being created a world of blessings filled with good things, those good things often become bad as when the river that waters the fields becomes a raging torrent and kills both crops and people. Is the divine punishing people for sin? The answer remains as problematic today as it was five thousand years ago. There is, in the end, no good explanation why evil exists in the world, in direct contradiction to the stern-eyed churchmen who ascribe it to a sin committed by a mythological couple in the distant past. The time has come to be humble and admit this. To attribute evil to God is to make the divine into a monster.

I think the time has come to recognize that Adam and Eve existed no more than did Pandora and that God is much bigger than a petty bloodthirsty divine right king who extracts tribute and punishment from divine subjects and then demands the murder his own son as recompense. As a second grader, I recall having a powwow with my little friends in the schoolyard out of earshot of the sister who taught us this bloodthirsty theology where we compared this version of God with a mean teacher who punished the entire class for the bad behavior of one kid. If a seven year old who has reached the age of reason knows this, so should the men with advanced theological degrees. History and complex human relations and Genesis 2 are mutually exclusive. Any theological or social or political argument that uses Adam and Eve or original sin as a reference point should be disregarded.

However, Genesis 1 is not a fake story. What might believers learn from its ancient writers? We might learn that our an-

cestors believed that the world and everything in it is precious because God created everything. Because our world is precious, we should care for everything that is in it to the very best of our ability. We should note that man and woman are equal beings, reflecting the very image of God. Because everything that God made is good, variations on a theme are just as good. Plums become prunes. Brass is an alloy of copper and zinc. All things are possible with a blessing God. Thus, a human being can be gay.

The very first chapter of a book written down and regarded as sacred scripture notes no colossal battle between good and evil and no standards developed by very human stern-eyed church men who believe that they know the mind of the Divine Creator of Heaven and Earth. Instead, there is God’s open-ended and ringing charge of “Let there be” and all of humanity continues their journey towards the divine trying to make sense of the world they see around them as the blessing God nourishes them tenderly on their way. God saw everything that had been made, and indeed, it was very good. Genesis 1:31

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

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## Why Are We So Mad At Each Other?...Or

### Why We Are So Mad At Each Other *continued from page 5*

grown “too soft and feminine” and voted for a male based on that contention. Upsetting the “natural” order – in the home – in the country – in the Church - is not only frightening, it’s disorienting, disturbing, perverse even, a profound unsettling of what has always been. Sound familiar?

Well, we know now what fuels our anger, our moral indignation. Now what should we do with it? The obvious remedy for the fear of upending what has always been is to do just that: keep upending it – in the home – in the nation – and, certainly, in the Church - until the unfamiliar becomes the (even boringly) familiar. Make it normal, natural, accepted and acceptable by taking the chance and doing it. Make the normalization of feminine power a solution fired by our moral indignation. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “The supreme task is to organize and unite people so that their anger becomes a transforming force.”

One final thought: I have a great fear of closed spaces. The remedy for that phobia is called desensitization. You step into the elevator with doors open; you step into the elevator with doors closed for a minute. Over and over you step in and the doors shut and then you step out, but each time you stay longer and longer. Then you stay in as the elevator moves. As you do that again and again, you stay longer, go farther, and the fear lessens. It never totally goes away, but it recedes - first to the background and then to a barely noticeable place buried somewhere within. Meanwhile, now you can go high and now you can go low without fear and dread. Worlds open up (the top of the Empire State building!), and your life is enriched. All of this has nothing to do with moral indignation – but hopefully it can humbly serve as moral inspiration!

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

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## Book Reviews

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### ***Hurting in the Church: A Way Forward for Wounded Catholics, by Father Thomas Berg. Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2017. Paperback, \$15.95. 208 pp.***

*Reviewed by Regina Bannan*

Last fall I was intrigued to see an op-ed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* by the vice rector of the New York seminary who made the kind of suggestions for improving seminary education that people in reform groups like WOC usually propose. If this seems familiar to you, I wrote about it in my blog for *The Table* on January 19. I also reported that I skimmed the book written by Thomas Berg and found his story of the trauma he suffered when his order was subject to a sex abuse scandal very moving. I still do. But I wanted to explore my second impression of the book: that the other stories he tells are mostly about women, and what that might mean.

The women have various hurts. Two feel used when doing church work, one by a pastor (Peggy), the other by volunteers (Amy). One is sexually abused by a pastor for years as a teenager (Jean). One confesses an abortion (Megan) and the priest gets out of the confessional to yell that she is a sinner and going to hell.

Hers is certainly Berg's most compelling narrative because it grapples with the genuine difficulty of forgiveness and how Megan achieves it. That the priest might not have had much time after *Roe v. Wade* to internalize how he was going to react in the confessional is part of Megan's thought process as she grows to validate herself to get to forgiving him. Yet this is a suffering only experienced by women. Berg does not acknowledge the gender dynamics of abortion, yet he is deeply sympathetic to her situation and her suffering. He does not condemn her. Megan is in an all-girls Catholic high school; she only tells her boyfriend; she carries crippling guilt for years after this experience of an abusive priest. All that is the sin to Berg.

In this book, realizing God's mercy is the cure for all this suffering, Berg's and the women's. He deals with the problem of evil – how does a good God allow suffering? – by presenting faith as a grace. Megan discovers “the serenity to *stop trying to make sense of it all* [italics in original].” Secret visits to empty churches brought about the healing she achieves. Megan identifies with Jesus as she looks at the crucifix.??

Miguel, the only man who Berg profiles, was so alienated by those in SNAP who could not understand how he could remain in the church that he formed a new parish organization for survivors, the Maria Goretti Network. I have not been a Maria Goretti fan since I really understood her story, but Berg uses Miguel's experience to shift to his final focus, the need to make the church a better place, starting at every parish, as Miguel wants to do. People who have been hurt can heal if they recognize that we are a church of “earthen vessels,” of flawed individuals.

Now, it's not right to think about degrees of abuse, but I could not help doing that as I read *Hurting in the Church*.

It's not the Grand Jury report, and the solutions Berg presents are spiritual, not psychological.

Jean, the teenager who was fondled by her pastor, keeps the secret for years, remains in the church, and shares her story so priests can learn “how *not* to treat a victim of sexual abuse who opens up to them in counseling or the confessional.” In her fifties, she is told “*You scare me!*” by a priest in her parish, who asks, “what was *your part* in this?” Jean tells Berg that it's taken forty years, but now she prays that her abuser is in heaven. Her “genuine spiritual charity” shocks even Berg. She, too, is healed through grace.

This is what Berg proposes as the “way forward.” While he gives a decent summary of the procedures in the Dallas charter, including how problematic the exclusion of bishops is, he centers in on Pope Francis's “Revolution of Tenderness.” He deals with the hurts of the Amys and the Peggys, and probably a lot of us, who've been wounded over the years of our work in the church. Creating a trusting, caring community in every parish – I'd like to see that, too.

Church injustice towards women is not addressed at all, not surprisingly. Berg is totally a man of the church, and his agonizing over how even to name LGBT people reveals how little he will step away from teaching. Ultimately, “wounded Catholics” will find the message here to be come back to the church to find Jesus. We're trying to do better, and we'll listen to you, but faith is what heals.

**Regina Bannan** blogs for *The Table* for WOC, and taught *History and American, Women's, and Organizational Studies* at Temple University.

**St. Mary Magdalene Community**

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**Epworth United Methodist Church**

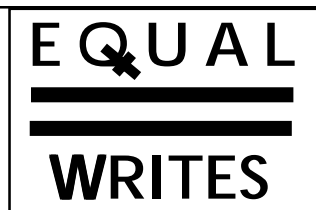
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**Drexel Hill United Methodist**

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## Scripture Reflection

Lent/Spring 2019

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

On the first Sunday of Lent, we read again of Jesus in the desert. This year I was thinking that I would visit Him there, and when He leaves for His public ministry, I will just hide out.

All that is happening around us—the heartbreak of multi-layered abuse, the realization that we actually separated children from their parents, being surrounded by a blizzard of lies, learning that tens of thousands of people still die DAILY from hunger related issues, the realization that war, racism, injustice and inequality are part of our daily lives...all this really does make me want to hide out.

Yet I was reminded this year that Lent, beside all its other meanings, is based on the Old English Word for Spring... warmth, renewal, new life, joy and hope.

Joy and Hope. *Gaudium et Spes*. Alice McDermott in her "Why the Priesthood Needs Women" opinion in *The New York Times* reminds us of this teaching of Vatican II: ...with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.

Hmmm... Hiding out doesn't seem an option when we are called to overcome and eradicate...or when we hear Joan Chittister say we are called to prophetic spirituality...or when we hear Veronica Openibo say we must end silent hypocrisy...or when we hear Martin Luther King say that progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of people willing to be co-workers with God.

Tireless efforts, persistent work ...surely describes our Holy Thursday and Ordination Day Witnesses...beautiful gatherings on glorious days...and you are welcome, you are needed. As Sr. Anne Louise of Pax Christi shared recently: A little sparrow was lying on her back with her "arms and legs" raised, staring at the sky. Her friends asked what she was doing. She answered that she heard the sky was falling and she was going to hold it up! Her friends said they were not sure she could really do that. She replied, "One does what one can!"

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