

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

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

**Holy Thursday**  
**April 9, 2020 11:00 AM**  
STANDING TOGETHER  
FOR WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

**Ordination Day**  
**May 16, 2020 9:00 AM**  
EUCCHARISTIC 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 2020 - JUNE 2020

**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.*

**An Open Invitation to Nelson Perez,  
Archbishop of Philadelphia**

Dear Archbishop Perez,

I would like to welcome you to your new position as 10th Archbishop of Philadelphia. I read with interest the article in the *Inquirer* on February 16, 2020, which described you as "...exactly the kind of leader the church is looking for now" and "[one who] will listen...be present...be himself." These are appealing words to describe a leader of the Archdiocese. Since you are well aware of the complexities the Church is facing in this time you know that being a listener is an essential requisite for anyone attempting to build bridges, to repair the fraught balance between the hierarchy and the laity as well as to offer pastoral care to Church members who suffer. Former parishioners of yours credit you with a "knack for collaboration, ...[a] direct yet understanding style with building bridges between demographics that did not always accept each other's needs."

On this note I wish to introduce you to my beloved group of associates in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, a demographic that has not been understood or accepted in its fullness by the institutional Church. We describe ourselves as women and men rooted in faith, as 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. We believe passionately that including women as full partners in the life of the Church will offer a new path forward, to solve the "man power" shortage as well as of-

*continued on page 2*

**SEPAWOC Announces the 2020 Mary  
Magdalene Award Recipient:  
Dr. Shannen Dee Williams**

*By Maureen Tate*

Many of us in the SEPAWOC Steering Committee were present for the Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference that took place in Philadelphia in 2015. We were particularly moved by keynote speaker, Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, who shared about her experience and research, documenting the history of discrimination against African American women who struggled for acceptance as members of women's religious communities. Her scholarship and writing on the experience of Black Catholics, especially the experience of women in religious life, is a powerful reclaiming of history that many of us are unfamiliar with.

This painful history is one that we believe is an important part of our story as we work to affirm the vocation of women who are called to serve in all ministries of our Church. In presenting this award to Dr. Williams, SEPAWOC wishes to honor her and her invaluable work,

*continued on page 2*



## Letter to Archbishop *continued from page 1*

fering a missing voice and perspective in the discussions that we can only read about in the press. We believe including us at The Table will bring about the massive change and healing the Church needs now.

I read in the article that you heard “a whisper that drew me in and never left” as you describe your call to the priesthood. You know, then, the enormity of that call and how women also could have had such an experience and are waiting to answer their call to God and to service of others.

I would like to tell you about our witness in front of the Cathedral on Holy Thursday, one which we have faithfully held for the past 40 years. We are persistent and prayerful. You might be interested in who we are and why we are there. With that in mind I would love to extend an invitation to dialogue with members of our group. Since you are a self-described “listener” I hope you would be willing to hear on a deeply personal level, our stories, and hopes for the institutional Church. We would meet you anytime, anywhere.

I await your reply. I will be sharing this letter in our current issue of our newsletter, *EqualwRites*. Should you wish to receive a copy I can provide that!

Sincerely,  
**Mary Whelan** Treasurer of SEPAWOC, co-editor of *EqualwRites*.

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### Ordination Day Witness 2020 ...If You Could Only Be There... By *Ellie Hart*

We cordially invite and even humbly implore you to attend our special Mass held outside the Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul in Philadelphia on Saturday, May 16 at 9am, Ordination Day.

If you could come, if there could be a multitude there, think about what that could say about the grace and greatness of the ordination of women? Inside the basilica, only men will be ordained. Outside, a woman, already ordained by her community, will say Mass dedicated to all women called to priesthood and whose answer by the official Church is a persistent and resounding, No.

If you could come, if there could be a multitude there, those entering and leaving the basilica and those passing by would see the Church is still standing and no chasm has opened to swallow any of us up. It's just those who are let in and those left out.

If you could come, if there could be a multitude there, we would rejoice and fill the park with song and prayer. We would receive communion together sharing nurture and nourishment. We could go forth together to change the world for the better.

We will hold our sacred service anyway, but, oh, if you could only come, if there could be a multitude there...

## Mary Magdalene Award *continued from page 1*

championing the call of women of color throughout history, who met rejection and obstacles in realizing their full vocation due to the sin of racism endemic in our society, as well as the Church. We honor her commitment to racial justice and scholarship in documenting the history of women of color within Catholic religious women's communities.

We are very pleased to honor Dr. Williams as this year's Mary Magdalene award recipient. Her research, writing, and speaking not only enables truth telling about this difficult reality in the history of our country and the Church but calls forth accountability, reconciliation, and some measure of healing for communities of women religious, and for all of us who seek justice, and desire renewal of the Church where all are welcome at the table.

Dr. Williams has achieved many noteworthy accomplishments. She is Assistant Professor of History at Villanova University, an historian of the United States, with research and teaching specializations in African-American, women's, religious, and civil rights history. She is at work on her first book, *Subversive Habits: The Untold Stories of Black Catholic Nuns in the United States*, which is under contract with Duke University Press. Based on previously sealed church records and more than 100 oral history interviews, *Subversive Habits* unearths Black sisters' largely hidden efforts in the long struggle against racial segregation and exclusion in the Catholic Church and wider American society.

Her research has been supported by a host of awards, grants, and fellowships, including a 2016-17 Scholar-in-Residence Fellowship at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, a 2011-12 Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Fellowship in Religion and Ethics from the Woodrow Wilson National Foundation, a 2011 Albert J. Beveridge Grant from the American Historical Association, the 2011 Huggins-Quarles Award from the Organization of American Historians, and the 2010 John Tracy Ellis Dissertation Award from the American Catholic Historical Association. In the fall of 2016, Williams began a three-year term as a Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians. In September 2018, Williams received the inaugural Sister Christine Schenk Award for Young Catholic Leadership from Future Church for using history to foster racial justice and reconciliation in religious congregations of women.

Please join us to present the Mary Magdalene Award to Dr. Shannen Dee Williams at our annual Holy Thursday Witness, April 9, 11:00am – noon, across from the Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul, Philadelphia. We will give thanks and celebrate the wonderful woman Dr. Williams has come to know through her research and who are an integral part of our Catholic history.

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

## Miscellaneous Comments on Feminism and Its Impact By Regina Bannan

A while ago, a man at liturgy in our small faith community suggested that women would never use violent tactics. In my inimitable fashion, I immediately shot back that no man can limit the tactics women choose to use, and that such distinctions – about women being better, more peaceful, more dialogic, than men – were false. Something like that.

I came home to pick up the NCR to see the headline, “How would foreign policy change under women?” Oh, no! Chris Herlinger, a male Chris, writes about the meetings of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which some of my friends attended. How can I critique that? The headline writer picked up one question Herlinger asks; another is much more to my liking, “What if a more expressly feminist approach influenced foreign relations?”

Feminism is an ideology that I have taught and identified with for a very long time. I would love to see a “more expressly feminist approach” to anything. While more often articulated by women, feminism as a movement includes women and men, lesbian, gay and straight, and, eventually, people who identify as genderqueer or non-binary. I see feminism as continually becoming more inclusive because at base it is about equality.

I like the Wikipedia definition because it’s broad as well as narrow: “Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men.” The last sentence is narrow and I think alludes to the history of American feminism, especially, and suggests its priorities. The first sentence is broad because it includes politics and culture, ideology and activism – and it says, now, “equality of sexes.” See above for genderqueer and non-binary; trans and bi people are here, too.

The various people quoted in the article – remember? – are mostly sisters and are more focused on peace than on feminism, entirely appropriate at this meeting. They are convinced that women’s experience should be brought to foreign relations because it’s different than men’s. I would say that, as society changes, it may become less different, but these comments articulate issues that emphasize women’s experience in families, with poverty, and as a result of wars they generally don’t fight. The gender lens is important to them.

A similar concern is the focus an article in *The Nation*: Needed: A New Foreign Policy: Time for a Citizen Intervention. These writers may be a bit edgier than the nuns in NCR, but the ideas are not that different, especially in critiquing war. Both men and women write the articles and don’t use a gender lens to explain their positions.

Now for the “miscellaneous commentary”: We know from feminism that no one woman can represent all women, and we would be deluded to believe that they do. More diversity in the women – and really, men – who get, for example, important Vatican jobs would be assured if there were greater transparency in the hiring process. Voices of Faith issued a media release in 2018 recommending “sustainable human resource policies, rather than continue in placing single handpicked women in a reportedly hostile environment.”

Finally, there is the Amazon synod in which including women did not achieve the results we had hoped. The initial communiqué calling for the synod was issued by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America which included 22 cardinals and bishops and 15 women who “joined them for the meeting.” Pope Francis suggested the theme of this plenary: “Women, building block of the church and society in Latin America,” which is better than many of his other statements about women’s role. The communiqué after the meeting was published in the official Vatican newspaper, and said this “isn’t a concession to cultural or media pressure, but the result of a realization that the lack of women in decision-making roles is a defect, an ecclesiological gap and the negative effect of a clerical and macho conception.”

Oh, my. Back then I asked the question: Do you think the inclusion of women (at the invitation and with the support of the Pope, it should be noted) made a difference? Apparently, not enough.

*Regina Bannan is the President of SEPAWOC.*

**St. Mary Magdalene Community**

**Saturday Mass at 5:00pm**

**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**

## Thoughts on Philadelphia's New Archbishop, Nelson Perez

By Eileen DiFranco

Like all Philadelphians, I'd like to welcome Bishop Nelson Perez home. I wish him well as he begins his new job in a city that has long suffered under Archbishop Chaput's scorched earth policies. Come to think of it, the previous three archbishops prior to Chaput were not very warm and fuzzy either, so a little milk of human kindness will go a long way to endearing the new bishop to the people of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

I am, however, under no illusions that Bishop Perez is anything but a company man just like his four predecessors. Even the "National Catholic Reporter" pundits have warned not to expect anything different from our new bishop. This is completely true. If Bishop Perez were cut from a different clerical cloth, he would not be coming here. His is a smiling face, however, and so people will expect better of him. They will be disappointed.

I can just hear some of my readers sigh. Why can't she just be happy for him? Why is she always so negative? Why can't she just make nicey-nice once in a while? What did she expect, the second coming?

Let me put this in a different way. Why can't Catholics expect something different after being in thrall to the imperial church for 1,700 years? Why can't we expect someone who will really take the light of Jesus from under the bushel of authority and tradition and set the city on fire with a faith that makes sense in the 21st century? Because if Perez and the other smiley faced recent Francis appointees continue to follow the old script and insist that the church was the same yesterday as it is today and will be the same in the future, it will just continue to bleed members.

So what Archbishop Perez's smiling face really means for Philadelphia remains hidden from our eyes. We do know that he supports immigrant rights, a step in the right direction for sure. However, we do not know what his stance on LGBTQ people is. Will he go after LGBTQ people as Chaput did? Will he ban them from meeting on church property as Chaput did during the pope's visit in 2015? Will he support the firing of gay teachers or gay music ministers? We don't know.

One thing we know he won't do lest he lose his job is support women priests. For a good many clerics, ordaining women is simply not a matter of justice. It's just the way Jesus made the church, apparently forever even as many "forever" beliefs have been disproven or found unworthy. However, this glib assumption of male privilege bestowed by a male god steamrolls not only women's vocations, but also denies the fact that one half of the population of the church might have something useful to say about the word of God. It establishes a hierarchy of genders, deifying the male sex organs which might be the only thing a cleric might have in common with Jesus. It also makes the Eucharist a magical rite where only cer-

tain men who recite certain words can command the presence of God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Unfortunately, I can imagine some scenarios as the new archbishop tries to explain how he really, really does like women in spite of the fact that alas and alack women can never be priests. Like his mentor, Francis, or a Philadelphia pastor I saw on TV in November, he might mention how "beautiful" women are, how smart, how dedicated and holy. If he does that, I'd rather have Chaput. At least you know where he stands. It's the smiling guys who drive the stakes into your heart.

Perhaps like some of his fellow bishops and Pope Francis, Bishop Perez will appoint a woman here and a woman there, pretending that tinkering around the edges will cure the stinking wound of the patriarchy. However, as with numerous commissions both local and papal have proven, the final say will always lie with "Father."

I've been told by any number of people that I expect too much, that clerics really "can't" say anything about women priests lest they lose their jobs. My response to a group of men who fancy themselves as the image of Jesus is that Jesus didn't lose his job for going outside the pale of his religious faith, he lost his life. The silent acquiescence of clerics to the violence of the patriarchy has deeply harmed women in every area of their lives.

And so Archbishop Perez, I have some advice for you once you are seated on your episcopal chair. Please don't ever comment upon the gifts of women. We already know what we have done and how well we have served the church. Don't trot out your one or two or three female organizational mascots and tell us that you respect women. We are done with all the clerical happy talk, fake sentiments, and phony equality. You and your fellow clerics have made the altar rail into a border wall keeping women out of any real decision making in the church. If you can't or won't change that, please keep your thoughts about women to yourself. Silence is less hurtful than bogus words.

I am waiting patiently to see what lies behind that smiling face but I am not holding my breath. Will it be the all-male power of the miter and the staff or a conscience that rejects the violence of the patriarchy that has infected the church from its very beginning? By your fruits, I will get my answer.

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

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

Editors: **Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan**

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

## THE PARTY LINE

### The Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Take on "What the Laity Can Do To Save the Church"

By *Ellie Hartly*

Meghan Cokeley, Director of the Office for the New Evangelization in the Philadelphia Archdiocese, promised at the end of her evening's lecture "to leave us with a sense of hope and mission and to overcome our sense of helplessness and hopelessness" as we face the challenges within our Church. Peppy, engaging, and professional – self-deprecating and saddened at just the right moments – she seemed the perfect choice for cheerleading the laity. Under her direction (We were not to interrupt, question, or react until she had completed her entire lecture in full), we would finally understand how we, just ordinary people, could save our Church.

The main reason the Church needed saving had to do apparently only with clergy abuse. Meghan ardently and mournfully condemned the abuse. Then she quickly mitigated these reactions with a rationale: "The Church has always had 'vagueness' in its teaching about sexuality resulting in an atmosphere of 'confusion'." Oh, priests who molested were just confused because Church teachings were vague? Her opening promise to us was already beginning to fade away.

Back to saving the Church, she noted two pitfalls we must avoid. The first was "dismissing the hierarchy" since the hierarchical structure was "ordered by God to reflect His order" and a "visible manifestation of God's will for the splendor of the Church". She labeled this the 'Petrine' dimension of the Church.

The second pitfall was "dismissing the laity" – thinking we have no power. The laity was the 'Marian' dimension of the Church, the "holiness that is hidden, quiet, invisible, reflecting the Church's intimate unity with God.

As we laity digested news of our having obviously female attributes, hiddenness, quiet, invisibility, Meghan excitedly delivered the good news! The two dimensions are not in conflict but in relationship with each other! The Marian even has primacy since the Petrine is there to serve it! And so we, the laity, can use and increase our power in the Church by becoming more Holy!!

And here are the tools to increase our Holiness (and thus save the Church)

#### •Prayer

•**Redemptive suffering** (in which we offer our suffering up to Jesus on the cross and, according to Meghan, "thereby oust the Devil – for Satan is very much at work in the world – with the blood of our martyrdom becoming the seeds of change.")

•**Forgiveness** Megan again: "Satan loves it when we don't forgive, and so we must combat the toxins of the world and bring grace to the wounds or dark places."

We kind of knew the above drill. We'd heard it most of our Catholic lives. The next tool, however, of which I had never heard, and the one that scared at least some of

us the most was:

•**Sensus Fidei** This the instinct for truth given to all Catholics by their Catholic baptism (This, Meghan and a nun in the audience explained, comes from God to Catholics from the beginning and grows with our increasing holiness. It brings to us infallibility of judgement. It is also what holds up the Church. Because of Sensus Fidei, the Church cannot fail.)

And, of course, we maintain our Sensus Fidei by:

- Fully participating in the Church and listening to the word of God
- Adhering to the Magisterium
- Maintaining holiness
- Seeking the edification of the Church

We have our own internal compass for life that will preserve the integrity of the Church, too.

With all that assuredness, there were, of course, cautions. To save the Church, we are not to read, listen, question, challenge, discern. In fact, Meghan demanded: "Turn off the media. You don't need to know all the works of Satan in the world. Trust your Father." And do not, whatever you do, engage in protest or actions. Fiercely, she emphasized: Actions will not get us there, only prayer.

Finally, we received the "party line" (or Kool Aid if you prefer to see it that way). We are to:

- Most importantly, **pray the Rosary.**
- Demonstrate** fidelity as our mission by going to Mass every Sunday and all Holy Days, to confession, receive the sacraments (my addition, not hers: except, ladies, Holy Orders), stay loyal to the priests and to fighting sin.
- Recommit** to the Lay Apostolate: If you have a call, say "yes" (me again: unless you are a woman with a call to Holy Orders).
- Forgive** and offer up your sufferings to God.

Then there were the final two:

"**Evangelize,**" she said. "Participate with God in using the works of Satan for his (I assume she meant God's, not Satan's) own good ends. And then she added this horrid sentence: "Perhaps (Did she say, 'perhaps'? I'm not sure. It's not in the notes I was taking.) the sex abuse scandal was a good thing in that it forced us to set our gaze on Christ again."

And, as she showed us a painting of Jesus asleep in the bow of the boat on raging waters, this:

**Curl up next to Jesus in the boat. Close your eyes.** Go to sleep next to Jesus in life's storms.

Turn off, tune out, pray and it will all go away. These are the ways our Church recommends we, the ever so powerful laity, save it? No wonder we stand outside the cathedrals and churches in powerful witness, and, yes, prayer, at what we need to see inside in order, not only to save our Church, but ourselves.

*Ellie Hartly* is co-editor of EqualwRites.

## We Spoke Out and We Should be Proud!

*In Response to the Outcome of the Amazon Synod, here is the International Press Release You as part of WOC Endorsed*

Inspired by Amazonia women, we take on responsibility – statement from global Catholic women, Rome, 13 February 2020:

Yesterday the post-synodal exhortation “Querida Amazonia” was published. With great sensitivity, it discussed the problems of poverty, exploitation, cultural colonization, migration and environmental degradation the Amazonia region is currently facing. It encouraged dialogue and appreciation of the unique contribution of the indigenous peoples to the shape of the universal Church.

What was most striking from the exhortation was that it did not resolve the great dilemmas brought to the Vatican by the preparatory document to the Synod. Instead, it seemed this document served as a further withdrawal from any concrete or bold proposals for reform and to bring about solutions to the pressing issues the Amazonia region are facing. The Pope recommended reading the final document of the Synod but did not settle the questions and open pastoral suggestions contained therein. “Querida Amazonia” proposed no concrete answers or solutions to those questions and requests.

One of the key issues brought to the Vatican by the Amazon Church was the formal recognition of women’s ministry and the possible sacramental support for their dedicated service in the Church. However, instead of concrete new proposals and solutions, there were a mere five paragraphs entitled “The strength and gift of women”.

In this section, the Pope writes about the great work, often indispensable, that women do in the Amazon Church, although that work is not formally recognized. Sadly, this appreciation of the role of women not only perpetuates but reinforces the exclusive tradition of the Church’s designation of a “special” place for women. This tradition describes women in a romanticized and idealized way, suggesting their role is in some way exceptional and set apart from or above and beyond the human norm. As a consequence, the basic form, the subject of Christian anthropology and moral theology, is man, and woman continues to be assigned a “special”, unique task, which does not include the diversity, freedom and charisms reserved for the “basic” version.

The shocking expression of this mentality is outlined in point 101 of the exhortation. The Pope writes that God has shown God’s power and love through two human faces: Christ and Mary. By putting them side by side, he is suggesting that men are similar to the former (Christ) and women to the latter (Mary). This takes away from the teaching that both woman and man are created in the image of God and thus both are, can and should be “Alter Christus”.

The theology behind this phrase is dangerous because it serves to exclude women from access to the full means of salvation. For there is an important ontological differ-

ence between Jesus and Mary – even though they are both human, Jesus is also God. The basis of the Christian faith is the conviction that Christ adopted human nature inclusively, not male nature exclusively, and that thanks to this, every human being can be saved and is indeed divinized in Christ.

So, if women are only being compared to the likeness of Mary, then why are women baptized in the name of Christ? Why at baptism are they called to be priestly, prophetic and royal which is a share in Christ’s own priestly, prophetic and royal ministry? How should they understand the term “Imitatio Christi”, which is so fundamental to any Christian spirituality? Above all, on what basis are they to be saved if they do not share the likeness of Christ?

At the same time, there remains, of course, the practical question of what this “characteristic power” is that women in the Church have. The document seems to suggest that it consists in imitating Mary’s motherhood. How should this be understood? How should it be manifested concretely for the community of believers? If we are to take it seriously, is the evaluation and thus validity of our vocations and charisms to be verified only by their similarity to motherhood?

Moreover, the document offers a compelling vision of an inculturated priesthood suffused by the values of pastoral care. But surely, if clericalism is a dysfunctional aspect of the contemporary priesthood and inculturation offers a new and more diverse understanding of what it means to be a priest, then the ordination of women with

*continued on page 7*

### TREASURER’S REPORT

Calendar Year 2019

Beginning balance (1-1-19)	\$ 2059.60
Revenues	
Donations	9286.00
Amazon Smile	29.20
Ad revenue	75.00
Total Revenues	9490.20
Beginning Balance + Revenues	11,449.80
Expenses	
Printing newsletter	5,890.00
Postage, permits, mailbox rental	1,077.00
Bank fees	15.00
Purchase of checks	19.99
Memberships (COR, WAC, WC-C)	175.00
Marie Collins tour	500.00
Website Domain fee	180.00
Kickstarter donation	100.00
Total Expenses	7956.99
Ending Balance (12-31-19)	3492.81
Prepared by Mary Whelan, Treasurer	

**Please support SEPAWOC**

**Because of your generosity we are able to publish *EqualwRites* and continue our other activities. Can we count on you to help us carry on our mission? No donation is too small—or too large!**

## **WOC'S First Two United Nation Events**

We were so proud when the United Nations granted WOC Consultative Status to its Economic and Social Council. It was an especially significant achievement for WOC because we now have an essential role in advocating for women's equality and a platform to influence decision makers at the highest levels.

As the initial WOC statement promised: "We will have new opportunities to engage with global faith-based organizations working for women's rights, and continue our witness as Catholics who uphold the values of social justice, radical inclusion and feminist theology for a more just Church and world."

Having consultative status also allowed us to participate in negotiations and meetings, and to hold side events at the U.N., such as at the Commission on the Status of Women meetings. Taking this opportunity seriously, WOC scheduled two parallel events in March 2020. WOC described their focus as "lifting up the connection between women's ordination and women's rights worldwide, and sharing the groundbreaking work of our Escuchando a Las Mujeres initiative.":

*Challenging Institutional Catholicism Through Latinx Listening Sessions and Empowerment* offered on March 10.

*Women's Exclusion from Catholic Leadership Threatens Human Rights* presented on March 11 with our own Marian Ronan as featured panelist.

SEPAWOC representatives will present our reactions in the July issue.

## **We Spoke Out and We Should be Proud!**

*continued from page 6*

all the qualities that Pope Francis attributes to them would be the best possible antidote to the clerical mindset?

Most of the document speaks with great respect and maturity about the indigenous people of the Amazon, about their needs and concerns. It encourages the global Church to listen to their opinions and their stories with sensitivity and attention. What is striking is the contrast with which women are treated in the very same document – their voices have so clearly not been heard, they are not equal partners for shaping the future of the Church.

In spite of this clearly excluding message we, women from Catholic Women's Council will not give up our hopes and vocations. Inspired by the example of our Amazonian sisters in faith, and in imitation of the Syrophenician woman who persisted despite Jesus' initial rebuff (Mark 7:25-30), we take responsibility for our Church into our hands. United we will work for the Church that incarnates the equality and dignity we find in the Gospel and that teaches us to follow Christ whoever we are.

AGENDA Forum katholischer Theologinnen e.V., Catholic Women Speak, Donne per la Chiesa, FrauenKirche Zentralschweiz, Friends of Catholic Women's Ordination, Future Church In Bona Fide, KDFB, KDFB – Bundesverband, Katholische Frauengemeinschaft Deutschlands (kfd), Voices of Faith, We Are Church Ireland, Women and the Australian Church (WATAC), Women's Ordination Conference

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in the Roman Catholic tradition which  
explore Scripture and contemporary readings.

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or write P.O. Box 353, Abington, PA 19001

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## Book Reviews

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### **Living When Everything Changed: My Life in Academia, By Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, Rutgers University Press, 2019. 276pp. \$29.95.**

*Reviewed by Maureen Tate*

The author of *Living When Everything Changed: My Life in Academia* readily acknowledges she drew inspiration for the title from a book by New York Times columnist, Gail Collins, titled: *When Everything Changed*. I had read the Collins book and was intrigued that someone would bring a similar lens to a particular profession and institutional context. Tetreault is particularly suited to address change within the arena of higher education, having worked as a professor, researcher, dean, and provost in several institutions.

Tetreault opens the memoir as she begins her new life as a college professor and shifts quickly back in time to reflect on biographical details of family ancestry and childhood in rural Nebraska, and later, Kansas, that shaped her journey. She paints a vivid picture of grandparents, parents, and extended family dealing with circumstances of rural poverty and isolation, the Depression, farm failure, military service, and limited access to education and employment. She grew up in a very Catholic world, part of an Irish Mission parish, a minority community in an otherwise Protestant state. In fact, she states that “being Catholic defined our family.”

Many of us can relate to the large influence of the Church on Catholics just half a century ago, especially for women and girls. Although younger than the author by 15 years, I clearly remember the levels of judgement, control, and shame we were regularly subjected to. We experienced how the Church both supported, and imposed strictures on, everyday family and community life, education, leisure, work, ritual, and personal relationships. However painful to recall, it is helpful now and again to be reminded of such a time when girls were taught to expect limited prospects and compulsively question their self-worth and moral virtue. It is no wonder that the “good news” of the gospel rarely resonated when the message we internalized was one of sacrifice, guilt, and shame.

The author did not question going to a Catholic college and her world expanded only slightly upon entering a small women’s Benedictine college, Mount St. Scholastica, in Atchison, Kansas. In an irony Tetreault acknowledges at the very end of the memoir, she is deeply inspired by an opening address by one of the Sisters which promised something more than a good education and the cultural and social opportunities of college life. Rather, students were offered “the best of the liberal arts tradition; ... We hold out to each of you the promise of becoming a whole man. ... A whole man ... I was being offered something bigger than myself, something beyond the material, something beyond college as a place to find a husband – my first imagining of an examined life.” This concept remains an inspiration to the author, despite the obvious linguistic irony. Some fifty years later, she finds herself looking back, acknowledging setbacks and challenges, but is grateful. “Life has brought me

things I couldn’t have imagined – the privilege of leading an examined life in higher education and being an essential part of teams that imagined a university of the twenty-first century”.

Post-graduation, and before embarking on a career in academia, the author is determined to avoid the trap of the typical women’s profession, “teacher”. She takes a variety of clerical positions before she signs up as an Extension Lay Volunteer, an opportunity for lay men and women to work in rural Catholic communities as catechists, nurses, outreach workers and support personnel for remote parishes. It is a stimulating period for the author. She is exposed to a more vibrant model of Church, one that is undergoing change and is engaged in the community. She develops close and collegial relationships with priests who are inspired by Vatican II and open to women’s lay participation.

When Tetreault finally lands as a secretary at the University of Chicago’s Catholic student center, she meets her future husband and takes up with a group of Catholic intellectuals who want to explore big ideas, questions of the day, and what it means to be Catholic and an intellectual. Although she never finds her voice in this intimidating group, it is formative. The author values her freedom and intellectual life and, considering a possibility she may never marry, feels an imperative to have a profession, anything but teaching. Of course, life intervened and before long she had her MAT from the University of Chicago and found herself teaching high school on Chicago’s South Side.

With greater freedom of thought post Vatican II, her intellectual circle shifts its focus to humanism. By the time the author gives birth to their only child, she and her husband have grown away from the church and are never part of a Catholic congregation again. The separation appears quite final as we never hear mention of religion going forward.

The family relocates to Boston and the years of early parenting are challenging and isolating. Tetreault pushes herself out and into new endeavors, including, by necessity, founding a local day care center. The women’s movement is well underway and she is exposed to women’s groups, marches, and feminist perspectives, including the “politics of housework”. This becomes a practical as well as intellectual interest that influences their family life going forward. It is at this point that the author turns to the research and writing that results in her first publication and launches her career as an academician.

The strengths of this memoir lie in the author’s honesty about her ambition as well as her insecurities. We follow her interior and outward struggle as she advocates for

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## Book Reviews

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continued from page 9

herself and her career while navigating a minefield of departmental territorialism, faculty egos, institutional hierarchy, cultural norms, and power dynamics, as well as emerging pressures of gender and race diversity in the world of higher education. We get a very up close and personal look at the very insular world of higher education. The author's career spans more than three decades in teaching and academic administration in several institutions where patterns of human and institutional dynamics are repeated and entrenched.

The content and style of *Living When Everything Changed* is very anecdotal. The author chronicles specific meetings, social encounters, professional consultations, scholarly endeavors, and family experiences in what I feel is excessive detail. Times, places, names and physical descriptions are liberally documented. Although feminists have long affirmed that the personal is political, and that scholarship rooted in personal experience is valid, I found the level of detail exhaustive and a distraction.

Tetreault teases the reader with hints of her scholarship in gender theory. Occasionally, she questions whether gender played a role in not being hired, or being fired, or in organizational dynamics within the academy. She mentions friendships and encounters with other women in higher education or scholars in feminist studies. She is asked to address conferences on gender issues. She has published and is working on several books: *Women in America: Half of History*; *The Feminist Classroom: Dynamics of Gender, Race, and Privilege*; and *Privilege and Diversity in the Academy*. However, the reader will experience frustration that these references are sprinkled throughout, almost as an aside.

At times, it seems the author is leading a double life in feminist circles although the reader does not have access to this dimension of Tetreault's life. Throughout the memoir, she affirms the value of learning over teaching and it is clear she is learning a great deal from her research and writing with colleagues on issues of gender and diversity. However, in the end, she admits that she could not jeopardize her positions within the academy by expressing what she was learning. This is an incredibly honest admission and many of us can sympathize with this dilemma. Nevertheless, it is disappointing, in this telling, that more of what the author learned is not available to the reader.

I found myself constantly looking for more conclusive analysis informed by Tetreault's scholarship in gender theory. Did her work in gender studies inform principles of leadership that she tried to implement within the academy? It was only in the last six pages that the author raises the prospect that feminist thinking might inform the world of academia. She notes feminist thinker, Adrienne Rich's "idea of imagining and working toward a woman-centered university and how things might be different if women were in positions of responsibility and authority". However, Tetreault concludes that this is "in-

spirational in theory but complex when put into practice". She believed her administrative responsibilities often required expediency of silence on gender issues in order to move plans forward or avoid alienation. She concludes that gender analysis is insufficient in addressing issues of race and privilege. Many would agree. However, the reader might have expected more explication. Certainly those of us who imagine a more woman-centered church are interested in these questions.

I have no doubt that those working in institutions of higher learning, will resonate with many of the author's detailed experiences navigating university cultures and departmental politics. Nevertheless, as someone currently outside the arena of academia, I found it challenging to relate to this memoir. While I was impressed with the trajectory of the author from traditional Catholic girlhood to accomplished educator, scholar and administrator, I often felt outside the circle of intended readership. Perhaps those who are or have been in the world of academia may resonate more readily with the author's narrative and purpose.

**Maureen Tate** is a frequent contributor to EqualWRites.

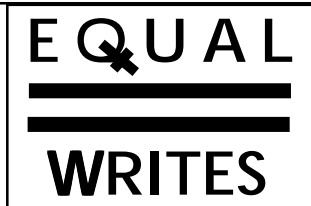


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## **Pentecost 2020 Come, Holy Spirit...**

*By Judith Heffernan, M.Div.*

In *The Holocaust* by Nora Levin I learned that of the six million Jews who were killed, one and a half million were children under 16 years of age. HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED? Was it a feeling of helplessness within good people - a feeling they could not do anything? I have watched cable news and listened to discussions most afternoons and late nights for over two months and I believe we are in a tsunami of helplessness. My brain feels as if it is knocking on my skull, my words are run-on sentences, my heart aches.

As an antidote, I went to Peace and Justice Day at Sacred Heart Church in Camden. Our welcome began with a reminder of Daniel Berrigan's reflection: You CAN do something, and the difference between doing something and doing nothing is everything!

The opening keynoters were Sister Ardeth Platte and Sister Carol Gilbert. Through the years I was inspired by

their words and actions (They spent 15 years in 40 different prisons for multiple peace actions). To meet them, to hear them in person was a most beautiful experience. They are gentle, kind, focused, dedicated, courageous teachers of the peace Jesus proclaimed. They spoke about the walls at our borders and the walls of our hearts, the connection of violence to the destruction of Mother Earth and Her creatures. They also spoke about hope and her wild possibilities- that what we do matters and NOW is the time to act.

Hope...Although I am so disappointed in the Pope's Querida Amazonia summary and I heartily affirm WOC's own dear Kate McElwee's statements, I do appreciate the reflection of Francis that we need courageous openness to the Spirit Who is always able to create something new...let us be fearless...

Let us be fearless on Holy Thursday and Ordination Day and witness together for truth, justice and equality in the Church, in our country, and in the world...Come, Holy Spirit.

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