
EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
WRITES	<i>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.</i>

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MARCH 2021 - JUNE 2021

HOLY THURSDAY WITNESS
11 AM on APRIL 1, 2021

Across from the Basilica of Sts. Peter & Paul
18th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
(In consideration of each other during the
pandemic, the witness will be silent.
Please wear a mask and maintain
social distancing but DO JOIN US!)

ORDINATION DAY MASS
9 AM on MAY 15, 2021

(Said by a Woman Priest)
Across from the Basilica of Sts. Peter & Paul
18th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
(Again, please wear a mask and plan to
social distance.
We look forward to being with you.)

Announcing Our Mary Magdalene Award
Winners for 2021:

Marianne and Tom Tucker

In applauding our choice of Marianne and Tom Tucker to receive our 2021 Mary Magdalene Award, Judy Heffernan reminded us of what their long-time friend, Roberta Brunner (who throughout the years has done behind-the-scenes work for SEPAWOC), always says of Marianne and Tom: They are her heroes because they followed their hearts and their call when both left their more lucrative careers (which were good works, too) to go into music and puppetry full time for the enrichment and joy for God's children of all ages!

She pointed out how this decision also freed them to be available to a myriad of people and causes that needed them and how they always found a way to be of service. We at WOC and SEPAWOC have been immeasurably blessed by their including in their good works, service to us as individuals, as a group, and as an organization. We are, therefore, most honored and proud to present this year's Mary Magdalene Award to Marianne and Tom.

For literally decades now, the Tuckers have immersed themselves in SEPAWOC's work to ensure women and all genders are fully included as leaders and ordained priests in the Catholic Church. They have, for many years, served as faithful members of the SEPAWOC Core Committee helping to co-ordinate and facilitate special events, Holy Thursday and Ordination Day witnesses, *EqualwRites* publications, and publicity. Marianne has

designed and maintains the SEPAWOC website, keeping it up to date and relevant; Tom diligently records and maintains our meetings' minutes, designs our awards and publicity releases.

All these contributions are invaluable, but there is also one very special gift they bring to us: music. Marianne and Tom perform music in a wide variety of venues and bring delightful puppet theatre to adults and children at schools, fairs, and fetes. They have toured the Northeast extensively, presenting folk and contemporary music, and their own original compositions.

Fortunately, SEPAWOC has been a major beneficiary of their talent and devotion. Marianne and Tom bring music to our meetings, our retreats, our small Eucharistic communities and larger public events, and especially to our Holy Thursday witnesses. They inspire us to sing loudly, joyfully, and soulfully as we stand in front of the Basilica proclaiming in song to the gathering of male priests and other parishioners inside, "Ordain Women Now". They lead us in All Are Welcome and We Shall Not Be Moved, in the Prayer of Saint Francis and We Shall Overcome. They bring us - and all who hear them - spirit and Spirit. They show us how much we need - and need to celebrate - our artists and how critical they are to our lives.

And so, we celebrate artists Marianne and Tom Tucker with the 2021 Mary Magdalene Award which will be officially presented at the St. Mary Magdalene's Community gathering on Zoom or outside on July 18, 2021. All are welcome! Our next issue will have more details, but we can tell you now, there will be music!

Unmasking the Unmasked By Eileen DiFranco

Who are those unmasked men? You see them at Trump rallies. You see them in the House of Representatives. You see them at biker rallies and bars. But perhaps you don't expect to see them in church? I know I don't, especially within the confines of an institution that has declared itself to be unequivocally "pro-life."

But there they are. The unmasked clerics are in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul telling people to remove their masks as they approach the altar to receive communion. They are in Delaware County and in Bucks County at St. Andrew's where the entire clerical staff came down with Covid in January. The Sunday before they got sick, the lot of them were distributing communion to their parishioners. These churchmen are brazen enough to baptize babies without wearing masks. So much for being pro-life after birth.

The clerics even go without masks in the administration building. Two members of SEPAWOC were shocked when they were received at the archdiocesan office by a maskless Archbishop and his maskless secretary.

In late January, the Archbishop - who must try the patience of an Almighty who has sent us Dr. Fauci, a Catholic for God's sake - removed the Jesuit pastor of Old St. Joseph's Parish for having the common sense and loving kindness to refuse to open his church during a pandemic which has killed over 450,000 post-natal souls.

I recently spoke with a nurse who told me that the four patients she cared for one Saturday in early February were all dead by Sunday. Her hospital runs five codes a day where pre-Covid there might have been five codes a year. This, apparently, is lost on too many churchmen in the Philadelphia Archdiocese who are led by an Archbishop who is, apparently, willing to risk a catastrophe as the more infectious Covid variants make their way into the Delaware Valley.

The sad part of the story is that vulnerable people willingly march up to communion each week thinking that a potential Covid-spreading father knows best. It should be evident that the pro-life churchmen know but don't care.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a registered nurse, Roman Catholic Womanpriest, author, and member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee.

St. Mary Magdalene Community

Sunday Zoom Mass at 9:00 a.m.

For more information: www.smmcommunity.org

TREASURER'S REPORT SEPAWOC Financial Statement

Calendar Year 2020

Beginning balance (1-1-2020)	\$3492.81
Revenues	
Donations	9253.01
Amazon Smile	20.61
Total income	9273.62
Beginning Balance + Revenue	12,766.43
Expenses	
Printing newsletter	7415.00
Website fee	99.50
Postage, permits, mailbox rental	596.00
Bank fees	38.00
Memberships (COR, WOC, WC-C)	175.00
Ad Irish Edition	80.00
WOC conference sponsorship	515.00
FutureChurch ad	100.00
Total Expenses	9018.50
Ending Balance (12-31-20)	\$3747.93

Prepared by Mary Whelan, Treasurer

Please Contribute

Your ongoing generosity permits us to continue our mission. As you can see from the annual report, we publish *EqualwRites* as well as participate in activities with other organizations that promote our common ideals.

If you would like to join with us in this important work please send donations to our mail box (SEPAWOC, P.O. Box 52046, Philadelphia, PA 19115). There is now a link for PayPal at our website sepawoc.org. And if you designate SEPAWOC as your charity through AmazonSmile we will receive donations. We look forward to another fruitful year—no gift is too small or too large!

SEPAWOC Engages with Archbishop Pérez

EqualwRites co-editors, Mary Whelan and Ellie Harty, interviewed two of our SEPAWOC members, Maureen Tate and Regina Bannan, who met in person with the Archbishop of Philadelphia in January.

Mary begins by explaining how it came about: In March, 2020, I wrote a letter to Archbishop Pérez, who had been recently installed as Archbishop in Philadelphia. We published that letter in the March issue of *EqualwRites*. My intention was to introduce SEPAWOC and to make him aware of our Holy Thursday witness in front of the Cathedral. It is to be noted that I sent similar letters to Cardinal Bevilacqua and Archbishop Chaput when they were sent to Philadelphia but Archbishop Pérez was the first to acknowledge my greeting, even extending an invitation to meet with him.

In my letter I wrote that his reputation was that of being a listener, having a “style with building bridges between demographics that did not always accept each other’s needs.” I also referenced an article where he revealed that he had heard “a whisper that drew me in and never left”, describing his call to the priesthood. I wondered how women who had heard the same call were to respond. Mostly, I wanted him to meet with us, to put faces on the women seeking justice, equality and full partnership in ministry.

In his response to me he cautioned that he would “not want to give...any false hope that I would change or compromise the Church’s constant Tradition. I will not meet with you to discuss the topic of women’s ordination.” I did not expect him to change his mind, or alter his opinion, but did hope that he would be an engaged, maybe curious listener.

Over the months at our core meetings we deliberately and prayerfully pondered this opportunity to meet with a church official, which had not happened before in Philadelphia. Due to the Coronavirus the meeting was finally scheduled on January 14th with Regina Bannan and Maureen Tate representing SEPAWOC.

Ellie will now write about the content of the meeting and the experiences.

Regina and Maureen each clearly defined their purpose in meeting with the Archbishop on behalf of themselves as individuals and SEPAWOC as a group: They were there to open lines of communication; to dispel fears and misunderstanding about our position on women’s leadership and ordination; and to clarify that our mission was not to tear anything down but to build a more vibrant Church. They also wanted to tell their personal stories as Catholic women and to describe the roadblocks and obstacles they had encountered in the institutional Catholic Church that had caused them to seek authenticity elsewhere.

Although cordial and pleasant, the Archbishop did greet

them unmasked and stayed that way throughout the meeting. Both women were masked, sat at appropriate distances from him, but admitted being surprised and a bit shaken by this negligence by someone who proclaims himself a “shepherd” protecting the welfare of his “flock”. Since, as Maureen noted later, they refused to be considered sheep in any case, they, with their masks, did the protecting of both him and themselves.

Maureen’s Story

Maureen grew up in what she described as a “typical Philadelphia Catholic family” in which Church was not always a predominant presence but which she saw come alive for her especially in her high school years in movements led by priests and nuns inspired by Vatican II and the War on Poverty. She attended Catholic schools and enthusiastically participated in the Archdiocesan Community Service Corps (CSC) a high school program of the Archdiocesan Youth Department, which at the time reflected a Church dedicated to bringing together youth in the kind of service and faith activities she saw as reflecting the future of the Catholic Church. She quickly took on leadership roles, often serving as a youth spokesperson to church leadership. She also gained her own formative leadership training in prayer and liturgy and led programs on combining faith and service.

In her college years, the Women’s Movement made its great impact, and Maureen eagerly became involved. It all seemed to fit together. “I never thought the Church would not ordain women,” she told the Archbishop since she had known so many women who felt called, studied, and then enrolled in at Divinity schools.

She also wanted him to know, later as a married working woman and mother: “I did everything you were supposed to do in parish life.” The whole family was faithful, active, and very involved. She provided leadership for parish religious education programs, her children studied for and received sacraments, and participated in religious and social justice initiatives inside and outside the Church. She became profoundly discouraged, however, by the Catholic Church’s persistent stance on women, especially when she saw its impact on her own family. Most of her life she had thought things were opening up but found they were actually closing down. Today, of her four children, all formed in the faith, only her son feels comfortable attending the institutional Church.

She stressed to the Archbishop that she sees the issue broader and deeper than women’s ordination, that the Church needs women’s gifts in all areas. Issues of gender affect how women view themselves and gain a sense of self-worth. She offered him a question to ponder: “Can you imagine my eight year old granddaughter seeing and hearing that her brothers can image God and she cannot? Can you imagine how painful that is for her grandmother?” (He did not respond or react.) She pointed out that the Church’s language emphasized an image of God as a white male, which has led to oppression of women as well as people of color. She continued to stress that these issues, as well as the sex abuse scandal, were why so many of her peers and their children have left the Church.

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SEPAWOC Engages with Archbishop Pérez

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(He responded only to the sex abuse, dismissing it as not wide-spread in the Church as the media suggests and countering that most sex abuse occurs in families.)

Regina's Story

Regina also grew up in a Catholic family in New Jersey but with a more liberal twist. She told the Archbishop her memory of her father's coming home from a Catholic college class on Scripture in the 1950's singing "It ain't necessarily so...!" Liturgy was important, he seemed to say, but stay open. And she did. She chose a Catholic women's college and found it confirmed her liberal tendencies, thanks in no small part to Vatican II. She was one of the students, for example, who participated in designing the liturgy when President Kennedy was killed and found it empowering. In fact, she attributed her whole time at St. Elizabeth's as sparking and enhancing her interest in both liturgy and social justice activism. In the turbulent and often dangerous 1960's, she traveled to Louisiana to help with religious education in Catholic schools and to participate in Black voter registration. At Brown University, she continued to be very involved in the progressive Catholic community, once again especially loving organizing liturgies.

After marrying and moving to Vermont, she found a parish that further encouraged and enhanced her involvement in liturgy and social justice. When she later moved to the Philadelphia area, she took some time in searching out meaningful liturgical experiences with strong community involvement. That is how she found the Community of the Christian Spirit. Initially gathered by the Medical Mission Sisters to train lay people to take back to their parishes, the community soon found they preferred to stay together as their own entity. Initially, local diocesan and order priests were celebrants, but, as some of them married, the community welcomed them to continue to preside.

One very active member, Judy Heffernan, had earned a Masters in Divinity from a Catholic seminary and had wanted to be a priest since she was six years old. "Can't we ordain her?" some CCS members asked. After carefully studying the practices of the early Church, Regina emphasized to the Archbishop, the community did very joyfully ordain Judy. She has faithfully been saying Mass and serving the community for over forty years.

Reactions

Both women concurred that the Archbishop seemed, at best, disengaged during the meeting. He stated at the beginning, "I will hear anyone". They soon discovered his actually listening and expressing reaction or even curiosity was another matter. On the positive side, they conceded, he was never angry or belittling; he did not lecture, reprimand, nor try to re-educate them. There was simply no reciprocity. He made it clear by his posture and the flatness of the conversation that he was not there

as himself but in his role as representative of the Church and upholder of its views. It was as if, according to Maureen, by this pose he was saying, "I will hear you since you are here, but what you have to say will not affect me," and Regina agreed that he seemed untouched by their personal stories.

He was, after all, always in the superior position. He saw the two of them as needing to share when he had no such need or interest. "You think you have the answers," he said at one point, "and those over there think they have the answers. The Church has withstood it all and worse so that must be where the Spirit resides." Regina remarked how fond he seemed of the metaphor of the Church as a giant cruise ship which takes a long, slow time to change direction. The irony of Church as luxury liner did not escape either her or Maureen.

In a word, their overall reaction was disappointment. There had been no affirmation of how they had intentionally tried to be Church, no recognition of their heart-break in severing so many ties with an institution they had once loved, no attempt to reach out and seek common ground to go forward. Yet Regina felt disappointed in herself, that she had asked no questions to get to know the Archbishop as a person except about their shared New Jersey roots. She was surprised that she had been awed by the office and fearful of the possible consequences of their meeting.

Yet they both believed the experience had been worthwhile. Just the fact that he had been willing to meet with them at all was a positive step. If nothing else, they had been able to show him that they – and, thus, the members of the organization they represented – were not wild radicals but calm, reasonable, mature, and faith-filled women who had, because of their gender, a very difference experience of Church than he had.

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A Publication of SEPAWOC

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**“Taking Out the Saints”:
Preview of a Forthcoming Book
By (*its author*) Eileen DiFranco**

This is how I learned American history. The British were oppressors. America revolted and fought a war for freedom. The Founding Fathers wrote a document declaring that all men are created equal. Then they wrote another one that said Americans were entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Black people were once slaves. But then they were freed by the Civil War. Then women got the right to vote. And everything is just fine now.

This is how I learned about the Catholic faith. God sent Jesus to earth to start a new church. God the Father needed his son to die to redeem the world from the sin of Adam and Eve. Before Jesus died, he had a Last Supper where he instituted the Eucharist and made the twelve apostles priests who ran the new church. This was God’s plan from the creation of the world. If you didn’t believe this, you would go to hell for all eternity. You will be OK as long as you do what the church tells you to do.

Both these stories cover up a multitude of errors and a whole host of sins. The company line has made both institutions great even as the arbiters of the foundational stories spun fantastical webs of deception, erecting an edifice of alternate, white-washed facts to cover up a difficult, often problematic history. In this framework of triumphalism, the truth became a commodity to prop up the idea that both entities are part of a divine plan put into place at the foundation of the world. Bad stuff got covered up, excused, re-interpreted, or omitted because it didn’t contribute to the narrative of triumph.

Within this allegedly divine plan, all things are possible, necessary, and acceptable; the kidnapping of Joseph, the rapes of Hagar, Zilpha, Bildah, and Bathsheba, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the torture and execution of Jesus, colonialism, the use of slave labor to build America, the attempted extermination of American indigenous people, the nuclear arms race, endless wars against the people of other countries. Each story is less a horror and more a teachable moment, a stepping stone, the collateral damage necessary because it built our current way of life and established the Christian faith and the American way of life. Supporters of the status quo look around at what we got; cell phones, cable TV, cruise ships, mega churches praising God, and look back at the losses of history as a necessary evil that got us to the enviable place where we are now.

Those who pointed out that there might have been other, better ways across the centuries were labeled as heretics or traitors to both church and state. Their books were burned; they were burned at the stake; they were followed by the FBI or put on a list of bad hombres, arrested, and harassed. Now they get anonymous death threats from empowered trolls on emails and Facebook—all in the name of preserving the status quo which works for a very small number of people.

In my upcoming book, “Taking Out the Saints”, I lift up

the many people who lived when atrocities were being committed largely in the name of God, and said, “No,” and often paid for it with their lives. While the ashes of the prophets were being thrown into the respective waters of their native cities, their critics and persecutors, indeed their murderers, were designated as Saints of the Church. Many of those who were sainted for their love of God as highlighted in their religious tomes, their prayers, and their ascetic practices were also involved in riling up the State to enforce their religious beliefs. Saints like Bernard of Clairvaux preached a crusade that killed tens of thousands of people. Saints like Augustine enlisted the military might of the Roman Empire to force his religious ideals upon sects like the Donatists who simply had another idea of how to be church. Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria were thugs who initiated the “Jesus Wars” that killed more of their fellow Christians than did the Roman Empire.

Why should we need to know that Bernard sent thousands to their deaths and that Athanasius and Cyril were thugs? Why expose the faithful to the dirty underbelly of the faith when all things ultimately work for the glory of God? Why not take their failings as nothing more than a teachable moment, chuckle, and ascribe their defects to the fact that nobody is perfect and all have fallen short of the glory of God?

Alternative facts created by comforting or explanatory myths distort the truth centuries, even millennia, after they were written down. Where whole sections of humanity are demonized, as were women by the foundational myth of Adam and Eve and later by the church’s ahistorical understanding of the founding of the church and the institution of the sacraments of the Eucharist and Holy Orders, the damage they have done and continue to do lasts unto the generations.

Men like Athanasius and Cyril and other intolerant Fathers and Doctors of the Church were less saints and more provocateurs whose refusal to consider other points of view destabilized the Roman Empire and set East and West at odds for centuries to come. The intolerance of those regarded as saintly set the stage for the later horrors of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the campaign against women identified as witches. Roads that could have led to other outcomes and a different world were sealed shut by narrow mindedness bordering on fanaticism.

My book does not seek to punish long dead people for long ago sins, but rather to heal the divisions that still beset us as a result of unacknowledged sin. The foundational myths and alternative facts of Christianity have never been held up to the light and dusted for fingerprints of love. Instead, the framework of theological correctness, triumphalism, and unquestioned belief has run roughshod over too many populations. Justice demands that the actions of those lifted up by the powers of the status quo as examples of faithful discipleship but who have instead caused and/or continue to cause grievous harm be identified so that the sin might be addressed, redressed, acknowledged, atoned, and at long last, forgiven.

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“Taking Out the Saints”: Preview of a Forthcoming Book *continued from page 5*

What might this look like in my book?

Consider Bernard of Clairvaux, he who wrote that the path to hell is paved with good intentions. Bernard was well versed in scripture and wrote marvelous theological tomes. He also engaged in ascetic practices that almost killed him.

Bernard was also a heresy hunter who decided that the famous Abelard was a heretic. He fixed a trial ahead of time that condemned outright Abelard’s more loving theology. As a result, Abelard’s books were burned and he became a broken man. Bernard then went after a monk named Arnaldo of Brescia. Arnaldo had been exiled from Italy for his support for the people of Rome who had asserted their ancient rights and formed the Commune of Rome where they, not the pope, were their rulers. For this, Brescia was dubbed, “Father of Political Heresies.”

Arnaldo, an Augustinian monk, then went on to commit two further egregious sins against his fellow clergy members. First, he condemned the wealth of the ordained and insisted that clergy who owned property had no right to administer the sacraments. He also condemned the temporal power exercised by the pope which he claimed debased the papal office. In spite of a direct order from the pope, Arnaldo refused to recant. For speaking truth to power, he was hunted down, hanged, and burned, his ashes thrown into the Tiber. Arnaldo of Brescia’s fame outlasted the Papal States. After the unification of Italy in 1871 and the dissolution of the Papal States, the people of Brescia erected a statue in their famous son’s honor.

Clairvaux, on the other hand, who was directly or indirectly responsible for preaching a crusade that caused the deaths of thousands of Jews, the silencing of his rival, Abelard, and the execution of Brescia, was canonized a saint a mere twenty years after his death. He is also revered as a Doctor of the Church. Sainted men like Bernard are hardly outliers in the Catholic Church. There were others at the time who favored Abelard’s teaching over that of Bernard and who agreed with Arnaldo’s assessment of the clergy and the pope. There were always segments of the population who did not agree with the crusades. Their voices were largely stamped out.

As we begin the long and painful process of examining the lives and legacies of those sainted by the church, we ask St. Arnaldo of Brescia to pray for us.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco *is the author of “How to Keep Your Parish Alive”.*

A Complicated Catholicism
By Marian Ronan

I trace my tendency to “make everything so complicated,” a failing of which I have been accused many times, back to my Catholic-Protestant-union identity. My doctoral work in poststructuralist feminist religious studies also probably didn’t help—an interpretive “framework of mess,” as my doctoral advisor Laura Levitt described it.

I am given to describing myself as an Irish-Catholic from Philadelphia, but that is only three-quarters true. My father’s people were Irish Catholics through and through, but on my mother’s side, Catholics had married Protestants for three generations. And I am married to an American Baptist minister.

Part of the story begins when my mother’s maternal grandmother, Hannah Kelly, an Irish domestic, married her employer, John Turner. I read somewhere that Irish immigrant women preferred to marry white Anglo-Saxon Protestant men because they didn’t go off to build bridges or dig canals, get killed, and never be heard from again. On Sunday mornings, while John Turner, who was, I believe, the superintendent of a factory—an iron mill, perhaps—took the kids to the Episcopal church with him, great-grandmother Hannah would sit in her rocking chair and say the rosary. I have the rocker in my living room.

But to complicate the story further, their eldest child, Jane, eventually married a Catholic and “converted back.” One of the many baffling aspects of my religious identity was that I had Catholic cousins on the Protestant side of the family.

One of Hannah’s younger daughters, Elizabeth, my maternal grandmother, married an ostensibly Protestant if very Irish-looking young man named Jim Dodds who was himself the product of a Catholic-Protestant union. One story was that, as a kid, his father would pay him to go to Mass, and then his mother’s sisters would pay him to go to the Protestant church, and he would pocket all the money and go neither place. Neither he nor my grandmother were very much church-goers. My mother became an Episcopalian as a young woman.

Then my mother’s younger sister, the aunt after whom I am named, got married to a British-Catholic immigrant and became a Catholic herself. My mother subsequently became engaged to an Irish-Catholic, my father, Joe Ronan, and planned to convert, but the nun who gave her catechetical instructions announced that all Protestants go to hell. This put my mother off since most of her family—well, a lot of them—were Protestants. When she and my father subsequently got married in the rectory office, the priest refused to include the flowers that had been delivered because theirs was a “mixed marriage.”

I often think about these several generations of cross-denominational entanglements in my family when writers argue that white ethnic Catholics lived in “ghettoes” before the Second Vatican Council. In my experience, this was not exactly the case.

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My mother did promise to raise the children Catholic, however, and to send them to Catholic schools, a promise she kept, though I never quite understood why; she was never a particularly obedient person. In any case, as a result, I landed in one of the first grade classes at St. Joseph's parochial school, in Collingdale, a working-class Philadelphia suburb, in 1953.

Now I was born in 1947, and the years 1946-1948 saw the largest U.S. population increase in the 20th century; men came home from the war, got married, and had their first kid. As a result there were three first-grade classes at St. Joe's in 1953, each with over a hundred children enrolled. People talk about how violent the Catholic sisters who taught those classes were. I have never, myself, understood how they avoided killing some of us.

The 1950s were not the most theologically liberal years for American Catholicism, either. Basically, the same absolutist, anti-Protestant teachings that had alienated my mother got preached regularly from the pulpit. Now given the disciplinary rigor of the post-war church, I most certainly did not put my hand up and disagree when the priest announced that all Protestants were going to hell. But the announcement definitely raised a few questions in my mind, since my Protestant grandmother, who had lived with us since my grandfather's death, was home baking me cookies at that very moment.

The culture of my family complicated my identity in other ways as well. My father eventually became the president of his union local and was emphatically pro-labor. He would sit at the dinner table and say, "If you ever vote Republican or cross a picket line, you will go to hell." I am given to saying that this was the beginning of my theological education.

Nor was my father a particularly pious Catholic. I hardly remember him saying anything religious at all. We certainly didn't say grace before meals in our "mixed" household. And when Daddy came home from working the Saturday night shift at the Philadelphia Electric generating station, he was given to saying, "What do you say we go to the 8 (AM Mass) and get it over with?"

But he was a "practicing" Catholic: went to Mass every Sunday, sold chances door to door to support the parish, and sang in the parish choir after his retirement from PE. And when I came home and announced that I just eloped with my previously-divorced American Baptist minister husband, he asked, "Are you still a Harp?" ("Harp" is a 19th century derogatory term for the Irish.). For him, our Catholicism was as much an ethnic identity as a religious one. "Yes, Daddy. I'm still a Harp," I replied.

I was wildly enthusiastic about the Second Vatican Council in part because of the steps taken there toward Protestant-Catholic reconciliation. I was also drawn to what I perceived to be the extraordinary beauty of the liturgical movement which influenced the Council and shaped the

liturgical renewal that the Council initiated. During the last year of the Council I became involved in the Grail, an international Catholic laywomen's movement that had played a significant role in the liturgical movement, and whose liturgies and Divine Office chapel services at the Grail's city centers spoke to me very deeply.

As I began spending more time at Grailville, the Grail's farm and conference center in southwest Ohio, this plot began to thicken. In 1972 and 1973, in response to increasing numbers of women enrolling in divinity schools, the U.S. Grail joined with the liberal Protestant organization, Church Women United, to sponsor two week-long summer programs at Grailville, "Women Exploring Theology." The two events comprised one of the first in-depth free-standing explorations of a possible Christian feminist theology. (The soon-to-be influential feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, a participant in one of the programs, said doing so was the first time it ever occurred to her that theology wasn't the purview of dead white men).

The programs germinated into a six-week, credit-bearing course for women, "Seminary Quarter at Grailville," where women from seminaries all over the country gathered to study with some of the earliest feminist theologians. Some of the leading Christian-feminist leaders of the future—pastors, theologians, organizers—launched their trajectories at "SQAG."

It might seem that such events would have melded very well with the marginal, union-based Catholicism of my upbringing, but that would be an optimistic reading. As is unfortunately the case, many revolutionary movements draw on a somewhat—or very—inflexible ideology to drive them, and Christian feminism, especially in its early years, was no exception. Regarding pioneering feminist theologian, Mary Daly, the Christian feminist ethicist Beverly Harrison showed that Daly's Catholic, and then ex-Catholic, feminist theology was for the most part the reversal of the hierarchical neo-Thomism Daly had learned in her first Ph.D. program at the School of Sacred Theology in Indiana. In neo-Thomism, men were on the top and women were on the bottom; in Daly's feminist theology, women were on the top and men on the bottom. More complicated analyses were unpolitical.

I began encountering this sort of thing at Grailville in the 1970s, when Seminary Quarter was underway. A Sister of Loretto had given a presentation on feminist theology, and some of us were discussing it with her afterwards. Whatever I said, the sister responded, "You know, you're not a real feminist."

And that has been true for the rest of my life, as I have, for example, raised questions about the racial problems confronting the Catholic women's ordination movement, even as I served as the president of the Women's Ordination Conference board.

And of course, I have raised questions about class as well. I had earned a Master of Divinity degree in the 1980s at a majority African American school, New York Theo-

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A Complicated Catholicism

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logical Seminary. I did this in large part because of my discomfort with the economic privilege at the uptown Union Theological Seminary where I had taken a few courses. But I also did so because the tuition was low and classes at NYTS were at night and I needed to work in the daytime to support myself. I thus resonated particularly with a speaker—Professor Sheila Briggs, I believe—at a conference in Milwaukee in 2000 celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Women’s Ordination Conference, who asked, “When are we going to start ordaining poor women?”

In recent years, my complicated Catholicism even seems to be generating a feed-back loop. Given my profound concern about climate change, I was an enthusiastic supporter of Pope Francis’s 2015 environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. Now let me be clear: as a Catholic feminist, I have spent many decades criticizing the centralized, monarchical governance structure of the Catholic Church. Never would I have imagined giving talks about a papal encyclical, much less to several socialist groups, as I did after *Laudato Si’* was published.

A number of my Catholic feminist colleagues spoke out against the encyclical because it failed to affirm contraception as a remedy for the environmental harm done by the increasing global population. But experts assure us that population is not the problem; if the poorest three billion people disappeared from the planet, carbon emissions would not be reduced at all. It’s consumption and profit-making that are the problem, as Francis argues convincingly. But the freedom of European and American women to use contraceptives is apparently more important than planetary survival.

As I engage with this “complicated Catholic” reading of the current world crises, I feel myself surrounded by my Catholic/Protestant/union forebears, as well as the rigid white-ethnic priests and nuns and feminist theologians like Mary Daly, who partly shaped my younger self, feminist theorists like Nancy Fraser and Judith Butler whose work underpins my current world-view, and armies of environmental thinkers and activists from Wangari Maathai to Pope Francis to Greta Thunberg. Surrounded by such a large—and complicated—cloud of witnesses, who knows how my thinking will evolve in the years to come?

Marian Ronan is Research Professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary and author or co-author of seven books, most recently “Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail (*Apocryphile Press, 2017*). Follow her blog at marianronan.wordpress.com.

What Is Your Experience of “Church” via Zoom?

We asked some of our readers to send in brief reflections on their experience attending traditional Masses or small intentional Eucharistic communities via Zoom versus in person. Here are their replies:

Marc Oleynick who attends the St. Mary Magdalene Community in Drexel Hill, PA starts us off:

We’ve adapted, and in a way, Zoom has saved us. One of the most distinctive aspects of the SMM community is its interactivity. We speak up during liturgy; we comment on the homilies; we take our time sharing the sign of peace. Zoom preserves these traditions. Yes, we miss real world socializing, but Zoom gives us access to a wider circle of friends, enabling community members living in foreign countries and far-flung states to join. It’s also a terrific tool for members with hearing difficulties, illnesses, and mobility constraints.

I believe Zoom is here to stay for our community, even after the pandemic ends. It’s made us more inclusive. It takes us back to Christianity’s humble beginnings: home services performed by a loving community, in which weakness becomes a source of strength.

Diann M. Westrick, M.D., also attends the St. Mary Magdalene Community:

I have followed the Roman Catholic Women Priest movement for several years, but since I live in rural, central Pennsylvania, I very much doubted that I would ever be able to be a regular participant with a RCWP community. One day last Spring I was scrolling through some posts on Facebook and happened upon one advertising Roman Catholic Women Priest communities that were offering Zoom liturgies. I contacted Kathy Schuck and she graciously sent me the link for that Sunday’s liturgy. I have been a faithful participant since then. For many years, I have been searching for an inclusive Catholic community and I can’t believe that I found one in the midst of a pandemic. What a blessing this has been for me. I feel more supported and sustained by this Zoom community than I ever did in any of the many Roman Catholic parishes I have belonged to in my lifetime. The members of St. Mary Magdalene Community are incredible and so welcoming. This pandemic has been a terrible time in so many ways. Being able to be a part of the St. Mary Magdalene Community during this pandemic has been a once-in-a-lifetime blessing.

Mary Ellen Norpel attends both St. Mary Magdalene Masses and Sanctuary of Peace intentional Eucharistic community in the Philadelphia area:

I do recognize that I am better enriched when SMM Community and Sanctuary of Peace allow the participants to share their thoughts on the readings. Some homilies, when we could go to church and only the presider spoke, didn’t do much for me.

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What Is Your Experience of “Church” via Zoom? *continued from page 8*

First of all, what the church forbids doesn't hold much sway with me anymore. My own intention is the same whether or not I'm in church. I like being in church because I see the St. Vincent de Paul, Philadelphia community as more representative of The People of God – diverse - y'all come, kind of. I guess this says that I have questions about the 'real presence' only there in church. I surprise myself to say that, but I'm okay with it because I have such strong belief that God loves all of creation, including me.

D.G., who zooms into an intentional Eucharistic community near Philadelphia as well as to livestreamed or pre-recorded Masses in a traditional Church, beautifully summarizes her reactions:

One day I'm going to write a song entitled, "The Blessings of Covid-19." While the pandemic has brought terrible suffering and loss to the world, we humans are good at innovation. Case in point, recorded and/or livestreamed masses. This time of trial deepens one's need for closeness with the Lord!

Traditional masses may be live-streamed and/or recorded. Three parishes with whom I have a connection all differ somehow from each other in the way they provide this unique way to attend mass but the purpose is equally served. Of course, one cannot receive the Eucharist, rather, a prayer of spiritual Communion is recited. One can join in singing the hymns from home, replay the homily or any other part, and even pause (a recording) to answer the phone if necessary. (For once, no one in church was disturbed by the untimely ringing!) It's not the same but is so much better than no mass at all.

In contrast, having also participated in a small, intentional Eucharistic celebration via Zoom, there is a much greater intimacy. Everyone is face to face (in our squares) thus connecting on a very personal level. Everyone is given an opportunity to individually contribute to the celebration in a variety of ways. Clarification, reflection, conversation are integral parts of the celebration. Folks who would not be able to attend an in-person liturgy, regardless of a pandemic, can join in from anywhere in the world, and they do! Including music requires some organization but it works. Everyone can hear the leading musicians and are then singing their hearts out with muted mics. The Zoomed liturgy can also be recorded for later sharing with those who were unable to attend.

To be sure, there is an energy present when in each other's physical company and when we are able to meet in person, oh what hugging there will be! But the advantages of small intentional Eucharistic celebrations are many! Both live-streamed traditional masses and Zoomed Eucharistic celebrations with small groups feed my soul and will be a part of that song when I write, "The Blessings of Covid-19!"

Kathleen Kennedy, another member of the St. Mary Magdalene Community, writes:

I have been a member of the St. Mary Magdalene Community for 13 years. I have always loved the intimacy of the physical space we shared at DHUMC and being able to talk with and hug community members. While I miss the physical interaction with community members, I have grown to love the community that has formed and expanded on ZOOM. We have had new members join from across the country and the world. Where we used to have between 30-40 members on a given Sunday, we now have over 70 most weeks and sometimes more. This experience has enriched my life and I hope we are able to incorporate our more distant members when we are once again able to meet in person. I have come to realize more deeply that in person or on ZOOM we are One.

Thanks to our faithful priests, our liturgies have been as rich as they were in person. These wonderful women create meaningful liturgies that speak to what is happening in our world and we are richly blessed by them.

Joe Sullivan, who is a participant in the Sanctuary of Peace intentional Eucharistic community summarizes what others have said and adds his own insights:

While I prefer meetings in person, Zoom meetings work well for me personally:

- 1. On Zoom, everyone can see each other face to face, and that makes us feel like a community.*
- 2. Seeing faces; noticing facial expressions; getting a sense of the emotional state of each participant; sharing joys and sorrows is wonderful and helps us at times to develop emotional attachments to one another. It reduces our sense of isolation. Not as good as in-person contact but still very good.*
- 3. We all need to have company and share; we can do that on Zoom, and it's better than phone calls or written letters.*

I see two other benefits that I hadn't realized until recently. In some ways Zoom facilitates listening since only one person can speak at a time and perhaps you wind up hearing more than you would if you were there in-person, "competing" with others to talk, or talking over one another. Also, in any in-person meeting of a group, some people may feel nervous about "speaking out", but that may be less true for someone on a Zoom meeting. I feel more confident speaking on Zoom. Depending on the individual, Zoom may encourage more impromptu remarks and help make sure such comments are heard and shared with the full group.

Book Reviews

This Hostel Life. By Melatu Uche Okorie. London, England: Virago Press, 2018. 99pp. \$15.

Reviewed by Ellie Harty

We don't usually review works of fiction in *EqualwRites*, but I believe this book effectively combines facts and analysis, autobiography, and three fictional stories based on true life experiences that highlight the impact of these facts on the humans who live and cope with them on a daily basis.

Melatu Uche Okorie in her three short stories reveals to us our often hidden – or even forbidden - presence, in these cases as women. They are relevant here in this publication because they reflect the kind of losses we have experienced because of our gender and our second class citizenship, especially in the Catholic Church.

In *This Hostel Life* Melatu Uche Okorie centers her first story on an episode in the lives of several women housed in a "direct provision hostel" set up for asylum seekers in Ireland. Okorie herself was a refugee from Nigeria and spent eight years of her life in one of these hostels in which people receive "provisions", often at the whim of the State, but are not allowed to leave the premises, to work and earn their own living, or have any say in how their lives are run. They also do not know when or how their petitions for release and permanent residency will be heard, let alone granted. Obviously closely based on her own experience, in her first story, "The Hostel" she captures the frustrations, humor, faults and foibles, and amazing grit of a group of women standing in line for their weekly provisions knowing they must wait humbly if they are to get anything at all.

The provision lines open at will, and this day, despite the long lines, only two of the four provision windows are open. People are chatting, telling stories, and complaining together when one of the women, Ngozi, who already has her allotment of provisions, sees a man coming from the window holding a jar of honey. She is furious because she had asked for honey and been told there was none left. She storms to the window and argues with the staff: "You better find one for me o, because I'm not leaving this place until I get one." Hearing that kind of defiance, the manager promptly closes all the windows, locks the door, and commands her staff to leave. Now the crowd turns on Ngozi, but she still stands her ground. Finally, when they see there is no hope that the manager will change her mind, the people slowly disperse. Even the narrator gives up.

The women are not perfect; they have their ethnic rivalries and jealousies and often amazing senses of humor. Some of them give in and adjust to suppression, but others never give in to injustice no matter how lost the cause. Much later that same day, the narrator notices Ngozi again: "From the window outside, me I can still see her stand alone for the dining room, fighting for her honey."

In the second story "Under the Awning" the main character has written a story for her creative writing class and

is about to be critiqued. She has written the story entirely in the second person point of view as this excerpt shows:

"You got on your bus, and after a while it filled up but the seat next to you remained empty although there were people standing in the small aisle. You stared out of the window, willing the bus to move faster..."

You got off at your stop and you immediately searched out the house with the little children who always shouted 'Blackie!' at you, but there was no one at the balcony, so you hurried past with relief."

How disconcerting the use of "you" is, as if she were always observing herself at a distance, as if she sees herself as going through the motions of life with little "agency" of her own in a land in which, as we see in other parts of the story, she was shunned or badgered or simply non-existent. Earlier in the story when she stood "under the awning" she tells us what people do when they believe they don't belong: "...you were desperate not to stand out...careful not to look directly at anyone. You had observed it was the way of things here, so people were not made to feel uncomfortable." It is our pre-feminist story in which we saw the only protection in the world against institutions that control us and genders that dominate us was "under the awning" of self-annihilation. How often have we lived that story in our own Church?

The character (we never know her name) is not without friends and family, but they, too, exact a price. Her mother, who had left her behind in Nigeria when she emigrated with two younger children, is silent and remote. Her one Irish friend, Dermot, disappointed as well. She tried to confide in him some of her sorrows, worries and humiliating experiences as an outcast refugee but found he dismissed her pain with perfunctory ah-don't-mind-them's or I'm-sure-they-meant-nothing-by-it's. She longed to tell him about other incidents and verbal blows she had endured, get some relief, and forge a deeper connection, but she gave up: "...you cried for a long time on your bed...and the next day, you went into the same Spar shop and bought a diary."

That last sentence ends the story within the story. The students in the writing class critique it: The story is too dark. Lighten it up; make the mother sympathetic. The use of the second person makes readers not care about the character. What makes the narrator suppress a cry, however, are the comments that the character is "too self-loathing and self-hating". Make her more "self-challenging", they advise.

She does make some changes. She cannot make herself give up the second person voice but does intersperse a few third person sections. She makes the mother more engaged; she lets the character see the insults and exclu-

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Book Review *continued from page 10*

sions more forgivingly and adds possible reasons other than prejudice and cruelty for their behavior. She re-submits the story mostly to accolades from her classmates. This is understandable. It is not her, but their, story now.

The last story “The Egg Broke” takes us back to a small Nigerian village years ago. A pregnant woman finds out she is going to have twins, and in compliance with ancient superstition about the evil twin births represent, the village elders will take them away and leave them to die. The woman tries to escape this fate but is unsuccessful and spends the rest of her days in futile search for her lost children.

Following this final story is a non-fiction treatise by Liam Thornton Ireland: *Asylum Seekers and Refugees* describing Irish policies on what constitutes refugee status, requirements for asylum, the design of direct provision hostels for those waiting asylum hearings, the court processes, and the reasons behind abrupt deportations, long waits, and unevenly applied procedures. In light of this, the reader is challenged to ask: Would the woman carrying twins have been granted asylum? The likely answer only deepens the tragedy.

Okorie’s autobiographical introduction along with the treatise that explains official policy, and then the stories themselves make the book compelling reading, especially for those of us who have experienced long, frustrating waits for justice, feelings of not belonging or alienation, and especially erasure because of gender. The first story is told in dialogue which, although challenging, is eventually less difficult to parse as we read careful enough to bring it into the light of understanding.

Ellie Harty is co-editor of *EqualwRites*.

Two Excerpts from WOC’s *The Table*

Regina Bannan and Ellie Harty from SEPAWOC write weekly blog post’s for WOC. Here are excerpts from two recent posts. Please check out this valuable forum at womensordination.org.

From Regina Bannan’s “A Big Deal”:

“So many people responded ‘what’s the big deal’ to Pope Francis’ change to Canon Law allowing all laypeople to be acolytes and lectors that I am going to say it IS a big deal.

I’ve edited what I wrote to my grandson: “This is so important to me right now because it’s a chink in the armor that I’ve been fighting for 40 years. Women in these roles — which I’ve done, even training lectors for the Burlington diocese — have always been provisional, al-

lowed by individual bishops but not really authorized to be in these roles. So it’s like being able to cast a real ballot, to use an example of ‘provisional’ from our current politics. In this case there’s absolutely no power but this change adds an ‘entitlement,’ another frequently disparaged term but important to those denied the right. We’ve argued that the theology the Pope uses here should affect everything — that all people are equal ‘by virtue of their baptism.’ The rest is sexism masquerading as theology.” ...

And “the Pope did it himself...the Pope on his own initiative changed Canon Law in favor of women.... If he can do it for acolytes and lectors, he can do it for priests and deacons. As I said before, anything else is “sexism masquerading as theology.” And doing that would be a big deal, indeed.

From Ellie Harty’s “The Past We Step Into”:

“I am sure she will be quoted often these days, Amanda Gorman, our twenty-two year old Youth Poet Laureate. I am overjoyed that she is so young and undaunted and inspired and inspiring. I shudder to think about a world in which gifts like hers might have been missed—or missing.

I believe we needed to hear all she had to say about our nation and our potential future. In fact, I’m still sitting this week in more glittering lights of clarity and glows of possibility than I had ever imagined. I, with our poet, want to free the light of a new dawn and be brave enough to see it and, more importantly, to be it. It’s such a heady thought, our wanting to shine that light on everything around us.

Imagine, for example, we shine it on our endlessly challenging topic here, the Catholic Church, and see it with ever-growing and glowing clarity....We may be far, but we are not irrevocably, apart.

In fact, on a larger scale Amanda Gorman expressed the problem and possibility beautifully:

*Somehow we’ve weathered and witnessed
a nation that isn’t broken
but simply unfinished*

...maybe that applies to our Church, too?

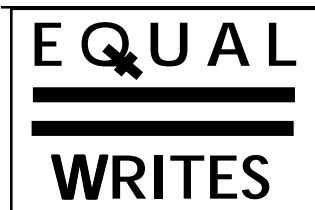
*It’s because being American is more than a pride we
inherit,
it’s the past we step into
and how we repair it*

Together? Yes, together.

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Scripture Reflection

Holy Thursday 2021

By *Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.*

Throughout my life I have not done Lent well, but I have always loved Holy Thursday. We all remember beautiful Holy Thursday celebrations, of liturgies and songs, incense and flowers, of being with people we love, in churches, homes or anywhere around a table as one Bread, one Body, recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

We also remember 39 years of witnessing together for justice and equality in the church universal...until 2020. The pandemic year changed Holy Thursday for all of us. I used to ZOOM from our witness to celebrate Holy Thursday Liturgy, but, in 2020, I celebrated a ZOOM Holy Thursday Liturgy!

On Holy Thursday 2020, we read that "Maundy" Thursday comes from "mandate"- to "love one another as I love you", and we remembered that message as we read from all the Scripture stories of the Last Supper. We read from Gabe Huck that in the early church the Eucharist was shared at a meal within a welcoming community of compassion, sharing their lives, goods, talents and resources with all in need. We gave thanks that we still celebrate the Eucharist as community, gave thanks that we are not alone, gave thanks that together we are work-

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ing for a just society, a just world, a just church. We shared Eucharist where we each were, yet we knew we were also together. We prayed Lynn Unger's *Pandemic: We should sing, pray, reach out with our hearts, our words, with tendrils of compassion, knowing we are all connected.*

Connected...and here we are at Holy Thursday 2021. We will witness across from the Cathedral, together, in person again: masked, socially distanced, honoring one another; witnessing for WOC's vision of a renewed priestly ministry within a discipleship of equals.

Rev. Bryan Massingale said of 2021: We look back with sober insight and ahead with new resolve...Truth matters, like the truth of equal and sacred dignity...The Spirit gives us the courage to translate our convictions into actions.

May we also live the words of Alice Walker: Activism is our rent for living on the planet! May we be moved by Mary McCloud Bethune: Protest openly anything that smacks of discrimination! May we proclaim with Shirley Chisholm, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, then bring a folding chair!"

Please join our witnesses on Holy Thursday and Ordination Day...in person or in spirit, joyfully knowing that we are connected.

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