

**Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Area** *MISSION* - 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.

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**HOLY THURSDAY WITNESS**  
April 6, 2023 at 11 am

**Sister Cities Park across from the  
Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**  
Please join us.

**ORDINATION DAY OUTDOOR  
MASS**

Saturday, May 20, 9am  
**Sister Cities Park across from Saints  
Peter & Paul Basilica  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**  
Led by a woman priest

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### **Our Procession for Justice and Inclusion**

It will soon be Holy Week. Throughout the world people are in processions. Some are participating in religious traditions; some are marching for their lives. Some begin in Palm Sunday joy and end in Good Friday grief; others begin in terror and grief and end in, if not joy, then at least safety and welcome. Still others cannot join any kind of procession or witness and just keep watch and wait.

Artist John August Swanson who painted “The Procession” (now housed in the Vatican Museum), noted the promises inherent in community witnesses:

- No one who marches or walks or stumbles or falls or waits does so alone.
- We all walk or wait in sacred spaces.
- We are all transformed by the journey.

“The journey or procession takes us out of our ordinary lives to experience a transcendental or universal connection. The outward walk reflects an inner journey. We have taken the steps to move to another space in the journey of our lives.”

Remember:

Witnesses are public, seen and heard - perhaps even derided or jeered – but also joined.

Witnesses offer us a dramatic presentation of whatever the world needs to see and remember at this particular moment.

Witnesses engender in us a more profound understanding of more than just our own lives.

Swanson reflects again:

Witnesses “help us see again what we have forgotten”.

Witnesses help us “see something familiar in a new way, in a new light, from a different perspective. The great procession is a celebration of life and faith where the rich and poor march in unison; the strong carry the weak, and the weak humble the proud; those who know the dance teach those who are just learning”.

Our own witness and procession to Easter will once again happen:

**April 6, 2023 at 11 am**  
**Sister Cities Park across from the Basilica of Saints  
Peter and Paul in Philadelphia**

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

Thirty-five years we’ve been there. Thirty-five years and counting. Talk about persistence. Holy persistence.

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

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

We’ve stood as a people left out of the all-male ordination finding our comfort within.

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

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

Yet we’ve stood in holy persistence.

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

Please stand and persist with us.

### **Ordination Day Mass and Witness**

**Saturday, May 20th at 9:30 am**  
**Sister Cities Park**  
**(Across from the Cathedral of Saints Peter & Paul)**  
**Philadelphia, Pa.**

**Congratulations Mary Magdalene  
Award Winners for 2023  
Mary E Hunt and Diann Neu**

**By Judith A. Heffernan**

Sixteen years ago, gathered around a table, the SEPAWOC Core Committee happily agreed to the grand idea that every year at our Holy Thursday Witness we would honor and celebrate people of courage who proclaim with their lives that equality and justice matter.

This year we will be celebrating Mary E.Hunt, MTS, M.Div, PhD and Diann Neu, D.Min, M.Div, STM, MSW and LMSW. I honor every letter after their names because Mary and Diann have lived their lives sharing with us the depth and breadth of their education with wisdom, insight, clarity, vision, and hope.

They have done all this with deep respect for each of us, honoring all the beautiful, intertwining circles of companions dedicated to this great work of equality and justice.

Very early in WOC's living history, I was deeply touched, moved and inspired to be with Mary and Diann at wondrous National WOC gatherings. Mary was our theologian and guide, having the ability to make great truth clear and concrete for us; Mary not only spoke to us, she also took time to listen. Diann was our liturgist and guide, celebrating our lived experience as holy, each of us honored and respected for who we were, are and would be, praying, sharing, singing, dancing, gathering around a table.

In SEPAWOC's living history, we sponsored a gathering of sharing together about what we were being called to do on our journey together- as our mission statement proclaims- for justice, equality and full partnership in ministry and for the transformation of a church structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry. We took a chance and invited Diann and Mary to be our workshop leaders--and to our delight they said yes! What I remember most about that day is that Diann and Mary were really happy to be with us and from that day for-

ward they would be united in a special way with SEPAWOC.

This Holy Thursday we will also celebrate that forty years ago Mary and Diann gathered thirteen women from various faith backgrounds around a table and they committed to creating a place where women's religious needs could be met and women's creativity nurtured--and WATER (Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual) was born!

WATER is an ever-growing network of religious feminists around the world who are committed to empowerment, justice, peace, inclusive religious communities and an egalitarian future. WATER focuses on our power, in collaboration with worldwide justice networks, to create social and religious change and to put the renewable moral energy of faith in the service of transforming an increasingly unjust and fragile world. (And as Diann would pray "Let it be so!")

So, please say yes and come on April 6th to witness, pray, sing and share. Celebrate Mary, Diann and WATER. Celebrate the power of our shared history, gathering together around a table. After all, it is Holy Thursday. Alleluia!

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

***EqualwRites* is a publication of  
SEPAWOC**

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## What the Spousal Metaphor Reveals and Conceals

By Katie Lacz

*Editors' Note: We thought this article, originally a post in WOC's The Table, was so excellent and relevant we included it here. It will also be published in the latest edition of WOC's "New Women, New Church".*

In America's wide-ranging Nov. 22 interview with Pope Francis, executive editor Kerry Weber accurately named the pain that many women feel because of the church's ban on ordaining women to the priesthood. In response to her pastoral question about what to say to a woman who feels that pain—to someone who has served her church and feels an authentic call to priesthood—the pope had no pastoral answer. Instead, he gave a theological discourse on Marian and Petrine principles, which the average Catholic would be forgiven for not knowing by heart.

The concept, popularized by Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, essentially states that the church has two natures: One based on the example of Mary, humbly receiving the will of God, and one based on the example of Peter, called to lead the church founded by Jesus. These natures reflect the essentially feminine and masculine qualities of people. Therefore, von Balthasar insists, women are to reflect Mary's example and men are to reflect Peter's.

This leads to a question at the heart of the conversation about women's ordination: Does being a man or a woman (not to mention the reality of nonbinary, transgender, and intersex people) play an essential role in what part I am capable of playing in the church?

We, as Catholics, are an incarnational people. We believe that our embodiment is sacred, a locus of divine revelation. That is the heart of the "sacramental principle," which theologian Richard McBrien defines this way: "Everything is, in principle, capable of embodying and communicating the divine."

Then yes, of course, my embodied self is not incidental to how I move through the world and the church. I am a White American woman, married, a mother of small children. All those characteristics affect how I interact with my specific time and culture, and how my time and culture (including the church) interact with me. Somehow, God moves and works within me as myself, concretely, enabling me to participate in the building of God's reign.

But, of course, the answer is also "no." Because we are complex, and in the kaleidoscope of our identities various characteristics come to the fore or recede to the background, not everything I do is determined by my femaleness. To break down our activities in the world as simply "feminine" or "masculine" is dangerously essentialist and binary. Yet, too often, that is exactly what the church purports to do with its sacramental theology.

When Pope Francis and the institutional church at large talk about the role of the priest in relation to the laity, and the perceived need for an all-male priesthood, one of the common arguments tends to hinge on a slavishly literal

interpretation of the symbol of Christ as bridegroom and the church as bride. Priests must be men, the argument goes, because they act in persona Christi, bridegroom to the Church as bride, and therefore must resemble that role for the symbol to ring out its truth. You can hear this in the pope's answer to the question about women's ordination: "The church is woman. The church is a spouse. Therefore, the dignity of women is mirrored in this way... Woman is more, she looks more like the church, which is mother and spouse."

The "resemblance" that priests must bear in this argument refers not to fidelity, or commitment, or mutual relationship, but to maleness. Jesus was a man on earth, and so only men can properly play the role of Christ in the Eucharist. Anything else would confuse the symbol. Somehow, we do not need our priests to be Middle Eastern or in their early thirties to understand that they act in persona Christi. But we do need the Y chromosome and its accompanying body parts.

It is worth noting that the argument rarely continues to its logical conclusion: that the non-ordained participants in the liturgy should all be women, so as not to obscure the metaphor that the church is the bride of Christ. Somehow, we are able to understand that the church, comprised of women and men, can be in the symbolic role of "bride," but we cannot imagine that men and women as priests could be in the symbolic role of "bridegroom."

Put another way, men can be part of the "Marian principle" of the church, but women couldn't possibly be part of the "Petrine principle" of the priesthood.

This does a disservice to the symbol of the spousal relationship, and shows a disturbing misunderstanding of the role of symbols. A symbol, Paul Ricoeur reminds us, both reveals and conceals—it is inherently ambiguous and multivalent. The symbol of Christ as bridegroom reveals Christ's faithful love, deep commitment, and union with us. The symbol of Christ as bridegroom conceals the mystery, complexity, and extravagance of God's relationship to us, which has also been described biblically as like a mother with her weaned child, or an eagle tucking her young under her wing, or a solid rock upon which to stand. Feminist theologian Susan Ross writes in *Extravagant Affections*, "Sacramentality is an inherently ambiguous reality, and the dangers of overstating either its disclosive or concealing powers are great" [emphasis in original].

In the metaphor of God as bridegroom to God's people, the bride holds an important role in our understanding of God's loving fidelity toward us. But it is not the only metaphor, and like the Bible itself, the metaphor is reduced to illegibility if it is taken literally. Furthermore, what is "literally" to mean? In different times and cultures—including the ancient Hebrew culture from which the God-as-bridegroom metaphor originally arose—the spousal relationship took on a variety of forms. In some of those times and cultures, a marriage relationship was inherently unequal, with the man superior to and dominant over the woman (or women, in the case of polygamous societies).

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## What the Spousal Metaphor Reveals and Conceals

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In the article “Bridegroom: A Symbol of Union, Not Separation,” Carroll Stuhlmuller writes: “The Yahweh-Spouse or Jesus-Bridegroom image does not stress sexual differences but intimate, joyful and fruitful union of all persons; it rests in the psychological complexity of masculine and feminine genders in everyone, including God and Jesus.”

Does my body affect what I do? Certainly. I have borne children; I have literally given my body and blood for the sustenance of another human being. Does it affect everything I do? Should it limit what I do in the sacramental life of the church? No and no.

It should be glaringly obvious that there is nothing inherently “male” or “masculine” about breaking open the word of God. There is nothing inherently “male” or “masculine” about, as theologian and Dominican Sister Mary Catherine Hilkert defines preaching, naming grace in the depths of human experience. And there is nothing inherently “male” or “masculine” about seeking to emulate the risen Christ, confecting the Eucharist, anointing sick people, marrying people in love, burying the dead. We veer into sinful, even heretical, territory if we suggest that only men are the official interpreters of, and interlocutors for, where grace is found in our lives.

That is true whether we are speaking of ordination to the diaconate or to the priesthood. If we can see women act in the person of Christ the servant as deacons, we can see women acting in the person of Christ as priests. Neither “act” is centered in maleness. But Pope Francis appears to dismiss the possibility of either reality.

I wish Pope Francis could someday have the opportunity to sit down for a roundtable discussion with women experiencing a calling to the diaconate and the priesthood. He would meet sincere Catholics with a deep relationship with a God who calls them to sacramental ministry. He would meet a group of women who authentically resemble Christ. In my time advocating for the ordination of women as part of the Women’s Ordination Conference, I have time and again experienced this to be true.

Part of the experience of women, as well as many other marginalized groups — especially for those of us who are also caregivers — is the experience of exhaustion. I am tired from the relentless work of parenting young children, yes. But I am also tired of rehashing the same tired arguments about why women must be shut out of the priesthood, barred from any meaningful decision-making and leadership roles in the church. Tired of doing the same work that other women have already done of shining light on our tradition to reveal that women have been here all along, participating in the sacramental economy and birthing God’s reign into the world. Tired of the attempt by the hierarchy to distract women by arguing among ourselves about our own worth and validity while clericalism marches ever-onward, aided by a spousal metaphor that becomes about power, not covenant.

The prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures are filled with some of the most beautiful spousal imagery in the Bible. But they also remind us that God says to us: “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19) Our ability to perceive the constant newness of God’s ongoing creation is not predicated by our gender. Now, if we could only perceive that a “new thing” might spring forth from God’s goodness if the church permitted women to act as the ordained ministers they are called.

*Katie Lacz is Program Director for the national Women’s Ordination Conference.*

### TREASURER’S ANNUAL REPORT SEPAWOC 2022 Financial Statement:

<b>Beginning Balance (1-1-22)</b>	<b>5,131.04</b>
Revenues	7,969.23
Total	13,100.27
<b>Expenses</b>	
Printing	9,360.00
Postal Services	715.00
Memberships	100.00
FutureChurch Ad	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,416.00</b>
<b>Balance on 12-31-22</b>	<b>2,684.27</b>

### Gracias, Merci, Grazie, Danke, Thank You.

No matter how we say it – we express deep gratitude as you support us on this journey. You may have been with us from the beginning or may be new to our efforts. You are possibly following the Synod with hope, or trepidation. But you are engaged and have a deep belief in the discipleship of equals which is why you read *EqualwRites*. We are united in our efforts, words, mission—we will never give up our dream of an inclusive church.

Donations can be sent by check to SEPAWOC, P.O. Box 52046, Philadelphia, PA 19115 (we have included envelopes in *EqualwRites*). You can also donate through PayPal at our website [sepawoc.org](http://sepawoc.org).

## **Ordained into Pain**

*By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco*

In the first chapter of Genesis, God looked approvingly at all of creation and said to the Divine Self, “Didn’t We do a great job?” Theologians and churchmen throughout the ages have completely ignored that chapter choosing instead to fixate upon the second, re-written chapter where God looks at the creatures the Divine obviously knew would screw up everything and said, “Meh.” To the woman, however, God said, “Foul.” You, you inferior thing shall bear children in pain and be subject to the man who stood right by you when you ate that apple.

Did the churchmen ever run with that second story! They made a myth into a reality and based an entire religion upon the mistake of one human being, a maid formed in primordial mist named Eve, aka “life.” From that one moment in time, all women were ordained into pain. It was the only role permitted women for millennia. The guys loved it even unto the death of the women. Female pain and suffering was, after all, the will of God.

Another set of elaborate theologies of suffering grew to support another myth created by another man who used and abused many women for sex until he got religion and discovered that women were even too revolting for that. That man was Augustine and the myth was original sin, a made-up sin so pernicious that it permeated all of humanity and spread through the sexual relations he once could not live without. He, the great Augustine, could not be responsible for his sex addiction. It was those darn women who caused men, who were otherwise holy, to sin through lust. Numerous other marginal, mentally ill, stupid, or violent churchmen also canonized as saints jumped upon that myth, including a voyeur named Jerome and churchmen of later generations like John Vianney and Padre Pio and an accompanying cast of thousands who came to believe that women’s bodies were the gateway of the devil and the direct cause of Jesus’ death. Women had to suffer and even die to atone for the great and ongoing sin of having a female body.

Churchmen became adept at instructing women in the fine art of suffering. As a result, women like Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila starved and beat themselves to ensure that their bridegroom, Jesus, would love them. Women like Bernadette of Lourdes and Terese of Lisieux became victim souls for Christ with the support of their confessors. Virgin martyrs died rather than engage in sexual relations. Churchmen like Hans von Baltasar, a friend of John Paul II and an architect of theology of the body, canonized women’s suffering by describing it as “a thirst... like heaven on earth.”

Within this model, all manner of evil is possible.

The language of suffering has been written into the language of the anti abortion movement with the help of churchmen. Women are expected to bear the results of rape, incest, bad health, and lifelong care of children with life threatening abnormalities because that is what God expects and demands of them. No health, social, economic, or social problem is too great for women and girl children to bear. Suffering is sanctifying, holy, even desirable to those who would regard pregnant women as victim souls, condemned by God, “himself” to a life of suffering. Few dare to call this out for what it was and for what it remains- abuse.

The churchmen’s insistence upon suffering extends to women with vocations to the priesthood. God, they claim, nixes those vocations. While men are uniquely and divinely chosen to celebrate the Eucharist by virtue of their body parts, women are condemned to “offer it up” because of theirs. In the equation of misplaced and misguided authority and women’s aspirations, the answer is arrogance, coercion, aggression, and suffering that the churchmen casually dismiss. It’s time to call out the churchmen for what they are- misogynists.

There is, of course, a reason why the men didn’t want Eve to learn the difference between good and evil and opted to punish her curiosity unto the generations. There was a reason why they substituted an obedient and humble Mary for a resourceful, intelligent Eve. There is a reason for the virgin martyrs, the traumatized victim souls, and the untruth of female subservience to men. That reason is a perverse and long lived evil called sexism that is based upon fear and not love.

Although the most frequent command in scripture is “Do not fear,” the churchmen fear. They fear women’s agency and authority. They fear their ability to create life. And they fear that they will lose their great power and their great wealth and their favored position in society if they recognize women as equal partners in ministry. And, as the church continues to fall down around their ears because of their intransigence, the men of the church, like Augustine, look everywhere but in their own hearts for the cause.

The great Black theologian Howard Thurman wrote, “Whoever fears has already lost the battle.” By fearing rather than trusting, the churchmen have sinned against the Holy Spirit by questioning Her ongoing intention to renew the face of the earth until there is no male or female because all are one in the Prince of Peace who came to give life- and not suffering and death- abundantly, pressed down and overflowing into our laps.

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

**SAINT MARY MAGDALENE COMMUNITY**

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## Book Reviews

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*Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis.* By John McGreevy. New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2022. 528pp. \$17.50.

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

The very scope of a book like John McGreevy's *Catholicism: A Global History*, extending from the French Revolution (1789) to the present day, and its resultant length—528 pages—would be enough to put off a lot of readers. But not reading it would be a mistake for a number of reasons.

First of all, McGreevy's overview of the social and cultural history of modern Catholicism weaves together invaluable information about the changes and continuities in the global church. But it also manages to do so in an amazingly accessible fashion, introducing major events from 1789 to the era-shifting papacy of Pope Francis with engaging stories of individuals who embody that history.

As McGreevy begins his first chapter on the French Revolution, for example, he introduces two priests. The first, the Irish Henry Edgeworth, accompanied King Louis XVI to his execution by guillotine in 1793, the beginning of the most violent, anti-Catholic phase of the Revolution, and Abbé Henri Grégoire, who was appointed a bishop of the new constitutional church and died excommunicated for his unretracted support of it. They compose the two trajectories of McGreevy's research: "Reform" Catholics who supported the liberal revolutions, and ultramontanists ("over-the-mountains" to Rome) who opposed liberal nation-states in favor of a supreme papacy. He begins later chapters with the similarly illustrative lives of priests, nuns, theologians, and laity from China to sub-Saharan Africa and more.

I learned a great deal from *Catholicism*. As a post-Vatican II Catholic, for example, I always assumed that the papacy-supporting ultramontanists were evil and the anti-institutional fighters for liberty were good. I was edified to learn, then, that Abbé Grégoire was one of the early advocates of the abolition of slavery. But I was also interested to learn that many of the Reform Catholics in the struggle against church power were highly educated members of the upper classes who despised the devotional practices of the poor. This contempt was one of the reasons why the rosary-praying, saint adulating Catholic lower classes stood behind the papacy.

I even came to have some sympathy for Pope Pius IX, "Pio No No," whom I once despised for declaring the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and papal infallibility. In fact, Pius, when elected in 1846, seemed quite reformist, but after the violent liberal revolutions of 1848 during which he was driven out of Rome, and then later after being imprisoned in the Vatican, he became more and more despotic and reactionary. Violent attacks don't bring out the best in people. Of course, the actions during his thirty-two year long reign, including the creation of the Syllabus of Errors, laid the groundwork for other repressive papal actions, like the condemnations of Americanism and Modernism.

Even as the reaction to anti-Catholic violence grew and the papacy became ever more the center of the church, church leaders were forced to come to terms with the growing power of nation-states and empires. This led to their entering into concordats regarding the appointment of bishops, the structures of educational institutions, and more.

Alongside these concessions, a sort of Catholic revival was taking place leading to the growth of Catholic institutions around the world as well as growing numbers of priests, nuns, and foreign missionaries. McGreevy calls this the new "Catholic milieu," the other wing of ultramontanist Catholicism. Some of the empires that most distrusted the church in Europe welcomed Catholic missionaries who advanced the development of their colonies. This collaboration of the Catholic church with colonial empires led to what McGreevy details in the last sections of his book as global Catholicism—with Catholics in the Global South the largest Catholic population in the contemporary world.

Unfortunately, these collaborations also led to the church's involvement in some of the most shameful evils of the modern world, including the support of slavery in some places and, after the Russian Revolution and the rise of communism, antisemitism and even the 1933 Vatican Concordat with the Nazis. During these same decades, Reform Catholic action and thinking continued, especially among "ressourcement" theologians who were at first condemned and then later appointed "periti" (experts) at the Second Vatican Council.

McGreevy's splendid exploration of Vatican II makes reading *Catholicism* worthwhile in itself. But his discussion of the Council's two significant omissions also lays the groundwork for his next galvanizing chapter on the sex abuse crisis as the "the most traumatic episode in Catholicism's modern history" (381). Despite its renewal of the liturgy, its turn to human rights, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue, the Council paid no attention at all to the governance structures of the church or questions of women and gender.

These omissions, along with the subsequent condemnations of contraceptives, women's ordination, and married priests after the Council, led to the departure of many men from the priesthood. This, along with the ongoing hierarchical structure of the church, enabled bishops and their subordinates to do anything to keep remaining men from leaving the priesthood, including transferring accused sex abusers between parishes. McGreevy even questions the canonization of John Paul II given the cover-ups during his papacy of sex abuse by Legionaries of Christ founder Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

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## THE GIFT OF THE (SEEMINGLY) POWERLESS

By Ellie Harty

To avoid being buried alive, fairy tale author Hans Christian Andersen, kept a note by his bed that said: “I only seem to be dead.”

With the above in mind, I suggest when we feel buried alive by a smirkingly insensitive, sexist, entrenched church hierarchy, we do the same. We leave ‘notes’ - in news columns, blogs, tweets, email blasts, in witnesses, in meetings, in protests and press conferences, in loud voices raised and quiet prayers offered - or in any myriad of other ways we devise – to proclaim to our oppressors:

“We only seem to be dead!”

We also only seem to be powerless.

In his book, *David and Goliath*, Malcolm Gladwell makes interesting points about power and what “seems” versus what “is”. He begins by stressing that the seemingly weak and powerless can not only vanquish overwhelmingly strong and forceful opponents and oppressors but can actually come out profoundly transformed and enriched by the struggle itself.

To support these convictions, he introduces the two ideas he will later explore in depth in the book:

“The first is that much of what we consider valuable in our world arises out of these kinds of lopsided conflicts, because the act of facing overwhelming odds produces greatness and beauty.

And second, that we consistently get these kinds of conflicts wrong. We misread them. We misinterpret them. Giants are not what we think they are. The same qualities that appear to give them strength are often the sources of great weakness. And the fact of being the underdog can change people in ways that we often fail to appreciate: it can open doors and create opportunities and educate and enlighten and make possible what might otherwise have seemed unthinkable.”

“Overdogs” (Is there such a word??) are often so large, so overinflated with their own sense of power while at the same time so weighed down with their own rigidity and resistance, they often become defensive, immobile, and ultimately fatally vulnerable, perhaps unto death (Hello, Catholic hierarchy).

Meanwhile, those perceived as weak because of their small numbers and minimal chances of success can actually watch those very weaknesses turn into untold strengths. That scarcity of numbers and meager chance of success can actually, according to Gladwell, equip “underdogs” with more “movement, endurance, individual intelligence, knowledge of the (territory), and courage.” (Hello, all of us!) And, with weaknesses now morphed into strengths, reformers and renewers can actually achieve the impossible – like changing a Church – while simultaneously transforming themselves as they grow internally and externally more dynamic and more confident.

True, we don’t want this journey to give us *just* the journey. We do want the goal of equality and full inclusion of all genders in Church leadership and ministry, including ordination as priests if they so desire, accomplished – and soon. And, to these ends, I believe we need to fortify and use the gifts Gladwell mentioned:

- our ability to organize and rally quickly in as many places as needed,
- our amazing and unfailing persistence,
- our inclusion of a wide variety of intelligent and wise individuals with fresh ideas and unique approaches,
- our canny awareness of our own territories, local attitudes, allies, and resources,
- our willingness to challenge our own religious traditions,
- our courage to show up and stand up and speak up for justice wherever and whenever we can,
- our determination to sing, praise, and celebrate treasures too long unappreciated and maybe even buried alive because they *seemed* to be dead.

This is obviously a pep talk, necessary because we are so often tired and discouraged and demoralized by such a powerful institution’s injustices largely running unchecked. It would be so easy – some would even argue more realistic – to lay down and surrender and be dead rather than just seem to be. It’s then we can remember the words of renowned historian, Howard Zinn:

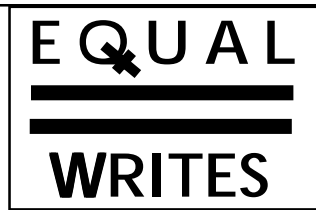
“What we choose to emphasize in this [our] complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places...where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act... And if we do act, in however small a way, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future in an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory”.

**Ellie Harty** is the co-editor of *EqualwRites*.

### Book Review continued from page 6

Despite McGreevy’s acknowledgment of the great harm done by the sex abuse crisis, his last chapter, “Pope Francis and Beyond,” is hopeful. McGreevy acknowledges the disaffiliation of many Catholics because of sex abuse and church teaching on homosexuality. But he also sees global migration leading to Catholic renewal in countries where the church is otherwise in decline as well the ongoing crucial role played by Catholic institutions in the Global South. Pope Francis is the symbol of these hopeful developments. Born himself in the Global South, the former Jorge Bergoglio has led a drive toward a more synodal and transnational church. Despite the growth of fascist populism in some countries, Francis leads a global turn to climate justice and anti-nuclear collaboration. Francis is spearheading “not an era of change, but a change of era,” with young people as “builders of a new social bond” (422).

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WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

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PHILADELPHIA, PA 19115

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**AFFILIATION:** *EqualwRites* is published by the Core Committee of the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter of the Women's Ordination Conference. We are inspired by, but independent of, the national office of the Women's Ordination Conference.

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## Scripture Reflections

### Lenten Season 2023

#### Luke 4:16-21; John 4:5-42

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

Lent has always been challenging for me, and this year Pax Christi has challenged us to root ourselves even more deeply in the authentic spirituality of Jesus, committing ourselves to do something more about injustice, violence and oppression. This Lent we will hear Jesus read from Isaiah: we are called to bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and help the oppressed go free. But what can we do, how can we do enough? We listen to our guide Mary E. Hunt: "Will what we do make a difference? ... Sometimes something very, very small can make a huge difference...think grains of salt. Many small acts of courage and commitment make change...plus we are part of an intertwined world community...Carry on!"

Lent walks on the bridge between Black History Month and Women's History Month. I think of Roy Bourgeois boldly proclaiming that sexism, like racism, is a sin and no matter how anyone tries to justify discrimination, in the end it is always immoral...We cannot be silent...Let us speak clearly and boldly while walking in solidarity as Jesus does with women in our world and in our church.

This Lent we will hear again the Gospel of the Woman

at the Well with Jesus. I always rejoice in what I heard Joan Morris say: This conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well is the longest private conversation recorded in the Gospels...AND when the woman asked Jesus where God was to be worshipped, Jesus did not reply that she should leave the liturgical questions to men! Ethnic, religious and gender barriers came tumbling down!

Spring comes during Lent in our hemisphere-which reminds me of the 2023 WOC campaign Wildflowers of the Grassroots: we are a network of committed and passionate advocates of ordination justice whose diverse gifts and efforts create a beautiful field in which our dreams of a renewed church can flourish. Diann Neu, at a recent WATER ritual, reminded us in song that we who believe in equality and justice cannot rest...

So this Holy Thursday and Ordination Day, all you Wildflowers of the Grassroots, come to Sister Cities Park across from the Cathedral/Basilica in Philadelphia and pray, share, sing, dance, and gather around the table. Every SEPAWOC celebration is a "Come as You Are" party where all are welcome!

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