


Vol. XXXIV No. 1	<b>EQUAL</b> 	<b>Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area</b>
		MARCH 2026 - JUNE 2026
	<b>WRITES</b>	<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b> - <i>As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.</i>

**HOLY THURSDAY WITNESS**

**April 2 at 11:15 am**

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

**Please join us.**

**ORDINATION DAY OUTDOOR MASS**

**Saturday, May 16, 9:30 am**

**Join With Us in Declaring: “The Time is Now!”**

*By Ellie Harty*

We are certainly besieged by calls for protests and witnesses these days. The calls are both widespread and local, diversified and focused, equally persistent and equally compelling. We cannot rest; we must act for justice and the rights and dignity of all people, and we must all do it RIGHT NOW.

I would love to write next: Okay, but Spring is coming. Let’s just slow down a bit, relax, or, at best, choose one cause and concentrate on that. Instead, I’m going to add another to the list:

**JOIN WITH US IN WITNESS:  
FOR WOMEN’S ORDINATION AND EQUALITY  
IN LEADERSHIP IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**HOLY THURSDAY, APRIL 2 AT 11:15am**

**Across from SAINTS PETER & PAUL BASILICA,  
Philadelphia, PA**

Why should we attend this witness when we already have so much else to advocate for and only so much time and energy?

True, there are such huge injustices happening everywhere at this time. True, it is difficult to get out there again and speak up again and sing out again and stand in public witness against another injustice, especially when the particular infringement may seem less critical or important. But then we remember what Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us:

**“JUSTICE IS INDIVISIBLE.”**

If we work for inclusion, equality, and justice on a massive scale for each other as American and world citizens, we must do the same, if on a quieter scale, for the inclusion and equality and justice for women in the Catholic Church. Oppression and repression by gigantic authoritarian, often patriarchal, institutions must be stopped no matter wherever they occur.

We cannot divide our causes for justice into important ... or

unimportant, as strongly worth pursuing ... or more discretionary, as critical ... or optional. Injustice anywhere, including in our Church, demands response or it will continue to feed into and perpetuate - and even condone - all the injustices happening everywhere.

Our theme for this year’s witness is “The Time is NOW!”. Join us for about an hour to stand proudly holding our “Ordain Catholic Women” banners. Pray, sing, reflect, and recite a litany. Then bless each other and the men only who are receiving the holy oils for Easter and celebrating Mass inside as we, once again, stand outside - as the outsiders we are - as their rituals proceed.

They have seen us before, and they will see us again.

But today we will be signaling our impatience as well as our message. There is a world out there crying out for justice, and we are, too. We are not waiting patiently any more. We want Justice undivided – and what’s more - we want it now.

*Ellie Harty is co-editor of EqualwRites*

**Maureen Tate: Nothing New!**

*By Regina Bannan*

Maureen Tate, the 2026 recipient of SEPAWOC’s annual Mary Magdalene Award, is an unusual volunteer. Look at some of what she’s done for us:

- Many theologically challenging Holy Thursday programs
- Six-foot banners of women leaders in the early church proclaiming “Nothing New!”
- A slide show about our history for the Women-Church Convergence
- Carrying the conversation about SEPAWOC for an hour with Archbishop Perez
- Writing articles and book reviews for *EqualwRites* (i.e., March-June 2014)

*continued on page 2*

**Maureen Tate: Nothing New!** *continued from page 1*

- Organizing our list of Mary Mag honorees

Maureen sees her participation in SEPAWOC as defined and strategic. She comes in and latches onto a particular project, and then is out for a while. She's like a consultant as she does remarkable things for which there is a clear need.

Maureen is surrounded by many circles: a huge extended family as well as four children and an increasing number of grandchildren; a neighborhood in West Philadelphia; and especially "The Grail". Maureen has been in international leadership for years; as I write this story she is on the way to Brazil for a meeting about the abundance possible in a shared economy.

The Grail is a women's movement that has expression through spirituality, activism for social and environmental justice and the arts, especially the liturgical arts. Maureen's involvement there impacts SEPAWOC. "Banners were on my mind" after a national planning meeting at Grailville, she says, where she did some of the sewing. That year she was planning Holy Thursday with the theme "Nothing New: Women Reclaiming Priesthood." She and her daughters got to work, sewing and painting those large banners of Mary Magdalene, Phoebe, Junia, and Theodora. These four women leaders have wandered around the area and onto YouTube: <https://youtu.be/alw9vJ3lAG8?si=lqxQv7hNYPt6JSP6> including those for the 40th anniversary of WOC.

Already, and even in strollers, all her children had attended Holy Thursday witnesses, adding memorably to the age diversity of the participants. They grew up standing up for women's equality.

But the mark of The Grail is much more than outward signs like these. It's Maureen's "primary spiritual community." Her experience is global so she holds the needs of women around the world in her heart; she "structures the activity of her life working to empower women." Her way of thinking is framed by a deep understanding of feminist theology explored at the 1974 Semester at Grailville and ever since. Bringing an expansive understanding of God to younger generations who are detached from faith communities and struggling to find a sense of belonging was a special concern in her religious education work in her parish. The message pours out: "I want them to feel that they are part of a loving universe, and made in God's image."

Growing up Catholic in Philadelphia had its problems, but programs for youth created a vibrant community, and made her later involvement "Nothing New." In high school and college Maureen and her husband experienced "an inclusive church responsive to the needs of the world." This shaped her expectations that sadly fifty years later are "overshadowed by the astounding resistance to the full participation of women."

Astounding, for sure. Maureen began investigating women's ordination when she heard about St. Joan's Alliance, an early international organization, and has been around WOC ever since. She earned a bachelor's degree from Temple in reli-

gious studies, a program which in that era presented perspectives from scriptural to sociological. Her master's in theology from LaSalle framed and deepened her understanding of the faith. But it was through The Grail that she integrated it all in a life of prophetic international witness and service within her many circles.

For Maureen Tate, this is "Nothing New." She exemplifies a prophetic woman leader with a lifelong global focus and local dedication. In gratitude for her strategic contributions to SEPAWOC and in recognition of her committed leadership in The Grail, we are honored to present her with the 2026 Mary Magdalene Award.

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

**LET'S MAKE 'ORDINATION DAY'  
EXTRAORDINARY**

We ask you to join with us on May 16 as we stand across from the Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul on Philadelphia Archdiocese's designated "Ordination Day" (obviously, for men only!).

Inside the Basilica, men will be celebrating Mass for other men. Outside the Basilica, we will also be celebrating Mass, but ours will be led by a woman.

The Mass outside will be the same as inside - yet also very different. Come see how that makes it extraordinary.

What else makes this day extraordinary? We have been conducting this Mass, this special witness for equality and full inclusion of women in the Catholic Church, for over 40 years. What can you call that other than "holy persistence"!

For over forty years, we've stood outside in heat, in rain, in wind, and in bright beautiful daylight.

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

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

Yet we've stood there steadfastly because we've always stood up for justice which in this case means full participation by *all* God's people in *all* expressions of the sacred and holy. Please stand and affirm and, in holiness, persist with us.

**Ordination Day Mass and Witness  
Saturday, May 16 at 9:30 am  
Sister Cities Park  
(Across from the Cathedral of Saints Peter  
& Paul)  
Philadelphia, PA**

## WHY I STAY

By Christine Eberle

“How can an intelligent woman like you still be Catholic?” The question caught me by surprise. Now, where do you suppose I was? A graduate seminar in physics, perhaps? Or at a bar, three-drinks-in? Nope—I got the question during an interview for an interfaith hospice chaplain position! (I’m pretty sure they weren’t supposed to ask that.) “Because it’s my church,” I shot back. “And I’m not going to let the bastards have it!” I was twenty-six years old

Just a few months earlier, when I was completing my chaplaincy training at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, I had given up Mass for Lent. My cohort had five men and three women, but I was the only “unordainable” one. (The other women were Protestant; the other Catholic was a Jesuit.) I was living in South Jersey without a car. On Sundays, I’d walk to my perpetually uninspiring neighborhood parish unless I was on call at the hospital, in which case I’d slip out to the nearest church. It was there that I heard the homily that shoved me out the door for six weeks. “Remember,” Father Somebody said, “without the Eucharist, there is no Church, and without the priest, there is no Eucharist!” Oh, good grief, Charlie Brown.

Fortunately, Carl Yusavitz (then a Mennonite, I believe) was a member of my chaplaincy cohort. As Lent was ending, he invited me to come with him and his Catholic wife, Mary Tanney, to the Easter Vigil at St. Vincent’s in Germantown. It was everything I’d been lamenting the absence of . . . intentional liturgy, thoughtful homily, vibrant community. Although it took another seventeen years for me to make St. Vincent’s my regular church home (geography and campus ministry jobs having intervened), I was relieved that such a place existed.

I do know that reasons to leave the Catholic church are abundant; I have many dear friends who now find their spiritual sustenance elsewhere. But for me, the reasons to stay are also abundant. First, I love the universality; from Sunday and daily Mass to the Liturgy of the Hours, I find consolation in knowing we are praying the same thing all around the globe. I love the liturgical seasons—how we shift the tone and focus of our prayer as we shift the colors of our altar cloths. I love our special rituals: ash distribution on Ash Wednesday, foot-washing on Holy Thursday, veneration of the cross on Good Friday, lighting of candles on All Souls. I love the breadth of our music, from Gregorian chant to Taizé ostinatos to Gospel spirituals to favorite hymns both old and new. I love the long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and the many organizations which put that teaching into effective action. And I love our vast array of saints—always someone to learn about, be inspired by, and intercede through—as well as the various religious congregations who model themselves in the charisma of their founders. (St. Ignatius of Loyola gets a special shout-out, for both my Jesuit education and decades of spiritual formation.)

I have often remarked that my Protestant friends seem to change denominations with the ease of switching school districts, whereas for Catholics it’s like leaving a family. That said, I know that many people really do need to walk away from their family; sometimes the hurt is just too deep. Fortunately, I seem to be able to handle the Church like I handle

my biological family—roll my eyes a lot, argue sometimes, but keep showing up and figuring out how to love well. When St. Vincent’s merged with St. Francis and Immaculate Conception in 2012, we became a blended family, and it was not Brady Bunch-easy. Many people left. But my 46-year-old cousin—my closest pal since childhood—had just died of a brain tumor. I knew I couldn’t lose my best friend and my parish in the same month. So, I resolved to lean in. “The way to keep loving this parish is to love what it’s becoming,” I said to anyone who would listen. That attitude has sustained me through many subsequent changes.

Full disclosure, however: I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have a vibrant Catholic place to worship—a place where people know and support one another, and where our values are aligned. (This doesn’t only describe St. Vincent’s for me, by the way; it’s also how I felt as a college student at Saint Joe’s and as a campus minister at West Chester University’s Newman Center.) If the only Catholic parish I had access to was one where the liturgy was flat and everyone was just checking the Sunday box, I might have a hard time returning week after week. But I hope that I would keep searching until I found a Catholic community that fed me on many levels, and where I was welcome to contribute more than my weekly offering.

Seven years ago, my husband, Porter, inherited his mother’s summer cottage in Maine, where we now spend about two months each year. I spent the first two summers dragging him to every possible Mass at the local parish, but “dragging” really was the right word. It always felt like obligation, never desire. Now, our Maine Sunday morning ritual includes enjoying breakfast and the Boston Globe at a favorite café, followed by meeting for worship at a tiny Quaker meeting-house. We never debate going, even though it’s a half-hour drive. So, here’s a question: What would I do if we moved there permanently? The water’s shut off for half the year, so I’ll never have to answer that. But I hope I’d either find a way to invest myself in the local parish or drive even farther to one that feeds us well. Because, as much as I love our Maine Quaker tradition—as much as I revel in the silence and stillness for those few weeks each year—by the time we come home, I am hungry for ritual again, and eager to be with my own community.

Although I just took several hundred words to explain why I stay, I think the most honest reason is the one I flippantly shared during that job interview three-plus decades ago: because it’s *mine*. I was raised in an Irish Catholic Philadelphia family; my father had been a seminarian; my mother and godmother taught theology at diocesan high schools; my own Catholic education encompassed kindergarten through grad school. I spent twenty-six years working as a Catholic campus minister in higher ed; as a spirituality writer, I’m part of a network of people doing creative work in Ignatian spaces. And I’ve been a cantor at St. Vincent’s for eighteen years now, singing at baptisms and first Communions and weddings and funerals—often for the same family. Catholicism is as intertwined in my life as ancient tree roots in the earth.

This church is *mine*, dammit. And I’m not going to let the bastards have it.

**Christine Eberle** is a writer, speaker, social justice advocate, and cantor. Her latest book is “Finding God Along the Way: Wisdom from the Ignatian Camino for Life at Home”. [www.christine-marie-eberle.com](http://www.christine-marie-eberle.com)

## GET THE SALT OUT OF THE SHAKER AND INTO THE WORLD

By *Kathy Schuck*

Those of you who have been surrounded by snow and ice this winter and spent many days salting sidewalks, paths, and driveways may be asking yourself: How is it that salt melts ice? It turns out the process is based on a concept of chemistry known as freezing point depression, a phenomenon that occurs when the freezing point of a liquid is lowered by the addition of another substance, such as salt. When salt dissolves in water, the salt molecules break apart into sodium and chloride ions, which mix with the water molecules and cause a disruption in the formation of ice, causing it to melt at a temperature below 32 degrees Fahrenheit or 0 degrees Celsius.

For thousands of years, salt has played a significant role, like the one above, in human history and culture. For centuries before refrigeration, salt was used to preserve meat and fish. Since ancient times, therefore, governments have recognized the benefits of taxing salt. This strategy made sense, generating steady revenue because everyone needs salt to live.

Problems, however, ensued. Britain, for example, had abolished its salt tax for England in 1825, but the tax persisted in British colonies, including in its crown jewel, India, where it was illegal even to collect natural deposits of salt. Mahatma Gandhi believed India could gain independence from Britain through nonviolent direct action, and he chose the salt tax as a focus for a major protest. In 1930, Gandhi wrote an open letter to the British Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin, requesting an end to the salt tax and explaining his intentions if refused. His request was promptly denied. To protest, Gandhi led a 240-mile walk starting with 80 people and mushrooming to 50,000 of every caste participating by the time they reached the sea. After 24 days, Gandhi arrived at the beach and picked up a clump of salt as an act of resistance to the salt tax. What is referred to as the “Salt March” was a symbolic protest to attract media attention and inspire action. It was Gandhi’s most successful campaign, and it ultimately sparked civil disobedience that involved millions across India. The final result: the Gandhi-Irwin Pact that made it legal for people in India to gather and manufacture salt. A year later the salt tax was totally abolished.

What might we learn from Gandhi? In his words, “Carefully watch your thoughts for they become your words. Manage and watch your words, for they become your actions. Consider and judge your actions, for they become your habits. Acknowledge and watch your habits, for they become your values. Embrace and watch your values for they become your destiny.”

Gandhi recognized that: “Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life.” Further back in time, Jesus also chose to use salt as a symbol: “You are the salt of the earth,” he said. Is it a coincidence that salt is a metaphor for peace, graciousness, wisdom, courage, and character? In the first century...in the 1930’s...today – even though salt varies in purity, processing, and additives, the invitation Jesus and Gandhi sent to us remains the same. In the toughest of

world situations and in light of persistent injustices, we are called on to recognize our giftedness and act as catalysts for positive change. As we’re already doing in our families and our communities in a hundred different ways, we are asked to embody love to enhance and heal the world.

What good is salt if it’s still in the salt shaker? Let’s find a way to get the salt we are out of the salt shaker and into the world.

**Kathy Schuck** is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest, our delegate to Women’s Ordination Worldwide, and a member of the Saint Mary Magdalene Community.

### SEPAWOC 2025 Financial Statement

Beginning balance (1-1-25)	\$ 4341.56
Donations	7043.24
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,384.80</b>

#### Expenses

Printing	5462
Postal services	842
Dues (Catholic Organizations for Renewal, We Are Church USA)	175
Ad (Future Church)	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>6629</b>

**Ending balance** 4755.80

Mary Whelan, Treasurer

#### Donations can be sent by check to:

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in the envelope we have provided.

You can also donate through the PayPal link at our website, [sepawoc.org](http://sepawoc.org)

#### TREASURER’S UPDATE!

By *Mary Whelan*

Preparing the annual treasurer’s report gives me a sense of deep gratitude. “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has,” Margaret Mead said. That describes us—a small group of individuals joined together for a common purpose—in this case, the promotion of justice, equality and full partnership in ministry in the Catholic Church, a seemingly simple, straightforward goal. Through your contributions we remain a stalwart presence, undaunted, despite the odds.

## AS THE BODIES PILE UP...

*By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco*

We should never be surprised by violence. We should never be surprised by war. We should never be surprised by men with big guns marching through city streets smashing car windows and breaking down doors. We should never be surprised by the deaths of innocents. We should never be surprised by rape or kidnapping. We should never be surprised by virulent, endemic racism and blatant sexism that infects governments, churches, and the media. We should never be surprised because this has been the *modus operandi* (MO) of civilizations for the last four thousand years.

There are many reasons why too many societies willingly stepped onto the treadmill of violence. And it's not because of some original fall from primordial innocence or some flaw in humanity from which every person suffers. There were civilizations, including in big cities, prior to the rise of Sumer, that were not violent, did not build walls, or field standing armies, cities that were semi-egalitarian long before the written history. What happened?

Before recorded history, any number of roads diverged throughout time. The great civilizations that arose around 4,000 B.C.E. chose to build theirs upon the myth of redemptive violence. And for four thousand years, we've been told that this way, the way of redemptive violence, is the only way, even as the bodies pile up.

The myth of redemptive violence has lasted longer than any other religious belief. It is also much stronger than any other religious belief. Christianity, where the Father demands the blood sacrifice of his son as a recompense for sin, is built upon it. If God can demand the death of God's child as a bloody sacrifice, then God can demand the death of anyone's child. Whether or not Jesus agreed to this unholy equation doesn't matter.

This myth has flowed beneath civilizations like a noxious sludge or an electrified third rail. It kills everything that touches it: the firstborn in an out-group's family, baby boys or baby girls, heretics, Jews, people of color, cheeky women, indigent people, the disabled, protestors, and scapegoats like Jesus.

This myth is supported by a host of other myths: The myth that God supports sacrifice and pain as a means to salvation; the myth that the shedding of blood provides purification and redemption; the myth that human beings have an inherent flaw that spreads sin like a contagion and can only be contained by priests and religion; the myth that violence is the only way because peace is too naïve or too hard; the myth of the just war; the myth that some people are inferior and deserve to be enslaved; the myth that God chose men to rule the country and the home because of their innate moral and spiritual superiority.

The elevation of man as the ideal human being is an omen as important as the Star of Bethlehem. Unlike the Magi who followed the Star to find the Prince of Peace, the rise of the patriarchal star sets the rough beast with his blood-dimmed tide slouching towards innocent people who will be consumed by his man-made wrath.

Women— and then children— are always the first victims of the beast.

Christianity was not born a patriarchal faith. Its leaders chose to become one by falling to the lowest common social denominator of its time. It only took a couple of generations for the Jesus movement to transition from one of respect, where Paul entrusted a letter he wrote to the church in Rome that was founded by the married couple Prisca and Aquila and to the deacon Phoebe, to the course correcting scribes who decided that women should not talk in church.

Patriarchal men began fabricating and then reveling in stories of gruesome martyrdoms where beautiful, noble women were sent to be raped and tortured by vicious pagan Roman mobs. While Christian men were expected to be all that they could be, Christian women were expected to have baby after baby, even if it killed them. In fact, the church has never had a problem with dead women, even when children were orphaned and left to starve. To the men of the church attired in royal robes and crowns, for whom food was never a problem, birth control and abortion were far more serious sins. In December 2025, the Petrocchi Commission headed by a 77 year old cardinal wrote that women could not be ordained to the diaconate because of historical evidence, theological investigation, scripture, tradition, and the magisterium.

The members of the commission quite obviously chose not to read Romans 16, a primary source, which clearly calls Phoebe a deacon. It didn't bother to study the ancient tombstones in Rome that name women as priests. What apparently mattered to them was tradition and the magisterium, both of which were established as precedent by misogynistic men who found sacred scripture wanting and so set their own rules, making these rules equal to what they call "the Word of God." It is these men who think that Jesus wants only men to run his church.

The patriarchy and its unholy twin, misogyny, are two of the marks of the beast that perpetuate the myth of redemptive violence. Those who follow this beast will divide people into arbitrary groups rather than unite them. They will excommunicate, sanction, and banish. They will fixate upon attributes over which people have no control, like gender. They will arbitrarily choose men for high office while denigrating women, demanding sacrifices from them that they are not willing to make. And they will paper over their mean-spirited divisiveness and label their sin the will of God.

As the churchmen knowingly, willingly, and sinfully refuse to recognize the equality of men and women, the bodies will continue to pile up. Women will remain the poorest of the poor, the first to die in times of trouble. The maternal and infant mortality rate will remain unacceptably high. Women will not receive the health care and family planning they need so desperately. And the ongoing violence against women and very young girls will not be addressed.

If the church would truly reflect the words of Jesus who preached the kingdom of God, not male supremacy, it must consign patriarchy to the deepest reaches of Hell and encase its evil in ice so thick it can never again be summoned by the call of ancient myths that have never made sense.

*Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest at the Mary Magdalene Community.*



**WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE 50TH ANNIVERSARY  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN  
MAY 22-24, 2026**

Together we will embark on a pilgrimage to honor the feminist thought-leadership of our 1975 landmark gathering and \*energize\* our movement for the future.

**WHAT TO EXPECT?**

- Be part of the joyful resistance
- Encounter the movement
- Build skills
- Engage with Feminist Theology
- Participate in Inclusive Liturgy

**FEATURED SPEAKERS?**

Dr. Natalia Imperatori-Lee is Associate Professor of Systematics with a focus on ecclesiology, feminist theologies, and Latinx theologies at Fordham University.

Dr. Teresa Delgado is Dean of St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and professor of theology and religious studies at St. John's University.

Dr. Nontando Hadebe is an African Catholic woman feminist theologian based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

**SAMPLE WORKSHOPS?**

- Women's Ordination Education
- Creating Inclusive Liturgies, Prayers, and Rituals
- Power Mapping the Movement
- Myth-busting and Truth-telling: How to talk about Women's Ordination 101
- WOC at my parish

**MORE INFORMATION AND HOW TO REGISTER?**

Go to [www.womensordination.org](http://www.womensordination.org).

**SAINT MARY MAGDALENE  
COMMUNITY**

Join us for Sunday Zoom Masses at 9:00 am

More information at: [smmcommunity.org](http://smmcommunity.org).

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## Book Reviews

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***The Mother* by Grazia Deledda. New York, NY: Italica Press, 2025. 119 pp. Paperback. \$20.**

*Reviewed by Marian Ronan*

A few weeks ago, a friend and I went out for coffee. The former owner of an independent bookstore, she presented me with a little book, *The Mother*, by Grazia Deledda. She said she was sure I would like it. The next day, I read its 119 pages straight through. Wow.

As I get old(er), there are a lot of people and things I am ashamed to say I know nothing about. Deledda is one of them. She was the second woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1927, having written thirty-three novels, twenty-five collections of short stories, several volumes of poetry, plays, a pastoral opera, a film script, Sardinian folklore, much more. And let me tell you, she is a fabulous writer.

Another thing I was ashamed of is that I didn't know the difference between Sardinia, the Italian island where Deledda was born and about which she wrote voluminously, and Sicily, a smaller island down at the toe of Italy.

But now, on to *The Mother*. Set in the small Sardinian cliffside village of Aar, the book tells the story of a mother (hence the title), Maria Maddalena, and her son, a young priest, Paulo. The mother was a poor servant as a girl, married briefly before her husband died and her son was born. She continued working as a servant to support him, and her son Paulo goes to the seminary. Maria works there to be near him. After he is ordained, he becomes the pastor of the parish church in Aar, and his mother goes there to support him in the rectory.

The plot thickens when Maria Maddalena becomes increasingly anxious about how her son lets his hair grow in, dresses himself, puts perfume on, and looks at himself in a mirror on the wall of his room, though priests were forbidden to have such mirrors. And he begins to go out in the dark to the house of a rich young woman, Agnese, not far from the rectory.

One night Maria follows him to the house, intending to confront them, but she can't get in. The next morning she tells Paulo she is going to leave the village, never to see him again, unless he breaks with Agnes. The next morning he writes a letter ending his relationship with Agnese and tells his mother to deliver it to her.

In the midst of all this, a woman brings to the church her little girl who is having a tantrum, believing she is possessed by a demon. Paulo reads the parable of the Gadarene demoniac to her (Mark 5), and as he does so, the little girl

becomes quiet. The village and Maria believe that Paulo is a miracle worker, and the night long celebration of his miracle saves him from returning to Agnese.

But then he learns Agnese has fallen and is bleeding, and he feels compelled to visit her. She's fine, but she tells him that unless he marries her and goes away with her as he promised, she will come to his next Sunday Mass and announce to all what he has done.

Paulo nevertheless celebrates Sunday Mass, with his mother in the back of the church, both worrying about what is going to happen. For most of the Mass, Agnese isn't there, but she eventually shows up. The drama ends with an unexpected event, but I'm not going to tell you what it is. You have to read the book through, as I did, to find out.

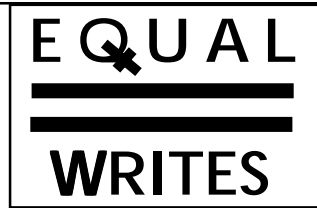
Beyond the narrative itself, there is much else to amaze the reader. For one thing, Deledda uses a neither literary technique called "magical realism," which magical or supernatural phenomena appear in an otherwise real-world or mundane setting. It has been used by some of the great writers of the twentieth century, including Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, and others. In *The Mother*, the former, ostensibly dead, evil former pastor of the parish appears to Maria Maddalena and gives her orders. Deledda weaves this and other magical matters seamlessly into the book. Doing this, some reviewers believe, expresses her commitment to showing the ways in which traditional Sardinian religious practices interweave with Catholicism on the island.

And if this were not enough, Deledda also weaves the extraordinary beauty of nature on the island into her story.

One of the things I love about *The Mother* is that Deledda demonizes nor adulates the young priest. Instead, she lays out the complexities of Paulo's passion for Agnese and his commitment to the priesthood—as well as his mother's struggles to demand that her son live up to his vow of celibacy and her realization of the depths of his passion for Agnese.

But there's a whole lot more to love about this book. Get a copy and see for yourself.

**Marian Ronan** is a retired seminary professor and the author or co-author of seven books and a whole lot of book reviews.



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## Scripture Reflections

### Pentecost 2026

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

During Lent, we reflect on the journey of Jesus to Easter, and we remember that women first proclaimed the Good News - Jesus has risen and lives still...but then these words of Luke will reverberate in our hearts: Their story seemed like nonsense and the apostles refused to believe them.

Yet soon after, the Pentecost proclamation resounds: The Spirit will be poured out on all people; sons and daughters will prophesy; young and old will dream dreams. We will be the beloved community that Jesus proclaimed.

On Pentecost weekend 2026, we will celebrate the fifty-year, Spirit-led journey of WOC and SEPAWOC!. For fifty years, through, with, and in the Holy Spirit, daughters and sons, young and old, have kept dreaming, envisioning, moving forward together, despite any obstacle or roadblock.

I have had the great blessing of being part of this glorious journey from the very beginning, Memories are flowing in of our prophets and guides from all around the world: memories of liturgies, music, teachings, workshops, conferences,

and celebrations, and I am so grateful for all who have joined in this great work-including you!

On Pentecost Weekend, we will remember, celebrate, and be renewed- and keep on going!

We hope to see you in Detroit for our conference in May, but if you can't come, please know we are packing you in our suitcases and taking you with us—for we are one in the Spirit.

This is the day our God has made, we will rejoice and be glad!

**Judy Heffernan** is member of the Community of the Christian Spirit, the SEPAWOC Core Committee, and we honor and celebrate her for 50 years of advocacy for women's leadership and full ministry in the Catholic Church.