

WHAT THEY'RE UP AGAINST!

Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR)

A report by Ellie Harty

Here are some lyrics to a song written by Malvina Reynolds that I thought particularly inspiring for we who are invested in the renewal of our (often beloved) Catholic Church. It is comforting to know that we can be the grass, the new growth, pushing through the stone that would confine us.

*God bless the grass that grows thru the crack.
They roll the concrete over it to try and keep it back.
The concrete gets tired of what it has to do,
It breaks and it buckles and the grass grows thru,
And God bless the grass...*

*God bless the grass that grows through cement.
It's green and it's tender and it's easily bent.
But after a while it lifts up its head,
For the grass is living and the stone is dead,
And God bless the grass...*

I do believe we are the grass that can break through the concrete, and the October meeting of Catholic Organizations for Renewal, my first meeting with the group, more than confirmed that belief.

COR members collectively represent those Catholics who do not have a voice in official Church organizations. The delegates to COR, therefore, represent hundreds, maybe thousands, of Catholics involved in renewing the Church, for example: The national Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) as well our own SEPAWOC, Dignity USA and New Ways Ministry, Future Church and Call to Action, Catholics for Choice and Catholics Speak Out, Ecumenical Catholic Communion and RAPPORT, Women-Church Convergence, and the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church, CORPUS, Pax Christi Maine, Voice of the Faithful, and the list goes on. This is a dynamic, formidable group made of exactly the kind of grass that can crumble stone.

To renew your own energy and sense of hope in this Advent season, therefore, feast on some initiatives these groups individually and COR collectively are working on:

- Planning and preparation for education, actions, and events before and after the Synod of Bishops focusing on **"Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment"** to be held in Rome in October 2018. (A questionnaire has already gone out to

identified youth. We suspect the concerns we focus on will not be included and one touted "vocation" will not involve girls becoming priests!)

- Identifying 100 **Catholic Women** who feel called ready to serve as **Deacons** by conducting educational retreats and workshops as well as the site, "deaconchat", which offers exploration and a chance to converse with priests or bishops.
- Discussing and dealing effectively with the revelation of the wide variety of needs and polarization created by the publication of Fr. James Martin's book focusing on **LBGTQI issues** in the Church and offering opportunities and discussions around supporting the **transgender community**, especially in the light of the Pope's remarks.
- Combatting the **fallout for women and others from the religious liberty initiative** that allows employers to refuse funds for reproductive choices based on moral or religious grounds.
- Working on creating **intentional Eucharistic communities** for the marginalized.
- Investigating the efficacy of **intersectionality** with other justice groups working on such issues as racism, immigration, ageism, cutting benefits to the poor, etc.
- Continuing the **"Catholic Women Preach" project** to allow viewers to see, hear, and celebrate women's voices in ministry and following up on **"A Church for Our Daughters"** initiatives. Enhancing the **"Save Our Parish" community work** to help forestall parish closings through publishing the socio-economic impacts, and distributing the film "Foreclosing on Faith" which follows the money from the sex scandal payouts to the closing of parishes.

And so the grass grows and spreads and strengthens. Pillars, walls, locked doors, closed minds, remember: "The grass is living but the stone is dead."

Ellie Harty is co-editor of Equalwrites.

I LOVE THIS CHURCH

We thought this poem said so much about our struggle and our sustenance. A member of the LGBT community, after giving a testimony about his own struggle within the Catholic Church, read it on Solidarity Sunday at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Germantown.

Knowing the Corruption, how can a Thoughtful Catholic say:

I LOVE THIS CHURCH

In the course of a half century
I have seen more Christian corruption
than you have ever read of.

I have tasted it.

I have been reasonably corrupt
myself.

And yet, I love this church,
this living, pulsing, sinning
people of God
with a crucifying passion.
Why?

For all the Christian hate,
I experience here a community of love.

For all the institutional idiocy,
I find here a tradition of reason.

For all the individual repressions,
I breathe here an air of freedom.

For all the fear of sex,
I discover here

the redemption of my body.

In an age so inhuman,

I touch here tears of compassion.

In a world so grim and humorless,

I share here rich joy

and earthy laughter.

In the midst of death,

I hear an incomparable stress on life.

For all the apparent absence of God,

I sense here

the real presence of Christ.

Walter Burghardt, S.J.



FOR WOMEN SEEKING TO BE ORDAINED PRIESTS

The Lucile Murray Durkin scholarship is primarily directed to women who wish to be ordained Catholic Priests (including Ecumenical Catholic and Roman Catholic Women Priests). Secondly it is open to women who are seeking priestly ordination in other denominations.

Applications are open to women enrolled or accepted into an undergraduate or graduate studies program. To be eligible the candidate must be enrolled or participate in at least one class or significant volunteer ministry of comparable scope that she believes would forward the discernment of her call to a life in ordained ministry.

Completed applications must be received by April 29th, 2018. Awardees will be notified by June 30th, 2018. Award Agreement is \$2,000.00. More information is at womensordination.org/programs/scholarship.

TO SUPPORT OR BECOME A WOMAN DEACON:

Along with retreats for women who are discerning their call to the permanent diaconate, FutureChurch, in cooperation with the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests and Voice of the Faithful have launched *DeaconChat*, a downloadable resource designed to inspire conversations about the diaconate among laity and clergy. FutureChurch's *100 Women Deacons Campaign* is an effort to bring the stories of women who feel called to the diaconate to the wider church. Go to CatholicWomenDeacons.org and Catholicwomenpreach.org to learn more.

WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST!

By Ellie Harty

Name Calling and Labeling

Let's start with Fr. Dwight Longenecker, in an article posted on August 24, 2015, on the *Crux* website. He begins with asserting: "Pope John Paul II didn't leave much wiggle room when he wrote, '... I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.'" Pope Benedict XVI followed up by proclaiming *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* as definitive, and, wham, the door to women's ordination, according to Longenecker, slammed permanently shut. "... It seems impossible to imagine how Pope Francis or any future pope could rescind that teaching." Period. The end.

Ah, but, he lamented: "Progressively definitive teaching from four popes has not stopped some Catholics from continuing to push for women's ordination." Longenecker followed this lament with - are you ready for this? - "The issue is clearly a *cause célèbre* for a certain type of graying Catholic dissident. Regarding themselves as brave pioneers, they are unable to see the futility of their campaign. Are they so blind that they do not realize that for the majority of Catholics outside North America and Europe, women's ordination is a non-issue? As for the women who have ordained themselves, the photographs of their ceremonies are quaintly bizarre. With their beaming smiles and makeshift vestments, they are not so much Cafeteria Catholics as Confused Catholics. Have they never heard the ancient maxim, 'Rome has spoken. That settles it?'"

Graying dissidents, are we? In a futile endeavor? A 'non-issue', is it? WomenPriests 'quaintly bizarre', are they? And, a Vatican pronouncement 'settles everything', does it? *I beg his pardon!* ... Actually, I don't want his pardon or his words, but that is what we get from a certain sector out there.

The man does want to console us, though, and the basis for consolation brings out one of, I believe, the most damaging and underhanded ways of undermining women and power and the working of the Holy Spirit in those called to ministry. He maintains, and he is not alone, that the end of even the possibility of women's ordination has brought about even greater good for women. Thank heavens, in fact, that particular door closed, for "when one door closes, another opens!"

That new opening door is really our old time favorite: Complementarity. We women, although left out of ordination forever, have, under Pope Francis, been "allowed new outlets for our gifts and, ... happily, a new breed of Catholic female theologians have taken Pope Francis' words to heart." Our consolation is, therefore: "While women cannot be ordained as priests, there are more women than ever serving the Church in a variety of ways," Longenecker then lists some of them: Sharing pastoral duties with priests, serving with men on marriage tribunals, in local church administration, pontifical councils and Vatican commissions, etc. Complementarity, Longenecker quotes Mary Ann Glendon, former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, as saying "is a broader con-

cept than that proposed in the traditional marriage model." Comforted yet?

Complementarity will allow both men and women to discuss, debate, and eventually reach a decision about conflicts or issues within the Church. (Except, of course, about women's ordination.) Again Longenecker, and presumably the Church, are both snide and optimistic: "The current discussions among a new generation of scholarly Catholic women are bringing fresh insights which are moving us on from the tired debates of the first wave of feminism which simply demanded ordination for women."

To give him credit, however, when his optimism does triumph over his snideness, Longenecker and those who think as he does can be persuasive: "However, it should not be imagined that the new wave of Catholic feminists are simply playing the submissive female doormat. They are challenging the Church to make real the rhetoric and truly integrate and appreciate the feminine genius. They call for continued de-clericalization of the Church, an authentic ministry of all the faithful, and a radical acceptance of the prophetic role of women in the Church and society."

It's good to know closed doors do some good. Imagine though what good could happen if all the doors were open!

Feminizing the Liturgy

I'm not the only one bugged by Fr. Dwight Longenecker. Pia de Solenni, writing at Patheos.com on March 3, 2016, also took him on in "Don't make the Church A Stepford Wife". (Love the title!)

Apparently, Longenecker published a piece, "Men at Church", in which Solenni quoted him as explaining why what he calls the "feminization of the liturgy" is so unattractive to men. "When well-meaning liturgists and priests feel they have to make everything in the liturgy emotionally relevant and 'meaningful' to everyone, many men switch off. When Father Fabulous insists on being emotionally entertaining in the liturgy he is likely to please the women while the fellas roll their eyes. When Sister Sandals develops new age liturgies that attempt to connect with our emotions, or when Pastor Hipster tries to push the emotional hot buttons with his sermon, most men are not only ready to switch off, they're ready to head for the door. ... Traditional Catholic worship, on the other hand, is by the book and objective. Men perceive it as being dependable and rock solid—not emotional, subjective, and flighty."

As Solenni points out, "He sets women up as being emotional, subjective, and flighty. Hmm...sounds more like a deadbeat dad or, at best, a Stepford wife." She goes on, "And for what it's worth, many women *think* and *feel* similarly about such liturgies. ... Some may choose to insist on Stepford wife caricatures of woman and everything related to her, but they miss the reality of all things essential to humanity. Until we have a profound and authentic understanding of woman, we won't understand fully the significance of salvation, humanity, the Church, or even Christ. ... And the same goes for a profound and authentic understanding of man, which of its very nature would not make caricatures of women."

Amen.

continued on pg. 11

What Happened to Hillary?

What Happened to US?

By *Marianna P. Sullivan*

In an earlier article for this publication, I suggested that Hillary Clinton's election was not a sure thing. However, in the spring of 2016 it seemed like everything was moving in her favor, especially when the GOP nominated a man proud of assaulting and demeaning women.

So, what happened? How did a highly qualified woman who had extensive experience in the public and non-profit sector and is well-versed in policy matters lose to you know who? Candidate Clinton is herself pondering the question in her memoir, *What Happened*. In recent weeks she has publicly discussed her views on the election's outcome. Her explanations don't go far enough to acknowledge her own responsibility for the loss, according to some commentators. Indeed, she made numerous mistakes. Especially dumb was setting up a private email server while Secretary of State, calling some supporters of her opponent "deplorables," and taking those high-paying Wall Street speeches in the years preceding her presidential run.

Aside from these errors, Hillary Clinton's loss is partly explained by the personal animosity many voters feel toward her and by the importance of misogyny in our society. The latter comes out strongly in the criticisms of her memoir. Her mention of the difficulty some Americans have in visualizing a female president has been widely criticized. But, together with the mistakes suggested in the previous paragraph, continued prejudice against women surely contributed to Hillary's defeat.

Readers of *EqualwRites* are fully aware of this lag in our culture. As we experience our exclusion from power in the church and the demeaning attitudes towards women expressed by many in the hierarchy, we understand patriarchy and its historical and cultural foundations. We seek by our behavior to demonstrate how a church that truly follows Christ's teaching would draw on the talents of all its members. However, the church provides no procedures to change these norms and the rules which exclude us.

The political system does provide such procedures; as a result, women and African-Americans have undeniably made progress over the years. However, they are not yet fully accepted as equal to white men; they are distinct, subject to different expectations, judged by different standards. One of the most touching episodes in Ms. Clinton's memoir is her account of her opponent hovering over her during one of the presidential debates and her regret that she did not challenge him. What if she had? Do you think that she would have appeared strong, justified, brave? Or shrill, strident, shrewish?

Still there was more to the 2016 election results than the status of women in the United States. People vote or stay home based on their circumstances, their perception of the candidates, their partisan history, and their economic status. Furthermore, Theodore White argued that elections are either about change or continuity. Clearly 2016 was a change

election and, to many, Hillary Clinton represented continuity. Finally, there was one crucial flaw in her campaign. Hillary Clinton did not present a clear and persuasive argument as to why one should vote for her. Why was she running? What was her program? Stating that she was not the other guy was not enough.

In an important book on public policy, *Thinking in Time*, Richard Neustadt and Ernest May argued that, in political and policy decision-making, one should examine the history of an event and of the issues and people involved. Time should be seen as a stream, with events representing a shift in the current. Viewed in the aftermath of the elections in 2008 and 2012, in the wake of technological change, uneven economic development, rising income inequality, and as a chapter in Hillary Clinton's 30-year political history, her loss seems understandable.

However, being the strong woman that she is, Hillary Clinton will not creep back to private life but rather continue to work on public policy in the areas that have interested her for decades. She will carry on. So too must we in our assertion of equal rights for women in our church.

Marianna Pulaski Sullivan is Professor Emeritus of Political Science, The College of New Jersey and a Member of St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Germantown.

The Table

You have probably already been reading *The Table*, the Women's Ordination Conference blog, and hopefully find it informing and interesting. We are happy to introduce two new bloggers - people you already know no less! - our own Regina Bannan and Ellie Harty. Our first post was on October 31st. Please check it out at womensordination.org.

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

Editors: Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan

Regular Columnists: Judith A. Heffernan



A SEASON OF DARKENING... WAITING... AND HOPE

By the time you receive this edition of EqualwRites, it will be Advent. In thinking about how difficult these times are for we who work for positive change in the world, we searched for an appropriate Advent blessing. Thanks to Jan Richardson, artist and poet, we found one that we think is perfect.

Darkness is where incarnation begins.

The gorgeous texts of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany shimmer with the light that God brings into our midst, as in the prologue to John's Gospel: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:5).

Yet if we lean too quickly toward the light, we miss seeing one of the greatest gifts this season has to offer us: that the deepest darkness is the place where God comes to us. In the womb, in the night, in the dreaming; when we are lost, when our world has come undone, when we cannot see the next step on the path; in all the darkness that attends our life, whether hopeful darkness or horrendous, God meets us. God's first priority is not to do away with the dark but to be present to us in it. I will give you the treasures of darkness, God says in Isaiah 45:3, and riches hidden in secret places.

For the Christ who was born two millennia ago, for the Christ who seeks to be born in us this day, the darkness is where incarnation begins. Can we imagine the darkness as a place where God meets us—and not only meets us, but asks to take form in this world through us? Comfort, O comfort my people, we hear God cry out in an Advent text from Isaiah (40:1). If, in this life, I cannot do away with grief, then I pray that I will at least enter into it with a heart open to this comfort, this solace that is one of the greatest treasures God offers us in the landscape of this season.

This comfort is no mere pabulum, no saccharine wish. And though it is deeply personal, it is not merely that; solace does not leave us to our own solitude. True comfort opens our broken heart toward the broken heart of the world and, in that opening, illuminates a doorway, a threshold, a connection. It reveals to us a place where, in the company of heaven and earth, we can begin anew, bearing forth the solace we have found.

Jan Richardson is a writer, artist, and ordained minister in the United Methodist Church. Known for such books as *Circle of Grace* and *Night Visions* as well as her popular blogs *The Painted Prayerbook* and *The Advent Door*, she serves as director of *The Wellspring Studio, LLC*, and makes her home in Florida. Jan frequently collaborated in retreats and conferences with her husband, the singer/songwriter *Garrison Doles*, until his sudden death in December 2013. Her latest book is *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times*

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ON NOT TAKING ON GENERAL JOHN KELLY

By Eileen DiFranco

Sara Huckabee Sanders has sternly warned us Americans about not “taking on” General Kelly because his title and distinguished service have apparently put him beyond the scope of human criticism even when he says something really stupid like there was a time when women were respected and held sacred. In spite of Huckabee Sanders’ dire warning, and the fear of being accused of asking a “fake” question, I would like to take the General to task and to cite the time and place when any society respected women or held them sacred.

Was it, General Kelly, way back in the day when “Saint” Augustine used a nameless woman as a sex slave for years but refused to marry her because she was of a lower caste than he? Was it when women were sold by their fathers, their brothers, or their uncles for a cow, a pig, or a kingdom? When little girls barely past puberty were “married” off to old men in a “marriage” that was blessed in a church by a priest? Was it when religious authorities were burning women at the stake for being witches or when they were being commanded by priests to have baby after baby even if it killed them?

Was it when Chinese women’s feet were bound, preventing them from walking? Or when Hindu women were expected to jump upon their deceased husband’s funeral pyre? Was it when little girls had/ have their labia cut off in order to be regarded as “pure” by the men who would later marry them? Was it when black women were enslaved and raped by their white, church going masters who touted the virtue of white womanhood?

Or was it when American women had no title to property they inherited once they were married? When they had no right to their children if they got divorced or were divorced? Or was it when women were denied the right to vote by men who held fervid religious sensibilities about the “God” given role of women in the world?

Do you know, General, that women in most societies were not taught to read, that American women were once barred from the university because great thoughts inspired by education might cause their uteruses to wander around their bodies, preventing them from bearing children? Did you know that once women were admitted to some colleges, the men would yell curses at them and spit at them during class? Do you know that even now some religious faiths still deny women the role of religious leadership and with a straight face claim that they are not anti-women?

Did you forget, General Kelly, that women could not win sports scholarships to college until 1972, that female athletes were/are often paid less than males and that women in general earn less than men for doing the same job? Have you looked around the Oval Office and the Senate and the House of Representative and noticed the dearth of women? Has it ever struck you as odd that a bunch of uniformly white men think that they have the right to decide about what constitutes health care for women? Have you noticed that it is men who lead countries into war while grieving wives and mothers are forced to hear clumsy, painful comments from clueless

men like they (the soldiers) knew what they were getting into?

What are your thoughts as thousands of women document the lack of respect paid to them by powerful and not so powerful men via #MeToo? Do you think the women are kidding? Lying? Most of all, what do you think about your boss’ comment that when you are famous, women let you do anything to them? Was that respect? Did you think your boss was kidding, that his remarks were “hyperbole” or “locker room talk?”

So, when exactly, General Kelly, were women treated with respect and sacredness? Are you thinking of the time when guys held doors open for women? Sacredness, as you may not know, goes way beyond meaningless gestures. Meanwhile, you talk out of both sides of your mouth as you engage in the age old male practice of name calling and vilifying women who dare to “take on” men, like Congresswoman Wilson whom you labeled an “empty barrel.” That doesn’t sound too respectful to me.

I will patiently await your citations because I am really interested in a time when women really were treated like they were made in the sacred image of their Creator.

I would also like to direct Huckabee Sanders to the Catholic Church, because she, too, needs a history lesson. In the not so distant past, the Catholic Church was regarded as “sacred” and its priests too holy to be “taken on” by some observant members of the non-ordained who suspected that the clergy had clay feet peeping out from under their cassocks. As a result, thousands and thousands of children were sexually molested because the patina of alleged clerical holiness and sacrifice blinded the faithful from seeing that supposedly redeemed and holy men were just like far too many other males in our patriarchal society.

History is an uncomfortable reality check for those who would turn back the clock to the good old days that were not so good for those who did not fit into the dominant narrative.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest and a founding member of the Mary Magdalene Community.

St. Mary Magdalene Community

Saturday Mass at 5:00 p.m.

Epworth United Methodist Church

501 Morgan Avenue • Palmyra, NJ 08065

Drexel Hill United Methodist

Sunday Mass at 9:00 a.m.

600 Burmont Road • Drexel Hill, PA 19026

For information contact Eileen at 267-258-6966

SPIRITUALLY ENRICHING EVENTS IN OUR AREA

November - April

Sisters of Saint Joseph Earth Center

9701 Germantown Avenue,
Philadelphia 19118,
215-248-7289

From Darkness to Light

Winter Solstice Prayer

Thursday, December 21, 2017, 6:30 p.m.
Gather at the SSJ Earth Center,
Process to Labyrinth
Prayer in Mount St. Joseph Convent

Cranaleith Spiritual Center

13475 Proctor Road
Northeast Philadelphia, 19116
215-934-6206

A New Earth: Preparing the Way

Presenter: Sharon Browning
Saturday, December 9, 2017, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Cost: \$80 (includes lunch)

Advent Contemplative Morning: Echoes of Mercy, Whispers of Love

Presenter: Maria DiBello, RSM
Tuesday, December 12, 2017, 9:30 a.m.-noon
Cost: \$25

A Morning of Mindfulness

Presenter: Marlene Skrobak, RSM
Thursday, February 8, 2018, 10 a.m.-noon
Cost: \$35

A Contemplative Afternoon with Laudato Si

Presenter: Leslie Porreca, RSM
Sunday, February 11, 2018, 1-4 p.m.
Cost: \$35

Ash Wednesday Retreat: A Heart Contrite and Broken

Presenter: Maria DiBello, RSM
Wednesday, February 14, 2018, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Cost: \$45 (includes lunch)

Becoming Radiant: The Lenten Journey of Dying Before We Die

Presenter: Sharon Browning
Saturday, February 24, 2018, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Cost: \$80 (includes lunch)

Lenten Contemplative Morning: An Awe do Quiet

Presenter: Maria DiBello, RSM
Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 9:30 a.m.-noon
Cost: \$35

Eco-Spirituality Weekend: Keeping the Traditions Alive

Presenter: Leslie Porreca, RSM
March 2-4, 2018, Arrival: 7 p.m., Friday; Departure: 11
a.m., Sunday
Cost: \$185 (includes lodging and meals)

The Great High Cross: Lent in the Celtic Tradition

Presenter: Meg Brown, RSM
Saturday, March 10, 2018, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Cost: \$45 (includes lunch)

Poetry as Prayer

Presenter: Renee Yann, RSM
Saturday, April 21, 2018, 1-4 p.m.
Cost: \$35

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Cultivating Compassion: Buddhist, Jewish, Christian & Muslim Perspectives & Contributions

Tuesday, January 30, 2018 – 7:00pm in East Parlor
Presenters: Aida Beaupied, Ph.D, Rabbi Nancy Fuchs
Kreimer, Ph.D, Cecelia Cavanaugh, SSJ, Ph.D, and
Quaiser Abdullah, Ph.D..

Listening & Speaking to Each Other: Compassion, Empathy and Justice

Tuesday, February 20, 2018 – 7:00pm in East Parlor
Presenter: Sharon Browning

WHY WE SUPPORT “MARY’S PENCE”

Those of you who attend Catholic churches know, once a year, there is a collection for “Peter’s Pence” to support, according to the promotions, the Holy See and Pope’s own charitable giving and expenses by giving him the direct means to help those in need during emergencies and natural disasters. The collections, they say, have taken in \$190 million; they do not say if this is per year or since the inception. “Mary’s Pence” accepts donations throughout the year specifically to meet the needs of women who may have been overlooked or underfunded by Peter’s Pence and other charitable groups. Officially, Mary’s Pence “invests in women across the Americas by funding community initiatives and fostering collaborations to create social change.” Their collections, since 1987, total \$1.5 million.

History

Peter’s Pence, according to official definitions, comes from “donations or payments made directly to the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, rather than through local parishes. The practice began under the Saxons in England and spread through Europe... Initially, it was done as a pious contribution, whereas later it was required by various rulers, and collected, more like a tax... In 1871, Pope Pius IX formalized the practice of lay members of the church and other persons of ‘good will’ providing financial support to the Roman See.”

On the other hand, **Mary’s Pence** came as a result of a 1987 prayer meeting. The more folksy history goes like this: At that meeting, “the extraordinary contributions of Catholic women doing the work of the church among the forgotten poor of the Americas was being discussed. Two Catholic sisters who were present shared frustration about not getting a grant they had requested from the diocese to fund their active and successful prison ministry while a priest had received a substantial amount to start a new program. The women lamented, why couldn’t the priest have been given a small part of the larger amount? Judge Sheila Murphy stated, ‘What we need is a Mary’s Pence,’ a play on Peter’s Pence, the Pope’s annual church collection for the poor. Mary’s Pence founder, Maureen Gallagher, OP, who was present at the meeting, describes a mystical experience she had while cleaning her house the following weekend. As she vacuumed, she prayed out her frustration, imagining all the bishops and cardinals who refused to help women in ministry standing before God. Each one was asked by God ‘Why did you do nothing to help women minister?’ and then they were banished. Then Maureen found herself before God, who asked, ‘What did you do to help women minister?’ Maureen said, ‘I’m a woman, I couldn’t do anything.’ God asked again, ‘What did you do?’ Maureen then knew Mary’s Pence needed to be formed and that she would be the one to do it.”

What’s in a Name?

We know full well after whom Peter’s Pence is named. Mary’s Pence, on the other hand, refers to all the women, the “Marys” of the Gospel, who ministered and “dared to remain when the other disciples had fled.” Mary’s Pence Grants provide support for social justice programs for women

in the U.S. and Canada, especially women experiencing difficulties including poverty, sex trafficking, asylum, domestic violence, homelessness, incarceration, cultural isolation and immigration. ESPERA Community Lending provides micro-loans and support to women in Central America and Mexico.

A Local Connection

We were delighted to hear *Welcoming the Stranger* in Warminster and Morrisville, Pennsylvania, received a recent Mary’s Pence grant. The project describes itself as providing “free education, training and resources to refugees and immigrants with the goal of helping each student improve their language and work skills, and giving them the resources needed to meet not only their own goals in the US, but empower them to actively participate in civic life, particularly around issues impacting immigrants. 75% – 80% of the students are women who are living at or below the poverty line when they begin classes. Funding from Mary’s Pence will support a class on work skills and language improvement in a large immigrant community... These skills improve job opportunities and economic self-sufficiency while preserving dignity and autonomy. *Welcoming the Strangers’* mission is focused on the Christian value of welcoming strangers into one’s community.”

Again, we welcome, support, and salute the positive impact of Mary’s Pence on women. You can donate at www.maryspence.org.



Mary's Pence

Spiritual Director

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Book Reviews

My Journey into Freedom: The story of one woman's path into ordained priesthood in the Catholic Church, by Caryl Conroy Johnson. Amazon, 2016. Paperback, \$5.00. 53 pp.

Reviewed by Regina Bannan

I hate it when Mary Hunt writes what I want to say. In a widely circulated review in the *National Catholic Reporter*, Hunt “encourage[s] readers, especially women, to write our own histories, to profile our own pioneers lest our history be lost. (Sept 22-Oct 5, 2017)”

Caryl Conroy Johnson's brief spiritual autobiography does just that. She's a pioneer as a Roman Catholic Womanpriest, and her story in some respects could be all our stories, full of #Me,Too moments of pain in the church. But what she does with that pain is to find forgiveness, which, I would argue, is difficult and unusual. Johnson characterizes her inner journey as a search for freedom, inner freedom, and forgiveness is the key. Early on, at a very public forum, a mission in her parish, she forgave the church for its treatment of women. Being vulnerable by speaking her truth was a relief, and most people supported her.

Johnson describes her growing realization of her call to priestly ministry with exceptional clarity. While I wonder if it's easier to realize the building blocks in retrospect, I admire her journey, especially her pursuit of theological understanding. Johnson has Masters degrees from St. Charles Seminary in Religious Studies and from Neumann University in Spiritual Direction. She integrates these academic experiences into her story of personal growth to freedom. This latter point is a good example of how memoirs illustrate only one side of current controversies. I feel a knowledge base is important for ordained ministers. At the same time, I know that others in the movement recognize that academic preparation can be a barrier to ministry for poor women and women of color. We know that dioceses support the education of male priests; those that support women like the Lucile Murray Durkin scholarships from WOC: www.womensordination.org/programs/scholarship and the online Global Ministries University: <http://www.globalministriesuniversity.org> are not enough.

The Adrienne Rich quote that begins “For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” continues “I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself.” Johnson describes doing this kind of inner work all along. That's what Rich thinks will “enable... genuine change,” and Johnson's life of faith is indeed a new reason for celebration. “Ordination—At Last!” is her heady description of what that day felt like. The book sparkles!

Now Johnson is a co-pastor of the St. Mary Magdalene Community in Drexel Hill, and has a rich ministry from there to South Africa, among Catholics and non, young and old. A sign of her healing freedom was returning to her parish church for the funeral of her stepmother. She experiences the deep, deep love of God once again, now truly free to be who she is.

And, a reminder: SEPAWOC is talking seriously about gathering its papers into the Urban Archives at Temple. Johnson's book again inspires me to think that we could do a collective history from various points of view, because each of us has a different story. Wouldn't that be fun?

Regina Bannan was president of the Women's Ordination Conference in the 1990s, and taught History and American, Women's, and Organizational Studies at Temple University.

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***Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail Movement, by Marian Ronan and Mary O'Brien (The Apocryphile Press, 2017). 346 pages, \$22.95.***

***Reviewed by Maureen Tate***

I am pleased to have the opportunity to review this book. In the interest of full disclosure, I should share that I am a member of The Grail and so my interest is self-evident. However, readers of *EqualwRites* will also be drawn to this remarkable collection of interviews with founding members of the International Grail Movement who transformed the role of women in church and society from its founding in the Netherlands in 1921. A century later, The Grail is still alive and well, empowering women and girls throughout the world. In this volume, authors Marian Ronan and Mary O'Brien have achieved a very personal and comprehensive account of how specific women forged a new path for women desiring to commit their lives to God in service to others.

The Grail Movement was founded in the Netherlands by a Jesuit priest, Father Jacques van Ginneken, who felt the participation and leadership of women lacking in movements of the time focused on Catholic Action and the emerging lay apostolate. From the beginning, the Grail was intended as a lay women's movement, led by women responsible for their own spiritual direction. Unlike other lay institutes of the time, they did not seek canonical status. The Grail defied categories, then and now, of religious community, social change movement, or women's organization, being all of the above. Women attracted to the Grail in the early years desired to commit lives of faith and service but were not necessarily interested in marriage or the convent. The Grail presented another way for women to live committed lives that called for sacrifice, spiritual search in the context of community, and some degree of adventure and heroism. As many of the women readily admit, their choice to join the Grail mystified their families who found their depth of commitment or life in Grail community incomprehensible.

*Women of Vision* began over twenty years ago with Grail members who wanted to write a biography of Lydwine van Kersbergen, founder of the Grail in the U.S. As was typical, Lydwine would only participate if others were included and so a series of interviews began with early leaders of the Grail and those who helped found the Grail in other coun-

*Continued on page 10*

## Book Review *continued from page 9*

tries, reaching six continents. Although the project lapsed for a number of years, it is good news that it was completed and that we now have this unique international perspective on the contribution of laywomen in the church and society of the Twentieth Century. *Women of Vision* focuses on sixteen founders and includes a comprehensive introduction providing important historical information and context. Each personal interview section is also preceded by a biographical overview. This structure effectively prepares the reader to further appreciate these women as they share about experiences and reflections that are deeply personal. Each account is a window into the lives of women in particular times and places and we glimpse the significant role The Grail Movement played in developing women's lay leadership to effect social change in diverse cultures.

This book was developed in two stages. As a result, readers will appreciate that the final work required a great synthesis of interview material, writing styles, research, and familiarity with the subject matter. The work is scholarly in its analysis and documentation of historical events, Catholic history and Catholic culture that situate the founding and development of The Grail Movement. This provides a suitable frame for the pictures of the women that emerge within the chapters. The co-authors are clearly accomplished writers and scholars and their personal experience within The Grail enables them to achieve appropriate objectivity while allowing us to hear the women's voices clearly. Readers will encounter some repetition in historical reference, description, and citation throughout. However, because each story has its own integrity, the repetition enables the reader to remain in each story without the distraction of referencing back to the introduction.

I particularly enjoyed the women's stories of their first encounter with The Grail as it very much mirrors my own experience in the 1970's. They talk about first attraction, the "something is different about these women" phenomenon that is so familiar to many who meet The Grail. One woman describes her experience as "falling in love", another recognizes that "this is the place for me", while others are drawn to the language of spiritual quest, the attraction of sacrifice, the expectation to work on difficult things, or the audacity to work for the conversion of the world. Very few joined through a Grail "program". The more common experience was meeting an interesting woman who invited them along to "come and see". In fact, one woman, when asked by her mother what the Grail was about, tells her that she will know when she gets there. This experience of learning through doing is common in other accounts as well. It is not unlike how many women come to the Grail even now.

Who are these women and what did they see in the Grail Movement that changed the course of their lives and, in amazing ways, actually transformed the world? Spirituality and spiritual search is a common thread in each woman's commitment and motivation, whether expressed in terms of Catholic spirituality or an orientation to mysticism. They value being part of a women's movement that could harness the power, creativity, and energy of women so that women from all walks of life could reach their full potential. They exemplify zeal, courage, and risk taking in their work for justice and solidarity with the poor. The international dimension of the Grail

was particularly attractive and many sought opportunities to work in other countries. They describe a Grail culture, experienced in Grail centers, that lived an integration of nature, beauty, ritual, and the arts.

Some of the most compelling passages involve reflection on personal challenges and disillusionment. These will resonate with anyone who has wrestled with issues of power, politics, leadership, self-doubt, injustice, aging, the challenges of diversity, and working cross culturally. The long lives of these women enable us to appreciate their growth and deepening perspective over time. Many reference core Grail principles of formation, particularly inspired by John Henry Cardinal Newman, that guided them along the way: "Lord let me grow to be that for which you have destined me"; as well as, "I go where I am needed." They commonly express a firm trust in God and spiritual community that enabled them to do what they felt they could not. One woman from Tanzania observes that "wherever the Grail went we left a kind of sisterhood. Wherever we have gone we have built a community of people". What a powerful legacy!

Mary Louise Tully, a U.S. member, observes that the Grail is not defined by projects or programs but by something much deeper: a life orientation. "Things happened because I happened to be there." And happen they did. Among these women of vision are those who: defied the Nazis during WWII, survived hardship and civil war as health care workers in Africa; founded schools and hospitals; were community and labor organizers, social workers, and theologians. One U.S. member took up the cause of Palestinian refugees at the United Nations. Another was elected the first and only woman Prime Minister of Portugal. Another works with Maasai women of Tanzania to protect their girls from the tribal custom of female circumcision. These interviews are as much about the interconnections as they are about any one accomplishment. Mimi Maréchel of Belgium expressed it this way, "The universe does not stop at the horizon of what I can see – there is something beyond. The Grail made it possible to integrate all aspects of the social, the cultural, and the religious, and to continue to grow, to stretch, to look further."

Reading *Women of Vision* was an enriching experience. As a Grail member, I can scarcely believe my good fortune to encounter The Grail when I did and to share community and a common vision with these amazing women. Although I have met a few of them, it was not until reading this book that I appreciated the breadth of their experience and the depth of their commitment. Like many women, Grail women are often a humble bunch. These stories are important because they are, in a way, about ordinary women, who experienced a call to serve God and the world in a particular context. Their story is as relevant today for those of us who experience a similar call. Lydwine van Kersbergen states here that "The Grail's vision, from the beginning, has been that it is a spiritual movement rooted in God, a women's movement for and by women, a cultural movement, a worldwide movement with a world-embracing vision." I am reassured that, a century later, women continue to resonate with that vision and respond to the invitation to "come and see".

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

**WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST!** *continued from page 3*

**Action/Reaction**

Colleen Hennessy, Irish writer and political scientist, in *thejournal.ie*, July 23, 2017, wrote a well-argued, incisive article "Is it possible to be Catholic and Feminist?" Her conclusion was, no, they cannot or they can only with great, and possibly unsustainable, difficulty. She ended with "Yet Irish church officials seem intent on denying the scope of the membership crisis fuelled by anger, disillusionment and betrayal. Since women apparently no longer want to participate in a hierarchical organisation where they have no representation or formal means of participation in decision-making, the Church must address this issue before they become totally irrelevant to our spirituality, families and communities."

Reasonable enough, pretty innocuous, I thought. What was disturbing, if not scary, were the posted comments on the article, most of which alternated between being anti-feminist, anti-Catholic or both. Here's a sample:

*Catholicism and feminism. 2 rabid ideologies that championing nonsensical ramblings instead of facts and logic. That both love preaching and pushing their warped ideology onto the vulnerable, and they ostracize anyone who doesn't bend to their will. So yes, you totally can be Catholic and feminist. It just means you are twice as terrible than just being one or the other. Of course it's possible. Feminism and hypocrisy often go hand in hand,*

*I suppose the one essential difference between them is that there is a concept of forgiveness in Catholicism whereas feminists are probably the most unforgiving grouping on the planet. One slip of the tongue and a yawning chasm of ignominy awaits you. Let's be honest here, most people would rather fall foul of Rome than the feminist hierarchy as the chances of survival would be far far greater.*

*Just ban both organisations for what they are – hate groups.*

*If feminism was still about gender equality then no it's not possible to be a Catholic or any kind of Christian & believe in equality of opportunity within Christianity because Christian scripture, the basis of Christianity, places women on an inferior status to men. Its the same and even worse in Islam. Women in the Catholic church wanting it to give them the equal status is a bit like a Jew joining the NAZI party in the hope of making it less anti semitic. Feminists in the Catholic church should just break away & set up their own superstitious cult.*

*Timothy 2:12, simples!*

I looked up Timothy 2:12. It says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet."

Let's face it. We have our work cut out for us!

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

**END OF THE YEAR DONATIONS**

**Another year comes to an end. During 2017 our community of women and men has remained steadfast and sustained one another in our pursuit of justice, equality and full partnership in ministry for all in the Church.**

**We on the core committee value your support, whether it is monetary or by your presence in front of the Cathedral at our two events every spring. We value your readership of EqualwRites and the notes and emails you send in response.**

**We ask that you will consider SEPAWOC as you make your end-of-year donations to your favorite causes. We have attached an addressed envelope for your convenience.**

**We look forward in hope to the New Year, that heart and minds and calcified traditions can be changed!**



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## Scripture Reflections

### Advent 2017

**Isaiah 40; Psalm 85; Mk:13; Lk.1; 1Thess.5**

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

Each week I receive a prayer/reflection from *U.S. Catholic*. Today we pray with Anne Frank: "I can feel the suffering of millions...and, yet, when I look up at the heavens, I know this cruelty will end". (Just a note: Historians tell us that Anne Frank and her family were denied U.S. visas since it was believed we needed to guard against an influx of refugees during a time of war.)

2017...suffering...cruelty...but, a new year is coming...Advent...can we help this cruelty to end? God calls us, "Give comfort to my people" (Is.40) How? We should "be watchful, be alert" (Mk: 13), and "pray without ceasing...do not quench the Spirit!" (1Thess.5)

Hearing this Scripture reminds me of a shared recent reflection by Pope Francis of the Vatican II teaching on the development of doctrine. Francis said that we cannot be "tied to interpretation that is rigid and immutable, as this would demean the working of the Spirit...move with great enthusiasm, as in the early church, toward new horizons where God guides us. Remember, too, that the Word of God cannot be mothballed like some old blanket, as it is a dynamic and living reality"...hmmm... could this relate to anything to which we've dedicated ourselves!?!

Advent is a time we hear from the prophets. In that same *U.S. Catholic* email there was a reflection on hope from our prophet Mary Luke Tobin, SL. She was one of only fifteen women observers at Vatican II (who were told by the officials, "Listen, but don't speak!") Cardinal Suenens and Father Haring made sure women were included on the commissions, and speak they did, for "Justice and peace shall kiss...truth shall spring out of the earth" Ps.85.

And we listen to Mary Luke Tobin's prophetic life from *U.S. Catholic and NCR*: She began the day by singing *Morning has Broken*; she said we must be open to the Spirit, open to an appreciation of all creation, open to ecumenical and feminist insights and hear the call of the poor.

As she did, may we see frustrations, tensions, conflicts and obstacles as the raw material for creativity and action to make the world more just, with peace for all, and she encouraged us to continue the struggle to get a fair female voice in the church and fully recognized personhood. ("Nothing is impossible with God"! Lk: 1)

May we live out her advice to Maureen Fiedler, SL, "Go out on a limb...that's where the fruit is!"

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