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**EQUAL****Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women  
and Men in the Philadelphia Area**

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**WRITES****MISSION STATEMENT** - *As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.*

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**IN HER HOLY VOICE****IN THIS HOLY SEASON****WHAT WOULD MARY SAY?****WHAT WOULD MARY DO?****We Celebrate the Advent/Christmas Seasons with: New Ideas, New Energy, New Life for Progressive Catholics Everywhere!***By Ellie Hartz*

If you need a burst of energy, a pierce of hope, a nudge of optimism for the end of 2018 and the start of 2019; if you need advent and Advent in your life, or Christmas with its light, joy and promise, just hang around the young! Let them inject you with their enthusiasm and inspire you with their courage. Let us learn from each other .

This was the spirit I saw at the 2018 Call to Action Conference in November. Young people, eager to work for inclusion, leadership of all genders, and social justice inside and outside the Church were paired with mentors who have long years of experience doing the same, and the result – to use a seasonally relevant word – was magic!

These particular young people were part of CTA's 20/30 Project for Mentoring and Leadership which, as the website describes, "aims to cultivate young leaders who live in the paradoxes of Catholic identity. We recognize that our faith is the source of holy, unique, and revolutionary potential for personal and common good and at the same time is the source of unreconciled (and often unacknowledged) oppression and injustice, specifically for LGBTQ people; people of color, women, and lay people throughout the world."

Briefly, here are some of the young people and the projects they are currently pursuing, some described in their own words:

**JOHN NOBLE** is a Roman Catholic student pursuing a Master of Divinity at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. John hopes to eventually pursue a Ph.D. in Church history or theology. He plans to develop strategies for empowering laity and the poor through community organizing.

**DEREK (BLACK MOSES) RANKINS, JR.** is a native of New Orleans, LA and a member of St. Mary's of the Angels Parish. He is an anti-racist organizer with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond Training Team and a graduate of Tulane University with a Bachelor's in Afrikan Studies and Sociology. Black Moses' Project: "*I have created a Liberation Rosary and Prayer Packet. The pamphlet and rosary have been designed from the Africana perspective of Catholicism. The rosary is designed in Pan African colors; Red for the Blood of the People & Jesus, Black for the People & GOD, and Green for the Land & Heaven (Home). The hope is for this rosary to hang, be worn, and prayed in the church, in front the courthouse, government office & programs, and wherever Racism is being practice on an institutional level.*"

**KELLY HANLEY** graduated from Holy Cross and Providence College, earned her Masters in Education through the PACT Program, followed by the Notre Dame ENL Program, and taught in Santiago, Chile. She's currently in her 7th year of teaching and 2nd year at Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit High School, where she teaches social justice to juniors, English to seniors, and helps run campus ministry. Kelly's Project: "*I'm working on building a resource manual filled with tools, guide, and philosophy behind implementing restorative practices at schools. Through campus ministry retreat programs, and in partnership with teachers and counselors,*

*continued on page 2*

## **We Celebrate ....** *continued from page 1*

*I hope that we can build up the vocabulary and practices to address conflict in more relationship-building ways. My project will include: a curated library of restorative justice resources, a slideshow to share with teaching staff, and a guide book for bringing the practices to life. Ideally, this will be shared beyond just our school community!"*

**MORGAN BENDEL** is a recent graduate of Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, MI, and was recently accepted as a Candidate to the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids. Morgan's Project: *My project with Call To Action will combine two of my greatest passions: religious life and LGBTQ+ advocacy. As a Candidate with the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, I will empower myself and my sisters to be a part of the conversation surrounding the LGBTQ+ community by facilitating and implementing ally-training workshops."*

**STEPHEN NJAU** was born in Mombasa, Kenya and raised in Philadelphia. He's part of St. Gabriel Small Christian Community, African Catholic Young Adults of Philadelphia. About Stephen's Project: *"In short, my project is focused on forming a bridge between those individuals who are imprisoned with the youth in the community. I am hoping to turn their tough experiences into inspirational wisdom. I want to make an impact and change the way we reform as a society by providing funding, time and care to change those who made a mistake into model citizens."*

**EMILY MORRIS** is a native of London, Ohio. She attended the University of Notre Dame and went on to serve as a Jesuit Volunteer for two years in the Pacific Northwest. Emily's Project: *"My hope is to gather women from my local community to learn from one another, hold space for sharing joys and struggles, and discuss social justice issues that impact our local community. The goal of this kind of gathering is to foster a sense of community, have tangible support for one another, and continue to inspire folks to keep working for the common good for every member of our community."*

**REVALON WESSON** is from Stillwater, MN and is currently pursuing a master's degree in theology, concentrating in social transformation. Revalon's Project: *"The Bible tells us that human beings are created in the image of God, but what does that mean? For my project, I will be exploring the theological concept of Imago Dei, both its implications and its complications in regard to those whose divine image is often marred by the patriarchal, heteronormal, classist, racist, and ableist ideas that permeate today's society. Using art as a medium, I want to build community around people in the LGBTQ community, women, people of color, and those with disabilities or who are chronically ill, examining what the image of God means to them and how they reflect that image with the full dignity of any other human being."*

**ABBY RAMPONE** is a Vermonter, a writer, and a feminist Catholic. She's concerned with creating radical, resilient communities in the face of environmental degradation and patriarchal violence. After graduating from Williams College last June, she moved to New York City, where she is pursuing an M.Div. at Union Theological Seminary. Abby's Project: *"For*

*my CTA 20/30 project, I am organizing a conference, which will foster ongoing relationships and grow into some sort of network (formal or informal). The conference's theme will be 'reimagining vocation.' It will be a space for young Catholics who don't see space for themselves in traditional ministry to explore how they might serve – and challenge – their Church and world."*

**BREANNA MEKULY** currently lives in Erie, PA and works with the Benedictine Sisters at their soup kitchen and with Sister Joan Chittister's ministries. Breanna studied theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Breanna's Project: *"I will be conducting intentional conversations with small groups of people around the intersection of sexuality and spirituality. Using a feminist Catholic perspective, these conversations will begin with dialogue on the beauty of diversity as a gift from a creative and playful God and enter into an exploration of LGBTQ terms and identities using the 'Genderbread' person."*

**BETSY ERICKSEN** is a community organizer and experiential learner who currently lives in Boston, MA. Betsy received a BA in Peace and Justice Studies from Wellesley College in 2014 and served with Life Together, a program of the Episcopal Service Corps, from 2015-2017. A community organizer, Betsy works with mothers and grandmothers concerned about climate change and the power of the fossil fuel industry. She is also committed to developing a contemplative practice and rhythm, both for herself and in community with other young adults.

**KARINA VARELA** is a recent graduate of St. Edward's University in Austin, TX where she studied English Literature and Religious and Theological Studies. After graduation, she moved back to her hometown on the Texas-Mexico border. Karina works as a tutor at a public alternative high school for 14-20 year olds where she regularly witnesses the ways that the US's unjust immigration policies impact education, incarceration rates, healthcare and a variety of other issues. Karina's Project: *"My 20/30 project is focused on young people in my community who struggle with issues surrounding mental health and/or substance abuse. It is all too common in my community (like in many other corners of the country) to lose a young person to addiction or suicide. The goal of my project is to work toward creating a communal dialogue within my parish centered on how to combat these issues as well as providing my church with partnerships/resources to local agencies already involved in this kind of work."*

Read more about these young people and their projects on the Call to Action website.

**Ellie Harty** is a co-editor of EqualWRites.

### **Support SEPAWOC**

To everyone who supported us financially in the past year we say, "Thank you". When you are planning your end of year donations will you consider remembering us? We depend on your contributions to defray our printing costs and in program planning.

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**WOMEN-CHURCH CONVERGENCE/SEPAWOC**  
**SPECIAL EVENT**  
*By Marge Cooper*

On **Saturday, April 6, 2019, from 1-4pm**, SEPAWOC and Women-Church Convergence are hosting a panel discussion to which ALL are invited. We have Marian Ronan, Sonja Spoo, Katie Grimes and Mariam Williams, four knowledgeable speakers willing to discuss and give their views on: **“How equality can flourish in a multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-generational church: What does this church look like physically, spiritually, and doctrinally?”**

This event is part of the Women-Church Convergence annual meeting which this year will take place in Pendle Hill, Wallingford. The Saturday afternoon program, with its panel of speakers, will be at the Swarthmore Friends Meeting House, on the Swarthmore College grounds. The address is 12 Whittier Place, Swarthmore, PA. Lots of parking is available. This is a free event (donation of \$5 is suggested). Hope to see you all there.

To entice you further, here are some bios of our speakers:

**Mariam I. Williams** began “At the Intersection,” her column in the *National Catholic Reporter*, in 2013, to explore life and culture at the intersection of race, gender, and Christian faith. A writer, dancer, arts educator, and public historian, she is an artist with a social change mission. Mariam was born and raised in Kentucky and holds an MFA in creative writing and certificate in public history from Rutgers University-Camden. As a member of The Decades, a Philadelphia-based woman of color arts collaborative with members of different generational, ethnic, and regional identities, Mariam seeks to present counter-narratives to people of color’s collective trauma and objectification. She currently is writing a memoir about sisterhood and sexuality in the traditional southern Black Church. In addition to *National Catholic Reporter*, her work can be found in *Women’s Review of Books*, Hidden City Philadelphia, Longreads.com, and on her website, mariamwilliams.com. You can also find and support her at [Patreon.com/MariamIWilliams](https://Patreon.com/MariamIWilliams).

**Marian Ronan** is well-known to us at SEPAWOC as a valued member and writer and book reviewer for *EqualwRites*. She is also Research Professor of Catholic Studies at New

York Theological Seminary, an African American, Latinx and Asian seminary in New York City. From 1999 to 2009 she was a member of the faculty at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. She is the author or co-author of seven books, including *Tracing the Sign of the Cross: Sexuality, Mourning, and the Future of American Catholicism* (Columbia University Press, 2009) and *Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail Movement* (Apocryphile Press 2017). She has been active in the movement for Catholic women’s ordination since 1975 and was president of the WOC Board of Directors from 2000 to 2002.

**Kathleen Grimes** is Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics at Villanova University. Dr. Grimes received her BA and MA at the University of Notre Dame and her PhD. in Theological Ethics from Boston College. Her research interests include liberation theologies, calling attention to the pervasive presence of white supremacy in the Catholic church, critically retrieving natural law theory, and sexual ethics. She places Catholic feminist ethics in conversation with Catholic tradition in order to address the challenges of the contemporary Church and is a regular contributor for the [Women in Theology](#) blog

**Sonja Spoo** is the Associate Campaigns Director at UltraViolet. She works to design and launch rapid response campaigns for the UltraViolet campaigns team. Prior to joining UV, Sonja organized activists, students and lawmakers from around the country to fight for reproductive rights from a faith-based understanding with Catholics for Choice. Sonja began her journey in grassroots organizing nine years ago in Philadelphia and has since worked to combat domestic and sexual violence, increase access to quality doula support for expectant mothers in underserved communities, fight against gender discrimination and pay inequity in the work place, and advocating for services with members of the homeless community. Sonja’s advocacy focuses at the intersections between faith, gender and race. Sonja is a graduate of Swarthmore College where she majored in Political Science with additional major study and research in African American literature, biology and religion. She currently lives in Washington D.C. where you will find her consuming large amounts of coffee and spending time cuddling as many dogs as possible.

**Marge Cooper** is a member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee and Women-Church Convergence.

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## No Wonder We Say “Time’s Up”

By Regina Bannan

This year, Pennsylvania is ground zero for the sex abuse crisis, and SEPAWOC is right in the thick of it, as we have been before. Two front-page articles ten years apart highlight the serious consideration we gave to this subject in *EqualwRites*.

The first article is by the late Sara T. Howard in September 1993 – before Boston, and well before any attorney general reports in Philadelphia. Sara introduces SEPAWOC to Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), which works to “inform, support and get the best possible treatment for survivors.” This article could have been written this year; the experiences Sara reports are like those we have been reading about again and again.

Sara investigates how sex abuse complaints are handled in the Archdiocese: “There are no procedures for parish-level staff” and “It is Father William J. Lynn, the Secretary of the Clergy, who receives complaints.” Of course, over the last two decades we have become very familiar with that name; Lynn became the first church official in the country to be convicted of covering up clergy sex abuse. (He served three years of his sentence before his conviction was vacated; a retrial is expected next year.) Cardinal Bevilacqua’s response? Laicize the priests as fast as possible, and assist the survivors.

The survivors did not feel helped, however. Sara summarizes: “Advice to those considering making their abuse known to the Church is to tell somebody you trust; don’t go to the Church first, and don’t go alone.” Recognize that this process has legal implications and “don’t sign anything.” Those who had sued the church for the cost of therapy found “bare-knuckled legal tactics.” Sara reports “a civil case to recover money damages must be brought any time up to two years after the survivor’s eighteenth birthday.” That deadline seems to have been extended in the last twenty-five years; providing a window to allow cases to be brought forward no matter how old they are is the focus of legislative debate. Sara concludes, “Whatever the amount is, in this instance, ‘We are the Church’; contributors pay, one way or another.”

In that same issue, psychotherapist Janine Mariscotti covers just about every erroneous assumption about clergy sex abuse. Her article should be printed on a card and given out instead of trying to explain it all; one example: “It is unlikely that given the dynamics of pedophilia, a mature and healthy adult expressing his or her sexuality—homosexuality, heterosexuality, or celibacy—would be attracted to pedophilia.” She concludes by examining the challenges of forming “close, interpersonal relationships” within celibacy, which “might not allow for the full, human expression of the heart and spirit that God intended.”

Ten years later, in 2003, Marian Ronan analyzes the reaction of “white male commentators” to the Boston revelations the previous year. Marian uses Gayle Rubin’s argument that what happens to one sexual minority negatively affects the others. She helps us understand this by making Rubin’s concept of concentric circles relevant to the Catholic environment: pedophiles, prostitutes, transsexuals/transgenders, gays/lesbians, divorced heterosexuals, single women, married women,

married men, and celibate men, the innermost circle in Catholicism. The idea is that unleashing denunciation of pedophiles in the outer circle affects those in circles near them. Marian first notes the immediate response to condemn gays, which has been articulated as recently as this month by a bishop and a cardinal. Then she looks at the situation of women.

First of all, women are often left out of the conversation, either as victims/survivors or as “voices.” Marian critiques the binary in Eugene Kennedy’s revision of *The Unhealed Wound*: “This division between institution and spirit is the same binary between body and mind or spirit that has shaped western civilization to the detriment of the ‘carnal’ classes, women, homosexuals, and Jews.” Remember those concentric circles?

Then Marian takes on Peter Steinfels’ *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*: “But it is Steinfels’ treatment of Catholic feminist theology that reveals his contempt for the women’s movement in the church.” By focusing in the Women-Church Convergence meeting in Albuquerque and not WOC or theologians like Elizabeth Johnson, Steinfels creates a feminism that “is difficult to reconcile with anything remotely continuous with Catholicism,” according to Marian. She finds more binary thinking here, too, as Steinfels separates the “vast majority of Catholic women in the pews” from feminists.

In that same issue, SEPAWOC promotes a SNAP conference and reports on a SNAP presentation at the Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR) meeting, including the founder, the late Barbara Blaine. This is the perfect transition to where we are now.

Everyone from the Pope on down has commented on the Pennsylvania grand jury report. I find the international response astonishing, and I imagine Josh Shapiro does, too. But after now-Philadelphian Juan Carlos’s revelations in Chile and Cardinal McCarrick’s everywhere he served, it was the right moment to expose how many priests and victims/survivors there were in an ordinary place, and to think about how many more there might be. We have benefited from the extraordinary attention of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, including front-page stories and human-interest columns, political

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**St. Mary Magdalene Community**

**Saturday Mass at 5:00 p.m.**

**Epworth United Methodist Church**

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**CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**  
**A Report from Catholics Organized for Renewal**  
**(COR) Membership**

COR members – including our own SEPAWOC - gave updates on what each of their organizations were actively doing in light of the latest (Pennsylvania) report on clergy sex abuse and in anticipation of revelations to come:

***Dignity USA***

After the clergy sexual abuse crisis of 2002, *Dignity* published a manual for LGBT survivors. Currently, the manual is in high demand. There has also been increased media and public attention focusing on the scapegoating and blaming gay priests for the crisis.

***Quixote Center***

Although sexual abuse has not been a focus of *Quixote Center* lately, members did connect with local SNAP chapters. On this year's All Survivor's Day about 40 individuals participated in a public witness/action in front of St. Matthew's Cathedral.

***FutureChurch***

The leadership helped coordinate "Times Up Catholic's Demand Action". A recent retreat with Dominican Sisters of Peace on clergy sexual abuse yielded some creative ideas including the promotion of the LCWR and the USCCB to meet in dialogue and for workshops on building a more synodal church.

***Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church***

Joe Boyle reported on his contact with Archbishop Chaput looking for dialogue and a public conversation. The Archbishop would not support a diocesan conversation and recommended that it be on the parish level. Its focus would be on transparency and accountability.

***SEPAWOC***

Members helped organize a local witness in coordination with Christa Kerber (CTA Philadelphia) and other local groups. A workshop led by CTA focusing on organizing locally to effect further change in the Church followed the witness.

***WOC***

The organization has been involved in partnerships with other COR groups. Kate McElwee noted that contact with WOC by individuals looking for advice about how to deal with the crisis has significantly increased since the summer. Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) held a special service at the Garden of Remembrance in Ireland during the Pope's visit followed by a silent march to the last operating Magdalene Laundry.

***Roman Catholic Women Priests***

The International Bishops drafted a statement regarding the abuse crisis. This prompted contact and dialogue.

***Ecumenical Catholic Communion***

St. Mary Magdela ECC community has been approached by many Buffalo Catholics who are looking for an alternative, given how disturbed they are with the clergy abuse crisis.

Catholics are approaching the community looking for a "home".

***Call To Action***

The past six months have focused on the development of youth leaders to bring new energy into all progressive Catholic social justice activities. Eleven young people in their 20's or 30's have already gone through the training.

**..... and we are far from finished!**

On January 2-8, 2019, Bishops will meet in Chicago for a prayer meeting. It is hoped that an action would be staged outside of the place where they are meeting. The theme would be a repentance.

In February, we hope to hold a "People's Tribunal" to mirror the Bishops' meeting occurring at the same time in Rome (February 21-24, 2019). Lay led local approach would reflect on Bishops' agenda. Gathering might be in Washington, DC and, hopefully would be live streamed!

After these two events, Listening Sessions could be designed to capture the energy. Voice of the Faithful has a Listening Session tool kit (Healing Circles) as a resource available to all.

For March/April, we are looking into hosting a speaking tour with Marie Collins or Mary McAleese or Jason Berry. Stay tuned.

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**No Wonder We Say "Time's Up"** *continued from page 4*

analysis and editorials. Then the Archdiocese created a compensation fund for child victims with a prominent oversight committee. Obviously a strategy to avoid legislation that would open the statute of limitations for lawsuits, the fund will be supported by "existing church funds, borrowing, and the sale of church properties," according to the *Inquirer*; but not "from Catholic Charities or donations made to parishes or schools." Note the sensitivity to predictions like Sara's. Note the failure to include vulnerable adults, who often are women, as Marian documents.

SEPAWOC has been deeply involved in the response. We participated in drafting the COR resources on the CatholicToo web site, "Time's Up: Catholics Demand Truth." We helped organize a witness in Philadelphia. We continue to write our blogs on WOC's "The Table." We welcome you to continue the resistance by joining the COR/Philadelphia Slack workspace being managed by Christa Kerber of CTA/Philadelphia. I don't fully understand how that works yet, but if you want to continue to be involved, send me an email at [sepawoc@sepawoc.org](mailto:sepawoc@sepawoc.org) and I will sign you up.

Activism is where SEPAWOC is now. We know about SNAP all too well and we support its witnesses and work for fairness for those harmed. We will read the books that address the Pennsylvania crisis as we did after Boston, but we are no longer naïve. This did happen here, and we are committed to no cover-ups in the future.

**Regina Bannan** *is a member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee. If you want to read the articles here, both issues are on the website, [www.sepawoc.org](http://www.sepawoc.org).*

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## Book Reviews

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***The World Wisdom Bible and Holy Rascals*, Rabbi Rami Shapiro (Skylight Press, Sounds True Press. 2017) 218pp, 232pp.**

*Reviewed by Eileen DiFranco*

From the Book of Proverbs: *Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels and nothing you desire can compare with her. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all of her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.*

I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel as if I have no control over things anymore. Not that I ever did, really. Perhaps I was just more confident or thought I knew more than I really did, especially when I was younger. The last two years have upended my understanding of how to act wisely in a problematic world.

So I struggle a lot. I'm a pacifist, but I also believe in justice. There are some people who believe that pointing out societal inconsistencies just stirs the pot and makes things worse, so wise people should just sit back and wait for things to improve in God's good time. There are some who believe that listening to the other side can change hearts and minds. There are those who find the truth violent and react violently. There are others who feel if you don't say anything in response to injustice, you are cooperating with evil. So, even though I'm old, I don't think I'm as wise as I'd like to be. I often feel as if I need some wise person to show up and show me the way because I often feel as if I am floundering.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro showed up, just when I needed him most. He is the author of *The World Wisdom Bible* which he said he'd like to place in every hotel room right next to the Gideon Bible and *Holy Rascals*. He also has a website, [www.rabbirami.org](http://www.rabbirami.org). Read them both.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro was the Friday night keynote speaker at the Federation of Christian Ministries Conference in July. He held the audience spellbound. One of the most interesting things he said is that all good things- and all bad things- come from God. Think about that for a minute. Who wants to think that bad things come from God? But that is what he said. What we like and what we don't like come from God because God, as Shapiro said, is a deity and not a duality. If we separate good from bad then we divide God and everything else into good and bad and you have the situation we've always had of goodies and baddies, innies and outies, thickly overlaid with human judgment and self-righteousness, and ultimately, violence.

I found his assertion shocking at first, but the old way makes God seem powerless in the face of evil. A dualistic world also allows those whose lives have gone well sometimes to feel smug, self-righteous, and entitled as they count what they believe to be God's personal bestowal of blessings upon them. The reality is, or course, far different. In the scripture quoted by Shapiro, God sends rain and the sun upon the crops of the good as well as the bad. God knows when every little bird falls out of its nest. God is present in the midst of the evil of war and God is present in the peace treaty. Put simply, as if

the divine could ever be simple, God is everywhere, in everything, always, in the good as well as in the bad and the ugly.

Rabbi Shapiro insists that humanity must put an end to the dualistic world if we are to survive. "Humanity stands at a spiritual crossroads. Turn one way, and we fall deeper into ignorance fear, alienation, and chaos. Turn another way, and we lift ourselves up towards wisdom, love, unity, and peace. There are powerful forces pushing us in each direction, and there is no guarantee as to which way we will choose. Sometimes it is like the blind leading the blind."

Every age is in need of wisdom because every age needs its own redemption. Shapiro offers advice that works in every age by offering one simple (there's that word again) idea, "When you know the truth, the truth will set you free." Shapiro calls this truth "perennial wisdom" because it occurs all over the world in every society in every age. Perennial wisdom, he says, frees us from the illusion of otherness, the sense of righteousness, and the alienation that so often drives us to do things that are unwise. Truth, he claims, transcends the binaries of sacred and profane, heaven and earth, Creator and creation. Once we are able to see everything as sacred and holy and from God, then "everything" becomes a verb rather than a noun and we become wise.

Shapiro sets the stage for acquiring wisdom in the introduction of *The World Wisdom Bible* by listing these four important points:

1-All life arises in and is an expression of the non-dual Infinite Life that is called by many names: Ultimate Reality, God, Tao, Mother, Allah, Yahweh, Dharmakaya, Brahma, the Great Spirit, among others. This infinite Life is not separate from humanity or from the world.

2-We all contain two ways of knowing the world: a greater knowing called Atman, Soul, etc, that intuitively knows each finite life as a unique manifestation of Infinite Life, and a lesser knowing, called self, ego, that mistakes uniqueness for separateness and imagines itself apart from, rather than a part of, Infinite Life.

3-Awakening the self and knowing that the interconnectedness of all lies in the singular Life carries with it a universal ethic calling the awakened to cultivate compassion and justice towards all beings.

4-Awakening your Self and living this ethic is the highest goal you can set for yourself.

It all sounds so simple.... Those who regard themselves as travelers upon the paths of wisdom understand that actually acquiring wisdom is really hard work that requires a lifetime of study and practice. In addition, what religion teachers used to call our "stations in life" require different types of wisdom which makes the journey even more difficult and more treacherous as travelers need repeatedly to put aside

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the things that used to work but now seem childish in comparison.

When wisdom is seemingly lacking in modern society, he assures us that Jewish tradition posits that there are always at least thirty-six wise human beings alive somewhere on the planet and, if not for their wisdom and the compassion that comes with it, human civilization would crumble under the weight of its collective ignorance, arrogance, and greed. The wise live not for themselves, but for others. As the author of the Gospel of Matthew put it, "By their fruits you shall know them."

Shapiro lists three kinds of beings of enlightenment:

1-Those who become enlightened first in order to help others do the same.

2-Those who become enlightened as they help others do the same.

3-Those who become enlightened only after they have helped all others to do the same.

Then, of course, there are gurus in Hinduism, sheikhs in Islam, superior ones in Zen. And, of course, Catholics have saints who may or may not fulfill all of the characteristics of those mentioned above. Shapiro lists the desert mothers and fathers as wise ones, rather than the saints that are honored on the liturgical calendar.

The wise ones advise that the way to truth or heaven or whatever one wants to call nirvana or paradise or heaven is not something separate from us or beyond us. This place is not in a future life after death contingent upon being good enough to be saved. Thus, human beings do not arrive at the kingdom of heaven after death, but rather live in the kingdom of heaven wherever they happen to be at any given moment. As the holy Qur'an says, "God is with you wherever you are." Or, as the gospel of Thomas and Luke state, the kingdom of God is within you and around you- if you have eyes to see.

Shapiro writes that you don't have to be totally awakened to the Ultimate Reality, that is to God, in order to live wisely. He said that you might just bump into wisdom as you live a good life. He said there is only one rule, the golden one which is the biggest piece of perennial wisdom because it appears in every religious faith in every age. Shapiro called the golden rule a benchmark that offers no exception, ever for anything, a pretty stiff order.

Be prepared to be challenged by *Holy Rascals*, but read it with an open mind. Shapiro pokes fun at the holes in the theologies of what he calls "name brand" religions; Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, not to demean them, but to force them to look at the fluff and nonsense that far too often lead them to commit violence and to exclude people in the name of their respective idea of God.

In a time of deep tribal division Shapiro gives us permission to laugh, even if ruefully at the ritual that passes for honoring and worshipping God. Laughter, Shapiro wrote, is one thing that the clergy cannot abide. All one must do is look at the pictures of the solemn old men dressed in identical red medieval vestments sitting at a synod on the family where women who do the lion's share of family work-have been denied voting privileges and you must laugh yourself silly at their hubris.

Shapiro, an observant Jew, maintains a non-partisan stance towards faith. However, he warns that name brand faiths,

Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam are heading towards a short shelf life as their specific sectarian stories become less compelling to increasingly well educated congregations who have the internet at hand to disprove outrageous claims of divine favor.

So, Catholic bishops, answer the knocks at your door!

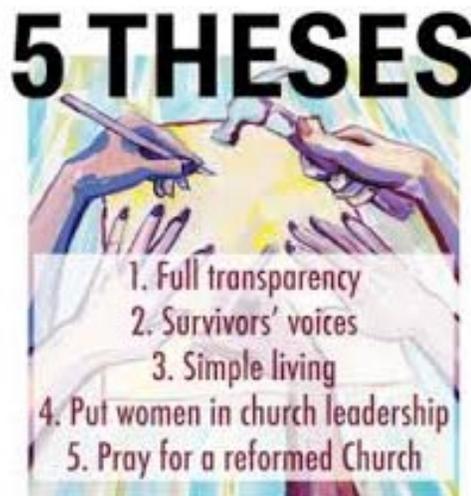
**Eileen McCafferty DiFranco** is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest and member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee.

## **POST ON YOUR CHURCH DOOR! CARRY IT AS A SIGN! MAKE IT INTO A POSTCARD AND SEND TO YOUR BISHOP!**

### **A MESSAGE TO THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS:**

We call on our Roman Catholic bishops throughout the world to bring light to the past, to demonstrate change in the present, and to build for the future of our Church.

Out of love for our Church, we Catholic women and men offer the following steps as necessary actions for our bishops. With faith and hope, we proffer these reforms in order to ensure the future of our beloved Church, for ourselves, for our children, and for generations to come.



**Editorial Staff of *EqualWRites***  
*A Publication of SEPAWOC*

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# EQUAL WRITES

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## Scripture Reflections

### Advent/Christmas 2018

*Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.*

Advent...this season we hear from the prophets... "I am not afraid...God is in our midst"...

In Hebrew, the word prophet is from a root meaning bubble forth, as from a fountain, proclaiming truth. Joan Chittister tells us prophets proclaim God's Word in the midst of chaos, and Joan adds that prophets today should love their people, their church, their country enough to want them to be just, honest, free and equal. Tom Gumbleton reminds us that at our baptismal anointing, we were told of our personal call to be prophets.

Christmas...the prophets proclaim... "A holy day has dawned upon us... Upon those who dwell in the land of gloom, a great light shines... God is with us... I will not be silent"...

There is gloom in many places today. Can we make a difference? In 2017 in NCR Joan Chittister wrote a column: "Make America America Again" She reminds us of Langston Hughes and "Hold fast to dreams". She comments that we must hold fast to the dream... declare it, require it, demand it. We can reflect that great light of compassion and inclusivity

to all the nations. Dorothy Day encourages us not to sit down and feel hopeless...there is too much work to do!

When I was very young, my beloved brother taught me card tricks usually beginning with, "Pick a card, any card of all". We can pick a work of mercy, any work of mercy... we can pick a country in crisis, any country at all...Joan tells us to rise up, resist and get on with it!

A few days ago I was in a startling accident-airbags deployed-gratefully helping to save me from serious injury or death. I was reminded it was because of activism that airbags were put in cars after years of struggle, insistence and protest. Never give up!

I was also reminded of James Carroll's story of being in a plane that almost crashed. On the way out he said to the flight attendant, "Your life is all extra now". The flight attendant replied, "It was all extra to begin with!" Alleluia!

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

