

	EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
Vol. XXXIV No. 3		NOVEMBER 2020 - FEBRUARY 2021
	WRITES	MISSION STATEMENT - <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>



National Billboard Campaign Launched In Philadelphia

(Note our own Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div. as our movement’s honored representative)

The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests has launched a national billboard campaign in Philadelphia to advocate for the ordination of women priests in the Roman Catholic Church.

Judy Heffernan, a longtime Philadelphia resident and a woman priest, is featured in the billboards now up in two Philadelphia locations: I 76 Northbound on the Schuylkill Expressway at Wharton Road going into University City and I 95 Southbound going into the Port Richmond area.

With the Catholic Church in crisis as evidenced by declining church attendance, archdiocesan closings of schools and parishes, dwindling finances due to the clergy sex abuse scandal and fewer vocations to the priesthood, many Catholics feel that the time has come to ordain women priests. We couldn’t agree more!

Women’s Ordination Conference Gala Celebration:

45 Years of “Prophetic Persistence”

November 27-30, 2020

Here is Your “Official” Invitation. Please Join Us!

The virtual gala and auction will be streamed over several days, without charge. You will be able to watch the gala at your own pace to truly enjoy testimonies from theologians, members of the Young Feminist Network, former and current staff members, and much more! Together we will give thanks to our trailblazing founders, members, and organizers, and all those who have broken bread around the table of justice. This year, please join us in preparing for our fabulous, feminist feast by: Becoming an organizational or individual sponsor; donating an item or experience to the auction! Please contact Kate McElwee at kmcelwee@womensordination.org;

Share your stories of WOC throughout the decades. Our “herstory” is our strength, and together, our prophetic persistence for gender justice in the Catholic Church. Thank you for your courage on this living journey for justice.

Do As I Say By Regina Bannan

Of course, the central conceit of Pope Francis's latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, is a problem. The deep meaning he attaches to "fraternity" is meant to extend the warm feeling of male bonding to all of humanity. But male bonding leaves me out and leaves me cold.

What does not leave me cold is separating out Francis's own words, written right now, as opposed to the many quotations from himself, other popes, and random sources from Aristotle to Rahner. I want to use his own words to argue that he could "do as he says" and be open to dialogue about opening ordination to all people.

Certainly we want this document to be as uplifting and resonant as *Laudato Si*. There was a newness there because Francis elevated the church's responsibility for the environment in a comprehensive way that had not been done before – and spoke to an emerging consciousness around the world.

Certainly we want universal peace and the end of "just" wars and capital punishment. We want refugees to be welcomed and the poor assisted. We want a politics that abandons domination and an economic system that does not depend on consumerism and capitalism. We want respect for all world religions. As it addresses these topics, this document presents a unified treatment of Catholic social justice teaching – but it feels as if it has all been said by popes before, at least from Leo XIII through Benedict XIV. Francis does say some things that we can use, however.

This is the "woman" paragraph, which reminds me of those documentaries that have a brief focus on women because they have to, and then move on to the "real" concerns: "23. Similarly, the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story." After that, women basically disappear except as the occasional victim of trafficking or poverty, or being elderly.

Anyone preparing a homily on the Good Samaritan would find Chapter Two, #101, and #165 really helpful; Francis is clearly deeply involved in thinking about the Christian scriptures. But note the way the woman disappears:

"83. This explains why a Samaritan woman, when asked by Jesus for a drink, answered curtly: 'How is it that you,

a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jn 4:9). The most offensive charge that those who sought to discredit Jesus could bring was that he was 'possessed' and 'a Samaritan' (Jn 8:48). So this encounter of mercy between a [male] Samaritan and a Jew is highly provocative; it leaves no room for ideological manipulation and challenges us to expand our frontiers. It gives a universal dimension to our call to love, one that transcends all prejudices, all historical and cultural barriers, all petty interests." Brackets mine, irony his.

Expanding frontiers provides the opportunity for another useful quote:

"121. No one, then, can remain excluded because of his or her place of birth, much less because of privileges enjoyed by others who were born in lands of greater opportunity. The limits and borders of individual states cannot stand in the way of this. As it is unacceptable that some have fewer rights by virtue of being women, it is likewise unacceptable that the mere place of one's birth or residence should result in his or her possessing fewer opportunities for a developed and dignified life." This throwaway reference to women's rights should not be thrown away.

Similarly, hold on to the following reflection, concluding with a quotation from the Abu Dhabi joint statement:

"131. For those who are not recent arrivals and already participate in the fabric of society, it is important to apply the concept of 'citizenship', which 'is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice. It is therefore crucial to establish in our societies the concept of full citizenship and to reject the discriminatory use of the term minorities, which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority. Its misuse paves the way for hostility and discord; it undoes any successes and takes away the religious and civil rights of some citizens who are thus discriminated against.'"

Transform the following to being about gender:

"147. Let us realize that as our minds and hearts narrow, the less capable we become of understanding the world around us. Without encountering and relating to differences, it is hard to achieve a clear and complete understanding even of ourselves and of our native land. Other cultures are not 'enemies' from which we need to protect ourselves, but differing reflections of the inexhaustible richness of human life. Seeing ourselves from the perspective of another, of one who is different, we can better recognize our own unique features and those of our

continued on page 7

Community of the Christian Spirit

Committed to peace and social justice,
CCS welcomes you to join in our Sunday
morning celebrations, liturgies
in the Roman Catholic tradition which
explore Scripture and contemporary readings.

For information, call Roberta Brunner, 267-277-4022,
or P.O. Box 353, Abington, PA 19001

Caste in the Church and the World

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

Jesus spoke a lot about scales falling from people's eyes, enabling them to see things they had never seen before. In some cases, he is described as curing people of actual blindness. Whether blind from birth or selectively blind, gaining or regaining sight included getting some kind of insight which presented new horizons to the people who described their new vision as nothing short of a miracle.

A long time ago, I applied to be the school nurse at Germantown Academy, a prestigious private school. A friend was the librarian, so I thought I would be a shoo-in. I'd get the job and my four children would attend GA tuition free. It was a win-win.

Well, I didn't get that job and although I was initially disappointed, it was the best thing that ever happened to me and my children, three of whom would not have thrived in that environment. Six months after GA turned me down, I was working in the School District of Philadelphia in an elementary school that boasted of having 76 different ethnic groups from Afghanistan to Syria to India, Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam, to Russia, Portugal, and all of Central and South America including the West Indies. I fell in love in a way that I probably would never have working in a suburban school that really didn't reflect the values that I was internalizing from my time at St. Vincent de Paul parish where at age 34 I first really learned what it really meant to follow the two great commandments of Jesus.

Sometimes transformation occurs with an earth-shattering brilliance; the vision of a dove, the sight of the unfortunate, a word, a phrase, a movie, a book that completely changes our lives. Other times, the transformation unfolds like a peeling onion, layer after layer after layer exposing our gradual awakening to something that has existed, sometimes forever, without our ever seeing, knowing, or acknowledging it.

Sunday lectionary readings have long been onions left unpeeled, vacuum packed to prevent any possible combinations that produce differences in flavor, although that is what onions are supposed to do. For example, I specifically refer to the infamous Gospel of Matthew 16:13-20 in which Jesus proclaims Peter as the rock upon which He will build his church and gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Paired with the Gospel is Isaiah 22:19-23 in which God promises to throw over the current ruler in Jerusalem and replace him with his own divinely chosen faithful servant.

On the surface, the readings seem to be pretty straightforward. God supports the status quo which is the position of those writing the scripture passages we read today. He, because this god is male, thrusts people he doesn't like out of office and summons his own servant whom he endows with divine authority to do his bidding which closely matches the bidding of the VIPs in power. All divine power comes to reside in this divinely chosen human being. This divine selectee is then given a key to which only he has access. The bearded men reading this

over the course of the millennia shook their gray heads in agreement. This is, indeed, how things worked both in the world and in heaven, according to an unchanging divine plan. No layers of nuance here.

This first reading is adroitly paired by another set of men who compiled the lectionary readings with a gospel where Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, just in case the listeners didn't get the message about how divine privilege gets meted out. Peter is rewarded with divinely conferred powers, given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and acknowledged as the rock upon which Jesus would build his church. This story made perfect sense to Christians for almost two millennia until women biblical scholars started unraveling it, peeling away the unfounded assumptions, exposing it to the air of diverse opinions and life experiences until it no longer makes any sense in our own time, especially since as we know Martha said the same, exact thing and got, well, nothing.

What these readings do, blatantly, I must say, in the year 2020 is assert yet again the notion of caste that allegedly originated in, and is sustained, by divine intention. This notion has hamstrung the church since the fourth century, making it far less than it could have been.

The Catholic Church would deny that its actual framework is a caste system, a system that they have no intention of dismantling. The priestly caste has endowed itself with sacred power whose source lies in a shadowy past. To sustain the illogical premise of sacred power, the arbiters of the divine regularly select lectionary readings to be public proclamations to drive their point home to the faithful. Peter, with his plentitude of power, is their point man. Who can argue with the successor of the man who got the keys to heaven itself?

A caste system is bad enough when it forklifts the male gender into the image of God. It's also awful in a democracy where all citizens are supposed to be equal. As we see on the nightly news, caste determines who dies of Covid and who gets shot by the police. It determines who lives near the oil refineries spewing chemicals into the neighborhood's air and who is forced to drink poisoned public water.

I have recently read Isabel Wilkerson's fine book, *Caste, the Origins of Our Discontents*. In brilliant prose, Wilkerson lays bare the harsh reality of caste that runs like a third rail under American society, electrified but largely unseen unless one has the eyes to see and understand the reason why we have become the people we are.

Wilkerson describes caste as an invisible program with unwritten rules for a polite society that assigns seats at the table or speaking parts in the board room. Caste endows the favored ones with the power to make decisions for others based upon opinion and appearance rather than fact. Caste orders and directs. It takes advantage of the least among us. It rarely listens and rarely changes its mind. Caste can make people into bullies.

continued on page 4

Caste in the Church and the World

continued from page 3

When one caste has a stranglehold on society, its non-productive and often evil nature commandeers society, warping it to fit its understanding of who is on top and why. It often blinds people to the source of its real power which is nothing more than a fairy tale that those who perpetuate it have woven into a spider web of privileges purportedly sanctioned by God. This viewpoint tells only one story, allows no differing opinions, leaves no other option, and ultimately lacks imagination. As a result, justice is turned back, righteousness stands at a distance, and truth stumbles in the public square and in the churches.

Caste also limits and misinterprets the power and majesty of God who will be what the divine will choose to be and all of humanity in its many manifestations, equally beloved and cherished by the God they all image. We forget this God at our own peril and the peril of the world. Leaving people out of the mix because of caste strangles good ideas, closing off avenues that might have made the world a better place.

Caste is also sneaky and often hides not only behind pious platitudes but also in the unconscious bias of those who would hotly deny hidden prejudice. It has many manifestations and sometimes you have to look really hard in order to see it. So many privileged people would be aghast to find that their actions or attitudes might be considered sexist or racist. I'll give you one example.

At the Acme last week, I was standing in line at the deli. There was a white man standing in front of me who was being waited on and a Black man off to my right. When the white meat slicer finished with the white customer, she proceeded to ignore the Black man who was clearly next and walked around cleaning things up. Another deli worker came out, looked directly at me and asked if I was being served. I pointed to the Black man and said he was there before I was. When another white man walked up to the counter, the slicer immediately stopped what she was doing and helped him. Did the white deli worker deliberately ignore the Black customer? Worse, did she even SEE him?

So what do we do with this notion of caste and its many manifestations? I think, first of all, we need to see it, recognize it for what it is, and unpeel it, as caustic as that might be to our tearing eyes. While we are not responsible for the past, we are obliged to act in the present and work against actions, laws, or decisions that harm our fellow human beings. Every unjust law in both church and state must be challenged. Christians need to ask themselves, "How can I fix this?"

In the final paragraph of her book, Wilkerson offers a picture of a world without caste.

In a world without caste, being male or female, light or dark, immigrant or native-born, would have no bearing on what anyone was perceived as being capable of. In a world without caste, we would all be invested in the well-

being of others in our species if only for our own survival, and recognize that we are in need of one another more than we have been led to believe. We would join forces with indigenous people around the world raising the alarm as fires rage and glaciers melt. We would see that, when others suffer, the collective human body is set back from the progression of our species.

I think what Wilkerson is describing is the Body of Christ in all of its splendor and power, and I celebrate opening our eyes to its dazzling beauty. I champion letting the scales fall from our eyes so that we can see the glory of our God shining in the faces of the least among us. Only then, as Wilkerson wrote, can we all be free.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco, RCWP, is a member of the *Mary Magdalene community*, the *SEPAWOC Core Committee*, and is a regular contributor to *EqualwRites*.

St. Mary Magdalene Community

Sunday Zoom Mass at 9:00 a.m.
600 Burmont Road • Drexel Hill, PA 19026
For more information
www.smmcommunity.org

As we see the old year out.....

Is there any doubt that we would all like to put 2020 behind us? There are no words to describe how our lives have been upended and radically changed. The stable center of our SEPAWOC community has been the support we have received from our readers. We are so grateful for your contributions as they help us to keep the issue of equality for women in the church a focus in Southeastern Pennsylvania. Our ongoing presence, even in the pandemic, remains strong.

As you contemplate your end of year donations please consider this new information: Under the CARES Act, taxpayers can now take a deduction for up to \$300 in charitable contributions if they don't itemize on the 2020 tax form. This is a flip from the previous rule that required itemization for a tax break.

Any donation you send is appreciated and helps us to continue publishing and programing. Thank you.

Alice Paul and Pauli Murray: Guiding us into the Light

By Jacquelin Agostini

The November 3 election has implications for women that go far beyond women's ordination. In light of the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment, I want to emphasize that voting is not just a hard won right but a moral responsibility.

Two prominent women in the movement for women's rights and Civil Rights were born near Philadelphia. Alice Paul, a Quaker, born on January 11, 1885, became a driving force for the 19th Amendment. Anne Pauline Murray, an Episcopalian, born on November 20, 1910, devoted herself to the pursuit of Civil Rights. Even though Alice was born to a well to do Quaker Family and Pauli to a poor Black Episcopalian family, they had much in common.

Alice's mother came from a prominent Quaker Family. Her Quaker father, originally orphaned, had tremendous drive and became a gentleman farmer. Alice was their first child who, at Moorestown Friends, excelled in academics and athletics. In 1901, she delivered the graduation valedictorian address.

Pauli Murray was the fourth of six children. Her mother was a nurse and her father, a Howard University graduate, taught in the Baltimore public schools. When Pauli was three years old, her mother died, and Pauli's father sent her to live with a maternal aunt, Pauline Fitzgerald. Three years later, ravaged by anxiety, poverty, and illness, Pauli's father was committed to the Crownsville State Hospital for the Negro Insane where, in 1922, a white guard taunted him with racist epithets, dragged him to the basement, and beat him to death with a baseball bat. Pauli lost her mother at a young age, grew up separated from her father and five siblings, and then lost her father to violence – quite a contrast to Alice Paul's life in a stable, supportive nuclear and extended Quaker family.

Pauli, in spite of her losses, developed a strong sense of family when she lived with her aunt and her maternal grandparents, Cornelia and Robert Fitzgerald. Cornelia was born in bondage. Her mother was a part-Cherokee slave and her father the plantation owner's son. Robert, her grandfather, was raised in Pennsylvania, attended anti-slavery meetings with Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, and fought for the Union in the Civil War. Together, they formed part of a large and close-knit family whose members ranged from Episcopalians to Quakers, impoverished to wealthy, fair-skinned and blue-eyed to dark-skinned and curly-haired. When they all gathered together, Pauli wrote, it looked "like a United Nations in miniature."

Pauli grew up, in her own words, "a thin, wiry, ravenous child," exceedingly willful yet eager to please. She taught herself to read by the age of five and devoured books. Her aunt was a teacher who encouraged her prowess. By the time she graduated, at 15, she was the editor-in-chief of the school newspaper, the president of the literary so-

ciety, class secretary, a member of the debate club, a top student, and a forward on the basketball team.

Alice followed her mother's footsteps enrolling at Quaker Swarthmore College. She thrived academically, athletically, and socially. In 1906 Alice started at the University of Pennsylvania which admitted women to graduate school. In 1907 she received a scholarship to Wood Brooke Quaker Study Center in Birmingham, England. It was there that she became involved in the Pankhurst's Suffrage Campaign and learned how women could wield power. By the end of the year, Alice was arrested 7 times, served 3 jail terms, hunger strikes, and forced feeding. In 1910 she returned to the university to write her PhD thesis based on an investigation of women and received her doctorate in 1912.

Pauli Murray declined to go to the North Carolina College for Negroes. Her whole life had been constrained by segregation, and she had watched North Carolina roll back the gains of Reconstruction and use Jim Crow laws to viciously restrict the lives of African-Americans. From the moment Pauli had understood the system, she actively resisted it. She went instead to Hunter Women's College and graduated top of her class in 1933. She went to work for the Works Project Administration, Workers Defense League, and as a teacher in the New York City Remedial Reading Project. In 1938 she was denied admission to a graduate program at the University of North Carolina because of her race. She launched a letter writing campaign that brought her to the attention of Eleanor Roosevelt and marked the beginning of a lasting friendship. She finally chose Howard Law School, and, although she encountered blatant gender discrimination, in 1944, she was the only female to graduate with a law degree.

Because she had also graduated first in her class, Pauli won a prestigious fellowship to Harvard University only to be rejected because "Harvard does not admit females". She coined the term 'Jane Crow' since she had been marginalized for being female as well as Black. In 1945, she earned her graduate degree in Law from the University of California and, in 1965, her Doctor of Judicial Science from Yale where she was the first African-American to receive a doctoral level law degree.

In 1912, Alice went to Washington, D.C. and started the National Women's Party. In 1913, she organized the Women's Suffrage Parade in D.C. the day before Woodrow Wilson's Inauguration. Women from all over the country participated and over half a million people came to view the parade all of which put pressure on Wilson to support Suffrage.

In January 1917, the National Women's Party became the first political protest to picket the White House. The picketers came from all over the country and held banners demanding women's right to vote and picketed every day, rain or snow becoming known as Silent Sentinels. By June 1917, police started arresting picketers. As the suffragists kept protesting, their jail terms grew longer. Police arrested Alice Paul in October and sentenced her

continued on page 6

Alice Paul and Pauli Murray:

Guiding us into the Light *continued from page 5*

to 7 months at Occoquan Workhouse. The food and conditions were so deplorable she started a hunger strike and was joined by other prisoners. Alice was then placed in a state run insane asylum whose director pronounced her “quite sane”. One doctor said, “She has a spirit like Joan of Arc. She will die but she will never give up.” Thanks to her many sacrifices and leadership, she helped ensure the 19th Amendment was finally signed into law on August 26, 1920.

Pauli Murray was also no stranger to jail, having been arrested for lunch counter demonstrations and a refusal to give up her seat on bus in Virginia. Her accomplishments in Law and Civil Rights were numerous. One of her major efforts was the writing of States’ Laws on Race and Color for the Women’s Division of the Methodist Church, labeled our ‘Bible’ by Thurgood Marshall and other Civil Rights lawyers. In 1964 when the U.S. Civil Rights Act passed, Pauli co-authored “Jane Crow and the Law: Sex discrimination and Title VII”. She was a founding member of National Organization for Women.

In 1973, at the age of 62, Pauli gave up a tenured Law Professorship at Brandeis to enter the General Theological Seminary prior to the Episcopal Church’s approval of Women’s Ordination. In 1977, Pauli became the first African-American Woman Priest ordained by the Episcopal Church.

The Alice Paul Institute was founded in 1984 and her Farmhouse Home in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey is on the National Registry of Historic Places. The Pauli Murray Family Home in Durham, North Carolina was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2016 and is managed by the Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice.

These two women clearly followed their ‘Inner Light’ throughout their lives with courage and perseverance, providing all of us with much needed inspiration.

Jacquelin Agostini, PhD. *has a Master’s Degree in Religious Studies from La Salle University and doctorate from Temple University. She teaches Women’s History at the Life Program at Rowan University.*

Editorial Staff of *EqualwRites*

A Publication of SEPAWOC

Editors: **Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan**

Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan,
Eileen DiFranco**

Women’s Ordination Worldwide

An Update by Kathleen Gibbons Schuck

Just as a reminder: Founded in 1996 at the First European Women’s Synod in Austria, Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) is an ecumenical network of national and international groups whose primary focus is the admission of Roman Catholic women in all ordained ministries. Since 2017, I’ve been honored to represent Roman Catholic WomenPriests (RCWP) to WOW.

This past September, the WOW Steering Committee was scheduled to gather in Vienna, Austria. In this year of Covid 19, however, the WOW Leadership Circle voted to convene virtually. Kate McElwee of the Women’s Ordination Conference (WOC) and I collaborated in building an agenda that integrated periods of prayer and reflection with each WOW member group sharing insights.

In advance of the meeting, we invited WOW members to send photos of a symbol of strength. Each image was explained and integrated into a mosaic during our opening ritual. Symbols ranged from running shoes, weights, and boxing gloves to a bishop’s crook with a pink bow, Bohdan Piasecki’s Last Supper painting, a sculpture of the Walking Madonna, icons of women disciples, books including *Mary and Early Christian Women* by Ally Kateusz, and *What They Don’t Teach You in Catholic College: Women in the Priesthood and the Mind of Christ* by John Wijngaards, and photos of a black sheep in the midst of a white field of sheep, scarred hands, feet, and nonviolent actions by members around the world.

Active WOW members and groups are concentrated in Europe as well as Australia and South Africa and so we had to juggle many time zones. Despite that challenge, however, in addition to business, elections and goal setting, we discussed pertinent worldwide issues, including the pandemic, Anne Soupa and the 7 apostles, Black Lives Matter, the Deacon Commission, and Querida Amazonia.

Sunday concluded with a global Eucharist built around the theme “With you among us, we are holy people” honoring Hildegard of Bingen, whose feast day coincided with this year’s gathering. Our homilist, Soline Humbert of Dublin, masterfully wove together the radical transformation of relationships Mary’s Magnificat invites with Hildegard’s own vision of an interconnected web of life. In the response, we heard voices from Africa, Australia, and Europe as well as North America. The total community listening and sharing included more than 500!. You can watch the video and/or read a copy of Soline’s homily at WOW’s webpage: <http://womensordinationcampaign.org>

Once WOW’s schedule of events and liturgies for 2021 is finalized, we will share it.

Kathleen Gibbons Schuck *is a member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee.*

Do As I Say *continued from page 2*

culture: its richness, its possibilities and its limitations. Our local experience needs to develop ‘in contrast to’ and ‘in harmony with’ the experiences of others living in diverse cultural contexts.”

On the other hand, I find all of this valuable:

“203. Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other’s point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. Based on their identity and experience, others have a contribution to make, and it is desirable that they should articulate their positions for the sake of a more fruitful public debate. When individuals or groups are consistent in their thinking, defend their values and convictions, and develop their arguments, this surely benefits society. Yet, this can only occur to the extent that there is genuine dialogue and openness to others. Indeed, ‘in a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction. In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together.’ [Querida Amazonia] (A note: somewhat ironic in light of what was left out of that; maybe the Pope is planning further dialogue.) Public discussion, if it truly makes room for everyone and does not manipulate or conceal information, is a constant stimulus to a better grasp of the truth, or at least its more effective expression. It keeps different sectors from becoming complacent and self-centered in their outlook and their limited concerns: ‘Let us not forget that ‘differences are creative; they create tension and in the resolution of tension lies humanity’s progress.’” [From the film *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word*, by Wim Wenders]

Sometimes, reading this document, I feel as if our culture, to the Pope, is what he more frequently refers to as “ideology.” But that is not necessary:

“218. All this calls for the ability to recognize other people’s right to be themselves and to be different. This recognition, as it becomes a culture, makes possible the creation of a social covenant. Without it, subtle ways can be found to make others insignificant, irrelevant, of no value to society. While rejecting certain visible forms of violence, another more insidious kind of violence can take root: the violence of those who despise people who are different, especially when their demands in any way compromise their own particular interests.”

Francis then addresses what that social contract might mean:

“221. Such a covenant also demands the realization that some things may have to be renounced for the common good. No one can possess the whole truth or satisfy his or her every desire, since that pretension would lead to nullifying others by denying their rights. A false notion of tolerance has to give way to a dialogic realism on the part of men and women who remain faithful to their own principles while recognizing that others also have the right to do likewise. This is the genuine acknowledgment of the other that is made possible by love alone. We have to

stand in the place of others, if we are to discover what is genuine, or at least understandable, in their motivations and concerns.”

Finally, forgiveness:

“241. Nor does this mean calling for forgiveness when it involves renouncing our own rights, confronting corrupt officials, criminals or those who would debase our dignity. We are called to love everyone, without exception; at the same time, loving an oppressor does not mean allowing him to keep oppressing us, or letting him think that what he does is acceptable. On the contrary, true love for an oppressor means seeking ways to make him cease his oppression; it means stripping him of a power that he does not know how to use, and that diminishes his own humanity and that of others. Forgiveness does not entail allowing oppressors to keep trampling on their own dignity and that of others, or letting criminals continue their wrongdoing. Those who suffer injustice have to defend strenuously their own rights and those of their family, precisely because they must preserve the dignity they have received as a loving gift from God. If a criminal has harmed me or a loved one, no one can forbid me from demanding justice and ensuring that this person – or anyone else – will not harm me, or others, again. This is entirely just; forgiveness does not forbid it but actually demands it.

“242. The important thing is not to fuel anger, which is unhealthy for our own soul and the soul of our people, or to become obsessed with taking revenge and destroying the other. No one achieves inner peace or returns to a normal life in that way...Nothing is gained this way and, in the end, everything is lost.”

Those of us who do not want the church to lose everything – and that is what is at stake – must call for the Pope and everyone who has power in the church to do as he says.

Regina Bannan is the President of SEPAWOC and contributes weekly posts to WOC’s The Table. This article is taken from her post on October 10, 2020.

Recommendation:

Commonweal magazine hosted an excellent online series this October focusing on “Reimagining U. S. Catholicism Today” which we think would be of special interest to you, our readers. Each one hour panel presentation explored a topic critically relevant to today’s Church:

• “Prophetic Inclusion: Catholic Women in Church Leadership”

• “Modern and Just Catholic Education and Formation”

• “A Reckoning of Catholic Institutions”

• “The Future of Community and Sacramental Life”

The panels included diverse voices with refreshing insights. You can view any or all at: commonwealmagazine.org/events/.

Book Reviews

Womanpriest: Tradition and Transgression in the Contemporary Roman Catholic Church. By Jill Peterfeso. NY, NY: Fordham University Press, 2020. 272 pp. Paperback. \$30.00.

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

I became involved with the women's ordination movement in 1975 when two of the leaders of the Grail, on the staff of whose organic farm I was serving at the time, told me I was going with them to the first Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit. I was not terribly interested in the issue at the time, but those were the days when people still actually obeyed orders. So I went, and the conference transformed my understanding of the issue.

Seventeen years later, when I was beginning my doctoral studies at Temple, I became involved in SEPAWOC. From there I became a member of the national WOC board and served as president of the board for several years.

But I was not enthusiastic about the first Roman Catholic Womanpriest (RCWP) ordinations on the Danube in 2002, or the ordinations in North America and elsewhere that followed. In those days I more or less belonged to the Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza "ordination is subordination" school.

But Jill Peterfeso's splendid new book, *Womanpriest*, has forced me to reconsider that position. The book is an ethnographic study of members of the RCWP group that burst on the public stage in 2002, and of the Association of Roman Catholic Womanpriests (ARCWP) that more or less split off the original group in 2010. Ethnography is based on field work with a particular group, involving interviews, observation, data collection, etc. But Peterfeso expands this into a kind of dialogic ethnography in which she includes, especially in the introduction and conclusion, some of her own experiences in womanpriest communities, and how this has influenced her own Catholic identity.

Peterfeso draws from her research a number of themes that embody and clarify the current reality and role of RCWP and ARCWP in contemporary Roman Catholicism. In chapter 1 she details the ways in which womanpriests use the deeply personal narrative of "being called" to dispute the Vatican's claim that their ordinations are illegitimate. Focusing on the centrality of the experience of "being called" in the lives of five prominent womanpriests, Victoria Rue, Juanita Cordero, Gabriella Velardi Ward, Mary Grace Crowley-Koch, and Kathleen Kunster, Peterfeso argues that such narratives enable these womanpriests to dispute Rome's claim that only men are "called", and that they are nothing but activist agitators. Rather they are multidimensional, faithful, reflective women who, in order to obey God's call, must disobey a patriarchal institution.

Peterfeso begins chapter 2 with the story of a Havertown priest writing to our own SEPAWOC, claiming that WOC members are not "true Catholics." She goes on to show that the retention of "Roman Catholic" in the title of the group demonstrates a commitment to Roman Catholic identity, and the ways in which Roman Catholicism since

Vatican II has sent out mixed messages, bringing the word "conscience" into the Catholic vernacular as well as refusing women who feel called the right to follow their consciences. Recent Roman Catholic history is precisely what inspires womanpriests to craft ways to make Roman Catholicism work.

These methods combine "conflict and creativity" (chapter 3). In response to what they perceive as the decline of the celibate-male-priest-centered Western Roman Catholicism, womanpriests create "discipleship of equals" communities that give members a way of moving their Catholicism to a better, fuller expression. But such creativity brings conflict with it, as when ARCWP split from RCWP over issues of governance, particularly how to have leadership without authoritarianism.

Womanpriest ordinations (chapter 4) are a prime instance of such creativity and conflict, demonstrating as they do womanpriests' location on the line between reforming and transforming the institution. Such ordinations elicit not only Vatican condemnation as "contra legem," but also feminist theological critique for its ostensible collusion in institutional "subordination." But they also focus badly needed public attention on the issue of women's subordination in the institutional church, and this is no small achievement.

The emphasis on the centrality of the community in the celebration of the sacraments is another of the transformative effects of womanpriest leadership (chapter 5). Here, too, however, creativity and conflict overlap, with some participants seeing the ontological nature of the sacraments and apostolic succession as more important than community participation. But in this case, as in many others, the most significant thing, in Peterfeso's estimation, is that womanpriests engage in actions, not just argumentation. (And there's a photo of our own Eileen DiFranco in the middle of the chapter!).

Peterfeso's next chapter examines how womanpriests' reality as "worker priests," due to the unavailability of congregational salaries, facilitates their involvement with other groups and church leaders, roles that can be both inspiring and confusing. Then, in chapter 7, Peterfeso explores, in a way that I find deeply moving, how the actual bodies of womanpriests have the potential to reposition the gendered, sexual and sacred natures of the priesthood, a revisioning that is especially needed in light of the sex abuse crisis.

What is, for me, however, the most moving part of *Womanpriest* is Peterfeso's concluding chapter, in which she brings into clear view the dialogic dimension of her ethnographic research. She does so by returning to material in the introductory chapter about her involvement in

continued on page 9

BOOK REVIEW *continued from page 8*

a womanpriest congregation in St. Louis, Therese of Divine Peace Inclusive Roman Catholic Community. Initially, Peterfeso was unable to decide what to make of the womanpriest Masses there. Did they remind her of the thousands of Catholic services she had attended throughout her life or did they unsettle her because womanpriest culture is unlike the Catholicism that she knew? Such concerns led her into a reexamination of larger questions about Roman Catholicism as well as about women and religious authority.

By the end of her research, however, Peterfeso realizes that her initial uncertainty about the womanpriest phenomenon had receded considerably. At the beginning, for example, she missed kneelers—RCWP liturgies are rarely in churches. She also had mixed feelings about the “enthusiastic affection” of RCWP liturgies which deviated from the relative anonymity of standard Catholic Masses. Gradually, she came to like engaging more directly with others, as in shared homilies, concelebration of the Eucharist, and interacting more before and after the liturgy. Her research also made her more unhappy about the many manifestations of the institutional church’s “history of viewing women as less holy than men.” Ultimately, she writes, “Like the Roman Catholic liturgy, like the Catholic liturgical calendar, my annual visits to Therese are becoming ritualized. I find comfort in this familiarity” (120).

These shifts in her personal assessment of the womanpriest phenomenon did not stop Peterfeso, scholar that she is, from raising further critical questions, such as those about the whole future of the womanpriest movement—its small, aging membership, for example—or about conflicting attitudes toward women in the fastest growing part of the church, the Global South. But the shift in her own perceptions illustrates graphically her compelling argument that participating in a womanpriest community, and experiencing a womanpriest celebrating the liturgy, is one of the surest ways to bring people around to supporting women’s ordination.

It is not possible, even in a long review like this one, to do justice to the careful and original thinking Jill Peterfeso brings to the issue that is so important to us, women’s ordination. But if what I have written here doesn’t send you dashing out (or dashing on-line!) to buy a copy of *Womanpriest*, consider this: I now think that ordination isn’t always subordination. And I think that dancing back and forth across the line between tradition and transgression may well be just the strategy we need to reform the Roman Catholic Church.

Marian Ronan *lives and writes in Brooklyn, NY.*

Be sure to check out The Table posts each week at the WOC website www.womensordination.org. SEPAWOC President, Regina Bannan, posts on Saturdays and EqualwRites Co-Editor, Ellie Harty, on Tuesdays.

U.S. CATHOLIC REFORM ORGANIZATIONS STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH FR. TONY FLANNERY

From the editors: In September, the SEPAWOC Core Committee approved our signing this letter in support of Father Tony Flannery who has been a fervent champion of women’s ordination and the LGBT+ community and has been chastised and marginalized by the Vatican as a result. Here is our response to the latest indignity to which he has been subjected.

As Catholics working together for a renewed Church, we stand proudly in solidarity with Irish Redemptorist Fr. Tony Flannery in the face of continued threats and bullying from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) over his support for women’s ordination and the full dignity of LGBT+ persons.

The Inquisition-era “oaths of fidelity” the CDF has demanded that Fr. Flannery sign directly oppose the Church’s long-held teachings about the primacy of the individual conscience, as expressed from St. Thomas Aquinas through the Second Vatican Council.

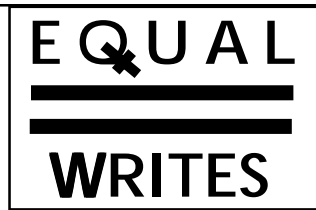
The oaths require Fr. Flannery publicly assent to Church teaching that priestly ordination is reserved to men, that homosexuality is “intrinsically disordered,” that marriage is only between a man and a woman, and that rejects “gender theory.” These kinds of outdated and insulting oaths are damaging to priests who are being asked to choose between their God-given conscience and the Church and its people, whom they are called to serve.

Fr. Flannery’s advocacy represents beliefs that many Catholics share and long to hear more priests speak out loud. This attempt at suppression by the CDF is a stark reminder of the institution’s resistance to any sort of meaningful dialogue towards solutions to the many crises the Church faces today.

While the CDF may attempt to prevent Fr. Flannery’s “return to public ministry,” what the congregation fails to see is that his ministry cannot be silenced, and in reality, they have not stopped him or all those who join him in following the Gospel message of equality.

If Pope Francis is sincere about his openness to dialogue, his stated need for an increased role for women in the Church, and his words that LGBT+ people are beloved children of God, this letter and oaths of fidelity must be rescinded. Moreover, structures and processes that advance the vision of a dialogical and discerning Church, which Pope Francis promotes and many Catholics long for, must replace these coercive and abusive tactics.

We call upon other members of the Catholic Church to show the same courage and fidelity to conscience as Fr. Flannery, and for pastoral leaders to walk fearlessly alongside the people of God on the journey to a more inclusive, loving Church.



SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

SEPAWOC
P.O. BOX 52046
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19115

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Philadelphia PA
Permit NO. 5892

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

SUBSCRIPTION: To begin or continue receiving *EqualwRites*, please send a contribution and your name and address to above address. We deliberately do not set a specific fee because we want people to feel free to contribute what they feel they can afford: \$5, \$10, \$15, or more. If that's really impossible for you, just send your name and address and we will start your subscription. When you join WOC as a national member, you do not automatically join us, so if you want to support both, you need to contribute to both.

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

MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *EqualwRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be February 2020. Final deadline for submissions is January 15. Send to ellieharty65@gmail.com or mail to above address.

ADVERTISING: Advertising helps us support *EqualwRites* and helps you find people who support us. Our ad rates are \$30 for one issue, \$75 for three issues. To place an ad contact mewhelan@comcast.net. Find us online at sepawoc.org.

Scripture Reflections

Advent 2020

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Advent-anticipation, preparing, waiting, listening to the call of the prophets!

Anticipation--as I write this in October, we are anticipating and preparing for THE election. I look back at what I shared here in October 2016: I have been drowning in the sexism, racism and threatened and real violence. I have been sad, angry, concerned, crazed and cannot go for any length of time without reading, watching cable or searching out someone to talk with about it... (Little did I know in 2016 that this would continue every day for four years.)

And now we wait.

Listening--to the call of the prophets: this year Advent begins on Thanksgiving weekend. 45 years ago on Thanksgiving weekend, 1,200+ people met together in anticipation, preparation and active waiting for a renewed church and a renewed priestly ministry within a discipleship of equals. We celebrate and give thanks for our Spirit-filled long-haul faithfulness. We affirm the message of our prophet Theresa Kane, RSM : Endurance is a quality of prophets!

And we listen to our Advent Prophets in these difficult times of suffering and turmoil: bring glad tidings to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives...hope in the Light shining in the darkness.

Perhaps we have come to better understand the deeper meaning of the biblical exhortation "pray always"... let us pray with Brother David Steindl-Rast: "Breathe deeply the breath of the one Spirit, whose guidance will move us if we open our hearts...take all human violence, all human greed, injustice, hypocrisy and lift it all with the strength of your heart into the stream of compassion and healing that pulsates through the heart of the world, that center in which all our hearts are one."

This prayer requires that we face the reality that children were intentionally separated from their parents at our borders...and 545 of them are lost in this maze of cruelty. May we claim our prophetic call and rebuke and reverse cruelty this Advent... and live out the prophet's call to give comfort to God's people.

Judith Heffernan is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit and the SEPAWOC Core Committee. See her in person in the picture on the front page of *EqualwRites*.

