EQUAL WRITES

Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area

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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.*

Wishing You A Blessed Holiday Season

Imagining a Synod

By Regina Bannan

"Francis's ecclesiastical imagination means spontaneity in a place where that does not happen often." I wrote this in the last issue of *EqualwRites*, and I have been thinking about it ever since. The Pope wants every Catholic in the world to participate in the Synod. That's more or less **1.34 billion people**! It takes an unusual ecclesiastical imagination to be so ambitious, yet in his opening homily Francis welcomes all to "encounter, listen, discern."

I see Francis moving between his understanding of a universal church, journeying together, and his recognition of the current structure of the church—parishes and dioceses, specifically. And, to take it one step further, every once in a while the Synod planning team I wrote about in the last issue brings up that those who have left the church and people of other religions can be included, too. This suggests a kind of openness and honesty we have not seen before.

That planning team issued a preparatory document September 7 with instructions to implement the phases—diocesan, continental, universal—they had broadly sketched out in May. October 17, every diocese was to have an opening liturgy for their phase of the Synod process. In September, *NCR* and *America* tried to contact all dioceses in the United States and found that few had implemented plans for the Synod. You can read in *NCR* about Seattle (WA), Burlington (VT), Davenport (IA), Syracuse (NY), and Chicago (IL). *America* found Gary (IN), Bridgeport (CT), Corpus Christi (TX), Marquette (MI), Phoenix (AZ), Reno (NV), St. Augustine (FL), and San Antonio (TX). *CruxNow* got a later start and was less optimistic, contacting smaller dioceses that might have difficulty with such a major effort: Laredo (TX), Little Rock (AK), Jackson (MS), and Lexington (KY).

Some of the decisions surprised me. Chicago's liberal Cardinal Blase Cupich decided to go with already-existing archdiocesan structures he usually consults—committees of priests, laity, religious, and women—and ask them to get ideas from their constituencies. The good news is that those groups exist and are active, but it doesn't seem as inclusive a strategy as Rome is imagining. In contrast, Gary Bishop Robert J. McClory bought right into the synod of everybody concept, having held one in 2017 and one in Detroit when he was there.

And I never thought I'd find agreement between the Bishop of Lexington, John Stowe, and our Archbishop here in Philadelphia, Nelson Perez. Stowe always seems to be on the same far left side of issues as I am, but he told Crux "there wasn't a lot of time once we knew how we were supposed to do this," less forthright leadership than I expect from him. He decided to have a barbecue after the opening mass to gather suggestions about "how to best roll out the process."

Similarly, Perez opined in his homily at our opening mass that Americans don't like ambiguity. He correctly characterized this synod as more about the process than the results; the synods on the family and youth previously held under Francis were more focused. Or maybe he had in mind those under prior popes, when the whole thing was coordinated in advance, with predetermined conclusions. Perez talked about Jesus' journey and especially the imperfect apostles who didn't really get what Jesus was about, yet all died martyrs; they would rather die than deny Jesus. He went on to quote the Pope's homily the previous week, which was also printed in the worship aid.

In his opening homily, Stowe drew on a different origin story. He pointed to "the inaugural gathering of the early Church known as the Council of Jerusalem, circa 50 A.D. This primordial synod brought together the original bishops – the Apostles – along with both Jewish and Gentile converts to engage in dialogue as to the ongoing direction of the Church. The hallmarks of that synod – and, indeed any synod – are not only fraternal dialogue, but hearts open to discernment and conversion." This written summary is more didactic than Perez's homily, and is from a Vatican II perspective: "Since the 11th century, when the Latin and Orthodox churches split in what is known as the Great Schism, the Western Church wandered away from a 'synodal mindset' which the Eastern Church embraced, and continues to embrace to this day…What resulted in Roman Catholicism is a more hierarchical and clerical approach to the vision of the Church that often excludes the lay faithful." Lexington has a head start over Philadelphia when it comes to diocese-wide assemblies. On October 30, they held the 125th Diocesan Convention. We have no tradition like that to draw on.

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What will happen here? On CatholicPhilly.com October 21, reporter Matthew Gambino warned "**What it is not** [emphasis added] is a gripe session for all that is wrong with the church. Nor is it whetstone for people to grind the axe of their agenda to a fine edge and wield it. It is not a means for falling into ideological camps, one pitted against another. And it certainly is not a Catholic-style exercise in parliamentary democracy." Gambino follows the Archbishop in noting that Msgr. Brian Hennessy, pastor of St. Alphonsus Parish in Maple Glen, "will add to his already full plate as a pastor and serve as the point person." Archdiocesan leaders are "discerning…a structure to begin the listening process." I'd come to a barbeque to talk about that. How about you?

I notice a different emphasis here than in all the reading I have done about the synod. Gambino writes, "Courage will also be necessary to speak honestly not so much about issues of the day, but about one's personal encounter with the living God. Synodality involves sharing one's deepest experience of faith with another person to build communion among them." This is more personal and evangelical than I think Pope Francis intends, but that may be my bias. Hennessey says it is "a moment of grace," and Gambino goes on, "meant to lead everyone into a deeper communion with Christ, to greater participation in his [sic] church and forward in mission to serve all the world." This external focus is key to the Synod I am reading about.

Like the Pope, Gambino does stress reaching to the margins: "But sharing is especially intended for those who do not show up regularly and may in fact have walked away from the church or are little noticed, for whatever reason." At this early stage of planning, Hennessy is thinking that parish pastors need to "find the opportunities to start a conversation at the parish, then expand outward." He said "It will be time well spent if we can draw people into greater participation" in the church. But he's measuring the time!

I want to contrast that with the approach of St. Joseph Sr. Katie Eiffe, director of synodal planning for the Diocese of Syracuse, New York, which she shared on a NCR Live podcast, also October 21. First of all, this is her only job right now, as far as I can tell. She was hired in August. Second, Eiffe is a laywoman and a sister, not a priest or a monsignor. Third, Bishop Douglas Lucia announced a diocesan synod on his own last February, and seems to have worked the process he intended into the Pope's timeline, despite having to hold listening sessions in the winter in the snow belt. Fourth, the sessions will be in the pastoral care areas of the diocese, which is more significant than may be obvious. The process is not tied to the parish – or the pastor. The Bishop is planning to attend all 21 sessions to listen and learn, not to speak. I had the sense that this was for encouragement, not surveillance. Fifth, Eiffe said they expect difficult questions to come up; married priests was the question to her, but you know that ordination of other than males is next on the list. She said there is no Q and A list and that people must feel the freedom to speak honestly from the heart: "freely, boldly, courageously." Sixth, as in Philadelphia, those who have been alienated from the church will be encouraged to attend; Eiffe sees how to do that as her greatest challenge right now. Catholic Charities will help reach the socially marginalized. There will be special sessions for public as well as Catholic high school students because they all are the church of the future. Other religious communities will be invited.

We have the diocese we have, not the one we might prefer. I hope to encourage you to participate by providing some models of how things could be done differently than I expect them to be done here. The spirit of Vatican II is being rediscovered every day as the Synod moves forward, and I hope everyone in Philadelphia will want to be a part of it, to "**encounter, listen, discern.**"

Regina Bannan *is President of SEPAWOC and contributes weekly posts for The Table at womensordination.org.*

The Bristol Text
From the Root & Branch Inclusive Synod

Here is a sample of what our involvment could produce. The organization, Root & Branch, already labelled: "A synod that starts with women and doesn't end there" gathered, online and in person, for their own "Inclusive Synod" in September. Excerpted below are the significant results.

The Bristol Text to Reform is a document that embodies some of the discoveries we have made in our journey of discernment. It is a statement of fundamental principles, not an exhaustive wish-list of matters that need addressing.

1.MORAL THEOLOGY
The Church has to accept the unruly freedom of the word, speaking afresh in different cultures and contexts. Our moral vision should embrace the entire person, a living response to the prophetic vocation to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

2. CHURCH AUTHORITY
'What touches all must be discussed and approved by all.'

3. REDEFINING AND RECLAIMING LITURGICAL MINISTRY
Hierarchy, and especially an all-male leadership, precludes the church from affirming the goodness in the diversity of creation, and the dignity and sanctity of all.

4. EMBRACING DIVERSITY
Every baptised person is clothed, without any distinction, in Christ. All belong to a royal priesthood. Jesus's call to celebrate his presence in the Eucharist requires no priestly caste. All ministries are open to all, as they were in the early church.

You can read the full text and the names and short biographies of the main contributors at rootsandbranchsynod.org.

What Are You Reading?

We were curious about what people were reading these days and thought you, our readers, might be, too. And so, we sent out the following request to some people connected to our lives and work:

We would like to know what you are currently reading that inspires and/or challenges you to continue to work for, and support, equality and inclusion of all genders in leadership and ministry in the Church and elsewhere.

Here are some of the responses we received:

Marian Ronan, research professor of Catholic Studies, author, lecturer:

I am currently reading *Kindred Spirits: Friendship and Resistance at the Edge of Modern Catholicism* (U Chicago: 2021) by the splendid young Fordham historical theologian Brenna Moore. In it, Moore addresses the deep, influential network and discourse of friendship between leaders in the liberal wing of Catholicism before Vatican II, including Jacques and Raissa Maritain, Simone Weil, Claude McKay, and others. I am especially grateful for Moore's refusal to categorize the profound and influential relationships between these friends (male and female, male and male, female and female) as gay or straight, sexual or not sexual. Away with the binaries. Friendship is complicated, as is equality.

Kathleen Gibbons Schuck, Roman Catholic Woman Priest:

I'm currently reading *Pedro Arrupe Witness of the Twentieth Century, Prophet of the Twenty-First* by Pedro Miguel Lamet. The book profiles Pedro Arrupe's life. Many of us recognize Arrupe's name as the Superior General and change agent who led the Jesuits from 1965 to 1983. Fewer of us know the backstory: He left medical school in Spain to join the Jesuit order. As novice master in Japan, he witnessed the explosion of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, then turned the novitiate into a makeshift clinic to attend to victims. His life was punctuated by great suffering and great love. Although long at 481 pages, this biography is captivating, insightful and entertaining.

Regina Bannan, President of SEPAWOC:

All My Sons is a 1947 play by Arthur Miller, which is a compelling and deeply moral play that examines the costs of war. Although written before "gender ideology," the play made me think about how I'm seen in this world and who I know myself to be as a woman.

Carl Yusavitz, ordained minister and retired behavioral healthcare chaplain and CPE supervisor:

Ever since "retiring" from chaplaincy ministry, I have been actively "rewiring" my brain to a new spiritual rhythm in my life. Reading Richard Rohr's daily meditations (Center for Action and Contemplation) have helped to create that new rhythm, which include "catching, checking, and changing" my long-standing binary thinking and paying closer attention to the present moment.

Marianne Tucker, 2021 Mary Magdalene award winner:

I won't be giving an author's name because what I have been reading has been a series of posts on a site called medium.com on getting help for what amounts to PTSD. A friend, whom we mentored as a teenager, knew that she needed to get help when her life seemed to freeze when she learned that her father was dying. All the mental abuse that comes from having a narcissistic parent who makes himself feel important by raging at and criticizing his children came back to her in an overwhelming way. He also had to plead guilty to having kiddie porn which explained an unhealthy interest in young girls. He had a jovial face for his friends, but he never got over his anger and belittlement of his children to the day he died.

This woman is funny, creative, loving and energetic, but now I can add brave and persistent to her qualities. She has been telling her story publicly so that others may benefit from her journey. She also writes well! If anyone wants the link to her posts they can contact me at tucktale@gmail.com. I find her and her journey to be an inspiration.

Mary Whelan, co-editor of *EqualwRites:*

Olive Kitteridge. She lingered in my mind ever since I read the book by that title. I recently gave myself the gift

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Can we count on you in '22?

Please remember us as you make your end of the year donations.
Our work continues!
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What Are You Reading? *continued from page 3*

of spending more time with Olive when I read *Olive, Again*, the follow-up book. I was not disappointed. The author of both, Elizabeth Strout, writes beautifully about this contrary, cantankerous and very human woman—letting us share her thoughts, actions, opinions and painful journey to self-awareness.

I love Olive's resilience as she moves through the aging experience, made rich by her complex interactions with the people in her family and community. It is a spiritual journey, after all--my favorite line in the book, "I think our job…is…to bear the burden of the mystery with as much grace as we can." Though Olive herself did not speak this line, it is from another intriguing character she welcomes into her life.

A reviewer from NPR wrote what sums up my feelings about the book: "That Olive! She continues to surprise me, continues to enrage me, continues to sadden me, and continues to make me love her. *Olive, Again?*poignantly reminds us that empathy, a requirement for love, helps make life 'not unhappy'."

Ellie Harty, co-editor of *EqualwRites*:

I am enchanted by Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass.* As a Native American botanist and teacher, she combines indigenous wisdom and values with science to mesmerizing effect. I'm at heart a dreamer, and so I love pondering the questions she asks of us as we struggle to save our planet. I also like it very much when we get some answers and I can turn dreaming into doing. It's a soft way to a hard place.

Sheila Peiffer, associate editor of WOC's *New Women, New Church:*

Matrix (Riverhead Books, 2021, 257 pages)

Set aside the obvious science fiction associations of this title and instead dig back to your high school Latin: mater, matrix: mother, source. This is the meaning that Lauren Groff relies on in her latest novel *Matrix*, "a defiant and timely exploration of the raw power of female creativity in a corrupted world", according to the jacket blurb. The framework of the novel is loosely based on the story of 12th century Marie de France, about whom very little is known except that she is considered the first female French poet. In Groff's version, Marie is an illegitimate child of some unnamed royal, ungainly in physical appearance and without a home.

Considered too ugly to marry, she is sent by Eleanor of Aquitaine at the age of seventeen to a run-down abbey of starving and sickly nuns in England. Groff's brusque and finely honed prose details how Marie transforms herself from a protesting novice into a powerful abbess and the abbey into a thriving "island of women", "self-sufficient and entire unto themselves."

Matrix is a celebration of female wit and will. Male characters lurk on the margins without ever appearing. Marie nurtures her burgeoning community through ingenuity, deception and sheer force of personality. She is ambitious and proud but determined to protect her abbey from all threats. When the Pope declares an interdict on all of England in 1208, meaning no Mass, no eucharist, no penance, Marie decides that "it will have no bearing on their lives…They will live as they always have, happily , and knowing they are the best beloved of god." Marie herself will celebrate Mass and the sacraments.

Matrix is a moving depiction of community life where "there is a place even for the maddest, for the discarded, for the difficult" as well as the saga of a medieval feminist in a time where the term did not exist. Groff's imagination depicts an enthralling vision of a mysterious, complex character and gives us all a vision of the potential of feminine leadership.

Please read the two lengthy book reviews in this issue by two of our veteran contributors, Eileen DiFranco and Maureen Tate.

By the way, what are you reading? We'd love to know!

A Woman's Lectionary for the Whole Church, Year W by Wilda C. Gafney

Reviewed by Eileen McCaffrey DiFranco

When I was a very small girl, I can recall scanning the credits after my favorite television shows anxiously looking for the names of women and crossly noting their absence to my father. In the 1960's and 70's, finding female names of note was like looking for lost balls in tall grass. I was occasionally rewarded with the names of the renowned costume designer, Edith Head, and the actor/director, Ida Lupino, but more often than not those credits rolled on and on with nary a woman's name. I also developed the habit of counting the number of stained glass windows devoted to women in churches I visited. Unsurprisingly, male saints always outnumbered the women.

Finding women in other areas was even less rewarding. Although all my teachers were women religious sisters, the parish was ruled by male priests. Politicians were all men. Doctors were all men. I recall once saying to my father that perhaps boys were better than girls. He quickly disabused me of that notion and explained the noxious effects of prejudice.

Little by little, more and more women inserted themselves into public life in the 60's and 70's; Ella Grasso was the first woman governor elected in her own right, and Sandra Day O'Connor served in the Arizona Senate before becoming a Justice of the Supreme Court. Both Shirley Chisholm and Geraldine Ferraro served in the House, and Ferraro later became the 1984 vice presidential candidate. Somewhere in the 60's a woman doctor set up shop in my neighborhood.

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, remained a bastion of the churchmen and all things male in spite of the promise of opened windows made by Vatican II. The lectionary selections reflected the stained glass windows. They revolved around men. There were the patriarchs who begot all those

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sons and the kings whose regal seed eventually produced Jesus. There were the twelve apostles who seemingly arose from the table at the Last Super clothed in vestments, carrying staffs, and wearing miters. Even the members of the Trinity were regarded as being somehow all male.

The women, on the other hand, remained largely invisible and were usually gathered into collective nouns that were masculine by preference. Those that are named were often regarded as sinners: Eve, the temptress, Jezebel, the evil queen, Rahab, the prostitute, and Bathsheba, the willing adulteress. They might be regarded as annoying like Martha who complained to Jesus that Mary wasn't helping her with the dishes. Others were admired for their ability to produce sons with that seed that the men spread about so liberally: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachael, Bilhah, and Zilpah, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Hannah, or without it, as in the case of Mary of Nazareth.

While the stories of the "bad" women like Eve are often included to teach lessons to other potentially "bad" women, those women with mettle are omitted from the lectionary. The daughters of Zelophehad: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah, and Tirzah who stood before Moses and the entire contingent of Israelites demanding their inheritance in the Book of Numbers is never read, nor is the book of Kings where the prophet Huldah is asked by King Josiah to interpret a recently unearthed book of the law. While weekday lectionary readings include the judges Gideon who blew his horn and the unsavory Jephthah who sacrificed his daughter to God, it leaves out the renown judge Deborah who won a great military victory. Her song of triumph is regarded as one of the oldest extant writings in the Hebrew Bible. The weekday lectionary that includes stories from the beginning of Exodus deliberately eliminates the names of the brave midwives Shipra and Puah who risked their lives by disobeying Pharaoh.

Other women are omitted because the churchmen would have a tough time explaining their significance in the early church. Two of these women are Phoebe and Junia, women of great import who were a deacon and an apostle respectively. They would also have to explain the very conspicuous absence of Peter in the annals of the very early church in Rome which Paul very clearly writes was founded by Prisca and Aquila. Paul's letters were written anywhere from 20-30 years before the first gospel and read like a who's who in the early church. Aside from brief mention of Peter and John, the names of the traditional apostles do not appear anywhere in Paul's letters.

Long time seminary and Hebrew scholar Wilda C. Gafney, Ph. D recognized that far too often the Christian churches recognize only one half of humanity in its liturgies and lectionaries, leaving a hole in women's prayer life and in their hearts. God, as many of us have come to believe, should not be be male by default but rather a representation of humanity in all its myriad expressions.

This reality is why her new book *A Woman's Lectionary for the Whole Church, Year W* is a balm for faithful women who try to find their way through the maze of maleness the churchmen have constructed over the course of the last two millennia. The dedication in her book reads, "For those who have searched for themselves in the scriptures and did not find themselves in the masculine pronouns."

Gafney refers to God throughout the book using feminine pronouns. She sometimes calls this feminine God "She Who Hears," the "Womb of Life," and "the Rock Who Gave Us Birth." She replaces the male names for God in the First Testament with "the Faithful One," "the Holy One" or "the Compassionate God. YHWH, which is considered unpronounceable by faithful Jews, is replaced by "the Fire of Sinai," "the Voice from the Burning Bush," and "the Ark of Safety." Her metaphors for the divine reflect the commodious nature of the Creatrix who spread out the stars and planets in the universe with a celestial spatula of divine love. Thus, Psalm 18 partly reads,

In my distress I called upon She Who Hears; to my God I cried for help. From Her temple She heard my voice, and my cry came before Her, to Her ears. She mounted up on a cherub, and flew; She soared upon the wings of the wind She made darkens, Her veil around Her, Her canopy dark waters and thick clouds. The Sheltering God brought me out into a broad place; She delivered me, because She delights in me.

In her July 29 lecture as part of FutureChurch's Women Erased series, Gafney explained how necessary it is to flesh out the meaning of certain words, most particularly those pesky collective nouns, and remove their male bias. She translates "the Israelites" as "the women, men, and children of Israel." Likewise, "the Canaanites" are the women, men, and children of Canaan. When Joshua led his army into the land of Canaan and slew its inhabitants, they killed not only the men, but also the women and children of Canaan. When allotments were made as they were at the time of the conquest of Canaan, those receiving the land included the men, women, and children as in the story of Zelophedad's daughters.

The actual meaning of nouns is equally important. Gafney said that the word "servant" puts a positive spin on a word that she translates as "slave." Hagar, the slave of Sarah, was raped by her master Abraham whom Gafney described as an abusive slave owner. Likewise, the patriarch Jacob raped the household slaves Bilhah and Zilphah. The begetting of important sons should not erase the evil that was inflicted upon these enslaved women.

Dr. Gafney also interprets the story of Bathsheba and David not as some sort of illicit, mutually agreed upon romantic lovers' tryst but as kidnapping and rape. Genealogically, Jesus was a descendant of this rape. Gafney calls him "Son of Bathsheba" rather than "Son of David."

Gafney's pairing of readings and psalms does not spare the reader from troubling connections that were glossed over or unseen in the past. For the first Sunday of Advent, she places the Genesis story of Hagar the slave girl, who is the first woman in scripture to receive an annunciation from God, with the hymn from Philippians in

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Book Reviews

The Meal That Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Food Crisis. By Mary E. McGann. Liturgical Press Academic, 2020. 256pp. $29.95.

Reviewed by Maureen Tate

I know I cannot be the only one gets distracted during Mass by such existential questions as: What are we doing here? What does this odd sharing of tasteless wafer and wine sip have to do with following Jesus and living the gospel? How did the shared meals of the early Jesus followers become so ritualized to the point of absurdity? And how did the welcome table, so central to Jesus' ministry, become coopted as a means of exclusion, condemnation and a test of worthiness?

What does the way we celebrate Eucharist say about who we are as a faith community? *The Meal that Reconnects: Eucharistic Eating and the Global Food Crisis* intrigued me because, quite honestly, I don't think of Eucharist as a meal. Prayer ritual for sure, but meal, no. That was something possible in the early church but not now. Yet, I still find meaning in the Eucharistic experience of being one body with a diverse community of believers and feel challenged to live into an appreciation of the Mystical Body. Each time I step forward to receive the Body of Christ, I assent to be the body of Christ to others and affirm again that we are all one body. This experience of Eucharist, at its best, is powerful and profound. Nevertheless, it is not what I would call a meal and it is a stretch to say that the wafer we consume is food.

The Meal that Reconnects is ambitious. The author stretches and weaves together threads of Scripture, liturgical theology, ecology, food justice, socio-economic analysis and ecclesial renewal. She states from the outset: "This volume asks: How can eucharistic eating create an alternative paradigm and effect a prophetic healing of relationships with the Earth's abundance and all who share it? How can eucharistic practice strengthen relationships of justice, solidarity, and reciprocity between human communities and the rest of the web of life?" These questions have the power to stimulate new reflections on the Eucharist for those who live their faith in the pursuit of justice, not only for humanity, but also for the very survival of our planet.

This book reads more like three books in one. Part I: Eating as Relationship opens with a very thoughtful chapter on why eating matters, followed by an exploration of the role of food and meal fellowship in the ministry of Jesus and the life of the early Christian community. The author references many scripture stories, parables, and teachings that readily illustrate how Jesus used images of food and his witness of the inclusive table to teach about God's unconditional love and mercy. McGann calls our attention to the ways that eating reflects our relationship to the world, as consecration or desecration. She reflects on the distinct aspects of growing, preparing, and sharing food at table, the "priestly creation" involved in creating healthy food that can be a source of solidarity. She highlights the interconnection between the "fruits of the Earth and work of human hands" that ensures not only physical survival but also life in community, where we experience mutuality and abundance, grace and gratitude.

In Part II, or the second "book" as it were, the author dives deep into Broken Relationships that result from our reliance on an increasingly global and mechanized food system. Drawing on many sources, McGann explores the science, economics, and politics of our industrial food economy. She considers the human and ecological costs of severing the relationship of food from its biological context as well as location and cultural aspects of food production and consumption. Those who follow issues of environmental justice and sustainable agriculture may be familiar with much of this information. Others may find the level of detail a bit overwhelming. However, there are lots of great tidbits on food history and public policy, as well as the science of seed, soil, and climate that will interest anyone committed to restoring our relationship to food as a way of caring for creation and the health of our planet.

The author is strident in her condemnation of corporate industrial food systems, as well as the purchasing practices and processed foods that most people have come to rely on. Some may judge her proposals to reverse course as overly idealistic, uncompromising, or naïve. However, it is hard to argue with an emerging consensus that something has gone terribly wrong with our disregard of Earth's natural processes. Restoration of our relationship to food calls us to greater humility and gratitude for creation itself and the diversity, mutuality, and generosity that flows from its very source.

Part III: Eucharist: *The Meal that Reconnects*, revisits the theme of Eucharist as meal and what it would look like if our liturgical gatherings more closely modeled the experience of a shared meal and its communal qualities of hospitality, inclusivity, and solidarity. She challenges us to think about who is at our table and what are we eating while also observing that our experience of Eucharist risks the same patterns of commodification as our relationship to food in general. McGann even critically examines how the communion wafers we use in a typical liturgy are produced in ways that mirror the very industrialized systems that are destroying creation. If we were gathering in true thanksgiving for the gifts of creation and one another, the author contends that our Eucharist would look and taste very different.

A meal that reconnects is one where we not only restore our relationship to food that is grown, prepared, and shared in right relationship with nature, but is in solidarity with all who partake. It is a table of abundance. "A Christian sense of justice invites a full focus on the table – a common table … which raises questions about relationships within the assembling community: who serves at table, who has access, who ministers to whom and when". Eating is a foundation for survival but it is also an "invitation to celebrate the goodness of creation and the graciousness of God whose creative life flows through

the web of creaturely existence."

The final chapters call us to reimagine our Eucharist practice as celebration in a more radical table fellowship where the common table embodies a more expansive common good, marked by "equity and justice, participation, and solidarity". This beautiful image is difficult to reconcile with traditional norms for Eucharistic celebration in large congregations where the focus is essentially on the priest's table, the altar. Those of us advocating for a more inclusive and renewed priesthood will resonate with McGann's invitation to set Eucharistic tables where all are welcome as equals, where food is recognizable and fully appreciated as gift, shared in a way that feeds body and soul. Many who participate in smaller intentional Eucharistic communities are already creating meals that reconnect, incorporating values of inclusivity, justice, and service, not only among those gathered but in community relationships that extend beyond the table.

Care of creation in all its manifestations requires that we take up the work of reconnecting the fruits of the earth with the work of human hands. In partaking of the bread that becomes the body of Christ, we are invited into a "co-abiding, a deep mutuality" with all who are part of the one body in which we live, move, and have our being, obligating us to one another in a community of gratitude and generosity.

There is much to recommend *The Meal That Reconnects.* Questions for reflection at the end of each chapter help recall themes and ground important connections in personal experience. The author aggregates a lot of source material and uses quotes liberally that are relevant and informative. However, when McGann writes in her own voice, she is insightful, compelling, and inspiring in her own right. The author is an advocate for a more "natural communion". Creation, and all that flows from it, is to be celebrated as gift and "implies a posture of receptivity and gratitude" that must be at the heart of any Eucharistic practice. Many follow the maxim of popular health regimens that "we are what we eat". When considered from a Eucharistic perspective, it seems McGann may be saying the same about the meal that is so central to our faith. After reading *The Meal That Reconnects*, I wonder if we have come to settle for spiritual fast food rather than the banquet that has already been set for all.

Maureen Tate *is a member of The Grail and the*

A Woman's Lectionary *continued from page 5*

which Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a slave. In Gafney's words, Jesus emptied himself to become Hagar, the slave.

The gospel for that day is the story of the Annunciation, usually a pretty picture of a scene and understood as a lesson in a trustful obedience and humility. Gafney offers a different way of interpreting the scene. In the traditional understanding of the Annunciation, a very young girl is overshadowed and overcome by the power of a male God. As I've gotten older, I have come to believe that modern consciences should be flashing the word "rape" or "incest" rather than the divine will of God the Father. Gafney wrote that, in accepting the angel's words, Mary became the "woman-slave" rather than servant of the Divine giving what is largely understood as a male God ownership of her body. Thus, Mary seems to consent to her rape which is supposed to legitimize the entire scenario for believers. We never know if Mary's foremothers Hagar, Bathsheba, Bilhah, and Zilphah and all the other scriptural women who were "seeded" through divinely appointed men were as obedient and accepting as Mary.

The lack of women's exegesis throughout the millennia has had serious consequences for women, men, and nonbinary people. The church's hermeneutics of female suppression rendered rape and female subservience normative and blessed by God. Generations of women were forced to say "yes" to the words of the men in their lives like their poster girl, Mary. Like Eve, women were regarded as temptresses and forced to confine their thoughts, words, and actions to male defined standards lest they pollute their "betters."

Wilda Gafney's lectionary offers one of many important steps that women theologians and biblical scholars, poets and believers have taken to refashion the scriptural landscape to reflect the fact that the majesty and complexity of God cannot be reduced to one story, one understanding, and one gender. Preachers might want to take note of this ground- breaking lectionary. The women in your parish deserve it.

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Scripture Reflections
Advent 2021

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Is.9: 1 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...

Matt.1:23 He is Emmanuel, God with us.

Advent, Christmas, Epiphany: each a journey of reflection, renewal and rejoicing. We give thanks that our Christmas and Epiphany People of God followed the light with open eyes, open minds, and open hearts.

Now Pope Francis has invited us to journey together as People of God and follow the light toward the next Synod: to encounter, to listen, to share, to discern and be open to the surprises of The Holy Spirit. Francis also cautions us to remember the seven last words of a dying church: "We have never done it this way!"

Our WOC Team, whose light we celebrate, assures us that they know and share the pain of hopes raised and dashed by Vatican processes; yet they call us to be involved in this process, a journey of holy possibility. We have a unique opportunity to amplify the voices of all those who long for and support women's ordination and gender equity in all ministries of the church in a way that feels authentic.

WOC calls us to let our voices carry through parish halls and the halls of the Vatican, voices for justice and change, carrying the hopes of all who long for a church more aligned to the heart of the Gospel.

WOC will insist that ordination justice is a vital part of the future of the global church and proclaim that there should not be a synod about us- without us!

In closing, as I ponder the invitation of Pope Francis, I want to remember that St. Francis also invites us on a journey: "to never exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion".

I just lost a very special friend--a four-legged, ninety-pound bundle of gentleness, kindness and love. He suffered greatly in his early life but somehow was able to forgive those who hurt him. He opened himself to the healing love of those who rescued him, opened himself to a journey of joy. His new name- Spirit--was surely perfect.

So, as we begin a new year, let us open ourselves to healing love. For our synod journey maybe we should follow some advice from the essay "Everything I Need to Know I Learned From My Dog": Allow the experience of fresh air and wind in your face to be pure ecstasy; when you see people you love, always run to greet them; when someone is having a bad day, sit close by and nuzzle them gently; let people touch you; and- avoid biting when a simple growl will do!

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light...God is with us on our journey. Alleluia.

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