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Why Rome in August?

**Roman Catholic Womanpriest, Kathy Schuck,
describes her harrowing but rewarding experience**

When I googled, “Is August a good time to travel to Rome?” Google’s response was, “Avoid visiting in August when the weather is stifling hot, and many Romans leave for a month-long vacation.” It’s true – when I was there between August 25 and 30, the temperature hovered each day at 89 or 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Italy was experiencing its worst drought in 70 years. The water level in the Tiber was so low that two piers of Nero’s Bridge were visible. Suffice it to say that bridge hasn’t been operational since the third century.

You may wonder, “Why Rome in August?” This year the timing was precipitated by Pope Francis’ naming twenty new Cardinals from all over the world. The Cardinal Consistory for these new Cardinals was scheduled for Saturday, August 27. Pope Francis used the occasion to call an Extraordinary Consistory of all Cardinals August 29 and 30 to discuss the reform of the Curia which restructures Vatican operations and permits lay employees to lead Dicasteries. What a wonderful backdrop to amplify to absence of women’s voices! That, my friends, is what motivated seven women from five countries representing Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) to gather in Rome in August.

WOW is an international, ecumenical network whose mission is the admission of Roman Catholic women to all ordained ministries. Members include individuals, country-level groups including the Women’s Ordination Conference in the U.S. (WOC), Catholic Women’s Ordination in the U.K. (CWO), Catholic Network for Women’s Equality in Canada (CNWE), Women and the Australian Church in Australia (WATAC), and We Are Church in Ireland (WAC-I), Austria (WAC-A), Germany (WAC-G), and Portugal (WAC-P), as well as international group members (Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research and Roman Catholic Womenpriests). All are committed to equality as a justice issue.

I have the honor of serving as the Roman Catholic Womenpriest (RCWP) worldwide representative to Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) and as a member of WOW’s Leadership Circle. I often describe Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) as an umbrella organization. Yet, in the wake of our August 2022 wit-



ness in Rome, perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it a “parasol” organization.

With that as background, below is a summary of our time in Rome.

Someone on WOW’s Facebook page dubbed us the “Magnificent Seven.” We are Alicja Baranowska representing Poland, Miriam Duignan representing Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, Rhiannon Parry Thompson and Pat Brown representing CWO, Kate McElwee and Katie Lacz representing WOC, and myself representing RCWP. We ranged in age from 36 to 76.

We gathered Thursday evening on the hotel’s roof terrace in what would become a daily predinner ritual. Our initial action was scheduled for Friday evening. We agreed to meet the next morning at Kate’s place to paint messages on the parasols.

Saturday was the celebration of the 20 new Cardinals. Not having tickets, we stood and watched on large monitors as Robert McElroy of San Diego and the others inside St. Peter’s became Cardinals. Monday, dressed in red, we gathered in front of Santo Spirito in Sassia, a church near St. Peter’s, for a prayer service. At 8 am, the seven of us proceeded to the Via della Conciliazione where we opened our parasols and headed toward St. Peter’s Square. It was energizing and surreal.

Once we reached the Square, we turned around and twirled our parasols. Then we headed under Bernini’s colonnade toward the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith to greet

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the 197 Cardinals as they arrived for their 9 am meeting. We were standing there in the shadow of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith at around 8:25 am when the police approached and requested that we close our parasols. Miriam's interview with the Associated Press was abruptly interrupted. When the police asked that we step under the columns, we complied. We were directed to a holding area behind wooden barriers. The police, uniformed and plain-clothed, who seemed to multiply, asked for our passports. They later confiscated our parasols. At one point, I noticed police vehicles on both sides of the columns and counted at least fourteen officers.

We continued to greet Cardinals and others as they passed under the columns. After an hour, the police asked us to walk across the square to the police station. Two of our group were driven. We who walked asked to stop as we hadn't eaten anything. We stopped at a café on the other side of St Peter's Square.

Upon reaching the police station, we ascended the stairs and found ourselves in a hallway about four-feet wide with little to no air movement. Our phones were taken. The men's room with an open eight-inch by ten-inch barred window was at the end of the hallway. On the wall hung framed pictures of Pope Benedict and Pope Francis. We stood in that hallway with the copier for the next three hours. We were not permitted to use the men's room. I was greatly relieved once the cleaning woman was located because she had a key to the women's restroom. Over time, two chairs were brought into the hallway. There were two doors off the hallway. Occasionally, when one opened, we felt relief for a fleeting moment, as we discovered the offices were air-conditioned.

Miriam speaks multiple languages, including Italian, which proved helpful in translating what the police were saying about us. Both Alicja and Pat were scheduled to depart Rome that day. Due to being detained, they missed the hotel check-out deadline. At one point, I expressed I was hungry. The officer opened his pack and offered me almonds, for which I was grateful. At another point, we were asked if we wanted one or multiple lawyers. Our response was one. There was a search for an English-speaking attorney. Again, we were in Rome in August, and one was not to be found. The police documents had to be translated into English.

Hot, hungry, irritated, uncomfortable - after what felt like an eternity, I began to feel queasy. I mentioned I was having difficulty breathing. The police let me stand in the men's room by the window. After about fifteen minutes, the police asked me if I'd like to go outside. Of course, I would. Kate insisted on coming with me. The police accompanied us downstairs and we stood outside in the shade of the police station. I was offered a chair. Kate stood. The police explained if I turned purple, I could go to the hospital. There would be no charge. I chose not to go to the hospital. I simply wanted to leave. While sitting outside, I asked for water. Another police

officer was sent for a bottle of water, which Kate and I shared.

Around noon, each of us was called into one of the offices to sign nineteen forms. The police had to purchase a ream of paper for the copier to make copies. The forms included a listing of the messages on each umbrella and notification that we were under investigation and had the right to a public defender. The police asked that we request a permit to gather in the future. The police designate where groups gather and ensure their messaging is appropriate and not immoral.

By 12:30 pm, when we were released, we were depleted and dehydrated. We wanted to change out of our red attire, get something to eat, and share what happened with the world. When I shared our experience with my daughter, her response was, "Mom, you lived through the sixties and the seventies without being arrested. Now, in your sixties, you get detained in Rome for four hours."

The Sunday after I returned from Rome, when Paul walked into the chapel, he came over and said, "Now you have something else in common with Jesus. He, too, was arrested by the Roman police."

(Editors' note: We asked Kathy if, after what happened, she would do it again. Her answer was, "In a heartbeat!")

Kathleen Gibbons Schuck is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest, representative to Women's Ordination Worldwide, and a member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee.

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Synod: Trust the Process!

By Regina Bannan

Over the last couple of years, the coverage of the Philadelphia 76ers, the men's professional basketball team, seemed to be about "The Process." I have to admit I never understood what that was, except I liked the slogan: "Trust the Process."

Now, as Pope Francis's Synod reaches its midpoint, I think it's time to "Trust the Process." One indicator: the official documents now call it "The Synod," not "The Synod of Bishops." Another was the shift to "listening" from the static nouns first articulated by the Pope: communion, etc. Once the Vatican office headed by Cardinal Mario Grech, whose most notable appointee is Sr. Nathalie Becquart, started issuing plans, it was clear it was going to be a process that involved the whole Church. And women were not to be peripheral.

I must admit I was suspicious. It was to begin with widespread participation in listening sessions, especially by the laity. Great opportunity if actually implemented. But then all these diocesan reports were to go to Bishops' Conferences in each country to be collated. "Trustworthy" is not a term I'd apply to the USCCB, so I expected whatever rough edges were left from the local reports would be honed off. And the same in the next step, when the country reports were to go to the Vatican for a similar consolidation.

That Vatican report has now been published, and I am amazed. An international team of over thirty experts in theology and in process – including twelve women – has come up with "Enlarge the space of your tent" from Isaiah as its central metaphor. They examine the many recommendations from the reports but also the process itself. "Listening," they say in 3.1, "requires that we recognize others as subjects of their own journey. When we do this, others feel welcomed, not judged." That attitude pervades the document and gives me hope.

At every stage of this process, including this one, the inclusion of women has been a primary concern. Section 61 puts it clearly: "women remain the majority of those who attend liturgy and participate in activities...yet most decision-making and governance roles are held by men. It is clear that the Church must find ways...to enable women to participate more fully at all levels of Church life." I eliminated from this point the idea that men should be encouraged to do more. They can step up on their own. I don't want to lose the focus on barriers to women.

The barrier to ordination is the major one, of course, and, as in the USCCB summary, it is not ignored. Removing it is not exactly endorsed – that's still a step too far – but the widespread concern that it be eliminated is acknowledged.

Almost all reports raise the issue of full and equal participation of women: "*The growing recognition of the importance of women in the life of the Church opens up possibilities for greater, albeit limited, participation in*

Church structures and decision-making spheres" (EC Brazil). However, the reports do not agree on a single or complete response to the question of the vocation, inclusion and flourishing of women in Church and society. After careful listening, many reports ask that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions: the active role of women in the governing structures of Church bodies, the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings, and a female diaconate. Much greater diversity of opinion was expressed on the subject of priestly ordination for women, which some reports call for, while others consider a closed issue.

Of course, Francis is just the most recent Pope to say ordination is a closed issue, but the process has outflanked the Pope. While its authors say this "is not a conclusive document," they claim in section 8: "Nonetheless it is theological in the sense that it is loaded with the exquisitely theological treasure contained in the experience of listening to the voice of the Spirit enacted by the People of God, allowing its *sensus fidei* to emerge." Right back to Vatican II – finally!

Adequate training is necessary for all who preach, I would note, as is recognized in section 93: "the quality of homilies is almost unanimously reported as a problem." It's this kind of comment that convinces me that this document is real. There are many examples of truth-telling that are much more profound: the transparency necessary to deal with both abuse and financial matters; the need to focus on the poor and suffering; a genuine welcome to LGBTQ persons and the disabled.

Does this inspire you to read the whole document? In contrast to the chunky book issued after Vatican II, "Enlarge the space of your tent" is written for you. It uses a graphic that includes more and more people under the tent as the text goes along. It uses quotations from episcopal reports from around the world that illustrate its universality. And it asks for a response from each diocese in sections 106 and 109. "After having read and prayed" with this document, what "resonates?" What "tensions" arise? What "priorities?" Now is the time to send a note to your local bishop to share your answer to these questions.

The last chapter, "The Next Steps," describes a gathering that I have questioned all along, but makes clear how creative it actually is. There have been a few gatherings of bishops by continent, like Asia and Latin America broadly defined. But section 108, asking all seven continents to gather not only bishops but "representatives of the entire people of God" upsets the usual order of things. Further surprises are those to be welcomed from "other faith traditions" and "with no religious affiliation." I especially like this: "Pay special attention to the presence of women and young people (laymen and lay women, consecrated men and women in formation, seminarians)" because it recognizes specific young people. Finally, it asks the bishops, in "validating and approving the Final Document," to ensure that it is "respectful of the process that has taken place and faithful to the diverse voices of the People of God in each continent."

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Of course, the last step in the process in our church is still hierarchical. We have hopes that the two Synods in Rome in 2023 and 2024 will include the diverse voices described here as voting members along with the bishops. But the Pope issues the final document. Even if he does not implement all the suggestions that come from the faithful, he cannot ignore the energy released by this process.

Regina Bannan is President of SEPAWOC

Christian Failures in Understanding Judaism, Jewish Women, and the Jewish Jesus

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

When I was a little girl, I can recall my Catholic aunt having an argument with my Protestant uncle about Jesus' ethnic background. Jesus, my aunt confidently asserted, could not possibly be a Jew, to which my uncle replied, "Of course he was a Jew. He lived in Israel."

After two thousand years of anti-Semitism and the deaths of millions, we now know that Jesus was, indeed, a Jew and not a Christian. He was born, lived, and died a Jew. His earliest followers, including Peter and the rest of the apostles, remained faithful Jews. Acts of the Apostles mentions the earliest followers of Jesus going to the temple every day and offering sacrifices after Jesus' death. Not one of them ran out immediately to establish a Christian church. Not one of them was ordained a priest and not one held the title of bishop or pope. Christianity and Judaism did not become separate religions until the second century. Even then, the Christians continued to use the Jewish scriptures- the only ones they had- to the point of claiming them as their own. The developing Christian liturgy followed the Jewish liturgy with prayers, psalms, and readings. The prayers over the bread and wine that Christians used were Jewish prayers. The gospels were not written by Jews who actually walked and talked with Jesus but rather by Christian Gentiles who lived forty to seventy years after Jesus died, never even lived in Palestine, and wouldn't recognize a Pharisee if they tripped over one.

How did all these misconceptions develop? Jewish New Testament scholar Amy Jill Levine has written extensively about the ancient and ongoing failure of Christians to understand Judaism. Her 2006 book, *The Misunderstood Jew* is well worth the read.

As the two faiths gradually separated, the Christians felt the need to define themselves as separate from the Jewish faith. They did it in a good old fashioned ancient rhetorical fashion- they maligned the Jews and their faith and fashioned them into the other in all of the four gospels and in some of Paul's letters. Pharisees became "money lovers"; the law became a weapon that actively harmed believers; rabbis became enforcers, and the Jews, blind guides who stubbornly refused to believe in the salvific action of Jesus in spite of what their own scrip-

tures said. Jesus liberated his followers from the constraints of an unwieldy law which deserved to be replaced because it hurt people.

Levine says that this and much of what Christians believe about Jews, Judaism, the temple in Jerusalem, and the law is false. Christians, she said, have not taken the time to read ancient Jewish sources that were contemporary with the gospels and instead have relied upon the gospels and gospel commentaries, all of which were written by Christian apologists who wanted to prove that the Jews were wrong to reject Jesus. These works have created a false Judaism that most Jews would not recognize.

A very brief synopsis of Levine's book debunks Christian beliefs about Judaism. Jews do not and never have found the law burdensome. Nor do they find it legalistic. Jews did not feel the need to be saved since they were already saved through the Law of Moses. They believe in a just God who forgives sin and do not find anything wrong or missing in their faith. The command to love God and neighbor was first a Jewish tenet before it became a Christian one. Jesus was an observant Jew in many ways, wearing fringes on the edges of his garments. He kept kosher and did not declare all foods clean: otherwise, his Peter and Paul would not be fighting over food in Galatians. Jesus was not the first Jew to call God "Abba" which should not be translated as "Daddy."

Levine writes that Jesus should be placed in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets like Amos, Isaiah, and Micah who did not make predictions but rather interpreted the signs of the times. Thus, he did not predict the complete destruction of the temple. A huge portion of the ancient temple called "the wailing wall" remains intact and a source of comfort for Jews. Most importantly perhaps, the individual Jews who took issue with Jesus in the gospels were just that- individuals- and not representatives of all the Jewish people.

Levine also questions the persistent feminist belief that Jewish women were treated badly by their own faith and needed to be rescued by Jesus. Jewish women were full members of their communities and contrary to modern beliefs, Jewish men did talk to Jewish women. Wells appear to be a common gathering place for men and women to talk and share news in ancient Palestine. Abraham's servant speaks to Rebekah at the well as did Jacob to Rachel, and Moses and Saul to groups of unaccompanied women.

Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well follows this well-known trope. According to Levine, the Samaritan woman was neither sinful nor an outcast since her people immediately believed what she told them about Jesus. Being married five times and living with a man not her husband did not violate any Jewish legal code. No one in her village found her sinful enough to be stoned. It was the Christians who made the Samaritan woman into a great sexual sinner.

In their efforts to present Judaism as anti-women, Christians forget their own violent misogynistic tendencies that have existed from the beginning. Unlike the Jews whose

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religious leaders married and had children, those men known as Church Fathers repudiated the Creator's command to be fruitful and multiply and adopted the most unbiblical notion of celibacy. Unfortunately, this notion created a virulent anti-women stance that has lasted until the present. According to the current church fathers, those women who are ordained and those who support women's ordination excommunicate themselves. Pedophiles have received better treatment.

So compelling was Judaism in ancient times that many Christians continued to follow both faiths well into the fourth century. John Chrysostom, (d. 407 C.E.) he with the reputation of having a "golden tongue," penned a virulent anti-Jewish screed designed for Christians who didn't share his own hatred of Jews. These so-called Christians, he wrote, actually viewed synagogues as holy places where their fellow citizens worshiped God and sometimes attended Jewish festivals and services, probably as friends and possibly family and neighbors who lived together in peace and harmony or perhaps as one loose religious body. Chrysostom tried his best to destroy this harmony in a very long tantrum, full of hateful invective in which he actually used the Jewish scriptures as proof of Jewish inferiority. His assertions that Jews were demons, their holy books, trash, and their synagogues, houses of prostitution, set the stage for Christian persecution of the Jews. It is quite obvious from Chrysostom's hysterical rant that quite a few Christians were ignoring him, perceiving Jews as their brothers and sisters rather than as demons. In the eyes of orthodox Christians, both then and in the future, however, Chrysostom was a saint, and the Christians who fraternized with the perceived "enemy" were heretics:

"I know that many have high regard for the Jews, and they think that their present way of life is holy. This is why I am so anxious to uproot this deadly opinion. I said that the synagogue is no better than the theater. ... This synagogue is also a house of prostitution, a hideout for thieves, and a den of wild animals. When God leaves, (the Jews, according to Chrysostom) what hope of salvation remains? When God leaves a place, it becomes a dwelling place for demons...God is not worshiped there. Rather, the synagogue is a temple of idolatry. Nevertheless, some go to these places as though they were sacred shrines."

Church violence against Jews continued and reached another low with Bishop Cyril of Alexandria (378-444). Regarded as a pillar of the faith and a Doctor of the Church, Cyril was actually a thug.

Compared to Egyptian pharaohs by historian Phillip Jenkins, the sainted Cyril engaged in what modern people would describe as "ethnic cleansing" as he attempted to purge Alexandria of its seven-hundred-year-old Jewish community. In actions reminiscent of Kristallnacht, at his behest rioting Christians broke into and destroyed Jewish shops. As always, there were other Christians - usually without church sanctioned halos - who disagreed with the violent anti-Semitism of too many Church Fathers and Doctors of the Church. They are usually labeled heretics.

There are current Christian theologians and apologists who have tried to explain away the vicious anti-Semitism promulgated by revered Christian leaders called saints that has profaned the Christian church and made too many followers of Jesus into haters and murderers. In response, one should ask what number of good deeds and credos is required to redeem the reputations of men who set loose the unholy specter of anti-Semitism upon the world. Those who preached anti-Semitism need to have their credentials for holiness revoked.

Misunderstandings about Jews, Judaism, and Jesus' position within his own society persist. The recent PBS special, "The U.S. and the Holocaust" horrifically documents the slide a once liberal society can take towards anti-Semitism. As synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are defaced, Jewish worshippers murdered at prayer, and right-wing neo-Nazis chant, "Jews will not replace us," it is imperative that Christians rediscover their Jewish roots and honor Jesus for what he was - an observant Jew situated within Judaism not against it.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest, member of St. Mary Magdalene Community and SEPAWOC Core Committee.

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Book Reviews

Maureen O'Connell. *Undoing the Knots Five Generations of American Catholic Anti-Blackness*. Beacon Press, January 25, 2022. 272 pages. \$27.27.

Reviewed by Maureen Tate

As I review *Undoing the Knots*, I am aware that I am tying myself in knots trying to communicate what is so engrossing and provocative about this book. The author investigates the history of her own family, in particular times and places, to examine how white Catholic identity formation has been rooted in, and perpetuates, anti-Blackness. If you are from Philadelphia, you will be interested in her extensive research into the history of our region and the growth of the Catholic Church in Philadelphia. Also of note is disturbing documentation of the Church's overt role in promoting racialized policies and practice that reverberate to this day. The story is not specific to Philadelphia, however, as the racialized patterns she identifies were in evidence throughout the country.

There is no doubt Maureen O'Connell is committed to anti-racism work, personally and professionally. Her unflinching examination of efforts to purge anti-Black thinking and behaviors may make some squirm in the face of her honest self-assessment. *Undoing the Knots* is a personal journey rooted in a conviction that resisting racism is essentially spiritual work. It is more than a scholarly exercise. The author wants to understand the underlying milieu of White supremacy that can explain how she and other White Catholics formed racialized identities over generations. She documents many ways the Catholic Church furthered anti-Blackness: how it defined who belonged and who didn't, who was made in God's image and who wasn't. Acknowledging this legacy, and our participation in systems that support inequality and anti-Blackness, is necessary if we are to be effective allies in fighting racism.

As the title suggests, we are all tied up in knots about racism, even those deeply committed to anti-racism work, who mean well and support change. Undoing the knots of anti-Blackness involves an intentional process of: naming knots that keep us anxious and separated; loosening knots by risking the chaos experienced in racialized situations; and undoing knots by bringing them to our awareness and letting them go, relieving the stress of protecting boundaries and identities that no longer serve us well in building just and authentic interracial relationships.

Sharing personal experiences and inner thoughts, O'Connell provides examples of knots many of us will relate to: withdrawal from interracial encounters, defensiveness about all the ways we are not racist, fear of making mistakes, preference for comfort over courage, relating to Black communities only through charity, willful ignorance, discounting the racism others experience; being polite and inoffensive but not fully engaged. We begin to loosen such knots when we name them, recognize the tightness they cause in us, and accept responsibility to be uncomfortable with ourselves until we do the work to finally let them go.

The author is well versed in feminist theology, as a Theo-

logian teaching courses on women and religion at La Salle University. She understands the many ways the Church has defined the personhood of women as subordinate and the consequences with respect to God imagery, full and equal participation, as well as women's self-understanding. She knows the personal cost of being defined as other and how women have been written out of church history. Therefore, we can recognize an underlying feminist hermeneutics of suspicion in her approach to uncover the history of her own family as it intersects with the unwritten story of the Black community who share that history.

O'Connell risks vulnerability in undertaking a very personal examination of family history, going back some 200 years, to locate ancestors, in specific times and locations, and to also locate and understand what was happening to slaves and free Black persons in the same place and time. She mines the history that is not written. Her deep dive into county, church and institutional archives yields much information but necessarily raises questions about who and what is missing from the records. When she overlays news accounts and other sources of the period against information about specific family members and their community, a more complex story of race, family, and church come into focus.

The author employs imagination and speculation to fill in blanks in the family story and by inference, our own. We track her ancestors' journey from early 1800's Chester County, PA, just above the Mason Dixon Line, to resettlement in neighborhoods of South and West Philadelphia, Fairmount, Nicetown, East Oak Lane and eventually to the near suburbs. As Irish Catholics, their journey closely aligns with the growth of the Catholic Church in the region, from early mission churches to the establishment of Catholic parishes in these very same communities. In this same period, Philadelphia becomes a bustling industrial city, offering the promise of jobs to waves of immigrants, especially the Irish, as well as growing numbers of Blacks heading north seeking greater freedom and economic opportunity. Sections of the book explore in depth the development of industry and jobs in Philadelphia and the inevitable expansion of one of the largest Catholic Dioceses in the country. O'Connell traces patterns of housing and job discrimination that were the foundation of neighborhood segregation that exist to this day. Throughout, O'Connell keeps a sharp focus on the Church's role in furthering anti-Blackness through policies, parish practices, preaching, education and housing segregation that contributed to deeply rooted racist attitudes among White Catholics.

The O'Connell family story will be familiar to many Irish Catholics families who experienced similar demographic shifts in response to socio-economic and political circumstances. However, the author's dogged exploration of

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archival material unearths a more unsettling story. Combining through church bulletins, parish and school records, local property records, newspaper advertisements, and other sources, she identifies patterns of Church decision-making, advocacy and land speculation intending to advance Catholic interests in Philadelphia at the expense of Black Philadelphians. At the same time, the Church established designated Black Catholic churches in order to maintain “racially harmonious” parish communities. Some may find the historical detail here a bit tedious, but it is invaluable city and church history many of us are unaware of. Alternately fascinated and appalled, I no longer wonder why there is so little trust of White people within the Black community.

A critical point O’Connell documents is that the Church was more than a faith community. The local parish was the center of community life. From schools and sacramental celebrations to the Holy Name and Rosary Altar Societies and other associations, to the local business community, the Church dictated all facets of family life. That parishes were racially segregated was a given from the foundation of the diocese. Whites did not interact with Black citizens by design. “Across the generations, ideas about what it means to be White resonates with ideas about what it means to be Catholic: people are naturally or innately superior or inferior, being good requires deferring to authority, security comes with upholding law and order, charity absolves responsibility for inequality, ... What’s more, these ideas about being Catholic and being White are passed down from one generation to the next through a set of embodied practices we recognize as the rituals of American Catholicism”. The author examines the ideas and practices of Whiteness handed down in her family as a means to disrupt a cycle of inertia and perpetuation of anti-Blackness. She firmly believes that “White Catholics cannot make meaningful contributions to movements for racial justice if we are tangled up in these knots, especially the distinctively Catholic ones.”

O’Connell advocates a practice of racial mercy. She draws upon a definition of mercy, attributed to James Keenan, S.J., that “mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of another”. Racial mercy, therefore, is the willingness to enter into the chaos of racism in its many manifestations. It calls us to remove the barriers, both internal and external, that prevent us from truly seeing and believing the experience of our Black sisters and brothers.

The author recounts one ‘aha’ moment she experienced in class, in a course on theology and racism, occurring the day after the 2016 election. A distraught student was moved to share “When it comes to racism, I just wish people would believe me”. Not believing Black experience is a form of anti-Black aggression that many of us may appreciate and is perhaps one of the tightest knots White Catholics hold on to. I was similarly struck recently when, in a small group discussion on *Undoing the Knots*, a Black participant shared that she was always taught not to trust White people and she still struggles with that knot. Here we were, a group of well-intentioned people, trying our best to be anti-racist and we could not assume trust.

The practice of racial mercy calls us to sit with the chaos and discomfort of not being trusted and simply believe the truth of another’s experience without qualification or rationalization. Knowing her truth is now part of my awareness, helping me to untie the racial knots in my life.

Maureen O’Connell challenges that “racial mercy ought to define Catholicism for White American Catholics”. Rather than suppress or further harden knots that keep us captive to an anti-Black legacy within our tradition: “We need knots that connect different people, knots of true belonging to each other that can bolster White Catholic courage for racial justice and in turn build multicultural communities that can withstand the forces of White supremacy that intend to separate us.”

Undoing the Knots was emotionally unsettling as I could not help wonder about my own family’s history and how my identity is shaped by generations of racialized experiences that I know nothing about. I gathered hints from the O’Connell family journey because my own passed through some of the very same communities. One can read this book on many levels. I found it historically informative and appreciated the theological framework for the Catholics imperative to do restorative justice and pursue the practice of racial mercy. The personal reflection Maureen O’Connell inspired will surely be a gift and resource as I continue the work of undoing my own racial knots.

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

Our Wish.....Is to continue the great work we do together—We at SEPAWOC and you, our faithful readers and supporters. Perhaps it is the optimism I feel reading the articles in this issue, or maybe I am feeling mellow because it is that time of year. We must keep the momentum going and for that we need your help.

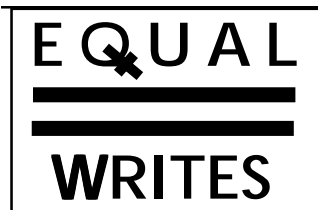
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Mary Whelan, Treasurer

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Scripture Reflections

Advent 2022 Isaiah 2:4; Psalm 146:7; Matthew 1:23

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Advent 2022... A Season for looking back, looking forward and embracing the now.

Looking back... As I write this, we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. Our church community recently enjoyed sharing where we were on October 11, 1962. (It was especially fun as we had people on our zoom gathering ages 54-89!) We remembered Pope John XXIII wanted to open the windows of the church and let in the fresh air of the Holy Spirit. He wanted us to pray together and ask the Spirit to "enlighten our hearts with Your truth and strength, guide us with Your wisdom, support us with Your power and enable us to be people of justice guided by love."

Vatican II scholars tell us that it was commonly supposed that the 2400 bishops would meet for a few weeks, ratify a few documents written for them in advance, and then go home. Nothing much would change.

SURPRISE! Three years later there were 16 living documents about Liturgy, ecumenism, social justice and the Church--including the profound message that the Church is the People of God. John asked us to be open to a new Pentecost that comes through prayer, dialogue, openness and reconciliation. He hoped that we would move forward on the road to renewal and respond to the signs of the times with joy and hope, without fear or reserve.

Looking forward... On October 27, 2022, in preparation for the upcoming 2023 Synod, the Vatican released a 45-page synthesis

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of listening sessions from around the world--and women were not on the cutting room floor! The multi-faceted role of women in church life was a concern mentioned by people on every continent! (I highly recommend that you refer to *The Table*, the womensordination.org blog, written by our own beloved Regina Bannan and Ellie Harty who have written many wonderful reflections about the synod; also, on the website there are terrific summaries and inspiring messages from National WOC, including a recent *NCR* article by our wondrous National WOC Director Kate McElwee.)

Looking back... We also remember in October, 1962 the world stood on the edge of nuclear warfare. Later Adlai Stevenson, the U.S. Representative to the UN, reminded us that we travel together, passengers on a little spaceship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil, all committed to its security and peace. We are preserved from annihilation only by the care, work and the love we give our fragile craft-- and one another.

In the here and now... Millions of our family are suffering from war, oppression and injustice, from lies, hatred and violence. As we each have helped bring about renewal in the church, may we help bring about the fulfillment of Isaiah's vision: may we work with God-Who is Love to transform our swords into ploughshares, study war no more, enable justice to flourish and set all captives free.

In the here and now... Advent 2022...let us wholeheartedly respond to the signs of the times without fear or reserve...and every time we sing Emmanuel--may we rejoice and give thanks in its meaning: God is with us. AMEN!

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