

	EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
Vol. XXXIII No.2		NOVEMBER 2025 - FEBRUARY 2026
	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>

**Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, and
Leaping with Hope into Our Future**
By Judith Heffernan

On WOC's Fiftieth Anniversary, Judy Heffernan, who was there in person, describes how it all began:

Having the great honor of being with WOC and SEPAWOC since their very beginnings, brilliant memories fill my heart as we celebrate our Fiftieth Anniversary, and I thought you might like to walk with me down Memory Lane!

In 1970, I saw a very small ad in the *National Catholic Reporter* that said: Deaconesses? Dare to dream! Write to Jeanne Barnes in Quincy, Illinois. Jeanne soon sent out a list of all who had written to her.

At the same time, there was a wondrous ecumenical group of theologians, professors, and religious leaders already meeting regularly in Philadelphia to discuss, reflect, share, pray and act about the ministry and ordination of women in all faith traditions. When they received Jeanne's list, they reached out to local people and invited us to come and join them.

Mary Lynch from Delaware and I found our way to that meeting. A grand journey, with wonderful surprises of the Holy Spirit, began that night, indeed! Mary later joined with Jeanne's work more closely and eventually Mary became the Coordinator of the "Deaconess Movement" of Catholic women and men who believed that women's place in the church should be everywhere, including as deacons and priests.

In December 1974, Mary invited thirty-one people to a meeting at Chicago Theological Union and asked, "What do we do next about women's ordination?"

After deep and serious sharing, it was decided we should go grassroots and have a gathering, inviting everyone. Leaders of religious orders and other real "movers and shakers" volunteered to organize the gathering, and, sure enough, with tangible God-speed, the gathering was held on Thanksgiving Weekend 1975!

So many people signed up, the venue had to be changed from a college campus to a hotel. Women and men, lay and religious, gathered to celebrate the gifts of women of the church. And, oh, what a celebration it was!

Nadine Foley, OP, introduced Mary Lynch to all the as-

continued on page 8



**WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE 50TH
ANNIVERSARY
DETROIT, MICHIGAN
MAY 22-24, 2026**

Together we will embark on a pilgrimage to honor the feminist thought-leadership of our 1975 landmark gathering and *energize* our movement for the future.
WHAT TO EXPECT?

- Be part of the joyful resistance
- Encounter the movement
- Build skills
- Engage with Feminist Theology
- Participate in Inclusive Liturgy

FEATURED SPEAKERS?

Dr. Natalia Imperatori-Lee is Associate Professor of Systematics with a focus on ecclesiology, feminist theologies, and Latinx theologies at Fordham University. **Dr. Teresa Delgado** is Dean of St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and professor of theology and religious studies at St. John's University. **Dr. Nontando Hadebe** is an African Catholic woman feminist theologian based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

SAMPLE WORKSHOPS?

- Women's Ordination Education
- Creating Inclusive Liturgies, Prayers, and Rituals
- Power Mapping the Movement
- Myth-busting and Truth-telling: How to talk about Women's Ordination 101
- WOC at my parish

MORE INFORMATION AND HOW TO REGISTER?
Go to www.womensordination.org.

PRAYING THE ROSARY AT 'ICE'

By Kathleen Schuck

January 31, 2025 – That's the Friday I first stood in front of the Philadelphia office of Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) at 114 N. 8th Street (the corner of N. 8th and Cherry Streets) with rosary beads in my hands. That's the day the security guard joined us on the sidewalk, asked us what group we represented, and one person responded, "We're Americans."

Ten months and over thirty-nine Fridays later, people continue to gather in front of the Philly ICE office at 3 pm... sometimes a couple, sometimes a dozen... we range in age from our 20's to our 80's, heavily weighted at 70 plus. In bone chilling rain and blistering sun, we stand in the wind tunnel gazing across the street as parents pick up their precious infants and adorable toddlers from day care. Our prayer is for our neighbors being hurt and our neighbors doing the hurting. Before introducing each contemporary sorrowful mystery of the rosary, we read a current news story revealing the cruelty and unjust suffering being experienced by many whose only crime is not having been born white.

Here's the thing – our busy lives go on – yet when we're away we miss this sacred ritual of standing together and prayerfully witnessing the inhumane and unjust tactics of the U.S. government in its treatment of people who came to here in search of a better life. In addition to the group of us who stand on the sidewalk, we know there are many behind us praying the rosary somewhere in the world. You, too, are welcome to pray with us every Friday at 3 pm.

Ever wonder what motivates us to keep coming back? In our own words:

Maria: "Years ago I worked at the Faith Justice Institute of St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. In 1980 (I think) I organized a spring break student trip to NYC- so the students could volunteer in some agencies I admired-Catholic Worker, Bread for the World, and Covenant House. Before the inner-city experience, we visited Maryknoll and learned about Liberation Theology. Then we toured the facility and had the privilege of meeting Maryknoll contemplative nuns. I actually had no idea that there was a contemplative order attached to these Catholic clergy and activists. The nuns explained that their work was important, that prayers sent good will and compassion to everybody in the world so that the folks 'in the field' would know that they were never alone, that they were always being held in love by these women.

Back to the rosary prayer vigil: I do it because I, of course, believe the immigrants are victims of hate and we must do everything we can to counter hate. It horrifies and baffles me that people (like those in our current national leadership) feel so threatened by someone who has an accent, someone who was born on different soil, someone who was raised in a culture that is foreign... that they can treat "others" like garbage. In fact, I believe the diversity of people and cultures in this world is enriching, something to celebrate. I view the ICE agents as oppressors - but also as victims. I assume some of them just needed a job that pays decently.

I believe prayer, in this case the rosary, fills me/actually fills all of us, with healing light, and I believe when we stand together in prayer, we send that light into our broken city, into our broken world, into the office we stand in front of. I truly believe in loving and forgiveness. I need to believe that the prayer we share together

opens the hearts of the oppressors/victims so that they will someday embrace empathy and caring. At the same time, I believe our prayer sends love and strengthens immigrants/victims to hold onto their humanity and hold onto hope as they suffer terribly."

Sue: "The experience of praying at ICE on Fridays has inspired me in a variety of ways. First, it has allowed me to combine two aspects of myself that are often disparate: my devotion to the rosary and my intense commitment to social justice. I made small signs that I can easily carry on the train each week. Each has a scripture passage about caring for the stranger or the immigrant. This experience has been the perfect mix of protest and prayer. Using current events to introduce each decade of the rosary is new for me and has made me more mindful in my private prayer.

Second, I have met a new group of women whose faith has evolved over the chapters of life, and I am learning from their experiences. I am more conscious of inclusive language in prayers I recite daily, more open to ways to maintain aspects of Catholic faith while pushing against the dimensions of the institutional church that get between me and my faith.

I want to continue to find ways to reclaim the faith that has sustained me amidst a political environment where Christianity is being weaponized for exclusion and inhumanity rather than for love. This week, I noticed more passersby acknowledging us and clapping, saying thank you, giving us a "thumbs up." I am immensely grateful for this time of public prayer on Fridays at ICE."

Terry: "I like that while we're there, the whole world passes by. Parents with little children, young couples, elderly people with shopping carts – every race, every age. I like that we have this quiet space together. We come together to bear witness to what is happening, to pray for peace together. All my life I've gone to demonstrations, and when I was young, I didn't mind the yelling, the language, the jeers about the other side that you hear sometimes. At this point I don't think that's so useful. We need to be able to be together, to listen to each other, to love one another. I still do go to those other demonstrations though. We have to do something; we have to keep acting together."

Eileen: "When I was in seminary, I read a small book about public theology, that is, expressing your faith outwardly for all to see. The idea always stuck with me. This is, of course, nothing new. Dr. King and Gandhi were pioneers in this type of action. A combination of all these factors inspired me to suggest that folks pray outside the ICE office. I think that prayer, more than demonstrations - of which I have done and do my share- is more efficacious since it is less likely to offend people and more likely to make them think. The rosary is not and never has been my preferred form of prayer. But it works outside of ICE for some reason. There is a lovely view of the sky over the Ben Franklin Bridge that I look at as I pray. I find that I am transported into another realm. There is also something about the community of women who have formed around this prayer that makes the time really special and prayerful."

Kathye: "I love being with folks on Friday afternoon. I find deep peace in standing together, praying and watching the beautiful families come and go across the street. If I'm out of town I do my very best to get back in time for Friday Rosary. Finding the news stories and sharing the mysteries is a gift to all of us."

Mary: "My experience of praying with others no matter what the

continued on page 6

“Homiletic Instincts”

By Christine Marie Eberle

I’ve been a writer since before I could spell, but as a young person, I assumed *writer* meant *novelist*. Somewhere under my bed, I have a folder crammed with childhood short stories, along with a novella of uncertain quality that my college newspaper published in installments. (It was a thinly-veiled account of my high school romance and breakup—from the imagined perspective of the ex-boyfriend. *Cringe!*)

God, as it turns out, had other plans for my writing. I began college as an English major, but my involvement with campus ministry at St. Joseph’s University led me to pick up a double major in theology. When it came time for grad school, I did not pursue theological studies but instead chose a degree in pastoral ministry. I wanted to be *useful*. I wanted to help people fall in love with God. I wanted to bring an abiding comfort to their deep sorrows. Though I would not yet have used this Ignatian phrase, I wanted to “help souls.” And so, I spent twenty-six years as a college campus minister. The writing I did in those decades was abundant yet disposable: prayers of petition, performance reviews, All Souls reflections, brief remarks for the president. No one was ever going to publish *The Collected Fundraising Appeals of Christine Eberle!*

By my forties, I’d managed to pitch a few of my reflections as magazine articles when a friend in the Catholic publishing world suggested that, surely, I had a book in me. Thinking about it, I realized that what I wanted to write had been shaped by the decade I’d spent working with a priest who had an unusually collaborative approach to homily-crafting.

Five days a week for ten years, Fr. Sam and I would each pray with the Scriptures of the day at home in the morning; once at work, we’d brainstorm homily ideas. The Sunday process would start earlier and last longer, but on weekdays, we’d often close the door to share ideas a mere twenty minutes before Mass. I got very good at finding a succinct story to illustrate a Biblical text and make a connection to the lived experience of our small congregation.

Now, before you get too excited . . . even when they were my ideas, my stories, and my words, I did not stand at the ambo to deliver them. I got them into Fr. Sam’s brain as best as I could, then sit back and let him and the Holy Spirit do their thing. The frustration of not being permitted to preach—and of our students not being able to hear a woman’s voice breaking open the Word—never abated. But the higher priority, for me, was that our congregation receive a message that might make a difference in their lives. So, on we went, for ten years.

It was only natural, then, that my first two books would turn out to be, essentially, daily Mass homilies. I didn’t think of them that way at the time; I called them “four weeks of daily meditations based on true stories.” But *Finding God in Ordinary Time* and *Finding God Abiding* each have a format that should sound familiar to Mass-goers. Start with a line of Scripture. Tell a brief, true story. Muse a bit on lessons learned. Close with a few questions for personal reflection. What is that, if not a little homily? I even provided a Scripture index at the end of each book, so that if someone had to preach on a particular text, they could easily check to see if I’d referenced it. Are there priests out there with my books on their nightstands, doing just that? I can only hope. But I do know that

my local rabbi occasionally quotes my reflections during his high holy day services!

My most recent book, published in January of this year, has a more narrative format. *Finding God Along the Way* follows my journey with twenty-five people along the 300-mile Ignatian Camino in Spain, starting with my accepting the Ignatian Volunteer Corps’ invitation to help plan the 2020 pilgrimage (postponed two years by COVID), and concluding six months after our return. The sections flow chronologically from Pre-Amble (see what I did there?), through Mountains, Vineyards, Deserts and Shrines, followed by a concluding Post-Amble.

Even within that narrative framework, however, I couldn’t shake my homiletic instincts. Again, every chapter begins with an anchoring Scripture quote and closes with one or two questions connecting the chapter to the reader’s own life. I believed that the stories I wanted to tell—whether they were about quirky companions, painful blisters, profound discouragement, or overpacked suitcases—were only worth sharing if they helped the reader connect to his or her own “pilgrim heart.” That’s why I subtitled the book *Wisdom from the Ignatian Camino for Life at Home*.

While I still rarely stand in a pulpit (at least not a Catholic one), the writing and retreat ministry I’ve embraced on the far side of my campus ministry career gives me countless opportunities to speak of the things of God. In *Finding God Along the Way*, I wrote, “Throughout the pilgrimage, my understanding of my mission had been crystalizing into one phrase: *Put it into words*. Put into words God’s love . . . God’s mercy . . . God’s continuous, transformative, tender beckoning. Those words could be written, spoken, sung, or even embodied in acts of kindness.” Through the grace of God, I will let my faith find expression in words as long as life endures.

You can find my books, follow my blog, sign up for my monthly newsletter, and see my upcoming speaking engagements at Christine-Marie-Eberle.com.

Christine Eberle is a writer, speaker, social justice advocate, and cantor at a local parish. She worked as a campus minister in higher education for 26 years before devoting herself to full-time writing and speaking about the intersection of faith and life. Her books include: “Finding God in Ordinary Time”, “Finding God Abiding”, and her most recent “Finding God Along the Way: Wisdom from the Ignatian Camino for Life at Home”.

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Finding Common Ground

By Eileen Flanagan

A circuitous spiritual journey led me to write *Common Ground: How the Crisis of the Earth is Saving Us from Our Illusion of Separation*. From the sisters in my Roman Catholic grade school, I learned that the world is sacred. This lesson was reinforced after I left the church as a young adult and continued to feel connected to a force greater than myself in the natural world. When I needed to make a decision, I often went to quiet woods, where it was easier to hear Spirit's voice. Over time, I also found quiet and community in the Quaker practice of worshipping in silence with others. When I married Tom Volkert, a Roman Catholic, we raised our children in both traditions.

I was drawn to Quakerism partly for its assertion that there is "that of God in every person," which is the basis for Quaker's long history of working for religious liberty and social justice, including for women and queer people. There were female Quaker preachers since the seventeenth century, including Mary Dyer, who was hung in New England for defying the Puritan ban on female preachers. Through the centuries, there were many Quakers who felt "led" to take great risks while following divine guidance, from those who participated in the underground railroad to peace activists who dodged the U.S. Navy to deliver medical aid to Vietnam by sailboat. It was this history of defying unjust authority that led to the creation of Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT), which uses nonviolent direct action to challenge the corporations profiting from climate destruction.

I had been a leader in EQAT for a few years when I heard the spiritual message which became the inspiration for *Common Ground*. I was at a conference at Haverford College where participants were asked about their vision for "living in right relationship," a phrase that implies relationship with Creation and the Creator, as well as other people. These words came to me with a clarity that felt beyond my own mind: "It's not about us saving the Earth. The Earth will survive whether we do or not. But the crisis of the Earth is saving us from our illusion of separation."

The phrase "illusion of separation" was new to me, but I later learned that it has been used by many spiritual thinkers and teachers. My first associations were the inspiring stories I had been hearing of people coming together to protect the Earth, often across historic difference, such as Indigenous people and ranchers, who found common cause in resisting a pipeline that threatened the land and water all of them relied on to live. After EQAT won our first campaign, pressuring PNC Bank to pause its financing mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia, we felt called to take on a campaign that included racial justice. Although some of us had significant cross-racial experience, EQAT was a predominantly white group, and building diverse partnerships was new territory for our organization. I became curious about what we could learn from others doing similar work.

Over the coming years, when I was asked to speak in other states, I tried to visit with local organizers to hear what they were learning about building coalitions to address the cli-

mate crisis. Their stories are at the heart of *Common Ground*, peppered with my experience in leadership during three EQAT campaigns. Finding a publisher this time took longer than with my previous books, but in the end the timing felt right, since many of the book's lessons could just as easily apply to the current struggle to resist authoritarianism.

For example, the places where people successfully resisted large corporations trying to expand fossil fuel infrastructure were places where people mobilized more than one group or constituency. The alliance of Indigenous people and ranchers in Alberta, who first inspired me, won their campaign to stop the Northern Gateway Pipeline in Canada. In Louisiana, a historic Black community thwarted a new \$9.4 billion plastics plant, which would have been one of the largest carbon emitters in the country. They did it by bringing together people from similar Black communities in the region known as "Cancer Alley," as well as white advocates, and people of many different faiths. Led by a Catholic woman, Sharon Lavigne, their group often invoked a religious call to protect the Earth. In one action, they reenacted the Biblical story of Joshua, who caused the walls of Jericho to crumble after circling them six times.

In addition to coalition building, successful campaigns often show courage. Sometimes this takes the form of civil disobedience, whether people are standing in the way of pipeline construction or holding a prayer sit-in at a bank financing environmental destruction. Again, faith showed up in many stories, as people shared with me what helped them to take brave risks and persevere when results were slow or disappointing. In my own experience, I've found prayer to be important in such actions, as well as singing, a communal practice that was key for the Civil Rights Movement.

While I started this project inspired by the stories of communities that successfully thwarted dangerous projects, I also felt led to include some stories where people did not win. That, too, feels right for these times, when we have to face the tremendous power wielded by billionaires driven by greed rather than the common good. Understanding how they wield that power is important, including the fact that they often pit communities against each other intentionally.

As I travel speaking about the book and these times, I'm heartened by the many people eager to apply these lessons, whether in the climate movement or the movement to protect democracy. I'm convinced that people of faith have a special role to play, grounded in discernment and the spiritual practices that can help us show up grounded in the courage of our convictions.

Eileen Flanagan is an award-winning author, speaker, and Quaker activist. Her books include: "Renewable: One Woman's Search for Simplicity, Faithfulness, and Hope"; "The Wisdom to Know the Difference"; "God Raising Us: Parenting as a Spiritual Practice"; "Listen with Your Heart: Seeking the Sacred in Romantic Love" and the recently released "Common Ground: How the Crisis of the Earth is Saving Us from Our Illusion of Separation".

On Ecclesiastical Prejudice

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

Like Paul Simon who said that there are fifty ways to leave your lover, there are many ways to demonstrate prejudice and an equal number of ways to explain it away or justify it. Consider J. D. Vance's justification of vicious remarks made by members of the Young Republicans. Young boys, he said, will make edgy "jokes" about Nazis, hoping the listener will forget that the "young boys" are over thirty years old.

Prejudice, of course, is not reserved for the political scene. The Catholic Church is guilty of egregious prejudice against women. What is prejudice and what does it look like?

Prejudice is such a nasty thing that I turned to 'Dr. Google' for a definition. The good doctor gave me several that are worth mentioning. Prejudice is "a preconceived notion that is not based on reason or actual experience but a feeling towards a person/persons based upon their membership in a particular group." Prejudice towards a group or an individual leads to injustice, contemptuousness, repugnance, revulsion, and misjudgment.

This aptly describes the church's ongoing prejudice against women. Like many institutions, the church has become more sophisticated in its expression of prejudice against one half of its members. Women are no longer called sewers, the gateway of the devil, unstable, feeble creatures who are unfit matter for the priesthood, etc. Instead, the church has come up with modern explanations as ridiculous as the name-calling by church fathers.

The church leaders now insist that they must follow the example of Jesus and ordain only men. This assertion ignores several important facts: First, Jesus didn't ordain anyone a priest at the Last Supper. Second, the churchmen do not have a guestlist of those who attended that seder, a family event that always included women and children. Third, the male-only priesthood, the church insists, is a constant tradition that existed "from the beginning." This contention conveniently ignores the Deacon Phoebe, the Apostle Junia, and Prisca, who with her husband Aquila, founded the church in Rome per Romans 16, a primary source that predates all the gospels. The Pontifical Biblical Commission recognized these points when it declared in 1977 that there was no reason not to ordain women priests.

However, the protection of the male-only club remains so important to many churchmen that they are willing to engage in spiritual, social, and political violence, aka prejudice, to maintain it.

John Paul II forbade Catholics to even talk about women's ordination. Those brave priests like Tony Flannery and Roy Bourgeois

who stood up publicly for their sisters in Christ were summarily removed from the priesthood. Likewise, men and women were fired from their jobs as teachers, pastoral assistants and liturgists for supporting women's ordination. In 2010, the church announced that those who supported women's ordination excommunicated themselves, and then claimed that women's ordination was a more heinous crime than clerical pedophilia.

The prejudice of Francis was softer. He worried, without any kind of proof, that, if ordained, women would become as clerical as the men. He then asserted women didn't need to be priests because they were the "strawberries on the cake."

The latest statement put out by the Vatican is a classic example of prejudice dipped in obfuscation disguised as attention to detail: The churchmen in the Vatican must engage in further "study" before making any kind of decision about women's ordination. Like Francis, Leo appears to be another breath of fresh air. We'll see. In an institution filled with powerful males with powerful prejudices, there are more than fifty ways to relegate women to second class status.

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

TREASURER'S UPDATE!

There are so many worthy causes to support at this time—more than usual perhaps!

However, as you plan your year-end donations and consider who needs your support in the coming year, I hope you will again remember the Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference. No donation is too small—and none too big!

We accept checks and Paypal.

And again, we thank you for your ongoing generous support. Without you, we cannot continue.

Our work reflects the gifts of time, talent and financial support. So many people are part of this movement and so many people benefit. We are steadfast in the belief in our cause.

Mary Whelan is SEPAWOC Treasurer and co-editor of EqualwRites.

SAINT MARY MAGDALENE COMMUNITY

Join us for Sunday Zoom Masses at 9:00 am

More information at: smmcommunity.org.

PRAYING THE ROSARY AT 'ICE' *continued from page 2*

format has helped me to connect with the goodness in others and in myself as well, connecting me in such a way that there is always more goodness. I expect that is why Jesus and many of the prophets as well as other religious holy men and women invited us to "pray always". I make the effort because I believe our presence makes a difference even for that short time we are there. If one good thing happens, whether it is a child smiling and waving at us or someone stopping and saying "thank you" or if people beep their horn to let us know they are with us, that is all good. All us humans are a combination of saints and sinners, and I would say the effect prayer has on me is that each time I pray no matter where or the format, alone or with others, I go about my life less as a sinner and more of a saint. In addition, the praying on Fridays has helped Carl and me decide to reopen our prayer group that we did for many years. God is good!"

Regina: "Originally, I joined the prayer vigil to support a friend's initiative to witness against what I thought unfair action by ICE. I was not so enthusiastic about the rosary, but I came to experience it as meditative. I frequently watched the clouds in the sky and connected to nature. I also watched the parents and children at the preschool across the street and connected to the community and the future of the city. As the witness developed, readings were added to the sorrowful mysteries that connected me to the many tragedies resulting from ICE action. Illness has made it impossible for me to attend in person, but I still feel part of the community because of their prayers for me."

Pam: "The power of praying in community, the way the love among us grows and grows, the way we make each other stronger by standing together for what we believe in, makes our faith come alive real and present every time we gather. The weekly ICE rosary witness has become an important spiritual practice for me."

Arline: "The rosary is not my favorite form of prayer, although I did pray it every day when I was in the novitiate and on mission. When Eileen said she was doing this, I so wanted to participate and be a part of this prayer endeavor. We cannot do nothing, seeing what is being done to the immigrants who have come to our country. The saying, 'the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak' has taken on a whole new meaning since I have 'entered the wisdom years'. I knew there was no way I would be able to join physically but when someone began to send the prayers, I knew this I could do!

I like what that principal said after the terrible shooting at Annunciation Church filled with school children attending Mass. He said, 'When you pray use your feet' which is an ancient African proverb. I sit in my recliner at 3:00 on Friday and pray aloud, uniting my spirit with all of your spirits. I love that Kathy sent the picture of the group at ICE in Philadelphia. I'm a visual person, so now I will add that to my field of vision as I pray as well.

When Eileen mentioned how an ICE officer came out and asked for prayers for him, I knew our prayers are working. Prayer changes the hearts of individuals and us."

Kathy: "The rosary is not a prayer practice I typically engage in. What started as a visual witness in front of the ICE Office has developed into a weekly ritual that grounds me. Early on, Terry explained the rosary was the prayer of the poor. I enjoy the banter with ICE employees and security personnel. I find our reading aloud the news stories that highlight personal experiences of local people most moving as they reinforce our prayer witness against these cruel practices devastating families. In the face of the helplessness I feel as our democracy is being undermined, the benefit of committing to one concrete action offers (a bit of hope.)"

We conclude by reading the Re-envisioned Magnificat by Rev M Barclay together. You can see (and pray) this poem at www.culturematters.org.uk/a-revolutionary-message-for-our-times-marys-magnificat/.

Kathy Schuck is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest and a member of the Saint Mary Magdalene Community.

***Love's Mercy is freely handed out;
none are beyond the borders of
God's transforming compassion.
The power of God is revealed
among those who labor for justice.
They humble the arrogant.
They turn unjust thrones into dust.***

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Book Reviews

***Spiritual Criminals: How the Camden 28 Put the Vietnam War on Trial.* By Michelle M Nickerson. University of Chicago Press (2024). Paperback. 268 pp.**

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

In these terrible days, with American democracy on the brink of collapse, people keep asking, “What should we do?” To consider the possibilities, you might want to start by reading Michelle Nickerson’s splendid *Spiritual Criminals*.

As the subtitle hints, the book is, in part, the story of the trial of the Camden 28, the last of the trials of members of the “Catholic Resistance,” loosely organized groups who raided draft boards and destroyed records in opposition to the Vietnam War. Oddly enough, given that Nickerson has devoted an entire book to them, the Camden 28 are the least known of the draft-board Catholic activists, much less well known, for example, than the Catonsville 9 whose 1968 trial involved both of the Berrigan brothers.

Spiritual Criminals is, in part, the story of how a group of mostly young people came together from up and down the East coast—some from our own Philadelphia—to plan and attempt to carry out an attack on records at the Camden draft board office.

As the subtitle suggests, a lot of the book is about the trial of the Camden 28, which ran from February to May 1972. But Nickerson puts the trial in context by sharing the story of the raid on the Camden draft board, who was involved in it, how they (barely) pulled it off, and the after effects of their arrest. Only eight of the defendants actually took part in the raid, but seventeen others were deeply involved in planning it, scoping out the draft board office and the building it was in, and planning the escape.

A central part of the story was that a participant in planning the raid, Bob Hardy, in whom the group’s leader, John Grady, imprudently confided, turned out to be an informant of the FBI, which enabled FBI agents to swoop down on and arrest the raiders soon after they started their work. Amazingly, in the trial itself, he helped bring about the acquittal by testifying to how the FBI had used illegal means to bring about the arrest.

The most fascinating part of the book may well be the story of the trial itself, because the twenty-eight defendants refused to settle their case before trial, even in the face of lengthy prison sentences. Instead, they chose to go to trial and defend themselves in lengthy testimonies on their own behalf, something the trial judge unexpectedly allowed them to do. In the end, the group was acquitted, as a result of what some call “jury nullification” - they all admitted that they were guilty, but made profound and compelling ethical and theological arguments for why they had to commit the illegal raids. Nickerson describes the trial as a “prosecution disarmed by loving kindness.” And one of the defendants best known to some of us - and the most brilliant articulator of the Christian reasons for destroying the draft files - was Irish-born Father Michael Doyle, the future pas-

tor of Sacred Heart Church in Camden. At a certain point, he even burned the Pentagon Papers, released by Daniel Ellsberg, to make ashes for Ash Wednesday.

Nickerson is a gifted writer, and just her exploration of the draft raid and the trial are well worth your reading time. But she highlights several other matters that also grabbed my attention.

One is the sexism that characterized the “Catholic Resistance.” Despite ten of the Camden 28 being women, and some of them (from South Philadelphia in particular) playing leadership roles in that action and others, none of them have gotten much credit in coverage of the draft raids. Nickerson also narrates how the leader of the group, John Grady, was actually having affairs with two of the young women in the group at the same time. In fact, sexual liaisons were not unusual throughout Catholic resistance groups. She also details how male members dominated the Catholic Resistance, especially the Berrigan brothers, who were given to proclaiming that political action against the war was the surest way to “manhood.” Philip Berrigan, in particular, stands out as a misogynist bully.

A second issue Nickerson highlights is race—how the Catholic antiwar activists were almost exclusively white. This was not because they intentionally excluded people of color, but because they believed, if arrested, they might get beaten up but Black activists might easily be killed. The belief was that the people for whom it was safest to participate in actions were priests and nuns, dressed in habits or Roman collars. The predominantly Catholic police were least likely to attack them. And most of the police were white, of course.

The third trajectory of Nickerson’s analysis was the impact of what used to be called the “Catholic Imagination,” on the Resistance actions, a mentality shared by people raised in the orbit of the Church based on rituals in spaces of worship and socialization, especially sacraments and devotion to the saints. Discussions of the “Catholic Imagination” are often focused on its manifestations in art, literature and music. But the Catholic Imagination is manifested in historical actions as well, for example, draft board raiders (or nuclear protestors) pouring blood on the objects of their protest, or burning the Pentagon papers for Ash Wednesday. Such actions draw on church rituals to mark the sacred imperative behind their works.

In light of the massive decline of the Catholic Resistance, not long after the Camden 28 trial (when opposition to the Vietnam War, led to, among other things, the end of the draft). Nickerson in a final chapter asks: “Is There Anything Left of the Catholic Left?” She muses about where and how we might see the impact of Catholic antiwar activism, and Catholicism more broadly, carried on today. And the “Catholic Imagination,” the ritual/sacramental framework, plays a

continued on page 8

BOOK REVIEW *continued from page 7*

big role in these musings. Even as many members of the 1970s Catholic resistance backed away from some or all of Roman Catholicism itself, Nickerson sees certain aspects of their lives shaped by Catholic culture and values. She offers, for example, Frida Berrigan, daughter of Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAllister, and her atheist husband. Even as Berrigan describes herself as a “practicing Catholic,” she and her husband attend a Unitarian church, yet live out in various ways the Christian values she learned from her parents and the Jonah House community in Baltimore. They also earn less than the level of U.S. taxable income so as not to fund the Pentagon.

I was thinking about all this when I came across a 2023 article in the *National Catholic Reporter* about Catholicism and Donna Haraway, the distinguished UC Santa Cruz professor emeritus of feminism and semiotics. Now let me say, at the risk of sounding self-promoting, that I already did a chapter on Donna Haraway’s trickster Catholicism in my 2009 book, *Tracing the Sign of the Cross*. And there is considerable overlap between my tracing Haraway’s hidden Catholicism and Nickerson argument about Catholic sacramentalism continuing in the lives and actions of post-Catholic-Resistance activists.

It seems that Haraway was astounded to learn that Pope Francis had cited one of her books, about multispecies unity, in his apostolic exhortation, “*Laudato Deum*,” the follow-up to his groundbreaking “*Laudato Si*.”

The article lists Haraway’s many strong objections to the Church’s teaching on gender and sexuality and other matters. But it explains that she also spoke of the concept of the “real presence” — in Catholicism, an affirmation of Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist — as guiding her understanding of semiotics, or the study of signs and symbols. “Real presence means that meaning and flesh, bodies, the earth are not separate but inextricably conjoined in living and dying with each other. That sense of being in and of and with the world in its fleshliness, I think I inherited from my (Catholic) formation.”

As Nickerson tells us in *Spiritual Criminals*, the Catholic Imagination goes on and on, in blood on draft files, and in multi-species unity.

Marian Ronan is a retired seminary professor and the author of seven books and hundreds of articles and reviews. She has been active in the Philadelphia Women’s Ordination movement since the early 1990s.

Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, and Leaping with Hope into Our Future *continued from page 1*

sembled so we would know ‘the power of one questioning woman’. Elizabeth Carroll, RSM, in her keynote address, advised us that an embittered female clergy would leave us in a worse than we were in our present situation, Bill Callahan, SJ, celebrated a beautiful, inclusive Liturgy and there was a closing blessing service for all who felt called to ordination. We were one family.

After the conference, a Core (from the heart!) Committee of Spirit filled, dynamic, inclusive people began what would become the Women’s Ordination Conference.

The Philadelphia contingent was led by Arlene and Len Swidler, who were also speakers at the conference. They had been dedicated proponents of equality in the church for their whole lives. They were our guides in every way. Len was a Professor at Temple and led a “get to know us” session there for anyone interested. A sizable crowd assembled and from that gathering SEPAWOC was born! Alleluia!

In closing, I want to share a few special things with you: At that very first meeting in December 1974 at the Chicago Theological Union, the President of that Seminary welcomed us warmly. He told us that John XXIII began the Second Vatican Council by apologizing to the people of the world for the sins committed against them by the Catholic Church, and now he wanted to apologize to the women of the church for the sins committed against them by the men of the church. It was a deeply moving moment of my life. (And let it be noted, eight years later, Pope Leo XIV received his Master of Divinity degree from the very same Chicago Theological Union!)

On her fortieth wedding anniversary, a dear older friend said to us gathered around her dining room table, that this was even better than her wedding day because now we were there to celebrate with them. I really understand her beautiful feelings because this fiftieth anniversary is even better than when WOC and SEPAWOC began - because you are here now to celebrate with us!

Judith Heffernan is a beloved member of the WOC and SEPAWOC community.

WE WISH YOU A CHRISTMAS SEASON FILLED



WITH JOY AND LOVE



Can There Be A 'Silent Night'?

By Ellie Harty

It's cold. We're tired. We're overwhelmed by both blazing light and profound darkness.

And yet we know it will get better, even joyous as it always does, if only we, as faithful advocates for justice and peace – in the world, in our Church - remember what is truly important in all we do.

And so, I offer you, who inspire me with your faithfulness, this poetic inspiration:

There Is No Silent Night by Richard Bolt

*There is no Silent Night,
when little ones are ripped
from their parent's arms.
The keepers of the sheep will not hear the angels'
"Glory to God in the Highest,"
over the guns of war.
The Wise Ones
will not be able to see the star,
when the skies are filled
with the LED signs,
proclaiming, "more, More, MORE!"
The Christ-child is born,
in bus shelter,
in prison cell,
at border fence,
in shelled-out hovel.
The Christ-child is born,
again, and again, and again.
The Christ-child is born.
Are we willing to meet the Child;
and, in meeting,
change our world?
Are we willing to change the world
and, in changing,
meet the Child?*

Amen.

Ellie Harty is co-editor of EqualwRites.

IN MEMORIAM

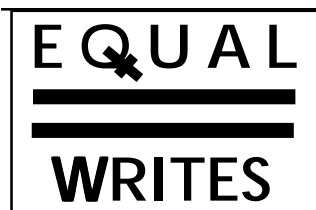
Margaret Ellen Cooper

Beloved SEPAWOC Member and Leader

Marge Cooper heard about SEPAWOC from a neighbor and she immediately joined and became a valued member of the Core Committee. She also readily took on the responsibility of representing SEPAWOC at Woman-Church Convergence meetings and faithfully forwarded to our listserv many messages that were generated by this international coalition of women's groups. Eventually, she was chairing both SEPAWOC and W-CC meetings.

We will miss her calm presence and common sense, and now know from her obituary that we were merely one last step on her fascinating journey. Here are some highlights:

After high school, "Margaret entered the order of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia where she was known as Sister George Marguerite. While teaching in schools in the area, she earned her bachelor's degree at Chestnut Hill College. She earned a master's degree in physics at the University of Rhode Island, and while there she became a member of the sisters of the Holy Cross and Passion. Moving to New York City, she taught high school math and physics for many years at Xaverian High School in Bay Ridge. After earning a master's degree in accounting at Pace University, Margaret moved to Philadelphia, eventually settling in Chestnut Hill. She enjoyed a distinguished career with the Internal Revenue Service, retiring in 2011. She loved everything Jane Austen and was a passionate member of the Jane Austen Society."



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Scripture Reflections Thanksgiving and Advent 2025

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Fifty years ago, this Thanksgiving weekend, 1200 people gathered together to reflect, share, sing and pray while asking, "What do we do next about women's ordination?"

From that gathering was born WOC and SEPAWOC, *EqualwRites*, Grand Events, Holy Thursday and Ordination Day Witnesses and loving bonds of support, commitment, understanding, respect and joy that have lasted a lifetime and beyond.

We hear the Thanksgiving Scripture, and fifty years of memories fill our hearts. Sirach proclaims: Bless the God of all, who has done wondrous deeds...from Psalms: Generation after generation sing of Your justice and wondrous works...and in Luke Jesus proclaims to us: Rise and go forward.

However, as we try to go forward, we are keenly aware that we are living in a most difficult time of division, lies, mistrust and cruelty. Sometimes we have no words for the daily shock and awe.

This Advent the Spirit of Light comes amid darkness with healing words from Isaiah, Psalms, Paul and Matthew... The Spirit is upon us, the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel and strength...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares...God, come and save us, give sight to the blind, protect the stranger...Throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light...And they shall name Him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.

O come, oh come Emmanuel... hear our prayer as we sing with Holly, Pete, Arlo and Ronnie: We are a gentle, loving people, a land of many colors, young and old together, an anti-nuclear people, and we are singing, singing for our lives.

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