

**SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE  
PROUDLY CELEBRATES  
35 YEARS  
ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN'S FULL INCLUSION IN  
ORDAINED MINISTRY**

**"Making new beginnings, being new beginnings"**

**EQUAL**

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

Vol. XIX No. 3

OCTOBER - JANUARY 2011

**WRITES**

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

**THIRTY FIVE AMAZING YEARS**

On September 12, *EqualwRites* editors, Mary Whelan and Ellie Harty, sat down with Judy Heffernan, M. Div. as she gave us her unique perspective on the 35 year history of WOC and SEPAWOC. Judy was a pioneer in the movement, and her involvement and commitment to the full inclusion of women in the church have never wavered. For this we are grateful, as we are for the dramatic history she unfolded:

In the early heady days of the Women's Ordination movement, one of the leaders decided to send Christmas cards to prominent church leaders. The cards depicted a typical wintry outdoor scene with two cardinals, one of each gender, in the middle of a snowy field. The sender wrote on the inside of each card, "God created cardinals, male and female God created them." Only Cardinal Krol, then head of the Philadelphia Archdiocese, wrote back, "Just like the St. Louis Cardinals, the College of Cardinals is an all-male team!"

The heartache experienced by those left out of the church's "all-male team" was certainly profoundly felt. For this reason, the 1960's Vatican II's early breaths of hope for a change in women's roles in the church caused such excitement. In fact, excitement – and hope – is just what Judy and other local women pioneers, like Mary Lynch, began to feel when they responded to a 1970 advertisement in the *National Catholic Reporter* inviting women to "dare to dream" about becoming deaconesses in the church. Many responded, and, as it turned out, did more than just dream. Mary Lynch became head of the deaconess movement and was the first woman accepted to the master's of divinity program by a Catholic seminary.

The movement quickly took on momentum. Protestant women began being ordained in significant numbers; women theologians were speaking up about the contributions of women

and doing serious research and producing scholarly publications exploring the significant role women had played in early Christianity. Even the press was taking notice. One milestone occurred in 1975 when the first conference in Detroit convened to focus on women's ordination in the Catholic Church. Because of room constraints, only 1200 participants could get in, but another 500 stood outside cheering, encouraging, praying. After the conference, volunteers across the nation began networking and organizing on behalf of the movement, now called Women's Ordination Conference or WOC. Locally, Philadelphia area attendees called a press conference to share what they had learned in Detroit and announced their organization's new name: Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference or SEPAWOC.

Throughout the late 70's and into the 1980's, the movement grew more organized and recognized. Religious women attended; meetings were even held in convents. Priests and bishops came to meetings and conferences. In the early 1980's, U.S. Bishops invited women and men to participate in a dialogue about women and the church in preparation for a pastoral letter they were planning to issue on the subject. In 1985, a conference was held in St. Louis just for women who felt called to ordination. The Rapport Committee formed at the conference made it its mission to contact all bishops to see if they would be willing to discuss women's ordination.

*continued on page 4*

INSIDE:

Mary Magdalene Homily 2 • Biblical Women - Bathsheba 6 • Book Review 8



## **The Feast of St. Mary Magdalene – A Homily by Eileen DiFranco, RCWP**

**On July 18, 2010, the Community of Mary Magdalene and SEPAWOC celebrated the Feast Day of St. Mary Magdalene. Eileen DiFranco presided at Mass. The Gospel for the day was from the Gospel of St. Mary Magdalene. Eileen then presented a homily based on the Gospel reading, the text of which is below:**

The conflict we read about today in our gospel of St. Mary Magdalene - how I love to say that - mirrors many other conflicts and knock down drag out fights that the church has experienced over the course of the last 2,000 years. Contrary to popular church opinion, something called the "one, holy, catholic, apostolic church" never actually existed. It still doesn't and probably never will because there has always existed a diversity of opinion - from the very beginning. There is a reason why the word, "catholic," with a small "c" is used to express the all-encompassing nature of the faith that harks back to Jesus. Christianity is -and needs to be- a wide- open tent without flaps rather than a good old all boys' network. Sadly, a utopian belief in unity can be imposed only from the top down and maintained by spiritual or physical force.

This diversity of opinion is reflected in our four canonical gospels where we essentially have four very different pictures of Jesus. With the discovery of non-canonical gospels in the Egyptian deserts during the last century, we know that when Christianity burst into bloom all over the Mediterranean, there were many ways of framing "The Good News" first mentioned in Mark's gospel. One of them was the gospel of St. Mary Magdalene which we just read in honor of our patron saint.

However, there were others: The Gospels of Thomas, Philip, and even Judas, which is not what we might think it is. There is the Protoevangelium of James, probably the only non-canonical gospel not condemned by the church. Most of what we think we know about Mary of Nazareth, including popular Marian piety, comes from this non-biblical source, including the names of her parents, Anne and Joachim and the idea that Joseph was a very old man when he married Mary.

The Mary we celebrate today, Mary whose name Magdala means "tower," appears frequently in all four canonical gospels. While John - who is not a son of Zebedee- is only mentioned as a witness only in the gospel bearing his name, Mary is portrayed as the loyal friend, the traveling companion, and the apostle to the apostles who was the very first person who was instructed by Jesus to preach the good news. While some modern readers of today's gospel and other non-canonical gospels tend to portray Mary as Mrs. Jesus - which would not dilute Jesus' message one whit if he were, indeed married - Mary was far more. The canonical gospels describe the fearful disciples cowering in the upper room both before the resurrection and afterward. In her gospel, Mary helped her fellow disciples become the people God wanted them to be.

Mary, Jesus' tower of strength, who inspired confidence in her fellow disciples became a huge problem to an emerging Christendom which was trying to define itself in the ancient world. As Christianity succumbed to the all-pervading very pagan platonic philosophy which included the denigration of women as a less than ideal human being, Mary, Jesus' right hand woman became a problem. The Gospel of Mary, along with other non-canonical gospels, some of which were written a mere ten years after the Gospel of John and like John, did not recognize the Petrine primacy, needed to be suppressed to insure unity.

Athanasius, one of the architects of the all male Trinity, directed that all non-canonical gospels be burned. Following three hundred years of anti-woman diatribes by the church fathers, Pope Gregory the Great redefined and re-imaged the woman who walked with the Savior by declaring her a whore rather than an apostle. Mary, according to Gregory, "... turned the mass of her crimes to virtue in order to serve God in penance."

The fate of women in religious, and therefore, societal and political spheres was sealed for the next 1500 years. Women remain shut up behind the wall of patriarchy, their names masculinized, their titles explained away, their tombs vandalized to remove any reference to their standing in the church. And so the "constant tradition" of no women in ministry was born and survives. Men with advanced degrees can say this with straight faces and believe it.

The only good woman, the ideal woman, was not the outspoken, courageous Mary Magdalene, but the humble, lowly, obedient virginal woman who served man as god without question in eternal repentance for the sin of Eve. It was really a sick world view, a world view which continues to haunt us as the Vatican recently has decided that women's ordination causes the same type of serious sin as does pedophilia.

But we are not here to talk about the Vatican or past or present church fathers. Rather, we are here to honor and remember our patron saint Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles, the first one commissioned by Christ to spread the good news among all the people, who, through the eternal and unstoppable Spirit of Truth, has been returned to her rightful status as Jesus' one loyal and steadfast friend. She is the woman who, as the gospel of Phillip says, "Knew the all."

I would also like to lift up giants who came before us or stand with us, women who looked into the eye of power and did not flinch: Jeanette Normandy, Jeannine Gramick, Louise Lears, Margaret McBride, Christine Vladamirov, Joan Chittister, Judy Heffernan, Regina Bannan, and men like the recently deceased Bill Callahan.

A hundred or so years ago, shepherds found the gospel manuscripts of Mary's gospel lovingly wrapped and hidden away in caves by Egyptian hermits who disobeyed the great Athanasius and refused to burn the books that told their story. Thanks to these nameless men and women of the desert, Mary has been returned to us with an untarnished reputation. However, not everyone knows that Mary Magdalene is not a



penitent woman of ill repute. Myths of denigration have a very long shelf life, especially when they perpetuate a useful stereotype and preserve power.

Brothers and sisters, it's been a long, hard journey into the light of truth and justice. We know, we have been told, it is obvious that our loving God, as Paul wrote, is no respecter of persons. Our bountiful creator makes only high quality human beings, all of whom image their God. For that reason, Jesus directed us to see God in each and every person we meet - at the peril of our immortal soul.

Jesus said that no one should lay any sort of burden upon anyone else's shoulders that the burden giver would not be willing to carry. Consequently, God does not oblige us to bear intergenerational sin. The Lord God, master/mistress of the universe, creator of heaven and earth, does not engage in petty human power plays. God recognizes neither our exclusions nor our enemies but instead pours out divine love, pressed down and overflowing into our laps.

We come here today to remember that while conflict is a normal part of life, the resolution of conflict should never result in the demonization or exclusion of any member God created with God's divine care. We are to remember what can and does happen when those who know better, those who read and preach the word of God, lord it over others, however good their intentions, in direct disobedience to God's law of love which is the only law God demands that we follow. Charity, rather than obedience or even faith, is the standard by which God will judge us. Faith, without love and justice, is nothing but sounding brass.

We come here to remember that church really is a sanctuary where we come to have our bigotry and fear of others exorcized rather than confirmed by long standing prejudice and reinforced by standard practice. We come here because when we eat and drink together as one body, when we talk to one another, seeing the God in one another, there is a greater chance that we will really truly recognize one another for

what we are - children of God. When that happens, the kingdom Jesus preached becomes the healing and reconciliation that all Christians have been empowered to carry to the ends of the earth.

I will conclude with a quote from a rarely quoted church father, Gregory of Antioch, who was not canonized, who writes of Jesus' inclusion of women in all aspects of church life: "Announce to my disciples the mysteries you have seen. Be the teacher of teachers. Peter, who has denied me, must learn that I can also choose women to be my apostles."

Let us pray that "Peter," as well as his brothers who allow themselves to remain in thrall to man rather than to God, will learn this lesson at long last. The church has limped along for too long on one leg, blinded and wounded in its sacred heart by its willing adoption of misogyny. It is time for this to stop.



### Cry Out with A Million Voices

FutureChurch's newest project provides ordinary Catholics with tools both to discuss pressing issues facing the Church and resist unjust suppression of that discussion by some officials.

FREE download at [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org) includes: *Twelve Steps of Gospel Nonviolence*, *Basics of Community Organizing*, a *Three Part Education Program on Women's Ordination*, *Discerning a Response to Common Abuses of Authority* as well as prayer, advocacy and media resources. Free download at [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org)

Special companion CD of Georgetown University debate "Can a Woman Receive the Sacrament of Orders" with Fr. Joseph Fessio and Sr. Maureen Fiedler also available for \$ 8.00 (includes s/h)

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**The Community of St. Mary Magdalene**

**Sunday Mass at 9AM  
Drexel Hill United Methodist Church  
600 Burmount Rd.  
Drexel Hill, PA 19026**

For more information, email Eileen DiFranco,  
Roman Catholic Womanpriest at  
[emdifranco@aol.com](mailto:emdifranco@aol.com).



### 35 Amazing Years, continued from page 1

WOC members spoke at colleges, community centers, and at parishes when permitted. Newsletters were born including, in 1992, *EqualwRites*.

The news, of course, was not all good. In 1978, the Vatican issued *Inter Insigniores* stating that women could not be ordained because they do "not bear a natural resemblance to Jesus." Other official and unofficial reactions and protests ensued; the Bishops' pastoral letter on the subject of women and the church was never written. Finally, in 1995, the Vatican issued the infamous *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, stating that women's ordination could no longer be discussed by anyone in an official Church position which effectively silenced the debate.

Women and men, however, not only continued to discuss women's ordination, they made their voices heard. When the 1978 proclamation came out, WOC asked local groups to hold prayer services in every cathedral. Needless to say, these were not permitted, but groups did begin holding prayer witnesses outside cathedrals. On Ordination Day at Philadelphia's Cathedral, a large group met outside to hold a prayer service "to remember our sisters who could not be ordained." (Initially priests led the service and nuns and priests attended although by 1980 they were directed by their superiors not to come.) In order not to upset those who had come to celebrate their family member's ordination, the often lively Ordination Day witness was moved to Holy Thursday when priests representing all parishes gather in the Cathedral to receive holy oils. Eventually a quiet liturgy was held on Ordination Day across from the Cathedral as the witness continued.

Other demonstrations also took place at major diocesan events, and when the Pope visited the area. Judy remembers the latter vividly. As the 'Popemobile' passed through the small street where she and some others gathered, they held up their signs: "I am ready and willing; please ordain me"; "God is an equal opportunity employer." Judy's mother held up, "Perform a miracle - ordain my daughter." The Pope smiled "but the bishops in the motorcade looked ill when they saw us and our signs."

Women persisted however, and did become ordained, Judy back in 1980, called to ordination by the Community of the Christian Spirit. Other women took the route of formal ordination in the model of apostolic succession. The "Danube 7" led the way, seven courageous women officially ordained by an anonymous Catholic Bishop on a boat on the Danube River in 2002. To date 100 women in Europe, Canada, and the United States have followed and been ordained Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWP) to date. WOC and SEPAWOC kept up with the times, taking an all-embracing view of ordination by championing those ordained by communities, through apostolic succession, and by Protestant churches as well supporting those seeking a complete restructuring of the church so that the issue no longer exists.

Thirty five, however, is a long time to maintain active support of a cause, no matter how worthy. Judy admits to periods of

discouragement, "Back from the seminary, I thought I'd be a priest and was hopped up about the progress happening. Then I began attending my local church again and watching all male processions and leadership. Once again, I felt I was becoming a raisin, rather than a grape, on the living vine." The low point for her came when the Vatican said anyone in an official position could not even discuss ordination. What keeps her going, however, are the high points. "I kept praying and found the Community of the Christian Spirit, a different expression of church but church all the same, and I found a reason to hold on." Her highest point came on May 3, 2003, when women celebrants led the Catholic liturgy for the first time at the Friends Center in Philadelphia. "Two of the ordained Danube 7 were there, Ida Raming and Iris Muller, and the spirit of community, of joy and welcome, of prayer and celebration, was amazing and unforgettable." New and fresh faces in the movement encourage her, too, as do the yearly Holy Thursday and Ordination Day witnesses at the Cathedral, each different and each powerful. "As I drive to them each year," she says, "I say to myself, I can't keep doing this. When I'm driving home, I say, I can't wait to do this again next year!"

### September's National WOC Board Meeting: Representative Aileen Hayes reports:

The national 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event went really well! We had a screening of "Pink Smoke over the Vatican" which is great. We might want to think of having a local screening in Philly as an educational/fundraising event. The film director, Jules Hart, attended the event as well. We raised money through our silent/live auction events. I do not have a final estimate of how much we raised yet.

I will be attending the SOA Watch in November with Erin Saiz Hanna and helping her to work at the WOC table there and attend the workshops that Roy Bourgeois. donated space for us to use! If any one of you are planning on attending as well please let me know and perhaps we can coordinate going down there/ staying together.

WOC is going to be helping to plan a WOW (Women's Ordination Worldwide) conference in 2015 to coincide with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WOC. I am on the planning committee so any input you want to give for such an awesome event, feel free to pass on through me.

I am also on the nominations committee this year for the WOC Board. If any of you are interested or you know of someone who might be a great addition to the national board, feel free to contact me about that as well.

Aileen's email is [hayaileen@gmail.com](mailto:hayaileen@gmail.com).

**Editorial Staff of *EqualwRites***  
*A Publication of SEPAWOC*

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## Delicta Graviora or Dessert first!

By Aileen Hayes

What are you having for dessert? Oh I think I will have the number one on the "delicta graviora" menu please. You know, the "attempted sacred ordination of women"? That one. It's tasty. It is almost too sweet but with a serious kick for an aftertaste. I may even have a second helping of it if I'm not too full afterwards.

For those of you who don't know what this delicious dessert is, let me give you the juicy details. It is something the Vatican chefs from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith whipped up a couple months ago. They have whipped it up before but this time they added a few special ingredients. This time they cooked it up specifically for women ordained and the men who stand by them. It was cooked up during a serious storm, while it was raining sexual abuse of minors. The Holy Chefs cooked up a dessert for those perpetrators too but left the special kick for the women's dessert. It is a powerful dessert! If you take even one bite, you can be excommunicated! I bet you have never eaten anything like this before.

Who doesn't love dessert? This one included. I especially love this one. Why in the world would I love something with such dietary consequences as excommunication? My taste buds are prickling because now the ingredients are out there for everyone to see. This delicious treat has gained international recognition. This is how it all starts. This is the way progress happens.

Look at the movements for Civil Rights and Women's Suffrage. International recognition of unjust policies and events surrounding these movements, were catalysts for positive change. Recall Rosa Parks who refused to sit at the back of the bus. Through her actions, the unjust racial segregation laws were brought to the forefront of the movement. Remember Alice Paul and the National Women's Party as they went on hunger strike in the Occoquan Workhouse and were force fed milk and raw eggs. The media attention of this horrific treatment of women sped up the movement towards the adoption of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment for women's right to vote.

This trend has also existed within the women's ordination movement across Christianity. The strongest example, especially pertinent because of its close relationship with Catholicism, is that of the Episcopal churches. Women were ordained out of necessity or in honor of their call beginning in 1974. Through the persistent overstepping of the bars to their ordination, these women were eventually backed by their church and all canonical bars were removed.

From what I see, there can only be hope for Catholic women in the Vatican's recent open judgment on the "attempted sacred ordination of women". In fact I want to extend my heartfelt and enthusiastic thanks to Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinal William Levada for giving us such a gift. The release of this document on the updated "delicta graviora" set the ball rolling around the world and back again. This ball won't stop until it lands in the now wider open goal of the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Delicta Graviora is an invitation in disguise. It says "come to the table, have your dessert first, and enjoy the sugar rush!" Ladies and gentlemen, let us keep moving towards what we know is right. We may yet see it in our lifetime.

*Aileen Hayes is a delegate to WOC and a member of the SEPAWOC*

## Thank-you, Magda

August 30, 2010: That day Magda Elias was forced to leave this country; immigration laws gave her no choice and immigration lawyers could offer her no alternative. My heart is aching. Magda's leaving is a loss to many- young and old, lost and found, two legged and four legged!

While in Philadelphia, much of Magda's ministry was at the Philadelphia Catholic Worker. She served the needy, worked for peace and stood for justice. For eleven years, she also worked long hours for SEPAWOC and *EqualWRites*, although much of her work she did unnamed and in the background.

Most of us, though, remember Magda as Karen Lenz's companion. A year ago at Karen's Memorial Service, we remembered Magda and pray that prayer again today...for Magda, Karen's faithful companion, who shared Karen's dreams and carried them out, carried through all the projects, carried in all the supplies and carried Karen everywhere with real love and joy...With Karen we were all inspired to help build a new day, a new world and a renewed church. Magda, may you find your way on the path of your own new adventure, carrying those dreams in your heart.

We miss you already. We trust, with Hildegard, that we are all encircled by the arms of the mystery of God. Go in peace, Magda—and come back real soon!

*Judy Heffernan*

## WE NEED YOU!

Do you support our mission? We hope you do, and we hope you are enjoying *EqualWRites* and want us to continue sending it to you! Please help us meet our printing and mailing costs by making whatever contribution you can. A self-addressed mailing envelope is included with this issue. Thank you so much.



## WOMAN OF THE BIBLE – BATHSHEBA

By Jim Plataras

Bathsheba, the most beloved of King David's many wives, appears only at the beginning and the closing of the longest coherent narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures. The 23 chapters, beginning with 2 Samuel 11, and concluding with 1 Kings 2, tell the story David's great sin (adultery with Bathsheba, and then having her husband killed as part of the cover-up) introduced a long period of violence and tragedy within David's family. The child born of David's adulterous liaison would die, but then "*David consoled his wife Bathsheba ... and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon. The LORD loved [Solomon].*"

This was not to be the happy ending of the story. In fact, the union precipitated disastrous events and tragedies during the rest of David's reign and even after his death. The subsequent 23 chapters in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings recount how:

- Amnon, David's first-born, raped his half-sister, Tamar.
- Absalom, Tamar's brother, then killed Amnon, and Absalom fled into exile.
- Absalom eventually returning from exile, won the hearts of all Israel and led a rebellion against his Father David.
- The rebellion failed and David was restored to his throne.
- But Absalom – who according to David's strict orders – was to be spared, was put to death by David's lieutenants. David, irreconcilable in his grief, cried out "*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!*"
- Adonijah, the next son in line for succession to the throne, during David's last days would attempted a palace coup. The coup failed, and David, at the urging of the prophet Nathan and Bathsheba, installed Solomon as his successor.
- Solomon spared his elder brother Adonijah's life for a time, but then Adonijah was also put to death.

One might wonder why the royal chronicler's devoted so much of his narrative skill in spinning out the lurid details of David and Bathsheba's sin and its tragic consequences. The Chronicler makes no attempt to excuse their behavior, but in recounting the prophet Nathan's confrontation with King David, he lays out all the consequences of their great sin. Uriah, the Hittite, a loyal member of his place guard, was sent to his death as part of the cover-up for David's transgression. The Chronicler does not explicitly link David's murderous deed with the subsequent violent deaths of his three eldest sons but the implication is clear.

In an earlier article dealing with *Apostolic Succession* in *EqualwRites*, I pointed out that:

The Yahwist tradition, which derived from Judah and southern tribes, emphasized the office of covenant mediator who serves as the guarantor of the permanence of the covenant. Moses is established as covenant mediator *forever*. The Yahwist tradition links

the Mosaic covenant to the Davidic covenant, God's promise to be with David and his sons *forever*. Continuity is top-down, and passed on through heredity.

The story of David's great sin and its consequences fits perfectly into this theological framework. David's sin, however grievous, could not invalidate God's covenant with the House of David. David was still God's beloved, as Solomon, his successor, would also be.

Bathsheba plays a significant, though secondary role, in the unfolding of the great drama. In the opening scene, she appears as the beautiful, presumably younger, neighbor who attracts the wandering eye of King David. There is no suggestion that Bathsheba did something wrong or seductive in carrying her bathing ablutions in what she thought was the privacy of her roof-top. "*So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him.*" She does go willingly to David, but, after all, he was the king! When she discovers that she is pregnant, she informs the king. It is not clear, however, whether she had any knowledge of, or involvement with, David's nefarious plan to conceal the paternity of the unborn child. She may have bought the official story that her husband had died as a hero in battle.

*"When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son." (2 Sam 11:26-27)*

The child born to Bathsheba died (in punishment for David's

*continued on page 7*

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sin).

Bathsheba then disappears into the background until the end of the story. She reappears in 1 Kings 1:11 when the time comes to designate a successor to the throne of David. The prophet Nathan went to Bathsheba to warn her that unless something was done, and done quickly, Adonijah, not Solomon, would be David's successor. Bathsheba followed his instructions and went to the king to intercede on her son's behalf:

*"My lord, you swore to your servant by the LORD your God, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne. But now suddenly Adonijah has become king, though you, my lord the king, do not know it." (1 Kgs 1:17-18)*

Bathsheba, however, is not the main actor as the Chronicler tells the story. He would have us believe that Nathan told Bathsheba what to say, and that she simply carried out his instructions.

Bathsheba's role as Queen Mother, following David's death in 1 Kings 2:13-18 is more enigmatic and difficult to accept at face value, at least as the Chronicler tells the story. Solomon, firmly established upon the throne, had spared the life of his brother Adonijah. Adonijah went to Bathsheba, the Queen Mother, asking her to intercede further with the King on his behalf. He had one 'small' request: *"Please ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me as my wife Abishag the Shunammite (David's concubine during his final days)." It was an audacious request; "going in" to the previous king's concubines was the conventional sign that the pretender had taken over.*

Bathsheba interceded with Solomon as requested, apparently not understanding the implications of Adonijah's request. Solomon's reaction was immediate: *"And why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom as well! For he is my elder brother. . . Today Adonijah shall be put to death."*

As the Chronicler tells the story, again the prophet Nathan and the pretender Adonijah had told Bathsheba what to say, and she simply delivered the lines. One suspects, however, that her role on both counts was more nuanced and more substantial. Bathsheba and Nathan were more than likely co-equal allies working together to protect Solomon's interests during the final days of David's reign. The alliance might be surprising since Nathan roundly castigated David for taking Bathsheba as his wife.

In the final chapter of the story, the Chronicler makes it seem that Bathsheba was blissfully ignorant of Adonijah's intentions. More than likely, she not only understood the implications of Adonijah's request, but that she also anticipated her son's violent reaction. Without too much reading between the lines, it is more likely that Bathsheba, while respecting her son Solomon's generosity in sparing the life of Adonijah, may have remained apprehensive about having the older half-brother still alive and at the court. She may have seen this as an opportunity to spur her son into action. The outcome, Adonijah's death, would have matched her wishes.

Bathsheba remains an enigmatic figure. During her tenure as David's favorite wife and later as Queen Mother, she simply acted as any mother might do to protect the interests of her son.

The Gospel According to Matthew includes four women in the Davidic genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and 'the wife of Uriah' (i.e., *Bathsheba*). The common denominator is that all were foreigners. Ruth might be described as model of virtue, but the only thing that the other three have in common is that each shrewdly took some action to ensure the continuation of the family line.

*Jim Plastaras is the author of The Witness of John: A Study of Johannine Theology and The God of Exodus and the Creation and Covenant*

### Support Courageous Women

We have all read about the women who have lost their jobs in the Roman Catholic Church in the past few years because of injustice, discrimination or their attempts to end injustice and inequality in the church.

Now there is a way for all of us to support these women. The Emily and Rosemary Fund has been initiated by Lynette Petruska, an attorney in St. Louis, MO, who made the first donation of \$75,000. The fund, which is administered by Voice of the Faithful, began accepting applications on August 10, 2010, with awards to be announced in late November, 2010.

To read about the inspiration for Lynette's donation, to apply for a grant, or to make a donation go to [votf.org](http://votf.org) or write to Voice of the Faithful, P.O. Box 423, Newton Upper Falls, MA 02464.

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## Book Reviews

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***Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling: Women Religious Leaders In Their Own Words*, edited by Maureen Fiedler. With a foreword by Kathleen Kennedy Townsend. Church House Publishing, 2010. Paperback. 224 pp. \$22.00.**

*Reviewed by Maureen Tate*

I was fortunate to have read the recently released volume, edited by Maureen Fiedler, titled *Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling: Women Religious Leaders in Their Own Words*. Maureen Fiedler is a name familiar to those who aspire to a Church that embraces gender equality, a social gospel and a renewed priestly ministry. She is a Sister of Loretto well known for her activism with the Quixote Center, Priests for Equality, Women's Ordination Conference and the We Are the Church Movement among other works. Maureen Fiedler is certainly a woman religious leader in her own right who also hosts a well regarded weekly radio broadcast *Interfaith Voices*. This book is actually an edited compilation of some of the interviews conducted on the show.

In her introduction Fiedler writes, "This book invites you to meet many of the women who are emerging as religious leaders today. They speak their own truth in their own words." This is exactly what *Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling* sets out to do and succeeds. The voices are insightful, positive and hopeful. The editor accomplishes her goal to recover the history of women in religious leadership and bring to light the good news that gender equality in the world of religion is "beginning to be realized." She wants to tell the story that "needs to be told," that acceptance of women leaders in religion has reached a tipping point and has been steadily increasing over the past four or five decades even if it "has been largely under the radar."

Many of the voices were familiar to me and I realized that my own journey in issues pertaining to women and religion coincided with the period in which many of the speakers were beginning their serious work in theology and activism, in and around 1970. These women have continued to be significant role models for me. Included in the volume are women familiar to many of us such as Joan Chittester, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Starhawk, Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, Elaine Pagels, Judith Plaskow, Mary Hunt, Elizabeth Johnson, Aisha Taylor, Helen Prejean, and Jean Houston. However, I appreciated being introduced to many newer voices, at least to me, such as the Reverend Sharon Watkins, Swami Krishna Priya Bognavati, Dr. Amina Wadud, Rabbi Eveline Goodman-Thau, Bishop Vashti McKenzie, Sharon Salzburg, LaDonna Harris, Dr. Jeanette Rodriguez and many others. The editor notes that these many diverse voices are included to reflect "the religious makeup of North America where the radio program *Interfaith Voices* is broadcast."

The introduction to the volume was excellent in providing a succinct overview of key issues related to gender equality in religion and why it matters for the world - that women religious leaders serve as role models for what is possible as a "norm for acting justly in the world." This, we learn, is especially important for "the majority of the world's poor, the

world's illiterate, and victims of crimes like human trafficking and sex slavery" who are disproportionately women. Maureen lays out the good news of women's emerging leadership, articulates why we should care about gender equality and religious institutions, and identifies some remaining obstacles that are largely cultural. She makes the case that the real story is about more than ordination and denominational leadership roles but is also about leadership in feminist theological and scriptural scholarship, spirituality, interfaith dialogue, social justice, peace activism, ecology, religious media and other groundbreaking roles.

The structure of the book takes a bit of getting used to. Each chapter begins with a catalogue of women throughout history who made contributions as leaders in a particular arena of activity. I came to think of these sections as our very own litany of the saints for women's religious leadership and a fitting context for the interviews that followed.

*Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling*, as an edited collection of interviews, retains the radio question and answer format that, initially, I found somewhat frustrating. There are many voices, some sixty in all, and the interviews are understandably highly edited. Consequently, the interviews have a somewhat clipped quality with well phrased, probing, and direct questions from the interviewer and what sometimes feels like short sound bite answers on some very complex issues from those interviewed. The result is a theological sampler or tasting of sorts, leaving you wanting more of each. Yet, midway through the book, I discovered that I was grateful for the brevity of the interviews and, instead, appreciated the variety of perspectives and the energy that was generated in the telling of a larger story. I did experience some conflicting emotions regarding the content of the interviews. Each voice newly inspired me with the dimension of religious experience shared as well as the woman's vision, courage and commitment. At times, I was also pained to think about how many women, over how many centuries, had put so much effort into what feels like such incremental change.

While the scope of the whole collection of interviews is quite broad, the depth in each is limited. The interview format does not allow for critical analysis of what has been said, yet it does support the power of women speaking in their own voices. As I was drawn into the flow of interviews, depth was rather achieved in the totality. Each woman's insight opened up new possibilities and perspectives with kernels of wisdom spoken from the lived experience of her own religious tradition. The many dimensions of women's faith experience represented in the collection contributed to a richer whole. What emerged for me was a sense of gratitude for all of the good work that is being done that I knew nothing



*continued from previous page*

about and an appreciation for how much has already changed and is changing. This book does in fact read as very good news and I felt hopeful, reminded that we should never give up on change. Understanding this complex story does, it seem, require a very long view.

An unexpected surprise I experienced in listening to the many interfaith voices was a refresher on some of the basic tenants of major religious traditions as viewed through an informed woman's perspective. Because the women speak their truth in their own voice the diversity of truths expressed in each tradition becomes more accessible and inviting. I'll admit that I found a few of the interviews disturbing, especially in relation to women's roles in the Muslim tradition. I felt there were contradictions not fully explored and I had to check my own assumptions and cultural prejudices as I struggled to listen with an open mind. The qualities of respect and honest inquiry that Maureen Fiedler brings to *Interfaith Voices* is an inspiration and a role model I appreciate and can learn much from.

The goal of *Interfaith Voices*, and this book by extension, is to promote interfaith understanding, dialogue and collaboration at all levels. These religious women leaders all share something best expressed by Swami Krishan Priya Bognavati, the first woman Hindu Acharya in the U.S. (An archarya means "respected teacher... who serves, who carries the lineage of our tradition, who helps people along their spiritual journey."). She shares that "being an acharya is about my commitment to my spiritual work, and my journey to experience God, and to serve humanity." I found that depth of soul and strength of commitment in all the women included in this collection and I am encouraged by the many dimensions of women's faith experience that is at work in the world.

If you are similarly encouraged, I invite you to check out the radio program, *Interfaith Voices*, at [www.interfaithvoices.com](http://www.interfaithvoices.com). You will even be able, as I did, to download past episodes free for your iTunes listening pleasure. The strength of this book, as with the radio program, is that you will be able to listen directly to these and other wonderful women in their own voice. It is a very good story.

*Maureen Tate is a member of the Grail and a participant in SEPAWOC activities.*

## OPEN DOORS THIS ADVENT

**From A Reflection by Joyce Rupp**

Advent is a season of opening doors. It is a time to deepen and strengthen our relationship with the Holy One so that more of the divine presence within us shines through and offers a welcome to others. It is a season to open the doors of our hearts so that we can both give and receive this love. One of the ways we can do this is by seeing ourselves and others as doors through which the divine presence continually seeks an entrance.

*Quoted from U.S. Catholic, November 24, 2008*

## MOVING RIGHT ALONG.....

*A commentary by Mary Whelan*

I want to give an update about the proposed changes to the new Roman Missal which I wrote about in the March-June, 2010, issue of *EqualwRites*. While the updated version of the Ordinary is scheduled to be implemented in the U.S. beginning in Advent 2011, the text is apparently still being revised in Rome. Philip Endean, SJ in the article "Worship and Power" published in *The Tablet*, the international Catholic weekly, on August 28, 2010, writes what I consider an excellent summary of the some of the history of the controversial changes as well as the implications of the final approval.

While he talks about the problems with "what counts as a good translation" the more pressing question is "how authority is being exercised. In some ways, there are overlaps with the clerical-abuse scandal. Of course, the objective damage done by bad liturgy is as nothing to the moral wrong of children being violated. But in both cases authority has dealt high-handedly and secretly with the sacred, the intimate, the vulnerable. High officialdom has been evasive; lesser authority has tacitly colluded." Those sentences summarize the core of the issue and why many Catholics remain involved in the reform movement in the Catholic Church.

Endean, who teaches theology at the University of Oxford, goes on to say he will have difficulty presiding at Mass "with any integrity" once these changes are imposed. The Church is providing guidance to priests regarding the implementation of these changes. While the Church authority may think it is instructing its priests to correct "liturgical excesses of previous decades" or just obey to "help [the people of God] make the best of a bad job" he wonders if "as victims of abusive power relations that we are only beginning to perceive" the clergy is being asked to pass that culture along. I believe there are other priests who are also asking that question.

The changes in the Missal are important and have to be "situated within the conflicts underlying everything in Vatican II and its aftermath: How the Church deals with change; the relationship between Rome and local churches; how the Church addresses contemporary culture" writes Endean.

When I think about this latest example of Rome exerting its authority, I am wondering if it is, sadly, a commentary on how the fear of losing control plays itself out? This is yet another example of the Papal authority's discomfort in tolerating open discussion or dissent. I also wonder if U.S. Catholics may be more concerned about who will be saying Mass given the current priest shortage rather than the language of Mass. Does the Papacy do these things to divert attention from what could be considered more pressing issues?

Whatifwejustsaidwait.org is an excellent resource if you would like to learn more about this topic.

*Mary Whelan is co-editor of EqualwRites.*



## Scripture Reflections

Looking ahead to Advent 2010, Is 2:1-5, Ps 146:6-7, Phil 4:4-5

By Judith Heffernan, M.Div

At Advent we celebrate a new year- a time, as Ted Loder wrote in *Guerillas of Grace*, to begin questioning again that we may know truth, to begin imagining again that we may accomplish justice, to begin risking again that we may make peace and to begin forgiving again that we may know mercy. This Advent we hear again some of the most meaningful messages in Scripture for me, "...They shall transform their swords into ploughshares... Let us walk in the light... God sets captives free... Rejoice in God always..."

"They shall transform their swords into ploughshares"... Patrick Cockburn, interviewed this summer on *Democracy Now*, told of a medical study by Chris Busby and other epidemiologists, which is based on interviews with 4,800 people in Fallujah, Iraq. It confirms that there has been a serious increase of cancer and birth defects, sometimes heartbreakingly grotesque. There is fear about what has been used in U.S. weapons because the study shows results which parallel illnesses suffered by Hiroshima survivors. Also this summer, Pablo Solon, the Bolivian Ambassador, delivered an address at the UN stating, "...24,000 children die every day in developing countries from preventable causes contracted from unclean water... that is one child death every 3.5 seconds..." ONE, TWO, THREE ... As my people say, 'Now is the time'!"

Forty-one countries have co-sponsored the document, "The

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

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Human Right to Water and Sanitation", but the United States is not one of them. "...Let us walk in the light".

"God sets captives free..." On July 5<sup>th</sup> we lost Rev. Bill Callahan, one of God's main co-workers in setting captives free. As Maureen Fiedler, SL, reminded us in *NCR*, Bill's ministry was dedicated to the justice call of Vatican II; he was a leader for justice and peace and advocated gender equality in the church—including women's ordination. In 1980 the Jesuits silenced Bill on the issue of women's ordination but, after prayerful reflection, he resumed his public stance for women's ordination for the rest of his life! (We love you, Bill!!) Maureen also reminded us that Bill proclaimed that the work of justice should be done with laughter, merriment and creativity.

This summer we lost Bill Pohlhaus, too, our own Gaile's beloved husband. Bill's Memorial Liturgy was a beautiful reminder of his lifelong work for the church, done, indeed, with creativity and merriment. Bill and Bill, "...rejoice in God always..." Gaile, we give thanks that together you and Bill continued to follow the call of reform and boldly but gently helped show us the way. We give thanks, too, Gaile, for that Sunday afternoon so long ago now, when you gathered us together in your living room, so that we would not let the work of women's ordination fall along the wayside in Philadelphia. From that day we stayed together and flowered into SEPAWOC.

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

**MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE:** If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *EqualwRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be March 2011. Final deadline for submissions is February 15. Send to eharty43@yahoo.com or mail to SEPAWOC P.O. Box 27195, Philadelphia, PA 19118

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