

**WE CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO OUR PRESENTATION OF THE  
MARY MAGDALENE AWARD**

to

**THERESA KANE, RSM**

*Sunday, October 30 at 2:00 p.m.*

*Saint Andrew's - in - the - Field Episcopal Church  
500 Somerton Avenue • Philadelphia, PA 19116*

*Refreshments will follow the presentation and comments by Sister Theresa.*

*For more information and directions, call 215-464-1319.*

**EQUAL**

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

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**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.*



**INTRODUCING  
THERESA KANE, RSM**

We are so fortunate. We have the privilege to honor a most illustrious woman, Theresa Kane, and to hear her speak, and that is a special honor for us as well. We welcome you to join us on **Sunday, October 30 at 2pm** at St. Andrew's - in - the - Field Episcopal Church in Somerton (Northeast Philadelphia) for this special occasion.

You may know Theresa Kane best as the brave, prophetic, woman religious leader who, in welcoming Pope John Paul II

when he visited the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC in 1979, publicly called for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. This act drew national and international attention to the question, to the women's ordination movement, and to Theresa Kane herself. (*USA Today* called her action the "Kane Mutiny"!)

One event - no matter how significant and far-reaching its impact - does not, however, define a whole life. And it is for her whole life's work, dedicated to justice, community, spiritual enrichment, and fostering full participation in the life of the church for Catholic women everywhere that we honor Theresa Kane with the Mary Magdalene award.

As past president and current member of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and in her lifelong work as a Sister of Mercy, Theresa Kane has continued to inspire women religious in this country to be involved with people and to interact in their lives rather than stay removed, remote, or isolated. She has especially championed Catholic women as they seek to fulfill their dreams and answer their calls. As she stated so beautifully in an interview in *CTA News* in April 2010: "Catholic sisters have grown into greater solidarity with Catholic women in general. We're struggling for the same vision and that's been a wonderful gift that we have. It's very life-giving."

For all her life giving achievements, we are proud to honor Theresa Kane this year.

## A Visionary Makes All the Difference

By Mary Whelan and Ellie Harty

Continuing our series focusing on exceptional women of faith and their gifts to the world, *EqualwRites* co-editors, Mary Whelan and Ellie Harty, interviewed Mary Ellen Graham, Founder and Executive Director of My Place Germantown. We found her to be a true visionary. She saw a need; she envisioned a solution, and then she ensured that vision turned into concrete reality. We proudly hail her as a woman of faith who is making a major difference in the world.

Mary Ellen had worked with the homeless for many years, at Mercy Hospice which provides transitional recovery housing for women and their children, and at Bethesda Project which also offers transitional housing and services to the chronically homeless in Philadelphia. When she became the social worker for Face to Face in Germantown, however, she encountered a significantly underserved population of homeless: men. Their situation was particularly dire because it was so prevalent and yet so often unacknowledged, especially in Germantown. True, some of these men did live on the streets and were visible, but the majority lived inside gutted or burned out, ramshackle or abandoned housing unfit for anyone, or they lived in deplorable conditions inside dilapidated buildings, often being charged exorbitant rents by absentee landlords for horrendous one room hovels. Adding to her frustration in trying to find these men decent housing and help for the conditions contributing to their homelessness (mental illness, addiction, etc.) was what she saw as the seeming reluctance of social service providers to come to Germantown for outreach or of officials to count the number of homeless there accurately. "It seemed we were not on the radar," she contended, "and so the perception was that Germantown did not have a homeless problem." It was these "hidden homeless" who began to haunt her more and more.

In 2005, Mary Ellen, along with twelve other St. Vincent de Paul Germantown parishioners, participated in JustFaith, a 30-week intensive program exploring Biblical tradition, Catholic social teaching, and the relationship between spirituality and social justice, that included hands on experience working with, and standing in solidarity with, the poor and marginalized. "At the end, JustFaith charged us to bring Catholic social justice teachings into concrete reality," Mary Ellen explained, and she had a vision of what, with the help of others, she needed to do. "I saw these men as being parallel to the lepers in the Gospel. They were the individuals people feared or felt they 'deserved' their situation just like people in the Bible saw lepers 'deserving' their disease. Like lepers, these men were often isolated, alienated, abandoned, judged. In the list of those we are called to tend, they seemed the least served." Her vision was to create permanent, not temporary, well-designed and maintained, not shoddy and neglected, efficiency apartments in the Germantown neighborhood where the men felt connected.

The result was My Place Germantown, a renovated former convent in a neighborhood near St. Vincent de Paul Church, in which twelve efficiency apartments for disabled homeless men provide permanent housing with on site 24/7 health and

social service support by a case manager and resident assistants.

This result, however, was not easily achieved. It took close to seven years and infinite patience and persistence on Mary Ellen's part. "Most difficult were all the no's. Coming up with a project, creating a plan, refining the plan again and again, and then being turned down by funders, organizations, individuals, even the archdiocese unable to see us, an unknown organization with only grassroots support, as credible was the worst." Thanks to the diligence of Mary Ellen and her cadre of supporters, the project did eventually obtain HUD and other funding only to meet seemingly endless hurdles in city bureaucracies, zoning, and even within the neighborhood itself. "Persistence and finding creative ways to approach the powers that be kept everything going. Resistance of the neighbors and distortion of our mission were especially hurtful, and living with the tenuousness of waiting for approvals and permits was difficult and draining, but I tried to see it as God's project, not mine."

There have been major highlights, too. My Place Germantown was one of the few projects to obtain HUD and city grant funding on its first try. The project is also now a model for permanent, neighborhood scale, supportive housing for homeless in Philadelphia and elsewhere. At the ribbon cutting, Mary Ellen exclaimed, "I was thrilled to see social service, housing, and other providers from around the city attend, and so many others sent messages of support." Germantown is definitely on the radar again!

Challenges continue, of course. The building, although renovated, was built in the mid-1800's and problems constantly arise. Fundraising is always a worry. Mary Ellen is sustained, however, by the special moments. The residence is now fully occupied with twelve formerly homeless disabled men whose small victories inspire all who meet them. "Because he now lives in permanent housing, one resident was allowed to get a motorized scooter and no longer has to use only a walker. Our hearing impaired resident now has daily attendant care, but even better, the other residents are saying, 'We should help him, too.' Early risers make coffee in the community room and get donuts so that all the residents can gather together regularly; a true community has formed. They even feel safe and comfortable enough to grumble to the staff!" She claims she has no big "redemptive stories" at this point, but she considers "getting residents who have been on the street to wear weather appropriate clothing is a major victory, and I have to focus on those. Then I can smile."

After some initial reluctance, reservations, and even protests, the neighbors have become welcome sources of encouragement and support. They host potlucks with the men, have given them odd jobs for extra money, include them in neighborhood improvement discussions, and have compiled lists of food banks and other resources in the area to help them thrive. Some neighbors participate in a Neighborhood Advisory Board that meets in My Place Germantown to air concerns, issues, and ideas.

When asked about the future for the project, Mary Ellen

laughed, "My Place Kingsessing?" She admits that she would love to see the start of another project "even if I don't live to see it finished." Her vision has never been "big multi-tenant housing but small neighborhood-scale housing that integrates into the neighborhood and even enhances it." This is the vision that became the reality, and this is the visionary that made the difference.

**Mary Whelan and Ellie Harty** are co-editors of *EqualwRites*.

## Did You Know?

Despite the best efforts of many the Vatican has issued its final decree and the 2011 Roman Missal becomes official in Advent this year. To learn more about the problems with the process and the product and to call for reconsideration of the 1998 Sacramentary go to the website [misguidedmissal.com](http://misguidedmissal.com).

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"Father Anthony Ruff, a Benedictine monk and liturgy professor, wrote an open letter to the U.S. Bishops in *American* magazine about his concerns regarding the new mass translations and the secretive, non-consultative fashion in which the Vatican forced these changes on English-speaking Catholics around the globe. After chairing the subcommittee on music for the last several years, he resigned in protest from the International Commission on English in the Liturgy....Call to Action is coordinating a national educational tour with Fr. Anthony." Go to [cta-usa.org/keepusinyourprayers/](http://cta-usa.org/keepusinyourprayers/) to see his speaking schedule.

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And speaking of tours did you know that members of Call to Action, WOC, Women's Ordination Worldwide, Roman Catholic Women Priests and Father Roy Bourgeois will be traveling to Rome from October 16-20 to present a petition and to draw international attention to the issue of women's ordination. Erin Saiz Hanna, WOC executive director, points out that the last time she witnessed at St. Peter's Square she was banned from ever entering again. Those of you who know Erin would know that a little thing like hierarchical threats would never stop her from advocating for women in the Catholic Church.

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A suggestion: go to [Futurechurch.org](http://Futurechurch.org) and click on "Open letter to U.S. Bishops" about the priest shortage crisis. Read the letter—it's excellent—sign on if you agree.

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We were so pleased to read that 3 women have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Leymah Gbowee, who fought rape as a weapon in the Liberian Civil War, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first woman to win a free presidential election, and Tawakkul Karman, a Yemeni activist prior to the Arab Spring and the first Arab woman ever to win the prize will share the \$1.5 million award. Their bravery and persistence are inspirational. Thorbjørn Jagland, chairman of the prize committee, stated, "We have included the Arab Spring in this prize, but we have put it in a particular context. If one fails to include women in the revolution and the new democracies, there will be no democracy." (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 7, 2011)

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We extend a uniquely "SEPAWOC welcome" to the new Philadelphia Archbishop, Charles Chaput. You can guess what that means: We at SEPAWOC welcome you, Archbishop, to stand up for all who are called to priesthood in the Church, including married priests and, most especially, women. The Church, and possibly you, often cite "tradition" as a reason

*continued on page 11*

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## Roman Catholic Priests Speak Out

By Mary Whelan

During the past several months I have been reading emails that actually bring hope to my heart. Priests (and I refer here to male priests) in Australia, Austria and the United States are speaking out in favor of women's ordination among other issues as well as standing in solidarity with a priest and archbishop who have followed their consciences, veering away from the official Vatican policies.

### Priests in Australia React to Bishop Morris' Removal

On May 2, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI removed Australian Bishop William M. Morris of Toowoomba from his position. In 2006 Bishop Morris had written a pastoral letter stating that he would be "open to ordaining women and married men if church rules changed to allow such a possibility." (from catholicnetwork.us). On May 1<sup>st</sup> Bishop Morris in an open letter to his diocese stated that he had written his thoughts in 2006 in response to the serious priest shortage in his diocese depriving some communities of the Eucharist on a regular basis and that his letter "has been misread and, I believe, deliberately misinterpreted." Pope Benedict appointed U.S. Archbishop Charles J. Chaput (who was installed as the Archbishop in Philadelphia in early September this year) to investigate. "I have never seen the report prepared by the apostolic visitor," Bishop Morris said. "...[W]ithout due process it has been impossible to resolve these matters, denying me natural justice without any possibility of appropriate defense and advocacy on my behalf." The National Council of Priests of Australia, which represents forty percent of priests there, issued a media release on May 3. Expressing sadness at Bishop Morris' "retirement", the release states, "We are appalled at the lack of transparency and due process that led to this decision by Church authorities. We are embarrassed about the shabby treatment meted out to an outstanding Pastor of this diocese who has faithfully ministered in the Church in Queensland....We are concerned about an element within the Church whose restorationist ideology wants to repress freedom of expression within the Roman Catholic Church...." (catholicnetwork.us)

### Dissent in Austria

In June a "Call to Disobedience" was issued by 300 priests

and deacons in Austria, though as of early September the number has risen to more than 400. Their seven-point pledge "includes actively promoting priesthood for women and married men, and reciting a public prayer for 'church reform' in every Mass." (*The New York Times*, July 22, 2011) Other points challenge the church's current practices as they relate to "celibacy, the treatment of gay and lesbian people, and communion for divorced and remarried people." (*U.S. Catholic*, September 6, 2011)

### Priests in US support Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois

At the Call to Action website (cta-usa.org) I read about the Clergy for Conscience letter which was signed by 200 priests supporting Father Roy who has been told by the Vatican "to recant his support for women's ordination or he will be removed from the priesthood." The letter supporting Father Roy's priesthood and his right to conscience was delivered July 22nd to Fr. Edward Dougherty, Superior General of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. The number of priests who have signed on continues to grow.

### U.S. Priests Form National Association

In mid-September at the *National Catholic Reporter* online service, I read that a new association of priests is forming in the U.S. The stated goals are twofold: to support priests and to create a "collegial voice so priests can speak in a united way." (ncronline.org, September 15, 2011) The priests promise to "hold one hand out to the bishops and one hand to the baptized faithful, the laity." While "protest and disagreement" will not be on the agenda, it is significant that they will be celebrating the Second Vatican Council for their first four years and have scheduled a major convocation in June, 2012 honoring the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Vatican II, focusing on liturgy, a hot button issue for the church at this time. According to Fr. David Cooper, chair on the organizing core, "Voice will be an overarching issue....For several decades priests did have a voice through priests' senates and councils. But in 1983 through a change in canon law...we lost our collegial voice." The association is created during a time of tumult in the church and with the convergence of several events: the creation of a website by Father Michael Ryan, whatifwejustsaidwait.org (which we covered in *EqualwRites*) asking to delay the new Roman missal, the

## Community of the Christian Spirit

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formation of the Irish priests' Association and the Association of Pittsburgh Priests. For those who responded to a survey sent to those priests who had signed on the Ryan's website the most important objective was to follow Vatican II teachings especially regarding the "primacy of the individual conscience, the status and participation of all the baptized, and ...establishing a church where all believers would be treated as equals."

### Association of Philadelphia Priests

Roman Catholic priests in the conservative Philadelphia archdiocese have formed an independent association this past summer. Father Chris Walsh, one of the organizers of the Association of Philadelphia Priests, said the group was created because priests want to learn more about how the archdiocese is handling the latest sex abuse problem. "Father Walsh said priests in the diocese are struggling, along with the laity and non-Catholics in the region, to understand how the sex-abuse problem was allowed to fester." (Maryclaire Dale for Associated Press, August 21, 2011) While stressing that this group does not seek to be adversarial nor "challenge incoming Archbishop Charles Chaput on priest celibacy, the ordination of women or other hot-button issues...[they] are still orthodox men who love the church."

### Some Observations

What does this all mean? I will make several inferences. It is not hard to believe that many priests, just as many of the laity, do not agree with the official Vatican policies regarding the handling of the sex abuse scandals, treatment of gay and lesbians, ordination of women, married priests, denying communion to divorced Catholics, and most recently, the handling of the changes in liturgy that have been forced on the church. But, until recently have many priests spoken up? Other than an occasional brave soul, such as Roy Bourgeois, up until now most priests have remained silent, possibly fearing reprisals and rightly so—look what happens when they speak up individually. But have they reached their tipping point?

Priests, like the laity, have been marginalized and silenced as Rome increasingly distances itself from the rest of the church. Those of us who work for change in the church have waited for this moment. There is strength in numbers and those numbers now place the Vatican in an awkward position. Can they "fire" every priest who speaks up, signs petitions and/or joins an association?

The priest shortage as well as the issues I have mentioned have left the priests in an untenable position. I would imagine they are being stretched beyond human endurance because of the shortage of parish priests. I also believe that morally some have been stretched beyond human endurance as they live a fundamental disconnect between pastoral needs and Vatican policy: Priests who have heard the pain of women and married priests who are ready to serve, willing to bring Eucharist to Catholics who have been "cut off" from the living vine. Many priests who minister to gays and lesbians and divorced Catholics must agonize over the

spiritual needs of their people while publicly being required to uphold the non inclusive, non pastoral Vatican dogma. I will assume many priests are as upset about the ongoing sex abuse scandal which never seems to go away or be addressed by those who hold the authority in the church.

In this same issue we write about Sister Theresa Kane who spoke her truth to Pope John Paul II in 1979. What a role model she is for all of us to let our voices be heard and not allow ourselves to be silenced. We need to speak in a united voice and support one another.

*Mary Whelan* is co-editor of *EqualwRites*.



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so all can be  
at the table



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Please join us in honoring our hard working parish priests and advocating for the day when they won't have to work so hard because we have all the priests we need.

# Feminist Sacramental Theology and the Grace of Ambiguity

By Cassie MacDonald

Failing to take account of the particular experience that women bring to the table—especially the communion table—is depriving us all of gifts that would serve to keep our faith tradition alive and relevant in these times. New understandings of the nature of language and new insights into the nature of our universe both suggest that this is a time when women’s ways of knowing and relating are vitally important.

## Sacramentality and Gender (or Lack Thereof)

The Christian sacramental principle, as developed in our Catholic tradition, rests on the understanding that every created thing is capable of communicating the divine. This understanding is essential to sacramental life because sacraments, as symbolic expressions, arise out of our lived experience, and are, according to Susan A. Ross in *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* drawn from the world to express the indwelling of the sacred. Theologian Paul Tillich in *Dynamics of Faith* also emphasizes this embodied nature: “No piece of reality is excluded from the possibility of becoming a bearer of the holy. . . . Faith, in the sacramental type of religion, is not the belief that something is holy and other things are not.”

This basic principle of the holiness of the created world, though never explicitly denied, has been subtly undermined by the Church in doctrines and practices that betray a suspicion and even fear of the body, particularly the female body. For example, Vatican II’s dismantling of barriers between clergy and laity and the renewed recognition of the sacramentality of all life did not take account of women’s concerns: gender was just not on the agenda. Furthermore, the insights from developmental psychology that informed new approaches to Christian initiation of adults at the time still reflected a bias for the male experience, and the energy of the women’s liberation movement in the 60’s and 70’s did not even enter those conversations. What has resulted, and still pervades, is a skewed sacramental life: the lived gestures upon which sacraments are based—birthing (Baptism), feeding (Eucharist), nurturing (Anointing)—are as much or more the acts of women than they are of men. However, within the church, these practices are taken up, stripped of any troubling physical association, and celebrated exclusively by men. A great impoverishment results. The language theory of sacraments has something to say about this, and we will see also how hermeneutics—understanding sacraments as symbolic language—opens this area of theology for the contributions of women, offering creative, rich and surprising possibilities.

## Theological Metaphors and Symbols

Sallie McFague in *Metaphysical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* argues that sacraments are a form of metaphorical language used in our tradition to express a truth that is ultimately inexpressible. Rooted in a symbolic reality, a metaphor draws a “thread of similarity between two dissimilar objects” using the better-known one to speak

about the lesser-known. The tensive quality of metaphor, its ability to hold simultaneously the reality that something *is* and also *is not* something else, its revealing and concealing in one gesture, gives the metaphor its life. Good metaphors “shock, they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension, and they are implicitly revolutionary.” Karl Rahner in an article in *Theological Investigations* agrees. In a “metaphorical theology” Jesus is a parable of God, “incarnate word . . . the absolute symbol of God in the world, filled as nothing else can be with what is symbolized.” What is true of Jesus is also true of us: “all beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily ‘express’ themselves in order to attain their own nature.” Sacraments also, like the body, express a physical perceptible world that connects us with another and ultimately unknowable one.

In *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, Sandra Schneiders goes even further: Symbols, and sacraments as symbolic expressions, engage us, in an “active presence calling for an interactive response,” for symbols are intimately bound up with the notion of continuing revelation. A particular symbol’s “saying” is never fully or finally said. . . . it is always ambiguous, always concealing infinitely more than it reveals.” Therefore, it calls continually for interpretation, which is why fixed notions of sacraments that rely on instrumental or legalistic approaches are so deadening. Paul Tillich, in fact, describes symbols in the nature of living beings: “They grow and they die. They grow when the situation is ripe for them, and they die when the situation changes . . . because they can no longer produce response in the group where they originally found expression.”

## The Grace of Ambiguity

Let us now draw out from symbolic language theory one thread to highlight a gift that feminist thought is offering sacramental theology: the grace of ambiguity.

We have seen how the vitality of a metaphor depends on its tensive quality, its ability to keep two independent concepts alive simultaneously, resisting the human impulse to retreat from the complexity of “both/and” into “either/or.” Yet dualistic thinking has marked traditional Christian theology, and sacramental theology has not escaped its influence. One theologian described the futility of attempting to define and classify the mystery inherent in a sacramental experience as trying to paint a bird in flight. This has not prevented a frequent collapsing of sacramental thinking into impermeable categories of sacred/secular, clergy/laity, male/female, spirit/body. Such categories artificially divide our reality and, inevitably, one half of the equation is valued over the other. Female lay members, persistently associated in subtly negative ways with the physical (rather than the symbolic) reality often come out on the less valued half of these dichotomies. When the inexpressible and transformative power of the sacrament is submitted to questions about “real presence” or who may validly administer the sacrament, the living metaphor becomes fixed in a finite human concept and begins to die. If this happens for a long enough period, the sacramental life of the people dies also, for metaphors are not ultimate truths but dynamic and ever-changing expressions of experiences that are beyond set words and prescribed gestures.

Adding to this dynamic is the picture of our universe this century reveals to us. Our world is not so much marked by order and readily-classified forms of life but by unpredictable, even chaotic, movement and change. This unresolved, unfolding nature of our universe also informs our notions of God and of our sacramental life. According to Elizabeth Johnson in *Quest for the Living God*, a sacramental theology in a universe “seeded with promise, pregnant with surprise,” needs the insight and experience of women to explore the fruitful possibilities at the edge of disorder. “Feminist theorists . . . encourage us to tolerate, invite, and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity, as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these may be. If we do our work well, ‘reality’ will appear even more unstable, complex, and disorderly than it does now.” But it is in the ambiguous that we find transformative potential.

What gives women this particular tolerance for the ambiguous and unresolved? Why is resistance to it still so strong in our sacramental practices? Some insights are suggested by psychoanalytic and object relations theory. In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow suggests that girls come to an understanding of their identity through a process of relationship and continuity. Identifying themselves as *like* the mother, their maturation relies upon a process of becoming the mother. This process colors not only the way females interact with other human beings—generally relational—but also the way they experience and use language. Boys, on the other hand, seeing the mother as essentially different, come to maturation by separation. Their relational posture is one of difference and alienation. Out of this sensibility, it follows that a male, hierarchical community would cling to dualistic ideas and clearly defined classifications.

It is, therefore, possible that the psychosexual dynamic of separation from the mother for men may unconsciously influence the way we develop rituals. Some anthropologists believe that rituals of blood sacrifice—among which the Eucharist is counted—represent an attempt by men to place birth, the awesome and perhaps threatening power of procreation given to women, in the realm of the symbolic and out of the physical, or woman’s, realm. The message: symbolic birth, practiced in the church solely by male clergy, is more significant, more elevated, even more holy, than physical birth. Women, therefore, can be removed from the equation—sacramentally, of course. To have any hope of transforming the hobbled liturgical practices in our church, we will need to bring into the open the unconscious motivations that may be informing the decisions of male church leaders.

Navigating the middle ground between chaos and order, between the need for human expression and the awareness of the divine ineffable, are women of faith. Nowhere is this challenging marginal existence more evident than in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Exclusive liturgical practices, placing clergy over laity, men over women and the spiritual over the material, undermine the radical inclusivity modeled by Christ himself. Jane Flax, author of *Postmodern and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory* laments that a sacrament that “should be the symbol of our nurture, growth and participa-

tion in the authentic human life of mutual empowerment . . . has become a symbol for the preservation of clerical power.” Mary Collins notes how gender and power struggles occasion a great loss of meaning in a moment which is, at its truest, “the assembly of outcasts and strangers . . . being invited to welcome and to forgive one another in Jesus’ name, to be at peace, to sin no more. This liberating reality is suppressed when we reject ambiguity and demand clarity and coherence in our ecclesial relationships before we can celebrate Eucharist.” Women, among others who exist on the margin of sacramental life, perhaps because they have less to lose, move with great heart into this place of “fractured unity,” inviting us all to come ahead into a reality of greater wholeness. It is my hope that the faithful work of feminist sacramental theologians might open the way.

We know, if we are awake and alive, that women enact sacraments all the time: birthing, feeding, comforting. I know it myself from personal experience. When my aunt died just over a year ago of ovarian cancer, I witnessed my mother nursing her in her last days. My mother attended mass and received from the priest, on my aunt’s behalf, the communion bread. She delivered this nourishment with a deep and simple reverence that was not given by formal seminary education, but by an instinct for the holy and an awesome humility. Mom heard my aunt confess her fears as well as her hopes for her first granddaughter Sophia, whom it was becoming clear she would not meet in this world. She administered medication, washed sheets, pillow cases, and underwear. When we arrived moments after my aunt’s death, she kissed her face, blessing it with her tears and sweet assurances that my aunt would now be free to meet Jesus, and the first among us to see Sophia. It is my hope that the faithful work of feminist sacramental theologians might open the way for the tender, mothering, holistic priesthood that my mother modeled with such grace.

*Cassie MacDonald is the Hearthkeeper of Brigid’s House, a center for poetry, prayer and peacemaking in Waterfront South Camden. She can be reached at [peacecatcamden@yahoo.com](mailto:peacecatcamden@yahoo.com).*

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## By Whose Authority?

By Jewel Lee Herder

By whose authority is it that only a man can receive a legitimate call by God into the Catholic priesthood, but not a woman? By whose authority is it that women are refused ordination into the priesthood? By whose authority is it that women priests, as well as supporters of the women's ordination movement, are threatened, intimidated, harassed, rejected, ostracized, shunned, fired, excommunicated, and laicized or defrocked? Is it really by God's authority?

We know the official Church answer, but a look into its recent history reveals times in which doors might have been opened. By the 1970's, for example, there were at least some official discussions on the topic, and the resulting votes on the conclusions, and the way those votes were used (or ignored), is enlightening. The meeting of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (April 1976) on the issue of women priests resulted in "three votes: (1) a unanimous (17-0) vote that the New Testament does not settle in a clear way and once and for all whether women can be ordained priests, (2) a 12-5 vote in favor of the view that scriptural grounds alone are not enough to exclude the possibility of ordaining women and (3) a 12-5 vote that Christ's plan would not be transgressed by permitting the ordination of women. On January 27, 1977, however, the publication by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Declaration (*Inter Insigniores*) on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood ignored the vote and declared Catholic teaching to be: "The Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination." Despite an apparent conflict between the actual vote of the Biblical Commission and the official Church statement, the result was irrefutable: the ordination of women was to be determined by early Church practice and subsequent tradition.

Equally interesting are the various ways in which the Catholic Church states its official position. John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* to the Bishops on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone, (May 22, 1994) wrote: "Priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone." Furthermore, he reminded them, "Pope Paul VI, out of fidelity to his office of safeguarding the Apostolic Tradition, and also with a view to removing a new obstacle placed in the way of Christian unity, reminded Anglicans of the position of the Catholic Church: 'She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his church. Paul VI directed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to set forth and expound the teaching of the Church on this matter. This was done through the Declaration *Inter*

*Insigniores*, which the Supreme Pontiff approved and ordered to be published.'" *Inter Insigniores* concludes: "In order that all doubt may be removed, the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful."

Pope John Paul II's Letter to Women (June 29, 1995) described the role of women using terms like: "help, service, mothers, wives, consecrated, virgins, bride, church, obedience, dignity, and numerous references to Mary, the mother of Jesus." He further asserted that "the presence of a *certain diversity of roles* is in no way prejudicial to women, provided that this diversity is not the result of an arbitrary imposition, but is rather an expression of what is specific to being male and female." According to John Paul II, "If Christ ... entrusted only to men the task of being an 'icon' of his countenance as 'shepherd' and 'bridegroom' of the Church through the exercise of the ministerial priesthood, this in no way detracts from the role of women . . . since all share equally in the dignity proper to the 'common priesthood' based on Baptism." He claimed, "These roles should not be viewed in accordance with the criteria of functionality typical in human societies. Rather they must be understood according to the particular criteria of the *sacramental economy*, i.e. the economy of 'signs' which God freely chooses in order to become present in the midst of humanity."

These church documents, doctrines, and directives sparked and fueled the flames of the women's ordination movement in the Roman Catholic Church, resulting in a lengthy and costly struggle for the rights of women in the Church. Many members, however, were forced to keep silent, supporting the activities of the Women's Ordination Conference underground or in disguise, in constant fear of being discovered. In fact, fear has been the number one reason given for what seems to be a lack of overwhelming participation in this movement, especially by young people. In conversations with Roman Catholic youth, I have been told that they are afraid that if they speak out in support of the Women's Ordination Movement, they will not be permitted to attend Catholic schools, including universities, or acquire employment at Catholic establishments. Young people are afraid of the embarrassment, humiliation and alienation of being kicked out of their church communities and are afraid their family members will be ostracized and asked to leave also. Young people are angry with the all-male hierarchy and the dominance and abuse of power perpetrated by the church leadership. They are frustrated, oppressed, and depressed, lacking hope for a future in which the church would be an egalitarian community inclusive of men and women, boys and girls, minorities and whites, rich and poor, all worshipping God and utilizing their spiritual gifts to edify and advance the kingdom of God. Without participation of significant numbers of diverse supporters which include adults, youth, women and men, movements usually become stagnant and remain a flickering flame of discontent, not a roaring fire of change.

The Vatican's refusal to ordain women called by God created an especially oppressive situation for the women and



the priests who stand in solidarity with them. It is often perceived as spiritual abuse. The male church leadership is using the church, its doctrine, the scriptures and its influence to advance its own agenda, relentlessly subjecting women, men, and youth to fear threats of excommunication for refusing to submit to the power and control of the hierarchy, for refusing to keep silent. Throughout history, it has been proven that incorrect interpretations of the scriptures have been taught by the “right teaching” office of the Roman Catholic Church, i.e. infallibility. So what makes them so sure now that they are correct beyond all doubt regarding the ordination of women? What if they are wrong?

Sheila Durkin Dierks, in her book *WomenEucharist*, cites the work of Kenan Osborne, OFM, author of *Ministry* (1993), on the New Testament: “We are presented again and again and again with the meaning of discipleship. Only here and there are we presented with small windows of church leadership . . . Even in these few places on leadership, however, one does not find that there are two ways of discipleship: one for leaders and one for followers. . . . The New Testament could be described in contemporary language as ‘the people’s book,’ not the ‘hierarchy’s book’. According to Osborne: “There is, to be sure, leadership in the New Testament; Jesus often used examples of negative leadership to tell the disciples how not to behave. The positive example is always a leadership of service, patience, [and] inclusion. It is leadership based in the needs of the community. The concept of an ordained class appeared slowly in the centuries following.”

Dierks again emphasizes Osborne’s points: “Osborne maintains that ordination in the New Testament is a difficult matter to prove and that many biblical theologians have worked on the presupposition that an ordained vs. non-ordained ministry status was proclaimed by Jesus. On the contrary, in all of the New Testament:

- a. Nowhere are the twelve ordained.
- b. Nowhere are the apostles ordained.
- c. Nowhere are the apostles or the twelve described as ordaining.
- d. Nowhere is there a command of Jesus to ordain.
- e. Nowhere are episkopoi (bishops) ordained.
- f. Nowhere are episkopoi described as ordaining.”

According to Osborne, “the word *priest* represented the sacrificial priesthood of the temple, not the discipleship of Jesus-infused ministry. Jesus himself is called priest in Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, though Paul says, ‘it was not Christ who glorified himself in becoming high priest’ [Hebrews 5:5];...Peter himself sees the priesthood as embedded in the discipleship of Jesus. ‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.’ [First Peter 2:9] The historical record requires some modification of the traditional Catholic notion that Jesus directly and explicitly instituted the Catholic priesthood at the Last Supper. . . . Jesus’ institution of the sacraments is implied and/or included in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, in his gathering of disciples, and in the special signifi-

cance he accorded the Last Supper which he ate with his disciples . . . . The priesthood as we have come to know it represents a fusion of different roles and ministries which are to be found in the New Testament churches. It is not even clear, for example, that anyone in particular was commissioned to preside over the Eucharist in the beginning . . . . There is no explicit mention that any of the Apostles presided over the Eucharist. Indeed, there is no compelling evidence that they presided when they were present, or that a chain of ordination from Apostle to bishop was required for presiding. Someone must have presided, of course, and those who did so presided with the approval of the community.”

Osborne makes an excellent argument to answer the question, “by whose authority, and concludes it is definitely not by Jesus’ or God’s authority. God can and will call whomever God chooses. Would the Roman Catholic Church cease to be Catholic if women were accepted to the priesthood? Is the church acting in good faith in what it believes Jesus would have done? How far is the Roman Catholic’s male hierarchy willing to go in order to preserve its all-male priesthood? Will excommunication of all women priests and all male priests that support and ordain them be enough? How many lives of called, spirit-filled, highly educated women, and their families and supporters are the magisterial office of the church willing to sacrifice to keep women far from the altar? And on whose authority is the Roman Catholic Church really acting? Can the Vatican with its magisterial officials say with 100% certainty that God will not and cannot call a woman to the ordained ministry of the priesthood within the Roman Catholic Church? If the answer is affirmative, then God ceases to be God. If the answer is no, then it is time for the Vatican to acquiesce to God’s authority, making room for the movement of the Spirit through God’s anointed women.

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## Book Reviews

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Reviewed by Marian Ronan

Mark Massa SJ is dean of the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College and the author of several previous books on American Catholicism. He has also been teaching for many years, and *The American Catholic Revolution* suggests that he's good at it. His book is clear and engaging. As we approach the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, Massa reminds us of some significant aspects of the Catholic 1960s and clarifies some others.

The basic argument of *The American Catholic Revolution* is that the really important thing that happened during the Catholic '60s—extending, according to Massa, from 1964 to 1974—is that American Catholics acquired “historical consciousness.” That is, we moved from a static world-view to the realization that “everything changes, and that historical events and figures need to be contextualized within their specific times and cultures in order to be understood” (xv).

Massa begins not with the opening of Vatican II but with the 1964 implementation in U.S. parishes of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Before this, most Catholics, we learn, assumed that what they did in church was timeless, but the changes in the liturgy made them consider the relevance of Catholic symbols. The subsequent liturgy wars were less about worship than about “change itself.” The pre-Vatican II liturgical writings of Rev. Frederick McManus, especially in the magazine *Worship*, illustrate this thesis. McManus's “deft historical contextualization of the new liturgy within the evolving tradition of the Western Church allowed American Catholics to see in the Council and its reforms their place in a long history of reform” (25).

Two chapters on *Humanae Vitae* also illustrate Massa's point. Though the encyclical may seem to have been about sex, or contraception, what it really did, simply by suggesting that the church's position on contraception might change, was to further incorporate historical consciousness into U.S. Catholicism. The expulsion of the Immaculate Heart Sisters of Los Angeles from canonical status by Cardinal McIntyre in 1970—the largest group of nuns to be “exclaustrated” in the history of the American church (82)—provides another instance of this shift to historical consciousness. The Vatican II mandate that religious congregations return to their historical charisms led to unintended consequences far beyond the institution's ability to envision—or control. The witness of the Catonsville Nine—“Dan Berrigan and his faithful cohort” (117)—against the Vietnam War similarly undercut the rigid, culturally assimilated American Catholic vision of the world with “the dangerous (implicitly historical) memory of Jesus” (123).

This argument culminates in a chapter on the work of Jesuit theologian and cardinal, Avery Dulles, “arguably the most visible and unarguably the most honored American Catholic



theologian by the end of the twentieth century” (130). Massa focuses his attention especially on Dulles's book *Models of the Church*, which was published in 1974. For Massa, Dulles' brilliant presentation of multiple models of the church is the fullest embodiment of the shift to historical consciousness and its law of unintended consequences, one that far transcends the limited perspective of “conservatives” and “liberals.” As a result of all these developments, and especially Dulles' theology, Massa concludes, the consciousness that everything changes, even the church, can never be explained away again. After 1974, it will be increasingly difficult to defend church teaching by appealing to timeless, static categories (158-159).

As I said, Massa's book is clear and well written. It's easy to imagine it being widely used in undergraduate courses on American Catholicism. This would be a pity, though, because *The American Catholic Revolution* is an example of what I have taken to calling the “feminism is so over” genre of Catholic books. What do I mean by this?

To begin with, Massa just plain doesn't say very much about women. There are thirteen women's names and groups in the index to sixty-nine men's. Massa would perhaps respond that this period—from 1964 to 1974—was well before the feminist movement catapulted women into positions of leadership, and so fewer women than men made noteworthy contributions to the “Revolution.” And of course, he does devote one chapter to women—the exclaustration of the Los Angeles IHMs—and says some very nice things about their contributions to that revolution.

But beyond the IHMs, the women Massa chooses to include are at best odd, if not downright insulting. One is Janet Smith, who edited an historically sophisticated volume on why *Humanae Vitae* was right; another is Anne-Marie Kirmse, a Dominican Sister who served as Avery Dulles' *research assistant* for twenty years.

Now wanna hear the names of some of the Catholic women Massa doesn't mention? Sister Mary Luke Tobin, for one, though surely her presence at Vatican II gave U.S. Catholic historical consciousness at least a tiny shot in the arm. Then there's Rosemary Radford Ruether, whose 1974 *Faith and Fratricide* applies historical consciousness to a particularly sticky aspect of the Catholic tradition. But most astonishing of all is that Massa never once in *The American Catholic Revolution* mentions Mary Daly, whose 1968 book, *The Church and the Second Sex*, marked the beginning of U.S. Catholic feminism. But maybe these women are all just “liberals” transcended by Avery Dulles' brilliant pluralism.

It's not fair to criticize somebody based exclusively on what they didn't write, though. So let's look at what Massa does say about women. Take for example, the subtitle of Chapter

1: “A Brief History of Catholic Time: Miss Havisham’s House.” Miss Havisham, you may recall, is a character in Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, a rich jilted maiden lady who spends the rest of her life getting even, a *frozen malevolence* expressed by all the clocks in her mansion having stopped. Massa is drawing here on a quote from Garry Wills’s *Bare Ruined Choirs*, in which Wills not only compares the “lying eternity and arranged air of timelessness” of pre-Vatican II Catholicism to an embittered spinster, but also to “Mae West’s vestmented and massive pose.” Wills compares a male-dominated monarchic institution to two extraordinarily repellent women, and Massa chooses to start his book by quoting Wills in full.

Then there’s Massa’s treatment of Elizabeth Johnson. Toward the end of his paean to Avery Dulles, Massa holds forth on how the theology of Thomas Aquinas is more in sync with historical consciousness than rigid pre-Vatican II neo-Thomist theologians realized. An example of this is the way in which some unidentified Catholic feminists started translating Thomas’s phrase “Qui est” as “She who is,” a translation that is, we are reassured to learn, “both grammatically correct and in line with Thomas’ argument...” (144). Then, in a footnote, Massa writes, “See, for example, Elizabeth Johnson’s brilliant and prize-winning work, *She Who Is...*” (185).

This, I submit, is Massa’s acknowledgment of Catholic feminist theology. The phrase “She who is” is an example of Aquinas, and a book by a colleague with whom Massa served for many years in the theology department at Fordham, is an example of this example. (Don’t be taken in by his calling Johnson’s book “brilliant”; he says it in a *footnote*). This from a guy who quotes Garry Wills repeatedly and writes more about Cardinal McIntyre in the chapter on the IHMs than about the nuns themselves.

I would offer Massa’s chapter on the IHMs, in fact, as the third stunning example of the sexism of *The American Catholic Revolution*. It’s all well and good to be grateful that Massa includes a chapter on women in his book. But let’s be clear: the story of the Los Angeles IHMs is a story of domestic abuse transposed to the ecclesiastical level. Yet a member of the male celibate clergy uses it as the one and only treatment of Catholic women in his entire volume.

It’s not as if there weren’t other Catholic women who embodied historical consciousness during the period Massa examines. How about the Catholic Sisters who marched at Selma in 1965? How about the Leadership Conference of Women Religious whose Sisters’ Survey of 1965-1967 documented change among 139,691 U.S. Catholic Sisters? How about Massa extending the “long decade of the ’60s” a year farther ahead and including the first meeting of the Women’s Ordination Conference in Detroit in 1975? But ending in 1975 would undercut the culminating significance Massa accords the work of his Fordham colleague and fellow Jesuit, Avery Dulles. For myself, hearing those speakers in Detroit call for the full equality of women in the church did more for my historical consciousness as a twenty-eight year old American Catholic than ten readings of *Models of the Church* ever could.

Some may argue that my documentation of sexism in Mark Massa’s *The American Catholic Revolution* takes nothing away from the validity of Massa’s thesis: the decade after Vatican II changed the American Catholic church forever, making it impossible for the church ever again to deny that things change. And here’s what I say to that: the abuse, exclusion and vilification of women in the Catholic church is a prime example of the paralyzed Catholic view of the world that Massa and others like to think ended with Vatican II. As *The American Catholic Revolution* demonstrates, for some of us, historical consciousness is still a long way off.

*Marian Ronan* is the EqualwRites book review editor.

## Did You Know? continued from page 3

not to ordain women. We call on you then to be truly traditional, to go back, far, far back, to the earliest Church, the one that formed and spread in early part of the First Century and acknowledge – dare we say celebrate? – the women who led it. Then make the giant, courageous leap of saying they should be part of the ordained leadership again. Do you imagine Jesus, the Jesus who ministered so ardently to the most marginalized, expects you to do any less?

• • •

On the lighter side, we think Philly’s archdiocese’s new *Phaith* magazine’s creative use of spelling is quite attention getting. Maybe we could use the same technique to get its attention focused on our cause. How’s this? “Phrustrated Phemale Pheminists Phight to Bring Ordination of All to Phruition. That’s only Phair, Isn’t It?”

• • •

Speaking of *Phaith*, the September issue includes a recipe to prepare when you invite your priest to your home for dinner. We figured, however, if it’s a woman priest you’re off the hook. She’ll be expected to do the cooking!

• • •

Thinking about starting your Christmas shopping early? We have a great suggestion. You’ll surely want to order the new teddy bear dressed in papal garb. It’s only \$300 and apparently approved by the Vatican. (We’re not kidding. According to the news, they’re selling briskly.) But a bear in clerical garb...hmmm. Is this really what you want your children snuggling with at night?

We’re not sure if it talks, but rest assured if it does, its pronouncements are infallible.

• • •

United Church of Christ has an extraordinary motto that is especially relevant for our Church in its current reactionary phase. It goes: “Don’t put a period where God has put a comma; God is still speaking!” Amen.

**Scripture Reflections**  
**First Sunday of Advent**  
**November 27, 2011**  
**Isaiah 64:6, Mark 13:33**

As I choose the readings for the First Sunday of Advent for this reflection, I realize this is the day for the introduction of the revised Missal for English speaking countries. For those of us helping to move the church forward to Vatican III, we feel many of the hierarchy trying to pull us backward to Vatican I, and I am sad. What to do?

I remember that prophets have much to do with Advent, so I read Isaiah's lament and, as I turn 65, I can understand it pretty well..."we have withered like leaves..." Then I consult some other favorite prophets and I hear Joan Chittister saying, "...You are the voice of today's church: speak loudly! You are the fire: burn brightly! ...This is no time for despair. This is no time to stop...This is the time to begin again!"

Next I read the Gospel and we hear the call to be watchful and alert. Theresa Kane builds on this idea and wants us to have a vision for the Catholic Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our call now, she believes, is to live with passion for social

justice, follow the Gospel mandate for solidarity with the poor, live out a discipleship of equals, and have a zeal for peace and non-violence. Theresa also reminds us that language that is exclusive, patriarchal and militaristic has no place in real community, in mission or in worship!

Then I remember that this is also Thanksgiving Weekend and the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of WOC. That conference began with the introduction of Mary Lynch, who dreamed and worked our gathering into existence. Nadine Foley said that she wanted us all to meet Mary, so that we would know the power of one questioning woman! I am not sad anymore.

I return to Joan for one last Advent piece of advice..."Let love direct you." May it be so.

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

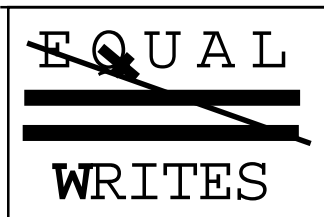
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