

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.*

**Women Deacons
Yes! No. Maybe?**
By Ellie Harty

Back in May of this year, there were sparks firing thanks to Pope Francis' agreeing to appoint, or more accurately reappoint, a commission to study, or more accurately re-study, whether or not women have historically served, and, therefore, might again serve, as deacons in the Catholic Church. The complicated weavings and punctuations inherent in my first sentence give you an idea of how complicated and punctuated, in so many ways, this study was likely to be.

Nevertheless, there was a burst of excitement and, dare I say, hope, then and now, for more equality and inclusion of women in the leadership and in all of the sacraments of the Church. There was also much dissention on the question. Perhaps you followed it; perhaps not. In case you did not, I would like to make a modest attempt to summarize some of the most prominent writers and speakers. I hope this will inspire all of us to say more, for as *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)* columnist, Jamie Manson in the May 19, 2016 issue challenged, "...we must not be afraid to let our prophetic voices rise up about it. The lives of countless women and the future of the church itself depend upon it."

Three of the writers I am citing gave histories of the roles of deacons in the church and Church, including Phyllis Zagano, a senior research associate at Hofstra University who has not only extensively studied the history of the diaconate but was cited by the other two. Zagano pointed out that the International Theological Commission (ITC) in 1997 affirmed in a written document that "history supports the argument that women could be sacramentally ordained." That document, needless to say, was never published. A new ITC in 2002 reexamined the issue and concluded "deaconesses" are not the same as deacons and reaffirmed that the priesthood and episcopacy are separate from the diaconate. It did, however, leave the question of whether or not women should be deacons to the "ministry of discernment which the Lord has left to his church."

Mary Hunt, in *Religious Dispatches* May 17, 2016 concluded "left to his church" meant "to the clergy," a veritable dead end for women. She noted that lay men, of course, were allowed to be ordained in the "restored diaconate" of the modern age as early as 1967. Women were not. They did, however, have an interesting side role. Married men could be ordained only if their wives consented, fair enough, but these wives had to have, according to the document, a "blameless Christian life which will neither impede nor bring dishonor on

her husband's ministry." Moreover, married men had to have shown "they are ruling well their own household" (in other words, holy patrimony!), and, although wives were encouraged to take the same diaconal training, they were "permitted only to carry their husbands' stoles in the procession leading to the men's ordination" (and probably launder them afterward).

The far more distant past, however, is supposed to be informing the present discussion. Phyllis Zagano, who is the only Western Hemisphere representative to the current commission, summed up that past history in an August 10, 2016 *NCR* article: "Were (women) ordained in ceremonies identical to those used for men? Yes. Was that always the case? Who knows? Did their ordination include the epiclesis – the calling down of the Holy Spirit – and laying on of hands? Yes. Did they have the same tasks and duties of men deacons? No. They had some. But neither did men deacons share their tasks and duties, including anointing ill women and those newly baptized." She concludes: "History alone cannot decide this. One hopes the Holy Spirit is in the details."

For all of us, it may depend on how and where we see the Holy Spirit emerging in those details. The *New York Times* on May 24, 2016 published a lively debate between Christopher Hale, a columnist for *Time* on faith and executive director of Catholics United for the Common Good, and Dawn Eden Goldstein, who has a canonical doctorate in sacred theology and is the author of *Remembering God's Mercy*. Hale argued in favor of women as deacons in the Catholic Church, albeit with the same roles as current male deacons, "able to baptize, preside at marriages and funerals, and preach homilies during Mass." He declared: "The people of God need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ preached from the lived experience of more than half its members." He also anticipated the "slippery slope" argument - that ordaining women deacons would inevitably lead to ordaining women priests - by asserting that deacons are not "mini-priests" because they are not allowed to act as "persona Christi" at the Eucharist. He saw them rather as having the tough job of interacting with people, especially the poor and sick in their joys and sufferings, and concluded, "as the old adage goes, when you have a tough job, give it to a woman."

Dawn Goldstein centered her argument on agreeing with Pope Francis that "Catholic women must be valued, not clericalized" and on this basis rejected ordaining women as deacons. Her reason centers around power: "As a woman, I believe with Francis that, when both clergy and laity think the clerical office means power rather than service, the answer is not to upend the sacramental system by ordaining women. The an-

continued on page 2

WOMAN DEACONS *continued from page 1*

swer is rather to dissociate Holy Orders from unholy ambition...”.

Christopher Hale agreed that clericalism is an affront to the spirit of the Gospels and creates an unjust power dynamic but disagreed with her construing this as what women called to the diaconate want. Instead, “it’s about allowing women to more effectively serve God’s holy and faithful people. It’s about allowing those same people of God to experience in a consistent way the wise and fruitful pastoral experience of more than half the members of our apostolic faith.”

To make her final point about women’s not needing Holy Orders to matter in the Church, Dawn Goldstein went back even further to explain women’s roles in the Church: “It is true that Mary Magdalene was the church’s first evangelist, but not as a deacon – as a laywoman! Clothed in Christ, she exemplifies Vatican II’s teaching that the laity is called to bring Jesus into every sphere of life. It would be a loss, not a gain, if we dressed her up in a clerical collar and black socks.”

Hah, says Mary Hunt, in her aptly titled *Religious Dispatches* article cited previously, *Pope Francis Has Painted Himself Into A Corner on Women’s Deacons*, this is exactly the corner Pope Francis has painted himself into. The clericalism he fears so much would only be exacerbated by ordaining women as deacons, but if he opts for “blessing” rather than ordination, he risks being seen as another patriarch “keeping women in their place.” Hunt sees the real issue, in fact, as ordination versus blessing as the way to diaconate. Men, of course, are ordained. She asks if women will be, too, or will they be “siphoned off into a spurious order of deaconesses who have title but no authority.” Deaconettes, one other author labeled this group.

In her article, *It’s Time to Be Honest About Women Deacons*, Jamie Manson sees little hope for even beginning to right the injustice women have suffered in the Church through the creation of a diaconate of women under Pope Francis. In fact, this issue has only “expanded the myth of Francis’ revolutionary attitude toward women.” In his statements to the group of women religious last May, Pope Francis, she argued, still emphasized complementarity, the idea that God created men and women differently and, as such, desires different roles and purposes for them in church and family. He still reasserted that, at the Mass, the priest presides in the person of Jesus Christ and a woman’s body negates the possibility of her ever doing so. He still reiterated the idea of the Church as a woman married to Jesus Christ and said a “woman’s consecration makes her the very icon of the Church and icon of Our Lady. We men cannot do this...” thus, once again, making women special -because of our bodies - but unequal - because of our bodies. Manson concluded “Francis’ theological imagination makes it impossible for women to achieve equal decision-making power and sacramental authority in this church. And it’s time we faced it.”

Positively or negatively, at least the issue is being discussed. Maybe, as inadequate as it is, this is the real hope. As Mary Hunt noted: “What surprised some people was the frankness of the discussion. The tone, perhaps more than the content, is

what is new. Women expect to be taken seriously and even popes have to listen...” She continued, “even in Rome there is now a dim realization unto healthy fear of women’s growing confidence and expectations of justice.” Phyllis Zagano had more confidence in Francis: “I cannot tell you how things will be resolved, or when. I can only say that it appears Pope Francis will make a decision. I genuinely believe his decision, whatever it is, will be the right one.” Let’s hope so. To requote Jamie Manson, “the lives of countless women and the future of the church itself depend upon it.”

Ellie Harty is a co-editor of *EqualWRites*.

A Thanksgiving Greeting to Our Readers

To our faithful readers, no matter how you are enjoying this newsletter, whether it’s the hard copy that came in the mail or at our website sepaowoc.org, we express a heartfelt “Thank you.” After all, it is that time of year when most people reflect on the blessings of the previous year. But, honestly, we have gratitude all year long—every time we receive a donation from our readers and patrons!

If you continue to value and support what we do, we ask for your ongoing consideration. Without you, SEPAWOC cannot possibly continue to exist or to publish our newsletter, three times a year. We will not be sending another request for funds at the end of this year as many organizations do, but we ask you to please keep us in mind when you make your year end donations. As you probably already know we are a 501c3 tax exempt organization.

And don’t forget that you can make a donation to us if you do your Christmas shopping on Amazon Smile where SEPAWOC can be designated to receive 0.5% of your total purchase.

The link is <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/23-2712266>.

Editorial Staff of *EqualWRites*

A Publication of SEPAWOC

Editors: **Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan**

Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan, Marian Ronan**

WHO IS MISSING FROM THE COMMUNION TABLE?

By Amy Blumenshine

The mood was celebrative as we heard the progress made in Roman Catholic/Lutheran¹ accords presented for vote at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Long past were the deaths and destruction of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648.) Still in the memory of many of those gathered at the assembly, however, were serious hurts from Lutheran/Catholic conflicts. Couples in love were forbidden to marry and prejudice fueled family splits and political wrongs, carrying a handy excuse for hatred and exclusion. Many knew of offense and hurt given at funerals or weddings due to exclusion.

Over the last 50 years, however, international and regional Lutheran-Catholic dialogues have been progressing. A Lutheran/Catholic task force gathered up thirty-two agreements on concepts that formerly divided us, produced a document, and our ELCA assembly was being asked to affirm the work.² The initiative and study report is titled “Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist” in recognition of this particular stage of the journey to full communion—neither the beginning nor the culmination, but a journey away from hostility towards communion (The document can be read at <http://www.elca.org/declaration-on-the-way>). The over-arching goal is nothing less than that of the sharing of the Good News—in particular not letting long standing feuds undercut our response to the needs of the world.

I was part of the 960 specially selected Lutheran parishioners and church leaders gathered in official assembly in New Orleans, August 8-13, to vote on official ELCA business. As we listened to the careful presentation, and perused the book of agreements, we were aware of the sorry past history of conflict and impressed with the significance of the agreements prepared by the long, hard, and faithful work of many joint Lutheran-Catholic groups. The mood was cooperative; the questions from the assembly floor prior to the vote primarily sought information.

Then my Bishop, Ann Svennungsen of the Minneapolis Area Synod, rose to speak. Addressing the dais of dignitaries in the darkened hall as the lights and cameras made her 20 feet tall on the video projection screens, she dared to bring up, in a very humble manner, “that which cannot be named” – the ordination of women. “I am so profoundly grateful for this work and deeply hopeful about our future conversation. I am also the bishop who sits on the task force to develop a social statement on justice for women. I am asking how can we further the conversation as we look at half of the human population, women and girls, who might be considering how God is calling them to serve in the church, and how we might enable all of God’s people to be able to speak the good news as priests and pastors as bishops, or perhaps even as cardinals or a pope. I speak with humility and respect and a deep desire for this conversation to continue and ask as your sister in Christ, how I might, how we might, be helpful in this conversation that we so want to have.”

Women from the “Declaration” team rose to field Bishop Ann’s question. One noted that the document itself on page 100 lists the ordination of women as one of the remaining differences, a point for future conversation, and that the document commits us to further conversation on that topic. They also made it clear that while the issue is a “delicate” one in the Catholic Church, it’s not something that ELCA Lutherans would give up.

As a Lutheran deacon, who also was once deemed unfit for ordination because of being a woman, I was struck by the bizarreness of the current circumstances. Back in those days of mutual exclusion we leaned heavily on each other. We Catholic/Lutheran women tended to work seamlessly together on Women Church Convergences and other religious reform initiatives. From then to the current time, brilliant and inspired Catholic women provided thinking and books which Lutherans used to advance enlightenment about the nature of God, of ministry, and of gender, as well as a banquet of diverse social justice and mystical concerns.

Now I was sitting in a churchwide assembly chaired by our national Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the elected leader of the ELCA. Gender balance was used in the selection of the voting members to the Assembly. My own synod’s Bishop Ann and a set of other remarkable women clergy were among those leading the churchwide development of prioritized initiatives to promote gender justice, to prevent gender-based violence, and to protect children.

Despite the great yearning for Christian unity and the end to painful division, and amidst the crying need for “all hands on deck” to deal with the crises of our times, the official Catholic rejection of ordaining women was hard to understand and seemed, frankly, absurd. We were told that although the Catholic Church recognizes women ordained pastors as fully recognized within the Lutheran tradition, the Catholic Church does not consider itself authorized to ordain women. The document states: “Agreeing that ministry is not the personal possession of the minister or to be claimed as a right, both Catholics and Lutherans believe that the church helps to call forth, nourish, test, and confirm the vocations of those who are to be ordained. Both Catholics and Lutherans have changed over time in their practices concerning who can be ordained.”

As both Catholics and Lutherans spoke with enthusiasm in anticipation of sharing the Eucharist, I imagined them speaking about accepting the full partnership and authority of women. (See News Conference <http://livestream.com/elca/events/5829763/videos/132491937>.) Imagine with me that these statements, made about moving towards Lutheran/Catholic unity, were instead about the full inclusion of women’s gifts: “I can’t wait for this day, which won’t be a long time in coming I’m sure, when we can share this chalice together ... We share a holy yearning, to be at one table again... We have work to do; the world is waiting for us. What a joy it will be for us to share that wonderful ministry together...” One young woman—forceful—wanting to go forward, said, “I think it’s going to move,... The people want it, the people want it, and that’s going to be the difference... We saw their reaction, the tears in their eyes; this has been family dividing... Ours is a narrative of reconciliation and hope, there’s a hunger for that... We want more unity between us.”

continued on page 5

SINGING A NEW CHURCH INTO BEING

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

Ten years ago I was ordained a Roman Catholic Woman Priest on a boat in Pittsburg, Pa. July 31 was a hot and heady day and the enormity of what we were about to do filled all of us ordinands with both excitement and trepidation. This was a day we and many others had anticipated for thirty years - the ordination of women in the Catholic Church, the first ordination on U.S. soil. Family, friends, and the media packed the boat as we joyfully processed in to the hymn "All Are Welcome" and processed out to "Sing a New Church" (into being.) For the first time in many lives, the words of these two hymns were literally true. All things seemed possible that day in spite of the ongoing repressive Catholic environment. At long last, I believed, people could have that new church so anticipated by members of the Catholic reform movement - if they wanted to.

Of course, all of us expected naysayers. The last three popes and their appointed bishops have done their work well. Claiming to know the mind of Jesus, these men misinterpret scripture and teach that the only real priesthood is an all male priesthood. This, they claim, is Jesus' plan for all eternity, a statement of breathtaking hubris that they have bequeathed to a large number of Catholics who then feel obliged to act as enforcers of episcopal will.

And so, a small number of protestors lined the shores the day of our ordination, shouting and gesturing with signs. These visible protestors were later joined by too many and far too cruel, anonymous writers of uncharitable screeds who lobbed nasty email bombs, threats, and ad hominum attacks at us women priests after our ordination. Fulminations from the cardinal archbishop of Philadelphia and some brother bishops followed a couple of years later by a Vatican announcement that we women priests had "excommunicated ourselves," just like women used to get themselves pregnant without benefit of man, further poisoned what passed for Catholic dialogue. Hate poured from the computer keys of allegedly faithful Catholics into my computer inbox. Sadly, Pope Francis' mercy talk has not stopped these disturbing practices.

Enough of that, even though it needed to be said because it is part of my ten year journey. Some things are not changing any time soon, and I have come to accept that. I've found that it's best to move on, because my ordination has made my life more positive in so many ways.

As I came to regularly break open the word and preach the gospel on a regular basis, I really came to appreciate the omnipresence of the good news in the world. A lot of truly wonderful things have happened in last ten years. First of all, more than two hundred women priests have been ordained in the United States, Canada, Columbia, South Africa, and Europe. Many of these priests pastor intentional Eucharistic communities that are completely free from institutional control. Thus, the persistent gender violence that is part and parcel of even the most liberal of Catholic parishes who are forced to use painful sexist language during mass, who must enforce

the ban on women at the altar, and who continue to prohibit women from preaching, even when they believe that the policy is both wrong and sinful, is absent from these communities. This freedom is reflected in the use of non-sexist worship language as well as the empowerment of all women- and all men- by virtue of their baptism as priest and prophet who become active participants in the liturgy which is, after all, the work of the people.

My community, St. Mary Magdalene, has been in existence since 2007. Members of St. Mary Magdalene left their once beloved parishes for a variety of reasons. For some, the sexual abuse scandal and its cover up drove them away. For others, the church's ongoing treatment of both women and gay people made remaining in a traditional Catholic parish unpalatable. For others, the use of sexist language during mass was like running one's fingers down a chalkboard.

At St. Mary Magdalene, people are safe from the hierarchy and their misguided and hurtful teachings. They are free from jarring sexist language that detracts from their worship experience. As equal members of the community, they are free to comment on the scripture readings after the homily. They are free to lift up personal prayers for family members and friends during the petitions, to offer up the gifts of the community at the Offertory, and to pray the words of institution along with the priest which makes the Body of Christ palpable in our midst. The good news is that The Community of St. Mary Magdalene belongs to the community and no outside force can prescribe a ritual that does not feed us nor can it shut us down.

The priests are free as well, free to write and use beautiful and life giving liturgical prayers minus clunky language, free to substitute readings from scripture about women that are never read in parishes under the aegis of the institution. (Romans 16, I Corinthians 19, Exodus 1:15-17, II Kings:14-20, Numbers 27:1-7, to name a few) and free to preach about marriage, childbirth, child rearing, and family life - all from first-hand experience.

Because of people who were willing to leave the comfort of their institutional parishes and become members of St. Mary Magdalene, forming a new beloved community, the parish is fully functioning and can provide all of the sacraments, just like any institutional parish. In addition, St. Mary Magdalene

continued on page 5

St. Mary Magdalene Community
Drexel Hill United Methodist
600 Burmont Road • Drexel Hill, PA 19026
Sunday Mass at 9:00am
Epworth United Methodist Church
501 Morgan Avenue • Palmyra, NJ 0806
Sunday Mass at 11:30am
New Jerusalem Community
Wilmington, DE
Sunday Liturgy:
For information contact Eileen at 267-258-6966

WHO IS MISSING *continued from page 3*

At the press conference about the Declaration, the Rev. John W. Crossin, OSFS, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, was asked how to promote unity between Catholics and Lutherans at the parish level. He observed, "This is a community waiting to participate... They might just be waiting for an invitation." Both Lutheran Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Catholic Bishop Denis J. Madden spoke of the benefit of Pope Francis' emphasis on developing a culture of dialogue. As Bishop Madden explained, "This is a perspective that lets you realize that the other person has something important to say, and that the other person has something that you should hear."

Who is missing from this picture? May the Holy Spirit act as She has so many times, and blow the cobwebs from the brains of our Catholic brothers in Christ to move our churches forward to full inclusion of women's gifts and callings to ministry and authority. Wouldn't that be a great way to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017?! We have work to do together!

Amy Blumenshine, MSW, MART (Religion and Theology), and PhD, is a Diaconal Minister/Deacon called by the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA to address the suffering of veterans and their families. She is a 1974 graduate of the Semester at Grailville, once lived in Philadelphia, and has enjoyed lifelong nurturing with the feminist spirituality movement – including *WomenChurch Convergences*, *Re-Imagining Conference and Community*, and *WATER*. Currently she is addressing the overlap between the war and rape systems.

¹ About Lutherans: The ELCA is the largest (3.7 million) denomination of Lutherans in the U.S., but there are about 40 others. Some, like the ELCA, but not all, affiliate with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) which sets standards on being Lutheran. All have their own governing principles. Most, but not all, ordain women. Gender justice is a current priority both at the LWF and the ELCA, but the journey is far from culmination. The ELCA is already in full communion partnership with the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian, Episcopal, Moravian, and United Methodist churches. Among other features, this indicates that clergy can serve interchangeably.

² The 32 Agreements had been unanimously affirmed by the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which commended the Declaration on the Way to Cardinal Kurt Koch (in Rome), president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, for further reflection and action. The text has been offered by the ELCA as a gift shared with the Lutheran World Federation for consideration by the member bodies.

SINGING A NEW CHURCH INTO BEING

continued from page 4

has produced three additional priests who preside at satellite communities in Delaware and New Jersey. Wonderful things happen when all members of the People of God are free to answer the call of the Holy Spirit.

When I walked aboard that ship in Pittsburg ten years ago, I had no idea where I was going. All of us were pioneers and only God knew our destination. But, I had a sneaky suspicion that She expected us to do something new and different, something exciting. Based upon the events of the last decade which exposed a long history of clerical sexual misconduct and the lack of pastoral care demonstrated by the wholesale parish closing across the nation, I think that She expected us to create a very new model of priesthood and in the end, a new way of being church.

For me, the people aboard the packed ship Majestic did sing a new church into being ten years ago on that hot July day ten years ago. I was working in my garden one day, my favorite way of doing prayer, and realized that God wanted me to scoop up and care for the people who were cast aside and marginalized by institutional intransigence and mean-spiritedness. The new church would be different from the old church in many ways, some of which I have already mentioned. In addition, we would be small. We would exist outside of the pale. Some people might not like what we are doing and criticize us. But our loving God, who welcomes everyone to sit at the table She has prepared, would continue to send Her grace, pressed down and overflowing into our laps.

And so She has. Amen.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco, RCWP is co-pastor of the *St. Mary Magdalene Community*.

Community of the Christian Spirit

Committed to peace and social justice,
CCS welcomes you to join in our Sunday
morning celebrations, liturgies
in the Roman Catholic tradition which
explore Scripture and contemporary readings.

For information, call Roberta Brunner or Margaret McLaughlin, (215) 572-5623,
or write P.O. Box 353, Abington, PA 19001

BOOK RECOMMENDATION

My Journey to Freedom

The story of one woman's path into ordained priesthood in the Catholic Church

By Caryl Conroy Johnson

"I have written my story," Caryl Johnson assures us, "not in protest, but in gratitude. The pain and messiness of my journey has been a transforming fire that led me to follow a very personal, life-changing call. The freedom to experience God in people and ways that had been beyond my reach prior to ordination is a gift I greatly cherish and is an ever-unfolding journey."

In this profoundly delightful and delightfully profound book, Caryl Johnson describes her past and ongoing journey in all its suffering and all its joys as she travels from her beginnings as a sparkling, inquisitive Catholic school girl to her present as a vibrant, inspiring Catholic priest.

She tells about how she almost left the Church but, instead, studied, prayed, listened, read and finally decided: "I was in a love relationship with the church and knew the only way I could continue in this relationship was to forgive. So I did." She relates how she continued to discern, challenge, study more, listen more, pray more and sometimes suffer more. Eventually, however, she was able, peacefully but ardently, to confront the Church's injustices, to women especially, and answer an embedded call to serve in the priesthood herself.

Caryl Johnson takes us on her journey in this book, not only in words, but in myriad, multi-hued photographs of paths she has taken in the physical world. Some are stony, rough, steep, and difficult; some are dusty, dry and parched; some have sunlight alternating with shadow and darkness; some are crayoned in autumn leaves or bleached with winter snow; some are straight and some are twisted. All are beautiful.

Caryl's journey is the same. We invite you to take it with her.

You can purchase the book in softcover and e-book at Amazon.com. You can hear more of her story in an interview at <https://bit.ly/carylconroyjohnson>. You can meet her at the Saint Mary Magdalene Community which she is co-pastor.

The Editors

LUCILE MURRAY DURKIN SCHOLARSHIP For Women Seeking Priestly Ordination

The Women's Ordination Conference, with the financial support of Sheila Durkin Dierks and her family, is honored to offer a scholarship fund for undergraduate and graduate women beginning in the 2017-18 academic year to support their academic and spiritual path toward ordained priesthood.

Who is encouraged to apply? Women enrolled or accepted into undergraduate or graduate studies program at a Catholic-sponsored college or university are eligible. This scholarship is primarily directed to women who wish to be ordained Catholic Priests (including Ecumenical Catholic and Roman Catholic Women Priests). Secondarily it is open to women who are seeking priestly ordination in other denominations. To be eligible, the candidate must enroll or participate in at least one class or significant volunteer ministry of comparable scope that she believes would forward the discernment of her call to a life in ordained ministry.

Timeline: Completed applications must be received by April 15th, 2017. Awardees will be notified by June 30th, 2017.

Award Agreement: \$1,000.00 to be awarded annually.

Sheila Durkin Dierks has been an ally of SEPAWOC for many years, and this scholarship in honor of her mother expresses a vision of the future as well as the present. Sheila has been ordained and celebrates with two communities in Colorado. For more information on applying, go to www.womensordination.com/programs/scholarship.

Book Reviews

***The Other Catholics: Remaking America's Largest Religion* by Julie Byrne. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016. Hard-back, \$29.95; e-book, \$28.99. 390 pp.**

Reviewed by **Marian Ronan**

For many progressive U.S. Catholics, myself included, the years since the Second Vatican Council can seem remarkable, even groundbreaking. Eucharistic communities forming and welcoming all kinds of people—the divorced and remarried, LGBT Catholics, married priests. Not to mention increasing numbers of women priests and women bishops leading growing congregations.

In her new book, Julie Byrne, without dismissing the achievements of progressive Catholicism since Vatican II, brings to our attention Catholics who were making such changes well before Vatican II, and who continue to embody such changes today: the “independent” or “other” Catholics. Byrne is the author of the enormously engaging *O God of Players: The Story of the Immaculata Mighty Macs* (2003), made into a movie in 2009. And once again, in *The Other Catholics*, she brings an astonishing narrative drive to a wide range of little-known historical and contemporary ethnographic material. There’s nothing like a good story.

Byrne introduces the “Other Catholics” by telling us that the term was first used in the 1890 U.S. Census, when six Catholic churches besides the Roman Catholic Church were presented as options: a church that would evolve into the Church of Antioch, the main focus of her research; a church formed to protest the doctrine of papal infallibility; the Polish National Catholic Church; and three others. The Census continued to count independent Catholic jurisdictions until 1936. But because the Roman Catholic Church is a “behemoth of size and influence”—with members comprising a fifth of the U.S. population—not very many people are aware that there’s any other kind.

Byrne shows, however, that independent Catholic churches have exerted significant influence whether many people know about them or not. By “participating in common Catholic patrimony, remixing it with other traditions, and giving sanctuary to alternative practices, independent Catholicism serves as a catalyst, cavern, and clarifier of Catholicism as a whole,” and even of American religion more broadly.

In support of her thesis, Byrne traces the “lineage of western independent Catholicism.” from the galvanizing early eighteenth-century French missionary and bishop, Dominique Marie Varlet, who almost by accident started the independent Catholic Church of Utrecht; through the career of Joseph René Vilatte (1854-1929), the first independent Catholic bishop in America; to the lives of Patriarch and Matriarch Meri and Herman Spruit and their successor, Archbishop Richard Gundrey, who built the independent Catholic Church of Antioch in the United States. And along the way, Byrne includes many other amazing stories, about groups that split off from, merge with, and fertilize the Church of Antioch during its evolution. The reader comes away strongly aware that there have been big differences within Catholicism for a long time, and that practices like ordaining women, having married bishops, welcoming LGBT people, respecting personal experience and other seemingly contemporary advances

have, been practiced within Catholicism for a good while.

It would be hard to do justice to the portrait of independent Catholics that Byrne provides in this book, but several points stand out for me. One is how the Church of Antioch, and related independent groups, no matter how many differences emerge among them, remain faithful to certain Catholic characteristics: the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and ordination, and their stress on apostolic succession, which, it seems to me, replaces connection with Rome as a main source of authority. Another aspect of independent Catholicism of which I was totally unaware before reading *The Other Catholics* is the strong influence within it of mysticism and related traditions like theosophy, esotericism, and spiritual healing. There has been quite a bit beyond the Baltimore Catechism in some branches of Catholicism for many years.

Some groups that Byrne includes in the category of “independent” or “other” Catholics may or may not appreciate being thus categorized—Roman Catholic Women Priests, for example, some of whom delivered a petition to the Vatican not long ago. And I myself wonder a bit whether Byrne’s subtitle—“Remaking America’s Largest Religion”—is a bit too simple (though my experience is that publishers mandate titles with sales in mind more than accuracy). Perhaps “Helping to Remake America’s Largest Religion” would be a bit better.

These quibbles notwithstanding, it would be hard to overestimate the contribution that *The Other Catholics* makes to the conversation about the present and the future of Catholicism.

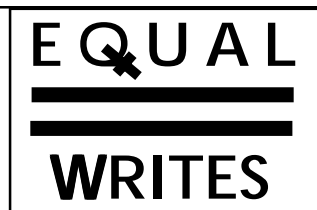
Marian Ronan is Research Professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary in Manhattan. The Apocryphile Press will publish her book, *Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail*, co-authored with Mary O’Brien, in 2017.

A Special Thanks To and For Marian Ronan

Marian has informed us that she is resigning as our book editor because she is writing a book of her own.

We were going to use this space to thank her and praise her for her witty, incisive, sparkling, intelligent, and inspirational articles, thought-provoking book critiques (See above!), and book edits for all these years. That, however, would have taken much more space than we have here. So, we decided not to do that.

We decided, instead, to treat this “resignation” as merely a “hiatus” from her writing, critiquing and editing for us. We decided, instead, to wait patiently, in joyful expectation, for the completion and publication of her new enriching, enlightening work...and, after that, for her return. We just cannot bring ourselves to let someone this invaluable go! Meanwhile, we thank you, Marian, and cheer you on.



SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

SEPAWOC
P.O. BOX 52046
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19115

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Philadelphia PA
Permit NO. 5892

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

SUBSCRIPTION: To begin or continue receiving *EqualwRites*, please send a contribution and your name and address to above address. We deliberately do not set a specific fee because we want people to feel free to contribute what they feel they can afford: \$5, \$10, \$15, or more. If that's really impossible for you, just send your name and address and we will start your subscription. When you join WOC as a national member, you do not automatically join us, so if you want to support both, you need to contribute to both.

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.

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 2017. Final deadline for submissions is February 15. Send to ellieharty65@gmail.com or mail to above address.

ADVERTISING: Advertising helps us support *EqualwRites* and helps you find people who support us. Our ad rates are \$25 for one issue, \$60 for three issues. To place an ad, contact mewhelan@comcast.net.

Scripture Reflections

January 1: Solemnity of Mary and World Day of Peace; Numbers 6:24-26: May God give you peace

By *Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.*

January 1, 2017 is the 50th celebration of the World Day of Peace, inspired by John XXIII and *Pacem in Terris*. This year Pope Francis, painfully aware that "piecemeal World War III" is being waged around the globe, has called for the focus to be on Non-violent Politics. Francis said that violence and peace are two opposite ways, but only peace allows real progress toward equal rights and dignity for all.

I have been drowning in the sexism, racism, and threatened and real violence I have seen and heard during this election season. I have been sad, angry, concerned, crazed and cannot go for any length of time without reading, watching cable, or searching out someone to talk with about it. This election has made me more prayerful as I say "God help us" so often. By the time you read this, you will know what happened on November 8th. May God give us peace.

Brother David Steindl-Rast shared this prayer for peace: Take all human violence, all human greed, injustice, hypocrisy and

lift it all with the strength of your heart into the stream of compassion and healing that pulsates through the heart of the world, that center in which all our hearts are one. Into this depth, let us silently sink our roots.

Since I last wrote this column, six people I love with all my heart are dealing with serious health issues, and I have turned seventy. These events have inspired me to make sure I say what is in my heart to those who have been blessings to me.

When I heard Joan Chittister, OSB speak about *Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope*, I told her I had been scarred by the struggle of working for women's ordination in the Catholic Church. I also said I had met and worked with wonderful people on this grand journey, and that we are grateful she courageously embraces and speaks out for the cause.

Our friend Mary just returned from India and shared *Namaste* with us... the Divine in me honors the Divine in you... to you, the *EqualwRites* community, who supports us and the cause and helps transform the struggle into hope... on this World Day of Peace: *Namaste*.

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