

	EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
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		<i>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.</i>

Helmut Schuller Visits Philadelphia On National Tour

By Mary Whelan

Helmut Schuller, Austrian reform priest, spoke at Sugarloaf in Philadelphia, on July 19, to an enthusiastic and welcoming crowd of 320. His topic: Catholic Tipping Point: A conversation with Fr. Helmut Schuller: Creativity, Courage & Conscience — Re-Imagining Church Governance and the Voice of All the Faithful. His tour was sponsored by national and local reform/renewal groups.

From the beginning of his presentation when he introduced himself, “I am standing here as a parish priest” this disarmingly gentle man (the N.Y. Times termed him a “mild rebel priest”) spoke as a firm, unrelenting advocate for Church reform that recognizes the needs and gifts of the entire community of the Church. He described the “tipping point” as the closing of parish communities, the base of the church, communities with Eucharist in the center, and which accompany the people through time. Of his initiative he said, “We (priests) must speak out and become advocates of people in the Church.” He spoke out against the hierarchy using Eucharist as an instrument of exclusion, of sanction. Regarding divorced Catholics: “We should invite them to come to us and help them in their lives. Vatican II has to go ‘into its time’—a modern civilization and practice companionship with the people of our time.”

“Vatican II rediscovered the dignity of the Baptized who are not just sheep without a voice. The people must be respected for their dignity, gifts and competence. But the leaders seem to be afraid of the laity.” He spoke about Pope Paul VI, who began *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamental*, a constitution for the Church in the late 60’s, as a consequence of recognizing the dignity of the people of God. It was soon discovered that this would be dangerous for the hierarchy and was buried by Pope John Paul II in the 80’s. Eventually the sex abuse scandal would surface as a problem which has at its root, abuse of spiritual authority.

In June, 2011, Schuller’s group issued the Appeal to Disobedience, in response to their understanding of the word “obedience” that the Church leaders have, i.e. when living in an absolute monarchy, obedience can become a problem when those calling for such obedience answer to no one. “We as priests thought we should take this provocative step.”

Fr. Schuller described how priests operate daily on two levels. Acting pastorally they deal with the needs of the faithful and in their decision making, their suffering and struggles.

On an official level they cannot acknowledge the unhealthy life that the Church is leading. This double life is distressing to many priests.

Seven points are addressed in the Appeal to Disobedience, beginning with a petition for church reform in every liturgy, denial of Communion to faithful of good will, preference of locally planned liturgies rather than priests performing multiple liturgies on Sundays and feast days, the Word of God being proclaimed by competently trained laity, parishes having a presiding leader when no ordained priest is present and admission of women and married people to the priesthood. These priests and deacons were asked by their Bishop to drop their appeal because it is an obstacle to reform. Their response: “We’ll discuss it when you drop the word ‘disobedience’.”

When asked what he would do if he were removed from the priesthood, Schuller replied that he and his parishioners had already discussed this possibility: “I will continue to be the minister to my parish.”

Re: married clergy and women’s ordination, his response was, “The arguments against are not theological but from the standpoint of tradition—fragile arguments from those who are afraid to change.”

Schuller spoke of the positive response of priests internationally including German, Swiss, French, U.S., Australian, Brazilian, African and Asian, though no Italians—yet! At the time we are publishing this issue, priests from six countries are meeting in Austria. “We want to address the most burning issue: the future of the communities. We want to be there for them, and their future is in danger from the shortage of priests,” Schuller, said in a telephone interview from the western town of Bregenz as the conference opened on October 11th.

Why was the visit and presentation by Schuller so welcome and so important? While the laity have been advocating for decades, the clergy have not been as united and as vocal, with the exception of a few who have spoken and often paid the price, such as Father Roy Bourgeois. Awhile back an article was written in *EqualWRites* about the new organizations of reform minded priests in Austria, Ireland and the U.S. It is important that laity and clergy be united in this endeavor. (That is why Helmut Schuller’s talk was so important to many who went to listen to him.)

Mary Whelan is co-editor of *EqualWRites*.

OPEN LETTER TO POPE FRANCIS FROM CATHOLICS AROUND THE WORLD

This September, the SEPAWOC Core Committee made the decision to add SEPAWOC as a signatory to this letter to Pope Francis. We quote the letter in part so that you know what we, as supporters of SEPAWOC, are requesting. Area #3 specifically reflects the “hopes and needs” of our organization. We hope you agree with our joining with other concerned groups and individuals to make these important points.

Dear Pope Francis and Brother Cardinals:

It is out of a deep concern for the Catholic Church, in the face of its many crises, that we, representing millions of Catholics from around the world, have collaborated in writing this letter. We are filled with hope that church governance will be discussed at your October meeting and we respectfully request that you give primary consideration to acknowledging the rights and responsibilities of the baptized to have a voice of influence in the decision-making of our Church.

Like you, we have experienced the catastrophic loss of trust in our Church, arising from the global revelations of Catholic clergy sexual abuse and hierarchical cover up. Abuses of power at the Vatican bank, as well as damaging disrespect and marginalization experienced by the laity, have caused many of our sisters and brothers to abandon Catholicism altogether. Our church seems unable to read the signs of the times and so handing on the faith to future generations has become ever more challenging.

In our understanding, what lies at the root of many of these problems is the destructive effects of clericalism. We support your desire, Pope Francis, to rid our Church of clericalism in order that we become a community of equals called, through our baptism, to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus. All Catholics have the right **and responsibility**, innately deriving from our baptism, to have an effective and deliberative voice in the decision-making of our Church. The full participation of the faith community is in accordance with the Gospel, the tradition of the early Church, and the vision of Vatican II.

To this end we have outlined five areas that reflect the hopes and needs of the *sensus fidelium*.

1. A Church that embodies the radical justice of Jesus in the world

We are inspired, Pope Francis, by your compassion for the poor and desire for social justice as well as your personal commitment to live more simply. We want to work, as sisters and brothers, to **build the reign of God on earth** - so that all people may live free from oppression, **war, unjust economic systems**, violence, hunger, poverty, and the degradation of God's creation. But our commitment to justice is compromised and often viewed as hypocritical because injustice exists within the Church itself. We hope for a time when all Catholics come to experience a joyfully renewed church that truly places **justice** and respect for the dignity and equality of every person at the heart of its lived mission.

2. A Church that welcomes open dialogue among its members

When speaking in Brazil, Pope Francis, you advised that “dialogue, dialogue, dialogue” is a cornerstone of all human progress, and we agree. The freedom of expression (including faithful dissent when required), freedom of reasoned inquiry, and the primacy of an informed conscience are vital to the health of our Church. We believe that prophetic women and men are continually calling us to engage the urgent theological, pastoral, social, and environmental questions of our time in new and inspiring ways. In this light, we recommend reinstating theologians, clergy and religious who, since Vatican II, have been censored and/or sanctioned for following their conscience. Secondly, as has been expressed by so many Catholics around the world, we believe that the Apostolic Visitation of US Women Religious and the investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious were unwarranted and unjust. Open dialogue cannot exist where fear of punitive action exists.

3. A Church that recognizes the fundamental equality of its members

Catholic teaching tells us that all persons have been created with equal dignity in the image of God. Therefore church structures must reflect this reality. Since all governance in the Church now rests exclusively with ordained male celibate priests, this excludes the vast majority of baptized Catholics. Therefore we recommend a canonical study of the feasibility of linking church governance to baptism rather than to ordination. With regard to ordained ministry, we recommend that identifying the call be based on individual and communal discernment of the candidate's gifts, spirituality, pastoral sense, and theological formation, rather than gender, sexual orientation, or state in life. We reject the sexist exclusion of women from full participation at all levels of the Church. Equally, it is unacceptable to deny our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters' access to full participation in every aspect of Church life and ministry. And it is unjust to ordain married male ministers from other denominations, while refusing to accept lifelong Catholic priests who have left the active ministry to marry. Further, divorced and remarried Catholics should not be withheld from full communion; their personal conscience in this matter should be respected.

4. A Church with greater participation of the baptized in governance:

Addressing the needs of our Church requires implementing collegial systems and structures with:

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Catholic Organizations for Renewal in Philadelphia

While national COR (Catholic Organizations for Renewal) continues to meet twice yearly, COR Philadelphia has not been active for a number of years. On August 22, interested individuals, representing local activist groups involved in Church renewal, met in an effort to be in solidarity with each other and to be a presence for change in the Church in Philadelphia. Representatives from Voices of the Faithful, Dignity, the Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church, Call To Action-Philadelphia, American Catholic Council, Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Council and Cathy Nerney, SSJ, who was instrumental in arranging for Father Helmut Schuller's visit to Philadelphia this summer, met. It should be noted that while COR Philadelphia has not had formal meetings recently, the groups named have been supportive in publicizing and cosponsoring programs.

There was a great deal of enthusiasm resulting from Father Schuller's visit, when he spoke to an audience of 320 on July 19th. This energy, they believed, could be used to galvanize Catholics who are ready to see change in the Church. While there are a number of initiatives afloat on a national level (see Letter to Pope in this issue of *EqualwRites*) interests of reform minded Catholics on a local level were discussed. Suggestions included attending the Archdiocesan Year of Faith events and engaging in dialogue with speakers. VOTF will invite two Pennsylvania representatives to speak on pending legislation regarding the reform of statute of limitation laws for prosecution of sexual abuse perpetrators. Their monthly first Friday witnesses outside of Archdiocesan offices at 222 North 17th Street continue.

One idea that particularly resonated with attendees for future action was to engage with young people, who could give insights into what they are looking for in the Catholic Church of the future. The second idea was to continue to study the concept of community and how it could be formed in a church that is changing radically because of parish closing as well as other multiple reasons, with ongoing concerns about the needs of those who are not being served, ministered to, not being able to celebrate Eucharist. One suggestion was to continue updating the list of Intentional Eucharistic Communities that have formed in the area.

COR Philadelphia plans to continue to meet on an ongoing basis.

Climate Change and Women's Ordination

By *Marian Ronan*

Since its inception, the women's ordination movement has had a single focus. Admittedly, national WOC has in recent years attempted to address its own racism. And WOC did stand up for the nuns—but the Vatican had condemned them, in part at least, because of their unretracted support for women's ordination. By and large, however, U.S. Catholic women's ordination activists work to get women ordained.

Although the St. Joan's International Alliance had addressed the question of women's ordination earlier in the twentieth century, women's ordination became an issue, for the most part, after the Second Vatican Council. Yet this was surely also the result of the second wave of feminism: months after the opening of the Council in 1962, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. *Commonweal* followed with a mildly feminist article by philosopher Rosemary Lauer that same year. And the year the Council ended, also in *Commonweal*, Mary Daly lobbed an opening feminist shot across the institutional church's bow.

For many of us soon-to-be Catholic feminists, however, another game-changer in the early 1960s flew pretty much under the radar: the month before the opening of Vatican II, naturalist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*. This study of the harmful effects of pesticides on the natural world, especially on birds, launched the environmental movement. By the 1990s, Rosemary Ruether, Carol Adams, and others were publishing eco-feminist theologies. But there's no entry for environment in the index of Jeremy Daigler's history of the Catholic women's ordination movement. Why would there be? What has climate change got to do with women's ordination?

The answer to that question is far different today than it would have been in 1975 when some of us gathered for the first Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit, or even in 2002 when the first Roman Catholic WomenPriests were ordained on the Danube. This is so because the effects of climate change are vastly clearer and more threatening now than they were then. There are now 50 more parts-per-million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than the 350-ppm upper limit that scientist James Hansen established in 2007. And Midwestern droughts, massive wildfires, and superstorms testify to that fact. As a leader of the U.S. Grail said at a recent meeting, climate change is now *the* moral issue of our time.

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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

Whispers and Groanings

By Mary Whelan

After reading "Shouts & Murmurs" in the October 7, 2013, issue of the *New Yorker* magazine describing a fictional phone call between the Pope and an imaginary Muriel Kesselman, my very active imagination took off as I fantasized about a possible telephone conversation between Pope Francis and our very own Archbishop Charles Chaput. Pope Francis was dubbed the "Cold Call Pope" by ABC news, having made at least a dozen spontaneous calls to the faithful.

I envision the phone call as such: Pope Francis rings Archbishop Chaput. "Well, hello, Charles." The very surprised Chaput would respond, "Why, Pope Francis, this is such an unexpected pleasure." Pope: "Well, Charles, it seems I need your opinion. You have probably heard that I am getting a positive response on my heartfelt comments since I became Pontiff, especially about the Church's mission of mercy and healing. However, there is one area that I just can't seem to get a grip on and that is the 'woman problem'. I just can't figure out what women want. I heard you were planning a program in Philadelphia to reach out to the women and thought I would pick your brain."

Archbishop Chaput responds, "We think we have something nice to offer the ladies. On December 7 the Archdiocese is holding a conference for Catholic Women: *The Feminine Genius: Every Woman's Gift*. We are going to address Catholic perspectives on current news and issues affecting women. We hope that we can help these women 'respond with an authentic feminine presence to transform every aspect of life and society.' As a matter of fact I am going to say the opening Mass and affirm the significance of this gathering. This conference will 'open[s] the door to the most beautiful kind of renewal, the kind that comes from an authentic feminine leadership in the family, in the community, in business, in education, in medicine, and in public life.' We have great speakers, six women and three men, speaking on topics such as the good news of sexuality and chastity by the father of six daughters, and a woman who will speak about the place of women in the family, the Church and the world. That last speaker is from Endow, (Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women) and will talk about our culture's desperate need for an authentic feminine presence to transform life and society. Oh, my, I see I have mentioned 'authentic feminine presence' and/or leadership at least three times. Hate to be redundant but it's written in our brochure so it must be important."

Pope Francis, "You have given me a lot to think about. Just to clarify one thing, I would ask if you think a conference would really do the trick? Will that be enough? What if this stirs up a hornet's nest, so to speak? What if some of these women start to agitate for authentic feminine leadership in the Church? What if it doesn't just end with a one-day meeting? From what I hear, some of them are asking for impossible things, like ordination and a role in church leadership."

Charles, "The thought crossed my mind, but I think I can keep a lid on this. So far I haven't had to have that conversation with anyone."

Pope Francis, "Well, I wish you luck with your conference. I have a feeling from my vantage point that this isn't a 'problem' that is going away anytime soon."

Fact vs. Fiction

I have to "confess" that I have mixed fact with fiction. The phone conversation is fictional. The conference isn't. I do not want to make light of it, as I am certain that the women and men who developed this program are sincere. On the website I read that they hope to address the fact that the contributions of women continue to be "overlooked, underappreciated and misunderstood". I heartily agree. I do not see any indication of breakout sessions in the workshop for discussion and I wonder what the "Q and A" will look like, if there is any.

There will be a Christmas market offered for some "fun shopping". Would there be the same offering if this was a conference for men? And by the way, would there even be such a conference for men with the same topics? So why a conference of women? And why now? It reminds me of the pastoral letter the bishops tried to write about women in the 80's which never came to fruition. I sat at one of the listening sessions which was to offer an opportunity for women to have input when I decided that nothing less than ordination would be acceptable. I asked then if there would be a comparable pastoral letter for men? I ask now if a conference is enough to placate us?

Why I am making such a big deal out of this event? This effort indicates to me that the "Church-men" still don't get it. It's too little, too late. Many women are beyond polite discourse and instruction on subjects we have researched, studied, read about, written about, dialogued about and understand. We want to move forward and take our place at the table. If women are credible and influential in the family, in community, business, education, medicine and public life as
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St. Mary Magdalene Community

Mass schedule

Every Sunday at 9AM

Drexel Hill United Methodist Church

McBurney Chapel

600 Burmont Rd

Drexel Hill, PA 19026

We have two satellites that meet on the second weekend of the month:

Saturday at St. Luke's UCC Church, 125 North Main St., North Wales, PA 19454 at 5PM.

Sunday at 10:30 AM at St. Luke/Holy Innocents Episcopal Church, 7001 Torresdale Ave. Philadelphia, PA 19135

Why the Woods Family Are Still Catholic

By *Laura Woods*

It was the first funeral since my father died, a cousin removed from me by generation and distance, and I felt a great obligation to attend bringing along a delegation representing his branch of the family tree. However, as I pleaded and bargained for a mass' worth of settled down, I wondered why in the world I brought anyone under the age of 18 with me. The funeral began, moved through familiar routines, challenging words, comforting rituals, and arrived at the moment when my eight-year-old shared communion with the 80-year-old devastated widower, and I had an answer for the next Sunday's whine of "Do I have to go?"

Yes, because if you didn't go, you'd be missing.

I will admit it is often my whining voice asking the question; well, asks it first, anyway.

While there may be a number of conflicts with Church any given Sunday, my fear that my children might believe I condone the choice to exclude women from priesthood was enough for me to research whether we needed to find a new spiritual home. It seemed better to bear the disappointment – or worse – of our extended family than to deprive them of the voices of women in their religious experience. Much better, it seemed, to avoid an education of: "Believe what I say, not what we do." But worship space after space would be a nice place to visit, but not home.

Our family learned a great lesson from the Boy Scouts of America. My oldest son begged for years to join, but, being another institution with a policy of discrimination in direct conflict with the world I want my children to be a part of, I refused him permission. But that felt like I was teaching him a lesson in righteous superiority when what I wanted to give him was the example of standing up for your beliefs. What gain was there in refusing my son of the gifts of the Scouts, and denying the Scouts the gifts of my son? So, I agreed to let him join but on the condition that he think about what a policy of exclusion means and a commitment to take actions to change it.

Our family carries that lesson with us into our Catholic Church. Our mere presence at that funeral made a difference. Our presence, enhanced with words and actions against exclusion and injustice, makes what we believe what we do. When my oldest son was baptized, the priest explained that what I was agreeing to was to give this child, while not precisely tangible, a sensory experience of faith and, with that, tools available for his use during those times when his faith breaks down. Those tools continue to sustain all of us.

Laura Woods is a writer, administrator at a local non-profit, and attends St. Vincent de Paul Church in Germantown.

Grace Filled

When I was a young man, I would sometimes remark, "I hope I can grow old gracefully."
Then I proceeded to become a drunk until the age of 55
I was definitely getting older...
But gracefully?

Now I am in my eighties.

Recently I spent a day with eight beautiful people.
We shared our spiritual journey;
There were tears, laughter, and a few more tears.
We ended with a real and loving liturgy,
I felt grateful ... and grace filled.

The next night I joined ten homeless people in a super market at an ice cream social.
I could feel the presence of Jesus.
The next day I went to the Catholic Worker Free Clinic.
For over an hour I was able to give homeless men and women a bottle of cold water...
And a listening ear.
I could feel the presence of Jesus.

The following day I left for Charlotte and the Isle of Palm to be with family and to rest.
I was overwhelmed with gratitude for my life.

I have grown older,
Maybe not as gracefully as I'd hoped.
But I'll settle for the world I have now
So fair, so full, of grace.

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THANK YOU! and, by the way, HELP!

In the spirit of the upcoming Thanksgiving Holiday, we want to give thanks to you, our loyal supporters, for helping us fund all of our projects, events, and especially our newsletter, *EqualwRites*, over all of these years. Our message of justice for all – and especially for women in the church – cannot fail... and won't if we keep making our case, championing our heroes, and praying.

Please help us continue by contributing \$25, \$15, \$10 or any amount so that we can keep informing, encouraging, inspiring, and publishing!

Thank you.

How “Sweetly Subversive” Should We Be?

By *Ellie Hart*

When I saw the title of a recent *New York Times* editorial (by Adam Grant, July 21, 2013), “Why Men Need Women,” my *EqualwRites* antennae perked up. We certainly could apply just the title alone to the church hierarchy especially, but to the whole church community as well. Maybe the article had some bright, new insights that might keep us motivated and encouraged in this seemingly endless struggle. So here goes.

The author cited research that suggested that men who grow up with sisters, and more importantly, who have daughters, become “gentler, more empathetic and more other-oriented.” This should be hopeful, I thought, because I’m sure most of our clerics did grow up with sisters. But then there was that pesky addendum: It was actually daughters who were the real key to men’s better understanding and relating to the cause of women’s equal rights - and rites. Alas, the persistent presence of the medieval notion of celibacy was rearing its damaging head again. This insight, though interesting, was really no help.

But how about this? Another cited study found that, by their nature, men in general go to more extremes than women. They are, in fact, “responsible for the lion’s share of the worst acts of aggression and selfishness” and “some of the most extreme acts of helping and generosity.” What tips them toward one or the other seems to be the interaction and influence of women in their lives. Now we were getting somewhere. The article went on to cite experiments in which children were put in mixed gender groups to problem solve. Each child was responsible for a part of the puzzle, all equally necessary to the final solution. Boys in mixed, versus homogeneous, groups became more respectful, caring, and receptive to everyone. No big surprise there – but certainly it encourages us to keep on trying to “lean in” as a way of having a more profound effect.

In the business world by now, the author went on to point out, we all recognize the bounty women bring: “When companies introduced women into their top management teams, they generated an average of 1 percent more economic value, which typically meant more than \$40 million.” That point alone should be music to Vatican ears. What is often overlooked, however, is the beneficial influence women have on the men around them, producing “increases in motivation, cooperation, innovation...” and for our cause I would add “appreciation”. With that in mind, I especially loved the author’s conclusion: “It’s often said that behind every great man stands a great woman. In light of the profound influence that women can have on men’s generosity, it may be more accurate to say that in front of every great man walks a great woman. If we’re wise, we’ll follow her lead.”

Okay, smaller steps than asking church leaders to follow women leaders, you might say, or you might point out that this is just more preaching to the converted. I was pointing that out to myself. Is there anything new here? Or really encouraging? Sometimes in my more desperate moments, I think, the discouraging can be more inspiring. Outrage can be such a powerful motivator, so I’ll give it a try.

In the September 15 edition of *The New York Times* was an

interview with Debora Spar, President of Barnard College and mother of three. The interview’s title was “Finding Satisfaction in Second Best”. I found just the title a bit worrying so I kept on reading. Spar has written a book, “Wonder Women: Sex, Power, and the Quest for Perfection” in which, among other more motivating recommendations for women I’m sure, she touts the virtue of “satisficing”. She clarified as follows: “To satisfice is to settle for something that’s second best... sometimes second best is really good, and second best is so much better than fourth best or worse.”

Now I understood she was talking about overworked executive mothers trying to do it all and do it perfectly, and she was recommending that their companies, families, and they themselves give themselves a break. Fair enough, I suppose. But I sincerely worry about any of us women – or the men standing with us – settling for less, no matter how tired and frustrated and discouraged we are. The struggle for women’s equality in the church has been so long and so hard and is so far from finished that if we let ourselves slacken, take a break, settle for, say, married priests, women as deacons, etc. as anything but stepping stones on the way, we will lose everything. “Satisficing” cannot be in our vocabulary. Can you imagine someone telling a man to do that? Only full satisfaction of a full role for women as first, never second, best will suffice.

I should probably end with that last sentence, but I just have to affirm the softer approach, too. The other day, I watched four year olds playing soccer. One little boy dribbled up to the goal post which was guarded by three little girls forging an impressive defensive row in front of him. He suddenly stopped, abandoned the ball, and ran over and hugged each of the girls. The coach just shrugged, “I guess he’s a lover, not a fighter.” Sometimes ferocity isn’t best (though “satisficing” definitely isn’t either).

That same September 15 *New York Times* contained a description of the making of a movie, “Wadjda”, unique because it was the first feature film ever to be shot entirely in Saudi Arabia and, even more amazingly, was written and directed by a woman. The story is about Wadjda, a ten year old girl who desperately wants to own and ride a bicycle, an act severely frowned upon in a country where women’s mobility is limited and bicycle riding is considered a threat to a girl’s virtue. Ironically, Wadjda hopes to buy the bicycle by winning a cash prize for the best recitation of the Koran. Haifaa al-Mansour, the Saudi writer and director, took great care to respect the culture and not give offense as she filmed under watchful government eyes. (When she wanted to shoot outside where strict social codes segregate the sexes, she had to direct from a van using a walkie-talkie.) But she was still determined to make her point and to encourage the oppressive regime to see the movie and have it widely distributed (at least in DVD since there are few movie theatres in her country). She persisted, letting the simple story of the bicycle and the girl be “sweetly subversive.”

In the end, I think her approach has some merit for all of us: “‘I don’t want to offend people or fight,’ she said. ‘It’s more like: Tell them a story and have them feel it...I know the Saudi won’t change overnight,’ she added later. ‘It will happen gradually...I feel it’s very important to celebrate the right steps, the right changes, even if they are small. Like women riding bicycles.’” Like women leading a church?

Ellie Hart is co-editor of *EqualwRites*

Climate Change and Women's Ordination

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If such a designation doesn't clarify the connection between climate change and women's ordination, perhaps considering the effect of climate change on women and girls will. As the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women noted in 2008, women and girls in rural areas around the world, especially in the Global South, have the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security, and thus will be disproportionately affected by the droughts, floods, extreme weather events and famine that accompany climate change. The fact that none of this seems to have anything to do with the question of women's ordination may be as much a statement about economic privilege in the women's ordination movement as about any inherent lack of connection between the two issues. Women whose families are starving, or whose villages are being washed away by sea-level rise, simply don't have time to enroll in seminary.

Of course, groups concerned with issues other than climate change have in the past challenged our singular focus on women's ordination. When I was the president of the WOC board of directors in 2000, I met with the leaders of several African-American Catholic women's groups who assured me that they were much too concerned with racism to spend time on women's ordination. Yet my own research into the climate change crisis facing us leads me to compare the current situation less to ongoing injustices like racism or classism and more to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941; immediate action is required.

Another way to look at the connection between climate change and women's ordination is to consider what Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson calls the sixth great extinction of species on our planet. By this he means that we are currently destroying approximately a dozen natural species a day, while the natural rate of extinction is between five and ten species a year— with approximately 30 to 50% of all species headed for extinction by mid-century. The last such extinction was 65 million years ago, but this one is the first for which human activities are predominantly responsible. Yet the survival of humankind—including future women priests—is directly dependent on the existence of the broadest possible range of species as sources for food, medicine, fuel, and other life-sustaining substances. And many of the unsustainable environmental practices that are destroying the climate are also complicit in this sixth great extermination.

Let me be clear: I am not proposing that SEPAWOC and other women's ordination groups abandon their commitment to overcoming sexism in the Roman Catholic tradition. I am arguing, however, that protecting God's creation from imminent destruction is also now our unavoidable obligation. With that in mind, I plan in the future to submit articles and reviews on environmental subjects (like the book review on page 8 of this issue) to *EqualwRites*, and to alert you to important upcoming demonstrations and conferences on climate change and environmental destruction. I hope others will join me. i

Marian Ronan *has been working on environmental issues, particularly the world water crisis, and now climate change, since 2002. She blogs about them and a number of other topics at marianronan.wordpress.com.*

Whispers and Groanings

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the Archbishop says, then why are we not able to fully participate in Church leadership?

And what is the “feminine genius” and “authentic feminine presence” anyway? Are those just words to flatter? Or is our authentic feminine presence really welcome and necessary everywhere?

I said back when I attended that workshop in the 80's — “Ordain women; don't study ‘them’, patronize ‘them’ or write about ‘them’.” It isolates women and prevents full membership and participation in the “whole” which means it can never be whole. It is a damaged, incomplete entity. Mary Hunt wrote in *Religion Dispatches* (October 13, 2013), “Catholics do not need ‘a profound theology of the woman’, but a clear, engaged reading of feminist work in religion that is among the most exciting theological productions today....Difference unto discrimination is a slippery slope.”

There is ample evidence of Pope Francis' desire to change some emphasis of the Church from “small minded rules” and its relentless focus on issues like homosexuality, abortion, and contraceptives to being a home for all, with particular concern to bring hope to the poor and marginalized. He advocates for a Church that does not judge and has been described as launching a Vatican Spring, bringing a little fresh air to the dark halls.

And yet, there is an odd disconnect when it comes to his relationship with half of the Church. Thus far Pope Francis has not had any public conversation with women Church leaders of any sort, which Mary Hunt points out in her article. This makes my imaginary conversation between the Pope and Chaput all the more ironic. He continues to uphold the oppression against U.S. women religious and the ban against women's ordination.

It really is too soon to evaluate the papacy of this complex man. It is reassuring that he is making an effort to understand the lives of human beings who live in the 21st century. But I long for an indication that he will listen to all, respect all and unite the Catholic Church as never before.

Mary Whelan *is co-editor of EqualwRites.*

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Book Reviews

***Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth.* Edited by Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee. Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013. 280 pp. \$24.95 (hardback); \$15.95 (paper); \$10.99 (ebook).**

Reviewed By Marian Ronan

Let me confess at the outset that I am extremely wary of the word ‘spiritual’. You might be, too, had you lived, as I did for more than a decade, in Berkeley, California, the land of beautiful people chanting OM in two-hundred-dollar Lululemon outfits.

But I decided to read *Spiritual Ecology* anyway because the climate change work I’ve been doing lately makes my need for a stronger spiritual base painfully apparent. You can only spend so much time reading and writing about the pending death of the planet without needing a serious infusion of hope.

I started reading within my comfort zone—three essays by Catholic environmentalists—Thomas Berry, Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis and Richard Rohr—and another by Thomas Berry students Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. I had read Berry’s early work in mimeographed form at Grailville in the 1970s and was glad to return to him here in “The World of Wonder.” Berry, who died in 2009, drew on his knowledge of world religions and Teilhard de Chardin to fashion a Universe Story in the service of planetary transformation. “The World of Wonder” challenges us to literally *see* the natural world as a sacred antidote to the imminent extinction of species brought on by Enlightenment individualism and the Industrial Revolution. Yet Berry manages to convey the task this seeing demands as a fundamentally numinous one that gives the reader unexpected hope.

The interview-essay with Sister Miriam MacGillis in *Spiritual Ecology* conveys the central place of Berry’s Universe Story in hands-on farming and environmental education at Genesis Farm in northwest New Jersey. And the co-founders of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Tucker and Grim, acknowledge Berry implicitly in their essay “The Next Transition.” The culmination of the 13.4 billion year evolutionary process, we learn, is a “Great Transition” or “Great Turning” from hyper-individualism and environmental destruction to kinship and sustainability—a hopeful prospect indeed.

Yet my favorite essay from this bunch is Franciscan Richard Rohr’s feisty “Creation as the Body of God.” Rohr begins with a refreshing acknowledgment of the huge role harmful Christian notions of physicality and embodiment have played in our current environmental crisis. What about “our supposed belief that the Eternal Word of God became ‘flesh?’” he wonders. Rohr then uses Christian theology, from Paul and Augustine, Duns Scotus and Aquinas, to Gerard Manley Hopkins and Sally McFague, to argue that the world is indeed the body of God, and creation itself is salvation. It seems, Rohr suggests, that the only thing that will make us recognize our oneness with all people and all creation is the common suffering that our planetary destruction promises. But God and God’s goodness will have the last word.

If I am wary of the “spiritual,” I have been downright phobic about discussing Native American religion ever since a bunch of white Catholic feminists got their butts kicked for appropriating Native American rituals at WomenChurch in the Desert in 1989. But I was deeply moved by the Native American selections in *Spiritual Ecology*. It’s one thing to hear Christian activists like Rohr denounce the Christian split between matter and spirit. It’s quite another to engage with a text by somebody who grew up not burdened by that split in the first place. In “Listening to Natural Law,” Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation, tells us that the spiritual side of nature is absolute, for which we must give constant thanks, but that we’d also better get off our lazy asses and make our leaders change their ways. Similarly, in her essay “In the Time of Sacred Places” indigenous activist Winona LaDuke details the indivisible connections between religious rituals, the people who celebrate them, the ancient land where they live, and the creatures who live with them. Examples include the relationship between the Winnemem Wintu of Northern California and the Nur salmon there, and between the Abnishanaabeg of Lake Michigan and the wolves and wild rice that sustain them. Similarly, Indian activist Vandana Shiva (who’s definitely not a Native American) identifies food itself as the inextricable bond between creator and created.

Unfortunately, another batch of essays in *Spiritual Ecology* is a good deal less helpful than these memorable depictions of the oneness of all creation. Written by white male “spiritual teachers,” they draw primarily on exhortation and repetition to get the party line across: CREATION IS SACRED they tell us, again, and again, and again. One of the offenders in this regard is the editor of the collection, Sufi teacher Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee. In his introduction and again in the final essay, Vaughn-Lee reinscribes repeatedly the either-or that underpins so much of modern culture—but this time it’s *either* separate isolated materialist lives *or else* virtuous ones lived in unity with nature. God forbid an acknowledgment that many of us live lives that oscillate back and forth between the two. And how fortunate that editor Vaughn-Lee includes articles better than his in this collection.

Jungian analyst Jules Cashford reinscribes another noxious polarity by adulating Gaia, the “Earth Mother,” even as he quotes exclusively male scientists and environmentalists throughout his essay. And “initiatory guide” Bill Plotkin assures the reader that after her soul initiation, when she embraces her mythopoeic identity, she won’t need “a particular job—or any at all. (She) can neither be hired for it nor fired from it.” Only a Berkeley Om-chanter on steroids could say such a thing in the midst of an on-going unemployment crisis.

Fortunately, a number of other essays offset these spiritual-in-the-worst-sense efforts. Whatever concerns I have about Buddhism being otherworldly are swept away by Zen Roshi Susan Murphy’s history of a genetically patented hybrid to-

mato raised by Mexican farmers for \$2.50 a day, fumigated with toxic chemicals whose wastes are then shipped to Alabama to poison the black community there while the tomatoes are sold on plastic foam trays in cardboard boxes made in Canada and shipped all over North America in refrigerated trucks whose coolants destroy the ozone layer. This is a juggernaut, Murphy reminds us, in which we all collude. For Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist bells of mindfulness some of us have had the pleasure of hearing have become less beautiful but no less essential: they're the floods, droughts, melting sea ice, and hurricanes that signal global warming. Only if we become mindful of the damage we are doing to Mother Earth is enlightenment possible.

And for Buddhist eco-philosopher and spiritual activist Joanna Macy, the western individualist ego is being replaced by a wider construct, an "ecological self." Rooted in our collective mourning for the imminent demise of the planet, we are coming to realize, for example, that we are not protecting the rainforest *down there*, but rather we are the rainforest protecting itself. By claiming the story of life on earth as "the innermost sense of who we are," Macy assures us, "a gladness comes that will help us to survive."

Spiritual Ecology is by no means the only volume that introduces westerners to the foundational oneness of nature and the spiritual. For progressive Catholics who want to begin understanding that oneness, however, the essays I've discussed here, and a number of uncategorizable others in *Spiritual Ecology*, are a pretty good place to start.

Marian Ronan is EqualwRites book review editor. She blogs at marianronan.wordpress.com

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OPEN LETTER TO POPE FRANCIS FROM CATHOLICS AROUND THE WORLD

continued from page 2

- i) participation of the faithful in the selection and tenure of bishops
 - ii) reinstatement of the principle of subsidiarity in parish councils, diocesan pastoral councils, and national conferences of bishops
 - iii) inclusion of qualified lay men and women serving in leadership positions in the Curia
- Implementation of collegial structures will promote a culture of authentically accountable leadership that more fully orients the Church toward the common good.

5. A Church that effectively confronts and prevents sexual abuse

The scandal of clergy sexual abuse can only be overcome when the bishops who facilitate or ignore the abuse are removed from office and brought to justice by church and civil authorities with universal, binding protocols established and implemented. The Catholic Church must earnestly examine the complex of systemic causes that have led to this scandal of global proportions and do everything in its power to prevent it in the future.

In closing, we ask you once again to recognize the rights and responsibilities of the baptized to participate in the deliberative decision-making of our Church. We offer to send a delegation to the Vatican to discuss our proposal further. We look forward to your reply as, together, we continue this important dialogue for the good of our church. We pray the wisdom of the Holy Spirit be upon you and your deliberations.

Your sisters and brothers in Christ,
[Signatures of every participating organization and individual]

SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Advent 2013

Matt.3:1-12, Matt.11:2-11, Isaiah 2:1-5

By Judith Heffernan, M.Div.

Two of the four Advent Sunday Gospels this year are about the prophet John the Baptist. We hear about how he lived, what he taught and his welcoming of Jesus to public ministry; we hear of John's imprisonment and of how much Jesus loved him. Writing about this on the thirty-fourth anniversary of Sister Theresa Kane's address to the Pope, I began to think about some of our prophets: how they live, what they teach and how they proclaim the presence and love of Jesus.

Recently I found an interview by *Mary's Pence* with *Rosalie Muschal-Reinhardt who was the first married woman to receive her Master of Divinity from a Roman Catholic Seminary, and the first coordinator/director of National WOC. She recalls when someone first told her in 1968 that she should be a priest, she replied, "I know my place in the church!" She says that, through activism, reflection and prayer, she came to understand the oppression of women and knew the system had to be changed. She named her life's mission to make the world a safer place for women, a saner place for men, and a better world for our grandchildren.

I also found a story about Elizabeth Lesser, author and founder of the Omega Institute, who wrote that she doesn't want to water

down passionate truths into spineless soup! She adds that she draws strength from Sister Joan Chittister who lives between the tenderness of love and the fierceness of conviction. (Now isn't that a great definition of a prophet!)

Then I had the wonderful opportunity of seeing the movie *Band of Sisters*. (Thank-you, *Catholic Coalition for Justice and Peace!*). The juxtaposition of historical footage and interviews with sisters about their ministries today was just wonderful! Everyone watching especially enjoyed when an older sister says that they do their work peacefully and respectfully, but they never take no for an answer!

Father Thomas Berry was also featured in the film. He beautifully says that we are all from the same source, we are one sacred community, and we must follow a partnership model rather than a hierarchical model. During the movie, it was made clear that there can be a rippling effect: as a community heals, so heals the world.

During this Advent Season, we will commemorate the Sandy Hook School tragedy. According to *The Children's Defense Fund*, since 1968 gun violence has stolen 166,000 lives of children. Isaiah, the prophet, calls us again this Advent to change our swords into ploughshares, our guns into pruning hooks. There can be a rippling effect. May it be so.

*We mourn the passing of Rosalie Muschal-Reinhardt who died on October, 6, 2013

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