

## ON RESISTANCE AND SURRENDER: A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

*As I was struggling to find some words—gentle words—for a Christmas meditation for this issue of Equal wRites, my thoughts centering on how inappropriately we choose to welcome Him, the Prince of Peace, as He draws near to be born again this season, the following meditation arrived from Cassie MacDonald, who is a lawyer, a peace activist, a poet, a gentle and loving person, and, I am happy to say, my friend. She is also the person who, quietly, without fuss or fanfare, faithfully compiles the calendar for each issue of Equal wRites.*

*I can think of no finer way to greet the Christ Child—to celebrate Christmas—than the process she describes here...editor's note*

by Cassie MacDonald

**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;**

**Where there is hatred, let me sow love**  
*from the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi*

When I first signed on to the Iraq Pledge of Resistance in October 2002, I had no idea that it would be almost two full years before that commitment would be completed. But then, the entire process was fraught with the deepest uncertainty, so began my long, long (and ongoing) teaching in the school of surrender. What a delicate and challenging work it is, to resist practicing surrender. This practice may be one of the

greatest gifts of peace work.

When on March 20, 2003, I was arrested outside the Federal Building in Philadelphia, I was obliged to surrender to a federal marshal. When on August 25, 2004, I had my day in court, I was obliged to surrender to the will of a federal judge, and to a probation officer. And on September 14, 2004—the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross—I surrendered myself to the Bureau of Prisons authority at 7<sup>th</sup> and Arch Streets. And over all of these is the surrender to the will of God for me. This is the ruling one, because it governs the way in which I do all the others. My surrender to God means

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	<b>EQUAL</b>	<b>Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area</b>
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	<b>WRITES</b>	<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b> - <i>As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.</i>

## WOMEN AT THE WELL

by Marian Ronan

The Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Lent this year (John 4: 1-30, 39-42) is a well-known and influential text, the story of the woman at the well. On his way to Galilee, Jesus stops at a well near the town of Sychar in Samaria, while his disciples go into town to get some food. A Samaritan woman is drawing water there and he asks her for a drink. As a result of the ensuing conversation, Jesus becomes the Messiah of the Samaritan people, and the woman becomes his messenger to those same people.

But this is not the way many Christians understand John 4. Rather, for many of us this is the story of an adulteress or of a woman who serves as Jesus' "straight man," that is, who offers him a series of cues so that he can demonstrate that he knows everything.\*

This interpretive tradition takes three primary forms. The first emphasizes vv. 16 to 18 in which Jesus tells the woman to go call her husband. The woman replies that she has no husband, and Jesus tells her that what she has said is true, that she has had five husbands, and that the man she has now is not

her husband. This exchange shows the woman to be a sexually immoral woman. But nothing in the text suggests this. Jesus does not condemn this woman. Rather, he praises her for her candor. And we know from Mark 12:18-27 that levirate marriage—a woman marrying even an entire series of brothers-in-law to preserve the patriarchal line—was practiced in the time of Jesus. We also know that women without men to support them were impoverished, because Jesus refers to the poverty of a widow later in Mark 12. There were, in fact, few wage-bearing jobs for women in first century Israel, so women whose husbands died or abused them made arrangements with other men in order to survive.

This interpretive tradition also teaches that the woman went to the well in the middle of the day because she was ashamed to encounter other women because of her adultery. But this reading makes no sense at all; why would she not have met other women in the middle of the day? The woman was at the well because she had to haul a great deal of water—not just for

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### JOIN US IN CELEBRATING WOMEN CALLED SATURDAY, MARCH 12

Rev. Patricia Fresen and Marian Ronan, Ph.D. will be the keynote speakers at *Celebrating Women Called*, a day-long conference which is one of several events nationwide marking the thirtieth anniversary next year of the women's ordination movement. Scheduled for Saturday, March 12, at the Friends Center, 1500 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, the day will also include a panel discussion, time for questions and dialogue, break-out groups, and a liturgy led by ordained Roman Catholic women.

Further details as they become available may be obtained by calling 215-545-9649.

## A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

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that I must try to surrender to worldly authority with the most patience, compassion and understanding I can muster. In short, obey the one commandment: Love One Another. This has been my message and my mantra from the first day. It was the legend on my vest that dark day in March 2003; it was my statement to Judge Rapaport; and it was the message I spelled out in jelly on scrap paper—makeshift prison art supplies—and hung from the end of my cot in the Federal Detention Center.

At every step, I encountered unexpected humanity. That it was unexpected only highlights my own limits. There was the marshall whose job it was to cuff me and take me into custody, but who kindly held my hood on all the way around the building in the cold, gusting rain; the correctional officer who repaired our hot water knob and gave us teasing, friendly advice about how to get processed out quickly; the administrator at work who encouraged me to take as much time off as I needed; the probation officer, who turned up on the day of our release to make sure we were okay. Our work is on behalf of and with these, as well as those who are suffering in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. Six short days in prison gave me a concentrated dose of powerlessness, and I continue to enjoy new insights from that experience. One surprise was how liberating it was. I think that is because of the consent, and the way that radically different surroundings can encourage one to invite grace. I have striven to hold onto that liberated feeling, but ironically, it has been more difficult out here in the “free world.”

Attorney General John Ashcroft has just resigned. In his words, “The demands of justice are rewarding and depleting.” It would be hard to find someone I disagree

with more in principle and action, but his parting words have the ring of truth. Yes, it is rewarding and depleting. It can only be sustained in community. If I have been delighted by allies in unexpected quarters, I have also been blessed by faith communities and individuals who gave tremendously in material and prayer support: Pendle Hill, home to my affinity group; the Sacred Heart community in Camden; Lucinda Hudson, my incomparable support person; my amazing mother, and many more friends and family members than I can name. It seems inadequate to even say that any of the work I describe here is mine, because so many stood—and sat—with me.

Shortly after my release from prison, I happened across a pamphlet written by a fellow affinity group member, Anne Curo. It was a reflection on the prayer of St. Francis. An instrument, she pointed out, does not play itself. It does not even tune itself. It makes itself available. On the subject of being an instrument, Anne offered this excerpt from the Bengali poet Tagore:

*The song that I came to sing remains unstringed to this day.*

*I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.*

The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set; only there is the agony of wishing in my heart.

Many days, remaining hopeful in the face of the world’s crazy wobble is hard. It feels like fighting a tidal wave with a breadstick. The instrument feels poorly equipped; the stringing and unstringing seems futile and yes, depleting. Another exercise in surrender. (I had some time to think about this, especially in the first day or so in prison, before we acquired books and paper and other occupations. I was doing some stringing of another kind: with some string that had been shed from our blankets and my

daily serving of Fruit Loops and Apple Jacks, I started a garland that eventually grew to about ten feet long by week’s end.) Anyway, on those difficult days, I try to remember someone we know only as “the Whistler.” Our cell in the Federal Detention Center overlooked the men’s recreation area, though the narrow slatted window did not give us a view. Late in the week, after the sounds of basketball and other games had died away, someone came into that room below, and started whistling. You would have thought this exquisite song, fresh and joyful, came from someone walking across a meadow in spring, not in a cement room crowned by chain link. Eventually, we made out the tune: *From a Distance*. Three nights in a row he came back, with the same song. The lyrics, by Julie Gold, were timely and fitting, and I’ll share just some of them here:

From a distance we are instruments marching in a common band. Playing songs of hope, playing songs of peace.

They’re the songs of every one. God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us from a distance.

From a distance you look like my friend, even though we are at war.

From a distance I just cannot comprehend what all this fighting is for.

From a distance there is harmony, And it echoes through the land. And it’s the hope of hopes, it’s the love of loves, It’s the heart of every one.

The Whistler reminded us that, though there are many things that can be taken from you, your song (whether you have come around to singing it yet or not) is your own. His song reached through the walls, through the dark: it is free. My prayer is for the common song of humanity—the heart of every one.

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drinking and cooking but also for washing, for livestock, and for crafts work.

A second interpretation of John 4 makes the woman a symbol of the pagan idolatry of the Samaritan people. This reading refers back to passages in Hosea and Jeremiah in which infidelity to God is portrayed as adultery. But it does not say in John 4 that the Samaritans are unfaithful, only that they “do not know God” (v. 22). How then can the woman be a symbol of their nonexistent adultery?

A third approach makes the woman not an adulterer but fundamentally irrelevant to the story. Here, the purpose of the story is to manifest Jesus’ omniscience—he knows the woman was married five times, but he doesn’t care why this is the case, and neither, it is implied, should we. Now I don’t know about you, but this portrait of a Jesus who uses a woman to set up the demonstration of his brilliance and wisdom conflicts seriously with my understanding of him as someone who cares deeply about people and treats them with respect. And if we read the text carefully we see that the Samaritan woman is far from Jesus’ “straight man;” rather, she asks Jesus real questions that enable him to better understand his mission and communicate about himself.

These negative portrayals of the Samaritan woman are harmful because they make women look immoral and insignificant. But they are also harmful because they distract us from the real meaning of the story. The woman in John 4 is an active subject, an agent, who collaborates with Jesus in his messianic ministry. Jesus asks her for water and she asks him for water as well. As a result, both of them are changed, Jesus’ mission is advanced, and the Samaritan woman no longer needs to live with a man who doesn’t respect her enough to marry her.

The other thing we need to bear in mind about this woman is that her exchange with Jesus liberates her from hauling water. Experts tell us that women in the time of Jesus hauled so much water that it damaged their posture. There’s a tendency to give an exclusively spiritual interpretation to the passage about Jesus as living water, but the woman’s words contradict this. She says, “Sir, give me this water so that I may never be thirsty again or have to keep coming here to draw water” (v. 15). And then later, after she realizes that Jesus is the Messiah and goes to tell her people, we read that she “left her water jar behind.” (v. 28) Her encounter with Jesus liberates her not only from an exploitative relationship but also from the oppression of hauling water.

The interpretation is important because today, millions of women all over the world are forced, like the Samaritan woman, to haul water long distances for their very survival. Consider these statistics:

- 1.1 billion people —40% of the world’s population—lack access to safe drinking water. Women and girls, in particular, spend 40 billion hours a year hauling water from distant, frequently polluted sources.
- 2.4 billion people lack access to sanitation; 5 million of them die annually from water-borne diseases including one child every 15 seconds.

This situation is caused by more than bad luck. As the world’s population explodes, the developing nations have learned from the West to use wasteful and unsustainable irrigation methods that deplete freshwater resources. Production of the commodities for which we in the West have an insatiable appetite—especially cars, electronics and oil—gobbles up water at an unsupportable rate. And transnational corporations like Bechtel, Suez, OMI/Thames and Veolia are buying up the public water systems of developing

nations. They then triple or quadruple the price of water and cut off water to those who can’t afford to pay, forcing women and girls to walk miles to distant polluted sources. A primary reason for this growing privatization of water is that international financial institutions like the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank make the sale of water systems to global corporations by developing countries a condition of receiving much-needed development loans.

Water systems are also being privatized in the US. Cash-starved local governments are selling municipal water systems with the expectation that because of their financial resources global corporations will maintain and rebuild rapidly deteriorating water system infrastructures. Research shows, however, that in most cases, the corporations maintain water services only for those most able to pay. In 2002, the city of Detroit cut off water to tens of thousands of residents in preparation for selling the city water system to OMI/Thames. The city needed to prove in advance that the water system would generate profits, so they cemented the water meters of thousands of poor families. Similarly, the city of Stockton, California, recently contracted its city water system to OMI/Thames over the protests of many citizens’ groups.

The realization that John 4 portrays the intimate connection between Jesus’ messiahship and the liberation of a poor woman from the drudgery of hauling water brings with it certain obligations. Christians cannot offer only the spiritual living water of the Gospel to sisters and brothers in developing nations and in our inner cities. We must also offer them clean, affordable water, and liberate them from the drudgery of hauling water over long distances. A first step toward accomplishing this is to inform ourselves about the world water crisis and its causes. One excellent resource is the *Water for People Not For Profit* campaign of Development and Peace, the development organization of the Canadian Catholic bishops at [www.dev.org/testA/current.htm](http://www.dev.org/testA/current.htm). Another rich resource is *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Theft of the World’s Water* by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke (The New Press, 2002). A third resource is the *Water for All* campaign, sponsored by the consumer justice organization, Public Citizen, at [www.citizen.org/cmep/Water](http://www.citizen.org/cmep/Water). The *Water for All* listserv sends out regular action alerts about how to protest water privatization in developing countries and in the US.

Finally, let us join together to ask the One who liberated the woman at the well to give us the energy and commitment to secure a decent life and fresh water for our sisters and brothers around the world.

\* Much of this exegesis of John 4 is drawn from Luise Schottroff, “The Samaritan Woman and the Notion of Sexuality in the Fourth Gospel,” 157-181. In Fernando S. Segovia, ed., *What is John?* Scholars Press, 1998.

*Marian Ronan is a member of the faculty at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA.*

## ADVENT SERVICE

*Lighting the Darkness*, the 2004 annual Feminist-Womanist Advent Service, sponsored by Women of Faith, will be held Thursday, December 9, at 6 p.m. at Rosemont College.

Dinner will follow the service. Reservations are required for dinner (\$13.00 per person; some scholarships available) and may be made by Thursday, Dec. 3 with the Metropolitan Christian Council at 215-563-7854.

## DIALOGUE BOX

### SELECTIVE INVESTIGATION? AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

*The following letter to the Philadelphia Inquirer from long-time women's ordination advocate Marge Sexton of Hollywood, PA, was printed in early November. Marge received, among a number of others, the e-mail response which follows her letter. We reprint it, and Marge's response, with permission.*

What a relief it was to read that the IRS is investigating the NAACP because of a political speech made by Julian Bond in July. It's about time they go after the tax-exempt groups that engage in political rhetoric in disregard of the law.

I am heartened by this turn of events because I know that the IRS, being ultimately fair and impartial, and will also investigate the Catholic church which will be held to the same high standard and perhaps lose their tax exempt status because of all the bishops and priests instructing their people to vote republican. What a wind-fall that will be in the coffers of the US treasury when the church starts paying its fair share of taxes.

Say, what? The IRS isn't investigating the church? They're only investigating some older black folks? Oh, never mind.

**Marge Hermann Sexton**  
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#### E-Mail Response

I resent your implication that the Catholic church instructed me on how to vote. Are you a Catholic? If so, what parish are you in? I hope you contacted the Archdiocese to let them know that you were coerced.

Your remarks insult the Catholic voter. Please! I've worked enough polls handing out pro-life brochures to practicing Catholics who voted Democratic. As for targeting the Catholic Church, how about the Baptist church? My husband's Methodist Church? The Jews for Jesus?

Sincerely,  
*(I'm not listing the name)*  
Havertown

#### Marge's Reply

Yes, I certainly am a Catholic. Born and raised. Envelope receiving, tithing Catholic. Until now, that is.

I taught CCD, was married in the church, my children were baptized. Until quite recently, my husband and I were coordinators of our parish RCIA.

I didn't contact the diocese to let them know I was coerced. I didn't feel coerced because I refuse to allow the church to coerce me. However, my sister did contact her priest to voice her objection to him. She got nowhere.

I can't speak for the Baptists, since I'm not one of them. The Jews for Jesus? Who are they, anyway? I don't know them. Jews I know aren't for Jesus.

As to the practicing Catholics who voted democratic, they are the hope of the church, for sure. I worked the election also, asking Catholics to please search their hearts and minds rather than just listening to the priests and the bishops before casting their votes.

I believe that pro-life is from conception to natural death. To me that means more than pro-fetus. It means pro-infant, pro-child, pro-old, pro-poor, etc. It also means anti-war and anti-death penalty. It's easy to be pro-life for "the innocents". It's much harder to be pro-life when society has deemed that life to be worthless.

As a child I embraced the Corporal Works of Mercy as guidance for my life. I believe they are the essence of Catholic Social Teaching:

Feed the hungry - Give drink to the thirsty  
Clothe the naked - Shelter the homeless  
Visit the imprisoned - Visit the sick  
Bury the dead

That's the church I believed in, but either it was never there in the first place and I deluded myself, or it slipped away while I wasn't noticing. Suddenly the church has George Bush's face on it and that hurts me. The church I know now is the church of the rich, the cruel, the self-righteous, the pompous and superior.

I have gay friends who are among the finest and most moral people I know. The church's treatment of them wrenches my heart because, sadly, they love it and continue to be hurt by it.

So I suspect we know different Catholic Churches, because we have vastly different values.

I have no way of knowing, but my guess would be that your world is white, upper middle class or perhaps higher, straight and financially secure. My world isn't vastly different from yours except that my life intersects with people of color, gay people, poor people, some strange and crazy ones. People for whom the black and white answers of church and republican rhetoric just don't always fit.

I know specific instances of Catholic priests exhorting their congregations to vote for Bush. I cannot imagine that you don't know of such cases yourself. Surely you know that the Bush campaign actively courted Catholics and you know of the Catholic bishops who freely and actively spoke out. Cardinal Rigali made it a point to be pictured with George Bush.

I would be in favor of ALL religious denominations paying their fair share if they are involved in politics, no matter what political party. I suspect they all get away with way too much.

Now that the religious right has hijacked the country, I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for that to happen though.

Peace and blessings,  
**Marge Sexton**

### FUTURECHURCH, WOMEN AND THE DIACONATE

*FutureChurch, a Cleveland-based national church reform group that says it has become "a leading voice articulating the need to find solutions to the priestly shortage in order to preserve our Catholic sacramental life," has launched a campaign to raise the issue of the priest shortage, critical in some areas, at the Vatican's Synod on Eucharist, scheduled for October, 2005.*

*In a recent mailing, the group solicited signatures for a petition asking that the synod "focus on the priest shortage and...end mandatory celibacy as a requirement for diocesan priesthood, welcome married priests back to active ministry, and open the diaconate to the tens of thousands of qualified women serving the church right now."*

*The mailing included postcards to be signed and sent to local bishops and to Cardinal Francis E. George, chairman of the committee on liturgy of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, urging this addition to the agenda of the upcoming synod.*

*As I prepared to sign and send the postcards, I read again the third demand, "to open the diaconate to the tens of thousands of qualified women serving in the church right now"*

*Open the DIACONATE? No, that was not my position, to be sure.*

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## RAHNER AND US: PARTNERS IN REFORM

By Mary Byrne

After fifteen years of successfully restricting my diet of traditional theology to morsels of mandatory readings in preparation for ministry and now the classroom, I find myself voluntarily captivated by the visionary twentieth century theologian, Karl Rahner. In the beginning, Karl and I had a rocky courtship marked mostly by my petulant confoundment and resistance. His intensity made my head hurt. I wanted my heart to ache.

As is often the case with the most worthwhile things in life, just when you are wondering *what the heck am I doing here*, a still small voice whispers to just wait another minute. The circumstances of my rendezvous with Rahner were dictated by unexpected events—of course! In August, my mother passed on after a year-long struggle with cancer. My mother was a closet theologian. She read all the big boys—Augustine, Aquinas, Ignatius, Chardin, and, yes, Rahner—to name a few. As I was going through her papers, many of them post-ems crammed with theological reflection and decorating the most imaginative places (cookbooks, checkbooks, linings of old pocketbooks—anything that was nearby when she was struck with thought) I was introduced to the beauty of her understanding of those things I had long believed were devoid of any kind of spiritual lyricism. Coincidentally, the lesson of caring for her in the last years provided the clarity needed to decide that the next step in my life was chaplaincy certification. One month after her death, I enrolled in the spiritual direction program at Chestnut Hill College, expecting to be immersed in the warm embrace of spirituality, only to find that the only course compatible with my schedule was—you guessed it—the theology of Karl Rahner. Thanks, Mom!

So now I find myself in a particular Rahnerian dynamic held in the tension of what is perhaps a paradox. Perhaps. I went looking for spirituality and found theology. Years ago, when I entered seminary, I went looking for theology and stumbled upon spirituality. Theology and/or spirituality? Are they mutually exclusive or is it just the times in which we live? In the relentless circuits of New Age speakers and healers, “theology” seems to have been banished to the dark night of the culture to keep company with the equally unpopular notion of “sin.” The phenomenal appeal of New Age spirituality (and also the value) is its universal awakening to the experience of a loving, immanent divine presence. The radical nature of this heart-centered perspective demands a temporary purging of the more cognitive “theology” and certainly the less forgiving notion of “sin.” At the same time that I sympathize with the reasons for the pendulum swing, I find myself questioning the foundation of the latest spiritual remedies. Flipping through the pages of the multifarious holistic freebies at the health food store, I get the feeling that the boomers invented God in the image of their own necessity. Have we thrown the baby out with the bath water?

This is neither an argument against new spirituality nor a defense of traditional theology. It is merely an observation on the relentless endurance of tradition. It does not seem that tradition can be easily discarded by stomping one’s feet or clicking one’s heels. If I have gleaned anything from hours of struggling with Rahner’s theology, it is that tradition is organic. What precedes us molds us. We are inescapably rooted in tradition. The transformative response to tradition is to move it forward—not into *something else* but into *something more*. And so, the question is: Does Karl Rahner make of Catholicism something more?

Rahner, who helped Pope John XXIII crank open the windows

to a breathtaking sense of God in the 20th century, relocated the originating point of our grasp of God within the context of human experience. The premise of Rahner’s theology is that since we cannot know God, *who is unknowable*, the only recourse is to seek God within the realms of our *experience* of God. Is this not what Jesus was talking about when he said that we must go through him to get to God? The notion of God emanates from a sense of God rooted in the holy mystery of being human.

Rahner plumbs the depths of human experience to ascend to the heights of mystical experience. When he moves out of the formulaic constrictions of his native theological language into the lyricism of prayer, Rahner lifts off the ground and takes passengers. Harvey Egan in his book, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life*, does the difficult work of processing Rahner’s theology to deliver us into the heart of Rahner’s spirituality. If I were challenged to quote one sentence from Rahner that best describes his liberating perspective of the human-divine relationship it would be the poetic phrase that “to be human is to be an immense longing” because “the heart is a lonely hunter until it rests in God.” This everyday mystic, Rahner’s beloved human being whom he deems God’s self-communication, “is the one who with difficulty and without any clear evidence of success plods away at the task of awakening in just a few men and women a small spark of faith, of hope and of charity...since all contain a primordial experience of God.”

When was God so uncomplicated? When was being human so forgiving? The movement of godspeak out of the head and into the heart of being human has the markings of the defiant and resolute energy of the spiritual holistic movement of the last 20 years. But here is a renowned theologian writing decades before this so-called New Age of a God who is “the anonymous presence of our heart’s desire” and “is experienced most clearly and most intensely in our ordinary and banal everyday existence.” Can we not recognize in Rahner the footprint of various psychospiritualities that console the contemporary pilgrim on the way to wholeness by reassuring us that we are ok, that the way out of our human darkness is through our divine spark, that the way to God is through our own lives? Perhaps, that is why I find Rahner so compelling when he claims that God’s presence becomes transparent when the “lights which illuminate the tiny islands of our everyday life go out.” For Rahner, the ultimate mystical experience occurs when, face to face with the limitations of our existence, we break apart and surrender to the experience of a God who is waiting within to carry us. The remoteness of theological comprehension is humbled by the intimacy of human compassion. Before there were Carolyn Myss and Jean Huston and Thomas More—to name just a few New Age visionaries—here was Rahner beckoning us to come down to earth to experience God within the context of our daily banal lives of great sorrow and equal joy.

Implicit in this invitation is the repudiation of dualistic theology. It is not a matter of divine transcendence or immanence. The human experience of the immanent God brings about the “the discovery of God in all things...a sober intoxication of the spirit” that re-creates us. It is the transcendence of all creation. Rahner’s theology of paradox births his spirituality. The hierarchy of linear thinking gives way to the mystery of inner feelings. God is more than a thought. God is a continuing event within the persistent drama of human life.

The Catholic reform movement and all its various manifestations including the women’s ordination movement owe some portion of their epiphany to Rahner’s complete regard and profound

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empathy for humankind as the expression of the Divine. He changed the way we look at ourselves and consequently the way we look at God. When you seek God in the panoply of human experience, you open the gate for everyone to pass through to a level playing field. And in this wonderful parade of human expression, we are all on display in our glorious diversity. We are all visible. We all have stories to tell. We imitate the way of Jesus in our courage to enter into conflict with anyone or any organization that denies our experience of God to justify their notion of God. The abuse of power is indeed the inherent danger of a theology wanton of a spirituality — an idea of God devoid of a sense of God. Conversely, self-righteous hubris may very well be the pitfall of reactionary reform that touts a renaissance spirituality devoid of a theology rooted in tradition.

Rahner’s implicit challenge to the reform movement is to continually call us back into the mystery of paradox which is, of course, the essence of the Gospel. This means living in the tension of being “spirit in the world” by referencing the experience of God as the source of our notion of God. His legacy which has become the mantle of reform is to model the innate transformative power of a spiritual theology as we are led into the something more.

*Mary Byrne is an ordained minister, currently working on a book, Thy Will Be Done, on Catholic women in ordained ministry.*

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## TEN TOP REASONS TO WORSHIP AT CHURCH OF THE BEATITUDES

*by Maria Marlowe*

10. You will be part of a service very similar to a Catholic mass but different enough to be better.
  9. Your family life will be affirmed, no matter what shape your family is in. (In other words, this church realizes there are other worthy families out there besides Mom, Dad, and Kids.)
  8. Your worship will be presided over by people who are married, have children, and can *personally* relate to the challenges of marital and parental commitments.
  7. You will not be patronized, insulted, ridiculed, reprimanded, and treated like children and/or sheep.
  6. You will not be subjected to someone micromanaging your life in the name of God.
  5. You will worship in a family where your marital status and sexual orientation are of no consequence. (That is, you are loved and accepted unconditionally.)
  4. You will hear acknowledged—finally—the dual parentage of Father/Mother God.
  3. You will occasionally hear the Gospel read *in a woman’s voice* and be spiritually enriched by *the gift of a woman’s homily*.
  2. You will not be required to pledge allegiance to the teachings of any human institution to receive the Body and Blood of Christ.
- And the #1 reason why you should worship at the Church of the Beatitudes: You will be part of a Christian family where truth is discerned in a circle, not a pyramid.

The Church of the Beatitudes is a wonderful community dedicated to justice, peace, and a fellowship that embraces everyone. It is located in Lansdowne, Pennsylvania, and is led by Father Bernie Callahan, a (married) priest ordained in the old (*read true*) Catholic rite. Mass begins at 9:00 every Sunday morning. *All are welcome in this place.*

(Call 484-433-9884 or go to the church’s website: [www.churchofthebeatitudes.org](http://www.churchofthebeatitudes.org) for directions and more information.)

*Maria Marlowe is a member of the core committee of SEPA\WOC*

## IRVIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CALENDAR AND CARDS AGAIN AVAILABLE

An archaeological calendar focusing on the roles of women ordained in the early church is available again this year from Scripture scholar and archaeologist Dr. Dorothy Irvin.

Also offered are all-occasion cards, several different bookmarks, and a new Christmas card depicting, in one of the earliest Madonna and Child paintings known, Mary overseeing women’s ordinations in Rome.

A map on the inside cover of the calendar (also available separately) features sites of tomb inscriptions, frescoes and mosaics of female priests, deacons and bishops of the early church.

In addition to photographs of archaeological records of women church leaders, the 2005 calendar includes Dr. Irvin’s exegesis of several Pauline passages commonly misinterpreted as advising women to assume subordinate positions.

Calendars are \$10.00. Further information is available from [irvincalendar@hotmail.com](mailto:irvincalendar@hotmail.com).

# APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION: MEANINGFUL, NECESSARY, OR OVERRATED?

by Jim Plastaras

Mary Ramerman's ordination celebration in 2001 was beautiful, moving, and offered profound insights into the meaning of ordained ministry. Representatives of the community she was to serve called her to ministry. Her co-workers in ordained ministry laid hands on her. Also important to Mary was the participation of Bishop Peter Hickman. Bishop Hickman's apostolic succession through bishops aligned with the Old Catholic movement, is as demonstrable as the lineage of Mathew Clark, Bishop of Rochester, or of our own Justin Cardinal Regali. Mary's ordination included the same elements found in the Hippolytus' descriptions of the ordination rite: election by the community, followed by the laying on of hands by bishop and fellow presbyters.

I am probably not the only one who wondered: Would Mary have been empowered for ministry—would the ordination have “taken—even if Bishop Hickman hadn't been present, or if he had been there, but if there had been a break in the succession chain between him and the apostles?

My belief in a church that is one, holy, Catholic, and *apostolic* affirms the continuity between the faith community to which I belong and the church of the apostles. The guarantor of continuity is not the supposedly unbroken chain of anointed leaders reaching back to the apostles, but rather the Spirit who guides us in the way of all truth (Jn 16:13).

The Fourth Gospel is quite clear on this point. The “tradition” is not only a body of truths handed down from the apostles to appointed successors, but rather the Spirit given to the disciples on Easter evening (Jn 20:22). The gift was not to the exclusive circle of the *Twelve*, but to the *disciples*, which is to say, to the whole community. This emphasis on the Spirit as an unmediated gift to the entire community appears also in the First Letter of John where the elder says: *You have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it. The anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you* (1 John 2:20-27).

There is a difference of perspective between the Johannine vision of the Spirit as unmediated gift to the community, and the ecclesiology of the pastoral epistles (Timothy and Titus) where the emphasis is on establishing a trustworthy line of successors who will preserve the tradition from error.

A similar difference appears in the Old Testament where two of the traditions view the promise of God's continuing presence to his people in very different terms.

The Yahwist tradition, which derived from Judah and southern tribes, emphasized the office of a covenant mediator who serves as the guarantor of the permanence of the covenant. Moses is established as covenant mediator *forever*. The Yahwist tradition links the Mosaic covenant to the Davidic covenant, God's promise to be with David and his sons *forever*. Continuity is top-down, and passed on through heredity. The chosen leaders and their offspring—both kings and priests—were to be conduits and mediators of God's blessings. The royal project to build a permanent temple in Jerusalem to replace the impermanent and portable tabernacle /tent was part

and parcel of the same mindset to establish visible guarantees of the continuity of God's presence.

The Elohist tradition, deriving from the northern tribes, by contrast emphasizes the conditional nature of the covenant. The people had broken their covenant with God, and more than once. The covenant lived on only because God reestablishes the covenant and/or creates a new covenant. The emphasis here is on discontinuity. God is not bound to follow lines of heredity. Kings of the northern tribes are set aside and replaced by others who are not their offspring. The mediators between God and his people in this tradition are the prophets are called without respect to genealogy or occupation.

The viewpoints represented by the Yahwist and Elohist traditions find echoes in the New Testament, but Jesus' description of his mission is drawn mainly from the Elohist/prophetic vision. At the beginning of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth, he presents empowerment by the Spirit as his only credential: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” (Luke 4:18.) The evangelists Matthew and Luke are at pains to validate the Davidic lineage of Jesus through their insertion of the infancy narrative into their Gospel narrative, but Jesus himself does not claim Davidic lineage or attach importance to it.

What light, if any, does this shed on our questions about the nature of apostolic succession? The heirs to the Yahwist theological tradition are forever trying to bring tidiness and predictability to the mystery of God's presence with his people. They describe the order of events in this way: At the Last Supper Jesus ordained twelve men, and then these twelve subsequently selected others and laid hands on them to take their place, and so on down the line. Here are obvious problems with the tidiness of this picture. To begin with, did I miss the ordination bit in my reading of the Last Supper narratives? And how does Paul fit into this neat picture? He wasn't one of the Twelve, and he wasn't one of those chosen to carry on after them.—Oh, he was an exception! So God can make exceptions to this orderly protocol!

And now back to my original question: Suppose Bishop Peter Hickman hadn't been at Mary Ramerman's ordination., Would it have counted? Or if in a remote village in South America, a base community prays and lays hands on one of its members to empower him/her to lead them in Eucharist, will it count?

I think the answer to these and similar questions can be found in an appendix to the story of the canonical empowerment of the seventy elders of Israel: *A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!” But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”* (Numbers 11:27-29).

*Jim Plastaras is a board member of CTA-Philadelphia. He earned his license at the Pontifical Biblical Institute and is the author of three books in biblical theology, including The God of Exodus.*

## COR/PHILADELPHIA WEB SITE

COR/Philadelphia, a coalition of individuals and Catholic Organizations for Renewal, have a new web site that includes a calendar of events sponsored by member groups, which include SEPA/WOC. Check it out at [cor-philadelphia.tripod.org](http://cor-philadelphia.tripod.org).

## NATIONAL NEWS

by Regina Bannan

The meeting of the national Catholic Organizations for Reform in Milwaukee began November 3. It was the day after the election, my plane had been delayed, and I was numb, if not in shock. What I needed was a good dose of renewal, and I got it! I came in as the group was talking about the role of women in the church, and I learned that those planning the Women's Ordination Worldwide meeting in July 2005 in Ottawa have also planned ordinations for the day after, July 25, in a compromise between those who want to pursue that strategy and those who want to stay more firmly aligned with current church policy. So watch for more details; our SEPA/WOC event March 12 with Patricia Fresen, director of the European seminary, will be even more important as this evolves.

The highlight of the COR meeting for me was a panel of young Catholics, including Aisha Taylor, the new national WOC program director, as well as Crystal Chan of the CTA national staff and four from Marquette University: campus minister Jocelyn Sideco and students Christian Eichenlaub, Danny Napolitano, and Michael Smith. They shared so much about their commitment to church and the reasons at least one might leave and why the rest stay. The depth of their feeling and strength of their ideas blew me away; I wondered if there were similarly articulate and committed young people at our colleges and Newman centers here. We need to find them and to listen to them and to give them the leadership roles they desire and are prepared for in the work they want to do, for social justice. We need to build the future with them.

COR also discussed parish closings in Boston and was briefed by national SNAP leaders. We approved the membership of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (Bishop Peter Hickman's church) in national COR. We looked at the lack of international developments in the Catholic reform movements right now and we re-

viewed the FutureChurch petition for different agenda items at the Vatican's Eucharistic Synod in the fall of 2005; see [www.futurechurch.org](http://www.futurechurch.org). We debriefed on the election and came up with some good strategies for injecting additional moral issues into national politics—like war and peace, poverty and justice—and Jeannine Gramick reminded us that now the majority position is that civil unions are OK, which would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. I really hope that the excellent voter guides prepared by Catholics Speak Out and Call to Action can be more widely distributed and discussed. I hope you were able to review copies before the election; if not, check out their web sites: [www.cta.usa.org](http://www.cta.usa.org) and [www.quixote.org/cso](http://www.quixote.org/cso).

National WOC is moving right along with its young staff; Joy Barnes will be on maternity leave but Aisha and board members will be filling in until she's back. They have done a terrific calendar of action for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign; January commemorates the resignation of Rev. David Stanley from the Pontifical Biblical Commission to protest the Vatican's ban on women priests, for example. The other side of this handout is the "Top Ten Reasons to Ordain Women." You know the format. I am sure these will soon come to you; the national WOC web site, [www.womensordination.org](http://www.womensordination.org), like ours, is undergoing revision as we write.

Many of you attended the following Call to Action National Conference, at which the excitement just builds and builds. Let us keep the energy and spread it locally!

News Flash: Just elected to the National WOC board: our own Eileen DiFranco! Congratulations, Eileen! You will represent SEPA WOC well and you will help lead WOC into the future with your strong ideas and deep commitment.

*Regina Bannan represents SEPA WOC and COR/Philadelphia and even the Community of the Christian Spirit at National COR. She teaches at Temple University.*

### DIALOGUE BOX CONTINUED

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*SEPA WOC's mission statement advocates "full partnership in ministry;" anything less, it seemed to me, smacked of a sell-out.*

*So I e-mailed FutureChurch executive director, Sr. Christine Schenk osj, with a request for clarification. Why, I asked, did the group limit its advocacy of women's ordination to the diaconate?*

*Her careful, measured reply came quickly, and at some length. Equal wRites regrets that space considerations prevent printing it in its entirety; selected excerpts follow.*

...editor

Karen

Thanks for your question.

No, FutureChurch does not limit its advocacy of women's ordination to the diaconate.

Our mission statement says "FutureChurch is a national coalition of parish-based Catholics who seek the full participation of all baptized Catholics in the life of the Church.

"FutureChurch, inspired by Vatican II, recognizes that Eucharistic Celebration (the Mass) is the core of Roman Catholic worship and sacramental life. We advocate that this celebration be available universally and at least weekly to all baptized Catholics.

FutureChurch respects the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and its current position on ordination and advocates widespread discussion of the need to open ordination to all baptized Catholics (underscore mine) called to it by God and the people of God.

FutureChurch seeks to participate in formulating and expressing the *Sensus Fidelium* (the Spirit-inspired beliefs of the faithful) through open, prayerful and enlightened dialogue with other Catholics locally and globally."...

Three (of the group's) efforts (the Future of Priestly Ministry project, the Women in Church Leadership campaign, and the Celebrating Women Witness resources, which includes the Mary of Magdala celebrations) are designed particularly for parish-based Catholics who want to address the "women's issue" but can't talk about women's ordination in their parishes. These initiatives are "formational" insofar as they are geared to bring more Catholic women and men to understand who Jesus really was, that he included women in his closest discipleship, first entrusted the news of the resurrection to women, and that both women and men served in coequal leadership roles (including eucharistic table sharing) in many early Christian communities.

A shorter way of saying it is that for these three projects, we have chosen to finesse our call to discuss women's priestly ordination in the interests of bringing contemporary biblical and historical scholarship about Jesus and women of faith to parish-based Catholics. If we framed it more simplistically (to my mind) solely as women's ordination, we would not have gotten in the door.

This does not mean we no longer call for discussion of women's calls to the priesthood. It does mean that we see women's full inclu-

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## IHR SEID DAS SALZ DER ERDE: A (VERY PERSONAL) SWIDLER TRIBUTE by Virginia Kaib Ratigan

The following article is one of a number of contributions to a festschrift, a collection of articles which serve as a reflection and celebration of the lives of activist scholars Leneord and Arlene Swidler, both of whom turn 75 this year.

Dr. Ingrid Shafer, editor of the tribute, says it is very much a work in progress and that further contributions are most welcome. To view collected articles, see [www.ecumene.org/Swidler75/](http://www.ecumene.org/Swidler75/). To contact Dr. Shafer or submit a contribution, e-mail her at [ihs@ionet.net](mailto:ihs@ionet.net).

As we reflect on the lives of our scholar friends it does not take long to realize how deeply connected their scholarship and teaching are to the relationships among family, friends and students that Arlene and Len have nourished over the years. Although it would be easy for me to focus on the importance of their mentoring and friendship in my own life, this little tribute will reveal many of the facets of their relationship to our children, Beth, Jamie and Anna, who always experienced them as Aunt Arlene and Uncle Len. These “children” are now grown with children of their own, but their adult lives have been shaped by those earlier years. Upon a deeper look at the impact on our children’s lives I realize that in retrospect one finds a key revealing the Swidlers’ love of people, of learning, of travel and of challenge that consistently has been embedded in their research, teaching and writing.

When I asked our daughter Beth what she remembers most clearly about Aunt Arlene and Uncle Len, without hesitation she gave me a long list. First she remembers that they were interested in her school work and in the opportunities for music and drama that her public school presented. She remembers many fun times in our home and the easy way that they could converse about so many topics with her. She remembers a steady stream of *Ranger Rick* magazines recycled from earlier years with their own daughters. She remembers lovely scarves and beads that were treasures from the many trips the Swidlers made all over the world for teaching, dialogue, and recreation. Most of all, Beth remembers an important turning point in her elementary school music career. She had rented a violin from the school during her beginning years. The school’s administrators decided that after the first year students would be responsible for obtaining their own instruments. I remember telling this to Arlene and Len. They knew that our budget was limited at the time so they went shopping for the violin and presented it to Beth. Through the years they attended her school concerts and were supportive in every way. The little violin remains in our closet waiting for Beth’s daughter, Zoe (age two), to be its next proud owner.

Expanding Beth’s world vision was the steady stream of large envelopes containing stamps from all over the globe that came to

the house. These stamps (from the office of *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies*) prompted us to take down the globe in our office and look for the geographical locations where they originated. Actually all of the children benefited from this gift. Finally, Beth remembers the many demonstrations that we attended, particularly those on behalf of women’s ordination. These events were exciting for our children and the lesson learned is the importance of speaking out on issues. Beth presently makes her home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and recently she was driven to bring little Zoe to a *Mother’s Demonstration for Peace*. She said it felt right and consistent with those early days in Philadelphia.

Our son Jamie also had a special relationship with Aunt Arlene and Uncle Len. His interests were travel and studying German. Both of these were honored in the years that he was growing up (in fact we traveled twice with the Swidlers in Germany). Fortunately his school offered German as one of the language options and so he jumped in to his studies with help from his father and the Swidlers. Arlene would continuously send little notes helping him gain vocabulary. At one point along the way Arlene and I were working on a book together (*A New Phoebe\**), and some of the essays and interviews that would be included were to come from several German women.

Since Len was teaching at the University of Tübingen for a semester and Arlene was there doing research, Jamie and I traveled to Germany for both work and recreation. The many little “vocabulary notes” that Jamie received from Arlene were stepped up in preparation for the trip. Recently I found one of these notes in a salt cellar that has been in our china closet all of these years:

*Jamie –*

*This is a salt-cellar. I don’t think I know anyone who uses, or maybe even has, one, either here or in Germany. But this was given Uncle Len by someone in East Germany. It says You are the Salz of the Erde. I imagine it’s one way of keeping up their Christianity in a difficult environment.*

*Anyway, Salz is salt, a handy word. The City of Salzburg, which you can figure out now, was originally a place where boats were stopped to pay a salt tax, I am told. There are also a lot of salt mines in that area. And Pfeffer is pepper, as in Pfeffernusse, peppernuts, those good spicy cookies we get around Christmas time.*

*The other word to know is Erde, earth. Geography in the German schools is Erdkunde. Erdgeschoss is the ground floor. This is important to know, as what we call the first floor is the Ergeschoss, and what we call the second floor is only the first in Germany, the erste Geschoss. Erdbeeren are strawberries; the German word seems to make better sense. Erdbeereis is strawberry ice cream. And Erdgas is just natural gas, from the earth.*

Indeed the trip to Germany was a great success and the vocabulary continued to build as Arlene, his teacher/aunt, would drill Jamie at the breakfast table, on walks, in museums, in churches, in beauti

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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

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ful gardens and in restaurants and ratskellers. Jamie found breakfast a great challenge since Aunt Arlene insisted that he eat a very large bowl of oatmeal for a healthful start to the day. Uncle Len knew just the right time to suggest that Jamie accompany him to the market and bakery for the daily shopping! To Arlene's dismay they never failed to buy chocolate bars at every opportunity, especially when we stopped for gasoline.

Jamie recalls the more serious aspects of his travel as well. His interest in holocaust studies was confirmed on the pilgrimage to Dauchau where what he had studied in school became "real" in the tragic testimonies he found at every turn. And true to their extraordinary teaching skills Arlene and Len suggested questions and explained the historical and cultural contexts of this *dark night* of history as well as the broader world picture of that period (along with consequences today). Jamie continued to follow up on this amazing introduction to the many threads of World War II and wrote two papers subsequently in his student days: one on the children's poetry of the holocaust and the second an oral history project on World War II. He remembers the serious talk of the theologians that he met on those trips, lectures that he did not understand, and a theater presentation on the holocaust. Always he was treated with such care—Aunt Arlene and Uncle Len always bringing him into the conversation and offering explanations. Jamie remembers an intriguing luncheon with Swiss lawyer (and advocate at Vatican Council II for women's ordination), Dr Gertrude Heinzelman. Arlene and I wanted to interview her as we continued to do research on women and the permanent diaconate. That wonderful afternoon brought him in contact with one of the "grandmothers" of the women's ordination movement and I think he began to grasp the work that Arlene and I were so intent on finishing. Also Jamie remembers staying the night in Hans Kung's apartment. As it turned out, Dr. Kung was out of town and Len was able to secure overnight hospitality at his apartment as we continued to travel through Germany.

During our second trip a great historic moment occurred. Jamie remembers that on the way to Frankfort (where we would take the flight for home) there were cars honking and people yelling out of the windows and great chaos all around. We discovered quickly that the Berlin Wall had come down and the whole atmosphere was literally charged with the release of years of pent-up frustration, and the euphoria in the country was never to be forgotten. This historic moment lives vividly in Jamie's mind to this day.

Although I am so grateful for these opportunities for our son, Jamie, I realize that this very enjoyable and challenging "first level research" is what has permeated the teaching styles of both Arlene and Len over the years. One might truly say that they would travel to the ends of the earth to encounter one more person, experience one more lesson from history, visit one more church or museum and participate in one more ritual or conversation!

When asked about her memories of the Swidlers our youngest daughter, Anna (who adopted us by way of Korea when she was eighteen months of age) remembers that Aunt Arlene and Uncle Len always supported cultural interests and had special connections to her native land, Korea. During Anna's early years the Swidlers were working closely with the fledgling community of Won Buddhists in the Philadelphia area. Won Buddhist Bokin Kim was a doctoral candidate at Temple University's department of religion at the time ( Dr. Kim now serves as academic dean for the

newly established Won Institute of Graduate Studies in Glenside, PA). Arlene and I were teaching courses at Villanova University in the religious studies department and were each asked to do a section of one of their introductory courses entitled: Religion and Human Experience. This was a natural for Arlene. She immediately began to think of speakers for our students and this is when she realized that asking Bokin to come to our classes would be good for both our students and him. As a result of Anna's introduction to our new immigrant friend, Bokin took a great interest in her and was a frequent visitor to our household. But it was through Arlene and Len that this friendship flourished. Anna remembers that Aunt Arlene was particularly generous in sending her little cultural items: fans, shoes, books, chopsticks and anything that she found that would speak to the beauty of Korean culture. One experience in particular stands out that involved an excursion to one of the many Asian markets in the Philadelphia area. We delighted in the marvelous array of vegetables, fruits, noodles and the many sauces that we would purchase for our households. Meanwhile Anna was able to experience the flavor of such a market and get a little closer to her roots. But her appreciation and respect for Korean culture go back to those early days and she will, undoubtedly, pass this on to her own daughter, baby Lenora.

Through these many little stories from our children's lives, the lives of Professors Arlene Anderson Swidler and Leonard Swidler are reflected in the larger mosaic of their academic careers. Our family has been the beneficiary of their legacy. Their friendship, their love of children, the intense interest that they demonstrated as they shared their knowledge and insights with others, their sense of humor and earthiness, their dedication to dialogue and global understanding, and their fine teaching and "good" hearts endear them to all of us. The ravages of illness that Arlene has suffered during these later years have not in any way faded the memory of her extraordinary gift of self to us. Arlene and Len, "ihr seid das Salz der Erde"!

*\*A New Phoebe, Perspectives on Roman Catholic Women and the Permanent Diaconate, Edited by Virginia Kaib Ratigan and Arlene Anderson Swidler: Kansas City, MO, Sheed and Ward, 1990)*

*Virginia Kaib Ratigan is Professor Emerita of religious studies at Rosemont College and a long-time member of SEPA/WOC.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

*compiled by staff*

### GRAMICK PILGRIMAGE

Sr. Jeannine Gramick will lead a pilgrimage to Austria and Bavaria for GLBT Catholics, their friends and advocates, from February 26–March 7, 2005.

For details: <http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze43yrc/Austria-Bavariabrochure.pdf> or e-mail [Gramick@juno.com](mailto:Gramick@juno.com).

### TAIZE PRAYER

All are welcome to an ecumenical service of the Scripture, song and silence that constitute Taize prayer on the third Thursday of each month from 7-8 pm at St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 654 N. Easton Rd. Glenside. For information: 215 887-1765.

### FAREWELL TO A FRIEND

It is with sadness that we note the passing of *The Other Side*, an ecumenical Christian magazine which was for many years a strong and fearless voice on issues including sustainable living, advocacy for GLBT Christians and social justice.

The magazine, which was published in Philadelphia, fell victim to rising costs and a decline in subscriptions.

## **SPEAKING OF FAITH: MORE THAN JUST A SHOW**

by Alice J. Foley

“Your show has forced me to get up one half hour early every Sunday,” I said to National Public Radio host Krista Tippett of *Speaking of Faith*. Her administrative assistant Connie said others have told them the same thing.

This show is described as NPR’s national conversation about belief, meaning, ethics and ideas. It is funded by the PEW Charitable Trust and the John Templeton Foundation as well as by regional funders.

Krista Tippett, in a recent interview, said she had been a journalist for many years before returning to school and receiving a masters in divinity degree in 1994 from Yale University. She described herself as a big public radio fan who realized the subject of religion was not covered except for a few specific news stories.

Minnesota Public Radio did some pilots for *Speaking of Faith* in 1999 and 2000 which drew a very favorable response, and then received the money from PEW. At this time almost 100 stations carry *Speaking of Faith* and Philadelphia’s station WHYI (90.9 FM locally) was one of the first to pick it up.

“After the local broadcasts (Minnesota Public Radio), *Speaking of Faith* debuted as a monthly in 2001,” Tippett explained. “The show covers a wide range of subjects but some of its focus changed after 9/11. We then had a show on “Where was God” as well as the “Spirit of Islam.” More of a focus on Islam, but not its radical element, developed after 9/11.

*Speaking of Faith*’s schedule has its team working on ideas/stories for months. Tippett may do an interview during a particular week that airs the following week or not for several months. “The actual production takes several weeks,” she emphasized, “and after the editing, mixing and other processes take place it then sounds flawless.

“We receive more and more ideas from listeners,” she said. “Ideas are all good and we may get to them eventually. There are a lot of big subjects out there and we try to delve into the origin of a specific idea.

“For example, we have been working on a story on communion – it is about being together, a meal, the life/relationship with Jesus. We are still involved with this show and it will air around Thanksgiving.

“I was a journalist for many years, was in divided Berlin at one time and have many interests including the arms race,” Tippett said. “I had a bit of a spiritual crisis, went to divinity school and came back to journalism. There are many ideas not yet done that we need to get to including faith and science and faith and the environment.

“People ask where we get ideas,” Tippett continued. “The people and ideas are all around you and much bigger and richer than merely sound bites. For future shows, I am interested in science and religion, aging, how gender is discussed in different traditions.”

Turning her attention to the name of her show, Tippett said, “When I speak of faith, I mean what totally sustains me in life, as a woman, as a progressive Catholic, as a person with disability and one who tries to have a meaningful relationship with God. Faith is the mustard seed built by spirituality, put into practice in my daily life and lived out by fifty- plus years of Catholic beliefs and social justice teachings.”

*Alice J. Foley* is a member of the core committee of SEPA/WOC, a member of Dignity, and member of St. Vincent de Paul parish

## **IALOGUE BOX CONTINUED**

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sion as a process, the first part of which is to educate about Jesus’ inclusive practice and to bring to visibility all the women ministers already serving in the church. The second part of the process as we see it, is to ordain women deacons. In the Anglican communion, women served first as deaconesses, then deacons and THEN they were ordained priests. Since the institutional church has not said women could not be ordained to the diaconate, this is still discussible in parishes and elsewhere. The fact is (if you read John Wijngaard and Phyllis Zagano, the two experts on this subject) the Church had deacons before we had priests (as we understand priests today). Paul describes Phoebe as diakonos...the same word he applied to himself. The ordination rites for women deacons were the same as those for men deacons and they were regarded as sacramental. (Hence the reluctance of the institution to ordain female deacons...but they have not, and cannot, close the door on this without serious damage to their credibility)...

To petition for women deacons does not mean that we have stopped advocating discussion of women’s ordination to the priesthood. Along with the Catholic Theological Society of America we believe widespread discussion of ordaining women to the priesthood is of the utmost importance. We have conflicting teachings in the Church...The Church says women are equal. But women can’t exercise this equality since canon law says only the ordained can participate in Church governance ... and of course only men can be ordained. Opening the discussion of priestly ordination to women in the Catholic Church will require much internal processing, alteration of canon law, and revision of some recent rather prominent proclamations. Such discussion may even require a third Vatican Council as Cardinal Martini among others, has suggested.

As we see it, opening the diaconate to women does not require such a complicated process, but is a doable, reasonable next step.

*Chris Schenk*

## **CATHOLIC TRADITION TOO RICH TO ABANDON DUE TO DISAPPOINTMENTS**

*The following article was part of a discussion on the katholica listserv, and is reprinted here with the author’s permission.*

One can understand the keen disappointment felt by many as we learn of a few bishops instructing their dioceses to vote, for all practical purposes, for George W. Bush. However, is leaving the church the most helpful way of expressing one’s disappointment? Why not stay and demonstrate that Catholics may, in good conscience, make another choice? Groups such as Pax Christi and the Catholic Peace Fellowship are doing much to enlighten many consciences about the horrors of the war in Iraq, as do several influential Catholic publications such as America. This unjust war is also a moral outrage, and one may rightly be convinced that s/he could never vote for a candidate who is promoting it. We need to defend the primacy of an informed conscience, especially in dealing with complex and controversial issues (such as voting, when one does not agree completely with any of the candidates).

People tempted to leave the church because of their disappointment with the church/institution might consider joining a really authentic Catholic community, where the laity are treated like adults and the primacy of conscience respected, and especially a community that makes the Sunday Eucharist a vibrant celebration of faith, and they will never want to leave. Our Catholic Tradition (with a capitol T) is too rich to be discarded because of recent (and very real) disappointments.

*...Charles Finnegan, OFM*

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## Book Reviews

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**THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE: MY CLIMB OUT OF DARKNESS** by Karen Armstrong. Knopf: NY, 2004. 336 pages. \$24.00.

reviewed by Patricia Conroy

Do you ever wonder what might happen if you were to keep yourself utterly open to flowing with the tides of life? In her latest book, British scholar Karen Armstrong invites us to do just that. *The Spiral Staircase*, subtitled *My Climb Out of Darkness*, tells the story of Armstrong's life from her decision to leave the convent after seven mostly torturous years, through her studies at Oxford and her work as a teacher, to her present life as an author and lecturer. This journey takes us all over the world and introduces us to a diverse mix of friends, jobs, experiences, highs and lows described with such candor that the reader is left exhausted, yet smiling.

*The Spiral Staircase* is a sequel to *The Narrow Gate*, the story of the author's convent life. Since her years in the convent continue to shape Armstrong profoundly, it would be impossible for her not to include incidents from them in this more recent book. It is riveting and painful to read that an obviously brilliant young woman was systematically trained to stop thinking. Her religious order followed, and possibly distorted, the rules of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, intended to make one "utterly pliable to the will of God as expressed through superiors." As a result of such teaching, we find Armstrong, as a postulant, for hours purposely and mindlessly treading a sewing machine with no needle in it. Her life as a nun is at once distressing and engrossing, much like a traffic accident. For the most part, however, Armstrong manages to maintain the insight of a detached observer.

Always a scholar, after leaving the convent, Armstrong was able to immerse herself in her studies. The noise, music, dancing and freedom of college and secular life offered thrilling but frightening challenges. She easily penned scholarly papers, yet was completely unable to take part in classroom discussions that required

her to voice her own thoughts and ideas.

She then moves through periods of tremendous upheaval: the eventual loss of her faith, anorexia, epilepsy, denial of an Oxford doctorate, being fired from her teaching position. These all become necessary stepping stones to her next career or phase of life. After publication of *The Narrow Gate*, which brings Armstrong some publicity and television appearances, she is asked to write and present a six-part documentary on St. Paul to be filmed in Jerusalem. It is here that her eyes and intellect are opened not only to a new understanding of Christianity, but also to Judaism and Islam. She goes on to write such authoritative books as *Muhammed: A Biography of a Prophet* (1993) and *A History of God: The 4000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (1994). In *The Spiral Staircase* Armstrong continues to impart wisdom from each of these faiths, but to our great benefit, she also expands upon her own unique philosophy, psychology, spirituality, and view of the world.

The book is not a difficult read, but not an easy one, either; I was unable to digest more than one hour of it at a time. Reading it reminded me of my first philosophy class, with its entirely new ways of looking at life which left me preoccupied and distracted. Similarly, *The Spiral Staircase* is a meaty and profound book, full of engrossing intellectual and spiritual insight and challenge.

Yet because the author maintains light-heartedness and good humor, *The Spiral Staircase* is also thoroughly entertaining. It forces a re-examination of belief systems and one's own particular view of the world. Sometimes, as a reader, I can become lazy and comfortable. When that happens, I know instinctively that *someone* or *something* is getting ready to give me a jolt. Karen Armstrong and her latest, *The Spiral Staircase* provide just such a jolt.

*Patricia Conroy is a real estate agent and writer who lives in Rydal, PA.*

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**FRIENDS OF GOD AND PROPHETS: A FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL READING OF THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS** by Elizabeth A. Johnson. Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999. Paperback: 320 pages. \$19.95.

**TRULY OUR SISTER: A THEOLOGY OF MARY IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS** by Elizabeth A. Johnson. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003. Hardcover; 379 pp. \$26.95

**DANGEROUS MEMORIES: A MOSAIC OF MARY IN SCRIPTURE** by Elizabeth A. Johnson. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004. Paperback: 172 pp. \$13.95.

reviewed by Gaile M. Pohlhaus

Just 4 pages fewer than 875 is the cumulative reading involved in these books. Am I suggesting that you read all of them? Well yes and no. The opportunity to study in detail the texts which Beth Johnson has written (and they are many more than these three) is too powerful a temptation for me to resist and I hope that this is true for you also. Undoubtedly many of you are familiar with *Consider Jesus* (Crossroad, 1990) and/ or *She Who Is* (Herder & Herder, 1992, 1993).

The overall impression which comes from a study of Johnson's work is threefold. The first is her absolute carefulness. Secondly is her amazing clarity of thought and style of writing. Folks may struggle with the profound ideas she discusses but they

rarely complain about her writing style. The third, and most important, is her firm commitment to the tradition of Catholicism while maintaining the ability to move beyond the tradition and explore. Unlike Karl Rahner who brings one only to the edge of new understandings and insights, Johnson explores such insights vigorously and pushes doctrine in new directions.

Her first book, *Consider Jesus* (1990), started as a series of lectures for the American Catholic bishops to bring them up to date on new Christology. *Consider Jesus* sets the standard for all her succeeding writing. In it she is very careful to distinguish between images of God and images of Jesus, which parallels her careful distinction between God and Jesus. On p. 105 she considers several different parables related in the gospels. One is the

image of God as a baker woman who is kneading yeast into flour in order for the bread to rise. Next she considers the twin parables in Luke 15—God as a housewife searching for a lost coin and God as a shepherd searching for the lost sheep. All of these parables reflect “the active, consuming love of God the redeemer” (105). Notice that she uses the noun God here and not the name of Jesus to identify “the redeemer.” She is referring to the totality of God and at the same time the second person of the Trinity who became embodied in Jesus. She is walking a fine line between modalism and Jesuolatry.

Johnson acknowledges that the common image of God is male and she attributes this to “the naïve use of the historical maleness of Jesus” (111-112). We can see here her precision, her absolute carefulness, in her use of language especially with regard to Jesus and to God.

She *Who Is* (1992) continues to exhibit clarity and precision of language as well as clarity of style. The ideas presented are overwhelming. I quote here a paragraph from the beginning chapter, “To speak rightly of God”:

The historical open-endedness of talk about God is due not only to its location in time, place, and culture, which is the case with all human speech, but to the very nature of what we are talking about. The reality of God is mystery beyond all imagining. So transcendent, so immanent is the holy mystery of God that we can never wrap our minds completely around this mystery and exhaust divine reality in words or concepts. The history of theology is replete with this truth: recall Augustine’s insight that if we have understood, then what we have understood is not God; Anselm’s argument that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived; Hildegard’s vision of God’s glory as Living Light that blinded her sight (7).

We can get a comprehensive overview of Johnson’s images of God in *She Who Is* by simply running down the titles of her various chapters: “To Speak Rightly of God,” “Feminist Theology and Critical Discourse about God,” “Basic Linguistic Options: God, Women, Equivalence,” “Women’s Interpreted Experience,” “Scripture and its Trajectories,” “Classical Theology,” “Spirit-Sophia,” and “Jesus-Sophia.”

When Beth Johnson was invited to present a paper on Mary for Villanova University’s 26<sup>th</sup> Theology Institute in 1993, she was in the early stages of her exploration of Miriam of Nazareth, having just published *She Who Is* the preceding year. As her work continued she realized that the study of Mary needed to be situated in a broader theological context. This was the genesis of *Friends of God and Prophets*, published in 1999.

*Friends of God and Prophets* starts with an examination of the situation under study or, as she calls Part One “Framing the Question.” The frame, the context, Johnson uses to examine the communion of saints is that of a sleeping symbol and Christian feminism. The sleeping symbol emerges to be communities of memory and hope, communities of prophets.

When Beth Johnson speaks of Christian feminism do not confuse it with the Vatican’s style of Christian feminism. Johnson and the authors of the feminist theologies she examines (fundamental, ethical, and pluralist) do not wish to be men as the recent Vatican document claims, nor are the words “equal” and “rights” (not to mention complimentary!) predominant in these theologies. She speaks of a symphony of voices mutually enhancing one another. Feminist theologies lead us to friendship and friendship is the identifying mark of the community of saints.

Part II of *Friends of God and Prophets* is the (re)discovery of this tradition in the history of the idea of the communion of saints. She examines two different models. What she calls the “patrons-

petitioners” is the model with which we are more familiar. The second, “companions together,” has always been there, but we are only beginning to recognize its power and appropriateness.

In the final 124 pages of text Johnson then develops a theology of the friends of God and prophets, calling to mind women’s practices of memory and how women have created companions in memory. While this companionship seems threatened by the darkness of death, women (and men) have found that “(W)e do not know, in the literal sense, but we hope. In the end, everything depends on the character of God” (201).

It is through the communion of saints that we become companions in hope when faced with death. Some of our companions have already died; some of us face death in the future. Yet death is our goal, the time when we will truly reflect God; with death, God will have achieved in us image restoration. And this image, this symbol, is an activating surge of love impelling us to love God and one another. We are active friends, prophets.

At the very end of the book are eight pages devoted to lists of names and prayers (litanies). This book itself will form bonds of connectedness throughout the universe. The communion of saints makes us all truly sisters and brothers.

Having situated all persons within the communion of saints, Beth Johnson is now ready to look at the memory, the dangerous memory, of one sister in particular, Miriam of Nazareth. The immediate problem of course is that there is not one memory but many memories. There are the different memories of the four canonical gospels, the memory of the Acts of the Apostles, and the memories of the noncanonical gospels. There are the memories of the stories surrounding icons, visitations, and blessings of Mary. Parts one, two, and three of *Truly Our Sister* tackle the difficulties of examining who Mary is. They show us various running paths to take, most of which seem to lead into *cul de sacs*. Johnson wants to move from what has become a transcendent symbol to a historical person.

Thus Johnson has to use tesserae to weave a tapestry or better yet make a mosaic which can tell us about Miriam of Nazareth. (A tessera is one of the small squares of stone or glass used in making mosaic patterns.) Both tapestries and mosaics require frames and part four of this book constructs the setting in which Mary lived, giving us the economic, religious, and cultural world in which she lived. Part five: “Mary in the Communion of Saints” is the meat of this book. Recognizing this, Continuum has published part five as a stand-alone book, *Dangerous Memories: A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture*. Adding about fifty pages summarizing the first four parts of *Truly Our Sister*, *Dangerous Memories* is suitable for adult reading groups or use in undergraduate classes.

Whichever book you choose you will be well rewarded with insights and images. Johnson presents us with a mosaic taken from the many perspectives of the entire Bible. For those unfamiliar with the purposes of each of the four gospels she brings us into the conversation with ease and directness. She looks at each of the fourteen scenes depicting Mary with “women’s eyes” and points out things which other writers often overlook. The resulting mosaic gives us a picture of a human woman who is both truly our sister and truly a prophet and friend of God. .

That should have been the final word but I have two more things to say. The first is that if you want to get a full picture of the contemporary theological landscape you could not do better than to read the works of Elizabeth Johnson. The second is that my personal criterion for good theology is: can I pray it? Not only can I pray Beth Johnson’s work, it forces me to pray.

**Gaile M. Pohlhaus** is a member of the faculty at Villanova University and coordinator of Villanova’s annual Theology Institute

## CALENDAR

### Centers for Spiritual Growth and Support

*The following centers and groups offer programs and activities of interest to progressive Catholics. If you would like to include events in the **Equal wRites** Calendar, please contact Cassie at 215-467-8898 or [peacecatphilly@yahoo.com](mailto:peacecatphilly@yahoo.com)*

**Franciscan Spiritual Center**, a contemplative place of simple beauty, respectful of creation, and reflective of the Franciscan values of hospitality, mutuality and Gospel living, offers programs that are holistic, ecumenical, collaborative in nature and supportive of nonviolence. The center provides accommodations, space for spiritual direction, prayer, study, art and exercise on a beautiful, handicapped-accessible campus. Clare House is a quiet place for contemplation, guided retreat weekends and directed prayer. Deepen your season with one of the center's Advent retreats: Hollowing Out the Darkness with the Light; Waiting in the Cave of the Heart; or Birthing Christ into Our World. In January, explore Art as Prayer; Inner Peace for Busy People and in February, the center offers retreats attentive to the spiritual gifts of those living with AIDS or widows and widowers. Also in February, learn about the Outrageous Pursuit of Community. For more information, call 610 527-4813 or check the web site at [www.fscaston.org](http://www.fscaston.org). The center is at 609 S. Convent Rd. in Aston, PA.

**Kirkridge** is a retreat and study center rooted in Christ, close to the earth, where people of diverse backgrounds find community and experience the transforming power of the Spirit for personal wholeness, reconciliation and justice in the world. Its work is based on the understanding that the life of faith requires not only action to transform the world toward greater shalom, but also the cultivation of a deep spirituality to sustain that compassionate action. In January, attend the Peacemaker Training Institute, try Knitting into Mystery or learn about The Recovery of Radical Christianity in a Secular Age. February is time to experience the literature of religious imagination with Light to Read By; Finding God in the Questions of Our Hearts; or becoming Empowered for Change with Nonviolence Training. For more information on these among many other programs, check [www.kirkridge.org](http://www.kirkridge.org), call 610-588-1793 or e-mail [kirkridge@fast.net](mailto:kirkridge@fast.net). Kirkridge is located at 2495 Fox Gap Road in Bangor, PA.

**Mary's Vineyard** welcomes people of all faiths. All those alienated from the traditions of their upbringing will be given opportunities to continue their search for meaning. Although primarily focused on the needs of women, the center is open to all who have accepted the responsibility to form and care for future generations and who desire to share their burdens and joys with others. Enjoy one of the ongoing programs: Weekly Yoga on Mondays; QiGong or Pilates on Tuesdays; Reiki Healing on Wednesdays; Meditation on the third Saturday and Peace Prayers on the 11<sup>th</sup> of each month. This winter, let the Vineyard workers help you Work through Grief and Loss, Find Balance During Uncertain Times, Pray with your Feet or learn about The Four Agreements. Or choose in February to experience the ancient healing art of Jin Shin Jyutsu. For information about these and other upcoming programs at Mary's Vineyard, please call 856 428-5495 or check the web site at [www.marysvineyard.org](http://www.marysvineyard.org). Mary's Vineyard is located at 1812 Haddonfield-Berlin Road in Cherry Hill, NJ.

At **Pendle Hill**, education is envisioned as the transforming of people and society. Programs offer the resources and time for integrated spiritual, intellectual and personal learning. Guests come to Pendle Hill to study, learn more about Quakerism, seek an experience of community living, deepen prayer and spiritual life, or discern a future direction. Welcome the new year with a four-day festival of art and prayer, including storytelling, discoveries in paper and clay and mindfulness. January programs include a Yoga Retreat You Can Take Home; Dreaming Paths to a Better World, Couples Enrichment and Simple Living. In February, try an Experiment with Light; Dancing in the Gates of Jewish Spirituality or Launch your Spiritual Autobiography. For more information on any Pendle Hill programs, call 610 566-4507 or check the web site at [www.pendlehill.org](http://www.pendlehill.org). Pendle Hill is located at 338 Plush Mill Road in Wallingford, PA.

The **SSJ Center for Spirituality** is a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill rooted in the charism of unity and reconciliation. In a spirit of hospitality, the center welcomes individuals and groups for spiritual direction, retreats, and other opportunities for deepening one's relationship with God, self, and all creation. For more information on upcoming programs, call 215 248-7231. The SSJ Center is at 9701 Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill, PA.

**Temenos**, an outreach ministry of the Swedenborgian Church, is a nonprofit conference and retreat center. It exists to facilitate renewal and transformation in human lives in the Swedenborgian spirit of inquiry and personal growth and the belief that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life. Programs are open to persons of all spiritual traditions and the sacred space of Temenos is also available for private individual retreats and for groups wishing to reserve space for their own programs or events. Visitors are welcome at worship Sundays at 10:30 a.m. at the Farm House Chapel followed by a spiritual discussion group at 12:15 p.m. This winter, learn the Art of Spiritual Warfare or enjoy a non-alcoholic, family-friendly New Year's Eve featuring games and music to "clear out the old and ring in the new." For information call 610 696-8145 or e-mail [programs@temenosretreat.org](mailto:programs@temenosretreat.org). Temenos is at 1564 Telegraph Road in West Chester, PA.

## Local Works for Peace, Justice and Equality

**ANCHOR** (A Non-Denominational Community Harvesting Our Resources) is a group of Christians committed to living creatively and reflectively. Its mission is to engage in the holistic exploration of contemporary spiritual/religious/moral issues. Communal prayer days and discussion groups, one each in the fall and the spring, address relevant topics of religious and social concern. For particulars on any of the above programs, call 215 233-4929 and request a calendar of events.

The **Brandywine Peace Community** continues its peaceful resistance to the manufacture of weapons by Lockheed Martin and to America's presence in Iraq. Join the community for a monthly potluck supper and program on the second Sunday of each month, 4:30 pm, University Lutheran Church, 3637 Chestnut St., Philadelphia (bring a main dish, salad, or dessert to share.) Also, join the community as a presence for peace at Lockheed Martin on December 22 for a Christmas Candlelight Vigil for Peace and on Martin Luther King Day, January 17. For information, call 610 544-1818 or e-mail [brandywine@juno.com](mailto:brandywine@juno.com).

**Call to Action/Philadelphia**, a group committed to church renewal, serves southeastern Pennsylvania, south Jersey and Delaware. For information on organizational meetings and programs, call 215 345-1176.

**COR/Philadelphia (Catholic Organizations for Renewal)** is a coalition of individuals and groups, including SEPA/WOC, sharing a commitment to a renewed church. All are most welcome to attend planning meetings. Information: 215 232-7823.

**Dignity Sunday Liturgies** are at 7 pm at St. Luke and the Epiphany Church, 330 S. 13 St. in Philadelphia. The church is wheelchair-accessible. For information on these and other Dignity programs, call 215 546-2093.

**House of Grace Catholic Worker** participates in faith-based resistance to the war and all forms of violence while offering health care to our neighbors in need. Contact the house for details on events that you can join: 215 426-0364.

**Philadelphia Catholic Worker** hosts liturgy and potluck every Thursday at 6 pm at 430 W. Jefferson Street. Fr. Charles Finnegan, OFM, will celebrate an Advent liturgy on Thursday, December 9 at 6:00 P.M. The Philadelphia Catholic Worker is a community striving to follow in the footsteps of Dorothy Day. A newsletter, "Common Life," is available upon request. For information, call 215 232-7823.

**Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference** core committee meetings with liturgy are held monthly, and all are welcome. For information on time and location, call 215 545-9649.

**Women of Faith**, a ministry of the Metropolitan Christian Council, is an ecumenical community in the greater Philadelphia area that celebrates women's gifts in Christian ministry and seeks justice and equality for all women in the church and the broader society. Women of Faith endeavors to foster Christian unity through worship and education, bringing together persons from diverse cultures and backgrounds for mutual nurture, support and service to the larger community. Join Women of Faith for a monthly potluck supper. For information on Women of Faith's Advent liturgy on December 9, see page 3. For information, contact the Metropolitan Christian Council at 215 836-7784.

### *Spirituality and Healing Workshop*

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Presented by:  
**The Time Out Center  
Jenny and Jim Ratigan, Facilitators**

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# SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

## ADVENT 2004

Isaiah 21:1-5,

Isaiah 35,

Psalm 72,146

by Judith A. Heffernan

Writing this reflection the weekend before the US election, I am certainly reminded of many Advent themes: waiting, anticipation, prayer, repentance, hope and peace.

Whatever the outcome of this election, our call will still be that of Isaiah which we will hear again this Advent: *They shall beat their swords into plowshares...they shall not train for war again.* This Advent, we will also hear the psalmist proclaim: *God sets captives free.*

I am reminded of Sister Jeannine Gramick's visit to our local Call to Action. She shared a wise and heartfelt reflection about her life's work.

Jeannine reminded us that although many of us heard that love is the most important virtue, we absorbed that obedience is the most important virtue. She encouraged us to take the time to travel further along the path of moral discernment.

As we grow in faith, we must look at the wisdom of the community, past and present, we must look at the Scriptures, at theologian

cal development, at our own personal experiences (what does our heart tell us?) and bring it all to prayer.

Then we must share our truth and, with communal discernment, we will build on the past and help the church/the world progress.

One reason Jeannine was officially silenced was that she "incited the people to protest!!" She then reflected on *Gaudium and Spes* and read that while observing the moral order and the common benefit, we should be able to speak the truth freely. She then decided not to cooperate in her own oppression. She would not agree to be silenced.

She exhorted us to not silence ourselves, and if we are locked in a closet of fear to find the key!!

Locked in. As we prepare for WOC's thirtieth anniversary celebration, I am reminded of the ritual which began the third anniversary celebration..."We have experienced chains, chains that oppress and bind...we have experienced chains, chains that link and free...help us transform the shackles that enslave and let neither hardened hearts nor frightened folk deter us from the road of freedom...may we begin anew to forge new links." Set the captives free.

As we celebrate the hope and peace of Christmas, as we begin the new year in which we will continue to incite the people to protest, may we never, as I read recently, put a period where there is only a comma. God is still working.

*Judy Heffernan has a Master of Divinity degree from a Catholic seminary. A member of the Community of the Christian Spirit, she is an original member of the Women's Ordination Conference.*

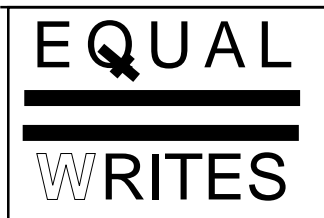
### FINE POINTS

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**AFFILIATION:** *Equal wRites* 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 *Equal wRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be March 2005. Final deadline for submissions is January 15. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122 (215) 232-7823, or e-mail her at [pclaverhouse@aol.com](mailto:pclaverhouse@aol.com).

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