

	<b>EQUAL</b>	<b>Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area</b>
Vol. XV No. 2		SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2006
	<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>

## PICTURES AT AN ORDINATION

At least forty people from the Philadelphia area were present on the Gateway Clipper steamboat *Majestic* to witness the ordinations of twelve women by three women bishops. *Equal wRites* asked many for a short – and fast – snapshot of their reflections on the July 31, 2006, event. What emerges from those submitted is the thirty-year old motto of the Women’s Ordination Conference: a renewed priestly ministry in a renewed church. This is not only about women being ordained; it is about what women mean for change in the greater church. We saw this change begin again in Pittsburgh, part of the ever-continuing Resurrection event. We celebrate this day and we think about the next steps. As the bishops said to the deacons in giving them their lectionaries: “Believe what you read. Teach what you believe. Practice what you teach.” We are all called to the Gospel message of renewal and love.

*More reflections begin on page 5.*

They were wives, mothers and grandmothers, teachers, nurses, hospice workers, campus ministers. They brought a rich background to their new roles as priest. They promised us a discipleship of equals with a heavy emphasis on service, already lived in their work and experience. These women also already know about the quest for equality, about finding yourself viewed as less than equal.

I thought about the young frightened seminarians that cross our paths in the women’s ordination movement: twenty-something and sure they know all there is to know, including what’s right for everybody else. If only those with the power to acknowledge the Church’s error could see this seasoned, bright, dedicated, loving and Gospel-directed group of women who are ready, willing and able to serve and bring the Good News to a culture and a country starving for it. If only.

Being in the presence of Patricia Fresen is in itself a grace. To see the grace-filled way she conducted these ordinations— with reverence and respect, with humility and joy—was a delight. I was moved as these women prostrated themselves and the litany of the saints was chanted. The bishops moved to the side so there was no mistake that this ultimate act of humility was before God and not the bishops. As the cantor and the community chanted and asked the help of Perpetua and Felicity, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, among others, I sensed that we (ordinands and supporters) who have been sidelined and marginalized by this church are not alone. Our spiritual ancestors were often marginalized, too, and we called on all of them to help these women fulfill their promises to help heal a very broken world.

*Peg Murphy is a member of the SEPA WOC Core Committee.*

The ordination was thrilling, truly monumental, the fruition of years of struggle. My thoughts like the river flowed in many directions. I thought mostly of my children and grand-

children. This is the beginning of a new church that will accept their talents with full equality, diversity, reverence – and even their foibles will not be condemned. The inclusiveness was palpable. It was a tender, gentle event, not pompous and exclusive. The liturgy brought home the feminine face of the divine – “Thanks be to God”. At one point, I turned to my new found friend and whispered “free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”

*Roseanne Hunt-Harkin is a long-time member of SEPA WOC who lives in Atlantic Beach, Florida.*

### MANY THANKS

Because of the generosity of one of our supporters, SEPA WOC is able to send this complementary copy to those who have expressed interest in the past. We want to share our many celebrations with you.

Thanks for coming to Holy Thursday; it was a wonderful, happy, spirit-filled celebration. Thanks for coming to Ordination Day; it was a powerful witness to the two women in our group who will stand for ordination this year. Thanks for sharing the SEPA WOC celebration of Mary Magdalen; we had our minds opened to new (old) gospels and our hearts opened to our special call. Thanks for being with us in Pittsburgh to share in the Roman Catholic WomenPriests ordinations of a new twelve. Thanks for your contributions for the chasuble for Eileen DiFranco, our own among the dozen.

And thanks for your contributions to SEPA WOC itself. We have received enough to pay for *Equal wRites* for the next year. If you’re not in that select group and want to be, express your commitment by sending a check to our treasurer, Marianne Jann, 49 Driscoll Drive, Ivyland, PA 18974. We would love to expand our reach.

Thanks. That is the meaning of Eucharist, as you know. You do it every day.

*Regina Bannan*

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVANT MINISTRY**

Dear Karen,

I am a long time subscriber to *Equal wRites* and was particularly interested in the most recent issue (which I've already passed on to a friend). I hadn't known (or had forgotten) that ordinations had been done and that the upcoming one in Pittsburgh is about to happen. Your article on the necessity, indeed command, of women who are ordained to enter into Christ's servant ministry, as opposed to becoming another piece of the male hierarchy, was just great.

Much to the amazement and consternation of the Episcopal church, the House of Bishops (concurring by the House of Deputies, lay and clergy) recently elected a woman to be our Presiding Bishop (U.S.)! You probably know this. In any case, after reading your article, I decided to send you the enclosed which is Katharine Schori's original acceptance for being placed in nomination. My husband, Allen, retired Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of PA, was privileged to vote for her. I do believe that she has the potential of doing the kind of ministry you are holding up. May she be enabled by Jesus and the Holy Spirit to withstand whatever comes her way.

Sincerely,  
*Jerrie Bartlett* Philadelphia

**MOVEMENT AND COMMUNITY**

Someone asked me in the week of exciting events whether I wanted to be next to be ordained. I said no. "Maybe a deacon?" she suggested.

I gave my usual reply, "No, a bishop!" But I really started thinking about my role in all this, and realized that I am doing exactly what I want to be doing, and have been doing it for more than twenty years.

I want to build the movement for women's equality in the church. Right now it feels like this movement is an essential precondition to women's priestly ministry, at least in our time. And it is finally beginning to achieve real, public results. Remember the old Baltimore Catechism definition of sacrament: an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. The recent ordinations have been sacraments in this most public sense, outward signs not only within the movement but also to the world at large.

Change is not easily accomplished in this church, and I love having a piece of it. But what we have done here at Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference is only one piece. I have always supported the "big tent" approach, recognizing that everyone from the "ordination is subordination" school of Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza to those who will accept no substitutes for full canonical rites in the cathedral belongs with us. Talking about how we differ is how we grow—as long as we don't divide.

In response to Karen Lenz's article in the last *Equal wRites* (read at <http://www.sepawoc.org/>), I would like to put forward a suggestion that Judy Heffernan made: "Maybe our

*continued on next column*

**A FEMALE BISHOP'S VIEWS:  
SACUTARIES ON THE STREET?**

*The following excerpt is from remarks of the Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori in response to questions by the nominating committee for the 26<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of America.*

The major issues facing the Church today have to do with its role in society. Will the Episcopal Church travel down a road to irrelevance or will we make common cause with whoever shares our values? Will we stay in our sanctuaries (figurative and literal) or in an even more self-giving way begin to develop sanctuaries on the streets? Will many of our members continue to believe that faith is something that can be neatly dealt with in an hour on Sunday morning and politely neglected the rest of the week? Or will we really begin to live into what was promised at our baptism, each and every day of our lives? We are meant to be transformative elements in this world, laboring to create something that looks much more like God's reign. We must get over the sense that religion and faith should have nothing to do with politics, recalling what Jesus said about serpents and doves, and not abandon the political realm to a highly questionable slant on Jesus' teaching. Gospel-based discipleship in this church could profitably include learning more about community organizing!

The other side of this is a desperate need to reach out to the vast majority of folk in this country and beyond who have no sense that Christianity is about recognizing the love of God for us all. Once we begin to own that realization in the depths of our own beings, we have some ability and capacity to participate in the mission of the Church. Reaching out to all those people will mean holding lightly some of our passionate prejudices about "proper forms of worship" and learning anew how to meet and welcome the stranger who may not speak English or appreciate baroque music. The Church's task in that department is to "entertain angels unawares" and bless the best of local cultures as showing forth the glory of God. Jesus and Paul (and Patrick) knew this, and some liturgists today can teach us about baptizing the best of the cultures around us.

goal for the fall should be meetings about where we are in our own hearts and where we want WOC to go. We had said we would do that when we were discussing the 5/3/2003 liturgy." That was the first of our events at the Friends Meetinghouse, and we had to put a Eucharist together that would please everyone. It raised questions we never answered except in action—sacrament—and we did the same thing for our second event on 3/5/2005, successfully in both cases, I think. We prayed together; we were movement and community.

I would like to invite everyone who can to join us in this discussion. Our first meeting in the fall will be Monday, September 25, at the Catholic Worker house at Fourth and Jefferson. We meet at 6 pm for a light supper and lighter discussion, and then have our meeting from 7 to 9 pm. Please let either Karen ([pclaverhouse@aol.com](mailto:pclaverhouse@aol.com)) or me

*continued on page 3*

([bannan@temple.edu](mailto:bannan@temple.edu)) know you are coming so we know how much food to order.

But did you catch how I snuck in “community” back there? That’s part of my answer to Karen’s questions.

I was overwhelmed when I walked into the First United Methodist Church of Germantown (FUMCOG) because it was full! Full! To join Eileen McCafferty DiFranco in celebrating her first mass. There were concentric circles of communities there: the St. Vincent’s community, the SEPA/WOC community, the Roman Catholic womenpriests community, various small faith and parish communities, other church reform communities, Germantown communities—many, many halos, circles, winding among us, connecting us with many others there and not there, all together to say “Yes, Amen” for this step forward in Philadelphia. Not the first step and not the last. But a really important one—based in community.

My answer to what the movement must do is to keep focused on communities. The two Philadelphia parishes most represented in Pittsburgh have had vibrant women’s faith groups for many years. Community means much more than just worshipping together; it is really sharing what is really deep, doing together what is really important, living faith and extending it beyond the community. That is our challenge now.

*Regina Bannan*, Philadelphia

## TO GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT

I really like good arguments. A friend of mine jokes that I argue about the color of the sky just to stay in practice. After reading the article “Let Us Proceed with Love and Deliberation” in the June-August 2006 issue of *Equal wRites*, I accept the invitation to dialogue.

One morning I was browsing through books and came across *The Q Gospel* and started reading. The event itself was rather insignificant but in combination with other ones speaks volumes to me about the state of the official Roman Catholic church. One can start by asking: How come we mainly hear about the four canonical gospels? How come women cannot be priests? How come priests cannot marry? How come gays and lesbians are ostracized and their authenticity attacked? How come nonviolence is not at the core of everything Christians do? One could go on, but I would like to add one more question: How come we have priests anyway?

Matthew 23:8-11 expresses my sentiments regarding priesthood beautifully: “You must not be called ‘Teacher,’ because you are all equal and have only one Teacher. And you must not call anyone here on earth ‘Father,’ because you have only the one Father in heaven. Nor should you be called ‘Leader,’ because your one and only leader is the Messiah. The greatest one among you must be your servant.”

Think of the recent ordinations of women by Roman Catholic bishops and stop to consider how little those women could accomplish within the existing system even if they were accepted today into the hierarchical structure. Here I go on record to say that I strongly believe that women should be

allowed to compete for any job they choose. The fact that I do not believe in the necessity of an official priesthood does not preclude my support of women’s ordination. If you ask me, the church is a construction of many individuals whose agendas have little to do with Jesus’ teachings. The church does not have a monopoly on Jesus and certainly does not decide who is a true Christian. The church’s audacity in excluding persons from receiving Eucharist borders on a pathological control disorder.

The failure to consider all available documentation about the life of Jesus as recorded in the alternative gospels and accounts, the failure to foster inner and inter-religious dialogue, and the failure to respect individuals as rational and reasonable beings, all contribute to the erosion of credibility and to the creation of irrelevance. These comments may seem out of touch with the reality of spiraling conversions among people of African countries, but the literalistic mentality of many new converts is in sync with the official, exclusionary, hierarchical, and inflexible nature of the official church.

Even within the so-called radical reform groups, such as the women’s ordination conference (WOC), there is an inability to liberate oneself of the Roman Catholic aura of authority, to think outside the box of “structural” Catholicism. We radical women fail to even engage in dialogue with one another to explore our individual understanding of the priesthood. We fail to include racial and sexual politics in the movement for reform. What does it matter that the person who stands on the altar is a woman if the institution still denigrates gays and lesbians, still supports the dominant military-industrial complex that keeps many minority and other people living in poverty, and promotes authoritarian and an exclusionary mind-set for everybody? The fact that the threat of excommunication always hangs over one’s head like a sword of Damocles is a feature of a dominating culture in which only a few—substitute only a few white males—are capable of discerning the right (moral) course of action. And are *you* in?

My advice is to run, actually sprint, away from this exclusionary scene. Positioning oneself within any organization as a primary identification creates a sense of otherness and puts the focus on *you*, which can be harmful enough, but it also distracts from the nature and state of that which you are *in*. The *in* in this case is our Roman Catholic church of many sins, and if I were to waste your time and mine dissecting its sad state and archaic nature we might as well take a long vacation. If this abysmal assessment does not convince you that other denominations or other religions are calling you then you may be stuck with me in the Catholic mess. Unfortunately for all, nothing changes unless some take action and after we return from our vacation the church will need more committed people to reshape and/or build it up from the ground. The beautiful thing about big messes is the potential for new vistas and I urge you to allow space for many different visions, diverse people, and brotherhood and sisterhood for all. Even though I personally did not get overly enthusiastic about the ordinations of eight women in Pittsburgh this July, I acknowledge the rightness of their visions because my church has space for all.

*Magda Eliasova*, Philadelphia.

*Dialogue Box continued on page 13*

## WOMANPRIEST: CALL & RESPONSE

By Jean Marchant, M.Div., D.Min.

Last year, I responded with a resounding “Yes, I am ready” to a call I have experienced all my life, and was ordained priest in a ceremony that took place on the St. Lawrence Seaway on the 25th of July.

As a woman, I have found deep fulfillment in marriage, motherhood, and ministry. But I could no longer ignore the persistent call to serve God’s people as an ordained priest.

Faithfulness to this call, and the desire to live my priesthood in a public way, necessitated my recent resignation from my appointment as Director of Health Care Ministry for the Archdiocese of Boston, a position that I held for the past four years. In this role, I served as “chaplain to the chaplains,” ensuring that Catholics who were ill in the Archdiocese of Boston received appropriate pastoral care. Most of the 70 hospitals in the Archdiocese have Catholic chaplains on staff, and there are extraordinary parish priests with tremendous compassion and sensitivity who assist in the provision of 24/7 sacramental ministry. However, given the size of the Archdiocese, the advancing years of the clerical ranks, and the high expectations of the people for sacramental ministry, it is not possible for the priests presently available to meet this need adequately. It was not unusual for my day to involve some measure of effort focused on the sacramental needs of hospitalized patients or those in a nursing home. On a good day, this would involve facilitating the hiring of a priest with strong pastoral gifts and skills who sincerely wanted to serve as a hospital chaplain. However, it often meant attempting to arrange for a priest when none could be found in an emergency situation, or guiding a chaplain in addressing the difficulty with a priest who either refused or was unavailable at the time of an urgent need, or dealing with priests who were pastorally insensitive, or listening with sadness to overburdened priests who sincerely wanted to meet the needs of hospitalized patients but were simply too burdened by other pressing demands to respond.

Often, swirling around in the midst of these sacramental scarcities were gifted certified lay chaplains ministering to the heart and soul of the patients and their loved ones...and praying that “Father” would get here soon and, perhaps more strongly, that “Father” would be “good”...meaning pastorally sensitive and able to truly minister to the spiritual needs of the moment. Unquestionably this constant wear and tear on my spirit as I negotiated these waters of weary clergy, caught-in-the-middle chaplains, and disillusioned family members pushed me through the birth canal of hesitation and into ordained priesthood.

For more than twenty years, I had been involved in healthcare ministry. At Caritas Carney Hospital, I ministered to and with people from the African-American community, the Island populations, and from Vietnam. I also was blessed to minister at the Hospice at Mission Hill, for people with AIDS. I met women and men whose experience of marginalization by both our church and our society was profound. I developed an ardent respect for the faithfulness and commitment of gay and lesbian couples. I discovered that my experience of being “on the margins” as a woman ministering in the Catholic church connected me with their experience of being “on the edges,” and we recognized in one an-

other a “kindred” spirit. People came to Mission Hill from all walks of life, some very successful in a material and/or relational sense, and others impoverished, lacking the basic necessities of life, or even having no one to call “friend.” Some were paroled to us from prisons, many were spiritually imprisoned, seeking a way to connect to a God that they thought had abandoned them as, for many, had their mothers and fathers. Each of these residents (and there were close to 1000 in my time) led me into deeper compassion and into an unquestionable awareness of the powerful healing that comes from knowing God within.

While each of these ministerial settings called forth and developed my gifts for ministry, each also heightened my call to priestly ordination. Patients and their loved ones gratefully received my ministry and affirmed me in it. I came to realize that faithfulness to God’s Spirit alive in my life obliged me to acknowledge and actualize my call to the priesthood. And so, I, along with two other women from the United States and one from Canada stepped forward last July and responded to God’s call — *contra legem*.

But my ordination placed me in an irreconcilable position in terms of my ministry as an employee of the Archdiocese of Boston. When the time was right for me to live my priesthood publicly, I offered my resignation. As I wrote on July 17 of this year to Cardinal Sean O’Malley, I felt “profound gratitude for the opportunity I have had to serve in this capacity and with prayers that my efforts will be honored, and that my ministry as a woman of God and of our Church will be respected.” Cardinal Sean’s response has been most gracious, acknowledging publicly his gratitude “for my many years of service in healthcare ministry.” However, his spokesperson, in commenting that “the cardinal has imposed no penalty,” announced that I had “separated herself from the Church by her own action.” I, of course, hold a very different understanding of my relationship to the church of my Baptism ... and Ordination!

My years as Director of Health Care Ministry have shown me the extraordinary burden carried by the priests of the Archdiocese of Boston, and the dramatically increasing unacceptable circumstances of unmet sacramental needs of God’s people. In my letter, I assured Cardinal Sean that “if the church honored the call of women and of men who are married, this burden would be listed and the people of God would not be wanting for pastoral and sacramental ministry... there is no shortage of priestly vocations in the Archdiocese of Boston.”

Presently, I am listening intently to discern where the Spirit in Her Wisdom is calling me to minister. I know without doubt that it will lead me to a place where my gifts and experience can best serve the people of God.

*Jean Marchant was one of the three priests managing the ceremony in Pittsburgh*

### LOOK WHO’S ON THE WEB!

For information about women’s ordination, and updated information about SEPA/WOC activities, check out our website: [www.sepawoc.org](http://www.sepawoc.org).

## EILEEN MCCAFFERTY DIFRANCO

Many regular readers of *Equal wRites* know Eileen already because she has written so much and worked so hard over so many years. The maven of the WOC billboards in Philadelphia, including one – by chance – in the neighborhood of her youth, Port Richmond. The parish community leader deeply rooted in St. Vincent's, beloved despite – or because of – challenge and controversy. The person willing to explore every avenue to move the church, from SEPA WOC to Voice of the Faithful to the Church of the Beatitudes to Roman Catholic Womenpriests. The seminary student developing Scriptural expertise and theological depth. The school nurse teaching others in night classes and protecting her vulnerable students by publicly naming the violence in the Philadelphia public schools. The mother and wife balancing swim meets and weddings with witnesses for justice – and enlisting husband and children, mother, sister and brother in the cause.

The priest – now affirmed in leadership and service.

I will treasure three images that did not make it into any snapshot I was able to take in Pittsburgh. Eileen smiling at me as I broke the line to go directly to her to place my hands on her head in the gesture of ordination. Eileen giving communion to Judy Heffernan – now two priests serving each other. Eileen in a great bear hug with Patricia Fresen, the ordaining bishop whom Eileen brought to speak in Philadelphia. How wonderful to be a part of all this!

*Regina Bannan*

### **Roman Catholic Womenpriests Ordination:**

July 31, 2006, Gateway Clipper Majestic, Pittsburgh

First Mass: August 6, 2006, First United Methodist

Church of Germantown, Philadelphia

First Mass: August 20, 2006, Church of the Beatitudes, Lansdowne

## MY SISTER – THE PRIEST

My sister, Eileen McCafferty DiFranco, is three years older than I. It was not easy being her little sister, especially in school. She was very smart and a wonderful writer, something I am not. Most of my friend's sisters would play games with them, but Eileen would sit in the corner of the house reading her books. I said to her many times "why can't you be like everyone else and play with me?"

As I drove to Pittsburgh with my mother, Larry (Eileen's husband), and Theresa (Eileen's daughter-in-law), I wasn't sure what to expect. I felt anxious and nervous and had a strange feeling in my stomach. We talked about the ordination, but it felt almost as if it was someone else we were talking about, not my sister. We attended the press conference on Sunday night and met the other candidates for ordination. They all spoke eloquently about their experiences and journeys. We all left feeling excited about Monday.

As Eileen, my mother, and I walked along the river Monday morning, we talked about when we were children, our aunts and uncles, our neighbors and our beloved Aunt Peg. Quiet moments spent among just the three of us. As we gathered on the ship, Eileen's friends from Saint Vincent's, her seminary, and SEPA WOC approached both my mom and me and asked how we felt. I knew I was excited but I also felt strange; this was a huge day for Eileen and for all Catholic women. But as the ceremony began, this calm, wonderful feeling came over me. I knew God was watching over us and was smiling down at these courageous women. As the women lay on the floor and the vocalist began chanting the names of the saints, I started to cry. I didn't want it to end – I felt like I was in another place and could feel the strength of these people who bravely came before us. When the service was over, I thought to myself "I'm so glad she's not like everyone else."

I told Eileen and both of my daughters that hundreds of years from now in some book, there will be a page about that day on the Majestic and Eileen McCafferty DiFranco will be listed. I am proud to be her sister.

*Marianne Jann is treasurer of SEPA WOC.*



*Maria Marlowe (right) holds SEPA WOC Chasuble presented by Regina Bannan (left) to Eileen DiFranco (center) after Eileen's first mass August 6, 2006.*

## MORE REFLECTIONS ON THE PITTSBURGH ORDINATIONS

As I watched and participated in the ordinations on Monday, I realized how accustomed I have become to the “rightness” of this.

Over 26 years ago I agonized over and celebrated in our community calling Judy Heffernan to be our Priest. The decision, the ceremony, the reality has been an affirmation of myself as a woman and my community as supportive and inclusive.

We traveled to Rochester, NY, twice to affirm Mary Ramerman’s and Denise Donato’s ordinations, and now we celebrate the newest priest and deacon ordinands. The ceremonies of each were holy and reverent, each woman willing and prepared.

I feel privileged to have been a part of these ceremonies. *Margaret E. McLaughlin* is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit.

### TESTOSTERONE POORLY SPENT

Pittsburgh, July 31, 2006, an occasion for contrasts. Women’s Ordination and Testosterone. Ya gotta wonder where that came from. Perhaps the relentless war and violence in the air. Maybe the endless ink about Landis’s likely having added even more of the stuff to his system to win the Tour de France.

Anyway, there we all were, aboard the Gateway Clipper, a smooth quiet ride.... along side barreling trains, screaming fire engines and the angry rush hour expressway traffic. On board, Bishops, the smartest of church leaders, called us to be the One Body Christ intended ...within sight of the city’s scores of closely packed, dueling steeples, testimony to our Church’s enduring inability to overcome, even in His name, the most superficial of differences among the faithful. On the river, the participants gently called for peace and justice and joined a woman in a reverent God praise in her native American tongue..... a stone’s throw from where her ancestors were driven from their long revered gathering place at the confluence of the three great rivers...by Vatican inspired white men...who then murdered each other for “rights” to land that belonged to neither. In the heart of the floating sanctuary hundreds quietly and lovingly laid hands on the ordained .....as they passed the half billion dollar Heinz Field where by month’s end thousands, some in grease paint, will stamp their feet, thump their chests and scream obscenities at their million dollar heroes. On the boat, with no chest thumping, but with unmistakable courage and resolve, twelve strong, smart, holy women asserted their rightful place and calling. It was a beautiful thing to be part of.

And then the day after: The front page: the prominently displayed image of ordinands, prostrate before the cross, framed on three sides by...”Israelis press more attacks,” “Police seeking help in club shooting,” “The Catholic Church rejects validity of riverboat rite.” There was nowhere to be found a statement of outrage from the Church concerning the Israeli murder of innocents; no story of Catholic Bishops chaining themselves to the gates of the White House in protest of our continued abuse of aggression in Iraq; not even a half hearted Church scolding of a favorite Roman Catholic

actor’s offensive drunken anti-Semitic ravings.

So, our leaders, in the face of mortal threats to humanity, corruption all around, spent what little testosterone they seemed able to mobilize telling us that the joyous event in which we participated was not “valid” and that we – determined, Christ following, peace promoting, justice demanding folks on the boat – were separating ourselves from the body of the Church. What a waste...for them, for us, for everyone. Had they only been there to share the moment of declaration with our own Eileen McCafferty DiFranco and all the others, they would have seen the real body of Christ and known that God is pleased by what She sees.

*Bernard Mc Bride* is a member of the SEPA WOC Core Committee.

### IN MY LIFETIME... ALLELUIA!

I am profoundly grateful for the courage and commitment of the women who embraced their call to the priesthood and stood for ordination on July 31. Years ago I thought ordination was just a few years away. I never expected the backlash, fear and defensiveness that caused so much pain and further alienation in our Church. The Church is stuck and is blocking Spirit energy.

But we know from basic physics that energy is never lost but must be transformed or redirected. Just when the numbers of men willing to submit to a severely restricted model of priestly ministry is dwindling we see that something is taking shape and gathering momentum. I was thrilled to see it with my own eyes! Women breaking bread... feeding community... being sign and symbol of God’s grace.

There were several moments that overwhelmed me. Family members, especially the husbands and children, gave witness to the call to ordination. Not only was this an affirmation of the women’s priesthood but a validation that family life and love is compatible with priestly ministry. One husband commented that the Church always taught that women were an occasion of sin and that he came to experience his wife rather as an “occasion of grace”.

I was touched to see Bishop Patricia Fresen watching intently and prayerfully over the community as participants received Communion. Although a protestor’s sign outside said “It’s nice to pretend,” I knew in that moment, in her expression, that what we were doing and experiencing was very genuine.

I was thrilled to be with so many of my friends from Philadelphia, from SEPA WOC. I was delighted that we were able to take this step together to witness a renewed priestly ministry in the making and am very grateful to those from SEPA WOC who have carried this work over so many years. Their vision has birthed new possibilities for the Church and for future generations of women. It was also a personal thrill to have our banners from the Holy Thursday Witness in Philadelphia prominently displayed in the ritual space. In my imagination, I saw Mary Magdalene, Theodora, Junia, and Priscilla extending their own special blessing on our priests. May we continue to support them and others so called. Amen. Alleluia!

*Maureen Tate* is a long-time member of SEPA WOC.

## “TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON, AND A TIME TO EVERY PURPOSE UNDER HEAVEN.”

These were the words on the front of the funeral mass program for my cousin, Dino Cedrone, who died on Saturday, July 29, 2006. He was 56 years old. I learned of his death on Monday morning, July 31, 2006 as I was preparing for the great events of the day. I shared my remorse with my mother who called with the news and then with my roommate and new friend, Roseanne Hunt-Harkin. He and his family were heavy on my mind the rest of the day.

The joy and energy on the school bus from the Radisson Hotel to the dock where we boarded the “Majestic” was palpable. It just increased tremendously as we watched the preparations being made for our departure and the liturgical music began to soothe us.

What a sight it was to see the eight candidates for priesthood and four candidates for the diaconate followed by our three bishops! All women being led by the cross of our salvation! That’s when the tears started for me. I really hadn’t believed that I would see this day! There is a *time for every purpose under heaven*.

No disappointment in the perfect use of inclusive language by our bishops and priests. Sheer delight in the inclusivity of the invitation to join in the words of the consecration and most especially the inclusivity of the invitation to “the feast.” The joint homily by the bishops quoting Susan B. Anthony...“Failure is Impossible.” There is a *time for every purpose under heaven*.

But it was the women themselves. How their friends and families shared their readiness and worthiness for this occasion. Husbands, daughters, sons, grandsons, sisters, brothers, priests acknowledging their love and respect for their candidate. And, the joy on their faces. Absolute, unabashed joy! It was on the faces of the other womenpriests and on the faces of our bishops. On all who were present! The outburst of joy as each group was presented with arms outstretched and bodies swaying to the music.

But not for Dino Cedrone. His Mass of Christian burial was a dismal affair. The priest never mentioned his name, not one personal anecdote, no words of sympathy to his wife of 30 years, to his daughter and son. Not a word. No joyous celebration of his life. The priest sang the parts of the mass (making it difficult to participate), he did the readings, the concelebrant read the Prayers of the Faithful, a woman sang in octaves no one could reach. My God, I wanted to put pins in my eyes! Was it just because of my experience on Monday, or was it just unfair that this man had more interest in cleaning the vessels that held the precious body and blood of Jesus, than in the beautiful soul of my cousin...his struggle with MS...his diagnosis of metastatic cancer of the lung in March...his death at home on hospice on Saturday...the feast of St. Martha, the woman of hospitality. There is a *time for every purpose under heaven* and a funeral mass is a time of hospitality. None was given to Dino and his family on August 2<sup>nd</sup>.

I want my recollections of the joy of July 31, 2006 be a tribute to him and the joy he brought to our family.

**Susan M. Cedrone** is a long-time member of SEPA WOC and wrote this on August 2, 2006.

## MORE THAN FORTY YEARS IN THE DESERT

October 18, 1964. There I was in St. Peter’s Basilica, having just arrived in Rome, less than a month earlier. Fully steeped in traditional Roman Catholicism, dutifully taught to me by my first-generation, Italian-American parents and enforced by my East Coast mostly Irish-American cadre of Catholic educators. From my all-boys Catholic high school, I spent a year at a monastic novitiate and four more years studying philosophy in a closed community of Augustinians at Villanova University. Selected for theological study in Rome, I was enthusiastically waiting to witness my first canonization, that of the Ugandan Martyrs.

As the ceremony progressed, I heard a very unfamiliar ecclesiastical sound – DRUMS — loud and constant. This sound was followed by the derisive snickering of some attendees. I wondered why the sound of drums was a reason for derision. In 1964, surprise maybe – but not derision. I was puzzled about the drums, but I felt certain that Christ would not have laughed derisively at anyone’s genuine expression of worship. I kept thinking, “Why not drums?” “Would Christ prohibit drums, if struck with love?”

The following year, I attended the closing of the final session of Vatican II. On the heels of the Council and the new, ecumenical, mostly Northern European thought that was arriving in Rome, it became clearer that the windows referred to by John XXIII couldn’t be opened fast enough for me.

The personal doubts I experienced about my vocation were exacerbated by the huge chasm between the way I saw the Church and the way I believed it should be. Breathing loving, fluid, and tolerant spirituality into a power structure which appeared to be disconnected from the members who needed it most was too daunting a task, and I left. When I left, I LEFT! - No more practice of Catholicism - and a general disregard for the value of any organized religion.

This spring, my cousin’s wife, Eileen McCafferty DiFranco, sends an e-mail indicating she will become a validly ordained Roman Catholic priest, among the first women ordained in the United States. I remember enough to know valid means “Apostolic Succession” the real power to administer sacraments, licit or not.

I sign on to go to Pittsburgh, to support family and to be a passive observer of what looks like an historic event.

I have no intention of becoming involved in the ceremony or becoming a supporter of the cause.

My intentions are promptly aborted by the simplicity, the inclusiveness, and the servant-leader attitude of the bishops and the ordinands. I cry, and I continue to cry. I realize the feelings I am experiencing are those with which I had been so familiar forty years earlier. I am crying because of the respect I have for the women who did not leave, but who have continued to further the cause of creating a church that actually lives the Gospel.

I had not planned to attend Eileen’s first Mass the following Sunday, but I did.

Nothing is impossible with God - not even a woman priest –or a rekindled spirit.

**Larry Anastasi** is a retired businessman from Moorestown, where he lives with his wife, Beth.

## INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH MISSES THE BOAT

I attended my first ordination on Monday, July 31, 2006, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Having been outside the Cathedral in Philadelphia on several occasions as a witness for women who sought ordination (when only men were being ordained inside) I found myself on the “other” side of the door this time as my “sisters” were ordained. And what an amazing and spirit-filled occasion it was. I could not help but wonder if the men have known such joy and happiness. I certainly hope so.

The ceremony began with the candidates for the priesthood and the diaconate being presented by their loved ones, husbands, children, grandchildren, spiritual advisers: people who knew them best, who could attest to their worthiness, sincerity and spirituality. It was deeply moving.

As the women lay prostrate, not before the Bishops but before the make-shift altar, as they declared the words, “I am ready...with God’s help I am ready,” as they experienced the laying on of hands in silence (the gesture was the prayer) by the Bishops and then by the community and as they were anointed, I was quietly crying tears of joy. Yes, I believe God has called these women and I find it hard to believe that anyone in the institutional church could make the determination that God “calls” only men to the priesthood. How does one know the mind of God?

I looked out the windows of the boat as we cruised effortlessly, silently, down the beautiful river and appreciated both the struggle and pain that preceded this day and the hope I was now feeling. I really had not been prepared for the emotion that I felt.

I do not know what will happen now. I do know that these women, who are wise, experienced in life, educated, compassionate, inclusive and deeply spiritual will bring the Holy Spirit to those they will serve. My only regret is that the hierarchy, the “keepers of the truth,” will not invite these ordained women “inside” to dialogue, will not ever know them as individuals nor recognize the gifts they offer. That I know for a fact. They will be judged from a distance, and they will be accused of causing scandal (women often are) and effecting “even greater disunity in the church than what existed before...” (Reverend Ronald Lengwin, spokesman for the Diocese of Pittsburgh). It is hard to imagine that these twelve women could cause any greater disunity in the church than that which already exists, disunity that has not been caused, I might add, by women! Forgive me for ending on a sour note, but I have been around these parts a long time.

But now I must prepare myself to attend Eileen DiFranco’s first Mass tomorrow. I already feel the hope returning.

*Mary Whelan is a social worker in the prison system.*

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*A Publication of SEPA/WOC*

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## WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO DO?

When I first heard about the event I thought it would be a fun trip with a group of us from CCS. I thought since we went to Rochester (twice) we surely could go to Pittsburgh to support Eileen McCafferty DiFranco. Since our community has been blessed with a women priest for 26 years, I really thought just observing the event would be enough. But now I wonder, what are we (the observers) called to do? How can we support these new woman priests?

The location for the celebration was beautiful – on the three rivers in Pittsburgh. The bishops and other women priests gave the event a holy yet festive atmosphere, but the candidates and their families carried the day. Their spirit of joy, dedication, and commitment was so evident it created the holy space we all shared for the ordination ceremony.

The candidates all had families, friends, mentors, or teachers who presented reasons why their person should be ordained. All the candidates had years of experience in varied types of ministries. All had education and training in all kinds of areas. (It made me feel sorry for the men who are newly ordained; they lack so much.)

One young presenter summed up all the presenters by stating, “I just want to say, ‘she’s my Gram and I love her.’” You could feel the love surrounding the new priests. It made me wonder what would we do, how would we live, if we really believed God loves us?

So instead of just observing, I got drawn into thinking of the future...What are the responsibilities of us who are not called to be ordained as women priests, but walk the paths with them? Driving home we heard a song that spoke to me...John Denver’s “...come and stand beside us – we can find a better way.”

*Roberta Brunner is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit.*

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## TO ORDAIN OR NOT TO ORDAIN . . . .

by Mary Byrne

I am fresh back from the ordination of eight women into the priesthood and four women into the diaconate in Pittsburgh. The ceremony took place on the aptly entitled *Majestic* boat as it glided along the convergence of the two rivers that flow through Pittsburgh and then merge into the Ohio. The river which has been the setting of several prior ordinations in Canada and Europe is not a coincidental metaphor. In fact, the singular and graceful gesture of the river flow in all its majestic glory radiated from the ordinands and permeated the historic ceremony. Like the river, the ordinands in the steadfastness and certainty of their calling gave witness to the veracity of following the instincts of one's natural and God-given purpose to which none can protest.

Alas, nothing is so simple. Certainly not the verboten ordination of women to the Roman Catholic priesthood – a theologically contested and emotionally charged act of such audacity that one would think that Jesus the Christ was stirring up the status quo again. Despite my own caveats regarding priesthood what binds me to these prophetic women is in fact their resemblance to Jesus. No, not the “natural resemblance” of canonical prohibition which excludes women from priesthood and is scandalous in its theological reductionism. (If Jesus is indeed divine as well as human, why is spiritual readiness for the priesthood based solely on physical characteristics? If one abides by the theory of “natural resemblance,” does it not follow that if Jesus ordained 12 semite males, that only semite males should be priests? And if that is the case, how do you account for the very Nordic-looking Pope Benedict? Where do you draw the line in cloning Jesus? Or do you recognize that the ministry of Jesus who was followed by men and women was beyond those kinds of temporal qualifications and it is precisely the message of inclusivity that provided the energy of the early church and it is precisely the lack of that same energy that is depleting the church in the 21st century.) The women aboard the *Majestic*, in the spirit of the early disciples, are clearly putting their lives, as they once knew them, on the line in order to follow and witness to the Gospel. What is incontrovertible is the deeply held conviction of their call to the priesthood not only as it resonates within their soul's longing but as it is confirmed by their faith communities.

And yet, among admirers like me, the matter of such ordinations in line with apostolic tradition and conforming to the Roman rite is still complicated and wrought with controversy. To be honest, I embarked on this adventure down the river with a mixed bag of motivations and I disembarked with an equally mixed bag of reactions. I went primarily out of my respect for Eileen DiFranco and the powerful witness of her constant faith, intellect and courage. On the more self-serving side, the book that I continue to write and wrangle with on Catholic women in ministry necessitated a first-hand experience of these so-called “illicit ordinations.” Finally, having had heard from the proponents and critics alike about last year's ceremony in Canada, I was just plain curious – and eager to form my own opinion.

So, what did I think about the Pittsburgh ordinations? Actually, it took days for me *think* anything at all. In a bow to the infused holiness of the ritual that seemed to flow out from the ordinands and surround us like a sacred mantle, I steadfastly resisted analysis for almost a week. In its place an endless stream of feelings and questions evaded clear articulation. Finally, one morning in the garden, I realized that my response to the ordinations was held in the tension of two distinct moments during the ceremony.

The first moment was at the very beginning of the ordination when the ordinands were invited to mingle the waters of their homelands together in a single vessel. One by one, they processed forward announcing their names and pouring forth the waters that nurture them. As the waters flowed, Dagmar Celeste held the microphone to pick up the unique sounds of the Pacific Ocean, the Delaware River, the North Sea in Ireland, etc. It was a uniquely feminine gesture that opened me up immediately to the possibility that something long-awaited had arrived. As one of the ordinand's young daughters said with precocious wisdom, there was a sense that these women “were changing the future for all of us.” I was riveted.

That initial hope was alternately enlivened and dispirited as the ceremony progressed. The homily revealed an intrinsic lack of confidence in the essential transformative nature of the ordination by dimming the mystery with myopic political rhetoric. However, that disappointment was rescued by the visage of all eight ordinands prostrated in utter surrender and readiness to their call and then soon after joining hands and swaying to the joy of receiving holy orders. The entire boat floated and rocked and rejoiced.

In the midst of such celebration, the moment of disillusion caught me by surprise. It unfolded slowly in an image that began with the vesting of the women. Seduced by the beauty and authority of the chasubles (never mind how much better long flowing garments look on women), I was transfixed. And yet, I felt like I had forgotten something very important. As if I had turned my back on a friend at an opportune moment. My sense of unease intensified with the subsequent invitation by Bishop Pat Fresen for all the newly ordained priests and all ordained clergy of any faith to join in the concelebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

A throng of priests and ministers gathered around the altar and all of a sudden an old picture came into focus. A good friend sitting next to me who knows that I am a minister asked if I was going to join the crowd. I declined for reasons that soon became obvious. When the ordained had finally assembled, several rows thick, the image prompted a gasp not only from me but from another friend nearby. We exchanged sad glances as she whispered, “It's still the same priestly caste.”

And so it was. With an altar positioned at the far end of the room Roman style sufficiently removed from the congregation and the priests chanting their privileged words of consecration suddenly the spark of hope went out. It was priesthood as usual.

*continued on page 10*

## TO ORDAIN OR NOT TO ORDAIN

*Continued from page 9*

That moment did not win the day. I did not leave the boat dejected. The spark rekindled in the residual feeling that something prophetic had taken place on the river beginning with the audacity of the event itself and certainly emanating from the extraordinary faith of the ordained deacons and priests. I did, however, toss and turn in confusion between the hope and the disappointment of that day finally settling into the realization that the questions provoked by reform in all its manifestations is our work in partnership with the workings of the spirit. We are indeed a people *on the way* to a place that is uncertain. In fidelity to pilgrimage, we need to stop, be still and ask for guidance along a path that is rocky with controversy.

So I conclude my observations of July 31, 2006, with several questions that I will ponder between this writing and the next. I also offer them to the newly ordained priests and to all my fellow travelers.

\* If a renewed church implies a renewed priesthood, what does that look like and act like other than putting women in the emperor's clothes? (I would have much rather heard how the ordinands will live out their priestly ministries than the movement agenda presented during the homily.)

\* Is it possible that "priest" and "clericalism" are religious constructs that are past their prime? Both imply a sense of hierarchy and exclusion inconsistent with a discipleship of equals and may be actually irrelevant and unnecessary in the burgeoning spirituality of relationality.

\* How is a women "priest" in ways that flow from her feminine spirituality? How is a woman "priest" in ways that are not imitative of men? And how do we present that, symbolize that, express that in new and different ways to signify a renewed church?

*Mary Byrne is a minister and writer. She is currently writing a book, As the River Flows: Roman Catholic Women in Priestly Ministries*

### **ALL YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW . .**

About the status of women in your diocese ... YOU are now AUTHORIZED to find out!

After the last national Catholic Organizations for Reform meeting, I reported that the groups that work on women's issues had formed a coalition to work together on one project a year. We wanted to avoid each organization doing its own thing on certain issues – like women's ordination – that we share. Not that this will prevent any individual action, but we hope it will build the movement cooperatively rather than competitively. As of now, it seems to be working. I have been representing SEPA WOC on this Women's Justice Coalition.

And now we need YOU. We chose gathering information as our first joint project. We want to find out the status of women in as many US dioceses as we can, so we are looking for people who can research and fill out a "report card" for their own jurisdiction. I volunteered Philadelphia for a pilot

study, so I have gathered our information here. We still need many other volunteers, so if you get *Equal wRites* and live in another diocese, volunteer to be part of the team that does yours. If you are from Philadelphia and have interest in another place – you may have nationwide calling, for example – you could volunteer for that diocese, or for any diocese. We imagine most of this will be done by calling appropriate diocesan personnel and will require about five hours in September.

The results will be announced at the national bishop's meeting in Washington. The report card includes topics like the seminary, religious education, lay ministry education, altar servers, foot washing, Eucharistic ministers and lectors, and diocesan councils, offices, and employees. The groups involved in the coalition, in addition to SEPA WOC, include Catholics Speak Out at the Quixote Center, which is doing the coordinating, and National WOC, FutureChurch, Call to Action, CORPUS, RAPPORT, Women-Church Convergence, Ecumenical Catholic Church, and Catholics for a Free Choice.

This reminds me of the great coalition work we did on the We Are Church referendum about ten years ago. The referendum was one of the first projects of Philadelphia Catholic Organizations for Renewal and is still the guiding spirit behind the international movement We Are Church. The Women's Justice Coalition has great ideas for public actions in the future. We changed our name from Women's Equality in a very early conference call – Equality in this church is not enough! But first, we need to identify the issues and the folks who support our efforts. Be part of it! Visit <http://womensjusticecoalition.org> to sign up.

**Regina Bannan**

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### **SEPA/WOC E-MAIL LISTSERV**

If you would like to receive and share information related to the women's ordination movement, and engage in dialogue with others committed to the cause of full equality in ministry in the Roman Catholic church, you are invited to join the SEPA/WOC listserv. To do so, contact Gaile Pohlhaus at [gaile.pohlhaus@villanova.edu](mailto:gaile.pohlhaus@villanova.edu).

## SISTERCELEBRATION: A FAREWELL TO ARLENE

by Virginia K. Ratigan

In 1974 Arlene Anderson Swidler edited a little volume titled *Sistercelebrations: Nine Worship Experiences*. The publisher, Fortress Press, instructed Arlene to include the following blurb for the back cover of the book:

People seeking equality of roles and opportunities for society's largest oppressed minority—indeed the majority of the population—have also been bringing the feminist concern and viewpoint to bear on the traditions and life of church and synagogue. One of the most imaginative fruits of their efforts has been the designing of new liturgies.

*Sistercelebrations* brings together nine of these original orders of worship. The outgrowth of renewed and intensive study of Scripture, religious history, and inherited theology, they reflect enhanced dimensions of faith and creative ventures in symbolic expression. Jewish and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, clergy and laity, the authors introduce each liturgy with a description of the situation to which it was first addressed and of the personal hopes, fears, and joys which attended its preparation and use.

On Sunday afternoon, July 16, the tenth Sistercelebration took place at Arlene's home, designed and led by Judy Heffernan with Regina Bannan, Gaile and Bill Pohlhaus, Jenny Ratigan, April (Arlene's main caregiver, a woman of the Episcopal faith from Burma) and Joseph (a graduate student from Nigeria who is with Arlene on Sundays). Joining together in a circle of love, prayer, gratitude, remembrance and friendship, we celebrated Arlene's life and gifts to all of us. And it was a farewell.

As Arlene turned toward the group in her hospital bed, Judy began: "We love you and give thanks for you, Arlene." This declaration of love and thanks opened the liturgy of anointing, sharing, communion and blessing that we celebrated on that sunny, warm afternoon in Philadelphia. There was history and story at the heart of our service. As Judy asked us each to share our reflections it became clear that Arlene was friend, mentor, writer, scholar, musician, advocate—a woman who never gave up no matter how tough the road she walked. We reminisced and shared stories so that the room was filled with laughter and tears. Whether more recent or long-time friends, all of us felt a certain bond with Arlene and we know that there were many others who, for a variety of reasons, could not be with us (but were there in spirit). We felt their presence.

And there was music: *Mother and God* (Arlene once wrote an article in *America* titled: "In the Presence of God My Mother"); Hildegard's *We are a wheel, a circle of life*; the hymn, *Praise to the Lord* with words adapted by Arlene (Pray to our God that you sisters may lead at the altar); *Sing Lo! Sing, O Sophia*; and, of course the wonderful song so frequently heard at WOC events, *Swimming to the Other Side*. In her body, racked with disease and darkness, there seemed to be a certain ease and "presence" as her eyes often locked onto one or the other of us. Perhaps a window into this great old soul. Perhaps the spirit kicking in!

Judy led us in a beautiful, conversational way—a very biblical style. As she gently anointed Arlene, we all were then

anointed and participated in a Circle of Hands Meditation. We were instructed to be "conscious of your breathing as energy flow...Imagine that the breath energy flows from the hand of the person on your left into your hand and across your shoulder and out of your right hand to the woman or man on your right. Pass it along to the next, and next, and so on until it circles around back to you continuing...Feel yourself as part of the whole group. You are feeding one another with your collective energy, soothing, healing, and energizing." This was followed by singing, praying and sharing.

The Eucharistic Prayer was so powerful in this context: Holy One of Light, we open ourselves to communion with you, the love residing at the center of all that is...Let us know your healing presence...Jesus, we give thanks that you have called and welcomed us to your table. We remember You around another table with your other friends. Please say to us what you said to them:

Share with me. This is my Body. This is my Blood. Now we are your body and blood. Let Your light shine through us, with us and in us. May we be one with You, and each other, now and forever. Amen.

After the final prayer for our Sistercelebration, Judy blessed a purple stole for Arlene: "Receive this purple stole from us, Arlene. It is the symbol of the Women's Ordination Movement and, Arlene, you are ours. We love you, Arlene, and bless you." The closing song, *Swimming To The Other Side* could not have been more appropriate. "We are living 'neath the great big dipper. We are washed by the very same rain. We are swimming in this stream together, some in power and some in pain. We can worship this ground we walk on, cherishing the beings that we live beside. Loving spirits will live forever; we're all swimming to the other side."

We will carry in our hearts the vision of Arlene, encircled by the purple stole, in the midst of her friends recognizing and participating in one of those simple, grass roots rituals in which we all share in the priesthood of Christ. This was truly the tenth Sistercelebration.

*Jenny Ratigan is professor emerita of religious studies at Rosemont College and co-author, with Arlene Swidler, of A New Phoebe: Perspectives on Roman Catholic Women and the Permanent Diaconate.*

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## MANDATORY CELIBACY AND THE IMPASSIBLE GOD

by *Marian Ronan*

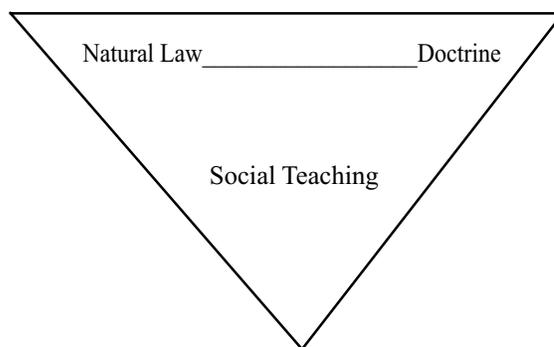
I have to confess that for many years I was pretty befuddled about what had happened to the Catholic church during my lifetime. First there had been my childhood, in the 1950s, marked by something like the settled rigidity of the Middle Ages. Then there was my youth, from the early 1960s through the mid-70s, bursting with the hope and vitality of Vatican II and feminist theology. And then there was the great rollback, with Paul VI and John Paul II issuing seemingly endless prohibitions related to sexuality and gender. How had all this come about?

I began to get a grasp on these developments in the 1990s when I discovered *The Frontiers of Catholicism*, a book by the historical sociologist, Gene Burns. Burns argues that as a result of certain critical concessions made at Vatican II, sex/gender prohibitions took on the greatest importance in Catholic teaching, greater even than Catholic doctrine *per se*. To be more specific, Burns maintains that in order to be accepted as a legitimate actor in the modern, democratic world—to be represented at the United Nations, for example—the Catholic church had no choice but to renounce its previous claims that the church possessed absolute authority over the state, or that the truth of Catholic doctrine trumped the freedom of the individual conscience.

But no institution ever willingly renounces authority, so instead of dealing with its diminished status, the church shifted its focus from the arena of doctrinal truth to that of the natural law, something that ostensibly transcends political or religious differences and is obligatory for all. Because this is the case, for example, Catholic bishops do not understand their public opposition to homosexual marriage and abortion as violating the separation of church and state because it is the universal natural law, not church law, that such behaviors violate. Political questions like the war in Iraq or global trade, however, are now beyond the immediate purview of the institutional church; the Vatican and the hierarchy may make statements about them, but all are free to form their individual consciences on these questions.

I found highly illuminating Burns's delineation of a new, post-Vatican II Catholic ideological hierarchy, with sexuality and gender at the top and unambiguous, and social teaching at the bottom of the hierarchy and entirely subject to the consciences of individual Catholics. The necessarily optional nature of Catholic social teaching in this new ideological structure explains, among other things, why the Vatican felt constrained to condemn liberation theology, which presents justice as anything but optional.

But perhaps because my scholarly training leads me to detect theological constructions everywhere, what Burns says in *The Frontiers of Catholicism* about the somewhat optional nature of Catholic doctrine since Vatican II never really rang true for me. It's hard to imagine that the architects of the magisterium aren't intending rather more to shore up Catholic doctrine than subordinate it to natural law. It seems more likely to me, then, that the post-Vatican II ideological reconfiguration is more like a triangle than a vertical hierarchy, with sexual teaching and doctrine positioned at the same level on the top, and Catholic social teaching subordinate to both:



In the face of this puzzlement, I encountered with some fascination earlier this year a study of the theology of Karl Rahner by the Reformed theologian Mark Lewis Taylor of Princeton Theological Seminary.\* As is widely known, Rahner was one of the dominant theological voices at the Second Vatican Council. For many of us who studied theology after Vatican II, Rahner's work was the touchstone, the lodestar, while Rahner himself became the beloved Father-Doctor-Professor of some of the great Catholic liberation theologians.

Two of the influences on Rahner's theology were the German philosophers Emmanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger, whose works helped Rahner to theorize an intensified attention to the human being within Catholic theology. According to this "turn to the subject," the experience of the self as a free person constituted in relationship is the only legitimate starting point for theological reflection (Taylor 10). For Rahner, this "turn to the subject" was a further development of the analogy of the idea of being of the Catholic-Thomist tradition. Rahner's implementation of this "turn to the subject" underpinned the new Catholic recognition of the human person at Vatican II.

The question Mark Lewis Taylor then pursues is whether God is love in the theology of Karl Rahner. Most of us would respond that without question, the God delineated in a theology that is so unambiguously affirming of the human as Rahner's is cannot help but be love. But Taylor argues quite convincingly that God actually isn't love in Rahner's theology, or rather, that God is only partly love there. For according to Taylor, Rahner's God loves human beings, but that same God isn't in fact impacted by the love of human beings, for being affected by the love of creatures would undercut God's absolute transcendence.

The God who loves but is not affected by love is the impassible God of Greek philosophy, the God of Plato and Aristotle, whose metaphysics shaped the Catholic tradition. Taylor finds the presence of the classic, impassible God within Rahner's theology fundamentally incompatible—"incoherent," he calls it—with Rahner's construction of the "turn to the subject" as the methodological basis of Catholic theology. This is so, Taylor argues, because the basic philosophical understanding of the nature of the human experience of love is that it is mutual, formed in relationship. Each participant in love impacts and is impacted by the other. A human being who loves but is in no sense affected, touched, by the one he or she loves is incomprehensible.

I've discussed Taylor's assertion that the God of Karl

continued from page 12

Rahner's theology is impassible with my friend the Catholic theologian and she agrees that this is the case. And so here we have the link between Catholic sex/gender ideology and Catholic doctrine, inscribed in the theology of the leading theologian of Vatican II. Nor is the link between sexuality and doctrine only a general one. It makes perfect sense in relation to the issues that have concerned many of us for a long time, the imposition of a celibacy requirement on Catholic priests and the exclusion of women from the Catholic priesthood. The celibate priest who is ostensibly beyond being impacted by sexual love corresponds, at a deep level, with the impassible God of Rahner's theology. Commitment to the impassible God also underpins the exclusion of women from the priesthood, since, according to traditional notions, women are by definition passive, the receivers, not the agents, of sexual love.

I myself find it hard to believe that somebody as smart as Karl Rahner didn't realize that his maintenance of the impassible God did not cohere with the rest of his theology. My own hunch is that, having been silenced once before the council, Rahner pushed the question of the human as far as he could, and left the rest to us. Then again, it must be admitted that he himself was a priest, committed, presumably, to celibacy.

These questions are secondary, however, to the fact that if Taylor is correct, then the greatest theologian of Vatican II only partly supported the holiness of the human person that was presumably fundamental to the teachings of that council. Perhaps, as the council taught, we are the people of God, but God may not exactly be the God of people, inasmuch as that God is beyond being influenced by our love in its depth and profundity. And as long as the church teaches that it is beneath that God to be loved by as well as to love us, that church is likely to continue to maintain that God's representatives must be beyond that love as well.

\*Mark Lloyd Taylor, *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Scholars Press, 1986). (In recent year Taylor changed his middle name to Lewis).

**Marian Ronan** writes regularly for **EqualwRites**. She teaches at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA.

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## DIALOGUE BOX

continued from page 3

### RESPONSIBILITIES OF THOSE NOT CALLED

To the editor:

Your article had many topics of interest and each topic has many sides and views to consider. It is times like these that I really miss having Mary Ellen Anderson with us. She taught me that discussions were the best way to really find out what you believe and value and that you can always learn from each other. I hope you receive many different and thought-provoking responses. When I think about women's ordination in the Catholic church I wonder how the new priests will function. I know what I don't want to happen: -just having women in place of men in the same current church structure-the same separation of clergy and laity. Some things I hope could happen . . . theological studies, liturgical training, and continuing educational support is important for the new women priests. An important aspect of the ordinations is what do the women do who are not called by a specific community. How do they serve the people? It will be interesting to see all the new ministries the priests will discover. And what are the responsibilities of us who are not called to be ordained as women priests but walk the paths with them? Can we be the supporting infrastructure for the new women priests just as the men priests in the past have had the support of the people in the parishes? What are we called to be in this continuing adventure? As to the future ordination ceremonies, someday I hope to see a celebration of this kind take place in a park or other easily accessible venue, where people could join in the celebration and have the opportunity to share this holy sacrament with their priests. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts in this forum. There are many different ideas that will be shared and I look forward to the discussion.

*Roberta Brunner, Jenkintown*

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***Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America***, edited by James M. O'Toole. Cornell University Press, 2004. 289 pp. Paper. \$19.95.

by **Dugan McGinley**

This book brings to life the American Catholic world of the last century. The subject matter is likely to strike readers of different ages in different ways. It is especially interesting for me because I was born in 1964 and mostly experienced the collapse and/or transformation of the various practices profiled in the book. Older readers will likely have embodied memories that inspire a mix of nostalgia and relief that things have changed.

In four separate chapters, this anthology focuses on prayer, Marian devotion, confession and Eucharist. Joseph Chinnici's opening chapter on prayer is for me the least engaging; but he does an excellent job showing continuities and discontinuities between prayer practices before Vatican II and after. This is essential grounding for what follows because it helps the reader to remember that the changes of Vatican II didn't just appear out of nowhere. Changes in Catholic practice were already well underway when the turbulence of the 1960s came along with Vatican II's officially mandated "revolution." He notes that Catholics had by then internalized a "pedagogy of participation" through lay-led devotions (which the clergy still did their best to control) and internalized vernacular prayer.

Those who are familiar with Paula Kane will enjoy her chapter on Marian devotions. She uses sociological theories to frame her discussion in terms of a religious economy in which Catholics dedicated themselves to Mary in exchange for her intercession and protection. Mary became especially important during the Cold War when she was perceived as the guardian of American values. She was "the woman the Reds fear most." The relatively low priority given to Mary during Vatican II, combined with the upward mobility of Catholics and the eventual end of the Cold War, caused Marian devotion to diminish in the latter part of the century.

I particularly like Kane's discussion of the use of Mary to enforce gender norms. I got a kick out of reading her samples from Marian publications of the way Mary enforces feminine modesty. My favorite is the description of "un-Marylike drum majorettes" in a Saint Patrick's Day parade. Feminist Catholics are no strangers to the ways Mary has been used by the church to set impossible standards for women, most pointedly in her ideal as a virgin mother, and I suspect readers of *Equal wRites* will enjoy Kane's take on Marian piety as much as I do. Still, I couldn't help but think that someone like Charlene Spretnak (*Missing Mary*) would have read this history quite differently. There must be something to appreciate in the idea of Mary as divine mother, but feminist theologians have tended to stress Mary's humanity instead. Kane concedes that this progressive and earthy Mary has attained limited popularity, so Mary is revered most visibly today by scary apocalyptic Catholics who network via the Internet.

James O'Toole's chapter on confession is my favorite, mostly because I have a particular interest in this subject. I was impressed that parish priests spent the majority of their time before Vatican II hearing confessions. Until frequent reception of the Eucharist became acceptable and norma-

tive, Catholics went to confession more often than they went to communion. This chapter made me realize how much keeping an account of one's moral failings has been endemic to Catholic identity, even for someone like me who grew up after Vatican II. But O'Toole documents the dramatic collapse of this sacrament for Catholics between 1965 and 1975. What used to be normative is no longer practiced at all by the vast majority of Catholics. This fact makes me wonder if sin-consciousness will figure into Catholic identity for future generations.

In explaining the decline of confession, O'Toole discusses a range of factors including the ban on birth control, feminism, maturity of faith after Vatican II, Saturday anticipated masses, the new mass, popular psychology, changing notions of sin and culpability, and the failure of new options like face-to-face confession and communal absolution. Personally, I have much ambivalence about this sacrament. I have very fond memories of the grace I felt when I used to avail myself of it and I find myself longing to experience it again; but I don't like how it upholds the clerical caste. I have difficulty imagining myself confessing to priests now that I've worked with so many as an adult and have seen firsthand the dysfunctions of the priesthood. I think I'd appreciate confessing to a woman priest, and I find myself hoping that women priests will be able to reinvigorate this sacrament which I think has real value.

In the final chapter, Margaret McGuinness writes about the Eucharist, moving from an emphasis on adoration in the first half of the century to an emphasis on reception in the second half. She treats the same elements across three eras and effectively profiles the shift from the Eucharist as something aloof and untouchable to something immanent and linked to social justice. Here too I see polarization in Catholic circles today, as exemplified in the often ugly arguments about the placement of the tabernacle. McGuinness uses two hymn titles ("O Lord I Am Not Worthy" and "I Am the Bread of Life") to represent the historical shift, but I think these songs represent the general polarization in the way Catholics understand themselves today.

We live in fascinating times. Some Catholics feel the reforms of Vatican II haven't gone far enough and they don't want to look back. Others are becoming increasingly vocal and influential with the bishops in decrying the "piety void" they have felt since Vatican II. Then there are younger generations of Catholics clamoring to find a usable past in a devotional world they never experienced. O'Toole's book suggests that Catholics clung to devotional practices as a bulwark against a tumultuous world until they ultimately attained American success and Vatican II called them to turn outward. The challenge for Catholics in our post-9/11 world of terrorism is to continue moving forward and reshaping the tradition rather than escaping back into it.

**Dugan McGinley** teaches in the Religion department at Temple University. He is the author of *Acts of Faith, Acts of Love: Gay Catholic Autobiographies as Sacred Texts (Con-tinuum 2004)*.

**The Burning Time**, by Robin Morgan. Melville House Publishing, 2006. 345pp. \$15.00

by *De-Anna Alba*

Drawn from the actual court records of the first witchcraft trial in Ireland, *The Burning Time* is not only a good story, but a fascinating study of the time leading up to and including the age of enlightenment (or lack thereof) that surrounded the Inquisition. It is the story of living on the cusp of a time of radical social change. The overall arc of the story asks the question, what does it mean to be civilized, and who has the right to make that determination for others? Although history has shown us repeatedly that only might makes right, is that necessarily true?

The main characters are actual historical personages, Dame Alyce Kyteler, an estate owner and a lesser member of the Irish nobility, and Bishop Richard de Ledrede, who arrived in Ireland in 1309, sent by the Pope to bring the Irish pagans into the church. Lady Alyce is a pagan who practices what she calls the Old Ways. The church calls it witchcraft. In the reading of the story we learn a lot about the Old Ways. It is presented quite accurately, as the author herself is a practicing pagan.

At that time in history paganism and Christianity co-existed. Catholic priests are known to have been priests in pagan rituals. One of the characters in the book, Father Brendan Canice, was just such a priest. Raised in the Old Ways on Dame Alyce's estate, he left to seek higher education which at that time was only available to students for the priesthood in the church. This is the crux of the bishop's reasoning that places the ways of the church above the ways of all others. In his eyes the church is the bastion of education, and therefore civilization.

In the bishop's view, without the church one had no hope of entering heaven, or of bettering oneself on earth. In the classed society of Europe the only way he could aspire to better himself—to gain more respect, power and more wealth for himself—was to become a prince of the church. Without the church one could not escape his or her station in life.

Dame Alyce flies in the face of this. She is a single woman, in and of itself unacceptable in the eyes of the bishop. She is also in charge of a vast farming estate and educates those who live on her estate, and considers them to be her extended family instead of mere chattel meant to be worked to death for precious little reward. She considers herself first among equals, not superior simply by an accident of birth or marriage. Because of her social position, she considers it her responsibility to serve and care for those within her charge. She is a healer and a midwife at a time when those occupations were being placed solely in the hands of the world's first medical doctors who alone had the sanction of the church.

Dame Alyce is unafraid to debate de Ledrede on all of these points, and he indeed cuts her a lot of slack because of her station. Not so her people. Although they practice the Old Ways right along with Dame Alyce, they are also members of the church. The bishop rails against paganism from the pulpit and threatens them with the Inquisition and eternal damnation. They become fearful, and though Dame Alyce is able to calm their fears at first, it becomes clear that this uneasy truce between herself and de Ledrede will not last.

She and some of her people escape. Others do not.

Petronilla de Meath, one of her bondwomen, and the one Dame Alyce has been training as a priestess, midwife and healer, is caught and tried by the Inquisition and sentenced to the flames. This is particularly ironic because it is Petronilla who has had the greatest internal struggle with what she knows and believes as a Christian and what she lives, feels and knows as a member of a practicing pagan group. She knows the church for a bully and sacrifices herself to it in the truest sense of the word. She becomes a willing burnt offering in order to save others.

If you want to learn more of this dark time in church history, or if you want to learn more about pagan beliefs and practices, read this book. And please don't skip the Author's Notes. They separate the facts from the fiction.

*De-Anna Alba* is the author of *The Cauldron of Change: Myths, Mysteries & Magick of the Goddess* (Delphia 1993). *She has been a practicing pagan priestess for 35 years.*

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## SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year Oct. 29, 2006

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 126; Hebrews 5: 1-6; Mark 10:46-52

by *Judith A. Heffernan*

Recently I have spent much time reflecting on women's ordination. SO HOW IS THIS TIME DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER TIME!?!

Well, this summer I had the opportunity of attending a prayer service with Arlene Swidler, a celebration of Mary of Magdala, the ordination in Pittsburgh and Eileen's first mass.

Arlene Swidler: we give thanks that Arlene's answers and questions were the foundations of SEPA/WOC. Arlene had led us, stood with us, written and spoke for us.

We had the sacred experience of telling Arlene of our gratitude, of praying together in word and song, of anointing and sharing Eucharist.

Then we blessed Arlene, "Receive this purple stole from us. It is the symbol of the women's ordination movement and you are ours."

Arlene is very ill, but we give thanks for the power in her life of working for justice, the power from her life which will never be lost.

Mary of Magdala day was truly a feast at the Catholic Worker. We sang, shared, reflected and rejoiced!

We prayed that we would know God's healing presence as Mary did. We prayed that we would stay with Jesus in good times and in bad as Mary did. We prayed that we, too, would be open to the unimaginable.

The unimaginable. Pittsburgh. Surrounded by mountains on the historic Three Rivers. A celebrating community, stirring music, three wise bishops, eight new women priests, four new women deacons, a solemn, inclusive ceremony, a joyful Eucharist—and God present among us.

Water and people from around the world mingled together in prayer, love and hope.

Eileen's first mass. A full church. A supportive, loving, joyful gathered community of faith from Eileen's full and vibrant life of service and conviction. It is the Transfiguration. We proclaim with the other disciples, "It is good for us to be here!"

All this makes it easy to choose these Scriptures for reflection. On October 29 we will hear, "I will gather them from the ends of the world and lead them to brooks of water... Those that saw in tears shall reap rejoicing... Called by God... you are a priest forever... Many rebuked him telling him to be silent... Jesus is calling you... God has done great things for us."

We are filled with joy!

*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.*

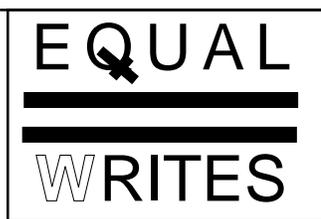
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**MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE:** If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *Equal wRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be December 2006. Final deadline for submissions is October 15. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122 (215) 232-7823, or e-mail her at [equalwrites2005@aol.com](mailto:equalwrites2005@aol.com).

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