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

Vol. XIII No. 2

SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2004

WRITES**MISSION STATEMENT** - *As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.*

THE COSTS OF IGNORING CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICISM

by Marian Ronan

Between 1979 and 1990, a group of determined and highly organized Protestant conservatives, under the leadership of Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the second largest body of Christians in the United States. Integral to their strategy were the identification and promotion of two theo-disciplinary wedge issues: the inerrancy of scripture and authority of the male pastor. A corollary goal was the suspension of the long-established Baptist practice of ordaining women. Bit by bit, the conservatives took over not only the national decision-making body, the convention, but also the Southern Baptist seminaries, long the strongholds of moderate Baptist theology. A significant factor in the takeover was the failure of the moderate majority—effectively mischaracterized as “liberals”—to take seriously the conservatives’ determination and ability.

Differences between the congregational (highly bureaucratized democratic) governance structure of the SBC and the hierarchical/monarchical structure of the Catholic church make it easy to overlook similarities between the takeover of the SBC and certain developments within American Catholicism since 1968. Feminist and postcolonial theorists have long observed that those in positions of dominance need know very little about individuals and groups beneath them, while minorities, whether statistical or ideological, cannot afford to do so. It’s a commentary on the triumph of a certain kind of liberal Catholicism in America that, no matter how embattled some of us may feel, liberal, or at least progressive, American Catholics tend to know very little about their conservative adversaries. As the moderates in the SBC discovered, this kind of ignorance can be costly.

My first inkling that conservative Catholics were people to be reckoned with oc-

curred not long after I arrived here at the Graduate Theological Union. A new president was named at one of the GTU seminaries, The Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, but because JSTB is a pontifical institution, the new president had to be approved by the Vatican. This the Vatican refused to do because it had become aware that the candidate had said, twenty-odd years previously in an interview published in the alumni newsletter of a Jesuit university where he was then president, that the church would eventually ordain women and married men. What struck me about this was that the president-elect reported having no recollection of the interview and did not possess a copy of the newsletter. Somebody had done some serious work to dig up his one-sentence response and forward it to the Vatican.

I am now researching conservative American Catholicism for a book I’m writing, and it’s clear to me that this kind of determination and hard work, as well as significant intellectual ability, characterizes many of the leaders and activists in the conservative movement(s) within the American church. I became especially aware of this when reading the webpage of Women for Faith and Family, an anti-feminist group founded by Helen Hull Hitchcock in 1984. Hull Hitchcock has been defending Catholic orthodoxy and the sanctity of the family with determination and intelligence for twenty years; in the mid-90s she helped to found a second organization, Adoremus, to reverse the Vatican II liturgical reforms, a task at which she and her co-workers would seem to be having considerable success. I regret that I am in such thoroughgoing disagreement with Mrs. Hitchcock, because I would welcome the opportunity to work with someone as smart, disciplined and articulate as she is. At one point, I emailed her to say how impressed I am by her work;

she wrote back to say that she was familiar with a book I had co-authored almost twenty years ago. For my part, I had previously barely heard of her.

Neoconservative commentators such as Richard John Neuhaus, William F. Buckley, Michael Novak and George Weigel are every bit as articulate and determined as Helen Hull Hitchcock. They are also, in some respects, more strategic. Richard John Neuhaus, the editor of the neoconservative journal, *First Things*, is quoted regularly in the so-called liberal media as a spokesperson for the “Catholic” position, and is virtually omnipresent on the religious and cultural lecture circuit. Just yesterday I received an invitation to a conference sponsored by a joint evangelical/Catholic forum to save

Continued on page 2

MARCH 12, 2005: HOLD THE DATE!

The year 2005 marks the **30th Anniversary of the Women’s Ordination Conference**. There will be a number of events held during the course of the year to celebrate this national organization’s history and highlight its purpose and achievements. The SE Pennsylvania Chapter of WOC (SEPA/WOC) is very pleased to be the lead sponsor of an all-day event on Saturday, March 12. The ‘theme’ of this gathering, to be held in Center City Philadelphia, is ***Celebrating Women Called***, and it will explore and support the variety of ways women have responded to their call to priesthood. Further details will be available in subsequent editions of this publication or by visiting the SEPA/WOC website at sepa.woc.org.

IGNORING CONSERVATIVE CATHOLICISM

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the ecumenical movement from the “social and political agendas” that divide it. Neuhaus was one of the keynote speakers.

A book by another influential Catholic neoconservative, George Weigel, *The Courage to Be Catholic: Crisis, Reform and the Future of the Catholic Church*, was one of three bestselling “Catholic” books in the US in 2002, along with Garry Wills’s *Why I Am a Catholic* and James Carroll’s *Toward a New Catholic Church: The Promise of Reform*. More than one reviewer in the mainstream press judged Weigel’s book to be considerably better written and more carefully thought through than the other two. Drawing on data from the John Jay Report that suggest a concentration of priest-abusers in the age-cohort trained in U.S. seminaries soon after Vatican II, Weigel argues that the clergy sex abuse crisis is a direct result of the culture of dissent that was launched by liberal opposition to *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. This abuse-spawning culture of dissent is continued by people who refuse to submit to papal teaching on homosexuality, gender complementarity, and women’s ordination. The only solution to the crisis, Weigel argues, is a return to unambiguous episcopal discipline and strict exclusion from seminaries of anyone who falls short of absolute assent to magisterial Catholic teaching, including the prohibition of the ordination of women. Equally strict must be the exclusion from seminaries of all homosexuals except those who separate themselves absolutely from gay culture and identity. Ramping up male pastoral authority, gaining control of seminaries, and preventing women’s ordination were of course central to the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Most denizens of the Catholic left will dismiss Weigel’s argument, should they even bother to read it. But dismissal guarantees overlooking the striking similarities between *The Courage to Be Catholic* and Peter Steinfels’s *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*, published the following year. As a kind of liberal, Steinfels can hardly oppose the ordination of women, though the net effect of his advocacy of the ordination of women to the diaconate thirty years into the Catholic movement for the ordination of women to the priesthood is clearly reactionary. Equally concerning is Steinfels’s stress on enhancing the power and authority of the American episcopacy as the solution to the clergy sex abuse crisis. Of course, both Weigel and Steinfels advocate enhancing the power of far holier, more admirable bishops than the ones who, it would seem, currently grace the church. But as for real structural changes that might introduce some checks and balances into the polity that enabled the crisis in the first place, don’t hold your breath.

This convergence between Steinfels and Weigel is not a coincidence. There is far more conversation, and more substantial conversation, between the “Commonweal” variety of liberal Catholic, whom Steinfels represents, and Catholic neoconservatives, than there is between “Commonweal” liberals and the Catholic left. Part of the reason for this may be, of course, that substantial intellectual conversation among Catholics on the left can be pretty hard to come by. The response to *A People Adrift* by one SEPA WOC member, and not an intellectually unable member by a long shot, was that the book is “too academic.” Meanwhile, Paul Baumann, the editor of *Commonweal*, publishes reviews in *First Things* in which he praises the adroitness

of Richard John Neuhaus and George Weigel, and *First Things* pursues new subscribers by announcing that Margaret O’Brien Steinfels, the former editor of *Commonweal*, is a reader.

The Catholic move to the right may seem rather far afield from the efforts of progressive Catholics in Philadelphia to secure women’s equality in the church, but it isn’t. Last June, Elizabeth Fox Genovese was one of the featured speakers at Villanova University’s theology conference, “Feminism in the 21st Century.” Fox Genovese’s dismissals of the “feminist elite,” especially Catholic feminists, have been commended by Mary Ann Glendon in the pages of *First Things* and in Helen Hull Hitchcock’s magazine, *Voices*. Fox Genovese lectures regularly at conservative Catholic conventions with Richard John Neuhaus, George Weigel and others, praising John Paul II’s “New Feminism” which supports the equality of women but only within the bounds of gender complementarity and woman’s inherent nature as mother. The ordination of women is most emphatically excluded from this ideology. The “New Feminism” appropriates for its own purposes the theological feminism that I and many other not particularly elite American Catholic women have spent our adult lives constructing. Villanova is free, of course, to invite whoever it wishes to speak at its conferences. But it behooves those of us working for the ordination of women in the Catholic church to understand that Fox Genovese, Glendon, Weigel, *et al*, like the conservatives who took over the Southern Baptist Convention, disagree profoundly with our objectives and are doing everything they can to see that we are defeated.

Marian Ronan’s article, “Mel Gibson’s *Passion* and the Many Uses of Christ’s Suffering” appears in the forthcoming issue of *Pastoral Psychology*.

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2 A CALL TO FOLLOW CONSCIENCE

Join Call To Action–Philadelphia for a morning of reflection and celebration. The featured speaker will be Sr. Jeannine Gramick, the subject of the recently released award-winning documentary: *“In Good Conscience: Sister Jeannine Gramick’s Journey of Faith.”*

Sr. Jeannine Gramick’s story is important for two reasons. First, because of the groundbreaking nature of her ministry over thirty years reaching out to gay and lesbian Catholics. She has been a tireless advocate for a more inclusive Catholic Church. But also through circumstances not of her choosing, she has in recent years found herself called to bear witness to the primacy of individual conscience, which, she suggests, “is one of the best kept secrets of Catholic theology.” In 1999, after a 10-year investigation, the Vatican, though it found her ministry to be orthodox, required as a condition for continuing her ministry that she publicly embrace ‘official’ teaching that all homosexuals are “intrinsicly evil.” The following year, the Vatican had the School Sisters of Notre Dame command Sr. Jeannine under her vow of obedience “never to speak or write about homosexuality, never to criticize the Vatican publicly or privately, and never to speak or write about the ecclesiastical processes that led to her silencing.” Her response was: *“I choose not to collaborate in my own oppression by restricting a basic human right. To me this is a matter of conscience. Is this [command] not a violation of the basic human right to self-defense? A woman religious does not surrender her human rights by virtue of her state of life.”* She paid a steep price. Sr. Jeannine left her community of 40 years which had up to that time supported her ministry. She has since joined the Sisters of Loretto where she is now free to speak out and continue her ministry.

WHEN: Saturday, October 2, 2004 9:00 AM – 12:30 PM

WHERE: Collenbrook United Church, 5290 Township Line Rd, Drexel Hill, PA 19026

ORDER OF EVENTS:

Gathering, Coffee & Bagels (9:00 AM)

Call to Worship, Penitential Rite, and Scripture Reading (9:20 AM)

Presentation by Sr. Jeannine, followed by questions & discussion (10:15AM)

General Intercessions and Eucharist (11:45 AM)

Commissioning & Dismissal (12:30 PM)

TO SIGN UP: Space in the Collenbrook Sanctuary is limited to 200 so please register early. An offering of \$15 is suggested to help cover costs. Mail your registration (to CTA-Philadelphia, POB 5009, New Britain, PA 18901) or call (215-345-1176) or e-mail us at CTAPhiladelphia@comcast.net to let us know you are coming.

CIRCLING THE CLERICAL WAGONS

by *Jim Plastaras*

The lead article by Nancy Phillips in the July 25 Sunday *Inquirer* confirmed what many of us had suspected: that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia was not much better than other dioceses around the country which had put children at risk by treating abusive priests with leniency and lax oversight. How could Cardinal Bevilacqua and his top aides like Msgr. Lynn have been so callous in their response to the victims of clergy abuse?

The most obvious explanation is that church leaders acted like senior management in most other corporations or professional organizations. Rather than care for the victims, the priority is to ensure that the institution gets away with the least possible damage. One might have hoped that senior management in the church, whose mission is to reach out to the weak and exploited, would not succumb to this corporate mindset, but that does not seem to have been the case. Rather than respond to needs of those who were injured, the power holders in the church’s hierarchy have been concerned with preserving the “clerical mystique” and protected the reputation of the institution. The excuse offered for patently unjust courses of action is the importance of avoiding “scandal.”

I would suggest that there is another, deeper reason for this pattern of circling the wagons whenever the good name of the clergy is threatened. Our cardinals, Msgr. Lynn, and many priests who studied four years of theology at St. Charles’ Seminary, hold to a vision of the church that is distorted and, in many respects, just plain wrong. They believe that the hierarchical governance, and the two-tiered structure (ordained clergy and non-clergy) came from Jesus (rather than from the Roman empire and feudal society). They believe that the laying on of hands at ordination produces an irreversible ontological change. (Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech.) Without going into all the reasons why this is bad theology, suffice it to say that such beliefs must surely have an influence on the way the church leaders dealt with problems involving clerical crimes and misdemeanors. Who was more important to the church, more deserving of attention? The young person who had been abused, or the priest, twisted though he may be, who had been the recipient of the “ontological change” of Holy Orders? Incomprehensible though it may seem, the primary concern and the preponderance of resources were devoted to rehabilitating the priest.

The Vatican’s reaction to the groundswell of demands that Cardinal Law “must go” is instructive. Even though it was clear to the Vatican that Cardinal Law had to go “for the good of the church,” there was concern that this not be seen as “caving in.” Change must come from above rather than from below, since the church is, at least by hierarchical definition, “not a democracy.”

The scandal of clergy abuse and cover-up by the hierarchy has revealed with greater clarity the noxious effect of clericalism. The Women’s Ordination Conference is able to make a critical contribution to the cause of church renewal by helping to dismantle this clerical culture. The goal must be not merely to open the clerical club to women, but to remove clericalism, which is a major obstacle to the renewal of ministry.

Jim Plastaras, a member of CTA-Philadelphia, is a parishioner of Our Lady of Mount Carmel church, Doylestown.

'TIS A GIFT TO BE SIMPLE

by *Mary Byrne*

On a recent road trip with my family through the rolling hills of Virginia, a broad banner in patriotic red, white and blue caught my attention. Positioned between two posts of a white picket fence, it read: IMPERFECT PEOPLE WELCOME! As we sped past, I wondered what kind of a place would issue that invitation—and in God’s country no less. Of all the improbable respites I have to admit that low on my list (right after a golf course) was a church. As we turned the corner, there it was indeed—The First Baptist Church.

It is high season for cynicism these days. Between church and state, it does indeed seem that imperfection, gratuitously reduced to moral behavior beyond the imagination of papal encyclicals and proposed constitutional amendments, is not to be tolerated at all. So I was not surprised at my first reaction to the gracious invitation: Churches love to take in the sinner so that they can throw out the sinner. It makes a church feel good, like a real institution, one with rules and regulations and consequences but, most important of all, members.

In Christendom, the polished-up word for members is disciples. By baptism, we are called to equal discipleship. However, in reality, only some of us are elected into full membership. And, more often than not, the members are held to enforcing a profoundly hypocritical standard of perfection that keeps the church/club visibly cleansed of the lepers of our day—women and men who do not live by the church/club rules. And there is a panoply of “undesirables”: women and married men who must choose between a call to priesthood and the Eucharist; unhappily married couples who must choose between being loved and the Eucharist; happily married couples who must choose between another child and the Eucharist; homosexuals who must choose between living healthy sexual lives and the Eucharist (caveat: some members may engage in deviant sexual acts and *celebrate* the Eucharist); politicians who must choose between following the church’s teaching on the primacy of conscience and the Eucharist. When did the Eucharist get so complicated? I don’t believe that there is anything simple about Jesus the Christ except his message. Therein lies a paradox of hope particular to his being. He embodies the full range of complexities inherent in the persistent human-divine drama. In so doing, he mirrors our legendary ambivalence toward courting mystery, seeking reconciliation, struggling with detachment, moving toward fulfillment albeit with frightful bouts of hesitation, succumbing to the temptations of inner abstractions and outer distractions, and yet oddly obedient to something that relentlessly calls the spirit. This is a tough life. No wonder that in his infinite wisdom Jesus decided what we all needed was a good meal and a good story. And in his heyday, he had quite a few of both. This was what he

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.

wanted to leave behind, what he wanted us to remember—a legacy of communion, of folks gathering around the table. He offers a simple respite from the complex life: Everyone is welcome at the table. From the rag-tag community of Jesus’ early followers—the marginalized circa 30 CE—to the ostracized circa 2004 CE,—The message is clear. IMPERFECT PEOPLE WELCOME!

The foundation stone upon which the church rests or totters depends on its faithfulness to this message. Just in case someday we might be misled to think that the power of this simple message has something to do with privilege, Jesus left behind stories to remind us where our hearts need to be. Every time I hear a priest in his gilded robes proclaim that only “members” are welcome at the communion table, I remember the Parable of the Great Feast (Luke 14:15-24). The master, looking upon an empty banquet hall where none of the members showed up, opens his doors “to the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame...hidden in the highways and hedgerows.” It is just a matter of time before the members of today’s church eventually become dis-membered by their imperfections. Soon no one will be left holding the collection basket. When that day arrives, should the self-proclaimed masters of the church/club come looking, they will find us gathering in the hedgerows where they are always welcome at the table.

‘Tis a gift to be welcome. ‘Tis a gift to be free.

Mary Byrne is an ordained minister and writer.

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City/State/Zip	_____
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ABORTION -- ONE WOMAN'S VIEW

by Eileen DiFranco

He is a young man with young children. His last post to the e-group to which we both belong left me breathless. "I guess," he wrote, "You (the group) will place the blame for millions of children murdered by abortion on the patriarchy." Women who opt for abortion, he wrote, have abortions because they do not wish to interrupt their education or their careers. Their selfishness, and not the patriarchal society, is the underlying reason for abortion. If women understood that their God-given role in life is to love their husbands and their children, they would not have any reason to have abortions.

Other members of the group argued with him that there is no simple explanation why women have abortions. Even the statistics and research he has done to prove his point do not tell the full story. Poverty, job and gender discrimination, inequality, lack of childcare, rape, incest, war crimes, and maternal age did not figure at all into his analysis. Once pregnant, he argued, the woman relinquished her right to her own personhood and body integrity to the developing fetus. This is the way of God and the way of the church. He was crystal clear, beyond a shadow of a doubt. Abortion is the murder of children and the women who seek abortions are murderers.

Perhaps this man and people like him have considered both sides of the abortion question, though the comment he made above suggests the contrary. I can say, however, that he has left an important value out of his equation of abortion equals murder—the mother. For him not to know, or choose not to know, the religious, cultural, and societal constraints under which the vast majority of women have lived for millennia makes me doubt his integrity. To paraphrase Stephen Carter in his book, *Integrity*, this man has ruthlessly simplified the value of the life of the mother in a conflict of competing rights. The "baby," even though it might consist of eight cells, is an "innocent child" whose right to be born supersedes anything the mother might offer to the contrary. The conversation and the buck stop here.

Every fertilized egg, many anti-abortion people (including the hierarchy of my own Roman Catholic church) believe is a human life and so must be treated with the same respect as living, breathing human beings. God, they would say, breathed life immediately into that fertilized egg which is a human baby from the time of conception.

However, what is lacking in the discussion is a definition of terms and an examination of the parties who are involved in the tragedy of abortion. Too often, there is no dialogue between what appears to be two diametrically opposed camps, which often reduces the topic to a simplistic discussion of fetal rights vs. maternal rights. Many people, including me, see the topic in shades of gray.

All religious denominations wrestle with abortion, because abortion is a very serious matter. Some denominations believe that a fertilized ovum is a form of life. It is not, however, human life. A newborn baby is human life. At some point in time, that conglomeration of cells becomes an actual life. All along that continuum, there is another party involved—the mother—who is an equal partner in the dance of life.

As a neonatal nurse and as a mother, I have felt and seen human life somewhere after the point of conception and at birth, and many places in between. These experiences, those that belong most often to women only, are often not part of the debate on abortion. This is another lapse in the conversation on both abortion and gender. The woman's experience is not considered to be important by the men who are setting the rules for dialogue, deciding upon language, and making and enforcing the rules.

I have cared for tiny newborn fetuses that weighed only a pound at birth. Their eyes were still fused together, but they could move their skinny little arms and legs, respond to pain, and attempt to breathe. The majority of them died because of underdeveloped respiratory systems. They had, however, "become" human life when they became "alive." They were named, loved, and mourned as children when they died. Their remains had to be sent to a funeral home for disposal.

Although the hospital where I worked regularly performed abortions when a mother's life was in danger, the baby was simply delivered. Some babies were thus delivered at twenty weeks gestation and died, while others born at twenty-four weeks gestation, lived. Every effort was made to postpone the delivery and maximize the baby's survival. There was never a need to actually "kill" the fetus in order to save the mother, although the baby frequently did die depending upon the level of prematurity. Because of my experiences in the intensive care nursery, I do not support late term abortions. For the same reason, I think those who harm or kill a fully formed fetus while harming or killing its mother should also be charged with a crime. These are not discussions the crystal-clear pro-choice supporters would like to hear.

I had two miscarriages, both at nine weeks. These were very much wanted pregnancies and when they ended, I felt that I had "lost a baby." However, what I saw after the miscarriage was NOT a baby as were the tiny ones in the nursery. Although I mourned what I had lost, I was not mourning a baby whose kicks, and knees, and elbows, and head, and hiccups I had felt. And when a friend's baby was stillborn at nine months, I knew that my grief over a fetal loss at nine weeks was not the same as hers. She lost a baby. I lost a pregnancy. Her beloved baby had a funeral mass. What I lost was swept away in a blood flow that could have killed me. To equate our experiences would demean her loss. These are not the type of discussions the crystal clear anti-abortion supporters are likely to want to hear.

I am able to tolerate the ambiguity of my position because I believe that fetal life is like no other life. The fetus is part of the mother and cannot live without her. It lives in the mother's body and harnesses every part of that body in order to develop. A fetus and/or a pregnancy can kill a mother. Until the last century, survival during pregnancy and delivery was not a blessed assurance. During every pregnancy and every delivery, every woman walked through the shadow of the valley of death. She had every reason to fear the evil of a complicated delivery.

The fetus is, then, a part of the woman's body. A married couple was once metaphorically considered to be one person in the name of the husband. Mother and fetus are literally one body—the mother's. The fetus cannot exist without the lifeblood of the mother.

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ONE WOMAN'S VIEW

Continued from page 5

This biological situation has nothing to do with God and rights and men. The fact that a fetus is part of a woman's body is a reality; indeed, it is her reality because it is HER body. No one else's body will be subjected to the stress of pregnancy but hers. No one will experience the pain of childbirth but her. Her body is her very own temple and no one else has a right to violate that temple either physically or legally.

I have a suspicion why some people and some churches endow only embryonic and fetal life with absolute value and full human rights. Abortion empowers women with rights to their own bodies, their temples. Women with "rights" to their own personhood and moral agency displace men from their positions of power in the patriarchy, in the family, and in society. Madonna Kolbenschlag, in her article, "Abortion and Moral Consensus," says that "...There is a curious contradiction in the views expressed by some churchmen and politicians who are so intransigent on the issue of abortion, over which men have no control, and so tolerant of war, over which men have always had control." ("The Christian Century Feb., 1984)

It is patriarchal churches like my own Roman Catholic church that has much to lose by the empowerment of women. And it is patriarchal churches like the Roman Catholic church that does not seem to see the inconsistencies in a position that focuses almost entirely upon the sacredness of non-viable life almost to the exclusion of the right to life of living, breathing human beings.

A few examples should suffice. Philadelphia's former cardinal, Anthony Bevilacqua, was the first of many American bishops to support the bombing of Afghanistan after September 11. Very few members of the hierarchy other than Bishop Thomas Gumbleton have regularly raised their voices to condemn the ongoing U.S. action in Iraq. Roman Catholic Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, so adamantly opposed to abortion, cavalierly dismissed John Paul II's dictum against capital punishment.

Lately, some Catholic bishops have made abortion the litmus test of orthodoxy, elevating life in the womb to a level of idolatry, while those who are legally murdered by capital punishment or in war are chalked up to some strange form of collateral damage accounting. Like the poor, the expectation is that criminals and victims of war will always be with us. Governments, with church support, have killed in the past. The churches have praised God and blessed the soldiers while they passed the ammunition and shot it at one another. Governments continue to engage in bloody and murderous combat in the present. Unless people of goodwill ceaselessly raise their voices against the carnage of war, innocent men, women, children, as well as fetuses will be murdered in the future.

Many Catholic colleges unabashedly sponsor ROTC programs where young students who are taught that abortion of the pre-born is murder are trained to become killers of their living and breathing sisters and brothers in Christ. Catholic high school guidance counselors willingly hand over the names and addresses of their graduating seniors to military recruiters who were then used as substitute teachers in my son's diocesan high school. The military,

my son reported, "likes" Catholic boys because they are easily trained to follow orders without question. Orders, I might add, that may include dropping bombs on civilian populations that include a fair share of babes in wombs. Bishop O'Malley of Boston, in his bitter condemnation of the "culture of death," blamed the evils of society not upon greed, violence, war, and rape, but upon divorce, feminism, and the sexual revolution. One wonders what the world might look like if Roman Catholic leaders focused exclusively upon stamping out war rather than worrying about women and sex.

The name of God and the Bible are used so many times and in so many ways to justify so many things. One of the bumper stickers frequently used by those in the anti-abortion movement is "Choose Life" based upon Deuteronomy 30:15-19. "See, I have set before you life and good, and death and evil. I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life."

A simple exegesis of this verse reveals that in the subsequent Book of Joshua, those ordered to "Choose life" put all of the indigenous men and non-virginal women in the conquered Promised Land to the sword. Those who were admonished not to covet their neighbors' wives or engage in adultery kidnaped all of the virginal women of the conquered land and raped them.

Through history into the present, those who have accepted and profess belief in this command to "choose life" have supported murder, rape, plunder, and rampage in the name of God, country, and religion. War has been described as "hell," a term good Christians can understand, but that term does not seem to stop Christian nations from visiting hell upon their neighbors by bombing and invading them. Back in March of this year, Karen Hughes, a counselor for President Bush, the "pro-life president," said that as a Christian administration, they believe in forgiving their enemies, turning the other cheek, and loving those who hate them. When pressed to explain the invasion of Iraq in light of these beliefs, Ms. Hughes replied that "All Christians believe that we should render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God, the things that are God's."

"Christian people have always believed this way," she added. I wondered if she was keeping a straight face. One wonders if this most Christian administration and the Roman Catholic hierarchy has read Reinhold Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. To paraphrase Niebuhr, "If life is sacred, then every life is sacred." The corollary is that if only some lives are sacred, then no life is sacred. Religious and political leaders lose their moral authority when they fail to understand this. The sanctity of all human life does not seem to enter into the discussion on either side of the abortion issue. How can we work to preserve all life? How can we live in a world and create what the late Cardinal Bernardin called "a seamless garment" that considers all life sacred and worthy of preserving?

I am convinced that if every child were a wanted child, then there would be no need for abortion except under the most unusual and horrific of circumstances. Unfortunately, gender constructs prevent the discussion and dissection of the problems surrounding unwanted pregnancies. It is easier to condemn selfish women, sexual activity outside marriage, and modern society in general rather than examining the unjust economic underpinnings of society that place women smack dab at the very bottom.

Men in church and society place burdens upon women that they themselves would never bear. A dispassionate reality check of church and world leadership indicates disproportionate male leadership. The old grammar rule, "masculine by preference," remains true the vast majority of time and places. In this preponderance of male numbers and male opinions, women's voices are criticized, co-opted, or silenced.

God has said through God's prophets that God wants mercy and forgiveness. The reign of God remains far away when God's children cannot and will not talk to one another. God cries almighty tears when God's children pull rank and privilege and lord it over their poorer and weaker siblings. All the voices of the children sitting at the table need to be heard, even when those voices might communicate something the rest don't want to hear. Some of the faintest voices might be those of unborn children. Some might be the voices of their mothers. Some might be criminals who committed heinous crimes. Others might be those whom our government has labeled our enemy. All remain our sisters and brothers in Christ. And so, all of the voices need to be heard, weighed, and measured. It is not an easy task and mistakes will be made. Because life is, indeed, so sacred, every effort must be made to preserve it, in all of its many manifestations.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a registered nurse and seminar student. She is a core committee member of SEPA/WOC.

DID YOU KNOW?

AND WE COMPLAIN ABOUT BEACH FEES

Back when the booming resort areas of the Jersey shore were still isolated villages (in the early nineteenth century) and high dunes hid the beaches from the view of spectators looking out hotel windows, gender separation when swimming was the rule, and men generally bathed in the nude, or nature's garb," as it was known.

Ladies, however, were usually covered as thoroughly as by their normal clothing in heavy woolen bathing suits, which became so heavy when waterlogged that "swimming" was impossible and the women could do little more than jump up and down in the waves.

Up until the Civil War, it was the custom for hotels and boarding houses to post bathing hours—before 6 am, women were prohibited from the beach while gentlemen bathed "in natural abandon." During ladies' hours, 6-7 am, 11-noon, and 4:30-5:30 pm, white flags flew from poles along the dunes, and married men were allowed to accompany their wives on the beach. Red flags signaled men only. (From *Vacationing on the Jersey Shore* by Charles A Stansfield, Jr.)

PROTESTERS DEMAND ACTION ON RAPE OF NUNS BY PRIESTS

A July demonstration outside the United Nations demanded that the Vatican accelerate its efforts to put an end to the sexual abuse of nuns by priests in Africa.

"We think that the fact that in 23 countries, religious women are being exploited and raped by priests is an important international issue," said Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice and an organizer of the rally.

The Vatican acknowledged the problem in March when confidential reports gathered by the superiors of major religious orders

for women appeared in the press, but claimed it involved only "a restricted geographical area." (*New York Times*, July 17, 2004)

NUMBER OF HUNGRY WORLDWIDE CLIMBING

According to report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization the fight against world hunger is being lost, with about 842 million people around the world reported to be undernourished, with that number growing at a rate of nearly five million a year.

LADIES FIRST?

"What enables organisms with gender to succeed better than organisms without gender? Male and female may be the inevitable consequences of sex, but before we get to this we want to report that, in some fundamental sense, women, like all female mammals, came first...males are simply modified females, tailored to a particular role in the reproductive process," (From *The Mating Game: In Search of the Meaning of Sex* by Gibben and Chafs.)

CORETTA SCOTT KING ON JUSTICE FOR ALL

Coretta Scott King told a Chicago audience that her slain husband's memory demanded a strong stand for equal rights for lesbians and gay men. "I still hear people say that I should not be talking about the rights of lesbian and gay people and I should stick to the issue of racial justice," King said "But I hasten to remind them that Martin Luther King, Jr. said 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' I appeal to everyone who believes in King's dream to make room at the table of brother and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people."

She also noted that lesbians and gay men "stood up for civil rights in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama, in Albany, Georgia, and St. Augustine, Florida, and many other campaigns of the civil rights movement" and saluted those gay people who fought "for my freedom at a time when they could find few voices for their own." (Dignity/Philadelphia "*Munchie*.")

MAKE EVERY THURSDAY A HOLY DAY

by Maria Marlowe

As many of you know, Holy Thursday has special meaning for those who work for and support women's ordination. This day when Catholics honor the gift of priesthood is also the day when SEPA/WOC organizes a prayer service outside the cathedral to remind those inside that some of God's calls are not being honored.

In the true spirit of Holy Thursday, we ask everyone in our readership to make every Thursday a Holy Thursday. We ask you to pray that the vision of Christ's very inclusive ministry will be fully recognized and replicated on this earth. We ask that all unite in prayer for desperately needed reform. Pray for women whom *God has invited* into priesthood. Pray for those who support these women and work tirelessly for them. Pray for those who block God's call.

Prayer is a powerful mechanism. People united in prayer make this mechanism even more powerful. Let's make every Thursday a day of prayerful experience that promotes the will of God against all human adversity.

Maria Marlowe is a core committee member of SEPA/WOC and has discerned a call to ministry.

Book Reviews

***Persons Of Color And Religious At The Same Time: The Oblate Sisters Of Providence, 1828-1860* by Diane Batts Morrow. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. xii + 336 pages. \$19.95.**

***No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns In Nineteenth-Century New Orleans* by Sister Mary Bernard Deggs. Edited by Virginia Meacham Gould and Charles Nolan. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002. Pp. xxxvi + 226. \$22.95.**

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

Some of the most exciting scholarship on women in American religion in recent years has focused on American Catholic sisters, and especially on sisters in the 19th century. And this is even more the case when writers attend to African American sisters. Half a century after the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, it may be possible for some Americans to pretend that racism is no longer a problem in the US, but reading about the experience of black women religious during the 19th century will cure the average reader of any inclination toward self-congratulation.

Especially noteworthy in this regard is *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time*, Diane Batts Morrow's study of the Oblate Sisters of Providence of Baltimore, Maryland, the first black congregation of women religious in the U.S. Like other women of color before the Civil War, black nuns were understood to dwell outside the cult of domesticity in which white women were idealized as pure "angels in the house." But vowed religious life enabled the Oblate Sisters, founded in 1828, to carve out for themselves a space within that cult. In this space they became "women of virtue" embodying standards "previously ascribed to white middle class women exclusively" (1).

Diane Batts Morrow's meticulous and inspiring scholarship draws on black feminist thought to interpret the achievements of Oblate co-founders Elizabeth Clarisse Lange and James Hector Joubert. These two established their congregation of free women of color to educate the daughters of the French-speaking San Domingan (now Haitian) refugee community in Baltimore in the 1830s. Despite a period of crisis in the 1840s, their efforts came to fruition by 1860. Morrow goes beyond existing scholarship to show the influence of French Caribbean, African, and African-American culture on Oblate spirituality and ministry. She also recovers the "mutually supportive relationship" between the Oblates and the Baltimore black Catholic community. In her analysis of this complex relationship, Morrow makes a significant contribution to theorizing the history of women religious, moving beyond the tendency of the church and some scholars to polarize cloistered and active congregations. As an alternative, she identifies a "dynamic tension between avoiding and engaging the world in all sisterhoods with service ministries" (99).

All this notwithstanding, the greatest contribution of *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time* is its sustained attention to race in the prisms of American Catholicism and women's religious life in the antebellum period. Minimally, this involves cataloguing the Oblates' neglect and intermittent abandonment by a church they desired only to serve. Yet in Morrow's deft hands this disturbing context heightens the uniqueness of the Oblate achievement and helps to clarify crucial differences within nine-

teenth-century American convent life. Dropping the dowry requirement may have signified the transcendence of class differences for white religious communities. But the Oblates' extreme poverty, rooted in lay and episcopal racism, made the dowry a necessity, though not an absolute one. Similarly, the convent-emphasized virtue of humility strengthened gender restraints in white congregations by restricting sisters to asserting themselves indirectly, on behalf of others. But humility also forbids false or excessive self-devaluation and this emphasis protected the self-esteem of black sisters. Catholicism before the Civil War was deeply racist and yet it was also a symbolic resource which helped the Oblates to resist their raced and gendered dehumanization (273-274).

Our understanding of the complex situation of black nuns in the South is further enhanced by *No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, the journals of Sister Mary Bernard Deggs. Deggs was a member of the second black Catholic religious congregation in the U.S., the Sisters of the Holy Family. She was probably chosen to write this congregational history in journal form because, when she began writing, she was one of the community's oldest members, and would have, during her student years, known some of its earliest members (xiii).

Thanks to the heroic labors of Deggs and her editors, we now know that the experiences of the Sisters of the Holy Family were in significant respects similar to those of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. In each case distinguished and dignified free Creole Catholic women of color fashioned themselves into associations which gradually received official approbation as Catholic religious congregations. They accomplished this variously with the assistance and despite the opposition of bishops and clergy. Suffering great poverty because of the declining situation of blacks before the Civil War as well as Catholic institutional racism, they each emerged as mature, tested women's religious congregations after periods of crisis which included the deaths and departures of vowed members.

Deggs's commentaries on the administrations of Henriette Delille, Jeannette Gaudin and four other superiors general of the Sisters of the Holy Family also offer insights into the distinctive features of that congregation. Perhaps most striking are stories reflecting the complex location of the Holy Family sisters in the three-tiered racialized social structure of ante- and post-bellum New Orleans. Multiple references to the "fair German complexion" of sisters and to quadroon and octoroon racial identities (10) suggest the ambivalence of the light-skinned sisters toward the slave and free people of color whom they served, often with heroism. The application of Chloe Préval, a former slave, to join the community in 1867 was so conflictual that it resulted in a division in the con

gregation that lasted until 1883. Class may also have been a determining factor here, since the applicant was a housekeeper. The Holy Family Sisters, like the Oblates, were hard pressed to avoid being identified as servants, despite their state in life and their education. Gould and Nolan believe that although the Sisters followed the social prescriptions of their time regarding race, they rejected them in their attitudes and non-public behaviors (6). For example, soon after the Civil War the sisters discontinued the rule that only women from free, elite families of color could enter.

In many respects, the black Catholic community in the United States, a small percentage of the American Catholic population yet one remarkably faithful to the Catholic tradition, has been neglected by researchers and rank and file Catholics alike. The two books reviewed here today are excellent resources for beginning to remedy this situation.

Marian Ronan teaches feminist studies in religion at Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA.

***Keep the Faith, Change the Church: The Battle by Catholics for the Soul of Their Church* by James E. Muller and Charles Kenney, Rodale, 2004, \$24.95**

reviewed by Regina Bannan

This book is a gift from my dear college friend from Boston, Pat McConville, who, with her husband Dick, joined SEPA/WOC last year for the Ida Raming event. I started the book so I'd be able to say I had when we met at the shore this summer—and then I found myself really interested and wanting to finish.

James Muller has written a fast-paced history of the sex-abuse scandal and the lay response that began in a parish outside of Boston and grew into Voice of the Faithful (VOTF). Read it if you want a refreshing review by an insider who has enough motivation to keep you going when you think you might just as well give up and go somewhere else. Jim Muller, after all, founded International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and won a Nobel Prize for it. Jim Post, who took over the role of president from Muller, was a prime mover in the successful movement to get Nestle to stop providing powdered baby food to the developing world (229). These men are used to organizing for results.

My secret fear was that Muller would be writing a triumphal story at the end of a relatively brief involvement and that the long-term results sought by VOTF would never be achieved. I am most interested in structural change, the third VOTF goal. By the end of the book, I concluded that Jim Muller is, too, and I began to see this book project as an attempt to explain the necessity of change in the church to those who became involved because of the first two goals, “to be responsive to survivors” and “to support clergy of integrity (60),” a term Muller acknowledges is difficult (132-133) but never returns to clarify.

A good example is Muller's treatment of the structural change in which I am most interested, the ordination of women, though I imagine that such an analysis could be done for other reforms as well. In

my perverse way, I marked all references to women's ordination when I was just reading for myself, not for review. I was amazed at how many there were. Muller's treatment and examples show how deep his concern for women's rightful place is, how arbitrary the Pope's “do not talk” is, and how this is indeed the unnamed pain that will not heal unless there is full and open discussion with a resolution that includes the people most affected—just like clergy sexual abuse.

Two women leaders, Svea Fraser and Susan Troy, both with Master of Divinity degrees, are Muller's sources of theological insight and liturgical effectiveness (32, 89, 94, 133-134). They and other women are frequently quoted, and a future in which women are ordained is alluded to by a couple of participants, including the priest at the convention liturgy (72, 172-173).

In a long chapter, “The Historical Case for a Democracy of the Laity,” Muller refers to two Philadelphia-area luminaries, Leonard Swidler (192) and Anthony Massimini (218), among others. His account is perfect for you non-history buffs because it relates many historical issues to those we face today. Muller concludes with a list of nine “activities” for those who want to “strengthen the church.” The first is to join VOTF, the second to “actively engage in dialogue about Catholicism,” and the third to “enhance the role of women in the Church (284).” Again, it is a problem that must be resolved and remains unacknowledged. I urge you to read *Keep the Faith, Change the Church* and to ponder the history of a movement that ALL of us have lived through, very recently.

Regina Bannan teaches at Temple University and is a member of the SEPA/WOC core committee and the Community of the Christian Spirit.

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.

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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 your group in the **Equal wRites** Calendar, please contact Cassie at 215-467-8898 or 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. Visit the center in September for a Seniors' Retreat Day; in October for The Journey into God, to walk the labyrinth, to learn about the Healing Wisdom of Feng Shui or to join a special retreat for Spanish speakers. In November, find healing in the Blessed Grieving Support Group, or try the Advent Take Home Retreat. Taize prayer is offered on the first Thursday of each month. For more information, call 610-527-4813 or check the web site at www.osfphila.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 September, join peacemakers Daniel Berrigan and Elizabeth McAllister for their annual weekend visit, take part in Sisterly Conversations, or try Hiking as a Path to Wholeness. In October, choose a Scripture-based teaching by Kathy Kelly on nonviolence, Photography and Spirituality or the Autumn Sabbath; or Build Vocal Community. For more information on these programs, among others, call 610-588-1793 or e-mail 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 11th of each month. In September, explore Soul Transition, Writing a Book, Moving into the Fullness of Who You Are, Awakening Your Light Body, or the Art of Living. In October, join other seekers in Untying the Knots in family relationships, practicing Feng Shui or Creating a Circle of Peace. November features wellness programs, including Reiki, Weight Management; Stress Management; and body wisdom through Kinesiology. 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. 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. This fall, try a weekend workshop to support your peacemaking, including: Nonviolence in Personal and Political Life; or Conscience and War: Helping Each Other Explore Our Leadings. Feed your spirit with a weekend on Centering Prayer, Earth and the Sacred, or Chanting; or exercise your spiritual intellect with a workshop on Understanding John's Gospel or Meister Eckhart and Catherine of Siena. For more information on any Pendle Hill programs, call 610-566-4507 or check the web site at 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. Come to Temenos for ongoing Yoga classes or the course in Miracles on Mondays or for 12 Step Spiritual Growth on Thursdays. Meditation and Reiki classes occur monthly. Upcoming concerts include Kenny White on September 15; Jay Gullo drumming on Sept 16; or Groove Lily in October. Enrich your family life with a program on Family Constellations in September or Parenting and the Enneagram in November. Women's retreats are offered in both September and November. For information call 610-696-8145 or e-mail programs@temenosretreat.org. Temenos is at 1564 Telegraph Road in West Chester, PA.

Groups Working 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 p.m., University Lutheran Church, 3637 Chestnut St., Philadelphia (bring a main dish, salad, or dessert to share) For information, call 610 544-1818 or e-mail 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 Wednesday at 6 p.m. at 430 W. Jefferson Street. 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, contact the Metropolitan Christian Council at 215-836-7784.

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Saturday, September 18, 2004

9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

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Presented by:

**The Time Out Center
Jenny and Jim Ratigan, Facilitators**

If you would like further information or if you would like registration materials please contact us at [610-695-9780](tel:610-695-9780) or info@thetimeoutcenter.com.



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SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

October/November 2004

Ps:98, Ps:34,Luke 23:35

by Judith A. Heffernan

On the July 4th weekend, the American Friends exhibit "With Eyes Wide Open" was in Philadelphia. I was profoundly moved by the 862 pairs of military boots, symbolizing the first 862 American casualties of the war in Iraq, each with a person's name, age and home state, some with photos and mementos.

As I walked along, I saw a thousand more pairs of shoes, all sizes and colors, representing some 16,000 Iraqi children, women and men who have died in our war. (Remember Helen Caldicott, M.D. told us it is OUR war, because we paid for it.)

I could only pray, "God, have mercy on us!". (Remember Dorothy Sollee told us we must repent of war as a grievous sin of our patriarchal inheritance.)

As the day progressed, I thought about all the lives and gifts lost to the world through war. Later, being me, I thought of all the gifts lost to the church through gender discrimination. How many pairs of shoes would represent the women called to ordination but denied by the hierarchy? Later that week, I read that the newly appointed bishop of Richmond had removed Judy Johnson, a National WOC Board member, from the diocesan Commission for Women, because her views about women's ordination put her out-

side the limits of the Roman Catholic Communion! AARGH!!!!

What an interesting phrase—"Outside the limits of the Roman Catholic Communion." Just today I attended the funeral of my eleven-year-old neighbor, who tragically died in a fire. It was a touching liturgy, at least until the moments before communion.

The pastor gave a two-minute talk asking the diverse community—assembled in sorrow and love—to honor Catholic customs and rules and refrain from receiving communion if they were not Catholics in good standing!

This was a child's funeral! I was ashamed to be a Catholic! I was enraged and embarrassed. Now I felt to my bones Joan Chittister's words that a patriarchal god has consumed western spirituality, has shriveled its heart and swallowed its soul.

I reject this elitist, patriarchal attitude that Jesus and the Eucharist are Catholic possessions. What an insult to people of faith everywhere!

I reject this same elitist, patriarchal attitude which denies women ordination! (Remember Elizabeth Carroll said so long ago at a WOC gathering, "Don't forget to stay angry!" She added that this anger must be energizing and creative, taking place within love, but not taking the place of love.) It is surely a struggle and, it seems, my life's work.

On July 3rd I was given a button that says, "Wage Peace." Let us also commit to "Wage Reform" and "Wage Women's Ordination" ...and don't forget to stay angry!

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.

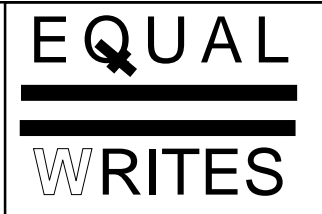
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AFFILIATION: *Equal wRites* is published by the core committee of the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter of the Women's Ordination Conference. We are inspired by but independent of the national office of the Women's Ordination Conference.

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 December 2004. Final deadline for submissions is October 15. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122 (215) 232-7823.

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