



# New Women, New Church

WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

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## Mainstreaming Women's Ministries in the Roman Catholic Church: A Survey of Young Catholic Women in Formation and Ministry in the U.S.

BY KATE MCELWEE AND KATIE LACZ

In May 2019 WOC initiated a research project, "Mainstreaming Women's Ministries," with a survey to ask the questions: What paths are 21-40-year-old Roman Catholic laywomen pursuing for formation and a career in ministry in the church including discerning ordination, so that their gifts and vocations may be fully expressed? How can the Roman Catholic Church best accompany women called to ministry and leadership?

A questionnaire was circulated to thirty-two academic institutions, various alumnae groups, and membership associations; it included eight demographic metrics, thirty-one multiple-choice or yes/no questions, and six open-ended questions. The survey was completed electronically by 224 women between May 4, 2019 and July 8, 2019.

We believe the findings of this survey are representative of a wide spectrum of experiences of women within the parameters of this study. We proactively sought participation from women representing diverse perspectives, including those who were unfamiliar with or opposed to the work of WOC. Our outreach largely focused on academic institutions. Of the thirty-two institutions contacted, we received positive confirmations that the survey was disseminated to students or alumnae from representatives of Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, The Catholic University of America, College of Saint Benedict and

St. John's University, Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Harvard Divinity School, and Union Theological Seminary. However, the survey was rejected by the National Association of Lay Ministers, who wrote that "some serious concerns have been raised by the board regarding this project as the goals were and sponsorship were unclear."

Nevertheless, we conclude that we were successful in our diversity outreach and we point to our findings on more controversial issues within the Roman Catholic Church, such as women's ordination, which largely mirror current national survey data.

Throughout the following report, "the respondents" refers to the survey takers, a group of women of whom:

- 97% were baptized before the age of twelve;
- 68% hold an advanced degree in theology and 32% were pursuing an advanced degree in theology;
- 89% currently attended or graduated from a Catholic university or seminary; of those, 52% attended a Jesuit institution;
- 86% belong to a Roman Catholic parish;
- 82% attend Mass at least once a week.
- 55% are employed by the Roman Catholic Church and 16% are



Katie Lacz & Kate McElwee

employed by non-institutional Catholic organizations, schools, or social agencies.

### Discussion of Findings

The results of this survey are perhaps best understood in three categories: Catholic identity, professional opportunities, and vocation. We found these categories to be experienced distinctively among the respondents, with significant compromises made in pursuit of fulfillment in all three.

### Catholic Identity

This survey confirmed that Catholic women (ages 21-40) place a high value on their Catholic identity (73%) and attend Mass at a significantly higher rate than the average Catholic in the U.S. (82%).

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# From the Executive Director



DEAR WOC MEMBER,

This wasn't supposed to be a "pandemic issue," or even a pandemic year, but here we are. I promise it is almost free from words and phrases like "the new normal," and "post-COVID/pandemic" (isn't that too soon?), but it is the issue for our times. Balancing in uncertainty as a church and a nation, we at WOC have turned to the labor movement song "Bread and Roses" (see WOC's remixed version on p. 8) as our march toward a new day. And perhaps our News and Notes section (p. 10) captures the realities of the moment, juxtaposing our cancelled plans at the United Nations with the joy-filled celebrations of Judy Heffernan and her community who ordained her forty years ago.

This issue includes an extensive summary of a research project exploring the paths that women in formation and ministry navigate, and the significant compromises they face in their faith, their careers, and their vocations (pp. 1, 11-12). It also affirms the deep love of the church these young women experience, and their longing to contribute and transform it in meaningful ways.

Karen Murphy poignantly explores "An Ordination Delayed..." (p. 4) and its impacts on her priesthood, holding fast to lyrics of composers that affirm her ministry and console her longing for ordination. And Sarah Farrish, a member of the Young Feminist Network, engages with the theology of priesthood in her article "Unity in Isolation," (p. 3) exploring the pandemic's impact on the sacraments and the witness of all

baptized people, knowing that we cannot go back to "business as usual."

Shannon Dee Williams amplifies this reality in an article calling for the Roman Catholic Church to make reparations for its role in slavery and segregation (p. 5), originally published in the National Catholic Reporter. We believe these words need repeating: "If there will ever be a chance for true peace and reconciliation, the Catholic Church must finally declare with all of its might and resources that Black lives do matter. The goal for Black people has never been charity; it is full justice, human rights, freedom and the complete dismantling of white supremacy, beginning with the church."

As we go marching, marching, you will find the book reviews of this issue important companions on this journey toward liberation and equality for all. First, we review a tremendous collection of feminist liturgies by Diann Neu, co-founder and co-director of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER), and an impressively researched ethnography of the Roman Catholic Women Priests movement by Jill Peterfeso (pp. 14-15).

We've also woven into this issue an excerpt from Margaret Farley's 1975 talk on the "Moral Imperative of Women's Ordination" (p. 9) and a report in Spanish and English from our Latina Outreach Coordinator on how WOC's *Escuchando a las Mujeres* helped her hear God (pp. 6-7).

Please also join me in welcoming our new editor, WOC board member Nancy Fitzgerald. It is with her time and talent, alongside the work of outgoing WOC board president, Sheila Peiffer, that this challenging and inspiring issue came together.

With renewed gratitude,

Kate McElwee  
Executive Director

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# Unity in Isolation

BY SARAH FARIASH

The class that had perhaps the largest impact on my formation as an M.Div student was “Theology of Priesthood.” It was the first year women were allowed to take the class—only after three other women and I petitioned the professor and dean of students for permission. It was an intimidating moment to step into a classroom, located in Jesuit housing rather than a normal classroom. Though previously open only to men preparing to be ordained, the information and perspective gained throughout that semester made any intimidation worthwhile. What was perhaps most striking was the experience of watching future priests struggle with these questions: “Given Vatican II’s emphasis on the priesthood of the laity, what is the role of the ordained priesthood? What is my priesthood for? What makes it different from the general priesthood of the baptized?”

Throughout the semester we explored a variety of options. Perhaps priests were merely sacramental dispensers, there to provide people with sacraments but to step out of the way at other times to let the laity lead. Perhaps priests were spiritual authorities, there to provide people with access to God. Perhaps, as suggested in Susan Wood’s *Sacramental Orders*, the role of the priest was to gather the people together to celebrate the mass. Reading John Paul II’s *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, we thought about the priestly role as having to do with ‘headship’ or ‘shepherding.’ As we journeyed along, I discovered that my own presence in that class complicated some of the simpler answers to this question. If, for example, the role of the priest was to be the one who has the time, resources, and desire to study theology and thus add a spiritual perspective to people’s lives, what made them (the soon-to-be-ordained) different from me (the never-to-be-ordained)?

Because many in the class were not brave enough to seriously engage the question of women’s ordination, they were left with unsatisfying answers about their own roles as priests that seemed to have more to do with some magical and unknowable quality of ontological differences than with actual theology grounded in love. As for myself, I came to the conclusion that priesthood was less about some sort of mystical ontological change that allowed a man to turn bread into flesh and more about the desire and capacity to facilitate for God’s people a deeper spiritual connection to themselves, the church, and God.

As we’ve entered a new era of video masses in the time of pandemic, however, I’ve found many of the same questions raised during that class now arising within me once more. I’ve found myself struggling to connect and feel spiritually fed by such forms of prayer. In many ways, video mass feels like a throwback to a pre-Vatican II era, in which the priest is up there on the altar doing something far away and inaccessible to the laity, who are not wholly present or integral to the mass or the Eucharist. I’m reminded of the question: What is the priest for? Are they merely there to perform some magical act with bread before a passive audience spread throughout the city? In Vatican II’s Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the liturgy is described as “a sacred action surpassing all others” specifically because it is “performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and Christ’s members.” In other words, the Eucharist is only the Eucharist because of the actions of the entire body of Christ, not just those of the priest. So where is the Eucharist when the head is cut off from the body? What is the priest really doing if not gathering the body of Christ together? Is it possible to virtually gather the body of Christ?

I think the answer to that last question is yes, but I don’t necessarily think the solution is to livestream mass. Recognizing that this form of worship is the one that is most familiar to many Catholics and is spiritually feeding some people, I’m not suggesting churches stop doing it, but I’d like to argue that in these new times it is not enough. The question is: How do spiritual leaders, rather than put on a performance, really gather people together so that the whole body of Christ is present and able to receive nourishment in this trying and difficult time? Scripture, church documents, and the experience of millions tells us that Christ is present in a special way when we gather together and so the question for this moment in time becomes: How we facilitate that togetherness while apart?



Sarah Fariash

Women, particularly women of color, are specially situated to provide new ways of being church during this time because it is what we have already been doing as we fight for a church that is non-patriarchal and decolonized. We know intimately that the current modes of rigidity and hierarchy serve only to isolate and disenfranchise the majority of the Body of Christ. The pandemic is making this obvious in a new way, but women have the tools to solve the dilemma because we have already been using them to continue our spiritual lives in a fruitful way. We know how to create liturgies that are inclusive and suited for spaces other than church buildings. We know how to reach out to one another when we feel alone in this fight. We know how to create community even when apart. WOC does this in multiple ways: through Facebook groups, zoom meetings, organized protests, inclusive prayer resources, and newsletters. These are all things we, the church, could use now.

Imagine how powerful it would be to have the church come together... to support protesters, showing them that their church stands with them

Particularly at this moment, when the pain of our black sisters and brothers in Christ is so exposed in the United States, spiritual leadership would be enhanced by women’s long tradition of protesting injustice. Black Catholics in the United States experience an extra layer of isolation due to the systematic racism that so often keeps them in poverty and makes them more vulnerable to diseases like Covid-19. Imagine how powerful it would be to have the church come together as the Body of Christ to support protesters, showing them that their church stands with them. Whatever it is we do in this time of isolation, rather than keeping business as usual, leaders need to focus on letting people know they are not alone.

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# An Ordination Delayed, A Vocation Compelled, and the Music That Nourishes the Journey

BY KAREN MURPHY

I was scheduled to be ordained a Catholic priest on May 2, 2020, an event that was canceled due to COVID-19. When it finally happens in September, it will look drastically different from the way my fellow ordinands and I have been dreaming. As I sit here reflecting, I am distracted and find it impossible to stay within the limiting walls of my own experience. My heart and mind are drawn to the racial injustice and generations of violence toward people of color that is finally forcing a reckoning within our country, to the millions in poverty around the world, and to every person who has ever lost someone they love to cancer or AIDS or another disease. My heart is drawn to the pain of alcoholism and addiction and, finally, to the great sins of our generation: isolation and loneliness.

There is so much pain around us that the postponement of my ordination feels at times insignificant, at times profoundly privileged. So many languish at the foot of the cross, longing for an ease to pain, longing for the promise of the Resurrection to manifest in their lives. In the context of so much pain in our world, how can I justify any disappointment in a change of plans? In what ways is this change causing me to reevaluate what it means to be a priest? How can I reconcile the work to be done with the delay of the rituals I believe with my whole heart will further sanctify the work to which I am called?

How can I reconcile the work to be done with the delay of the rituals I believe with my whole heart will further sanctify the work to which I am called?

I find some comfort, some guidance, and some answers in the music that has nourished my soul. The lyrics of the songs that have fed my faith now have deeper and more urgent meaning; they anchor me to the Jesus I meet in the Gospels and with whom I have promised to walk. In this moment of deep pain—weeping-at-the-foot-of-the-cross pain—in our world, as I ponder

and pray, wait and write, I am reminded by these songs of God's promise to me, and through me, to the world.

*In the context of so much pain in our world, how can I justify any disappointment in a change of plans? I can't. Because my vocation isn't about me. It's not about "my call," but what my answer to God's call makes possible. I am allowed to feel tired, sad, disappointed. But the work of the Gospel does not allow me to subjugate real suffering to the passing inconvenience of having to wait. In my priestly role, I am called to go joyfully after the one lost sheep, the one who is broken, lonely, despairing of feeling God's grace.*

- *Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart. (Schutte)*
- *For everyone born, a place at the table. (True)*
- *Blest are they whose hunger only holiness can fill, for I say they shall be satisfied. Lead me, Lord, lead me, Lord, by the light of truth to seek and to find the narrow way. (Becker)*

I don't need to wait for ordination to do this.

In what ways is this change of plans causing me to reevaluate what it means to be a priest? As a Catholic woman becoming a priest, there is so much uncertainty. There will likely never be the job I truly long for—being a parish priest. There will likely never be the financial security to do ministry full time. There will be beautiful opportunities in the Catholic tradition closed to me because of my obedience to the Spirit. The change in our ordination plans has deepened my sense of trust in God to lay the path forward and reveal it to me. The change calls me to an even deeper "letting go" of safety and certainty and places me inch-by-inch closer to those for whom safety is a far-off dream.

- *I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans of fullness, not of harm, to give you a future, and a hope. (Foley)*
- *In ev'ry age, O God, you have been our refuge. In ev'ry age, O God, you have been our hope. (Whitaker)*



Karen Murphy

- *Teach us your wisdom, O Lord. Shadows have clouded, have crowded our sight. Give us hearts that see. Set our loving free. Hear us and help us, O Lord. (Schutte)*
- *Be not afraid, I go before you always. Come follow Me, and I shall give you rest. (Dufford)*

I don't need to wait for ordination to do this.

How can I reconcile the work to be done with the delay of rituals I believe with my whole heart will further sanctify the work to which I am called? The truth—the amazing, wonderful, glorious truth—is this: I am already a priest. I am called to the work and have been doing the work of the shepherd for many years. Ordination will formalize this process, but just as we are baptized by water and the Spirit, so too will I be ordained by the laying on of hands and by the Spirit. And the Spirit has been alive in me and leading me for decades in service for the greater glory of God by helping me to love God's people.

The truth—the amazing, wonderful, glorious truth—is this: I am already a priest.

- *Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light! Shine in Your church gathered today. (Farrell)*
- *I am the resurrection, I am the life. If you believe in me even though you die, you shall live forever. (Toolan)*
- *You shall be my witnesses through all the earth, telling of all you have heard and received, for I arose and am with you and you have believed. (Winter)*

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# The Church Must Make Reparation for its Role in Slavery, Segregation

BY SHANNEN DEE WILLIAMS

The ever-expanding protests over the epidemic of police violence and systemic racism in the United States, manifested most recently in the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, have brought our society to another monumental crossroad.

At the intersection of these enduring crimes against humanity and protesters of varying hues and creeds screaming, "Enough is enough," is a global system of anti-Blackness and violence that has strangled Black communities in the United States and across the African Diaspora since the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. That these murders and protests have erupted amid a global pandemic that is disproportionately killing Black and Brown people only underscores the unchecked ferocity of institutionalized systems of white supremacy in our society.

In recent days, Catholic statements condemning the sin of racism alongside some clergy and sisters at #BlackLivesMatter protests across the country and world offers hope to those who have long struggled against the plague of white supremacy within and outside church boundaries. This is especially true for many Black Catholics who initiated the fight against racism in the Catholic Church in the modern era and Black Catholic women and youth who have been shouting Black Lives Matter since the hashtag emerged from three Black women activists in 2013 following George Zimmerman's acquittal in the murder of Trayvon Martin.

That it has taken so long for the institutional church and many non-Black Catholics to embrace the rally cry of #BlackLivesMatter, however, cannot be ignored. It must be said, too, that the recent Catholic statements on racism and rising protests fall way short when it comes to acknowledging the church's role in the contemporary crisis and direct complicity in the sins of anti-Black racism, slavery and segregation in the modern era.

While Catholic social teaching affirms "the right to life and dignity" of every person, the fact remains that the church egregiously violated these teachings through its participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and imperial practices of African slavery and segregation in the Americas, Europe and Africa.

In the 15th century, the Catholic Church became the first global institution to declare that Black lives did not matter. In a series of papal bulls beginning with Pope Nicholas V's *Dum Diversas* (1452) and including Pope Alexander VI's *Inter Caetera* (1493), the church not only authorized the perpetual enslavement of Africans and the seizure of "non-Christian" lands, but morally sanctioned the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This trade forcibly transported at least 12.5 million enslaved African men, women and children to the Americas and Europe to enrich European and often Catholic coffers. It also caused the deaths of tens of millions of Africans and Native Americans over nearly four centuries.

In the land area that became the United States, the Catholic Church introduced African slavery in the 16th century long before 1619. In fact, at various moments in American history from the colonial era to the U.S. Civil War, the church was the largest corporate slaveholder in Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri. We must also never forget Roger B. Taney, the nation's first Catholic Supreme Court Justice and a descendant of prominent Catholic slavers from Maryland, infamously declared that Black people "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect," while denying the freedom petitions of Dred and Harriet Scott and their two daughters in 1857.

## Following the abolition of slavery, the Catholic Church stood as the largest Christian practitioner of segregation.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, Catholics, including religious orders of men and women, were also the largest owners of enslaved people during the colonial era. In Brazil, which received the largest number of enslaved Africans imported to the Americas, the Jesuits were at the center of the brutal sugar economy. Like their counterparts in the United States, Black Brazilians today, who are mostly Catholic, are fighting systemic racism and one of the



*Shannen Dee Williams*

highest rates of police murder against Black and Brown people in the Americas.

Following the abolition of slavery, the Catholic Church stood as the largest Christian practitioner of segregation. In the United States, where the history of many Black Catholics predates that of white and ethnic white Catholics by over three centuries, the vast majority of Catholic institutions and religious orders of men and women systematically excluded African-descended people, especially U.S.-born Blacks, from admission solely on the basis of race well into the 20th century.

The historical record is inundated with gut-wrenching examples of Black Catholic faithfulness in the face of unholy discrimination and segregation in white Catholic parishes, schools, hospitals, convents, seminaries and neighborhoods. Yet, this history is rarely incorporated into dominant narratives of the American Catholic experience.

The systematic denial and erasure of Black Catholic history denies the fundamental truth that Black history is Catholic history. It is also a part of the system of white supremacy that continues to inflict harm on the descendants of the enslaved people who literally built this country and the American church and those who continue to benefit from the brutal history of colonialism, slavery and segregation.

In early 2020, I outlined a plan of action for Catholic reparation for slavery and segregation in Catholic News Service. This included:

- Making formal apologies for the church's own histories of slavery and segregation;

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# ¿Qué sentido tiene que se queden las mujeres en la iglesia católica?

BY LILIAN MEDINA ROMERO

Hace un año exactamente tuve la oportunidad de darle vida al proyecto de Women's Ordination Conference, Escuchando a las Mujeres (EALM); una iniciativa que buscaba recopilar las experiencias de las Latinas dentro de la iglesia católicas en los EE. UU. Cuando vi la vacante, pensé que era la respuesta a la pregunta que tantas veces le había hecho a Dios. Quería saber si estaba enojado conmigo.

Desde muy joven había tenido una relación conflictiva con Dios. Por un lado crecí en un país cristiano y en una familia tradicionalmente católica. Mi madre y mi abuela, aunque no iban todos los domingos a la iglesia, eran muy creyentes. Luego, mi madre encontró refugio en otra fe cristiana en la cual ella se involucró mucho más con asistencia y participación regular. Nuestra fe nos decía que la mujer tenía un lugar en el hogar y en la sociedad. La mujer es la ayuda idónea del hombre. La mujer cuida, es temerosa de Dios, da buen ejemplo, da alegría y orgullo a su marido, se casa solo una vez y solo se entrega a un hombre. La mujer pertenece a lo privado y no lidera. Apoya pero nunca lidera. Aunque esto último no fue una enseñanza explícita (nunca lo escuche en ninguna misa o predicación cristiana), es una enseñanza implícita, normalizada e incuestionable dentro de la iglesia y nuestra sociedad.



Lilian Medina Romero

## EALM le dio voz a Dios en mi vida

Al mismo tiempo, crecí en una familia de mujeres al mando, y no por elección sino por obligación, por la mera necesidad de sobrevivir. Al ser la mayor de seis hijos, mi madre tuvo que trabajar desde muy pequeña para mantener a su familia. Mi abuela sobrevivió muchos años de violencia doméstica y mi madre desde muy niña fue testigo de la misma. Sus relaciones amorosas estuvieron marcadas por la desconfianza y el dolor que deja haber crecido en la violencia. Fue madre soltera, una mujer fuerte, independiente, valiente y trabajadora. Pero eso no le alcanzó para potencializar sus capacidades, por que sus oportunidades de crecimiento profesional y económico se vieron limitadas, y ahora entiendo que fue por ser mujer. Ella no quería que yo pasara por eso, por lo que, contrario a lo que dice la iglesia, me empoderó para encargarme de mi propia vida, conocer mi cuerpo, tomar decisiones responsables sobre mi salud sexual e invirtió en mi educación para tener una vida "decente".

Para mí, era muy difícil reconciliar las realidades de las mujeres que veía en mi mundo con las expectativas sociales y religiosas de lo que una mujer debía ser y hacer. Duda de la existencia de Dios, me enojé y me sentí culpable una y otra vez por preguntarme como un ser que es la mismísima representación del amor, el poder y la bondad, limita las capacidades que él mismo nos dio y nos juzga cuando las usamos. Me sentía culpable por cuestionarle, por alzar mi voz ante las injusticias de su iglesia, por hablar en contra de ella y llamar a otras mujeres a romper con el vínculo sagrado del matrimonio para salvar sus vidas y las de sus hijas e hijos. Sentí, por muchos años, que Él estaba enojado conmigo. Me sentía hipócrita por querer los beneficios de su amor, mientras cuestionaba que su imagen en mi cabeza fuera masculina, celosa y opresora.

EALM le dio voz a Dios en mi vida, porque a través de otras mujeres, Dios me habló. Le escuche en las voces de cientos de mujeres que como mi madre, mi abuela y como yo, le creen porque han experimentado la paz de su presencia, pero que al mismo tiempo lidian con una lucha interna para entender por qué los supuestos designados para liderar su causa y promover su palabra, las excluyen y discriminan. Junto a ellas descubrí que Dios y la iglesia no son la misma cosa, que nuestras preguntas son legítimas y bien fundadas, y que estamos llamadas a cuestionar las decisiones y las posturas de las instituciones que representan nuestra fe cuando las mismas son injustas y contrarias al verdadero amor y la voluntad de Dios.

La respuesta todavía no es 100% clara para mí. Sin embargo, los resultados de EALM nos muestran que las mujeres se quedan en la iglesia por diferentes razones. La principal es que ser católicas, sea por tradición o convicción, es parte de su identidad. Muchas encuentran en la iglesia sentido de pertenencia y fortalecen su fe a través de sus prácticas espirituales. A otras, les da propósito y sentido de paz, justicia y misericordia. Y algunas, simplemente dejar la iglesia significa renunciar a la idea del único Dios que conocen. Cualquiera que sea el caso, identificarse con la fe católica o cualquier otra fe cristiana, no significa la validación o complicidad con los actos discriminatorios y abusivos de la institución. EALM también me mostró que no somos ciegos ante la disfuncionalidad de la Iglesia Católica como institución (principalmente debido a problemas de abuso sexual de menores, la exclusión de las mujeres de puestos de autoridad y supervisión, y las limitaciones impuestas a ellas para explotar sus dones al servicio de la iglesia). Es un hecho que ser mujeres de fe en Cristo no limita nuestra capacidad de cuestionar las posturas y acciones de las instituciones que nos representan. Por el contrario, continuar siendo parte de esta, reconociendo su influencia en el mundo occidental, podría ser un acto de rebeldía para exigir su transformación desde adentro.

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# Why Do Women Stay in the Catholic Church?

BY LILIAN MEDINA ROMERO

A year ago, I was given the opportunity to bring to life a WOC project, *Escuchando a las Mujeres* (EALM). We collected information on the experiences of immigrant Catholic Latinas within the Church. This opportunity came to me at a time in my life when I questioned if God was mad or disappointed at me. Today, I believe EALM was God's way of addressing my concerns.

From a very young age I had a conflicting relationship with the idea of God. I grew up in a majority Christian country in a traditionally Catholic family. Although my mother and grandmother did not go to church every Sunday, they lived by the teachings of the church. After years of attending, when I was a teenager, my mother left the Catholic Church to join another Christian faith that fulfilled all her spiritual needs. In that space, my mother truly felt God's calling and became much more involved with regular attendance and participation. In both churches, I learned that women had a place at home and in society. Their teaching said that the woman was created as the suitable helpmate of the man. She is the one who cares for others, is fearful of God, sets a good example, gives joy and pride to her husband, only marries once, giving herself to only one man. Women belong to the private spheres of life. They support but they never lead!

At the same time, I grew up in a family of strong women who were in charge. It was not a choice for them, but an obligation imposed by the need to survive. As the oldest of six, my mother, who witnessed my grandmother endure years of domestic violence, had to work from a young age to support her family. She sheltered a lot of pain and her relationships were deeply affected by the mistrust, distress, and trauma left by the violence she witnessed. She was a single mother, a strong, independent, brave, and hard-working woman. My mother had no choice but to lead. However, being a woman in our society limited her opportunities for professional and economic growth. My mother didn't want me to live that, so she empowered me to be in charge of my own life, to know my body, to make responsible decisions about my sexual health, and to educate myself to make a comfortable living.

It was very difficult for me to reconcile the reality of the women in my life while also tackling the social and religious expectations of what a woman

should be. For a very long time, I doubted the existence of God. I was confused and conflicted, angry and guilty—a mix of emotions—and I questioned my faith and God. I felt guilty for speaking against the injustices perpetrated within "His" church; for speaking out against it and calling survivors of domestic violence to break the sacred bond of marriage to save their lives and those of their children. I felt, for many years, that God was angry at me for questioning. I felt hypocritical for wanting the benefits of "His" love while questioning the idea I had in my head of a masculine, jealous, and oppressive God.

## EALM gave God a voice in my life.

EALM gave God a voice in my life. I heard God in the voices of hundreds of women who believed in God because they have experienced the peace of God's presence in their lives. Yet, they struggled when trying to understand why they are excluded and discriminated against by the people (mostly men) designated to lead the cause of God and spread God's word in the world. With these women, I discovered that God and the church are not the same things. I learned that our questions are valid and well-founded and that we've been called to question the decisions and stands of the institutions that represent our faith when they are unjust and contradict the true love and the will of God.

When I started working on this project, some of my close friends, who have already left the church, questioned the impact of the initiative. They said that the patriarchal nature of the church and the corruption of its institutions were so embedded in our systems that the church could never be transformed into something different. Some of my friends even argued that validating the faith of the women in the listening sessions could perpetuate the acceptance of religious norms that contribute to the silence, guilt, and shame of women. All of them asked: *"Is there even a point for women to stay in the Catholic Church?"*

The answer is still not 100 percent clear to me. However, the results of our work at EALM show that women stay in the church for different reasons. The main one is that being a Catholic, whether because of tradition

or conviction, is part of their identity. Many women find a sense of community and belonging in the church. They strengthen their faith through their spiritual practices. To many others, the church gives them purpose and a sense of peace, justice, and mercy. Additionally, for some, leaving the church means giving up on the idea of the only God they've known. EALM also showed me that, whatever the case may be, identifying with the Catholic faith or any other Christian faith does not necessarily mean validation or complicity with the institution's discriminatory and criminal acts. Women are not blind to the dysfunctionality of the Catholic Church as an institution (mainly due to problems of sexual abuse of minors, the exclusion of women from its leadership, and all the limitations imposed on them to exploit their gifts in the service of the church). Likewise, being women of faith in Christ does not limit our ability to question the stands and actions of the institutions that represent us. On the contrary, choosing to stay and be part of their church, could be, for some women, an act of rebellion and a demand for the church's transformation from within.

This is precisely our call to Catholic women. The Catholic Church is one of the most relevant, powerful, and influential religious institutions in the world. Therefore, it is imperative that Catholic women take actions to make the church a fair, transparent, and inclusive institution. Joan Chittister explains in her book *The Time is Now* that the invitation to follow Jesus really is a call for active participation in the improvement of a world that tends to go in the wrong direction. As Jesus did, we must point out injustices and oppose all practices of oppression, including racism, sexism, and slavery in any of their forms.

As followers of Christ, our faith is in God, not in the system. Therefore, if the system does not represent the goodness, equality, and justice of God, it is we, the women of the church, who are the ones called to do something about it.

*Lilian Medina Romero serves as WOC's Outreach Coordinator.*

## As we go marching, marching, in the beauty of the day:

### WOC Organizes Women's Day March in NYC

Through the headwinds of institutional misogyny, through the fears of the coronavirus, through the busy streets of New York City, we persisted—and we marched in observance of International Women's Day. Supporters of women's ordination (including one canine ally) strode through the streets of New York City from the United Nations to St. Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday, March 8, singing "Bread and Roses" and symbolically breaking the chains that bind the people of God in the institutional Catholic Church.

At the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral, we proclaimed that women's rights shouldn't end the moment they enter the doors of a church. The event was covered by various media outlets, including Crux, which quoted several WOC members and supporters, including Taylor Watson:

*"It's something I think a lot of Catholics believe and there's a curious discrepancy about the way the church teaches its members to fight injustice, but also allows an injustice in its own ranks. I'm happy to be part of something that will address that and take the church in a new direction, hopefully."*

As we made our way from from the United Nations to the cathedral on Fifth Avenue, about 25 participants sang this version of the traditional song of the labor and women's suffrage movements:



## "Bread and Roses" - WOC Remix

As we go marching, marching, in the beauty of the day  
A million empty churches, vocations cast away  
Are brighter with the radiance that a woman's call discloses  
For the church can hear us singing, bread and roses, bread and roses.

As we come marching, marching, we march for all genders too  
For we are all Christ's body and together are made new  
Our baptismal calls aren't lesser, as the Vatican supposes  
Hearts starve as well as spirits, give us bread, but give us roses.

As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women saints  
Go crying through our singing: there shall be no more restraints  
Upon the Spirit's calling that they know to be true...  
Yes, it is bread we strive for, but we strive for roses, too.

As we go marching, marching, we're standing proud and tall.  
The rising of the women means the rising of us all.  
No more the complement to men, no more the church door closes...  
But a sharing of God's glories, bread and roses, bread and roses.

*[Note: "Bread and Roses" comes from a speech given by women's suffrage activist Helen Todd in 1910, calling for equal rights based on dignity and respect. Her speech inspired the poem "Bread and Roses" by James Oppenheim, which is the original text of the song from which ours is inspired. "Bread and Roses" has been the slogan of various women's rights and labor rights movements, most famously the textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912. To learn the melody of the song, listen to Joan Baez and Mimi Fariña, or the Judy Collins version.]*





# Moral Imperatives for the Ordination of Women

*Excerpts from a presentation by Margaret Farley, R.S.M. at the first WOC conference, 1975*

## The Moral Question

I think I understand the reluctance of many women in the church today to allow the issue of ordination to the priesthood to become central in an overall questioning of roles for women in ministry. That is to say, I understand a concern to challenge the very meaning of ministry in the church and to reform the patterns of ministry so that women will not be caught in structures which continue to fail to liberate either women or men. I especially understand a concern to press beyond an egalitarian ethic to an ethic which recognizes that equal access to institutional roles is not sufficient to secure justice if the institutions and roles are themselves oppressive to persons as persons.

I nonetheless wish to argue that the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood must indeed be central to any considerations of roles for women in the church, and that the many moral imperatives which confront the church regarding women and ministry unavoidably converge in the imperative to ordain women to the priesthood. The office of priesthood, in fact, offers a particularly potent focus for addressing directly the sources of sexism in Christian thought. Reasons and attitudes which have kept women from the office of priesthood are remarkably similar to reasons and attitudes which continue to keep them from full participation in the general priesthood of the faithful.

...

## The Moral Imperative

When the Roman Catholic community reflects on the question "what ought we to do" regarding the ordination of women, it has the same sources of moral illumination that it has for any other ethical reflection on how its faith is to be lived. It must look to its tradition, to the Scripture and theology which are part of that tradition, to other disciplines which can inform its theology, and to its own contemporary experience as a Christian community. We have explored some of the sources of which it must take account, seen some of the places of insight and some of the places of impoverishment of insight, discovered some of what must be incorporated and embraced and some of what must be transformed or abandoned. Through all, I have implicitly assumed that part of the richness of the Roman Catholic tradition of theological ethics, of moral thought and moral teaching, is the refusal to retreat to voluntarism, and the insistence that laws and policies should be inherently intelligible, should make inherently good sense in the church's efforts to love truthfully and faithfully. What, then, is the answer to the question "what ought we to do" regarding the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church? Two general imperatives, it seems to me, are already clear: First, the Church ought to open its ordained sacramental ministry to women. It ought to do so because not to do so is to affirm a policy, a system, a structure, whose presuppositions are false (for the nonordination of women is premised on the denial in women of a capacity for leadership, a call to represent God to the community and the community to God, and a worthiness to approach the sacred in the fullness of their womanhood). It ought also to do so because not to do so is to harm individual persons and the church (by choking off the life of faith which is possible in a Christian church modeled on the life of God; by perpetuating unjust patterns of relationship between women and men; by failing to speak a word of healing to persons as yet fragmented in the powers of their own selves; and by reinforcing inadequate notions of freedom and destiny for women and for men).

*This excerpt is the beginning of a Herstory series celebrating the thought-leadership of the 1975 conference, in advance of WOC's 45th anniversary this fall.*



Secondly, women in the church ought to seek ordination — for the same reasons that obligate the church to ordain women, and because some women will have received a unique imperative by the power of the Holy Spirit and from the Christian community in which they find life. They should seek it without bitterness (though they will know the meaning of Naomi's complaint, "Call me not Naomi, for that is beautiful; but call me Mara, for that is bitter"). They should seek it in spite of weariness (though they can say, too, "I am so tired . . . and also tired of the future before it comes," and though they are subject to the cardinal temptation to weaken and not to struggle forward in freedom and responsibility). They should seek it in a way that does not alienate them from one another, whatever their pasts and whatever their present contexts. They should seek it because now ripens the time when they must say to the church, for all women, words reminiscent of the words of Jesus Christ to his disciples (under the continued query for a revelation of his true reality), "Have we been so long with you, and you have not known us?"

*Read the rest of the article on the WOC website:  
[www.womensordination.org/resources](http://www.womensordination.org/resources)*

# COVID Puts WOC's UN Plans on Hold

BY SHEILA PEIFFER

Last fall, I confidently reported that WOC would be participating in the United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2020 as a full-fledged, badge-carrying accredited non-governmental organization (NGO) of the UN's Economic and Social Council. But little did we know that the Covid-19 pandemic would change our lives so drastically. The 64th annual convocation of the CSW was abruptly cancelled and the 65th CSW, planned for March 2021, is already scheduled as a virtual event only.

However, the intrepid UN women have continued to hold online meetings which have the advantage of accommodating even those who could not afford to travel to New York. Thousands of women have been conversing, planning, and dreaming in sessions related to the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 10th anniversary of UN Women, and the 75th anniversary of the UN itself – not to mention the annual CSW. Everyone involved is working--in transformative and innovative ways under the new conditions--to accelerate the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially Goal 5, for Gender Equality. WOC submitted a statement for this effort which read, in part, "As Catholics, we believe the global and moral influence of the Catholic Church would be far more credible if the institution and its leaders practiced gender equality."



In addition to being active in the UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), WOC has also joined the Conference of NGO's (CoNGO), an independent international association facilitating and supporting the effectiveness of civil society organizations at the UN. CoNGO is a watchdog agency, ensuring that NGOs have maximum access to UN bodies. It's also a collaborative network that pushes for change and strengthens commitments to the goals, ethics, and vision of the UN.

As WOC's current representative to the UN, I have been inspired by the creativity and dedication of these women from all around the globe who tackle disagreement and challenge head on. Many cultures, many priorities, many generations are represented in the online forums I've been attending. The women and their projects are all, in their own ways, "fierce" –and that makes the acronym used by the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) a perfect way to describe the work we're all doing together. Their insignia can inspire us all as we work for gender equality in these uncertain times:

- F Feminist
- I Intersectionalist
- E Environmentalist
- R Revolutionist
- C Climate Activist
- E Eternal Optimist

*Sheila Peiffer is the past president of the WOC board of directors and WOC's NY representative to the UN.*



*Judy Heffernan, holding her original WOC membership card at the WOW 2015 Conference*

## Ordination Milestones: Judy Heffernan celebrates forty years as priest

Judy Heffernan celebrated the fortieth anniversary of her ordination to the priesthood with members of several communities. Members and friends of the Community of the Christian Spirit, which carried out this then-audacious ordination on May 11, 1980, attended the celebration via Zoom, from as far away as Arizona and Wisconsin and as close to home as Montgomery County and Philadelphia. Members of St. Mary Magdalene, Palmyra, a RCWP parish where Judy also celebrates liturgies, were also on hand for the occasion, making their way from various South Jersey towns. And members of Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference (SEPAWOC) were in attendance, too, zooming in from Chester and Bucks counties. The national WOC was represented by Kate McElwee from Rome and Erin Saiz Hanna from Rhode Island. The previous week, Diann Neu of WATER shared the liturgy from Maryland, to Judy's great delight.

It was a wonderful crowd of well-wishers, and Judy delighted in everyone who came. She is beloved, not only for her forty years of creative liturgies, but for her humble joy in the people she loves and serves. Her introduction to the new edition of WOC's *Liberating Liturgies 2.0* offers a glimpse into who Judy is and why so many came to share her special day. Her only regret about her Zoom celebration? She could not hug everyone there.

Judy's loyalty to WOC and to the cause of women is unquestioning. When she writes her Scripture Reflections for SEPAWOC's publication *EqualWites*, which she has written for every issue since its inception thirty-five years ago, she often alludes to the history of the movement. An uncompromising peace advocate, Judy has increasingly been preoccupied by national politics and weaves connections to all her causes into the readings she chooses to explore.

Throughout her ministry, Judy has been a worker-priest. After a diocesan school refused to hire this woman graduate of an Indiana seminary, she became a center director for the School District of Philadelphia's early childhood program, established during the Rosie-the-Riveter era when public schools served the young children of women working in the war industries.

Judy is also a Golden Griffin, a proud fifty-year alumna of Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. We expect to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of her ordination in 2030. We'll be thrilled when we can all be with her in person, but we'll be sorry when we no longer have to Zoom to bring us together from so many places.

**Mainstreaming Women's Ministries Survey ... continued**  
**from page 1**

A large majority of respondents work for the institutional Roman Catholic Church (55%), and nearly half volunteer in a Catholic setting (47%). When asked to describe what gives them joy about being Catholic, sacraments, community, history and tradition, and social justice teachings ranked highest. Many described their joy as being rooted in the global nature of the church and feeling connected to a heritage or a lineage through the saints or their family. For some, the joy is complicated.

**Professional Opportunities**

We found that the women of our survey understood which positions are available to women in the church; for many, their vocational calls fell into those categories. However, many expressed pain or frustration at the limits placed on their careers (or vocations, in some cases). While lay ministries and teaching were understood as professional opportunities, women still expressed a hope for more, or a sadness about the compromises they would have to make to fit into those roles.

These professional choices are inherently connected to financial security. Our respondents were evenly divided between those who incurred student loans for their advanced degree and those who did not. However, thirteen percent identified financial support from the Catholic Church or a related agency.

The financial discrepancy between men and women in ministerial degree programs significantly disadvantages women. For instance, a male student preparing for ordination often lives in a community-sponsored apartment or residence, where expenses are financed by the church. He is not expected to provide for a family or any dependents and can dedicate himself fully to study. In addition to tuition fees, often meals, laundry, and a stipend are provided. If tuition fees are not covered by the diocese or his order, then student loans are forgiven once he is ordained. A woman in the same program simply does not have the same financial advantages, nor the opportunity to pursue ordination upon completion of her studies. She balances a job and familial responsibilities on top of her academic pursuits.

**Vocation**

Our respondents overwhelmingly agreed (82%) that the institutional Church does not value women's ministries and vocations equally to

those of men, and just 35% felt their ministry or vocation was recognized by the institutional church. Interestingly, nearly twice as many respondents (66%) answered that their ministry or vocation is recognized by their local faith community, confirming the importance of mentors, small faith circles, women-church groups, and supportive parishes described throughout the survey.

Yet even with these statistics, analyzing women's vocations through this survey is perhaps the most complicated story to tell.

The statistics found 61% of respondents identified a call to teaching, 52% identified a call to pastoral ministry, 50% identified a call to social justice ministries, and 35% described themselves as having a vocation to preaching. Just 17% described themselves as having a vocational call to priesthood, and even fewer—only 12%—described a calling to diaconal service.

As researchers, we took particular notice to the 13% who responded "other" to describe their vocational call, the 11% who responded "I'm not sure," and the many times throughout the survey when women articulated their vocation fell beyond the scope of the "common" options we listed. These far more honest and creative responses were also reflected in attitudes toward ordained ministries, which is to say: It's complicated.

When asked if they would pursue ordination if the Roman Catholic Church opened ordained ministries to women, 41% responded no and 30% responded "unsure." When asked if they might pursue ordination through independent catholic movements, 82% percent responded no.

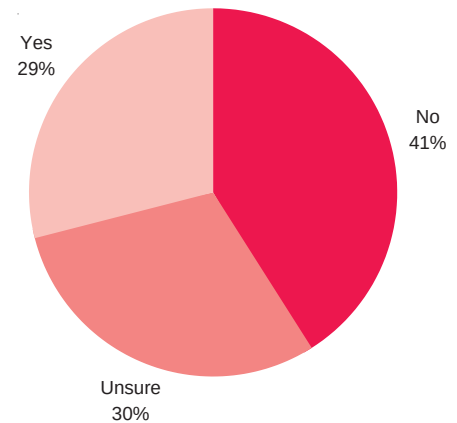
While a large majority (80%) believe it is theoretically possible for the Roman Catholic Church to ordain women as deacons, and 74% believe the church should do so, a smaller majority—63%—believe it is theoretically possible for the Roman Catholic Church to ordain women as priests, while 62% believed the church should do so.

We found that not only do women experience their vocations beyond the institutional hierarchical structures, but a majority believe that simply ordaining women is not a solution to the deeper inequalities and intersectional oppressions of the Roman Catholic Church.

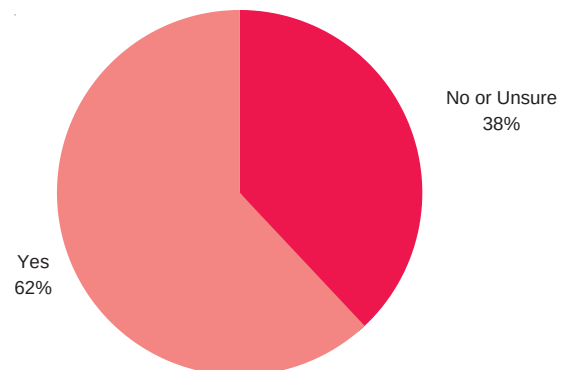
That said, when asked about the "most crucial change/s" needed, "women's leadership" (followed by women's ordination) was the most cited response. Promoting women into leadership positions and opening ordained ministries to women are needed steps to better support women's vocations on an institutional level, but for holistic transformation—and for many individual women—healing will require the creativity of the Holy Spirit, which we found in abundance among our survey respondents.

*continued on page 12*

***If the Roman Catholic Church opened all ordained ministries to women, would you pursue ordination?***



***Should the Roman Catholic Church ordain women as priests?***



### Implications for the Roman Catholic Church

This survey affirms the multiplicity of women's experiences as ministers and explores the significant compromises women navigate to contribute to the institutional Roman Catholic Church. While their Catholic identity is overwhelmingly described as "extremely important," the lack of women's leadership opportunities, financial insecurity, and clericalism present the biggest barriers to sustainability and fulfillment on their ministerial paths.

Some solutions to these challenges could be considered straightforward: Increase leadership opportunities for women, ordain women to the diaconate and priesthood, provide institutionally backed funding for women in ministry and theology programs, and offer career opportunities with a living wage. While these may be understood as radical proposals requiring discernment, they also do not engage deeply enough with the inadequate and sexist theological language and scaffolding of the church that reduces women and women's contributions to lesser, unequal, monolithic complements to those of men.

Our data reveals the complexities of women's own discernment as they navigate their relationship with the church and the creativity required to do so. Our church will require both innovative and holistic thinking, as well as creativity, to truly empower and support women. Our recommendation is to look to the women who persist in ministry, such as those in this survey. This is not a painless process, but the risk is too great not to embark toward equality.

Our recommendation is to look to the women who persist in ministry, such as those in this survey. This is not a painless process, but the risk is too great not to embark toward equality.

We recognize that our data must now be interpreted in light of how the pandemic is shifting the nature of gathering and acting as church. Short-term, many of our respondents will miss their graduations. Hiring processes may have stalled, lay ministries have receded, and those doing works of mercy are putting themselves at greater risk. Teachers are grappling with an enormous change to their teaching systems in a short period of time.

On one hand, the sacramental life of the church is being centralized into the hands of the ordained clergy. Livestreamed Masses often consist of a male priest celebrating the liturgy alone or in the presence of other members of his community; therefore, the majority of those receiving the Eucharist at this time are ordained men. But on the other hand, many women are finding ways to minister beyond walls, remotely, and through creative use of online platforms. This is a living example of how, despite the obstacles they face, women who minister find a way.

*Kate McElwee serves as the executive director of WOC, working and living from Rome, Italy. Katie Lacz serves as WOC's program associate, based in Colorado. Together they were awarded a Pastoral Study Project grant from the Louisville Institute that made this research possible. For the complete study, please visit [www.womensordination.org](http://www.womensordination.org)*

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*\*Through its Pastoral Study Project program (PSP), the Louisville Institute enables pastoral leaders to bracket daily work routines in order to pursue a pressing and significant question for the life of faith. Grants of up to \$15,000 support independent or collaborative study projects ± projects that privilege pastoral perspectives and rhythms and honor grassroots research conducted by skilled clergy. PSP grantees use a variety of platforms to share what they learn with a wider audience, extending their leadership in ways that benefit the broader church and culture in North America. Louisville Institute is funded by the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment and based at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky). The Institute's fundamental mission is to enrich the religious life of North American Christians and to encourage the revitalization of their institutions, by bringing together those who lead religious institutions with those who study them, so that the work of each might inform and strengthen the other.*

On the global level, **80% were not satisfied with the opportunities for women with ministry degrees and training in the global institution of the church**, and 65% responded that their ministry or vocation was not recognized by the global church.

On the local level, **73% were not satisfied with the opportunities for women with ministry degrees and training**; however, 66% responded that they felt their ministry or vocation was recognized in their local faith community.

## The Church Must Make Reparation ... continued from page 5

- Stopping the closings of active African American parishes;
- Reinvesting in and expanding the Black Catholic educational system;
- Requiring the teaching of Black and Brown Catholic history in every Catholic school and seminary;
- Endowing scholarships, fellowships and professorships for Black and Brown scholars at Catholic colleges and universities;
- Broadening formal church leadership to include anti-racist women and members of the laity.

I also called upon Catholics to take leading roles in campaigns working to protect Black lives, eliminate racism in the health care system, end mass incarceration and bail, and secure police reform and accountability.

In the wake of uprisings sweeping the world, the obscenely high unemployment rates in the Black community as a result of the pandemic, and the growing use of militarized police forces against protesters, additional actions are warranted. I now wonder if Catholic reparation must also include creating institutions to help establish more formal connections and foster long-term engagement between African American Catholics and African Catholics in Africa. Over the past few years, significant numbers of African Americans and other members of the African Diaspora living in the West have begun to repatriate to Africa in response to the rise of white supremacist and state violence threatening Black communities.

### Unity in Isolation... continued from page 3

The Eucharist is powerful. However, in a time when we are so physically separated, it is imperative that priests and other spiritual leaders discover new ways to keep the Body of Christ united and whole. This is an opportunity for women to step up and fill in some of the gaps left in this time of quarantine. Just as I had the opportunity to walk into a classroom previously only accessible to men, now, during these extreme times when many of us cannot go into church buildings, women have the opportunity to occupy roles previously held only by men. We are called on to creatively and prayerfully lead the Church in unity, using the tools we have already been using to bring women together in the fight for recognized spiritual equality.

The earliest documented roots of the Catholic Church are in Africa. Considering the fact that the church is also currently experiencing its greatest rates of growth on the continent,

it would be a substantial development for major U.S. Catholic universities to follow the lead of Webster University in Missouri and begin establishing African American and African-led campuses in Catholic Africa with exchange, enrichment and study abroad programs at every level from K-12 to the university and the adult laity.

While I do not yet foresee a mass Black exodus from the United States, assisting in efforts to reconnect Black people to the land of their ancestors and growth in Africa is essential. Moreover, if there ever came a time when Black Americans did need to flee for their safety, the church could play a leading role.

The denial of the  
dignity and sanctity of  
Black life is a part of  
the DNA of this  
country.

It is also a foundational  
sin of the American  
Catholic Church.

The truth is that if we are to be a church truly reading “the signs of the times,” we need to experiment and bravely step into the depths of the unknown to learn new ways to connect people with one another—even at a time when connection seems impossible or dangerous. We do this by opening ourselves up to listening to the whole diversity of the Body of Christ. Newness only comes when we bring fresh ideas forward and that is more likely to happen when we listen to voices like those of women throughout the world who have not been listened to in the past. The Body of Christ is still one. May we look forward with hope and excitement to the original and unique ways in which, even during this fearful time, the Spirit will bring forth this truth.

*Sarah Fariash, M.Div, is a writer and hospital chaplain intern based in San Francisco, Calif.*

The denial of the dignity and sanctity of Black life is a part of the DNA of this country. It is also a foundational sin of the American Catholic Church. Black Catholic history reveals that the church has never been an innocent bystander in the history of white supremacy.

If there will ever be a chance for true peace and reconciliation, the Catholic Church must finally declare with all of its might and resources that Black lives do matter. The goal for Black people has never been charity; it is full justice, human rights, freedom and the complete dismantling of white supremacy, beginning with the church.

*Shannen Dee Williams is the Albert Lepage Assistant Professor of History at Villanova University. She is completing her first book, Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle with Duke University Press. This article was originally published in the National Catholic Reporter, ncronline.org June 15, 2020, and reprinted with permission.*

### An Ordination Delayed... continued from page 4

I don't need to wait for ordination to do this.

The music that plays in my head day after day is more than a spiritual support; it is the soundtrack of my vocation, and there is no delay, no waiting, no inconvenience for me to embrace fully this invitation from God. Our ordination in September will be a small gathering. I confess that as the day approaches, my focus on the ritual has faded and my deep longing to be Christ's hands and face and feet here on earth continues to intensify. I am so grateful for the ordination service that will formally sanctify my vocation. But the truth is that God has already consecrated me to God's loving service.

*I say “Yes,” my Lord, in all the good times, through all the bad times. I say “Yes,” my Lord, to ev'ry word you speak. (Peña)*

Amen and Alleluia.

*Karen Murphy, M.A., is a deacon with Roman Catholic Women Priests and writes to us from New York.*

Diann L. Neu, *Stirring Waters: Feminist Liturgies for Justice*  
by Diann L. Neu. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020.  
352 pages. ISBN 978-0814666135 \$39.95 ppbk.

REVIEWED BY SHEILA PEIFFER

An unintended side effect of the Covid-19 quarantine has been a peek behind the curtain at how things work in our worship practices to help us assess what is valuable, effective, and meaningful in our rites and rituals—and what is not. Virtual masses have highlighted what many of us have long known and endured: how male-centered and lacking in true participation the Eucharist is as the church currently celebrates it. This time of pandemic disease, rampant unemployment, pernicious racism, ongoing sexism, and other social injustices cries out for rituals that will nourish, inspire, and challenge – and this collection is just what we have been waiting for.

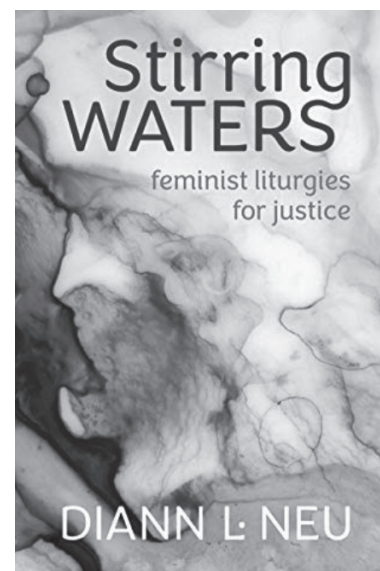
*Stirring Waters: Feminist Liturgies for Justice* by Diann Neu gathers an amazing array of fifty-two rituals appropriate for a myriad of situations, from traditional Catholic feast days to secular occasions like Earth Day or Black History Month. The “Catholic Imagination” has long been touted by theologians and cherished by the laity as a significant marker of our faith. In this book, imagination and creativity are joined with an acute sense of justice-seeking advocacy to fashion celebrations that meet most possible needs and occasions. There are rituals that honor everyday life as well as its high points. Prayers and songs inspire; readings are diverse; symbols and sacramentals are quotidian and readily available but given an aura of grace through their use.

The author provides directions that are clear; simple gestures that encourage full immersion; contemporary media and internet resources that richly augment the offerings; and times of reflection, community response, and actions that deepen and expand the liturgies. In short, these liturgies are models of how we should and can worship as communities desirous of challenging ourselves, growing in faith, and living out a call to justice.

Above all, Diann Neu has organized this volume with care and accuracy. There are four sections, each with a monthly ritual, plus four additional rituals in a final section, rounding out the number to fifty-two liturgies or one for every week of the year. Of course, the reader is free to pick and choose at will – not just among entire rituals but by selecting litanies or songs or readings or reflections as desired. Guides on “How to Create a Feminist Liturgy for Justice” and “How to Start a Feminist Liturgy Group” are also included, generously aiding the reader with rubrics for effective organizing and presiding. And the indexes!

Any way that one might want to look something up has been provided for and every reference is thoroughly cited, making it a valuable addition to anyone’s prayer resources.

This collection is the product of thirty-five years of Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) collaboration and creativity.



Whether you are on your own or part of a community, new to feminist thought and practice or an old hand, familiar with presiding at worship or a complete novice, you will find this book to be a source of hope and a means of finding solace in an increasingly challenging world. As Traci West, author and Professor of Christian Ethics and African American Studies at Drew University Theological School says in her brief comment, “Overflowing with ideas for action, study and communal spiritual practice, it is the grounding resource faithful people struggling against social injustice need right now.”

*Sheila Peiffer is the past president of the WOC board of directors and WOC's NY representative to the UN.*

## ¿Qué sentido tiene que se queden las mujeres en la iglesia católica? ... continúa de la página 6

Justamente este es el llamado que queremos hacer a las mujeres católicas. La iglesia católica es una de las instituciones religiosas más relevantes, poderosas e influyentes del mundo. Por lo tanto, que las mujeres católicas tomen acciones para hacer de la iglesia una institución justa, transparente e inclusiva, es imperativo! Joan Chittister, explica en su libro “The Time is Now” que la invitación a seguir a Jesús realmente es un llamado a la participación activa en la mejora de un mundo que tiende a ir en la dirección incorrecta. Como Jesús lo hizo, nosotras debemos señalar las injusticias y oponernos a toda práctica de opresión incluyendo el racismo, el machismo y la esclavitud en cualquiera de sus formas.

Como seguidoras de Cristo, nuestra fe está puesta en Dios, no en el sistema. Por ende, si el sistema no representa la bondad, igualdad y justicia de Dios, somos nosotras, las mujeres católicas, quienes estamos llamadas a hacer algo al respecto.

*Lilian Medina Romero serves as WOC's Latina Outreach Coordinator.*



Jill Peterfeso. *Womanpriest: Tradition and Transgression in the Contemporary Roman Catholic Church*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press. 2020. 284 pages. ISBN 978-1-5095-0976-8 \$30 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY ELSIE HAINZ MCGRATH

*[P]erhaps...Rome's rejection of women's ordination has given womenpriests a type of ministerial power that they would not have if they were legally ordained within the institution." (pp. 124-125).*

Jill Peterfeso, religious studies professor and theologian, offers a meticulously researched and engagingly written ethnographic study and history of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement in North America. Peterfeso, who attended the 2015 Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) conference, displays wide knowledge and a remarkable depth of understanding, examining the who and why of womenpriests and exploring what their actions as creative agitators reveal about contemporary conflicts in Roman Catholicism.

Peterfeso offers stories of activism leading up to the creation of Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWP), including the "hidden church" in postwar Communist Czechoslovakia, which ordained hundreds of priests, including married men and seven women. Within this context, Peterfeso explores the beginning of RCWP in 2002 with the ordinations—and immediate excommunication—of seven women to the priesthood by two male bishops on the Danube River in Germany, and follows the movement to the St. Lawrence Seaway at Gananoque, Ontario in 2006.

The book examines significant differences between womenpriests and their "legal" male counterparts, highlighting the way RCWP reimagines the sacraments. First, unlike male priests, they share sacramental authority with the community. Second, they create radical inclusivity of all those present, Catholic or not, by welcoming them to the sacraments. Finally, they modify traditional ideas about who can—and does—image Christ.

Peterfeso also highlights theological documents never released by the Vatican for general audiences, most notably a 1976 Pontifical Biblical Commission report concluding that there are no scriptural grounds to exclude women from ordination, published the same year as *Inter Insigniores*, which came to the opposite conclusion.

RCWP is only one example of the work of Roman Catholic reformation, and this book leaves much of that reformation unexplored. But it is a gold mine, with a wealth of academic research and a warmth of undertaking, filled with the words and wisdom of many womenpriests and their congregants.

With three appendices, bountiful endnotes, and a full index, this is the book everybody who has ever wondered about the suppression of half the world's population in the Roman Catholic Church has been waiting for.

*Elsie Hainz McGrath, M.Th, is a Roman Catholic Womanpriest and the pastor of Therese of Divine Peace Inclusive Roman Catholic Community, St. Louis, Missouri.*

## Womanpriest

Tradition and Transgression  
in the Contemporary  
Roman Catholic Church

Jill Peterfeso



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Enjoy this prayer card  
featuring a drawing by  
WOC board member,  
Christina Ellsberg



Dorothy Day

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prepared by the WOC  
board!



*"Most of our life is unimportant, filled with trivial things from morning till night. But when it is transformed by love it is of interest even to the angels."* Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*

**God of love, take my small, ordinary life and fill it with purpose.**

**Take my half-hearted strivings and give them flesh.**

**Take the darkness of my fears and light them with your grace.**

**Like our sister Dorothy, give me the spirit to act with courage and boldness, to bring the gospel to life in my own world each day.**  
*Amen.*

**Dorothy Day** (1897-1980), co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, worked tirelessly for the poor, advocated for peace, spoke for women's rights, and encouraged laypeople to embrace Jesus' teachings through works of mercy. A convert to Catholicism, she found strength in her deep devotion to the Eucharist.

**Women's Ordination Conference**



## *Liberating Liturgies 2.0*

Many longtime WOC members will remember (or were contributors to) the original *Liberating Liturgies*, published in 1989. Decades later, we know that a lot has changed in our understanding of radical inclusion, intersectionality, and feminism(s), but we know that the need for liberating rituals, liturgies, poems, and celebrations is greater than ever.

The selections in this new collection were chosen for their diversity, adaptability, and creativity, with the hope that they may resonate widely and deeply. Part of being a Catholic woman ministering today is ecumenical solidarity, which is reflected in the pieces we have chosen. *Liberating Liturgies 2.0* is meant to serve as an invitation into the interconnection of our prayers and to express the movement of the Spirit in all people. We believe liberation can take root only when we dare to speak our own prayers.

The 93-page collection includes original watercolor paintings by artist Liz Kalloch. Pre-order your copy by visiting the WOC website today: [womensordination.org](http://womensordination.org)