



# New Women, New Church

WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

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## The sting of canonical housekeeping

*Pope Francis' updates to canon law codify the "crime" of women's ordination and send a chilling message to a church in crisis*

BY KATE MCELWEE

Pope Francis's June 1 changes to the Code of Canon Law (Book VI) on offenses and punishments failed to correct the mischaracterization of the "grave crime" of women following their authentic vocations to ordained ministry. As those who followed the news in 2007 and 2010 know, this is not new, but a painful reminder of the Vatican's patriarchal machinery and its far-reaching attempts to subordinate women.

In 2007, the Vatican issued a decree stating the attempted ordination of women would result in automatic excommunication, and in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI classified the "attempted ordination of a woman" as one of the most "grave crimes" in the church, on par with those who sexually abuse children.

The consistency of the Vatican's misogyny does not diminish its power to shock and appall the faithful, who can distinguish between the actually "grave crime" of sexual abuse of a child and the fulfillment of a priestly vocation to serve the people of God. The codification of the "crime" of ordaining a woman is an attempt to criminalize God's call. That attempt is theologically unsound and incompatible with our understanding of God's boundless creativity, power, and mercy.

The new canon 1379, which excommunicates women who are ordained to "Sacred Orders" and the people who ordain them, is a woeful attempt to suffocate the Holy Spirit.

This language can also be extended to ordaining women to the diaconate, which seems incongruous with the fact that a Study Commission on the Women's Diaconate is currently active.

However, when questioned by the Catholic News Service as to why the revised canon does not specify priesthood, Bishop Juan Ignacio Arrieta, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, replied, "If we come to a different theological conclusion, we will modify the norm." That statement seems to offer a glimmer of hope.

### The consistency of the Vatican's misogyny does not diminish its power to shock and appall the faithful

This kind of mixed messaging from Pope Francis has become a bit of a trademark, saying one thing as pastor and another as Supreme Pontiff. As a pastor, Pope Francis champions breaking down walls and opening doors, encourages encounter and accompaniment with the most marginalized in society, and calls each of us to follow our "dream of vocation." But as pontiff, he has repeatedly and painfully rejected the equality and dignity of more than half the church, reinforcing the "closed door" on women's ordination to the priesthood, questioning the very



sacramentality of the church's long history of ordained women deacons.

Ecumenically, he will embrace the woman archbishop of the Church of Sweden, but then say in another forum that the ordination of women "leads to ruin."

It is easy to reject canon 1379 (and canon 1024) as pure "codology," but even for those of us who have been in the game for decades, and those who logically know that this was simply canonical housekeeping, updating the code to include what was already in place, it still stings to be confronted with the lengths the Vatican will go to prioritize the punishment of women above all else.

Particularly at this point in the global pandemic, when so many around the world are estranged from their faith communities, longing for the sacraments and pastoral care, or have found a home with women-led parishes or house churches, this is not just bad PR, but a kind of spiritual violence.

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# From the Executive Director



DEAR WOC MEMBER,

*“It isn’t that we never need sharp, directed, focused and even single-issue movements—we absolutely do. It’s just that we live in a system that thrives when conditions are abundant and diverse, in a universe that holds contradictions and multitudes, and we often reject that chaotic fertility too soon, as if we can’t tolerate the scale of our own collective brilliance”*  
— adrienne maree brown

You and I know we’re not a single-issue organization; although we are absolutely uncompromising in our mission to advocate and pray for women’s ordination, our mission statement continues “... into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church.”

This issue of *NWNC* reflects the deep “fertility” of our mission statement, and celebrates the “collective brilliance” of the movement, especially in this moment in history, that will guide us to embody and birth that transformative, liberating, abundant, and just church our world needs.

Holding “contradictions and multitudes,” this issue includes an article on the advantages and limits of digital organizing (p. 7), the surprising spiritual strength of virtual retreats (p. 9), and a hopeful report on the re-emergence of in-person Ministry of Irritation efforts honoring the Feast of Mary of Magdala, with several photos of actions around the world (p. 13).

In our *Walking with Women Called* section, we honor four awardees of the Lucile Murray Durkin Scholarship, now in its fifth year (p. 8).

Anne Tropeano, a 2020 scholarship recipient, reflects on the impact of the scholarship on her path and invites us all to interrogate contradictions, imagery, and imagination as we work for a renewed priesthood (p. 5).

We also share theologian Dr. Teresa Delgado’s remarks from a discussion WOC hosted at the UN on Latinx Empowerment (p. 3). Delgado’s reflection focuses on the church’s colonization of land and women’s bodies as extensions of an unequal power structure of subject over object, and offers concrete solutions to disrupt the status quo.

The Good Troublemakers profiled by Rosa Manriquez (p. 6) similarly seek to challenge the status quo by asking hard questions of our movements, and finds heart in Olga M. Segura’s book, *Birth of a Movement Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*, reviewed in this issue (p. 14). Our other review comes from *NWNC* editor Nancy Fitzgerald, who assures readers that John O’Brien’s book, *Women’s Ordination in the Catholic Church* (p. 15), should be on your women’s ordination shelf, particularly as it engages with the arguments through the lens of the Eucharist, a timely subject for those in the US.

Our strength is in the weaving and unweaving of these tensions and, and while it can feel undone, the “messy brilliance” is a needed counterweight to what we described as “canonical housekeeping” in our cover story: the codification of the “crime” of women’s ordination.

Lastly, as we were preparing this issue, one of our founders and advisory board members, Sr. Donna Quinn, OP passed away. For those who knew Donna, you know how she pushed everyone she met to work harder for the equality of women and girls, and you probably have a story to tell about it! She was fierce and funny and totally one-of-a-kind. We honor Donna on page 10, and in all that we do at WOC. May her legacy and her brilliant light shine on.

With gratitude,

Kate McElwee  
Executive Director

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# Challenging Institutional Catholicism and ‘New Feminism’ through Latinx Empowerment

Excerpted from remarks given at the 65th UN Commission on the Status of Women session, March 16, 2021, hosted by WOC

BY TERESA DELGADO, PH.D.

Before I delve into the theological underpinnings of women’s experience in the Catholic Church, I’d like to begin with a non-canonical text, from the writings of one of my favorite authors, Puerto Rican writer Esmeralda Santiago. While most of us are more familiar with her pseudo-biographical works, *When I Was Puerto Rican* and *Almost a Woman*, I have found her novel *America’s Dream* (*El Sueño de América*) to be most insightful for our considerations today.

Without giving away too much of the story—because I hope you will read her book—I can say that Santiago has provided us with an allegory about Puerto Rico. Everything in the story has double meaning—the names of América, Correa, Rosalinda, Ester—because América, the protagonist, is really the personification of Puerto Rico, or America with a Spanish accent. The protagonist is América González, a single mother working as a maid at the only hotel on Vieques. The novel begins with América’s fourteen-year-old daughter, Rosalinda (Beautiful Rose-flower), running away with a young man. Her daughter’s impulsive action stands in the tradition of similar conduct by América and América’s mother Ester (Star); Rosalinda is but the latest in a long line of fatherless illegitimate daughters of a mother maid.

In the story, América is abused by Rosalinda’s father Correa (the word means belt or strap) who, at ten years her senior, impregnated but refused to marry her when she, too, was fourteen. He was married to another woman with three children of his own, but Correa continues to possess and oppress América; he does not permit her to be with, or even speak to other men. Even the slightest provocation could lead Correa to beat América. But he always does his penance; Ester’s house (where América and Rosalinda live) is full of his penitential offerings: “Electronics typically mean he knows he’s really hurt her, but chocolates always mean she deserved it....A coffee brewer for a split lip. A toaster oven for a black eye. A rocking chair for a broken rib that kept her out of work for a week.” Correa, with all his charm and good looks, is the quintessential abuser; América is the archetype of the battered woman.

Santiago’s story is telling us, in bold terms, that Puerto Rico is like a battered woman. In other words, the structures of violence against women’s bodies are the same as the structure of colonization against lands and people. The realization that women are living under the stronghold of colonization lays bare the dream of decolonization; the colonized do not wish to remain colonized, deep in their souls. They dream of freedom, and maintain that dream at all costs. The title of Santiago’s novel implies as much, although her protagonist’s dream falls short of reality. The colonized know that it is better to be free from colonization than to be governed by it on every level. Even while maintaining the dream of the demise of colonialism, the colonized learn much from that same system: subversive tactics, trickery, and even silence, which masks pain and vulnerability. It also teaches survival tactics of creativity, adaptability, compromise, resilience, acceptance of the “other” within our own identity. And women have been quite adept at these survival tactics.

I highlight this connection with colonization for two reasons. First, the United Nations has been a fierce advocate for decolonization efforts since the establishment of the Special Commission on Decolonization in the 1960s; and second, the Catholic Church has been the historical driver of colonization, both politically and theologically, woven together through the “Doctrine of Discovery,” which laid a foundation for the seizure of lands, the extermination of peoples, and the persistence of white supremacy and racism. The underlying architecture of colonization is no different from the underlying structure of violence against women, as Esmeralda Santiago’s story highlights.



Teresa Delgado

The connection between sexual violence and institutional violence against women could not be more clear, as spoken by women themselves. The colonization of lands and peoples and of women’s bodies are both derived from an unequal power structure of subject over object, and upheld by a hierarchy that maintains the status quo. Pope John Paul II’s “theology of the body” as the theological foundation for what the Catholic Church is calling the “new feminism” is, in my view, a reenactment of the same structures of subject over object. Using the language of complementarity, this “new feminism” upholds the dignity of women by essentializing motherhood as the greatest good of women’s being (our anthropology) and greatest gift to the body of Christ, the church. What complementarity masks is its negation of women as women: If women are not fulfilled in their physical, spiritual, and emotional functions as mothers, then they do not exist as beings. Not only does this perpetuate a colonization of women’s being, but it denies the full humanity of women and men.

This is why the territory of women’s sexual agency and autonomy is so contested within the Catholic Church—around sexual rights, reproductive justice, marriage, divorce, and so on. In other words, when women say to the church, “I want to be free from violence and free to be who I am called to be,” this is where the church harnesses its strongest defenses. Both sexually and institutionally, the focus has been on control of women’s bodies and voices. A particular narrative of the Virgin Mary has been very useful for maintaining that control. The classic Roman Catholic emphasis on complementarity as a fundamental element of our humanity has still relegated women to the lower of the hierarchical ordering of male and female, despite John Paul II’s insistence on the valuation of both sexes in distinct, yet equal, ways. This is nowhere more visible than in the division of labor within the institution of the Church itself: The priest takes on the symbolic manifestation of Jesus as priest, prophet, and king. Jesus as the suffering servant, on the other hand, the one who gives his life for many, seems to be the distinct role reserved for women, since only men can take on the priestly function.

*continued on page 11*

# Desafiando al Catolicismo Institucional y al ‘Nuevo Feminismo’ a través del Empoderamiento Latinx

*Extraído de los comentarios pronunciados en la sesión de la UNCSW65, “Desafiando al Catolicismo Institucional y al ‘Nuevo Feminismo’ a través del Empoderamiento Latinx,” el 16 de marzo de 2021, organizada por WOC*

BY TERESA DELGADO, PHD.



*Teresa Delgado*

Antes de profundizar en los fundamentos teológicos de la experiencia de las mujeres en la Iglesia Católica, me gustaría comenzar con un texto no canónico, de una de mis autoras favoritas, la escritora puertorriqueña Esmeralda Santiago. Aunque la mayoría de nosotras estamos más familiarizadas con su obra pseudo-biográfica, “*Cuando yo era Puertorriqueña*” y “*Casi una Mujer*,” he encontrado que su novela “*El Sueño de América*” es muy esclarecedora para nuestras consideraciones de hoy.

Sin develar demasiado de la historia—porque espero que lean su libro—puedo decir que Santiago nos ha proporcionado una alegoría sobre Puerto Rico. Todo en la historia tiene un doble sentido—los nombres de América, Correa, Rosalinda, Ester—porque América, la protagonista, es realmente la personificación de Puerto Rico, o de América con acento hispano. La protagonista es América González, una madre soltera que trabaja como camarera en el único hotel de Vieques. La novela comienza con la hija de América, Rosalinda, de catorce años, que se escapa con un joven. La acción impulsiva de su hija se inscribe en la tradición de conductas similares de América y de la madre de América, Ester (Estrella). Rosalinda no es más que la última de una larga lista de hijas ilegítimas—sin padre—de una madre sirvienta.

En la historia, América es maltratada por el padre de Rosalinda, Correa, quien, diez años mayor que ella, la embarazó cuando también tenía catorce años, pero se negó a casarse con ella. Él está casado con otra mujer y tienen tres hijos propios, mientras continúa poseyendo y oprimiendo a América; Correa no le permite estar con otros hombres, ni siquiera hablar con ellos. La más mínima provocación puede llevar a Correa a golpear a América. Pero siempre cumple su penitencia; la casa de Ester (donde viven América y Rosalinda) está llena de sus ofrendas expiatorias: “Los electrónicos suelen significar que él sabe que la ha herido de verdad, pero los chocolates siempre significan que ella se lo merecía. [...] Una cafetera para un labio partido. Un horno tostador por un ojo morado. Una mecedora por una costilla rota que la mantuvo sin trabajar durante una semana.” Correa, con todo su encanto y su buena apariencia, es el maltratador por excelencia; América es el arquetipo de la mujer maltratada.

La historia de Santiago nos está diciendo, en términos audaces, que Puerto Rico es como una mujer maltratada. En otras palabras, las estructuras de la violencia contra los cuerpos de las mujeres es la misma que la estructura de la colonización contra las tierras/los pueblos. La constatación de que las mujeres viven bajo el reducto de la colonización pone al descubierto el sueño de la descolonización; las personas colonizadas no desean seguir siendo colonizadas, en el fondo de su alma sueñan con la libertad y mantienen ese sueño a toda costa. El título de la novela de Santiago así lo indica, aunque el sueño de su protagonista no llega a la realidad.

Las personas colonizadas saben que es mejor ser libres de la colonización que ser gobernadas por ella en todos los niveles. Aún manteniendo el sueño de la desaparición del colonialismo, las personas colonizadas aprenden mucho de ese mismo sistema: Tácticas subversivas, el engaño, e incluso el silencio que enmascara el dolor y la vulnerabilidad. También les enseña tácticas de supervivencia como la creatividad, la adaptabilidad, el compromiso, la resiliencia, la aceptación de la “otredad” dentro de nuestra propia identidad. Y las mujeres han sido muy hábiles en estas tácticas de supervivencia.

Destaco esta conexión con la colonización por dos razones. En primer lugar, las Naciones Unidas han defendido férreamente los esfuerzos de descolonización desde el establecimiento de la Comisión Especial de Descolonización en la década de 1960; en segundo lugar, la Iglesia Católica ha sido el motor histórico de la colonización, tanto política como teológicamente, entrelazada a través de la Doctrina del Descubrimiento que sentó las bases para la toma de tierras y el exterminio de los pueblos, así como para la persistencia de la supremacía blanca y el racismo. La arquitectura subyacente de la colonización no es diferente de la estructura subyacente de la violencia contra las mujeres, como pone de manifiesto la historia de Esmeralda Santiago.

La conexión entre la violencia sexual y la violencia institucional contra las mujeres no podría ser más clara, tal y como lo expresan las propias mujeres. Tanto la colonización de las tierras/los pueblos como la de los cuerpos de las mujeres se derivan de una estructura de poder desigual del sujeto sobre el objeto y son sostenidas por una jerarquía que mantiene el statu quo. La “teología del cuerpo” del Papa Juan Pablo II como fundamento teológico de lo que la Iglesia católica llama el “Nuevo Feminismo” es, en mi opinión, una recreación de las mismas estructuras de sujeto sobre objeto. Utilizando el lenguaje de la complementariedad, este “Nuevo Feminismo” defiende la dignidad de la mujer esencializando la maternidad como el mayor bien del ser de la mujer (nuestra antropología) y el mayor don para el cuerpo de Cristo, la Iglesia. Lo que la complementariedad enmascara es su negación de la mujer COMO MUJER; si la mujer no se realiza en su función de madre (física/espiritual/emocional), entonces no existe como ser. Esto no sólo perpetúa una colonización del ser de la mujer, sino que niega la plena humanidad de mujeres y hombres.

Por eso el territorio de la agencia y la autonomía sexual de las mujeres es tan disputado dentro de la Iglesia Católica en torno a los derechos sexuales, la justicia reproductiva, el matrimonio, el divorcio, etc.

*Este artículo continúa en línea: [womensordination.org/espanol](http://womensordination.org/espanol)*

# Becoming Fr. Anne

BY ANNE TROPEANO

*Anne Tropeano reflects on her vocational journey after receiving the Lucile Murray Durkin Scholarship from WOC*

Elijah went a day's journey into the desert, until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death saying: "This is enough, O LORD! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers." He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree, but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat. Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again, but the angel of the LORD came back a second time, touched him, and ordered, "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!" He got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb. (1 Kings 19:4-8)

As a woman walking the path to ordination in the Roman Catholic Church, there are countless times that I simply want to lay down like Elijah under the broom tree and give up. The road is often so crushing that I cry to God in my prayer, "This is enough, O LORD—take my life." But, like the angel, the Women's Ordination Conference is sent to my aid to lift me back onto my feet and nourish me for the journey that would otherwise be too long.

In 2020, I had the great privilege of receiving the Lucile Murray Durkin scholarship for women discerning priestly ordination. A few months prior, and after much wrestling with God over many years, I entered formation with the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests. I knew it was the right decision, but still, I was tentative—scared even. I was uncertain of what lay ahead and what the personal cost would be. I proceeded quietly with one foot out the door, looking for any opportunity to let myself off the hook and tell God "no." But then came the scholarship: A Roman Catholic organization officially recognized my vocation. It was a validation I didn't realize I needed. In that moment, a profound shift occurred within me: My resolve locked in, and with that shift I started to become an actual priest. I started to become Father Anne.

Since then, the graces have only deepened. Over the last year, I was quoted in an article in the *New Yorker* (thanks to Kate McElwee), completed my formation, built a website, began preaching each week, started an electronic newsletter, opened social media accounts, embarked on a

I proceeded quietly with one foot out the door, looking for any opportunity to let myself off the hook and tell God "no." But then came the scholarship

fundraising campaign, set up an LLC, started hosting online Liturgies of the Word, and established a group of supporters. And to top it all off, I also secured a dream location for my ordination: the breathtaking Episcopal Cathedral in downtown Albuquerque. Through every homily, every phone call, every email, I feel the hand of God at work gently forming my prophetic voice, my pastoral heart, my resilient spirit. Every day, I become more and more a Roman Catholic priest.

WOC continues to sustain me on my path to the mountain of God. WOC mentors me with guidance and advice, feeds me with programs and prayer, inspires me with a fierce and unflagging commitment to God's vision of justice. It will take my entire life to become Father Anne. I am thankful WOC will be by my side.

*Anne Tropeano is preparing for ordination on October 16, 2021 in Albuquerque, New Mexico with the Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests. Visit [fatheranne.com](http://fatheranne.com) for more information.*



Anne Tropeano

## Why Fr. Anne?

I use the moniker Father Anne for many reasons, but, in a nutshell, it's this: We are a Church that relies heavily on symbol, and the priest is a one of the most powerful symbols in the Church's imagination. I am inserting myself as fully as possible into this symbol in order to expand it to include a woman's body. I live the life, I wear the collar, and I assume the title "Father." In so doing, I both mock the absurd notion that women are not called to priesthood, while at the same time confirming the reality that I am, in fact, a real Roman Catholic priest—as real as any man serving in the same role.

In addition, I don't want any confusion. When people in the United States hear the title "Father" in reference to a minister, they almost always identify this term with the Roman Catholic Church. Let there be no mistake: I am not Lutheran, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Methodist. I am a Roman Catholic priest, and it is the Roman Catholic Church and its leadership (this includes you, Pope Francis) that I directly challenge with my ministry.

*You're invited! WOC is hosting a meet and greet and grassroots organizing workshop before Anne's ordination in Albuquerque, Friday, October 15 from 5:30-7:30pm For more details: [woc@womensordination.org](mailto:woc@womensordination.org)*

## Good Troublemakers

*A new effort within Roman Catholic Women Priests calls the movement and progressive Catholics to be anti-racist*

BY ROSA MANRIQUEZ

*“I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens’s Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”*

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”

In 2018, Dr. Miguel De La Torre of the Illif School of Theology led a regional Roman Catholic Womenpriest retreat on the theme of racism. It was an impactful weekend that covered the history of racism, the emergence of white supremacy, and the basic goals of antiracism. The most controversial subject was a discussion of white feminism. The conversation revealed the need for progressive feminist organizations like ours to examine our own racism in order to maintain integrity of purpose.

George Floyd’s murder was a catalyst for many progressive groups to enact antiracism training and to recognize the existence of white supremacy. Against this background, the Good Troublemakers was established by a core group of Western Region priests. Although the group has shared articles, books, and videos, we are more than a book club. Instead, we are asking hard questions of RCWP with the goal of bringing “a positive peace which is the presence of justice.” Among our hopes and dreams, the Good Troublemakers are calling for preparation for ordination to include training in antiracism, community organizing, and cultural enrichment.

During the history of the women’s movement, people of color have been marginalized and white women have taken center stage, and this practice is still happening in our progressive movement today. The Good Troublemakers strive to become a conscience for RCWP about the presence of white feminism within our organization. These are some of the questions we are asking ourselves:

- Do we value the wisdom of marginalized voices and resist the impulse to insist “they” be more like “us”?
- Are we listening to the voices of younger generations, and meeting their spiritual needs?
- Do we understand that what we do is more important than who we say we are?

Over the centuries, we have seen the evolution of Jesus’s teachings from a spiritual, mystical way of being that identified with the marginalized and fostered compassion to an established institution that has a dysfunctional existence as a modern idol. There are countless instances in which the institution—with its buildings, riches, hierarchy, and authoritarian pronouncements—matters more than the inspired wisdom of Jesus of Nazareth.

The institutional Roman Catholic Church has co-opted the call to priesthood as a hostage of this idol. Ordaining women would be the recognition of God’s intent to call the least likely to the role of monarch, prophet, and leader. Women’s ordination could birth a post-institutional church that witnesses, proclaims, and celebrates the Good News in everyone, especially in all who have been made unwelcome by the institution and those who, like the apostle Thomas, reject a cult of idolatry by asking questions.

Together, we envision a priesthood that centers the marginalized and proclaims that the first will be last and the last will be first by actively dismantling white supremacy. We commit to pairing charity with justice and education with action.

*Rosa G. Manriquez, IHM is a mother and grandmother in addition to being an ordained Roman Catholic priest and a member of the Immaculate Heart Community and Call To Action. She lives in East Los Angeles.*



Rosa Manriquez

“

The Good Troublemakers take heart in Olga M. Segura's words:

“In a world that oppresses Black people, our church fathers can create a space that centers, learns from, and financially supports the scholars, thinkers, professors, and writers doing antiracism research that the church can more broadly integrate into ministry. This includes providing antiracism resources and training for those who are preparing to receive the sacraments. Another church is possible if we let Black women lead.”

- *Birth of a Movement Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church* (reviewed on page 11 of this issue)



# The Gifts and Challenges of Digital Organizing

BY ANNA BURNHAM

I joined WOC in October 2020, seven months into a global pandemic that necessitated—for those who were able—isolation and distancing. In those months, we became Zoom experts, FaceTime connoisseurs, pros at hand-washing and determining what a six-foot distance looked like. I came to WOC as the organization's Digital Organizer, and so for the first time in my organizing career was faced with a unique challenge: organize entirely remotely and digitally. I first fell in love with organizing because of the tangibility of it, the rootedness of it, the way it enables you to meet people and be with them in a singular present moment. Something I love about organizing is that the path to social change is not always linear, and it's not just about big moments and demonstrations. Every conversation you have with someone in the community (however big or small, global or local that community may be) is an essential part of that social change, because transformation in a community comes out of the roots of relationship. Every cup of coffee or lunch with someone is an essential building block to making change happen.

But, of course, COVID provided unique challenges in organizing not just for WOC, but for people and organizations advocating for social change everywhere. Gathering in person was not the safest option, and crowds were best to be avoided. This meant that many activists' tools for attracting attention and building change—protests, demonstrations, in-person community building meetings—were no longer accessible. For WOC—an organization long known for our signature “Ministry of Irritation” that makes us unafraid to demonstrate outside a cathedral or march down the streets of the Eternal City—this meant a shift entirely into digital organizing (that is, organizing online), a type of organizing that presents its own gifts *and* its own challenges.

Much of digital organizing is tied to social media, and so WOC turned to social media as a focus of our socially distanced organizing (being part of a worldwide movement for ordination justice that necessitates lots of interaction across continents and time zones on social media meant we had a nice head start!). Whereas before the pandemic we might have gathered in person to demonstrate, now we gathered on Twitter, sending our Twitter activists detailed schedules of when to tweet (and at whom) to garner maximum attention from the church powers-that-be. We encouraged shares and engagement on Facebook and Instagram, having our supporters double and triple our reach by sharing our content to their own followers. We held Q&As on our Instagram stories, encouraging our followers to ask us questions about women's ordination and putting our faces to the work of WOC. Throughout various campaigns, we had friends and supporters send us pictures and videos that we would then share out on social media, emphasizing that even though we were far-flung, we were united.

We also continued to gather, though within the realm of Zoom instead of in someone's living room. For Vocations Awareness Week in November, we held a virtual letter writing-party where we hung out and drafted our letters to bishops around the world telling them about our own calls to ministry and demanding to know why they would turn down our calls from God. These spaces provided crucial organizing power, yes, but they were also pastoral—they gave people excluded from ministry due to their identity space to talk about their journeys and share similarities with others. We hosted Zoom events for new members of our Young Feminist Network, thrilled to expand our reach and meet people from all over the country who were grateful they had found us.

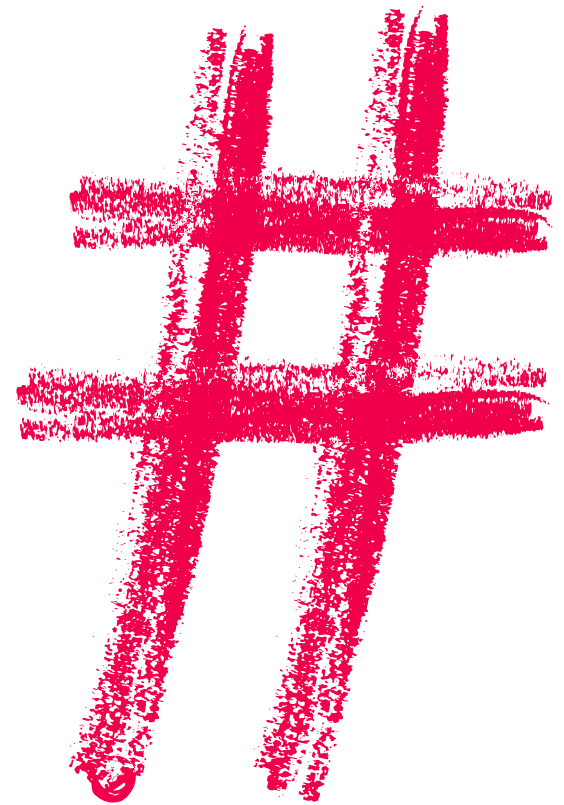
Digital organizing during COVID has provided unique challenges, but it has also provided unique opportunities. In July 2021, we were able to be a part of an international action for the Feast of Mary Magdalene. Coordinating messaging, images, and the theme of Mary Magdalene's red egg, we were able to watch as our friends *Toutes Apotres* held a press conference and vigil in Paris, wearing red and holding WOC's prayer cards as a symbol of solidarity. In Chile—still under stricter gathering restrictions—a WOC supporter organized an entirely digital action of women who supported us, flooding our social media with powerful images of women in red holding red eggs. And in several cities across the U.S., vaccines finally made it safe for WOC supporters to hold small outdoor vigils outside cathedrals, drop banners, and post signs calling for an end to ordination injustice. Digital organizing made the international component of that day possible, and it also spread our message to exponentially more people than were able to gather in person. I hope the future of WOC's organizing will be some combination of the tangible and the digital, one providing a strong foundation and the other providing the wings.

*Anna Burnham is a recent graduate of Harvard Divinity School, and served as WOC's Digital Organizer from October 2020–July 2021.*



Anna Burnham

Every cup of coffee or lunch with someone is an essential building block to making change happen.



# Meet Our Scholarship Awardees

We are so happy to announce the awardees of the 2021 Lucile Murray Durkin Scholarship for Women and Non-Binary People Discerning Ordination



Tammy Fuqua

Tammy Fuqua felt the calling to ministry the moment she walked into her home church of Saint Matthew Ecumenical Catholic Church in Orange, California and saw a woman priest at the altar. After going through an inquiry class shortly after joining the church in 2002, she was baptized, confirmed, and received communion at an Easter Vigil. Tammy then got to work in every ministry she could at the small church—usher, Eucharistic minister, youth minister, altar server, and sacristan were just a few of the roles she immersed herself in. Within a few years she began to have a deeper calling and asked if she could become a deacon. The pastor, Bp. Peter Hickman, convinced Tammy to go back to school and pursue her education. With this, she completed her undergrad work with honors and then attended the St. Cyprian School of Theology and completed her theology studies in preparation for ordination. Tammy was ordained a deacon on January 5, 2020. She is now enrolled in a graduate program in Pastoral Theology at St. Joseph's College in Maine. She will finish the program December 2023 and walk with her class in May 2024. Upon completion of this program, she will pursue ordination to the priesthood.

Susan Russell, currently based in Medina, Ohio, will continue her Master's in Theology at John Carroll University this fall. Last semester, she completed a research paper on theologian John J. McNeill, exploring the concepts he presented to facilitate change in LGBTQ policies with his 1976 book, *The Church and the Homosexual*. Her two main research interests include the treatment of LGBTQ people and the ordination of women in the Catholic church.

Susan is an independently licensed social worker and chemical dependency counselor in private practice with Cornerstone Psychological and Counseling Services LLC. She is in the process of becoming certified to work with nonbinary and transgender individuals through the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH). She made this decision after losing a client to suicide and learning about the high rate of suicide and violence against transgender individuals.



Susan Russell



Jemma Suwa

Jemma Suwa was born and raised in Nigeria, and has now lived in the US for about a decade. She has a Bachelor's degree in Communication, Master's degree in Professional Media, and is currently enrolled in a dual degree program at Vanderbilt University—Divinity & Community Development. Jemma is committed to continuing to explore ministry at the intersection of her deepest passions—congregational ministry, community development, and storytelling/video production. She describes her sense of the call to ministry as a “deep knowing” that has endured in her heart for as long as she can remember; one that she has wholeheartedly embraced at times, and then wrestled with at other times.

There are a number of areas that inspire Jemma's ministry, including a passion for interfaith dialogue and collaboration; envisioning church outside of the four walls; pastoral care; issues of identity, home, and belonging; contemplative spiritual practices; amplifying the voices of women; working for equity and justice; decoloniality; and pan-Africanism, among others. She currently resides in Nashville, Tennessee, and has just begun the ordination process in the Tennessee region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Meredith Toussaint is a recent high school graduate who will begin her first year at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota this fall. She comes from a long line of empowered women who were not afraid to stand up for themselves, who worked to break down barriers that stand in the way of women rising to their full potential, and who instilled in her the courage to never settle for what women have been told they are allowed to do.

During her senior year of high school, when she was unable to attend Mass because of the pandemic, Meredith helped her family and members of her community find creative ways to worship God, which led her to seriously question the church's ban on women's ordination.

Throughout the year, she found a passion for women's ordination justice in the Catholic church. She began to question the church's teaching that women are not fit to be priests, began to care deeply about this cause, and was then connected with WOC, an organization that gave her hope for the future of the church.

Meredith is excited for her future at St. Catherine University and beyond, and will continue to advocate for justice in the church for as long as it takes. She dreams of a church where all are welcome, of a priesthood that includes all priestly people regardless of their gender, and of a radical faith, where the final word is love. She prays that the church will embrace justice and equality, and be a place where all really are welcome, but knows that this is not possible unless all are welcome to lead.



Meredith Toussaint



## WOC Offers First Virtual Retreats

BY KATIE LACZ

This winter and spring saw a long-held dream of WOC come true: WOC offered virtual weekend retreats for members. Led by feminist theologians and ministers, and supported by a wonderful team of volunteers, the retreats were an opportunity to nourish the spirituality that grounds and guides members' activism, and to deepen community in a time of increased pandemic-induced disconnection. People who have been WOC members for years, or decades, gathered alongside those who just learned about WOC and desired to meet others traveling the same path for ordination justice.

From February 26-28, WOC members could participate in "Creative Wisdom, Subversive Spirit," a retreat grounded in the story of the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah as well as the art and life of trailblazing abstract artist and mystic Hilma af Klint. Retreat leaders Luisely Melecio-Zambrano and Lizzie Berne DeGear created a weekend of meditation, introspection, and prayer grounded in the body, exploring "pillars" of authority, community, subversion, and building for the future. The retreat closed with a feminist liturgy celebrating the creative Spirit of Wisdom. Melecio-Zambrano brought her gifts as a midwife, spiritual director, and dancer, and Berne DeGear shared her theological studies, priestly presence, and experience of Hilma af Klint's art.

In anticipation of Pentecost, WOC's second retreat featured the theme "She Went Up in a Flame," referencing an apocryphal story of Mary Magdalene becoming like an "ark of glass and fire" when threatened for proclaiming the Gospel. Retreat leaders Molleen Dupree Dominguez, a teacher, spiritual director, and writer; and Jaclyn Newns, an artist, spiritual director, and retreat leader; combined Mary Magdalene's story and the scholarship of WOC member Janet Antico, with the art of Alma Woodsey Thomas. Thomas, a Black woman whose art celebrates color and pattern, offered creative "sparks" for retreatants to create their own art as part of the retreat weekend.

Both retreats included extensive workbooks with journaling prompts, bread recipes, background articles and reflections, as well as pre-recorded videos offering visio divina, guided meditation, and yoga.

In a long-haul movement, a retreat is an opportunity to renew reserves, slow down, and recognize the ever-present God with us. Especially now, still grappling with the prolonged trauma of the pandemic, our need for time and space to rest and be present to ourselves, one another, and God is stronger than ever.



The planning stages for a third retreat for the fall have begun, and future retreats will include reflection groups for women and nonbinary people who are called to ordination. As one retreatant put it in their feedback:

"I loved being in the small groups and learning about the other participants along with their viewpoints. This was my first time there and really enjoyed being with many who feel the same way I do. It was like coming home."

*Katie Lacz, WOC's program director, is based outside of Boulder, Colorado.*

## WOC Welcomes a new Office Manger, Janel Reyes



*Janel Reyes*

WOC is pleased to welcome Janel Reyes to our DC team as our dynamic office manager. Janel describes herself as "a single mother who put herself through college," and is wholly committed to women's rights in the church and society. You can reach Janel by email: [office@womensordination.org](mailto:office@womensordination.org)

*Welcome, Janel!*

## WOW Marks its 25th Anniversary

Twenty-five years ago, in July 1996, Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) began at the First European Women's Synod in Gmunden, Austria, with the mission: "To promote worldwide the ordination of Roman Catholic women to a renewed priestly ministry in a democratic church, and to stand in solidarity with women who are ordained in the ongoing renewal of the church."

This past July, WOW celebrated its 25th anniversary with a worldwide Eucharist on Zoom and a "digital quilt" of photographs highlighting the activism and ministry of the organization. The liturgy, which featured the theme "Keepers of the Resurrection Garden," had 100 attendees from at least thirteen countries and included reflections from Rosa Manriquez, IHM, and Soline Vatinel Humbert. The liturgy and digital quilt can be viewed on WOW's website: [www.womensordinationcampaign.org](http://www.womensordinationcampaign.org).

## Remembering Donna Quinn, OP

On July 30 2021, one of our founding members, advisory board members, Women-Church Convergence sisters, and dear friends, Sr. Donna Quinn, OP passed away, in the company of several sisters and staff of the Sinsinawa Dominicans.

Donna was a fierce feminist and supporter of women's equality in the church and society. She boldly spoke out for women's representation and suffrage in the Church, and was a moral voice for reproductive justice.

So many of us will remember Donna and the ways she changed our lives, made us laugh, and pushed us to work even harder for women's equality. She was tough, funny, and brave. Donna had radical and inspired ideas and was the creative mind behind the first “pink smoke” protest, among so many other actions.

Donna founded “Chicago Catholic Women” in 1974, and chronicled its herstory from 1975-1999 in her book, *Chicago Catholic Women: Its Role in Founding the Catholic Women's Movement*. As Mary Hunt wrote in a 2017 *National Catholic Reporter* review, “The group was source of exasperation and challenge for kyriarchal clerics who cowered in the face of strong women... Thanks to Quinn’s records—culled from her meticulous files at the Women and Leadership Archives at the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership at Loyola University in Chicago—women’s work will not be lost.”

We will continue to be inspired by her legacy as a woman of integrity, strength, and vision. May she rest in power and justice.



Donna Quinn, OP

“Women are asked again and again to lead—to call for action—to renew the church. The Spirit has moved, the church is responding.”  
- Donna Quinn, OP

## Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic: Catholic advocates call the Holy See to account

*[Editor's Note: As an NGO in consultative status with the UN, WOC can submit written statements to ECOSOC meetings. The following statement was accepted as part of the agenda of the ECOSOC High-level segment on the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: Building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.”]*

As the world begins to emerge from the restrictions and struggles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial for full recovery and effective achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 that women play an equal, if not dominant, role in the rebuilding efforts. Women have borne the brunt of the effects of this pandemic: suffering disproportionately economically, taking on additional domestic and child care duties, providing much of the nursing and nurturing while also being subject to increased levels of domestic violence. No strategies should be conceived without full and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

Ironically, this has been plainly explicated by the Vatican in its recent document, “Women in the COVID-19 Crisis: Disproportionately Affected and Protagonists of Regeneration.” While bluntly excluding women from any role in decision-making or equal participation in its own administration, either global or local, the Vatican can still maintain that the rest of the world needs to “pay close attention to the experience and struggles of women so they can fully participate.” This document is prescient in stating that “the leadership and contributions of women are indispensable...to regenerate a more inclusive and sustainable economy and society”—yet is blind to its own lack of input from women. While urging others to “identify and remove structural barriers to inclusion,” the Vatican has, perhaps, the highest and sturdiest walls preventing any participation from women in meaningful leadership. The document urges its ministers to preach sermons countering violence against women, yet models an oppressive mentality of treating men as worthy of participation where women are not. And, (double irony!) the Church will not allow women to preach about anything, even violence against women.

WOC is the largest organization that is

working for full equality of women in the Roman Catholic Church. WOC maintains that the ECOSOC goals for sustainable development will founder while the Holy See exerts influence in the Commission on the Status of Women because it models the subjugation and silencing of women. Far from practicing what either the United Nations or its own document on COVID-19 recommends, the Holy See unequivocally and systematically excludes women from decision-making. The prestige and diplomatic and cultural influence enjoyed by the Roman Catholic Church around the world makes it a formidable justification for women’s suppression. But, in order to build back from the COVID-19 crisis effectively, women’s contributions must be not only sought but amplified; the process must be inclusive, valuing the participation of women and marginalized genders for transformative change in every sphere.

The best way to ensure achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to hold all members of the United Nations community to the same standard of dismantling any barriers to gender equality and promoting full participation of women in order to provide an inclusive and effective path to resilient recovery.

## Latinx Empowerment ... continued from page 3

In other words, complementarity becomes a source of unjust relationship that accords men the benefit of one aspect of God's image and relegates women to another, without any regard for the way a particular cultural context (namely machismo/marianismo) can hasten that distortion. Within the particular cultural experience of Latin America, the image of the Virgin Mary is upheld as the shining example of what it means to be a "grace-filled" human being, one who has maintained the characteristics of submission, obedience, and dependence on God's will to receive the universal gift of God's grace. John Paul II's anthropological vision is inseparable from his Mariological vision: "Mary's divine motherhood is...a superabundant revelation of that fruitfulness in the Holy Spirit to which man submits his spirit when he freely chooses continence 'in the body...for the kingdom of heaven.'" Traditional Roman Catholic theology has asserted that "if every woman were an image of the Mother of God, a spouse of Christ, and an apostle of the divine Heart, she would fulfill her feminine vocation no matter in what circumstances she lived and what her external activities might be."

<sup>3</sup> This understanding of female humanity has been the dominant and authoritative understanding for Latin American women and Latinas who have been shaped within a Catholic context of Latin American culture. Therefore, to be a Latin American woman or Latina is to be judged against this vision of the "grace-filled" woman, namely the Virgin Mary, who submitted to the will of the Father, gave her body for the Son, and allowed herself to be impregnated by the Spirit. Obedience to a male image is the fundamental starting point for female humanity. To be "full of grace," then, is to mirror Mary in one's own life: giving up one's autonomy to answer a larger, more meaningful call.

This emphasis on submission, obedience, and dependence as the fertile ground within which God's grace is sown, has violent implications for Latin American women and Latinas. Ivone Gebara asserts that "[t]he symbols of love and power are unfailingly male and tied to obedience. A culture of obedience has developed differently for women than for men. We must recognize that the hierarchy in society is a sexual one crisscrossed by others."

<sup>4</sup> What would happen if women's voices and choices were affirmed by the church? What would happen if women were able to experience full autonomy of their sexuality and their reproductive agency as women?

It would be as if the bottom card of the house of cards were pulled out; the entire system would come crashing down.

### The corrective to colonization of women's bodies and the church requires that we learn from women's ways of "being church" through Latinx culture and value systems.

In the words of women themselves, why do women stay in violent and oppressive situations? Out of well-founded fear: fear of retaliation, fear of collateral violence, fear of being alone, fear of being ostracized from a community. In many ways, the same can be said of the reasons Catholic women stay in a church that denies them the fullness of their humanity: excommunication is but another form of instilling fear of being cast out, alone, ostracized. All this for not conforming to ways of being a woman that the church prescribes.

So what are the alternatives to maintaining the status quo of colonization in our church? I believe the fact that the institutional church is crumbling—through the clergy sex abuse crisis (yet another manifestation of dominant power) and diminishing credibility—is a sign that the powerful hold of colonization is wearing thin and being recognized for the distortion of the Gospel that it is. While promoting women in ordination is important—and I would never dismiss that importance—the process of decolonization of our church requires more than having women in leadership and at the altar. The corrective to colonization of women's bodies and the church requires that we learn from women's ways of "being church" through Latinx culture and value systems. This decolonization has at least five components:

- **It is centered on "accompaniment" and "solidarity."** In contrast to a system of hierarchy and status quo, Latinas have shown us what it means to walk with one other through misery, hardship, and strife; they are examples of the power of *acompañamiento* y *solidaridad* in every facet of our lives.

- **It is less concerned with doctrine and more with popular religiosity** (focus on practices of faith). The voices of women have told us that the church's doctrine is less authoritative than the practices of faith that are life giving and life affirming. From prayer to acts of charity to movements for justice, this is where the spirituality of women resides. From the Ecumenical Women at the UN gathering, I paraphrase by saying "women's advocacy is a form of worship."
- **It invests in community, not in the institution.** If we center our understanding of community as the "body of Christ," the communal body that nourishes us and calls us to new life in Christ, then we are not bound by an institution or an official church but by a community that loves us, surrounds us in care and support, and protects us from harm. "Where there are two or more gathered in my name, there I am" (Matthew 18:20).
- **It continues to challenge the institution at every level.** While I am advocating for different ways of understanding and living into new forms of "church," I am not suggesting we let the current institution off the hook. On the contrary, as women we must challenge the church at every level, at every turn, and lift a mirror up to the church itself to demonstrate how it has fallen short of its own Gospel message of love and justice. While women's ordination is not the singular goal, it is still an important one that must not be lost. The words of the prophet Jeremiah are a voice from God "to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10).
- **It compels us to "be not afraid."** Some commentators suggest that a form of "fear not" or "be not afraid" is voiced over 300 times in the Bible; I believe those words are instructive because they connect us back to where I began, with Esmeralda Santiago's story of America. If you ask Puerto Ricans why they have not advocated for full sovereignty from the United States, more often than not, the response has something to do with fear: fear of losing benefits, fear of succumbing to communism, fear of decline in quality of life. But all these responses begin with fear of excommunication, of isolation, of alienation. Colonization instills fear and paralysis by design, because fear and paralysis maintain the status quo. In the same way, the oppression and violence experienced by women instills fear, and rightly so. This fear of excommunication, of isolation, of alienation leads to paralysis which, by design, maintains the status quo.

*continued on page 12*

## Latinx Empowerment... continued from page 11

What if women had spaces and places of protection and community, of comfort and autonomy, where they could find refuge, free from fear? Isn't this what "church"—the body of Christ—is supposed to be?

In the same way, the oppression and violence experienced by women instills fear, and rightly so. This fear of excommunication, of isolation, of alienation leads to paralysis which, by design, maintains the status quo.

*Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).*

The possibility of decolonization as women, as Catholics, suggests the discomfort of living in a liminal space, an in-between state on the boundaries of existence that are not concrete. This is certainly an uneasy existence, when an entire people have no sense of where they belong in relation to themselves or others. But the comfort of a certain identity as women can lead to complacency, an acceptance of things as they are—the status quo—and a lack of questioning or critical perspective that brings about change.

I propose, then, that the discomfort or uneasiness of what it means to be woman is a desirable place because it is a catalyst for creativity, not complacency; it highlights the contradictions of one's reality, rather than status quo acceptance; it challenges the existing reality by asserting a critical perspective. In fact, what emerges out of a place of dis-ease is the voice of the prophet, which can motivate a people to change that which is seemingly unchangeable. This is our decolonial challenge; this is our calling as Latinas.

*Dr. Teresa Delgado, professor of religion and chair of the religious studies department at Iona College, teaches courses at the intersection of theology and ethics. Dr. Delgado's book, A Puerto Rican Decolonial Theology: Prophecy Freedom, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017. She is currently working on a manuscript on sexual ethics, Loving Sex: Envisioning a Relevant Catholic Sexual Ethic.*

- 1 Esmeralda Santiago, *América's Dream* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996), 91.
- 2 John Paul II, 75: 3 in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Translation, introduction and index by Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 421.
- 3 Donald DeMarco, "The Virgin Mary and the Culture of Life," in *The Virgin Mary and Theology of the Body*, 74-75. DeMarco draws from the writings of St. Edith Stein to emphasize his point that the fallen and perverted feminine nature, as marked by Eve, can be restored to purity and health only through surrender to God, marked by the Virgin Mother. "Paradoxically, it is through this surrender that a woman achieves her fulfillment both as a woman and as a human being."
- 4 Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, translated by Ann Patrick Ware (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2002), 106-107.

## Canonical Housekeeping .. continued from page 1

Even if these are the final acts, the last gasps of an empire to stall its inevitable demise, the continued criminalization of women's vocations is a shameful chapter in the institutional church's story. The exclusion of women is one of the deepest wounds in the "field hospital" of the church, and we call on Pope Francis, the pastor, to heed the wisdom of the People of God, who know the limitlessness of God's call and yearn for inclusion and healing.

*Kate McElwee serves as WOC's executive director.*

## Leaving a Legacy

Prayerfully consider supporting the future of the Women's Ordination Conference to empower the next generation of women leaders working for equality in our church.

When you make a legacy gift, you are ensuring that the mission you care so deeply about—the ordination of women as priests, deacons, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Catholic church—will continue to be fulfilled.

Whether by bequest, assigning WOC as a beneficiary of your retirement plan or life insurance policy, or a stock gift, your generosity will support women working for equality into the future.

Contact Kate McElwee for more information: [kmcelwee@womensordination.org](mailto:kmcelwee@womensordination.org) or 202-675-1006.



# Red eggs appear as symbols of support and possibility for women's ordination on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene

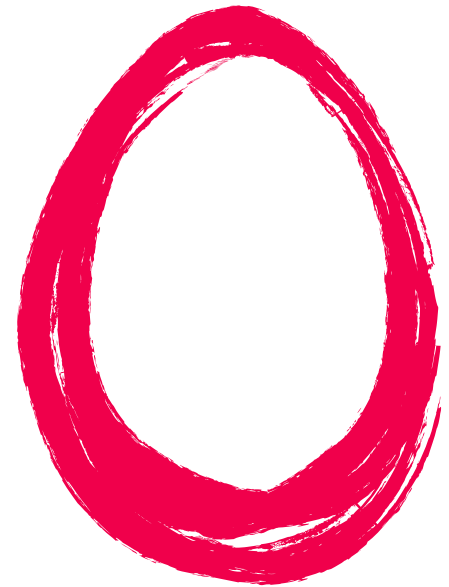
There's a story from Eastern Orthodox tradition about St. Mary Magdalene and her iconic red egg:

Mary Magdalene went to the emperor Tiberius Caesar to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and brought an egg, a symbol of rebirth and spring. The emperor told her that it was no more possible that Jesus had risen from the dead than it was possible for the white egg in her hand to be red. But immediately, the egg in her hand turned red—a sign from God that the “impossible” had happened.

Like Mary Magdalene dismissed by the emperor, many people today are dismissed by the institutional Church when they proclaim that God has called them to ordained ministry. But every authentic call from God has beauty and vitality, and stands as a bright symbol of divine creativity.

On July 22, the feast of St. Mary of Magdala, WOC activists created powerful visual displays of red eggs in cities across the U.S. as a reminder that what earthly powers deem as “impossible” can in fact be confirmed and called forth by God.

The actions in Chicago, D.C., Denver, and Philadelphia and took place in solidarity with the women of the French organization “Toutes Apôtres!” (“All Women Apostles!”), who on July 22 presented themselves as candidates for ordained ministries in the French church. We were joined by Mujeres Iglesia in Chile.



*From left: Red eggs decorate the doors and fences of the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Denver; and a prayer vigil is arranged on the steps of St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington, DC.*



*From left: A “red egg” banner hangs outside Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago; a prayer vigil at the Archbishop Quigley Center in Chicago; and a red egg hangs on the door of the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul in Philadelphia.*

Olga M. Segura, *Birth of A Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*. New York: Orbis Books, 2020. 176 pages. ISBN 13: 978-1626984202; \$20.00.

REVIEWED BY REGINA BANNAN

In *Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church*, Olga M. Segura documents how Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi “created a decentralized community of activists who stand in solidarity with the rallying cry, ‘Black Lives Matter,’ and center the lived experiences of society’s most vulnerable, Black transgender and queer women and men.” That focus came about after the leaders of the movement realized how invisible LGBTQI people were—despite their contributions to the 2014 Ferguson protests, as BLM first came to national attention. Never again, they vowed, would they repeat that omission.

Notice the word “center” in that paragraph. Segura uses this book to recenter Catholic readers, to immerse us in the world of BLM, and to suggest what Black women’s leadership might create in our church. It’s a decentralized model for the 21st century. These three women organized Black Lives Matter on social media in 2013, and it has many different manifestations and an open, local leadership. Recentered and decentralized is what a movement created and led by women looks like.

Segura’s Catholicism is not the lockstep experience of earlier generations. Like many other immigrants, her family carried deep traditions from the Dominican Republic. She appreciates the evangelical Riverside Church in New York as much as the Jesuit influence of Fordham University and at her former job at America magazine. Now an editor at the National Catholic Reporter, she draws on example after example from her own development as a Black Catholic.

It’s important to Segura that the founders of BLM have strong faith backgrounds: Patrisse Cullors grew up in a religious home; Opal Tometi identifies as Christian, and Tarana Burke, who created “Me, Too,” was raised Catholic. Religion is not antithetical to BLM, Segura insists: “It is the secular version of our Catholic social justice teaching.” BLM just takes the teaching further.

Segura demonstrates the point by reading several Catholic documents through a Black lens. She finds many similarities between *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis’s environmental encyclical, and BLM—including criticism of profit, consumerism, and individualism.

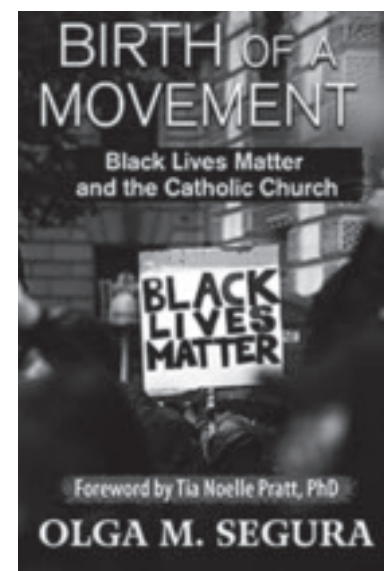
At the same time, however, she contends that Francis could have been more sensitive “to effects of climate change and capitalism on marginalized ethnic groups” beyond “indigenous communities.” BLM, with its wider focus, is conscious of “a global Black family” that is different in different parts of the world.

Another critique of *Laudato Si* from Segura is one that many in the WOC community have made: There is “no mention of the ways gender intersects with issues like global warming. The only explicit mention of gender in the entire document is used to negate the very existence of transgender women, men, and children around the world.”

*Birth of a Movement* devotes even more space to a critique of *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the pastoral letter published in 2018 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Segura quotes Fr. Bryan Massingale: “Anything they say about race always has the comfort of white Catholics in mind.” Segura suggests the bishops survey Black Catholics to find out what their issues are, instead of issuing platitudes deploring racism. An example: Segura comments, “There was no comment on capitalism and its role in the selling of Black women, men, and children.”

Segura draws on Tia Noelle Pratt and Shannen Dee Williams, who have documented the white supremacy underlying the Black Catholic experience, and on Nikole Hanna Jones’s *1619 Project* for the history of racism in the United States, from slavery to policing. Pratt’s moving “Foreword” offers this summary: “As Segura rightly notes, it was the Catholic Church that introduced chattel slavery to what is now the United States.”

This racial capitalism is the key to Segura’s analysis, and gradually becomes more obvious throughout the book. Using the writings of Kelly Brown Douglas, Clarissa Brooks, and Cedric J. Robinson, as well as many interviews, she develops a theology of reparations for white Catholics, both bishops and laity. Her reparations agenda goes beyond the financial to the spiritual realm, inspired by M. Shawn Copeland, as well as the activist realm, inspired by Angela Davis.



Segura quotes Fr. Bryan Massingale: “Anything [the bishops] say about race always has the comfort of white Catholics in mind.”

Many Black names Segura mentions are well known; many, many more unfamiliar names are invoked, too—mainly those who have been killed, mostly at the hands of law enforcement. This book could be used to develop a litany, a very Catholic worship form.

Segura demonstrates how the insights of BLM and the leadership of women, specifically Black women, can be the means to create a genuine anti-racist transformation in the Catholic Church. It’s more than inspirational; it’s practical. Segura is the voice of a generation becoming aware at 9/11 and having experienced both the pandemic and the George Floyd revolution. What better way to tie them all together than through Black Lives Matter?

Regina Bannan is a longtime member of WOC and SEPAWOC, and a regular blogger on WOC’s blog, *The Table*.

John O'Brien, *Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church*: Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020. 212 pages. ISBN 978-1-7252-6804-3; paperback \$26

REVIEWED BY NANCY FITZGERALD

It all began, as most things do, with a meal. Some meals are more memorable than others—a family argument erupts, a reconciliation happens, a brand-new tradition is born. We reminisce about the past, tell old (but important) stories, make plans for the future: *Next year in Jerusalem; do this in memory of me.*

John O'Brien begins his book, *Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church*, with a meal, too—the Eucharist. It's at the crux of the Church and the center of the controversy over women's ordination. It's one of the pillars of the hierarchy's insistence that women cannot preside at the meal that is the source and summit of our lives as people of faith. They cannot do this, male leaders insist, because it's clear from the Gospel accounts that only men were present at the first Eucharist.

But O'Brien shows readers that what we thought was clear actually is not. Looking at the Eucharist through the lens of historical criticism, it all becomes a bit murky:

... we do not know exactly and with certainty the details of the historical Last Supper, certainly not in such a way as to be able to claim that what transpired there rules out definitively the possibility of women being ordained to presidency at the Eucharist. (25)

The gospel of Luke alone recounts not just the Last Supper but a total of ten meals, each of which contain elements of the Eucharist, calling participants to transformation, asking them to spurn worldly power, upsetting societal norms, and welcoming outsiders, including women. And that, says O'Brien, "puts the burden of proof on those who would exclude the possibility of women presbyters." (27)

From his first pillar of scripture, O'Brien moves on to his other major arguments, looking at the prohibition against women priests from the perspectives of history, theology, canon law, and church tradition. He exposes the circular reasoning at the heart of the prohibition, and examines more recent church documents. Among them, *Inter Insigniores*, Paul VI's 1976 document presenting theological and historical arguments against women's ordination, as well as—of course—*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), Vatican II's constitution of the sacred liturgy. This document fundamentally rethinks the concept of the priesthood, puts the priest and people on an equal footing and corrects a "former one-sided application of power to ordained priesthood." (155)

That changes everything. It takes us back to that first meal, that Last Supper. It strips away the accretions of centuries and sits us down at a table with the marginalized and the powerless. It opens up the priesthood to people of all genders.

Another book on women's ordination? Seems like overkill—until you read O'Brien's extensive, thorough, carefully edited and footnoted work. Some books, like Gary Macy's *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination*, draw on the history (and there's plenty of it); others, like John Winjgaard's *What They Don't Teach You in Catholic College*, offer an overview of the dubious theology behind the prohibition. O'Brien, a professor of theology at the University of Durham in the UK, does both, with a healthy dose of scripture, canon, law and tradition thrown in for good measure. It is a thorough, scholarly (yet readable) volume that calls into question (and exposes the absurdity of) the convoluted reasoning for refusing women access to the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Nancy Fitzgerald is a member of the WOC board of directors, and an editor of NWNC.

## Book of note

Friend of WOC and Women's Ordination Worldwide, Ida Raming, RCWP has a new book in English, *55 Years of Struggle for Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church*.

This new collection underscores Raming's vital role in the movement and provides historical context to the developments under Pope Francis. With firsthand accounts, and decades of experience, Raming's pioneering record of the movement is a service to us all.

Ida Raming, *55 Years of Struggle for Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church*. Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2020. 127 pages. ISBN 13: 978-3-643-91265-7; \$32.00.



Born in Ohio in 1931, Dorothy Stang, a Sister of Notre Dame, served as a teacher in the US until being sent to Brazil as a missionary in 1966. There, she worked tirelessly, feeding the hungry, setting up parish communities in remote regions, and advocating for justice for struggling farmers. She was murdered by assassins in the depths of the Amazon forest on February 12, 2005.

Dorothy Stang

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Enjoy this prayer card  
prepared by the WOC  
board!



God of the poor and the forgotten,  
Open my eyes to the suffering of others  
here in my community and across the  
world.  
Help me to see that we're all connected  
because we all belong to you.  
Help me to respond with joy to your  
call, as our sister Dorothy did; let me  
"sink myself into God," as she longed  
to do.  
Let me see your face in the faces of those  
struggling with sorrow and injustice.  
Let me find beauty in your creation, and  
teach me to honor it.  
Let your Word be a shield for me, as it  
was for Dorothy, and your Gospel trans-  
form my life and guide my steps wher-  
ever you lead me.  
*Amen*

Womens Ordination Conference  
[womensordination.org](http://womensordination.org)

## New WOC Merchandise



T-Shirts available in women's and unisex sizes for \$20  
Masks in adult and youth sizes \$9-\$17



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