



# New Women, New Church

WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

Vol. 46, no. 1

\$2.00

Winter 2022

## Vatican Includes WOC on its Synod Website

BY KATE MCELWEE AND KATIE LACZ

Imagine our surprise to receive a positive reply from the Vatican to our request to include Women's Ordination Conference materials on their "Synod Resources" website. It is a first: a Vatican website linking to [womensordination.org](http://womensordination.org)!

Given that the Vatican's relationship with WOC has typically ranged from refusal to engage to using police to detain nonviolent protesters, this step is not to be taken lightly. The gesture, and the headlines it generated in international news outlets, demonstrates both courage and openness from the synod office. Our hope is that it will empower more women and non-binary people to engage in the synodal process and to speak out. Following the publication of the Associated Press article about the news, our inboxes were flooded with notes of congratulations and relief. As one member said: "This is a golden beginning."

We need that kind of hope because it can be hard not to be cynical about the Synod on Synodality, especially when this local listening phase is in the hands of the USCCB and ultimately, the world's bishops (it is a Synod of Bishops, after all). When the synodal process opened in October 2021, our research determined that fewer than half of the dioceses in the US had even a mention of the synod on their homepage. These numbers were confirmed by *America* and others. While we know the numbers have since improved, there is still the danger that marginalized voices, and those that challenge church practices, will be left out of the process.

We know that the integrity and impact of the synod will depend on the

inclusion of courageous conversations about women's equality and broader gender equity in the church. The Vatican including WOC on their synod resources website is a breakthrough, but as the synodal process moves up the hierarchy, our work is to ensure that ordination justice remains on the table.

The integrity and impact of the synod will depend on the inclusion of courageous conversations about women's equality and broader gender equity in the church

We see the synod as an opportunity to use our unique position to raise our voices, amplify our ministries, and call for the changes we long to see in the church. Our synodal commitments remain as strong as ever:

- Amplifying the voices of the People of God who long for and support women's ordination and gender equity in all ministries of the Church.
- Providing tools, guides, and lay-led spaces to engage with the Synodal process in a way that feels authentic to all.
- Holding the bishops and Vatican accountable to inclusive vision of the working documents of the Synod.



- Calling it like it is. We know and share the pain of hopes raised and dashed, and like so many, share a well-earned distrust of Vatican processes.

Our hope is rooted in the power of the Holy Spirit and the emboldened, growing chorus of voices around the world, calling out for equality. As Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich said in a recent *La Croix* interview: "We must stop acting as if women were a marginal group in the Church. They are not on the periphery of the Church, they are in the center. And if we do not give a voice to those who are at the center of the Church, we will have a big problem."

Along with our readers, we know our voice and we will use it boldly throughout the synodal process. Please use our resources to engage in the synod in a faithfully discerned way. Our voices will carry, and our hope carries, too.

### In this issue

From the Executive Director ... 2  
Theological Reflections ... 3 & 9  
Escuchando a Las Mujeres ... 4  
Ministry of Prophetic Obedience... 5  
Walking with My Call ... 6

News and Notes ... 7  
Ministry of Irritation ... 8 & 10  
Book Reviews ... 11  
Prayer Card ... 12

# From the Executive Director



DEAR WOC MEMBER,

While it may not yet be Spring, there is certainly a sense of new life in the air. Not only is our small team making big strides, as you will read in this issue, but the local and global church is also abuzz.

The headlines generated from our cover story brought renewed energy and hope to the synodal process, and Australian Dr. Elissa Roper's piece (p. 3) adds greater theological food for thought about the door to dialogue that has opened, and yet the painfully apparent limits of synodality if clericalism goes unchecked. Our Latinx outreach project *Escuchando a Las Mujeres* shares an update on their growing collaboration with the Mexico-based *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia* (p. 4). For a final piece of international news, we share our response to Pope Francis' installation of women as catechists and lectors in St. Peter's Basilica (p. 7).

More close to home, there is quite the buzz about the Sacred Swarm (p. 6), a youth-led Eucharistic friendship circle, in our Walking with My Call section, and newly ordained woman priest Mary Michael Leahy shares her story of prophetic obedience and the path that lead her to the WOW 2015 conference in Philadelphia, where she met the Roman Catholic Women Priests (p5). WOC celebrates each person who answers their call to ministry, and we recap our travels to Albuquerque to support Anne Tropeano at her ordination through a "Festival of Joyful Resistance" and a touch of Ministry of Irritation (p. 10).

We also marched at the USCCB meeting in Baltimore to reject the bishops' partisan politics and weaponization of the Eucharist (p. 8).

In this issue we introduce four new board members (p. 7) and review a book edited by the former editor of NWNC, Diana Wear, *Dancing with the Divine: A Flow of Grace*, a collection of essays that highlight the "grace engendered by movement and dance" (p. 11).

While there is so much emerging, I would also like to acknowledge the passing of our Advisory Board Member, Harry J. Halloran, Jr., whose generous spirit and support of WOC empowered our mission to continue in significant ways. I believe through our continued, courageous work, we honor his legacy. Our deepest condolences to the Halloran family and all those who knew and were inspired by him.

Our members are truly our greatest blessing, and so dear reader, thank you for being part of our community. Your gifts and prayers keep our movement buzzing toward equality.

In solidarity,

Kate McElwee  
Executive Director

*NEW WOMEN, NEW CHURCH* is published two times a year by the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC). WOC works for the ordination of women as deacons, priests, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church.

## EDITORS

Kate McElwee  
Nancy Fitzgerald  
Sheila Peiffer, Associate Editor

Send address corrections and all correspondence to:

WOC National Office  
PO Box 15057  
Washington, DC 20003  
(202) 675 1006  
woc@womensordination.org

.....

## NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jennifer O'Malley, President  
Bernadette Raspante, Vice-President  
Anne Latour, Treasurer  
Sara Sullins, Secretary  
Matthew Casey-Pariseault  
Lukey Ellsberg  
Nancy Fitzgerald  
Jacob Andrew Gonzalez  
Clare Kemmerer  
Jocelyn A. Sideco  
Robert Yohanan

.....

## ADVISORY BOARD

Regina Bannan  
Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza  
Teresa Forcades, OSB  
Jeannine Gramick, SL  
Celine Goessl, SCSC  
Mary E. Hunt  
Andrea Johnson  
Theresa Kane, RSM  
Anthony Padovano  
Rosemary Radford Ruether

In memory: Donna Quinn, OP; Harry R. Halloran Jr.

In principle and practice, WOC values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability.

A subscription to *New Women, New Church* is included in WOC membership for an annual fee of \$45. WOC is incorporated under 501c3 as a non-profit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible accordingly.

Copyright: Women's Ordination Conference 2022 All rights reserved.

# The Synod on Synodality: Ditching Clericalism and Renewing the Church

BY ELISSA ROPER

With the Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis is gathering the sleeping, bumbling Catholic church and giving it a good push in a new direction. Will it be successful? Only with the help of the Holy Spirit and the consensus of all the people. The former will do the heavy lifting, thank God, and the latter will play their part only if now is the *kairos* for what lies at the heart of synodality: renewal.

The Second Vatican Council accepted the breakthrough understanding that the Church was well overdue for renewal. Vatican II retrieved what was good and true (*ressourcement*) and brought much of the church's thinking up to date (*aggiornamento*), but one event alone could not renew everything. There were some elements of ecclesial life that remained untouched by renewal, some of which we now recognize as forms of corruption named clericalism. James Keenan describes clericalism as Catholic culture that sanctions the "self-preserving power of clerics." [1] Clericalism is a bastion of juridical, hierarchical power that resists the work of the Spirit. Although it may include lay people, Keenan points to the particular "exclusive power culture of the episcopacy" and names it hierarchicalism. [2] Today's renewal must include the bishops: their culture, theology, and understanding of authority. [3]

Synodality is an expansion of Vatican II's renewal, and it seeks to do away with clericalism completely, sweeping clean both the obvious corruptions and the smaller, more insidious ones. When we look at his writings, it's easy to see that Francis has been preparing us for this clean sweep for a long time. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he calls us to ask ourselves if we, as church, truly believe our own responsibility as missionary disciples. Do we neglect non-Christians—and the Earth itself—as our neighbors to whom we are inextricably bound? In *Laudato' Si*, Francis cautions us against the too-easy path of placing distance between ourselves and the concept of holiness. In *Gaudete et Exsultate*, he challenges us to ask ourselves if we doubt the ability of the Gospel to be encountered anew by every culture. And his apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, shows us just how much we have to learn. Each of us must ponder whether the innocent among us have been abused, disbelieved, neglected, and ostracized. The pope himself openly demonstrates his own shocking misjudgment in the Chilean abuse scandal and his willingness to move from humiliation to truth-seeking, from repentance to action.

Synodality has been put into action in the nine years of Francis's papacy. It is not renewal simply through decree—that would still be clericalism. It's renewal from the bottom up. And that demands self-reflection from each one of us. Let me ask you, dear reader: what is your hope for renewal?

## It's renewal from the bottom up. And that demands self-reflection from each one of us

Your heart may be burdened by the pain of abuse and betrayal. An older couple in my parish attended the public hearings of the *Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. They committed to listen to the survivors and their families, and to allow suffering into their hearts. They told me how one bishop gave his public account and, when finished, stood up and walked tall and proud to his seat, refusing to make eye-contact with anyone. The experience aged my friends, but they were Christ in that room. They were the ones who were wrenched with compassion, taking on the burden of others' sins.

Where is the hope for renewal in this sadly ubiquitous situation? Here the light of truth is harsh and revealing, and may well be wielded by those outside the church, as was the case with the Australian Federal Government, who ordered the establishment of the Commission. The Final Report of the Royal Commission states: "We have concluded that there were catastrophic failures of leadership of Catholic church authorities over many decades, particularly before the 1990s. Those failures led to the suffering of a great number of children, their families and wider communities. For many, the harm was irreparable. In numerous cases, that harm could have been avoided had Catholic



Elissa Roper

church authorities acted in the interests of children rather than in their own interests... [survivors] were often disbelieved, ignored or punished, and in some cases were further abused." [4]

Further illumination was given by The Light from the Southern Cross report. Produced in 2020, it contains 86 recommendations on the governance of dioceses and parishes in Australia. It provides a genuine opportunity to achieve those fruits of good governance that the church craves: co-responsibility, accountability, transparency, and inclusivity.

How does this connect with the Synod on Synodality? Let's look at it through the themes of the synod.

### Communion

The word communion has the same root as community: *commūnis*, or common. Theologian Bernard Lonergan describes how community is built up through stages: common experience and common understanding lead to common judgement, which brings the fruits of friendship, love, and commitment. Communion, then, is when people of faith build community in the Spirit, with openness to God and all creation—a true Communion of Saints.

What does my story about the abuse crisis in Australia say about communion? I described how my friends chose to take an unknown path that would certainly bring them grief because they were impelled by their consciences to share some part of a common experience with victim survivors. With this new information and insight, they built a common understanding and moved to a common judgement, along with others who chose the same path.

The impact this couple had on others is known only to God, but they placed themselves where their consciences may be informed and their minds and hearts enlarged (as too their suffering). Through their transforming experience, they have become more merciful and discerning members of the wider community. I have seen this community, communion-building transform a parish.

*continued on page 9*



# Escuchando a Las Mujeres Embraces Collaborations with *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia*

BY LILIAN MEDINA ROMERO

WOC's *Escuchando a Las Mujeres* works to strengthen the movement for women's ordination and gender justice by creating space for storytelling, dialogue, and grassroots organizing through the lens of Latinx Catholic and Christian spirituality, and *mujerista* theology. In January, the EALM team collaborated with *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia* to exchange ideas and give voice to Latinx-led synodal efforts.



Lilian Medina Romero

*Tras Las Huellas de Sophia* is a virtual project that aims to “walk in the footsteps of Sophia-Wisdom and her ancestors, present and future, in the daily feelings and thoughts of women,” as they explore feminist, theological and artistic approaches to their faith. The project lifts up the voices of women who testify to the divine presence in their lives through theology and feminist art that deconstruct the patriarchal, racist, classist and sexist gaze of a male, white God with European features. It was founded by two Mexican Catholic scholars, Maria Andrea Gonzalez and Marisa Norway, who both experienced rejection by their church leaders when they questioned the discrimination against women within the church.

In conversations between EALM and *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia*, the sister projects compared the findings of their respective surveys of Latinx Catholics. *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia* recently completed a significant survey to enhance the voices of women in the synodal process, and WOC's Latinx Outreach coordinator, Lilian Medina Romero, shared findings from our 2019 survey. Unsurprisingly, similarities abound.

Latinx Catholics often feel abandoned by the institutional church because part of their identity is not welcomed in the church, whether it be their vocational or spiritual calling, their sexual identity or gender, or relationship decisions such as leaving an abusive partner or using contraception. Participants echoed their own experiences and longings to advance true representation of women in the institutional church.

The conversations also explore ways our two projects might collectively work to reclaim the leadership and ministries that belong to women and those of marginalized genders. The outsized influence of the Catholic church in Latin America and in the lives of Latinx Catholics underscores just how important international collaborations like this are to women globally. We look forward to furthering our collective efforts for the transformation of the church into one that promotes and embraces equality and diversity.

## Escuchando a las Mujeres Abraza Colaboraciones con *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia*

Escuchando a las Mujeres, un proyecto de WOC, trabaja para fortalecer el movimiento por la ordenación de mujeres y la justicia de género mediante la creación de un espacio para la narración de historias, el diálogo, y para las organizaciones de base, a través de la lente de la espiritualidad católica y cristiana latinoamericana y la teología *mujerista*. En enero, el equipo de EALM colaboró con el grupo *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia* para intercambiar ideas y dar voz a los esfuerzos sinodales liderados por la comunidad Latinx.

*Tras Las Huellas de Sophia* es un proyecto virtual que tiene como objetivo “caminar sobre las huellas de Sophia-Sabiduría y su devenir ancestral, presente y futuro en los senti-pensares cotidianos de las mujeres,” mientras exploran enfoques feministas, teológicos y artísticos de su fe. El proyecto levanta las voces de mujeres que dan testimonio de la presencia divina en sus vidas a través de la teología y el arte feminista que deconstruyen la mirada patriarcal, racista, clasista y sexista de un Dios masculino, blanco y con rasgos europeos. Fue fundado por dos académicas católicas mexicanas, María Andrea González y Marisa Norway, quienes experimentaron el rechazo de los líderes de su iglesia cuando cuestionaron la discriminación contra las mujeres dentro ella.

En dos conversaciones a través de Zoom entre EALM y *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia*, ambos proyectos compararon los hallazgos de sus respectivas encuestas a católicas latinas. *Tras Las Huellas de Sophia* completó recientemente una importante encuesta para realzar las voces de las mujeres en el proceso sinodal, y la Coordinadora de Alcance y Difusión para la Comunidad Latina de WOC, Lilian Medina Romero, compartió los hallazgos de nuestra encuesta de 2019. Como era de esperar, abundan las similitudes. Las católicas latinas a menudo se sienten abandonadas por la iglesia institucional porque una parte de su identidad no es bienvenida en la iglesia, ya sea su llamado vocacional o espiritual, su identidad sexual o de género, o decisiones sobre sus relaciones como dejar a una pareja abusiva o usar métodos anticonceptivos.

Las participantes hicieron eco de sus propias experiencias y anhelos de promover una verdadera representación de las mujeres en la iglesia institucional. Las conversaciones exploraron formas en que nuestros dos proyectos podrían apoyarse mutuamente mientras trabajamos colectivamente para recuperar el liderazgo y los ministerios que pertenecen a las mujeres y a aquellas personas de géneros marginalizados. La enorme influencia de la iglesia católica en América Latina y en la vida de las personas católicas latinoamericanas subraya cuán importantes son las colaboraciones internacionales como esta para las mujeres en todo el mundo. Esperamos continuar con nuestros esfuerzos colectivos para la transformación de la iglesia en una que promueva y acepte la igualdad y la diversidad.



# The Generous Call of a Loving God

BY MARY MICHAEL LEAHY

*But those who look steadily at the perfect law of freedom and make it their habit—not listening and then forgetting, but actively putting it into practice—will be blessed in all that they do.*  
James 1:25 (The Inclusive Bible)

My ordination as a Roman Catholic Woman Priest on November 20, 2021 was a sacramental moment I had spent most of my life desiring, preparing for, and striving toward. Climbing that holy mountain to Actualization, a vision embedded in my soul and sparked by the Divine, was rigorous. There was heartbreak, hopelessness, isolation, confusion, harassment, and condemnation, but my passage into the priesthood would never have happened if I had not possessed a Spirit-driven focus and certainty that I had been baptized for that vocational destination. As a child, I possessed an innate understanding of being beloved by God. As I sat in the pews of the traditional parish of my youth, my understanding of a calling to the priesthood was formed. It was not a calling to social justice, nor celibacy, nor consecrated community life, nor theological study, nor spiritual direction, nor parish ministry. All those roles had been suggested to me by spiritual mentors as alternatives to what I knew God asked of me. And although I spent time in many of those ministries, none of them was a faithful fit.

Frequently, I have been asked what essence of the priesthood attracts me. I reiterate that my desire is not the most important factor. Instead, the generous call of a loving God to which I respond is the deciding factor. The certainty and knowledge of that call has been with me for as long as I can remember. It has framed my life and most of my choices. But on my labyrinthine journey I encountered many dead-ends and was forced to recalibrate how I could ultimately succeed in embodying an imitation of the life of Christ I believed was my destiny. This life of Jesus included breaking the bread at an inclusive table, healing the sick, anointing the suffering and dying, baptizing the lost into new life, caring for and protecting children's bodies and spirits, facilitating reconciliation and forgiveness, teaching and living the Gospel, and preferentially caring for the poor, all parts of priestly ministry.

Certain events in my life seriously derailed my path to priesthood. In my early twenties, as I was embracing discipleship, I encountered some disordered people who posed as virtuous ministers.

One was a priest with inappropriate boundaries and the other was a psychologically immature spiritual director. The damage they inflicted on my blossoming spiritual life and values was grievous. Reactively, I careened out of the institutional church for over a decade as I searched for truth and the healing of my wounds. The gift of that time of self-exile was my adoption of the practice of contemplative prayer. Beginning with generic meditative practices, my routine evolved slowly but surely into trusting again the Catholic symbols and prayer practices of the mainstream church. I learned so much about myself, and about spirituality and religion, during that time. I regard my healing from those events as the result of grace and of my still-intact belief that God intended something for me, although at those moments I had no idea what it involved or how it could happen due to my alienation from the church.

**All those roles had been suggested to me by spiritual mentors as alternatives to what I knew God asked of me**

For many years my interior vision of becoming a priest was also stymied in practical ways. The most obvious was that women could not become priests in the Roman tradition. But I believed that if my calling was true, then at some point in my life that barrier would collapse and women would be accepted for ordination in the Roman Catholic Church. Actually, I still have this hope today (although I am certainly not waiting for that to be the case). In the interim period, I was a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, a case worker for elderly people who lived on the economic margins of society, a faith formation catechist, a charity fundraiser, an activist for social justice issues, a leader of spiritual formation groups, and a secular health care manager and real estate agent (the latter avocations allowed me to make a salary to support my family). I watched and waited. I tried to acquire skills that would help me when I finally became a priest.



Mary Michael Leahy

Then, ten years ago I suffered a cluster of physical maladies that required several months of rest to fully recuperate. During that time of stillness and quiet in my convalescence, I could hear God's certain and insistent summons to resurrect my old wish to attend divinity school for priestly education and formation. Nothing had really changed in the institutional church in the years I was waiting for women to be welcomed to the priesthood, but the message I felt—down to my very marrow, could not be denied. I needed to go. There could be no more waiting. So, I quit my lucrative career, applied to and was accepted into graduate school, and moved my family close to its campus. I described the comprehensive lifestyle change to my husband and daughter as an adventure. I did not know how I would become ordained to the priesthood but I was open to all possibilities that the Holy Spirit would present.

Upon entering the degree program, I needed to decide my major. As women were not yet allowed into the priesthood, I chose a Master of Divinity track so I could be just as prepared as the male scholastics who would be ordained upon graduating. In March 2013, five months after I had enrolled, Pope Francis was elected. I took his first remarks to the public as a sign that he was the pope who would make the changes necessary to allow women to be priests. I even told my professors I would be a priest. I think they felt sorry for my naïveté.

In 2015, I went to the 40th anniversary gathering of the Women's Ordination Conference in Philadelphia. The theme was Gender, Gospel and Global Justice. It was there, at that meeting ground, that I was introduced to the Roman Catholic Woman Priest movement. Although since that first encounter I have navigated a lot of discernment issues in embracing the movement,

.... continued on page 8

# The Sacred Swarm

## A Sacred Space for Seekers of Spirit and Justice

BY MAGGIE STANG

On a chilly January day in 2021, I hiked with my dear friend Mary in the woods of Western Washington, pulling up our masks while passing the occasional fellow hiker on the trail. As the raindrops fell and my feet continued through the moss-lined trail, I felt gratitude for the spaciousness of the pine-scented mountain air. With the pandemic dragging on, quiet winter hikes had become an even more cherished source of peace.

The month before, Mary and I had planned and hosted a virtual gathering series we called “Queer and Trans-Led Advent Liturgies,” as part of a final project as part of Call To Action’s Re/Generation program. For months we met via Zoom with other “one foot in, one foot out” Catholic young people across the country and dreamed up ways to create nourishing spiritual communities even in a time of isolation and physical distancing.

As a team of young queer women, we decided to create an Advent liturgy series that was not only queer-affirming, but queer-created and led. We’d been raised Catholic, so it thrilled us to hear our queer and trans peers offering homilies in a liturgy setting. For our readings, we picked poems and quotes from our queer elders, including James Baldwin and Marsha P. Johnson. When it was my turn to guide the liturgy in the Zoom-presider role, I felt my spirit fill with vocational joy. In a world where queer folks have experienced so much harm from the Catholic church and other Christian faith denominations, it was an honor to hold a space that felt safe and affirming.

On that winter hike with Mary, I found myself missing our liturgy series, and wishing Advent could have lasted much longer. As a person in a constant process of discernment around my relationship to the Catholic church, I yearned for a community with other folks who needed a bit of distance from the church but still valued communal, spiritual gathering. I realized while walking in the woods that day that we did not need to end our liturgies just because Advent had ended.

I remembered my friend Nichole’s words at our last Re/Generation gathering. She said that in hosting these gatherings “we could ordain one another.” I remembered that we didn’t need to wait for anyone else to give us permission to make liturgical space and pray together, even if we were without a specific religious identity. In the past, I let my search for a spiritual home keep me from exploring the pull I felt toward some sort of ordained ministry. My experience with facilitating the Advent liturgies taught me that I needn’t wait.

I spent the next few weeks trying to understand what my peers were seeking in a gathered spiritual community. My friends responded with encouragement, generously sharing their insights. They expressed a desire for a space that was grounding for them as they continued to work for social, racial, and environmental justice during a pandemic and a tumultuous election year. They wanted to make connections and develop friendships with other spiritually-minded people. They wanted to be inspired by both voices they related to and those different from their own. They spoke of a desire for a reliable place to rest and re-energize. After many conversations, two of my Re/Generation friends, Nadia and Nichole, expressed interest in helping me create this new spiritual gathering space.

We chose our name, The Sacred Swarm, because of our appreciation for the lessons of nature and because of the rich metaphor it provided. Like a swarm of honeybees, many of us are branching out from our early faith traditions and searching together for a more spacious spiritual home. Some of us may return to our original faith communities and some may not. But, in the meantime, we gather together to ask big questions and honor the ways each of us individually experiences the divine. We describe ourselves as “a space created for seekers of Spirit and Justice to build community and share ways to access the divine.” We decided to offer a monthly gathering and invite one of our group to offer a reflection each month. Usually, we have two readings, a little singing, reflection, and some quiet time.

For each month’s gathering, we select a simple and accessible theme and choose readings that speak to it. We invite peers to join us and offer a reflection related to that theme. We use social media and email to spread the word, hoping our invitation reaches people looking for a gentle and inclusive spiritual experience. Over the years, I’ve met and gathered with wonderful people I would not have met otherwise. These new friends have also contributed in shaping the space.



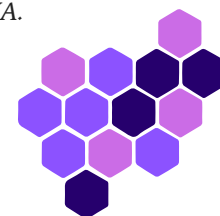
Maggie Stang, Nichole Carrubba, and Nadia Busekrus  
(clockwise from top left)

In the past, I let my search for a spiritual home keep me from exploring the pull I felt toward some sort of ordained ministry

Over this past year of hosting monthly gatherings, Nadia, Nichole, and I have checked in consistently, making room for reflection and adjusting our liturgy as we learned and grew together. We’ve always hoped our group would evolve and emerge in a way that reflects our desires as well as those of the people who join us. We don’t know exactly what our gatherings will look like as we continue to grow and evolve, but one thing’s for sure: We’ll join together for prayer and sustenance as long as our meetings bring life.

Just over a year ago, I could not have imagined myself holding and leading liturgies while I felt so unclear about my relationship with the church. I knew I had a call toward something like ordained ministry, but the actual experience of that call felt like a blurry, far-away hope. Now, though, the encouragement of friends has brought me the joy—and the unexpected opportunity—of ministering to spiritual seekers like me.

Maggie Stang is a spiritual seeker, community builder, and a relational therapist in Tacoma, WA.





# Welcome to Our New Board Members

*WOC is delighted to add the voices, talents, and creative energies of four new members of our board of directors.*



Matthew Casey-Pariseault



Jacob Andrew Gonzalez



Clare Kemmerer



Jocelyn A. Sideco

**Matthew Casey-Pariseault** is a Clinical Assistant Professor of History in the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies at Arizona State University. His research focuses on religion as a force for social change in modern Latin America, and his public-facing work on religion in Latin America has been featured by NPR's *Latino USA*, *The Washington Post*, *Salon*, and *Indian Country Today*. Matthew is an affiliated faculty member with the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict and serves on the steering committee for the Religions in the Latina/o Americas unit of the American Academy of Religion. He lives with his wife and their five-year-old son in Tempe, AZ, and could not be more excited to do his part in advancing the important work of WOC.

**Jacob Andrew Gonzalez**, a native of Phoenix, Arizona, is the eldest of four sons born to Anabel and Fernando, working-class Mexican-Americans. His grandparents, Pedro and Maria, are migrants from Chihuahua, Mexico. Jacob is a Juris Doctor candidate and NAACP Legal Defense Fund Earl Warren Scholar at Yale Law School. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary in New York and a Bachelor's degree in Classics from Stanford University.

**Clare Kemmerer** is a second-year graduate student at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. Her research explores the historic complicity of female monastics in anti-Judaism. She is currently a Re/Generation Fellow in the New Orleans branch of Call to Action. Clare worships at St. Augustine's in New Orleans and at St. Martin de Porres in New Haven. She is excited to be serving on WOC's board.

**Jocelyn A. Sideco** is a Catholic-Episcopal minister with a background in training leaders in deepening their cultural competency, educating to enhance diversity and multicultural awareness, and building social justice practices that promote the dignity of each person and the common good. She ministers predominantly to discerning young adults and fractured organizational structures. Most notably, she cofounded *Contemplatives in Action* and convenes QELRS (Queer Educators in Religious Schools). She leverages her network to build capacity and advocacy especially for people most injured by current structures. Jocelyn is the pastoral associate at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Burlingame, CA, where she leads the online experience of prayer, education, and justice outreach. She also serves as associate executive director of the Catholic Volunteer Network. Jocelyn holds a Masters in Theological Studies from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley and lives with her spouse and two daughters in Burlingame, CA.

## On the Installation of Women Lectors and Catechists

On Sunday, January 23, Pope Francis conferred—for the first time—the ministries of lector and catechist upon lay women and men in St. Peter's Basilica. As it recognized their sincere vocations and formation, the ceremony was rich with symbolism and meaning for the global church as it was live-streamed around the world.

It was just a year ago when Pope Francis changed canon 230 to include “all lay people” in the ministries of acolyte and lector, and it was just in May 2021 when he issued his Apostolic Letter, *Antiquum Ministerium*, creating the Ministry of Catechist, open to all laypeople.

The impact of these ministries will be most felt locally. To the faithful in “priest-less parishes” and those on the margins of their dioceses, these women will be pastors in so many ways, except in their title. (And they probably already are!) If you read closely the mandate of the catechist, as explained by Archbishop Arthur Roche, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, it is expansive, including leading Sunday liturgies, coordinating pastoral initiatives, and fostering relationships within the community.

However, we at WOC know that this is not enough. The continued exclusion of women from ordained ministries not only contributes to sacramental scarcity and clericalism, it reinforces cultural and social discrimination. This step does not remedy the vast inequalities women face within the Catholic church. It benefits patriarchal systems to embrace the labor of women while maintaining their exclusion from positions of institutional authority. And yet, it also benefits the local church to experience women in ministry, and it benefits women to have their gifts recognized.

Our message to Pope Francis: It is the same Spirit that calls women to the ministries of lector and catechist that calls women to the diaconate and priesthood. Listen to their experiences and embrace them as equal partners in faith.



# Catholic Organizations for Renewal Witness at USCCB Meeting, Calling for “Bread, Not Stones”

As the U.S. bishops gathered behind closed doors in Baltimore to finalize a controversial document about the Eucharist and who is fit to receive it, WOC led the way alongside Catholic Organizations for Renewal (COR) calling upon the prelates to provide “Bread, Not Stones” to the faithful they are meant to serve.

Fierce winds, far-right protesters, and a fanatical heckler failed to dampen the spirits of the peaceful group of about 50 who assembled for a prayerful witness on November 15. The event was a testament to the power of progressive Catholics joining together to raise their voices for justice and inclusion, as well as a welcome return to in-person actions for COR for the first time since the pandemic began. Participants gathered from up and down the eastern seaboard via buses organized by COR, and more than 60 others participated virtually via a livestream on Facebook, with thousands watching afterward.

The witness opened with an acknowledgement of the unceded indigenous land upon which the gathered met and a reading from the Gospel of Matthew from which the theme “bread, not stones” was taken. Participants then wrote words and phrases about what the Eucharist means to them on a large banner upon which was printed phrases already submitted to COR:

- Communion is for all.
- What would Love do?
- I stand with all my Catholic family that rejects using Communion as a political weapon.
- Communion is the living heart of the Church.

Led by WOC Executive Director Kate McElwee and Program Director Katie Lacz, the group processed to the Marriott hotel, where the bishops met, while singing “Table of Plenty.”

At the hotel, the group was threatened and verbally assaulted by a heckler shouting anti-LGBT, anti-women, and anti-abortion sentiments, but those gathered kept up spirited chants of “Bread Not Stones,” and Catholics for Choice president Jamie Manson and DignityUSA Executive Director Marianne Duddy-Burke courageously continued to speak.

“We are here in love,” Manson said. “We are here because we do not want people sent away empty.” Duddy-Burke shared an experience at her wedding: “After we exchanged our vows, we served as Communion ministers and fed every one of our guests who was there, and it was one of the most sacred moments of our lives.”



Kate McElwee and Katie Lacz lead the march toward the USCCB meeting

Energized by the testimonies, the group marched and chanted as it circled the Marriott. Rounding one corner, it came across a near-silent group of anti-abortion protesters of the “Men’s March,” who seemed startled to see the colorful presence of our group.

We returned to our starting place for a final blessing and a chorus of “All Are Welcome.” No bishop showed the courage to come and meet our group, but the witness was covered in *Newsweek*, the *National Catholic Reporter*, *Religion News Service*, *The Pillar*, and *Crux*. While much media coverage seemed to create a false equivalence between the “Bread, Not Stones,” witness and the alt-right rally hosted by *Church Militant* the next day, we know that our message of inclusivity and sacramental equality is nothing like the violent rhetoric and action of the right-wing group. The politically charged rhetoric and actions of the USCCB brought these extremists home to roost.

Later that week, the bishops released a tepid document on the Eucharist, declining to name specific public figures who should be denied the sacrament. Though this was a better outcome than expected, the bishops’ actions leading up to that point caused damage, division, and discord in an already wounded U.S. Catholic church. In a time when a host of pressing issues are in need of serious discussion and action, including the role of women in the church, racial justice, climate change, and the global undertaking of the Synod on Synodality, the amount of time and oxygen that the Eucharistic debacle took up was yet more evidence of the bishops’ misguided priorities and the USCCB’s utter inefficacy.

But greater evidence abounded of the prayerful and peaceful power of Catholics united to stand for the Eucharist as it was intended—as a gift of grace for all.

## The Generous Call ... continued from page 5

I have come to believe that this is exactly where God wants me to be in order to proclaim the Good News that includes freedom, justice, and compassion. And I now know that my ordination to the priesthood is a way of bearing witness to a prophetic obedience to God’s will for me, regardless of the obstacles on that odyssey. It has been decades in the realization of my vocational call, but since I have arrived at that station I have been flooded with enormous amounts of strength, stamina, creativity, joy, and hope. These graces will carry me through whatever waters Sophia Wisdom deems my journey to the priesthood must traverse. So good to have arrived! So good to be who I was created to be!

Mary Michael Leahy lives in Cambridge MA, and was ordained a Roman Catholic Woman Priest on November 20, 2021. She received her MDiv (2017) from Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

## Renewing the Church ... continued from page 3

What does the Synod on Synodality say about communion? The *Vademecum* doesn't say much—one small paragraph actually—because the point of the Synod is to receive. The People of God are called by the Synod to give and receive: within parishes or any small group, and the circles are to grow wider and wider—to the diocesan level, to the bishops' conference, to the Vatican.

If Pope Francis were to make decrees without building this *sensus fidei*, there would be no achievement of true consensus, care for avoiding schism, or authentic pastoral care and patience. These are the elements identified by theologian Yves Congar as necessary for true reform in *True and False Reform in the Church*. It is very good guidance for any group hoping to participate in reform. Even if the solution is obvious to some, there must be an attempt to bring people together on the journey. True renewal comes after the hard work of building the collective consciousness through shared experience, understanding, and judgement. The final achievement of friendship and commitment will enable the sort of compassion, co-responsibility, and unity in diversity that many want to see and live in the church. It's the hard road.

### Participation

Participation is the second theme of the Synod, and it encompasses the gamut of Catholic culture and praxis, governance, theology and spirituality.

You might be white-hot furious over the sheer stupidity of treating lay people like infants, through the reservation of the full power of authority and responsibility in Christ to clerics only. You may be a lay person who yearns to exercise your gifts in and as the Church: preaching, sanctifying, and leading. You may be a woman, seeing your baptismal dignity regularly dismissed by millennia-long ecclesial practice, built on the assumption that women are biologically inferior.

What is the solution? Where does your hope lie? If we step out of our pain and anger to reflect on reality, an understanding emerges. A "better bishop" won't solve all our diocese's many issues.

A sudden surge in the priestly population won't bring our children back to the pews. Even if the pope permitted women's ordination today, one has to wonder what those women would experience.

Consider instead how the Spirit works through conversion and transformation. The Spirit doesn't work as a treasure in a box but in human hearts and minds.

We know that our dioceses' problems can be attended to by the cooperation of the faithful, in their diversity of skills and creativity, with the authority of the bishop, but only if we work to remove clericalism from the foundations of ecclesial authority. Our children long to belong and to contribute within a church culture that offers life, love, faith, and reason. For that to happen, we must release patriarchy and clericalism from their grip on church practice and culture.

## The Spirit doesn't work as a treasure in a box but in human hearts and minds

These examples are the work of conversion of hearts and minds *out of which* life-giving praxis and decision-making may emerge.

Pope Francis has committed the global Catholic church to such a process through the Synod on Synodality. It is a commitment to ongoing conversion, and it aims for a comprehensive renewal to complete the work that the Second Vatican Council heralded in its *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*.

Synodality is a call for the entire People of God to participate in authentic renewal of ecclesial governance, praxis, and ecclesiology. Every diocese, all bishops, and every Catholic are called to accept this moral duty to participate in church renewal and to take responsibility for its success. Renewal is in fact a *baptismal calling*: to live a life of constant conversion, always seeking the good and true through expansion of heart and mind, is *being baptized*.

This will involve a clean sweep of clericalism and all of us need to hold a broom.

### Mission

One consequence of the long reign of clericalism is that *mission* is often a concept far from the minds and lips of the People of God.

The First Assembly of the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia revealed a general confusion between mission and ministry, and a great desire to have this clarified.

As the third theme of the Synod on Synodality, mission is to take its rightful place as the activity of all the baptized. Mission that is synodal will develop alongside communion and

participation, which the *Vademecum* acknowledges: "The Synodal Process...is an opportunity to foster the synodal and pastoral conversion of each local Church so as to be more fruitful in mission." This simple sentence provides a whole new mindset for many parishes and dioceses.

### In Conclusion

Pope Francis wants a church that breaks out of the corrupted, stifling way of thinking that clericalism clings to. Committing to synodal renewal will bring about fresh discoveries in what is truly valuable, as communities choose to build each other up and cultivate consensus. People grow in compassion and understanding when they are able to give and receive of themselves. Councils and synods have enormous potential for initiating and supporting conversion. The actual power takes place in acts of conversion, in and through the people. [5]

I will point to my parish friends once more as examples of trusting in the Spirit's guidance and, by walking the unknown path, finding meaning. Not a shallow, unexamined meaning but truly authentic meaning, that has been built up in faith, friendship, humility, and suffering. It comes out of authentic experience of communion, participation, and mission.

This is my hope for renewal. Synodality is concrete. It is no mere ideal, but the hard stuff of reality. Clericalism has distracted the church long enough. It's time to engage our hearts and minds beyond what we think we are capable of.

Pope Francis is committing the church to a new direction, but be assured that it is the Holy Spirit doing the heavy lifting. And remember: You are that church, and you are a Temple of that Spirit.

*Elissa Roper writes to us from the Yarra Valley of Australia. Dr. Roper recently completed her doctoral thesis: "Authenticity and Synodality: Towards a contemporary ecclesiology for the Catholic Church."*

[1] James F. Keenan, "Vulnerability and Hierarchicalism." *Melita Theologica*, n.68/2 (2018): 132.

2 Keenan, 134.

3 Keenan's rigorous theological work breaks open the solid boundaries that have grown up around the meaning of the episcopacy and authority. See: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/if-we-want-reform-church-lets-make-women-cardinals>.

[4] The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/religious-institutions>

[5] See: R. Houghton, *The Transformation of Man: A Study of Conversion and Community*. NY: Paulist Press, 1967.



## A Festival of Joyful Resistance: Albuquerque Embraces “Fr. Anne”

In a long-haul movement like the one seeking women’s ordination in the Roman Catholic Church, one must find nourishment along the way. Friendships, laughter, prayer, and the moments when everything aligns to remind us of the change-the-world reality of the path we’re forging.

We at WOC celebrate each person’s vocational call, and through the many years of movements like the Roman Catholic Women Priests, we are graced to be able to witness the beautiful, embodied reality of ordination justice.

After a long stretch of digital organizing and remote work, we jumped at the chance to celebrate the ordination of Anne Tropeano in Albuquerque on the weekend of October 16-17. Fr. Anne received the Lucile Murray Durkin Scholarship from WOC in 2020 and was one of two scholarship recipients featured in the June 2021 *New Yorker* article by Margaret Talbot, “The Women Who Want to Be Priests.” Anne maintains close ties with WOC as a fellow activist and schemer, and is committed to “putting Kate McElwee out of a job.” We knew we had to be there to support her on this big day.

Our weekend festivities kicked off with a Festival of #JoyfulResistance, an evening of local food, live music, and games like Women’s Ordination Bingo and Pin the Stole on the Priest. It was a love-infused gathering to affirm God’s authentic call to priesthood in Anne; to join in celebration with WOC members and friends; to proclaim boldly our joyful resistance to the status quo and our prophetic persistence in creating a new way of being church. Oh, and to dance!

The ordination itself was held at St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral in Albuquerque and concelebrated by local ecumenical ministers from six other denominations. One of the most powerful moments during the ordination was when the faith leaders laid hands on Anne and blessed her, affirming her call and welcoming her as an equal in faith.

If only the institutional Catholic church would open its heart to this kind of beauty, and experience the joy and vibrancy of a woman answering her call to priesthood. It was a moment we will always remember. The burden and barriers that women called to priesthood face are immense and overwhelming, but when you witness a woman following God’s call with a big smile and tears of joy streaming down her face, you know truth.

Anne’s first Mass was held on October 17th, the day the Vatican opened the Synod on Synodality at the local, diocesan level with the hope of exploring what “journeying together” looks like. We also unveiled our synodal message, “Journey Together, ToGetHer Ordained,” through visual installations. What a poignant and powerful message to send to the bishops: If you want to journey with the People of God, follow the women. Courageous, prophetic, and filled with the Gospel message of equality, Catholic women are walking the walk of justice. And the bishops would do well to get in line.

Anne’s ordination weekend, and each person’s courageous answer to God’s call to justice, are profound reminders of what WOC stands for: affirming women’s vocations to ordained ministry, empowering those who model a renewed priesthood, creative and bold public witnessing for women’s ordination, and trusting the strength of the grassroots community and the power of the Holy Spirit.

While Archbishop John Wester of Albuquerque did not publicly comment on Anne’s ordination, the diocese released an updated directory of “schismatic ministries” the following Monday, with Anne at the top of the list. The work continues.



## Looking for a worship community?

Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP/ARCWP) minister in worshipping communities in the North, South, and Central America, the Philippines, Taiwan and South Africa.

All are welcome to attend! During COVID, many liturgies are online (live streamed and on zoom). For more information: [www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org](http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org)



Carla De Sola, *Dancing with the Divine: A Flow of Grace*. Oakland, CA. Omega Kairos Books, 2021. 212 pages. ISBN-13 978-0578982892; paperback \$24.95

REVIEWED BY LUISELY MELECIO-ZAMBRANO

Carla De Sola reveals the book's genesis in the preface, in alluding and subtle ways to sacred moments she's experienced through her embodiment as a dancer with the Divine. Her *kairos* moments, as she calls them, led her to go beyond her personal experience to invite other dancers to share theirs. The result of this invitation is *Dancing with the Divine: A Flow of Grace*, edited by former NWNC editor, Diana Wear and designed by David W. McCauley, Jr. It's a collection of 40 essays from a variety of contributors who "highlight breakthroughs of grace engendered by movement and dance, and open us to a fuller consciousness of God's presence and flowing love."

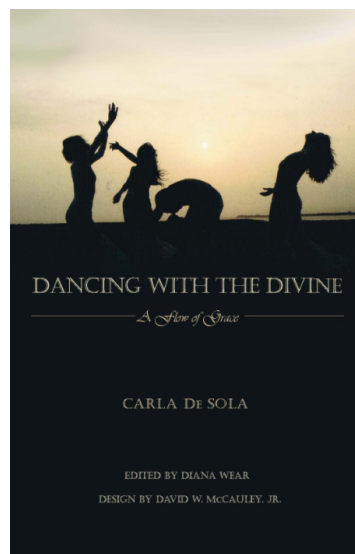
The book is divided into five sections, each starting with a theological reflection by Diana Wear. She allows us into moments of movement with the Divine within her own journey, as the reflections flow and continue with the movement of the book.

I found myself taking notes and finding deeper admiration for De Sola and her spirituality, as well as for the intentionality of her work both in this book and in the half century of her leadership in sacred dance.

I read this book through my own lens as a dancer, a spiritual director, a midwife, a Venezuelan/Puerto Rican Catholic ecofeminist. I was moved most by the stories that bring readers into the vulnerable places of union with the Divine. I found myself recognizing the *kairos* moments not only as a dancer and human, but as a spiritual director. The collaborators offer readers the unmeasurable gift of witnessing and hearing about their intimate moments with Mystery, ancestors, Wonder, and Love, who is "One who is both transcendent and imminent."

The first section on "Dancing for the Common Good" includes stories by a variety of voices from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Canada, and the United States, with people of different ages and abilities and with different wounds. The second section focuses on how "Dance Moves the Soul." The contributors continue to share their *kairos* moments. Whether they take place on a stage, in front of an altar, in prison, or in the street, each includes moments of a felt embodiment of the Divine.

The third section, "The Joy of Dance," shares experiences of joy in the midst of grief, shame, and silence. It begins and ends with poetry and is dotted again with *kairos* moments.



The fourth section, "Journey to Awareness," includes writings from more dancers who describe their *kairos* moments through dance as a recognition of the presence of the Divine within them and around them through a guardian angel, their ancestors, the elements, or the safety felt in dance. The descriptions of these moments are anchors throughout the writing.

At times I felt that this book was a gift written just for me—and I think many readers will experience that personal connection. It carries in its stories treasures worth sharing. The last section, "Called to Dance," which speaks about moments that resonate for any of us who has felt a calling, whether to dance or to something else. The sincerity of the writers recounting their experience of call and their *kairos* moments invites readers to look into their own life and recognize their own *kairos* moments. Perhaps the reason this book—especially the final section—resonated so strongly in me is that they resonate with *kairos* moments in my own life.

I have been embodied by the Divine, with and through and in Her in dance, in a way that my body recognizes in spiritual direction and at births and deaths.

The book highlights these moments of one's cells vibrating with and deeply resting in the Divine's Love and Belonging and Truth and Beauty, so we can recognize the same in our own lives. This book welcomes you into this sacred space, as if you were welcomed around a fire with a group of people, each willing to share, in their own way, their intimate experience dancing with the Divine.

De Sola, Wear, and each collaborator (along with McCauley with his designs) invite you around the fire. Yet the invitation isn't passive. It drew me to notice, claim, and share my own *kairos* moments and allow them to move me to Mystery and recognition beyond these pages.

The book ends with a poem written in the afterword by Carla De Sola that invites readers to awaken, dance, and live into the moments of mystery, grace, and reception of the Divine in our lives.

The intentionality and thoughtfulness of the words, the visual art, and the poetry are evident throughout the book.

Though *Dancing with the Divine* includes voices from different cultures and countries, the book is especially focused on US voices, able-bodied voices, white voices, women's voices, progressive voices, and Catholic voices. Among the collaborators are many theologies. But the thread that weaves it all together are the collaborators' lived experiences of their moments beyond the ordinary, moments of dancing with the Divine.

Luisely Melecio-Zambrano, M.Div accompanies women through life, death, and the cycles in between, as a spiritual director, midwife, speaker, dancer, facilitator of theater of the oppressed, and organizer.



Thea Bowman

# Women's Ordination Conference

P.O. Box 15057

Washington, DC 20003 USA

NonProfit  
U.S. Postage

PAID

Brentwood, DC  
Permit No. 932

Enjoy this prayer card prepared  
by the WOC board!



God, give me a heart filled with joy  
To proclaim the Gospel as Thea did.  
Give me a voice filled with compassion  
To share my song with those who long  
to hear it.  
Give me a mind filled with wisdom  
That honors the wisdom of our elders.  
Give me a life filled with courage  
To always tell truth to power.  
Make me bold, loving and determined,  
as Thea was  
To unite myself with Christ in all I do.  
*Amen*

**Thea Bowman**, born in Mississippi in 1937,  
converted to Catholicism and became a Franciscan  
Sister of Perpetual Adoration. She spread the Gospel  
as a teacher, a singer, and an emissary for racial  
justice in the Catholic Church and beyond. She  
courageously shared her African-American  
spirituality with Christians in the US and around the  
world. She died in 1990.

Women's Ordination Conference  
[womensordination.org](http://womensordination.org)

## 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).