



New Women New Church

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A Voice for Women in the Catholic Church

WOC Celebrates 15th Annual World Day of Prayer for Women's Ordination

By Erin Saiz Hanna

Thousands of years ago, the silence of the night was broken when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and asked her to bring Jesus into the world. From that moment when Mary accepted God's call, she became a leader—some would say a priest—whom Catholics celebrate.

In the millennia since Mary responded to God's call, countless other women have said "yes" to the call to serve God as ministers, deacons, priests, and bishops. However, the institutional arm of the Roman Catholic hierarchy refuses to acknowledge their sacramental ministry and leadership roles, and the Vatican has banned discussion of women's ordination.

Every year on March 25th, the feast of the Annunciation, WOC joins the global women's ordination movement in celebrating the World Day of Prayer for Women's Ordination. In concert with WOC's campaign "Break the Silence: Shatter the Stained-Glass Ceiling!" organizers from Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Long Island, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Rochester, Sarasota, St. Louis, and Washington, DC, said "yes" to women's ordination with public witnesses and home liturgies.

In Washington, DC, over twenty activists gathered outside the Apostolic Nunciature with signs and banners for a peaceful vigil, which was covered by Religion News Service and featured in the National Catholic Reporter. Supporters for women's ordination sang songs, chanted, and were warmly welcomed by onlookers during heavy DC rush hour. In addition, WOC directors Aisha Taylor and Erin Saiz Hanna



WOC supporters gathered outside the Vatican Embassy for the 15th annual World Day of Prayer, calling for church leaders to break the silence on women's ordination.

gave speeches, which can be found on WOC's Ordain Women YouTube channel.

In addition to events around U.S. cities, WOC members downloaded "Break the Silence" postcards calling church leaders to ordain women. The postcards, co-sponsored by Call To Action and Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, were mailed or placed in collection baskets around the country, and specifically advised church leaders that women's ordination supporters would not financially support the Roman Catholic Church until it ordains women.

The campaign theme "Break the Silence," was intended to highlight the 1994 letter in which Pope John Paul II officially forbade discussion of women's ordination. Since the 2008 World Day of Prayer, the Vatican has callously doled out penalties to those who have publically supported women's full inclusion in the Roman Catholic Church. Read Taylor's statement online at www.womensordination.org.

Please join us for a
farewell party in honor of
Aisha S. Taylor
WOC Executive Director

Featuring Special Guest

Roy Bourgeois

WHERE

Rumberos - Latin-American Art Bar
3345 14th St, NW
Washington, DC 20010
Columbia Heights Metro

WHEN

Thursday, June 25th at 6:00 PM

RSVP

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woc@womensordination.org

Suggested Donation: \$15

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Dear WOC Members,



Dear Members,

As I sit down to write my final letter to you as Executive Director, I feel a mix gratitude, excitement, sadness, and peace. With the support and advice of many of you, I have grown and learned a great deal. I will hold with me forever the relationships we have built in the past five years. This movement, the organization, and each person I have met mean a great deal to me, and it is difficult to say good-bye.

However, it is with complete confidence and great excitement that I announce that Erin Saiz Hanna has accepted the position of Executive Director. With the strides we have made in the past five years, and with Erin at the helm, WOC is poised to move to the next level of advocacy and activism for women's justice and equality in the church. Look for more information about Erin and the transition to her new leadership role in our email newsletters and in the next issue of *NewWomen, NewChurch*.

In this issue, our front page story recounts the celebrations of this year's World Day of Prayer for Women's Ordination. This fifteen-year-old tradition continues to grow and change. From coverage in the National Catholic Reporter to inclusive prayer in many woman-led communities in the U.S., this year's day of prayer reflects the changing landscape of the movement. We are getting more media attention by publicly demonstrating against unjust policies, while at the same time, Catholics around the country are giving and receiving spiritual nourishment in communities that strive to model the change we seek in the RC Church. Tom (TC) Parsons describes one such community, the Therese of Divine Peace community in St. Louis, on page 8.

After years of ground work with the WOC Board of Directors and staff, one of my greatest priorities and passions at WOC is coming to fruition. On page 3, you will see a picture of our newly formed Anti-racism Team during our first meeting in April, and you can read a brief summary of the team's

work. I am pleased to report I will continue to be a team member for at least two years. Keep an eye out for more information in upcoming issues of *NWNC* about this vital initiative.

For our burgeoning human rights strategy, Kate Childs Graham brings us an interview with Catherine Bordeau, Advocacy Coordinator for Ecumenical Women, a coalition that advocates for gender justice at the United Nations. One key part of our strategy is to build relationships with organizations that work with the UN to learn from and partner with them.

In Claremont, Calif., WOC members attended the Pat Reif Memorial Lecture given by leading ecofeminist theologian Ivone Gebara. I was overjoyed to read the transcript of her speech because she reinforces the direction in which I have been leading WOC in the past few years. On pages 6 & 7, we have printed an abridged version of her speech. Gebara calls us to create new strategies to counteract the damaging cultural, ideological, and political influence of the Roman Catholic Church. She urges us to work within and engage the RC system in order to change it, not for our own spiritual well-being, but for the benefit of the billions of people in the U.S. and around the world who are affected by Vatican policies and teachings.

My article on page 10, describes the intersections of racism, homophobia, and faith, in the passage of California's Proposition 8 and provides a contemporary example of the devastating impact the hierarchy can have on politics and culture, regardless of one's religious affiliation.

From Victoria Rue and Jane Via, both ordained through Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP), we get an inside account of the discussions that have been occurring within RCWP regarding the recent episcopal ordinations in California. We hope to both support RCWP and the women ordained and to serve as a forum for discussion and dialogue about the different views in the women's ordination movement.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your support, feedback, and blessings. You will be in my heart and in my prayers. WOC would not be the thriving and active organization it is without members like you. Continue to keep the faith and keep working toward the vision of an inclusive and accountable church. May the peace of Jesus be with you.

Blessings of justice, peace, and love,
Aisha S. Taylor
Executive Director

NewWomen, NewChurch is published quarterly 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.

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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 *NewWomen, NewChurch* is included in the WOC membership fee of \$45. WOC is incorporated under 501(c)(3) as a nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax deductible accordingly.

WOC archives, including microfilms of *NewWomen, NewChurch*, are held at Marquette University. For more information, contact Philip Runkel at the Department of Special Collections & University Archives, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI 53201-3141, 414.288.5903, or phil.runkel@marquette.edu.

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Cardinal Egan: Ordain Women!

By Jeannine Gramick, SL and Beth Rindler, SFP

In a recent interview on an Albany radio station, Edward Cardinal Egan, who will retire on April 15 as head of the New York Archdiocese, remarked that the question of allowing priests in the Roman rite of the Catholic Church to marry is "a perfectly legitimate discussion." Most U.S. Catholics agree.

In fact, most U.S. Catholics also think that the ordination of women as priests is another "perfectly legitimate discussion" that has been stymied by the Vatican in the last 40 years.

In 1970, the National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN) urged qualified women, who felt so called by God and the community, to seek priestly ordination. In keeping with *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII's landmark encyclical on peace, NCAN called on women to ask for ordination because "one who possesses certain rights has likewise the duty to claim those rights as marks of one's dignity" (*Pacem in Terris* par. 44).

There is no theological, sociological, or biological reason for denying ordination to women. Especially because the priest shortage is so acute, Church leaders have no right to use gender to limit the call of the Holy Spirit. How can the hierarchy speak of a vocation shortage as it denies equality to half of the Church's membership?

Promoting the fullest development of the human person, NCAN recognizes the interdependence of men and women; neither gender can arrive at wholeness without the other. From its very beginning, NCAN has spoken out on issues related to human rights and social justice, and the ordination of women priests is a human rights and social justice issue.

In unprecedented numbers, Catholic women are enrolled in seminaries and schools of theology and stand ready to serve the Catholic community. Inspired by the example of four Episcopal bishops who ordained ten women in 1974, NCAN extends an invitation to Edward Cardinal Egan and all retired bishops to ordain Roman Catholic women. NCAN invites our Catholic bishops to write a new chapter in the Acts of the Apostles so that the other half of the human race may preach the good news, administer the Sacraments, and serve the people of God as ordained ministers of the spirit and life of Jesus.

Jeannine Gramick, SL and Beth Rindler, SFP are Executive Coordinators of the Board of the National Coalition of American Nuns.

This op-ed was originally published in El Diario, a Spanish-language newspaper in Brooklyn, NY on March 26, 2009. Erica Gonzalez, the Opinion Page Editor, translated it from English to Spanish.

WOC Anti-Racism Team Update

By Erin Saiz Hanna



Back row, from left to right: Erin Saiz Hanna, Tracy Robison, Regina Bannan, Louise Akers, SC, Joanne Bray, and Aisha Taylor. Front row: Christine Haider (Not pictured: Alta Jacko)

Within the context of our mission to ordain women as priests, deacons, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Catholic church, WOC initiated an antiracism team, a group of committed individuals whose goal is to lead WOC toward development and implementation of vision and strategies to dismantle racism—individual, group, and institutional—within WOC and the church community.

From April 3-5, 2009 the WOC anti-racism team met for the first time at the Dignity Office in Washington, DC. Erin Saiz Hanna agreed to be the staff liaison to the Board of Directors, with Tracy Robison and Regina Bannan as co-chairs. Additional team members include, Louise Akers, SC, Joanne Bray, Christine Haider, Alta Jacko, and Aisha Taylor. There are currently three women of color, and five white women on the team.

During the first part of the meeting, the team shared stories regarding individual anti-racism work, reviewed steps to create a safe space for the group, agreed on decision making procedures, and examined WOC's vision and institutional commitment to anti-racism work.

The second portion of the meeting concentrated on familiarizing the team with definitions (racism, white privilege, etc.), schema for understanding the levels of racism, as well as an in-depth discussion of institutional racism and white supremacy. This was followed by analyzing WOC structures in relation to institutional racism.

The team will continue to meet via monthly conference calls and through the team's listserv. WOC members are welcome to send comments and questions to the team at antiracismteam@googlegroups.com.

News Notes...continued on page 4



Letter to the Editor

Dear Aisha and Erin:

I just read your newsletter. 2008 was great! 2009 will be better yet. Maryknoll is going to continue to support Roy Bourgeois, another crack in the wall.

I have a hopefully helpful comment.

Diana Wear is entitled to her opinion regarding Roman Catholic Women-priests (RCWP), but to leave them out of her "Timeline" and then to have you publish it that way seems to lack that sense of inclusive ministry you promote.

Thanks for all your hard work.

Peace and all blessings,
John Houk

Diana Wear responds: Please note that this timeline was not authored by me, nor was it an exhaustive history of women's ordination, nor, for that matter about WOC. The timeline was compiled through a Google search in response to an article in the news about a Vatican spokesperson's comments regarding women's ordination by Protestant churches. I found this information on a web site and published it to highlight Protestant ordinations as a matter of record. Let me add that I am very supportive of RCWP and those ordinations that have been taking place over the past seven years. No slight was intended. Finally, may this be a call to action for a WOC timeline—any WOC herstorians out there?

The Vatican Initiates Two Separate Investigations of Women Religious

By Erin Saiz Hanna

In recent months, the Vatican has initiated two investigations of U.S. women religious. Last December, the Vatican announced its plan to assess the "quality of life" in apostolic women's religious communities throughout the United States. Then in April, a second study of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) was announced. LCWR is the umbrella organization of the 68,000 U.S. women religious.

One notable difference in the investigations is that the one announced in December is

sponsored by the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, whereas the investigation of LCWR is being conducted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF).

According to Cardinal Levada, the Vatican investigation of LCWR has become "necessary," because of the 2001 meeting between LCWR and the CDF, where the sisters were invited "to report on the initiatives taken or planned" to promote the reception of three areas of Vatican doctrinal

concern, including the ordination of women, homosexuality, and theology of religious pluralism.

Since 1959, the Vatican has officially recognized LCWR as an entity of the church under the Code of Canon Law. Therefore, the Vatican has the capability to dictate official mandates.

WOC offers prayers to all women religious affected by this process.

Introducing the Newest Member of the WOC Team

By Clarissa Mendez



Clarissa Mendez

As a native New Yorker of Dominican and Puerto Rican descent, I grew up Catholic. Although today I consider myself a recovering Catholic, I both celebrate and challenge many Catholic perspectives that are embedded in my Latino culture. Coming from a family of strong women, it was natural that I also fell into the women's movement. I depend on my circle of women peers for mentorship, guidance, dialogue, and learning—to lean on them, as well as make myself available for them to lean on me. My journey as a woman leader began in school when, in my first year of high school, I was chosen to represent my school

on the New York City Superintendent's Student Council. I served in this role for four years and mentored my successor. Later, in college, I organized events and became involved in different student body organizations on many different levels and across various local college campuses. Since then I have contributed in some of the same ways to nonprofit organizations. As a clinical psychologist, I have participated in nonprofit child welfare organizations, juvenile justice, and the environmental field, leading adult and youth groups, in San Francisco, New York City, and now Washington, D.C.

In addition to my position at WOC, I work with colleagues, management and leadership of mostly nonprofit organizations to create inclusion strategies to achieve their missions and strengthen their organizations as an organizational development practitioner. With fifteen years of nonprofit work behind me, including serving on a number of boards, it is great to apply my experience and skills here at WOC.

I am also a proud member of the La Trenza Leadership Network, a network of professional women who engage in practicing holistic leadership. We have defined this as bringing the mind, body, spirit, and emotions to all we do, whether we are working on getting to know ourselves better, or having a challenging family experience or transitioning between duties at work or celebrating achievements. We are changing the leadership landscape for the 21st century.

In my work at WOC, I bring my experience and enthusiasm to the national staff to create an inclusive and accountable Catholic Church! Women in leadership are needed in all communities, which is why I enjoy working for the women's ordination movement in the Roman Catholic Church.

Clarissa Mendez is the administrative assistant for Women's Ordination Conference. She began her part-time position in June 2008.

2008 Women's Ordination Conference

Financial Report

Fiscal Year 2008

July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008

Revenue

Direct Public Support	\$214,465
Merchandise Sales	\$ 1,863
Mailing List Rental	\$ 2,661
Interest & Dividends	\$ 475
Program Service Revenue	\$ 769
Insurance Settlement	\$ 26,979
TOTAL	\$247,212

Expense

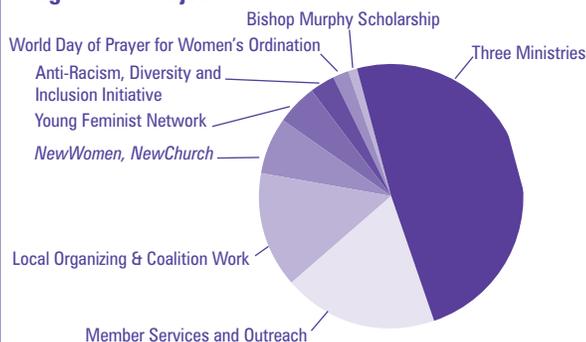
Programs & Projects	\$141,480
Three Ministries	\$ 69,325
Membership Services and Outreach	\$ 26,881
Local Organizing & Coalition Work	\$ 19,807
<i>NewWomen, NewChurch</i>	\$ 9,904
Young Feminist Network	\$ 7,074
Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative	\$ 4,244
World Day of Prayer for Women's Ordination	\$ 2,830
Bishop Murphy Scholarship	\$ 1,415
Management and General	\$ 36,895
Fundraising	\$ 21,750
TOTAL	\$200,125

Net Income in Fiscal Year 2008 \$ 47,087

Fund Balance at Beginning of Year \$ 34,452

Net Assets at End of Fiscal Year \$ 81,539

Programs & Projects



Learning from our Sisters: Experience in Advocacy at the United Nations

Interview conducted by Kate Childs Graham



Kate Childs Graham

As you read in the last issue of NWNC, WOC is initiating a Human Rights Project, taking steps to become more actively involved at the United Nations (UN) level in order

to claim women's equality in the church as a human right.

In preparation for this project, WOC board member Kate Childs Graham sat down with Catherine Bordeau, Advocacy Coordinator for Ecumenical Women, an "international coalition of church denominations and ecumenical organizations which have status with the Economic & Social Council (ECOSOC) at the United Nations." Ecumenical Women coalition's involvement at the UN will differ from WOC's involvement, in that the coalition members of Ecumenical Women are often supported by their institutional denominations and are not as focused on women's rights within denominations. An edited transcript of that interview follows.

1. Tell us a little bit about Ecumenical Women. What are your goals and your mission?

We work, train, and empower our ever-expanding network to advocate for gender equality at the United Nations, especially through the annual Commission on the Status of Women. It is our understanding that the church at its best can model policies that reinforce gender equality, create budgets which reflect a desire to invest in women's equality, and develop networks of women and men who resist systems of patriarchy, domination, and abuse. We believe that the church is a powerful transformative vehicle for the teaching, protection, and enforcement of women's rights and gender equality when its constituents and leadership are informed and empowered.

The Ecumenical Women coalition advocates for gender justice at the United Nations, incorporating annual advocacy trainings for our constituencies and delegations, network building and policy recommendations that challenge structures of inequality. Members of Ecumenical Women advocate not only for a few improvements but for a fundamental

system change in church and state to invest in and empower women worldwide.

2. How did you first get involved at the UN level?

As a coalition, Ecumenical Women was founded in 2000 on the occasion of the five-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing +5) to enhance and reinforce the collaboration of progressive churches and ecumenical organizations to advocate for the rights of women at the annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

However, some of our member organizations have been present and active in working for gender justice since the United Nations was founded and were present at the very first Commission meeting in 1946. You can find more of this history in our Guide to Advocacy at the UN. Visit www.ecumenicalwomen.org

3. What does advocacy at the UN level entail?

We work to positively influence the outcome of the Agreed Conclusions during CSW. During this last CSW, one out of every ten civil society delegates was a member of the Ecumenical Women coalition. Our representatives come from every region around the world and are therefore able to meet with governments from every region to advocate the ecumenical agenda.

4. Do you find that by working at the UN level you have been able to see more success than working through domestic outlets or even religious institutions?

I wouldn't say there is more success in any of these outlets than others; I think that there are a variety of efforts needed in order to affect the systemic change needed to overcome gender inequality on the local, state and international levels. The policies of our various religious institutions inform our recommendations at the United Nations. Because of the diversity of organizations within the coalition, we are able to develop a stronger position than with just one denomination or ecumenical organization's position. This then assists delegates with providing policy recommendations within their own church or denomination, which often works more closely on advocacy work at the domestic and local levels.

In addition, we share the tools developed by our various member bodies. Last year a gender budget analysis toolkit was

launched by the Anglican Women's Empowerment network. Because of our close ecumenical collaboration, we were able to distribute it throughout the world and within many denominations thereby building the capacity of women to analyze not only their government's budget but also their churches. We also work to engage men and boys in building positive models for what it means to be masculine.

5. Do you connect your work on women's equality in decision-making/leadership at the state level with women's equality in decision-making/leadership in religious institutions? If so, how?

We are intentional about building the capacity of the women who come as part of the Ecumenical Women delegation to the UN CSW. Everyone who attends brings their own gifts and experiences, and we work together to build each other's capacities. For some women, capacity building means learning to speak up in a group process (and feeling that there is space to do so); for others it means gaining advocacy and public policy skills; and still for others it means integrating an important issue into their ministry through music, art, or words. Most women who come work in all of these various forms of leadership and each is equally valued. We are intentional about creating space for young women in all of our processes. We take time to explain processes, encourage people to take leadership roles, and try to support each other's work throughout our time together. We work to build a network of women who have attended CSW and continue dialogues and advocacy work when we're not centered in New York.

All of this contributes to a new style of leadership and group process; building the leadership skills of women at all levels who will be better equipped to participate in the decision-making/ leadership in their religious institutions; and global networking and coalition building to better support the work of women of faith working for gender justice around the world.

6. Do you know of other groups working for women's equality within religious institutions? What has been your experience in terms of their success?

With the financial crisis, I know that budgets are being cut around the world. Unfortunately, many of those cuts will

continued on page 11

Feminism and Religious Identities

By Ivone Gebara

Pat Reif Memorial Lecture delivered at Claremont College, March 2009

Feminist Critique of Feminine Christian Identities

The feminist generation of the last century does not deny the importance of the symbolic dimension of our life, but criticizes reducing symbolic Christian culture to a male hierarchical culture and negating the rebellious message of the Jesus Movement. For us, the vital insights present in the Christian tradition became repressed and weakened by a historical process of accommodation to power structures of domination. Theology was a strong instrument for this domination and for the repression of all emancipatory initiatives. The earthly justice present in the Jesus Movement tradition was dislocated to a heavenly justice that alienates us from our own bodies and concrete issues.

The criticism inside Christian Churches was first of all a movement from feminist theologians and Christian activists trying to change by rational arguments the pretension of male culture to present itself as universal. This universal conception includes women in a kind of fixed definition and identity in the way of subordination to men and God. The struggle for a new understanding of our own self and of our identity became a very important field to feminism and also to feminist theologies. In Brazil we tried to make this reflection available also to grassroots groups of women trying to help them to tell their stories, sufferings, and hope in order to rediscover their plural identities and to value them.

We struggled too much in these last thirty-five years. While Christian churches denied the right of choice for women, feminist theologians became allies of movements promoting the decriminalization and legalization of abortion. While Christian churches still continue to proclaim homosexuality as a sin, we declare homosexuality to be a choice, and women from different sexual orientations work together and respect one another. While Christian churches were silent about the rape of women, we struggled to recognize it as a crime deserving harsh punishment. While Christian theologies of different churches were male and racist, we became pluralistic and anti-racist.

Indeed we worked a lot. We did new theology, biblical studies, wrote lots of books and articles, and created new liturgies, etc. But most of our work was frequently in the



Sister Ivone Gebara with WOC activist, Theresa Yugar.

margin of our original churches. As feminists we were not integrated as part of the ministry and magisterium of our churches.

For a long time in spite of our suffering we did not care. Now, after many years we have begun to think about the flourishing of our labor. And we are convinced that our struggle for freedom and justice have precedence over any theological orthodoxy. We do not care about patriarchal orthodoxy. But we do care about the life of our poor people, and poor women living inside the Christian tradition. Because of them, we have to think more about our methods of working and our new concepts in order to leave a nourishing heritage to the new generations. I am also saying this probably because I am getting old. I feel that with our feminist theological past history we still need to work in new, simple language and new forms of expression to manifest our common desire for a better world, to console ourselves in our sufferings and joys, and to keep the flame of hope lighted. I am talking with general words but I know that a reading of a text from the Bible can help a group of grassroots women to discover truth differently from what middle class scholars discover in the meaning of the words and the structure of the text. Just as liberation theology in Latin America worked with the Bible, we have to explore in a new moment and in plural contexts, the potential meaning for liberation present in biblical myths, in narratives and in poetry in spite of our critique of the patriarchal background of the text. We did lots of work but we have still work to do following our liberationist intuition for the new moment of our common history.

Some Limits in Our Present Feminist Policies

I feel today that most radical feminists with a Christian formation are losing a chance to exert more pressure and help other people to be allies inside the same institutional church. We are not very insistent inside the institutions to educate ourselves and others about the urgency of religious change. We were not politically and continually present in some struggles because of the negative responses of religious institutions. We are sometimes like a dog that was kicked once or twice by a master and we hate to hear the sound of the same boots coming along. From my Brazilian experience I have to say that women inside the churches are still not very well organized to be a real political lobby inside it and I do not know if they want to do it. We are so deeply formed in the sacred male spirituality that we move only on the surface of the antipatriarchal religion. This religion is inside us. We are colonized by it. This religion takes possession of our subjectivity and appears frequently when we thought that its force was over. We are still in captivity and we need to hold hands strongly and tenderly to begin to see another light.

Some groups of women declare themselves no longer inside Christian churches and they try to erase this tradition from their own identity. They do not believe that the institutional church has any significant thing to say to them. But, at the same time they are struggling against the conservative policy of the church, especially regarding sexual issues. And to do this work they have to know the positions on those questions developed by the churches and recognize their power in civil society. They have, for instance, to recognize the political and ideological influence of the Roman Catholic Church and others inside Latin American culture. They can't put themselves totally out of institutional churches, but they have to deal with them, if they are struggling in a feminist perspective and want to change cultural behaviors, cosmologies, beliefs and social laws.

Our identities are today challenged by the multiplicity of components that are tied to our own self and to the people with whom we are living. Theology is one component among others in this complexity of what we call religious identity. Being close to the sufferings of people, their struggles and new

joys cause us to be more worried with vital questions than with the question of religious identity itself.

Are we living a backlash?

I am convinced that we Christian feminists cannot erase our convictions while we are inside church institutions. But we have to admit that there are so many women inside church institutions who feel emptiness and a big contradiction between, on one side their personal convictions and choices and, on the other, the ethics, politics, and theologies of church institutions. In spite of all contradictions most women feel that their churches or religious congregations are part of their own body, part of their history and part of the place they chose, of course in a limited way, to be their space of conversation and struggle. Religious institutions become an important part of their cultural traditions and they do not want to feel marginalized inside them. This is also true for women from poor communities. Being part of a church is an important element in their lives. Also most feel a contradiction regarding the way religious institutions treat them, but they do not want to move out. They feel a kind of cultural connection coming from their parents and grandparents and their local culture.

In spite of my desire for radical change I have to admit that things go slowly in cultural spaces and in the human heart when we are searching for deep changes as a new understanding of what it means to be a human being and a new understanding of our women identities.

We need new strategies in order to move the policy of our institutions. This is not properly a backlash but a consciousness of the new moment in which we are living and also the needs of new generations.

One strategy is using our capacity to speak out together and sometimes loudly against the present policy of religious institutions. We are able to organize ourselves in public manifestations against a law made by the government, exert pressure and change it but we are not able to do the same when unjust laws and behavior come from the church.

These strategies have to be lived on different fronts: in parishes, in chapels, in religious communities, in newspapers, in small periodicals, by e-mail. We have to try once more a massive struggle to denounce the new forms of oppression of women connected with religious discourses (sermons) and denounce the unfair appropriation of the space, goods and richness of the fruits of the work of many

generations of women. We gave freely to the church our time and work without any salary, and now we have to ask permission to enter our own common house or to sing what we love to sing. In this effort we have to be more active locally but also internationally in order to bring about a more effective policy.

One of the biggest questions concerns new generations of women. Most of them feel that the feminist struggle is finished because there is some equality in some places, especially for some jobs. The concept of equality has not been adequately analyzed in the new social context of our world. For some young people rights and justice became an individual issue and not a social issue. And the meaning of rights and justice is limited merely to having opportunities in this same oppressive and racist society.

How are we going to maintain and express new political power as women when the post-feminism generation stands in a different place?

I am worried about the instability and growth of individualism in our time. As a consequence there is also a growing search for the security that comes with patriarchal religions as well as from the military. The apparent backlash of feminism in fact is the backlash of collective values—the backlash of national and international governments, the backlash and the fear of religious institutions to dare to welcome the changes needed for our time.

The implication of this entire situation goes far beyond what we thought of as feminism and as feminist theology and religious identity.

There are new questions to be asked, beyond all those that emerged in every field of women's activity. We are there today.

Our Present Religious Identity

My religious identity is a mirror of myself. Moving, searching, embracing struggles for human dignity, for the dignity of the planet, for my neighbor unfairly put in jail, for the child that has no place at school. My religious identity is a mirror of my present life. Dreaming again the possibility of justice and peace for all, betting the possibility of erasing hunger and war from the world, wanting love and friendship for myself is part of my present identity. It is also my fragile faith knowing that each one of us can betray our beliefs (including me). They are apparently strong but they are also fragile, able to die for "a new pair of sandals" or by a threat of torture. Symbolically, we can deny ourselves searching for love and justice as

Peter denied Jesus. Our new feminist religious identity is a multiple identity. It is not a new universal feminist identity that situates women's condition as a monolithic condition, and feminist religious tradition as a new dogmatic one. Our new identity has to do with our everyday wake-up as full citizens of the world, with our renewed longing for better conditions of life for human beings and for the planet. Our new religious identity is a kind of vital perception of following the emancipatory impetus always present in human history. Our new religious identities, even while we keep the same name—Christians or Muslims or Buddhists and others—and express a kind of go-beyond-it regarding traditional systems and theological concepts. These old concepts seem exhausted in their capacity to provide new enthusiasm or social and personal transformation for the present generation. Something new is awaited inside us.

We are living in a marvelous challenging world but also in a world where frequently we do not feel at home. We built fortresses inside and outside us in order to keep alive a system that is producing death with the appearance of life. Our new plural religious identity invites us to be a stone in the shoes of this system, a dissonant voice in the churches, and a sign of contradiction in a pretentious homogenous world.

Our new identities have to express the capacity to speak in our name and be responsible for our choices and deeds.

Let me finish this reflection by sharing some poetic words of my dear friend Dorothee Solle. Like Pat Reif, for whom this talk is in honor, she was, until the end of her life, one who struggled for justice and was an inspiration for feminist theologians of old and new generations. Solle's quote is from her book *The Window of Vulnerability* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990):

*To be alive is to be vulnerable.
To be faithful is to resist the
temptation of security.*

We do not want security for our religious identities. We want vulnerability and faith as bread for our daily life.

Ivone Gebara is a Brazilian Sister of Our Lady (Canoneses of St. Augustine) and one of Latin America's leading theologians, writing from the perspective of ecofeminism and liberation theology.

*For full text of this article, visit
www.womensordination.org*

All Are Welcome: A Parishioner Reflects on an RCWP Parish

By Tom Parsons

Every Sunday evening, a small group of twenty to thirty people gather in the Hope Chapel, nestled in a corner of the First Unitarian Church in St. Louis' trendy Central West End. Mass with Therese of Divine Peace Inclusive Roman Catholic Community starts at 5:00 pm, but the sanctuary needs to be set up before that can happen. Co-pastors and Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) Rose-Marie (Ree) Hudson and Elsie McGrath are among the first to arrive, and each week they and other parishioners pull the altar, candles, chairs, and other items for Mass out of storage and arrange them into the familiar setting. Nametags are distributed, and as more people arrive, a healthy amount of chatter builds up as familiar faces greet each other with smiles, hugs, and jokes. The choir (a good quarter to one-third of the congregation, depending on the week) practices, and I remember that I need to get a couple of gift bearers. As the clock closes in on 5:00, people begin to take seats, and Mass proceeds just like any other Roman Catholic Mass, except for the fact that the priests are women, the language is inclusive, and everyone, Catholic or not, is welcome to participate in the Eucharist.

The Therese community began celebrating Mass a couple of weeks after Ree and Elsie's well-publicized ordination in November 2007, at the Central Reform Jewish Congregation. Excommunications and arguments aside, the ordination and first couple of Masses brought in hundreds of people. As things settled, a community of about twenty-five people remained. They have done so for many different reasons, ranging from a commitment to feminism, to personal hurt from some patriarchal and authoritative members of the Catholic hierarchy. Some came because they connected with the emphasis on social justice and liberation theology, others because the parish is open and affirming of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (GLBTQ). The list goes on. I personally committed to the Therese community because of all of those reasons to some degree or another, but especially the inclusive Eucharist, which to me, emphasizes everything Jesus envisioned. All of us are invited to participate in God's family, not in spite of ourselves, but *because* of ourselves. In



Roman Catholic Womenpriests, Rose Marie (Ree) Hudson and Elsie Hainz McGrath with acolytes Mike and Jan Quimm at Advent liturgy.

Galatians 3:28, Paul made clear that Jesus came to abolish all distinctions among us: "In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus." We do not have to follow the dictates or the example of the hierarchy when it comes to gender, sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity. We are beautiful, exactly as God created us, and our Catholic tradition compels us to follow our consciences in these matters.

Over the past fifteen months or so, the Therese community has gone through a lot of changes. When the community was first celebrating together, readers, eucharistic ministers and songs were hastily gathered during the days leading up to each Mass, and I know I was always more than a little worried that something might go wrong. With some changes in the language and trying to start a parish from scratch, many times some of us (including me) forgot to go up and read, stumbled terribly through readings because we had never lectored before and had a lack of confidence in ourselves, misplayed music, forgot to gather all the lectors and gift bearers, and many of us sat or stood at the "wrong" times.

Despite or maybe, *because* of this, something special happened over those months. We were able to laugh at ourselves, realize it's okay if we mess up here and there, and we started to come together as a community. People began to connect with each other. We relied on each other, joked with each other, talked with each other, and even cried together. We started having monthly community meetings where we talk about everything from the vision we want for our parish, to how to develop the music to how to make sure Ree doesn't set

herself on fire when burning palms for Ash Wednesday. We've gotten together for chili dinner potlucks, and trivia nights. We've prayed for each other in sickness, unemployment, or when we have simply had a tough week. We've truly come together, and I personally have fallen as much in love with this community as I have with inclusive liturgy. The members of the community are good people—they would give the shirt off of their back to someone if they needed it. To think that the Catholic hierarchy would consider us ripe for excommunication makes me think they have a serious misconception about the vision of Jesus.

So, we're here, fifteen months after starting from scratch and doing a pretty good job of building a parish. But where are we going? I can't say for sure. I believe Sophia is doing something special in our community, and I think we need to continue to grow. How should we grow? Should we focus on getting more people? That's not really our style, but with a tight-knit community, are we able to be open and welcoming to new people?

Even though we have a good mix of parishioners of different ages, and somewhere around twenty-five to thirty percent of the community is openly GLBTQ, over ninety percent of us are white. How do we deconstruct the social structures of white privilege that causes so much hurt in our world and become a truly diverse community, reflecting the beauty of all of God's ethnicities and cultures? Are we a liberating place for the GLBTQ community? What is our role in these endeavors? How can we work together, embracing God's beautiful human diversity to liberate each other?

I won't pretend to have answers to those questions, but I do have great trust that as long as we try to stay open, Sophia will continue to work beautiful miracles for us and through us. Until then, we'll do our best to witness to the Kingdom by following Micah's advice: loving kindness, doing justice, and walking humbly with our God.

Tom Parsons is a member of the Women's Ordination Conference. To learn more about Therese of Divine Peace, go to www.thereseofdivinepeace.org.

Women Bishops: Questions and Analysis

By Jane Via, Ph.D and Victoria Rue, Ph.D.

The ordination of four U.S. women as bishops on April 19, 2009, brings the number of women bishops in the Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA movement to a total of five. It also raises theological and structural questions both within the movement itself and in the public which supports the Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP).

The women ordained included Andrea Johnson of the Eastern Region, Bridget Mary Meehan of the Southeast Region, Regina Nicolosi of the Midwest Region, and Joan Houk of the Great Waters Region. The first RCWP woman bishop of the Americas is Dana Reynolds who was ordained in 2008 and who serves the Western Region in the U.S.

Often when those who have been marginalized for so long begin to create their own structures, they duplicate the oppression and the brokenness that they have known. The seeds of hierarchy have been planted deep within us as Catholic women. Clericalism is the only model we have grown up with. Will we duplicate the patriarchy as we seek to transform it? How can women priests and bishops use these historically burdened titles to transform our church?

As a movement for renewing priestly ministry, we have significant differences with the traditional role of priests and bishops in the Roman Catholic Church. But how do we unlearn hierarchical decision making? As women priests, we do not promise obedience to a bishop. But will we repeat the clerical club of the traditional church? Yes, we can and we will if we are not conscious at every juncture that we are here to transform our church, as well as ourselves and to deconstruct the clergy-lay divide.

Thoughtful analysis of the role of a bishop lies at the core of these questions. Currently, RCWP understands a bishop not as an administrator or executor of laws and policies, but as a pastor to the pastors and people of her region. RCWP bishops are elected by the woman priests of their respective regions for service to that region.

A key issue is the future role of the laity in electing these bishops. Some RCWP women believe that involving the laity would result in politically driven elections that would fail to adequately take into account the qualifications and experience of the woman elected. Others in the movement feel that the model of the early church cannot be recaptured without the full participation of the laity in the election of bishops. The latter women argue that the

well-educated, committed, progressive Catholics of membership-based church reform groups, in addition to the members of faith communities led by a Roman Catholic Womanpriest, would competently and responsibly participate in these elections. After all, for most of the history of the church, bishops were elected by laity and clergy. It was not until the 19th century that popes claimed the right to appoint bishops.

Other key issues regard terms of active service for an ordained bishop. Will bishops be accountable to the people they serve? Can they be asked to retire when their service is no longer consonant with the needs of their people? Or will they retain an active pastoral role as bishop for a lifetime regardless of their effectiveness? The importance of this issue will be heightened if RCWP is faithful to its current commitment to exclude bishops from administration and non-pastoral leadership positions.

Another question raised by the recent ordinations is "Why so many bishops?" One woman will be bishop of a region of fewer than five women priests. Two will be bishops in the same geographical area, regions artificially separated by title and interpretation of the movement. Does the presence of so many bishops in such a small movement (thirty-six women priests, eight women deacons and twenty candidates nationwide) signal an irrevocable embrace of hierarchy? Is this too top heavy for an organization that has not quite five years of existence in the U.S?

Bishop Patricia Fresen of Germany believes it is imperative to have this many bishops now. With the number of women preparing for ordination each year, multiple ordinations are required annually. These events are seriously taxing for one sole bishop. Both Bishops Fresen and Reynolds had serious health problems this past year that were exacerbated by the demands of constant travel and pastoral needs. Fresen believes that with five bishops in five geographical regions, each of whom can preside at local ordinations, the health of none will be inordinately strained.

Fresen also believes that regional bishops are needed to support women priests after ordination. Candidates for ordination participate in an RCWP program that provides them with education, regular contact, spiritual direction and support in their ministries. Once ordained, woman priests find themselves outside the program and without support. Woman priests have looked to the one U.S. bishop and to Fresen who has



Back row, left to right RWCP bishops: Ida Raming, Patricia Fresen, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, Antiochan Rite Bishop Jeannette Love. Front Row: New RWCP bishops: Regina Nicolosi, Andrea Johnson, Joan Houk, Bridget Mary Meehan.

been assisting with the administration of the preparation program, to provide this support. Already, however, there are far too many women priests for one or even two bishops to adequately serve in this pastoral way.

As the discussion continues and lived experience of episcopal roles progresses, time will tell how these issues are resolved. The governing structures of the U.S. RCWP movement continue to be refined. It remains to be seen in what direction they will move. Will they move toward hierarchicalization or carefully protect against it? Can the progressive Roman Catholic laity trust this movement to really change the inherently stratified, classicist, and exclusive structure of the church and to embrace the inclusive community Jesus modeled? The roles of women who are not bishops and the people whom they serve are critical to this evolution.

Much also depends on the character of the five women now ordained to serve. Will they succumb to the seductive perception that they are governors not servants, more important in the community and in community decision-making than any other member? Will women priests and their communities also succumb in their deference to the current canonical interpretation of an episcopate? Or will the women bishops and those they serve resist these temptations and refresh and renew this ancient role?

Victoria Rue, PhD, is a former WOC Board member and a priest ordained in 2005 through RCWP. Rue is a lecturer in Comparative Religious Studies and Women's Studies at San Jose State University and she writes to us from Watsonville, Calif. Jane Via, PhD, is also a priest ordained in 2006 through RCWP and a county prosecutor in San Diego, Calif. She co-founded the first RCWP "parish" in November 2005, Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community, which meets weekly in San Diego with an average attendance of 75.

Racism, Homophobia and Faith intersect in Passage of Proposition 8

By Aisha S. Taylor

This spring has seen major strides in the movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) rights. Iowa, Vermont and Maine granted gay and lesbian couples the same right afforded to most U.S. citizens—to make a public expression of their love and commitment in a state-recognized marriage. The District of Columbia, the home of the WOC national office, passed a law that recognizes valid out-of-state marriages of same-sex couples. As advocates of an inclusive and accountable Catholic Church, we believe it is important to celebrate these successes. However, especially considering how the hierarchy treats people who are LGBTQ, it is also our responsibility to critically examine recent setbacks in the movement, such as the passage of California's Proposition 8, which eliminated the right for same-sex couples to marry.

The results of this ballot measure spurred intense reaction. African-American voters were immediately blamed for the passage of the proposition due in part to inaccurate exit polls. However, subsequent studies have shown that African-American support for Proposition 8 was dramatically overstated, and variables such as politics, age, and religion were much more predictive of decisions in the voting booth. So, why were many people—from Rachel Maddow to Bill O'Reilly to reform-minded Catholics—so eager to point the finger at people of color? Has that myth been adequately debunked? Has the blame been appropriately shifted to the people who were actually responsible? In this article, I address these questions in order to raise awareness and foster discussion among WOC members. As people of faith who advocate for a church that understands and responds to the needs of our communities, it is vital to examine this knee-jerk reaction and discuss what it means for us.

Racist Reaction

On January 28, I participated in a panel at Georgetown Law School titled "Lessons Learned from Prop-8: Intersectionality, Racism & Homophobia in America." I was joined by Jasper Hendricks, Director of Field Operations and Political Programs, National Black Justice Coalition, and Sultan Shakir, Regional Field Director, Human Rights Campaign. To my surprise and disappointment, my co-panelists testified to blatant racism within the national coalition

that had worked against the ballot measure. In conference calls subsequent to the passage of Proposition 8, they bore witness to gay rights advocates using the n-word and voicing negative stereotypes based on race time and again.

Television talk shows were also quick to jump on the bandwagon of blaming people of color. On the Rachel Maddow Show, Maddow cited the inaccurate exit polls, saying, "The big finger-pointing part of the liberal uproar over the passage of Prop-8 is the fact that African-Americans, who turned out in much larger numbers than in '04, voted in favor of Prop-8 at a seven to ten margin. So the states, and the country, are left to grapple with what it means for civil rights that the same voters who disproportionately helped elect the nation's first African-American president, also took rights away from the gay community." This clip is posted on YouTube, and the comments that follow it are laced with racism and homophobia.

The O'Reilly Factor, a conservative talk show, echoed this sentiment, but took it a few steps further. Bill O'Reilly said he was offended by protests in front of Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, a predominantly white church. According to O'Reilly, "It was the Black vote that voted down gay marriage—why weren't they in front of the Black church?" On the same show, Margaret Hoover, a Republican strategist, dissented and made the previously neglected point that religion was the deciding factor, not race, and that "Rick Warren was the most vocal about [Proposition 8]... It was the Mormons and the white church leaders—" however, O'Reilly did not let her finish.

While O'Reilly demonstrated an all out refusal to hear alternative explanations, a scan of other mainstream media coverage revealed what seemed to be a complete inability to see past the conveniently packaged and easily articulated "Black vote" theory. Few if any were willing to look at other possibilities as to why LGBTQ Californians had been stripped of their rights to form state-recognized families beyond the assumption that African-Americans, by virtue of their race, are against gay rights.

Debunking the Myth, Finding Alternative Explanations

While the initial exit polls were proven inaccurate by at least ten percentage points,

Melissa Harris Lacewell, Political Science Professor at Princeton University, provides one explanation as to why people of color voted for Proposition 8 at slightly higher levels, based on circumstances beyond race itself. In an interview with Rachel Maddow, Harris Lacewell asserted:

Those who were in the coalition to vote no on Proposition 8 did not do due diligence in communities of color. They didn't go there and make the arguments about *Loving v. Virginia, 1967*—the case in Virginia that went to the Supreme Court, which finally allowed interracial marriage. They didn't talk about the fact that the language used against gay marriage is the same language that was used against interracial marriage. ... They didn't do enough work in the communities of color.

It is perhaps even more important to discuss the revision of early polling results. A study conducted by Patrick J. Egan of New York University and Kenneth Sherrill of Hunter College disproved the initial exit polls by clearly demonstrating that African-American support of Proposition 8 was much more in line with white support than reported. According to the two professors, 58% of African-Americans voted for the measure. By comparison, 59% of Latinos and Hispanics supported it, along with 49% of whites and 48% of Asians. This study confirmed the results of surveys conducted by two separate agencies just before the election, which found that there was no significant difference in the level of support for Proposition 8 between California's African-Americans and the general public.

Therefore, a more appropriate question seems to be, why did a majority of Californians vote against gay marriage? Many studies state that political ideology, party affiliation, age, and religiosity had a far more significant impact than race or gender. In particular, people of faith supported Proposition 8 in overwhelming numbers. In the study results, Egan and Sherrill stated:

African-Americans are more religious (as measured by frequency of attendance at religious services) than any other racial or ethnic group of California voters ... controlling for frequency of religious attendance helps explain why African-Americans supported Proposition 8 at higher levels than the population as a whole. Among Californians who attend worship at least weekly, support for

Proposition 8 was nearly uniform across all racial and ethnic groups. Among those who attend worship less than weekly, majorities of every racial and ethnic group voted “no” on Proposition 8.

In the Georgetown Law panel mentioned above, I drew sharper attention to the role that religion played in the results, noting the following findings: 1) 84% of those who attend church weekly voted yes, 2) 81% of white evangelicals voted yes, 3) 65% of white Protestants voted yes, 4) 64% of Catholics voted yes, and Catholics account for 30% of all California voters at eleven million.

Caught in the web of oppression, white advocates for LGBTQ rights resorted to racist assumptions and turned against the very people who could have worked with them—had they not been written off from the beginning. In fact, the leaders of the “no on 8” campaign should have done a better job of increasing the visibility of LGBTQ people of color, since heterosexism and racism often catch them in the cross hairs of these debates. This is a common way in which hegemony and oppression is preserved. Often called “divide and conquer,” oppressed groups are pitted against each other to take attention away from the real issues and to ensure that the power of the oppressors remains unchecked. However, by noting the corrected statistics and critically examining mobilizing strategies on both sides (instead of simply the role of communities of color on Election Day) we can see more clearly who we need to hold accountable for the passage of Proposition 8.

Holding our Faith Leaders Accountable

The failure to hold our church’s leaders accountable for a history of colonialism and the persistent use of de-humanizing words and actions, as evidenced by their role in Proposition 8, has prevented a true understanding and adequate response to

the backlash against people of color that occurred after the passage of the measure. At the Call To Action conference in November 2008, a participant asked Dolores Huerta, co-founder of the United Farm Workers Union and a leading Latina advocate for the LGBTQ community, why Latinos voted for Proposition 8. Huerta responded something to the effect of the following:

I will re-direct your question to look at the role of the predominantly white, Euro-centric Catholic hierarchy and their vast cultural and political influence since colonial times. We must examine the reasons why Latinos may be inclined to vote this way. We need to call out this damaging influence and hold the leadership accountable.

WOC publicly supports LGBTQ Catholics and, like Huerta, we believe that church leaders must be held accountable for their untenable actions and for the way in which they allocate church funds.

The Catholic hierarchy teaches that homosexuality is an “intrinsic moral evil” and the Holy See uses its seat at the United Nations to oppose LGBTQ rights around the world. In January, a United Nations Declaration calling for worldwide decriminalization of homosexuality, in order to curb the number of violent hate crimes perpetrated against GLBTQ people, was signed by 66 UN countries. The Vatican did not sign it, and worked against additional signatures from other countries.

In this country, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is among the most vocal and active opponents of gay marriage. Much of the funding for the “yes on 8” campaign came from religious groups including the USCCB, which contributed \$200,000. Likewise, The Knights of Columbus, the world’s largest Catholic family fraternal service organization, gave one million dollars and committed to funding the USCCB’s national plan of action to work against legislative and

judicial efforts for marriage equality.

Through this continued lobbying and financial backing, the church is complicit in maintaining a second-class citizenry. In 2004, the Government Accounting Office issued a report stating that 1,138 rights, benefits and responsibilities are denied to same-sex couples whose marriages are not legal under state law. This means that LGBTQ couples and straight, unmarried families do not receive the same treatment regarding hospital visitation, adoption, medical leave, and much more. These discriminatory measures leave the courts, cities, towns, and other government entities unable to protect all families equally under the law.

As advocates for a fully inclusive church, this issue is relevant to all of us. At a time when the number of states granting marriage equality under the law has doubled in one month, we call on our church to stop discriminating based on sexual orientation, or any fabricated distinction.

In WOC’s quest for a renewed, inclusive church, we believe that it would make a difference if the Vatican removed the ban on women’s ordination. With women excluded from most decision making and governance positions in the church, the Vatican’s influence on public policy has been devastating and it affects people regardless of religious affiliation. A perfect example of this is the passage of Proposition 8. If Catholic women were able to fully exercise their leadership with the full backing of the Church, and all of its financial, legal, and human resources, the church’s stances on many issues would be very different. Women would help bring about structural change that would move the Roman Catholic hierarchy to use its influence to promote global justice for everyone, including women, people of color, and people who are LGBTQ—and all the intersections of our identities.

Aisha S. Taylor WOC’s Executive Director.

Advocacy at the UN...continued from page 5

affect women’s ministries. This is significantly debilitating for women’s equality globally and greatly reduces the access women have to certain levels of religious institutions.

Lastly, while it’s not directly related, there is a dire need for more young women’s involvement so they will be empowered to participate in the work of religious institutions. Having worked in one myself, I know that they are dominated by men. While most of the men I have worked with

are open to women’s concerns (or may even consider themselves feminists and pray to Mother God), they might not always think of how a certain issue affects women or to suggest that women are essential people to have at any table, whether it be for a panel discussion, for planning an international conference or writing a policy statement. While I recognize that not all women are conscious of the need to bring a “gender lens” or analysis to a discussion, many are, and that perspective is essential within a church that

has so often historically marginalized women.

7. What advice can you give to WOC as we become involved at this level?

Set clear goals, learn the system, build young women’s capacities, involve your sisters from the Global South at all levels, and pray joyfully every step of the way.

Kate Childs Graham is a member of WOC’s national Board of Directors. She lives in Washington, DC.

My Vocation to Become a Woman Deacon

By Maria Angelika Fromm

I was born into a very Catholic family in the German Democratic Republic, known as East Germany, in 1951. In those days, everyone who disapproved of Communism could mainly choose between fleeing the country or retiring to a private life. For my family, living the Catholic faith and having a close bond with our church community was radical in the political climate. My grandmother in particular gave me the foundation for my deep faith, but she did not question her Catholicism because it sustained her through many struggles. Instead of joining the youth organization “Junge Pioniere,” I went to religious education classes in the afternoons and realized that this was not approved of by the teachers. This made me stand up for my faith and live with the negative consequences from an early age.

When the political pressure increased, my family decided to risk the flight. As poor refugees, we moved to a Protestant neighborhood of Lower Saxony in former West Germany. Again, I found myself in the position of being an outsider, as the daughter of poor refugees and as a Catholic in a Protestant community. I continued to stand up for Catholicism, in a very traditional way, before the Second Vatican Council. My faith gave me strength in this position as an outsider.

I started reflecting on my faith in my teenage years, and, caught in the spirit of Vatican II, started studying the Bible intensely. I soon discovered the question of women’s rights in the church. I asked myself, why are women so irrelevant in the Roman Catholic Church when Jesus of Nazareth had no problem including them in his circle of disciples and as leaders in his ministry? I also became aware of the fact that in the early church, women were deacons.

Full of enthusiasm, I decided to study theology in Münster, where many important theologians of Vatican II were teaching. In their traditional way of thinking, my family could not understand this decision and I had no financial support. Regardless, I knew being in charge of a parish was my vocation. Following Vatican II, I was full of hope that the church would allow women to hold office. At that time, a feminist approach to theology was not known in Germany. However, I wrote my thesis on the role of women in the New Testament. This thought was new and had to be approved by the University.

I completed my studies in 1973 and took a position as a middle-school teacher for German and religious education. The office

of pastoral associate had not yet been established, but I was volunteering for pastoral care at my school and in the parish. Regardless of my title, I was in charge of my parish’s liturgy without a problem, and I could feel the spirit of change within the German church. With my own family growing, I continued teaching and developed children and family church services. I was happy whenever I could read books about feminist theology, which was established in Germany in the late seventies. I lived my vision of holding an office through my volunteer work developing liturgies, and as a teacher for children and youth catechesis. During the 1980’s, I worked in a parish where I wrote all of the homilies for the priest, and he gave them every week as if they were his own. At the same time, in a small parish in my village, I developed ecumenical liturgies with other parishioners, where I preached and spoke the words of the Eucharist. The longer I established myself within my parish, the more I began to win over many of the parishioners with my new findings concerning feminist theology and women’s rights.

Then in 1994 I was hit by disappointment when women were officially excluded from clerical office by the Roman bulletin *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, despite all the beautiful words about women’s dignity from John Paul II. It was now obvious that the unjust canon—Canon 1024—was going to remain untouched and that the gaps within the hierarchy of the church were going to increase. I had reached a dead end.

Hope emerged in 1995, when the We Are Church movement started in Austria and Germany. It seemed like a new chance to get the rigid church moving again together with like-minded people. From its beginning, I enthusiastically participated within the movement, pushing for equal rights for women within the church.

In 1996, I co-founded Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) at the European Women’s Synod in Gmunden, Austria. It was here that I noticed the purple stole on Myra Poole and Valerie Strout, women’s ordination advocates from the UK. Inspired by the idea, I brought purple stoles to Germany and together with other women of the We are Church movement we expanded its meaning to be a visible symbol of demonstration for the equality of women in a changed and renewed Roman Catholic Church. Since the hierarchy denied feminist theologians from even discussing women’s ordination, the only

thing left to do was to protest, in a public display of the truth.

During our demonstrations in the ensuing years, we have had hundreds of conversations with members of many parishes who do not have a problem picturing a woman pastor in today’s Germany.

In addition to my activism for women in the church, I continued to be committed to pastoral care and service to people on a volunteer basis. How I live and what I do is based on my vocation to be a deacon. The service of a deacon, the way of life, exemplified by Jesus, is a basic function of the church and is a viable option for women. Furthermore, a number of German theologians agree that administering the sacraments is part of liturgy—that women are already functioning as deacons. I do not believe that the 2000-year-old office of the priest, taken over by men, with exceptions in the early church, is desirable for women. Today, we need an office based on partnership. The permanent diaconate brought into being after Vatican II, has unfortunately not been opened for women yet. I believe opening the diaconate for women, based in partnership, would be a trend-setting way for the church to further develop this office and furnish it with new powers.

There is also a spiritual reason for my vocation. The phrase “scars are eyes” can be applied to my life. Many obstacles in my life, including flight from East Germany, divorce, and illness have opened my eyes to the misery of others. I consider it my obligation as a woman deacon to minister to those pushed to the margins and to meet them at eye level. After being pushed out of the parishes in my diocese because of my criticizing the church, I went back to university to study Islam and I have been participating in interreligious/intercultural dialogue for some years now. I have a vision of being a woman deacon who serves as mediator and bridge builder between the religions and cultures.

The continual unfolding of the healing feminine influence and the commitment to a joint understanding of peace and justice in our societies, despite crisis, are sources of energy for me, which let me prophetically live and endure the “ice age” in the Roman Catholic church.

Maria Angelika Fromm writes to us from Mainz, Germany. She is a member of We Are Church Germany and she organized a significant portion of the October 2008 event in Rome.

Marjorie Procter-Smith. *The Church in Her House. A Feminist Emancipatory Prayer Book for Christian Communities.* Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008. Paperback, 228 pp. ISBN 978-0-8298-1701-0. \$22.00

Reviewed by Susan Roll

Marjorie Procter-Smith, the LeVan Professor of Preaching and Worship at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, authored two original and thought-provoking books on feminist liturgy in the 1990s: *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* (1990, second edition 2000 published by OSL Publications) and *Praying With Our Eyes Open. Engendering Feminist Liturgical Prayer* (1995).

Then she accepted an administrative position at SMU, and of course there was little time to write. What a great gift it is to both organizers of grassroots-level emancipatory liturgies and liturgy scholars that she's back, writing with the same sharpness, richness, and provocative insight as before, and incorporating nearly twenty years of development in the field of feminist ritual since *In Her Own Rite* first appeared.

This book draws from the same vision as Procter-Smith's first two books but aims at practical application, providing not only

planning insights but concrete suggestions and usable prayer formulas. Virtually anyone can use this book to shape local creative worship keyed to social justice, community-building, and full inclusivity.

Its structure is perfectly logical and easy to follow. Her thematic chapters cover Places, Things, Bodies, Sound, Prayer, Scripture, Seasons and Events, Entering into Community, Meals and Healing. Each chapter includes a brief introduction, "Thinking about X," then "Spiritual Disciplines of X," then patterns pertaining to the topic—postures and gestures for Body, speaking and listening for Sound—followed by suggested prayer texts and ritual actions. Each chapter closes with appropriate additional resources.

Her first two chapters set the context for this type of liturgy in the contemporary development of small gatherings based upon the house churches of New Testament times and the early, often persecuted Chris-

tian communities, thus the title *The Church in Her House*. Procter-Smith's direct and clear naming of the evils of exclusion, and the way she identifies the sources of wisdom available, can have a remarkably energizing effect on readers. The second chapter gives hesitant or first-time ritual conveners a solid grounding and a sense of confidence in planning and guiding liberative ritual for gatherings of highly diverse people, many of whom have experienced marginalization and virtual invisibility in church or society.

Whether you are, as Procter-Smith puts it, "on the bus" (that is, involved with a denomination or a local parish community) or "off the bus" (self-explanatory!), and you are involved with Christian common prayer or liturgy of any sort, this book should be on your shelf next to an inclusive Bible and some good music resources.

Susan Roll teaches liturgy and sacraments in Ottawa, Canada.

Leora Tanenbaum. *Taking Back God: American Women Rising Up for Religious Equality.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009. 350 pp., index. ISBN: 978-0-374-27235-7 \$27.00 (hardcover)

Reviewed by Diana Wear

It always amazes me that despite having read seemingly countless articles, books, and documents on women's ordination in the Roman Catholic Church that I am still fascinated by the subject. This is not to say that everything that comes out stirs my passion and imagination but I still enjoy a good read on the topic. Leora Tanenbaum has written a superb book on this theme—it is well researched, thorough, very well written, balanced in tenor, and clear.

Tanenbaum doesn't limit her study to Roman Catholic women, however. As a devout Jewish woman she extends her search to her Jewish tradition and other Jewish denominations—Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Orthodox. Widening her tent, she also surveys Evangelical Protestants, and Muslim women as well.

Her issue is reform and she addresses it astutely: "Reform is not impossible. To my mind, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are strong enough that they can withstand a little reform without compromising their core values. The issue is not a matter of 'if,' but 'when.' We can reread our sacred texts and interpret them through the lens of women's equality. There are many truths to our sacred texts, not just one, and we can

expose multiple meanings that enrich, not strip away, the validity of our faith." (p. 13) Throughout her book she lays out the problems facing the reform-minded and then she persuasively shows solutions—some require a lot more patience with the status quo than I am comfortable with, having been part of this movement for so many years, but I was also oddly comforted by many of her examples of those who have accepted the small steps and are still moving forward in their tradition.

On waiting for consensus—as many Catholic women have heard the refrain over the years that "the church isn't ready for women priests," Tanenbaum quotes Muslim activist Asra Nomani who says it so well: "That will never happen. We're up against this entire empire that has a consensus against us, so we will never turn that tide if we wait for our rights to be given to us." (p. 26) Point in fact, Muslim women have a much tougher and more violent road to hoe in getting even some basic rights, but the struggle is happening by the will of many courageous women.

Tanenbaum covers a wide swath of key issues facing women's reform and renewal of their church: staying in the root tradition and why leaving doesn't work; sexuality—

and how the personal is political; feminist critique and of course, inclusive language. She covers each of these topics as they affect each group but also in hopes of complete housecleaning for each of the traditions she covers.

Activism is a key element and Tanenbaum ends her book by providing a list of things every faithful religious person can do: educate yourself in your faith about your religion; press local religious leaders to push the boundaries, to work with laity; put your money where your faith is, give to WOC, of course; and learn about other faiths—we have similar struggles and also much to share. (p 308-309)

Church, synagogue, mosque, and women's book clubs would do well to put this on their list for summer reading. This book belongs on the shelves of everyone who is interested in women's place in religion. We owe a debt of gratitude to Leora Tanenbaum's research and magnificent book.

Diana Wear is the Book Review editor for NWN. She has a day job at UC Berkeley where she is Managing Editor of an academic journal.

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Upcoming events

May

May 16: Los Gatos, CA: RCWP Ordination: For more information, visit www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org

May 29, 7:00 PM: Drexel Hill, PA: SEPA-WOC with the National WOC and Call To Action-USA, presents "Break the Silence - Shatter the Stained Glass Ceiling." An evening with Roy Bourgeois, M.M., and Aisha S. Taylor: Collenbrook United Church, 5290 Township Line Road 19026. Suggested Donation - \$10 to \$35. For information contact: sepawoc@sepawoc.org; 215-545-9649

May 30: Portland, Oregon: RCWP Ordination: For more information, visit www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org

June

June 6: Atlanta, GA: RCWP Ordination: For more information, visit www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org

June 13: Los Angeles, CA: Women and the Word: Bridging the Gap with Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and a panel of pastoral ministers. Daylong conference sponsored by FutureChurch staff and Women of Los Angeles, Orange and San Bernardino Counties. For more information, visit www.futurechurch.org

June 15-18: Silver Spring, MD: Creative Feminist Ministers: Education, Training, and Networking at the WATER Institute: Tuition: \$400 includes lunches, an evening reception, and coffee/tea breaks. For more information, contact Mary E. Hunt at mhunt@hers.com or Anna Roeschley at annabeth@hers.com.

June 25: Washington, DC: Join us for a farewell party in honor of Aisha S. Taylor, WOC Executive Director, featuring special guest Roy Bourgeois. Rumberos - Latin-American Art Bar: 3345 14th St, NW Washington, DC 20010 (Columbia Heights Metro) at 6:30 PM. RSVP to woc@womensordination.org or 202-675-1006. Suggested donation: \$15

July

July 2-5: Dignity's 40th Anniversary Convention: "Together We Will Reach the Promised Land," San Francisco, CA: To register or for more information, visit www.dignityusa.org

September

Sept 26: Coalition of American Nuns: 40th Anniversary Celebration - Worker Justice in Church and Society. A conference day for women religious, congregational leaders, and all interested in justice for workers. Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, St. Joseph Hall, 6400 Minnesota Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63111-2899. Keynote Speakers: Theresa Kane, RSM and Eileen Purcell. Margaret Ellen Traxler Award Recipient: Louise Lears, SC. Registration: \$35 includes continental breakfast and lunch. Further information: call (313) 891-2192 or 708-974-4220 or email ncan.nuns@yahoo.com, or register online at www.ncan.us

To have your event listed here, contact Erin at ehanna@womensordination.org or 202.675.1006.

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