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A Voice for Women in the Catholic Church

Women's Ordination at the World Synod of Bishops in Rome

By Erin Saiz Hanna

This past October the 2008 World Synod of Bishops took place at the Vatican. Over 240 bishops from around the world gathered to discuss, "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." From October 15-19, 2008, Women's Ordination Conference joined with Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) to call for full and equal participation of women in the Roman Catholic Church. During the week, WOC held a press conference and demonstration, handed out educational materials, hosted an educational forum on women office holders in early Christianity, and toured archaeological sites where women are believed to have been church leaders.

WOC's grassroots actions raised public awareness around Rome and in Vatican City throughout the week, by carrying a banner and wearing t-shirts that said "Ordain Women" in nine languages. Aisha Taylor remarked, "All along our route, hundreds of women and men smiled and nodded to us, and we educated many about WOC and the need for women's ordination and an inclusive Church."

WOC distributed over 1,000 stickers and over 600 fliers to visitors in St. Peter's Square, including many priests and women religious. Activists in Rome reported WOC's presence remained in and around Vatican City for weeks following the campaign.

In addition to the demonstrations in the public square, WOC hosted an educational forum on women's leadership as priests, deacons, and bishops in early Christianity



WOC demonstrated at St. Peter's Square, Vatican City, with Catholic activists from around the world to call for the full and equal participation of women in the Roman Catholic Church on the feast of St. Teresa of Avila during the Synod of Bishops.

with the kind and generous help of a coalition partner. WOC and coalition partners also toured both the catacombs of Priscilla and the Basilica of St. Praxedes.

WOC's actions and events garnered worldwide attention, not the least from the Italian police, who followed and detained the group each time they held an event in St. Peter's Square. They seized their passports and returned them after recording the names and passport information.

Despite this harassment from police, the campaign was a massive success and generated media coverage of the women's ordination movement in more than 100 media outlets around the world, including Associated Press, International Herald Tribune, the major press agencies in Germany and Italy, as well as in media in Austria, Canada, New Zealand, Nicaragua, the U.K., and Vatican City.

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March 25, 2009
15th Annual World
Day of Prayer
for Women's Ordination

2009 Theme:
"Break the Silence on
Women's Ordination.
Shatter the Stained
Glass Ceiling."

To download a toolkit, visit
www.womensordination.org.
To plan an event or for more
information about events in your area,
please contact Erin Saiz Hanna at
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Dear WOC Members,



Have you caught your breath yet from the final months of 2008? Are you feeling refreshed and renewed with the New Year and the changes it has brought? Or has 2009 already caught you in its forward movement? How ever you are feeling in this time, my wish for you is that this issue of *NewWomen, NewChurch* will inspire excitement and confidence in the movement for justice for women in the Catholic Church.

We have many reasons to celebrate, not the least of which that last season was chock full of activism, media coverage, and demonstrating the impact that women’s full inclusion will have in our church and our world.

Our cover story gives you a summary of our demonstration in Rome during the bishops’ Synod on the Word. We have included an overview of our varied activities, a list of our accomplishments, a few pictures, and a letter from a young seminarian that I received via email after Erin Saiz Hanna and I returned. It is powerful and it has inspired hope in those we have shared it with so far, and you can read it on page 4.

The response to our cover story from the last issue, on the participation of Fr. Roy Bourgeois, a Maryknoll priest of thirty-six years, in the ordination of Janice Sevre-Duszynska, long-time WOC activist and Roman Catholic Womanpriest, inspired us to attend the School of the Americas Watch annual event in Georgia in November. Now, more than ever, Catholics of conscience are rising up and taking risks to be public about their support of women’s ordination. View pictures and read an update about Fr. Roy on page 3, and an overview of our participation in the SOA Watch vigil on page 5.

I am overjoyed to announce a new strategy that WOC is currently implementing, inspired by Kate Childs Graham. On page 6, Childs Graham eloquently describes our plan to look more closely at the exclusion of women from governance and decision-

making structures of the church and how that affects women in the international arena.

As a part of our commitment to publicize the stories of women answering their calls to spiritual leadership, you will see two articles: Evelyn Hunt on a new “multimedia docudrama,” presenting five women ministers in Cleveland, followed by a description of Roman Catholic Womanpriest, Judy Lee’s ministry to the economically poor in her neighborhood. A third article recounts the ordinations of three women in Chicago on pages 8 and 9.

As if November did not have enough going on, the International Federation for a Renewed Catholic Ministry (IFRCM) held a meeting in Vienna, Austria. Dagmar Braun Celeste represented WOC at the event, and Evelyn Hunt (former WOC Board President and current Director-at-Large) was instrumental in bringing about WOC’s membership in the coalition. IFRCM originally focused solely on optional celibacy and the creation of a married Roman Catholic priesthood. Hunt and Celeste, the authors of the article, explain the move toward the inclusion of women and the issue of women’s ordination. This meeting was unprecedented in its collaborative nature and inclusion of women’s leadership, and you can read about it on pages 10 and 11.

On March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, WOC will join our sisters and brothers in a global day of prayer and action – the World Day of Prayer for Women’s Ordination. This year, we have chosen the theme, “Break the Silence. Shatter the Stained Glass Ceiling.” To continue raising awareness about the rising number of voices calling for attention to this issue, we are using the name of the campaign that we initiated in October, after learning about the Vatican’s threat to excommunicate Fr. Roy Bourgeois. Participate in this growing movement by organizing an event to celebrate the day. Go to our website to download the free organizing packet. In a climate in which the Vatican has tried to eradicate dissent, this is a way to demonstrate widespread support for ordination and an inclusive and accountable church.

As always, I encourage you to write letters to the editor and send us your input. May this winter and the New Year be a time of rest, renewal, and blessing for you.

In hope for peace through justice,
Aisha S. Taylor

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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Update on Roy: Awaiting Word from the Vatican

On October 21, 2008, the Vatican sent a letter to the Maryknoll community stating that Roy Bourgeois, a Maryknoll priest of thirty-six years, had thirty days to recant his support of women's ordination or he would be automatically excommunicated.

In response, the Women's Ordination Conference initiated a campaign entitled "Break the Silence. Shatter the Stained Glass Ceiling." with Roman Catholics Womenpriests and Call to Action as partners. The campaign included an online petition, the first of which garnered over 3,700 signatures in less than a week. Before the thirty days were up, WOC sent that petition to Pope Benedict XVI, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Apostolic Nuncio to the U.S., Archbishop Pietro Samb, and Maryknoll Superior General, John Sivalon. Since the onset of

the campaign, over 5,000 signatures have been collected. In addition, the National Coalition for American Nuns (NCAN) and WOC sent a combined total of over two hundred names of women religious to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith who, in good conscience, stand with Bourgeois in breaking the silence on women's ordination.

While Bourgeois received the same punishment of *latae sententiae* excommunication as the Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) last May, it is expected that a formal excommunication will take place once the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith responds to the letters sent either in support or in opposition to Bourgeois' actions. Unlike RCWP, Bourgeois had the option to prevent official excommunication by recanting his support. However, since learning of his



On Sunday, December 21, a group of activists met outside St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco to offer prayers for Roy Bourgeois and Cardinal Levada, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who was resting in San Francisco.

pending excommunication, the Maryknoll priest has publically gone on record with his support and maintains he is at peace with his decision.

For ongoing coverage of the campaign or to sign the petition visit www.womensordination.org

Letter to the Editor



Dear WOC,

Our family received our best gift of 2008 a few months ago. Samuel Ivan was born on August 24. He was a small baby at 5 lbs. 15 oz. but he has brought us *tons* of happiness. Samuel is such a happy baby and we've found that it's not at all difficult to get a beautiful smile out of him.

Emily loves being a big sister and seems to think Sam is her own "real-life" baby doll to play with! She turned four years old this month, and she loves the experiences of Japanese culture.

Roger and I are doing well. Roger stays really busy with work. Even with his long nights at the office, we are thankful they are long nights here in Okinawa and not long nights in the Middle East. I stay busy with the two kids and with my volunteer work with the American Women's Welfare Association.

We are loving life in Okinawa. We made one big trip this year to Kyoto, which is a beautiful city with such a rich history. We also use every chance we get to explore right here in Okinawa. We were lucky enough to

show off our island to family that visited this year. We were really fortunate to have my parents come out for a month when Sam was born. I write all this in the hopes of "enticing" more visitors to come out this way!

In closing, we would like to wish everyone many blessings and hope for peace in the New Year.

With love,
Joy Barnes

Joy Barnes is the former Executive Director of WOC.



Go Green with WOC!

In our continuing efforts to keep things digital and dematerialized whenever possible, WOC now offers our members the option to download *New Women, New Church* directly from our website.

If you are an active member, you can get your username and password to log into our "For Members Only" section on our new website by emailing ehanna@womensordination.org and note in the subject: "Go Green." You can also receive membership notices and donation acknowledgements electronically.

If you're not a member, see page 14 for a membership form or see page 5 for renewal and giving options.

.continued from page 1

On the final day of the campaign in St. Peter's Square, WOC activists were detained one final time while handing out literature on women's ordination. When the Italian police were notified that WOC was scheduled to depart for the U.S. the following day, an officer shouted, "Thanks be to God!"

Regarding the synod itself, there was noteworthy advancement for women. For the first time in history, twenty-five women were invited to participate, including six female experts, and nineteen auditors. In addition, for the first time, Catholic bishops discussed the need to restore women's experiences and stories to the lectionary.

Of the fifty-five propositions approved by synod participants, Proposition 17, titled "Ministry of the Word and Women," recommended that "the ministry of lector be opened also to women, so that their role as announcers of the Word may be recognized in the Christian community." While women already act as Scripture readers throughout the Church and especially in the U.S., it has not been officially installed. If the language in this proposition is included in the pope's final



Women's ordination advocates gather outside the Vatican for an inclusive liturgy in support of women's full inclusion into the Roman Catholic Church.

document regarding the synod, this would be a positive step for women in the Catholic Church.

WOC congratulates FutureChurch and thousands of church reform activists, including many WOC activists, who sent postcards to synod delegates in support of these objectives.



Left to right: Naoko Iyori (Japan), Aisha Taylor (USA), Maleen Hinse (Germany), Rose Marie Hudson (USA), Angelika Fromm (Germany), Anne Brown (UK), Jennifer Stark (UK), Annegret Laakmann (Germany), and Erin Saiz Hanna (USA) gather for an international press. Not pictured: Marleen Wijdeveld (Netherlands) and Maria João Sande Lemos (Portugal).

Erin Saiz Hanna is WOC's Assistant Director. To view footage of the October 9th press conference in Rome, visit www.youtube.com/ordainwomen. To view more pictures and read more about the event, visit www.womensordination.org.

Letter from a Young Seminarian

Dear Aisha Taylor,

I am a seminarian studying for the priesthood in Rome. You do not know who I am, but I met you while you were in Rome. I was dressed casually and not wearing my clerical clothes. You handed me one of the WOC cards while I was crossing the street. I simply said thank you and kept on walking, not realizing what it was for at first.

I must tell you that I was very impressed by how you, Erin Hanna, and the other women from WOC made your presence known in Rome in such a positive way. It is important for you to understand that your efforts were a great success, more than you realize. WOC has been out of Rome for almost two weeks now and you are still being talked about at my seminary and I am still seeing your cards and pamphlets around the city. You inspired many women and men about their faith and women's equality within our Church.

I will tell you in complete confidence that many of the young seminarians between the ages of 21-35 years old support (privately, of course) the ordination of Catholic women in the Church. It is mostly the older seminarians and priests that have a lot of difficulty with such an idea.

What impressed me and other seminarians about your group's presence in Rome is the fact that you led the protests in a very respectful and peaceful manner, yet you were very effective and became "the talk of the town."

I can provide you with information about the topics of conversation in the seminary, including the ordination of women. I will say that many of the older priests and seminarians are truly afraid of WOC and their continued success in our Church and culture, mainly because they do not like change. However, many unfortunately, also still hold some very sexist views of women.

One thing I've learned from growing up with sisters is to respect women—always—and I certainly do. I believe that many women would make excellent, holy priests in our Catholic Church. The gift, talents, and charisma that many women could bring to the office of priesthood are innumerable.

On the negative side, as much as you have my support, along with other young seminarians, in regards to WOC and its cause, I do not think the all male priesthood will change in the near future.

However, I do believe it could happen in our life times. There are still just too many

old, set-in-their-ways clergy men still dominating the Church. Times have changed dramatically for women over the years. Women have the ability and the power to reach equality with men in all areas of life and many are doing so.

I truly support you and WOC. Unfortunately, I have to contain my support to a private manner, because I would be kicked out of the seminary for publicly supporting women's ordination. Please forgive me that I cannot support WOC publicly. I look forward to the day when Catholic women from all over the world reign as Roman Catholic priests in a Church so desperately in need of such women.

Please do put my e-mail on your mailing list, if that is possible. And more importantly, thank you for your group's presence in Rome, and how you presented yourself and WOC in a very mature, respectful manner. You truly inspired me and many other young seminarians.

God Bless you,

"A Young Seminarian in Rome"

P.S. You may use my letter in any way possible. As long as it is anonymous, I will not get in trouble by the sexist brass in the seminary.

At the Gates Calling for Justice: WOC at the School of the Americas Watch Vigil

By Erin Saiz Hanna

From November 21-23, the Women's Ordination Conference joined the over 20,000 people gathered in Fort Benning, Georgia, to protest the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formally known as the School of the Americas (SOA).

For nearly sixty years, the SOA has trained over 60,000 Latin American soldiers in torture techniques and violent military tactics that have claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, including religious workers, teachers, and organizers for the rights of the poor.

In response to the 1989 slaying of six Jesuit priests, their co-worker and her teenage daughter in El Salvador, Fr. Roy Bourgeois and fellow activists began the School of the Americas Watch (to educate the public, lobby Congress, and promote nonviolent resistance to the SOA tactics).

For decades, Bourgeois has been a pioneer for social justice. It came as no surprise when he decided to participate in the ordination of his friend and fellow SOAW activist, Janice Sevre-Duszynska on August 9, 2008 in Lexington, Ky. Bourgeois stated "As a Catholic priest – and this is important – I cannot possibly speak out about the injustice of the war in Iraq, about the injustice of the School of the Americas and the suffering it causes, and at the same time be silent about this injustice in my church. I belong to a huge faith community where women are excluded, and I have a responsibility to address this."

During the annual SOA Watch protest and activities, over two thousand activists showed their support and solidarity with Bourgeois by signing onto WOC's "Break the Silence. Shatter the Stained Glass Ceiling" campaign. Many wore signs, t-shirts,



Erin Saiz Hanna, WOC Assistant Director, remembers victims of soldiers trained at the School of the Americas by placing a cross on the SOA gate.

and buttons to show their support, including a group of women religious from Washington State who all wore signs, "Dominicans in Support of Women's Ordination." WOC offered educational materials on women's ordination and hosted a workshop for interested activists.

Aisha Taylor was invited on the main stage to represent WOC. Taylor said: "In a world

divided by poverty, stunned by economic crisis, and continually reeling from sexism, racism, homophobia, and many forms of oppression, it's long overdue for the Vatican to use all of its resources to work toward solutions [to these problems]. When I consider our challenges, I imagine the transformation that could take place if Catholic women were able to fully exercise their leadership. Imagine if women's ministries had the full backing of the church, with all of its financial, legal, and human resources. If they did, we would do noth-



From Left to Right: WOC Executive Director, Aisha Taylor, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, and Janice Sevre-Duszynska.



Erin Saiz Hanna gathers with Dominican women religious calling for women's ordination.

ing less than change the world. It's not simply a matter of justice — the world needs women's leadership."

For more information on how you can break the silence on women's ordination and support for Fr Roy Bourgeois, visit WOC online at ww.womensordination.org. To support the School of the Americas Watch and to help end the violence, visit www.soaw.org.

Erin Saiz Hanna is WOC's Assistant Director.

Support WOC's Ministries...How Can I Help?

Join WOC or renew your membership today!



Visit www.womensordination.org to make a secure donation online.



Mail a check made payable to WOC to PO Box 15057, Washington, DC 20003.



Call the WOC office today at (202) 675-1006.

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Send monthly checks: WOC will provide twelve envelopes for you to mail your monthly check. Simply contact our office and we'll send your donation envelopes.

Getting Over the Brick Wall: International Human Rights Law and Justice for Women

By Kate Childs Graham



Kate Childs Graham

For over thirty years, the church

reform movement has been working to overturn unjust laws and attitudes in the Catholic Church. Though we have done so with strength and passion, eventually we always hit the

same brick wall—the brick wall being, of course, the institutional hierarchy of our church. Sure, we have made cracks in the wall. Sometimes these cracks are immediately spackled and other times we have shook the foundation that the institutional hierarchy stands on. Nevertheless, the brick wall has persevered. But what if there were a way to climb over the brick wall? What if there was a way to put a different kind of pressure on the wall, so that it finally fell?

This way may exist through international human rights law. This may seem like a foreign concept to those of us who are better versed in scripture and canons than international treaties and conventions. However, women around the world have been using international human rights law to gain equal rights in their families, communities, workplaces, governments, and even in their religious communities.

In 1979 the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted. It is the most widely accepted human rights document to date, with only seven UN member states (including the United States) refusing to sign and ratify the convention. In addition to being the most widely accepted human rights document, it is also considered the most radical treaty in the human rights corpus. Its radical equality can be found in Article 5 of the convention, which reads:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

This article is asking states to move past their standard duties of protecting their citizens and their property. It is embellishing the role of states—moving states to inform people's conscience and transform their ideas to align with the spirit of CEDAW. It is asking states to examine the private as well as the public sphere.

Now some would argue—citing the right to religious freedom in human rights law—that religious communities are exempt from this examination. However, the Beijing Platform for Action developed at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women refutes this argument:

Religion, spirituality, and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men.... The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is inalienable and must be universally enjoyed.... However, it is acknowledged that any form of extremism may have a negative impact on women and can lead to violence and discrimination.

With Article 5 setting the tone, CEDAW covers a wide array of women's rights, from rights within the family to equality in the workplace. For the purpose of women's equality in the Catholic Church, we should focus on Article 7, which grants women equality in decision-making and leadership of governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations. Through Articles 5 and 7, we can define women's equality in leadership and decision-making levels in the Catholic Church as a human right.

CEDAW contains reporting and communications mechanisms. Under these mechanisms, states that are party to the convention must submit a report every four years and a CEDAW committee makes recommendations to states based on their progress in terms of women's rights. Individuals, having exhausted all domestic legal avenues, can also file complaints against their states. As previously stated, CEDAW asks states to look at their private sphere, and the Catholic Church operates in this sphere. Hence, these mechanisms could provide an opportunity for individual states to be held accountable for the discriminatory actions of the Catholic Church operating in their country thereby forcing the state to put pressure on the Catholic Church to overturn its discriminatory policies.

So, now that we have claimed women's equality as a human right and discovered how the Catholic Church could be

pressured under international human rights law, what do we, as leaders and members of WOC, do to advance our cause? First, we have to educate ourselves and our partners in the church reform movement about international human rights law. In Fall 2010 WOC will be holding a summit on human rights.

Next, we need to learn from and partner with other women's rights organizations such as the National Organization for Women who have used the channels of international human rights law to advance women's rights around the world.

Once we have done this foundational work, we need to gain a voice in the international human rights community in order to define women's equality in the Catholic Church as a human right. We can gain non-governmental organization (NGO) consultative status at the UN, which would allow us a seat at the table during important meetings. This seat would enable us to submit statements that would define women's equality in the Church as a human right. It would also enable us to submit state shadow reports to the CEDAW committee, highlighting women's inequality in the Catholic Church for the committee members.

With these steps and others, WOC can advance women's causes in the international human rights community. In doing so the hierarchy of the institutional church may well feel increased pressure from the international human rights community. The Catholic Church has a long history of leading, and following the lead, of UN-member states.

WOC is preparing to take these steps to get over the brick wall that is the institutional church, while maintaining its programs that are putting major dents in the wall. I am certain that by putting new pressure on the institutional church, WOC and the church reform movement will finally see women's equality granted in all leadership and decision-making levels of our church.

Kate Childs Graham is a member of the WOC Board of Directors. WOC's Human Rights Project is based on her graduate thesis, The Prohibition of Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church: Transforming the Movement to a Human Rights Framework. Kate writes for ReligionDispatches.org, YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com, and NCRcafe.org and serves on the Call to Action Next Generation Leadership Team.

Five Women Make Waves Cleveland Women at a Crossroads

By Evelyn Hunt

After seventeen years of creating life-enhancing programs for women in search of spiritual and religious renewal, SacredSpace of Cleveland, is once again breaking new ground. To celebrate its 20th year, the not-for-profit women's collective has created a multimedia docudrama entitled "Making Waves" to be presented September 12, 13, and 19, 2009, at Reinberger Auditorium Theater in Cleveland, Ohio. Scripted from oral histories, the stories of five women pioneers in their own denominations will express through multimedia their amazing journeys. Kay Eaton and CeCe Miller, founders of SacredSpace and long-time WOC members, have initiated and developed the project with these women whose compelling stories fueled the efforts.

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the youngest of the five and the first woman bishop in the Ohio Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, attributes her inspiration and path to ministry to the other four women in the project:

The Reverend Kathryn Huey of the United Church of Christ (UCC), who was raised Catholic, felt the strong pull to priesthood and pursued Religious Studies

and teaching at John Carroll University, the Jesuit University in Cleveland. After working on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops report on women and coming to believe the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church would be impossible in her lifetime, she joined the UCC, with the support of her family, and now pastors a church in Cleveland.

The Reverend Georgina Thornton, pastor of an African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cleveland, had a long struggle to answer her call to ministry.

Dr. Reverend Halle Frances Christian, of the United Methodist Church, has a courageous and compelling story of her determination and persistence in seeking ordination.

Reverend Dagmar Braun Celeste, ordained in 2002 as a Roman Catholic Womenpriest, has been excommunicated by the Vatican for her willingness to break through the barriers to ordination and equality that women face in the Roman Catholic Church.

These women are prophetic change makers, pushing past the boundaries women experience in their churches, and giving new life to other women who wish to follow the call of their hearts to serve their

communities as ministers.

Sacred Space is calling on the community to honor these women and applaud their journeys through adversity. This theater production is the perfect form of expression to help us understand more deeply the dreams realized by these five extraordinary women.

Evelyn Hunt served as WOC's President from 2002 to 2006. She is currently a Director-at-Large, representing WOC as a delegate to the National Catholic Ministries Alliance and in the International Federation for a Renewed Catholic Ministry.



Georgina Thornton



Dagmar Braun Celeste



Elizabeth Easton

WOC at 2008 Call To Action Conference

By Laura Singer

The Call To Action 2008 Conference in Milwaukee provided another great opportunity for WOC to connect with members, introduce ourselves to new people, and recruit activists to take action to get women ordained into an inclusive and accountable church.



From left to right: WOC board members Drina Nikola, Theresa Yugar, Laura Singer, with human rights activist Dolores Huerta, and WOC Executive Director Aisha Taylor and Assistant Director Erin Saiz Hanna

Aisha Taylor, WOC's Executive Director, participated in two presentations with the National Catholic Ministries Alliance where panelists shared their experiences of participating in more inclusive Catholic worship communities where women have equal access to leadership and priestly roles. Aisha spoke about the Faith Sharing Communion group in Washington, D.C. that includes WOC members.

Erin Saiz Hanna, WOC's Assistant Director, participated in a session called "Small Faith Communities for Catholics in their 20s and 30s."

WOC hosted two caucuses—one for the Young Feminist Network and one for general WOC membership. At the YFN caucus, over 20 participants discussed WOC's recent programming and issues of direct concern for young adult Catholics.

Over 25 people from around the country attended the general WOC caucus including Dolores Huerta of United Farm Workers



At the colorful and festive WOC booth, staff and board members spoke with hundreds of people and gathered signatures on a petition that enabled activists to "Break the Silence" on women's ordination with Roy Bourgeois and hundreds of women religious.

from Bakersfield, Calif., Joan Hammond, an ordained woman from the Independent Catholic church near D.C. and a number of representatives from the Midwest. WOC

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Excerpt from *Women Find A Way: The Movement And Stories Of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*.
Used with permission of Roman Catholic Womenpriests—USA.

A Priest of the Poor

Judith A. B. Lee

Ordained a priest, Boston, 2008

My call to the priesthood has evolved and grown within my lifelong call to serve as Jesus did. For me this means sacramental ministry with the poor, the ill, the different, and the outcasts of society by virtue of color, caste, sexual orientation, mental or physical illnesses or challenges.

While I have always served, in 2006 I began to set all other things aside to fully discern and enact the call. Early in 2007 I met Bridget Mary Meehan, RCWP, at a house Mass. This was a providential meeting of grace and understanding that plunged me deeper into discernment and service. I continued my work with several families from a mission parish and my own parish, and I returned to my work with those at the very bottom—the homeless and the hungry—in an outdoor feeding ministry initially started by a Lutheran-Episcopal church. It became clear to me that serving wounded people as a priest with the renewed and inclusive Roman Catholic Womenpriests was the road I was called to take.

My vision of ministry was shaped by the love of Jesus as I experienced it in human faces and arms throughout the years. Some of those arms have embraced me and sent me forth, and others have, in their pain, reached out to be lifted up, but all are the presence of Christ. My vision is strongly influenced by the Holy Scriptures and empowered by the Spirit of God/Godde.*

For me, the question is more “Who” than “what” called me to serve the poor, for the work is sometimes so hard that I would run from it if not for Godde’s call. The voice within calls clearly. I hear it sometimes in the night, and when standing in awe of creation as with Moses in the mountains. I hear it by the sea with the disciples, and in community (ekklēsia/“church”) with Mary and Martha and Mary of Magdala. A fire grows in my heart and belly. It is a passion for which I am called to do. Like Moses, it includes a call from Godde’s heart to my own. “I have felt their sufferings,” says God (Ex 3:7). And I feel them, and am almost consumed by them. God’s people become my people. I am one with them. I am prepared to serve. Yet, like Moses, I protested that I cannot possibly do this now.

*Godde is a feminist spelling for the divine.



Pastor Judy Lee reading the Gospel, themed “Jesus Welcomes Everyone” with the Church in the Park.

My early life experiences and later professional training in social work, counseling, theology and ministry equipped me to serve. I was called to love and follow Jesus as a child at my faithful grandmother’s knee. We were poor, living in an inner city, richly multicultural Brooklyn neighborhood. With white flight, it became a black neighborhood, having the presence of a strong church and wonderful pastors and youth group leaders. The mental illness, alcoholism, and poverty in the midst of strength and beauty, both in my own family and in the families of friends, gave me empathy and understanding. Following Pastor Melvin G. Williams, I became a professional social worker, and later a professor and theoretician of social work. I served, taught, and wrote about issues of injustice, and felt a passion for the poor. But there was always a missing piece. I had a pastor’s call, but not yet within the church.

As I moved up in academia, I began to become distanced from the poor. I also moved away from the church, as it moved away from me when I accepted and owned the complexity of my sexuality, painfully left a marriage and, though androgynous, eventually lived with a woman, accepting the stigma and shunning of an open life. I lived as a border dweller, and sometimes an outcast who, come what may, continued to love Jesus.

Then, in the early 1980s, Godde guided my steps daily through Washington Square Park on my way to teach at NYU. There the modern-day “wretched of the earth” slept on the park benches and froze in winter. I began to engage these lonely people in dialogue. I could not sleep. I got up and read the Scriptures. Matthew 25 and Isaiah

58 were open before me. The pages burned as I touched them. I knew that God was calling me, also an outcast, to serve the poorest of the poor. I told Godde that I didn’t know if I could do it, and that I was a strange choice! Still I said “yes.” The next day, I wrote a proposal, and entered the city shelters for women and began my work on many levels. As I moved among the broken women of all sorts in a 150-bed shelter, I looked into their eyes and immediately recognized that social work intervention could not touch lives here, but God’s love would. I would bring love and prayer as much as I would bring my skills. I was blessed in serving. I continued this work in Connecticut, and later in Guyana, South America. It shaped the rest of my life in many unforeseen ways.



Judy Lee celebrating liturgy with her community.

I wrestled with the call again in the early part of 2007, as I realized that God was making a way for ordination as a Roman Catholic woman priest. This was not a “general call,” but specifically so that I could serve the poor, the stranger in the land, and the outcast. I was more than ready to prepare for and move on toward ordination, but a part of me wanted to keep this separate from serving God’s blessed and sometimes difficult people. I told God that I was too old for this kind of work, that I had given much of my life to it and it was time to rest. I argued that southwest Florida, this right-wing playground of the rich, is the last place it could be done as there are no resources or support. There is no fire for the poor unless it is to consume them. I told Jesus that loving God’s precious broken people would hurt too much. (How could I ever say that to Jesus, who gave all, and to the Christ who appears before me in their faces?) I told God that I did not need to



Church in the Park chanting "Come by here, my God, Come by here" as Pastor Judy lays hands on them for healing and blessing.

add a thick outer layer to my feelings about life's losses and unfair changes. I wrestled with Jesus over taking the cup. And finally, I was sick of academic work, and did not want to research or write another paper in my life. I pushed back at the Spirit who pushed and pulled me with love into the work. I know that God was as sick of me as YHWH was of Moses with all his excuses. So God gave me an "Aaron" for support, two or three, and more...many more. I was blessed with a wise, courageous, wonderful RCWP mentor in Bridget Mary; with a strong, insightful, caring ministry mentor in Rev. Becky Robbins-Penniman, an Episcopal priest; and by my side supporting me in the work was Joe Irvin, a CORPUS priest. I recognized that Godde had provided what I would need to answer the call. Is this not a miracle?

I bring a heart and a spirit that can only be filled by Godde. I bring my radical love, a passion for justice, and a desire to follow Jesus who showed us how to bring the reign of God on earth. Formally, I bring theological and ministerial study with a Doctor of Ministry Degree from Global Ministries University and the guidance of qualified mentors that I add to my Doctor of Social Welfare Degree from Yeshiva University and a Masters of Science Degree from Columbia University School of Social Work. I am Professor Emerita at the University of Connecticut School of Social



Church members call Judy Lee to be ordained at dedication ceremony.

Work. A full professor for many years, I bring twenty-seven years of teaching social work on all levels. This includes mentoring divinity and ministerial students from Yale Divinity School, and clergy and religious from various places; forty-plus years of social work and clinical counseling practice,

and decades of parish work with youth, families, and visitation ministry. I also offer the books, articles, and poetry that I have written and published to the service of the kin-dom.

I have been called by a diverse local community, and supported by that community and by my communities throughout the United States and internationally. One of the pastors of my youth, David Ver Nooy, and peers of that group are with me still. In September of 2007, they gathered in a New York church and laid hands on me, praying for the Spirit's indwelling for this journey. Joe Irvin co-pastors with me, and I deeply appreciate his ongoing presence. The Lamb of God Lutheran-Episcopal Congregation, and two prophetic and inspiring pastors – Walter Fohs and Becky Robbins-Penniman – working in a discipleship of equals, emerged to support and co-sponsor The Church In The Park. God miraculously restored my life companion, Judy Beaumont, a former Benedictine Sister, after a battle with leukemia, shares in my work fully with different and much needed gifts. And there are more than forty volunteers for the Friday night ministry. We implement a feeding and worship program, now serving almost one hundred people a week, which includes ministry on all levels of material and spiritual needs. And every

continued on page 11

The Power of Community Ritual

By Katy Zatsick

In 2002 seven women were ordained on the Danube River, which began the movement now called Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP). I have attended seven ordinations of women, including two in Rochester, New York, and one in Canada, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, and now, for the first time, in Chicago.

The Chicago ceremony was held on All Saints' Day at St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Lincoln Park, with splendid music and nearly 400 people in attendance. The most poignant moments were during the part of the ritual, the "Laying on of Hands." This is done in complete silence. First, presiding bishop Dana Reynolds laid her hands on the four ordinands, then all invited priests and clergy followed suit, as did the members of the congregation who were invited to do so by each ordinand.

The congregation became silent, and the quiet deepened as each of the persons



From left to right: Mary Smith (WOC board member), Linda Wilcox, Barbara Zeman, Alta Jacko, and Mary Styne

called forth gently laid his or her hands on the head of each woman. Blessing upon blessing as we decended into the reality of the kingdom of Godde was being made manifest within us and among us. What a gift of peace. In the quiet stillness of my soul, Godde's love poured out and forth to all whom shared that Sacred space.

It was the experience of Christmas and Easter and reconciliation and healing all at the same time. It was a fullness of being. That wonderful gift of the reign of Godde was made manifest through the People of Godde.

That day, I invited a young man to join the RCWP program. Matthew had told me, "People say I should become a priest, but they (the Roman Catholic hierarchy) wouldn't want me because of what I do." Matthew is homeless and has dedicated his life of ministry to "opening the doors of the church to those most vulnerable." Let us work to renew the Roman Catholic priestly ministry so that all who come experience inclusion and the love of Godde for each of us.

Katy Zatsick has been a member of the Women's Ordination Conference for 30 years. Katy was a WOC board member from 1999 to 2005 (then known as Katy Scott). She has experienced a call to priesthood since the early 1980's.

Nade de Turbe (Let Nothing Disturb You)

By Evelyn Hunt and Dagmar Braun Celeste

The name of a coalition can truly make a difference. From the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests in 1985 to the North Atlantic Federation for a Renewed Catholic Priesthood in 2004 to the International Federation for a Renewed Catholic Ministry (IFRCM) in 2008, wives, WOC, and women priests were at the heart of growth and expanded inclusivity.

In his report to CORPUS on the name change, founder and ambassador Anthony Padovano wrote, "The mandatory exclusion of marriage for all church leaders, consciously or not, made a dreadful statement about the value of women and family life."

Still, it took until the IFRCM Congress that took place November 6-9, 2008 in Vienna, Austria, to fully include women in the leadership ranks of the married priests movement. With the election of Michaelita Quinn (co-President of the Federation of Christian Ministries) and Andrea Johnson (ordained priest, former WOC Executive Director, and a co-founder of Women's Ordination Worldwide) to the shared vice presidency of the IFRCM, we have finally reached inclusion.

In his report Padovano continued, "it is instructive to note how our liturgical celebrations have changed. In 1985, the Congress opened with liturgy celebrated by a canonical, celibate priest, not formally part of the Federation." By 2008 a Roman Catholic woman bishop was invited to preside.

To begin the Congress in Vienna, William J. Manseau gave a history of the collaboration between married male priests and women priests in the U.S. That was followed by Bishop Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger's inspiring presentation on Roman Catholic women priests' ministries, including some of her own experiences as bishop. To witness women in action serving each other and the church, was a moving experience for all. The woman's touch did not end there.

The service began with the Taizé version of Teresa of Avila's "Nada de Turbe" and ended with the Magnificat. The readings called us to be the salt of the earth and to underline the point, Mayr-Lumetzberger brought small, hand-sewn pouches full of salt crystals from her home region the Salzkammergut. The liturgy was simple yet inspiring and moving. RCWP Dagmar Braun Celeste co-presided with Mayr-Lumetzberger.

One of the most radical of the talks of the conference was given by Andre Lascaris, a Dutch Dominican, and author of the document "The Church and the Ministry," in which he called for people to select ministers and ask their local bishop to confirm them for these ministries. Lascaris claims that the validity of the Eucharistic service would not be diminished even if bishops refused to confirm such ministers. He called the report a "cri de coeur"—a cry from the heart. His hope is to promote a dialogue in the church on how to devote ourselves to the salvation of people and to become a church with a future. The report is written in an irenic style and is not polemic. Quoting St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians Lascaris said, "the people of God—they are the body of Christ. In this body everybody is equal and different. Leadership is one of the gifts, one of the charisms. It cannot exist by itself; leaders need a following and community needs leadership."

Leonard Swidler also discussed the necessity of participation of all, calling for democracy within the church. He proposed a new constitution for the church and said, "community action without the inner spiritual dimension of the carefully thought through—and perhaps even fought through—reflection and choice of the right concepts, insights, concerns as reflected in the precisely written words, will drift into arbitrariness and even tyranny." With this statement, Swidler made the case for a newly written constitution for the church.

John Raymaker called for steps we can take to bring about a Third Vatican Council, to complete the reforms set into place with Vatican II and to address the issues not confronted in the 1960s. Tom and Michaelita Quinn discussed the pluriformity of ministries represented in the FCM community. During Manseau and Mayr-Lumetzberger's presentation, Celeste described WOC's programs and its three ministries: Prophetic Obedience, Walking with Women Called and Ministry of Irritation.

Perhaps the most practical ideas came from Helmuth Schueller, former Vicar General of the Vienna diocese and now a parish priest and author. In 2006 he launched a parish initiative protesting parish mergers and closings throughout Austria. Hundreds of local pastors signed the initiative and directly following the Congress, Schueller travelled to Rome to meet with those responsible for these policies. They were only



Acting President Lambert van Gelder is at the head of the table at the far end. On the right are four of the six U.S. delegates who attended this gathering to represent their member organizations. Starting two in from the left: Dagmar Celeste representing WOC; Bill Manseau representing CORPUS; Peter Brennan, representing International Society of the Apostles Sts. Peter, Thomas, and Mary Magdalene; and Anthony Padovano, representing CORPUS.



U.S. delegates dined with Roman Catholic woman bishop from Austria, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, who later led the liturgy. From the left around the table is Tom Quinn, of the Federation of Christian Ministries (FCM); Peter Brennan; Bill Manseau; and Anthony Padovano.

received after the pope let it be known that they should be heard. For weeks following these consultations in Rome, the Austrian press covered the effort and featured stories on all sorts of church reform needs, often as front-page news.

Dagmar Braun Celeste served as Ohio's First Lady from 1983 to 1991. She now lives in Cleveland, Ohio and continues to work with religious, philanthropic, and artistic organizations. In 2002 she was among the first seven women to be ordained a Roman Catholic Womenpriest on the Danube River.

Evelyn Hunt served as WOC's President from 2002 to 2006. She is currently a WOC Director-at-Large, representing WOC as a delegate to the National Catholic Ministries Alliance and in the International Federation for a Renewed Catholic Ministry.

Job Announcement: Executive Director

Anticipated Start Date: Early June 2009

Position Title: Executive Director

Organizational Description: Women's Ordination Conference is a national non-profit organization that works to ordain women as priests, deacons, and bishops into an inclusive Catholic church.

Position Summary: To give direction and leadership toward the achievement of the organization's philosophy, mission, strategy, and its annual goals and objectives.

Reports to: Board of Directors

Major Functions:

- **Program and Service Delivery** - Oversees design, performance, implementation and quality of programs and services to members and other interested organizations.
- **Media and Public Relations** - Assures the organization and its mission, programs and services are consistently presented in strong, positive image to relevant stakeholders
- **Fundraising** - Plans and implements organizational fundraising, including identifying resource requirements, researching funding sources, establishing strategies to approach donors, submitting proposals and administering fundraising records and documentation.

- **Human Resource Management** - Effectively manages the human resources of the organization according to authorized personnel policies and procedures that fully conform to current law's and regulations
- **Fiscal Responsibility and Financial Management** - Recommends yearly budget for Board approval and prudently manages organization's resources within those budget guidelines according to current law's and regulations.
- **Board Collaboration** - Works with Board of Directors on programming, fundraising and other activities by collaborating with Board members and interfacing between Board and staff.
- Other duties as assigned

Qualifications:

- Committed to WOC's mission to ordain women into an inclusive Catholic church
- Bachelor's degree
- Administration, fundraising and finance management skills
- Basic knowledge of current Catholic issues, women's issues in the Catholic Church and feminist theology
- Excellent communication, writing and presentation skills
- Demonstrated commitment to the principles of diversity and inclusion
- Self-motivated with a positive attitude
- Able to travel

Application Process:

Submit: a) resume, b) three references, c) a 1 page cover letter, and d) a separate document (5 pages max) with your responses to the following questions:

1. WOC's mission is to advocate and pray for the ordination of women as deacons, priests and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church. What is your vision of women priests within an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church? What are your views on the different forms of and paths to ordination: contra legem ordinations (e.g. RCWP/ECCJ); small faith community ordinations; view that all are priests through baptism and no need for formal ordination; people working within the institutional church to get the Vatican to ordain women. How WOC should promote the goals of each of these constituencies?
2. Describe your leadership and organization styles. How would you lead and manage the WOC staff (Assistant Director, Office Manager, Consultants for Bookkeeping and Fundraising) to accomplish WOC's strategic goals? What conflict resolution process or strategies would you use?

3. Describe an event that you worked on that was covered by the media and what specific actions you took to get your message covered by all forms of media. What went well? What needed to be improved? How would you promote WOC's mission through the media?
4. Tell us about your experience in fundraising in soliciting donations in person, by direct mail, and writing grants. Our current budget is about \$200,000 a year. What are your ideas for building and sustaining WOC's donor base?

Send all materials via e-mail by **February 15, 2009** to Kate Childs Graham, WOC Board member, at kchildsgraham@gmail.com.

WOC fully and actively supports equal opportunity for all people and encourages women, people of color and LGBTQ applicants to submit proposals.

WOC at 2008 Call To Action Conference...continued from page 7

staff described WOC's recent programs and campaigns using exciting technology. A rich discussion followed, including reasons to stay in the church, suggestions for outreach and details of recent WOC actions at the Rome Synod.

At the WOC booth in the exhibition area, attendees engaged in inspiring conversations and signed WOC's petition to support Roy Bourgeois. People appreciated the opportunity to take tangible action.

Laura Singer is the President of WOC's National Board of Directors. She has been an active WOC member for nearly 15 years.

A Priest of the Poor...continued from page 9

week we experience the miracle of the loaves and fishes, as the crowd swells and still we have just enough prepared by many loving hands. I am filled with thanksgiving.

Each week, as I lead the worship service in the park, a core group of elders surround me. I stop before the reading of the Gospel. I look around at the rainbow of broken, yet hopeful faces and our eyes meet. I see the grungy clutter of the city park, the cars speeding by with great noise, the children on the swings, the men playing basketball behind us, the smells of a warm dinner and

yesterday's beer spilled on the tables and ground permeating the air. I ask, "Where are we standing?" The people respond, "On Holy Ground!" We then chant the hymn by that name. The Breath of the Holy Spirit claims and purifies it, in the same way our very lives are claimed. So the fire in my heart continues, and the Spirit still speaks to the church, and to this servant.

To purchase a copy of Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, visit www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org.

Women's Ordination Timeline

In response to the claim that women have never been ordained in the history of the church, we would like to highlight the Christian communities who have ordained women. Taking a little stroll on a few websites, we reprint some findings here, for the record.

- The earliest abbesses were ordained for specific ministries. It was only later that they were blessed by their local bishop.
- A 3rd or 4th century burial site on the Greek island of Thera contains an epitaph referring to Epiktas, a "presbytis" (priest or presbyter). Epiktas is a woman's name.
- 451 Council of Chalcedon Canon nr. 15 of the Council states: "No woman under 40 years of age is to be ordained a deacon, and then only after close scrutiny." Apparently, the council wanted to start restricting the ordination of deaconesses, which must have been a common practice at the time. Anyone ordained to the Holy Order of Deacon would be eligible for later ordination to the priesthood.
- Until the 9th century the Eastern Church ordained women deacons.
- In 1660, Margaret Fell (1614 - 1702) published a famous pamphlet to justify equal roles for men and women in the Quaker tradition.
- Early 1800's: A fundamental belief of the Society of Friends (Quakers) has always been the existence of an element of God's spirit in every human soul. Thus all persons are considered to have inherent and equal worth, independent of their gender. This led naturally to an opposition to sexism, and an acceptance of women ministers.
- 1853: Antoinette Brown was ordained by the Congregationalist Church. However, her ordination was not recognized by the denomination. She quit the church and later became a Unitarian. The Congregationalists later merged with others to create the United Church of Christ.
- 1863: Olympia Brown was ordained by the Universalist denomination, in spite of a last-moment case of cold feet by her seminary which feared adverse publicity. She later became a Unitarian. After a decade and a half of service as a full-time minister, she became a part-time minister in order to devote more time to the fight for women's rights and universal suffrage.
- 1865: Salvation Army is founded and has always ordained both men and women.



This row of women shows Theodora, the bishop of the Church of St. Praxedis in 820 A.D., shoulder to shoulder with her predecessor St. Praxedis. Both women wear Episcopal crosses. The other two women depicted, continuing to the right, are Mary, Mother of Jesus, and St. Pudentiana.

- 1880: Anna Howard Shaw was the first woman ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church, which later merged to form the United Methodist Church.
- 1889: The Nolin Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church ordained Louisa Woosley.
- 1889: Ella Niswonger was the first woman ordained in the United Brethren church.
- 1892: Anna Hanscombe is believed to be the first woman ordained by the parent bodies that formed the Church of the Nazarene in 1919.
- 1909: The Church of God (Cleveland, TN) began ordaining women.
- 1911: Ann Allebach was the first Mennonite woman to be ordained at the First Mennonite Church of Philadelphia.
- 1914: Assemblies of God was founded and ordained its first woman clergy.
- 1917: The Congregationalist Church (England and Wales) ordained their first woman. Its successor is the United Reformed Church. They now consider it sufficient grounds for refusing ministry training if a potential candidate is not in favor of the ordination of women.
- 1920's: Some Baptist denominations and the United Reformed Church in the UK begin to ordain women.
- 1922: The Jewish Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis stated that "Woman cannot justly be denied the privilege of ordination."
- 1922: The Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren granted women the right to be licensed into the ministry, but not to be ordained with the same status as men.
- 1930: A predecessor church of the Presbyterian Church (USA) ordained a woman as an elder for the first time.
- 1935: Regina Jonas was ordained privately by a German rabbi.
- 1936: United Church of Canada.
- 1947: Czechoslovak Hussite Church.
- 1948: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark.
- 1949: Old Catholic Church (in the U.S.)
- 1956: A predecessor church of the Presbyterian Church (USA) ordained its first woman minister.
- 1956: Maud K. Jensen was the first woman to receive full clergy rights and conference membership in the Methodist Church.
- 1958: Women ministers in the Church of the Brethren were given full ordination with the same status as men.
- 1960: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sweden
- In 1961, the Universalists and Unitarians joined to form the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). The UUA became the first large denomination to have a majority of female ministers.
- 1967: Presbyterian Church in Canada.
- 1971: Anglican communion, Hong Kong. Joyce Bennett and Jane Hwang were the first regularly ordained priests.
- 1972: Swedenborgian Church.
- 1972: Sally Priesand became the first woman rabbi to be ordained by a theological seminary. She was ordained in the Jewish Reform tradition.
- 1970's: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- 1974: Methodist Church in the UK.
- 1974: Sandy Eisenberg Sasso became the first woman rabbi to be ordained within the Jewish Reconstructionist movement.
- 1976: Episcopal Church (11 women were ordained in Philadelphia before church laws were changed to permit ordination).

John Shelby Spong. *Jesus for the Non Religious*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2007. 315 pages.

Reviewed by Connie Molbeck

If you believe in a literal translation of the Bible, read no further unless you are willing to have your deepest beliefs challenged. In his latest book, *Jesus for the Non Religious*, Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong debunks every myth about the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth. In the end, he leaves us with a Jesus whose connection to the divine teaches all how to become more human.

Spong, who describes himself as "God intoxicated," spends the first two thirds of the book showing how eighty-four percent of the actions and words of Jesus, including the birth in a stable, the star of Bethlehem, miracles, the resurrection, and the ascension are derived from Jewish Scripture. He speculates this happened orally in the synagogue, as stories about Jesus were told and embellished during the forty years between his death and Mark's first gospel.

So what is left of our beliefs? Spong thinks most "theism" is not about God, it is about human fear and weakness. Since the beginning of time humans have created gods to help them cope with fear of death and disaster, to explain creation, to define

morality, to justify every prejudice. "It is this claim to possess the absolute truth that keeps anxiety in check," Spong states, and we humans are, by nature, anxious people.

Spong says too much of Christian faith is rooted, not in the beauty of creation, but in the "presumed depravity of human corruption," and that we often express anger and prejudices generated by our "denigrated status as Christians;" believing we are sinful people who would be punished forever without the torture and death of Jesus to redeem us. Luckily, this kind of angry theism is dying. He feels churches spend far too much energy "defending the indefensible," including the Catholic Church's denial of full ministerial rights to women, rather than helping their flocks open up to the "transcendent dimension of life and love that we call God."

For Spong, "It was the full humanity of Jesus that allowed his followers to perceive divinity in him." Jesus broke all tribal boundaries, loved every form of outcast, broke patriarchal customs and Sabbath laws. Jesus asks us to lay down our own tribal securities and prejudices. "Divinity is

seen in the fullness of humanity when limits disappear and hatreds fade and a new creation emerges."

Spong devotes considerable time to women's issues, including the relegation of women to second-class status throughout history, and particularly in the church, and gives a number of examples of Jesus stepping outside that model.

This book resonates with me because I have always seen my faith as less mystical, "get into heaven" oriented, and more as a guideline for how to live. My Catholic faith life has been mentored by Hindu Mahatma Gandhi, who seems to have understood the message of Jesus better than many Christians, by Baptist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, and Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh. The Jesus I know and love challenges us to rise above selfish concerns, even in the face of torture, death, or excommunication, who loved his tormentors and killers, and teaches us to do the same. It is a powerful message if we could ever dare to live it.

Connie Molbeck is a peace and justice activist in Racine, Wis.

Women's Ordination Timeline...continued

- 1976: Anglican Church in Canada ordained six female priests.
- 1976: The Rev. Pamela McGee was the first female ordained to the Lutheran ministry in Canada.
- 1977: Anglican Church of New Zealand ordained five female priests.
- 1979: The Reformed Church in America (though women had been admitted to the offices of deacon and elder in 1972).
- 1983: An Anglican woman was ordained in Kenya.
- 1983: Three Anglican women were ordained in Uganda.
- 1984: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints authorized the ordination of women. This is the second largest Mormon denomination; it is now called The Community of Christ.
- 1985: From the *New York Times* for Feb. 14, 1985: "After years of debate, the worldwide governing body of Conservative Judaism has decided to admit women as rabbis. The group, the Rabbinical Assembly, plans to announce its decision at a news conference...at the Jewish Theological Seminary..." Amy Eilberg became the first female rabbi.
- 1985: The first women deacons were ordained by the Scottish Episcopal Church.
- 1988: Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.
- 1990: Anglican women are ordained in Ireland.
- 1992: Church of England.
- 1992: Anglican Church of South Africa.
- 1994: The first women priests were ordained by the Scottish Episcopal Church.
- 1995: Seventh-day Adventists. Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, VA ordained three women in violation of the denomination's rules.
- 1995: The Christian Reformed Church voted to allow women ministers, elders, and evangelists.
- 1998: General Assembly of the Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Anglican Church in Japan).
- 1998: Guatemalan Presbyterian Synod.
- 1998: Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands.
- 1998: Some Orthodox Jewish congregations started to employ female "congregational interns." "Although these 'interns' do not lead worship services, they perform some tasks usually re-
- served for rabbis, such as preaching, teaching, and consulting on Jewish legal matters."
- 1999: Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil (ordination as either clergy or elders).
- 2000: The Mombasa diocese of the Anglican Church of Kenya.
- 2000: The Church of Pakistan ordained its first women deacons. It is a united church which dates back to the 1970 local merger of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans and other Protestant denominations.
- 2007: The Worldwide Church of God, a denomination with about 860 congregations worldwide decided to allow women to serve as pastors and elders.

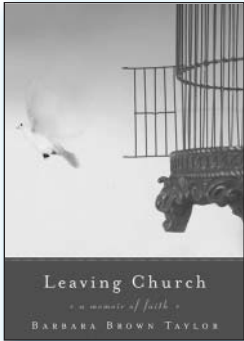
This timeline was put together by Diana Wear of the Ministry of Irritation. She has a day job in the Office of History of Science and Technology at UC Berkeley and she lives in Richmond, Calif.

Sources:

http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Chronology_Ordination.htm;
<http://www.religioustolerance.org/femclrg13.htm>; and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordination_of_women

**Barbara Brown Taylor. *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith.*
San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006. 235 pp. \$ 23.95 (hardcover).**

Reviewed by Diana Wear



WOC readers may be familiar with Barbara Brown Taylor's many books on a plethora of topics: sermons, God, faith journey, science and religion, and more. She is a gifted writer and a person of deep faith. Her extensive

experience, knowledge, and beautiful writing weave together an exquisite story in this latest memoir, *Leaving Church*. Though the book has been around for a while, this is a keeper, and an important book for the Roman Catholic women's ordination movement. Taylor lived her life as a priest first working in a big church, and then in a small church setting, all the while

gaining keen insights into both the beauties that abound as well as the traps and shortcomings of each. Adding to this commentary is a story that is told by a woman of spiritual maturity and psychological health so it lends an even greater credibility.

For those women who experience a call to priesthood, you will find yourself in good company with Taylor. Her call is clear and she explored it to the fullest as an Episcopalian priest. Her memoir begins as she is about to leave her job in a large parish in Atlanta to a "dream" parish out in the countryside where she and her husband could live closer to nature in a rural setting. Though Taylor finds her dream church in many ways, eventually she suffers from burnout, and after five years, leaves that church too. Fortunately for us, though, she doesn't just collapse after her burnout—she is still able to share with us her profound reflections and critique.

The priesthood in the Episcopalian Church has much similarity to the Roman Catholic priesthood, even without the discrimination by gender or marital status. Taylor gives a thorough analysis as an insider and as a person of faith that reveals what many WOC women have observed from our beginning—the problems of an assembly not being called to more responsibility, the problem of the priest being too central, and the priest having too much power (from its founding, WOC's mission statement has called for a renewed priesthood). The following is Taylor's observation about her own role: "[T]here may also be something wrong with giving one person so much power, so that the starring role in the drama goes to the same person every week.... Week after week, I was permitted to stand up in the special clothes and talk while everyone else sat quietly and

continued next page

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I am called to ordination. Yes No Maybe I have included names and addresses of friends who might be interested in WOC.
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Upcoming events

February

February 13, 2009: Washington, DC: Defying Rome, Finding Peace: An Evening with Fr. Roy Bourgeois and trail-blazing Muslim feminist Asra Nomani: Refreshments and silent auction at 7:30 pm, Talk at 8 pm: All Souls Church, Unitarian, 1500 Harvard St. NW, Washington. (General admission \$35, students \$25) To RSVP, contact Katie at katie@interfaithradio.org.

February 24, 2009: New York City: Taking Back God: American Women Reclaiming Religion with Aisha Taylor at 8:15 pm, Lexington Avenue at 92nd St., New York City. For more information, visit www.womensordination.org.

February 25: Silver Spring, MD: Women's Ritual at WATER: This group meets at WATER on Wednesdays at 7:30pm. The WATER office will be open at 7:00pm for tea and conversation. RSVP to annabeth@hers.com or call 301.589.2509.

March

March 10 at 7.30pm: Washington, DC: WATER Moon Sisters: Moon Sisters gather on the Mall near the Smithsonian Metro stop, east exit. Email annabeth@hers.com to RSVP and join the Moon Sisters email list.

March 11, 2009: Silver Spring, MD: Contemplative Prayer at WATER: This group meets at WATER on Wednesdays at 7.30pm. The WATER office will be open at 7.00 pm for tea and conversation. RSVP to annabeth@hers.com or call 301.589.2509.

March 25, 2009: 15th Annual World Day of Prayer for Women's Ordination: To plan an event or for more information about events in your area, contact Erin at ehanna@womensordination.org or at 202.675.1006.

April

April 19, 2009: California: Episcopal Ordinations: For more information, visit www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org

April 26, 2009: Philadelphia, PA: RCWP Ordination

May

May 15th - May 17th, 2009: Bethesda, Maryland: National Gathering Intentional Eucharistic Communities 2009 - Embracing and Shaping Our Future: The early registration deadline is February 15 and all registrations must be received by April 1. To register for more information, visit <http://www.intentionaleucharisticcommunities.org>

May 16, 2009: Los Gatos, CA: RCWP Ordination

May 30, 2009: Portland, Oregon: RCWP Ordination

June

June 6, 2009: Atlanta, GA: RCWP Ordination: For more information, visit www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org

June 13, 2009: 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 <http://www.futurechurch.org/newsletter/bridgingthegap.htm>.

August

August 2009: Midwest: RCWP Ordination date to be announced.

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

Book Review...continued

listened. Week after week, they heard the gospel filtered through my sensibilities.... If I sometimes felt like a hostile parent and my parishioners like over managed children, it was not all our fault. We needed a different way of being together before God, shaped more like a circle than a pyramid. We needed to ditch the sheep paradigm. We needed to take turns filling in for Jesus, understanding that none of us was equal to the task to which all of us had been called. We needed to share the power." (pp. 162-163)

Taylor also talked about the need for the church to critique itself, which she apparently did not feel was possible in her role as a priest. Catholics have that wonderful notion from Vatican II called *ecclesia semper reformanda* which means the church is always

reforming itself. Alas, we, too, see how little that is done in our own church. A case in point is how a priest like Fr. Roy Bourgeois risked excommunication for airing his disagreement with the church's practice to ban women's ordination. But it isn't just about church law or dogma. After Taylor had left parish ministry she remarked that she had suddenly felt the space and freedom to read Scripture with new eyes and question the institutional church in ways she never would while in the role of priest. She was able to see that Mother Church did not have the motivation to "raise questions for which she [the church] had not answers" or "might cause the faithful to lose confidence in her" but also, "why waste valuable time rehashing things that had been settled centuries ago." More to the

point however, Taylor just wanted to seek "some way to stay related to her [Mother Church] that did not require [her] to stay a child." (pp. 174-175)

Taylor needed to move out of that church role in order to practice her faith anew. And yet through it all she continued to grow in her relationship with God, with other people of faith, with non-believers, with her church, and with the world. Her story is moving and gracefully expressed. Read it and take her challenges to heart—they will feed your soul.

Diana Wear is trained, formed, and educated to be a Roman Catholic priest, though she has not chosen ordination at this time. She writes for us from Richmond, Calif.

WOC Merchandise

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