



A Quarterly Newsletter of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

Just A Gesture

By Mary E. Hunt

When I was in seminary studying for the priesthood we read an article entitled "Training the Muscles that Minister." As I recall, it encouraged us to work on gestures that would be effective when we presided at liturgy. I always chuckled at the title because it seemed so very masculine, sort of like injecting a little macho into the mass. In fairness, I think it was a way of saying that gestures are not trivial when it comes to religion, a position I have come to appreciate.

Needless to say, as a Catholic woman prepared for ordination, I have not needed that aspect of my training very often. But at the bishops' meeting in Dallas focused on priest pedophilia, I kept wishing that the men gathered there had read the piece and heeded it. I kept waiting for a gesture, a crack in the armor, an exception to the rule, a tad of gumption, a gutsy guy breaking from the pack to do the right thing by the victim/survivors and their families.

I did not expect any bishops to walk six blocks to attend a feminist Eucharist

Nor did I watch the door with baited breath as a panel of women discussed ordination. We agreed that ordaining women is an important gesture of justice. But we insisted on critical reshaping of ministry lest the move reinforce the clerical structures that spawned the cover-ups and pay-offs. Jimmy Breslin came and CNN filmed all of the presentations, but the bishops were too preoccupied with their own ordination problems—starting with massive law suits and an implicit no confidence vote cast by the laity with their wallets—to know the panel was happening. Had they mastered the art of gestures, they might have sent a very visible observer because one day these fellows will serve next to their ordained sisters. Indeed, seven Catholic women were ordained, albeit illicitly according to patriarchal canon law, in Austria in July 2002, in a gesture that signals serious moves toward change.

I held out a moment of hope for a gesture when scores of Catholics joined in prayer at one hotel and processed to where the bishops

*They have missed the heart of the matter—
letting the intangibles carry the message.*

celebrated by the Women-Church Convergence. After all, they were busy figuring out ways to keep the word "cleric" out of their document on children lest it apply to them rather than just to deacons and priests. Incredibly, they gave no concrete sign that Cardinal Bernard Law and others had committed grave injustices when they took the word of their priests over their parishioners, when they disregarded professional advice and reassigned serial pedophiles to unsuspecting parishes.

were staying. It was a real procession with banners, singing and a quick stop at the local cathedral for good measure. It had the tint of a gesture. But I wanted one from the bishops, a sign that they, too, were religious enough to let a sign speak powerful words. That is what religious people do.

I waited as the procession ended in a vigil across from their hotel. I wanted just one bishop to come out and join us for a song or two. Happily, several of the nuns who were

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Intern and Visiting Scholar Opportunities

WATER is accepting applications for Intern and Visiting Scholar opportunities for Fall 2002 and Winter/Spring 2003. For an application form, check www.hers.com/water or contact WATER at 301-589-2509. Help get the word out to students and seniors alike.



Feminist Eucharist, Dallas, TX: (l. to r.) Bridget Mary Meehan, Diann L. Neu, Ruth McDonough Fitzpatrick, and Kay Norton Haughey.

Editorial

Religious pluralism is more than a catch phrase. It is a reality with hundreds of religious groups dotting the U.S. landscape that used to hold only Judaism and Christianity, with Catholics and Protestants eyeing each other warily. Islam is now the fastest growing major tradition with Buddhist, Hindu and New Age groups taking their place among the many. The choice to be religious and how has never been wider.

WATER participates with several dozen groups in the Women's Networks in Multireligious America of the Pluralism Project of Harvard University directed by Diana Eck. This is a useful forum for learning from and working with women who are committed to being religious in new ways while rooted in our respective (and respected) traditions.

Professor Eck's book, *A New Religious America*, is must reading before one tries to debate the recent California court decision to delete the 1950's addition, "under God," to the Pledge of Allegiance. Regardless of how the appeals process goes, the decision wakes us up to the fact that we not only have different ideas of the divine, but we are also not all persuaded that we live under (maybe through, within, alongside?) any divinity. How this new religious reality will be reflected in our common life remains to be seen.

Many religious professionals—whether rabbis, ministers, theologians, counselors or religious educators—were trained for earlier times. Each of us was well schooled in our own faith, taught to work with "our" people according to the customs and polity of our tribe. No one imagined the need to minister more generically, as it were, to offer solace, information, accompaniment and support for those who see the world quite differently than we do. That is one of the challenges of contemporary ministry which all training, including feminist approaches, must now meet. This is not easy and it is not trivial. Religious women of many faiths are leading the way.

This does not mean that rabbis will be handling confirmations for busy bishops, nor imams preaching at Rosh Hashanah services. If the Women's Networks group is an example, it means that we will learn by listening and doing together. Then, when we come to the tough issues, for example, the Middle East, we will be more inclined to say to one another, as was said so poignantly at our last meeting, "What do you want from me?" rather than "This is how it will be." Hopefully, it will make a world of difference.

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but, alas, it was too much to ask.*

Just A Gesture

(Continued from page 1)

observers at the meeting found their way across the street. A hint of hope. But no bishops. I was not surprised, but felt a certain pity for their spiritual poverty. They have missed the heart of the matter—letting the intangibles carry the message.

Lots of other religious groups are vexed by this gesture business. In a recent Maryland case, a transgender Methodist minister, the Rev. Rebecca A. Steen, turned in her credentials rather than struggle to overcome opposition to her new gender status. Allegedly charges of incompetence against her sprang from issues unrelated to her gender change and events before her voluntary leave of absence to deal with her transition. But absent a gesture from the United Methodist Church that trans people are welcome in ministry, it is a hard case to make. In light of ministers who have come out against such a policy, it is clear that some religious institutions can be tougher than the rest of society on difference. The absence of a gesture can be a gesture.

Religious gestures can be risky business. In the aftermath of September 11, a Missouri Synod Lutheran priest, the Rev. David Benke, Atlantic district president of that denomination, participated in an interfaith service in Yankee Stadium. He is now paying with his job for what he surely considered to be a good pastoral move. His opponents accuse him of syncretism, having shared the stage with Jewish, Hindu and Muslim colleagues even though he prayed in the name of Jesus. What more do they want? Like the Catholic bishops, apparently these Lutherans have gestures confused with dogma.

When I saw footage of the bishops' closing session, the only visible sign of change being their white cassocks and red hats instead of black suits, I realized the gesture that was necessary. They needed to throw open the doors of their hotel meeting room, cast out their security guards and badge checkers just for a few minutes, and invite everyone in to pray, maybe even celebrate the Eucharist. It

would have been so Catholic, and they would have seemed so religious.

If I had been doing their public relations, I would have encouraged them to forsake the dressy outfits for street clothes. Roman collars and white robes have bad associations right now. I would have directed them to cast a fraternal arm around victim/survivors and beg their grieving parents' pardon. I would have told them to welcome the demonstrators in from the street, yes, maybe even ask a women-church person to offer a blessing. I would have encouraged them to show that they understood the degree to which they have erred and the seriousness of their resolve to act differently by doing just that.

It would have been a grand gesture, an unmistakable sign that the bishops, too, are part of a broken church in need of healing that none of us can finally achieve alone. What a positive visual it would have been to end their disastrous gathering. More than a p.r. move, it would have been a clue that spoke loudly to those with ears to hear. Instead, the trained muscles remained flaccid and adequate ministry eluded them all once again. Just a gesture would have been enough, but, alas, it was too much to ask.

*Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D., feminist theologian,
cofounded and codirects WATER.*

In Memory of Her

From WATER:

In loving memory of Patricia Lynch, CSJP, whose leadership of her peace-seeking community encouraged WATER in its earliest days. We are sustained by her example of courage, style and tenacity demonstrated through her long career in health care administration. A state-of-the-art cancer center carries her name at Holy Name Hospital, Teaneck, NJ.

From Hallam C. Shorrock, Jr., Claremont CA:

In memory of Helen Shorrock upon her death.

June 13, 2002

WOMEN SAY TIME IS RIPE FOR A NEW MODEL OF CHURCH

Silver Spring, MD – “Cosmetic changes will not do. Now is the time to overhaul the Catholic Church before more children are harmed, more women are abused and more injustice is done by cover-ups and pay-offs,” said Mary E. Hunt, codirector of the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER) and a Catholic feminist theologian.

WATER joins progressive Catholic groups on the occasion of the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ meeting in Dallas, TX, in an unprecedented gathering that demonstrates that Catholicism is far more than a few hundred clerics who take their marching orders from Rome. In a move analogous to the NGO gatherings that regularly accompany United Nations meetings, the Dallas educational forums, protests, and liturgies (including a feminist Eucharist celebrated by the Women-Church Convergence) signal a new moment when lay Catholics claim their power as church by setting the bishops’ agenda and accomplishing their own.

WATER is a feminist educational center that specializes in women’s issues in religion. WATER’s constituency includes professional theologians and activists, international colleagues as well as U.S. progressives from a range of religious traditions. The impact of the implosion of the U.S. Catholic Church goes well beyond U.S. Catholics. It is of concern for religious people around the world because the Catholic Church influences public policy from the United Nations to national governments.

WATER welcomes the opportunity to scrutinize an institution that has acted for centuries with impunity with regard to women’s well being. The Church’s obstinate refusal to ordain women, effectively keeping decision-making in the hands of clerical men, has caused international scandal. Its opposition to women’s reproductive choice, its virulent statements against homosexuality, and its systematic ignoring of some priests’ sexual abuse and/or rape of women have made the hierarchical Catholic Church an international symbol of and agent of women’s oppression for too long.

Pedophilia and sexual abuse perpetrated by priests are the straw that has broken the camel’s back. Patriarchal Catholicism is in disgrace. Despite the Vatican’s continued charade, religious people around the world are scandalized and outraged by many U.S. bishops’ handling of abuse cases and by the sheer magnitude of the problem. Only wholesale change toward inclusive and participatory, democratic practices will be sufficient to restore any luster to this tawdry jewel.

Women are not interested in cleaning up the Church but in changing it. “Victim/survivors deserve our primary energies,” said Diann L. Neu, codirector of WATER and a psychotherapist who specializes in liturgy and ritual. “How they are treated is a reliable indication of what needs to be done. So far, the institution’s response has only worsened the problems by demanding silence for money, blaming the victims instead of assuming responsibility.

Concrete changes needed include:

1. Professional standards of conduct like those for teachers and doctors for all religious professionals. This means zero tolerance for sexual abuse.
2. Restructuring of all ecclesial institutions to dismantle the pyramid of power and replace it with circles of accountability. This means an end to clericalism and hierarchy and a new egalitarian, participatory model of church with full financial sharing and disclosure.
3. Renewed discussion of ethical norms, beginning with sexuality, and including war and economics. This means learning ways to live with diverse Catholic opinions and rediscovering the non-negotiable value of peace.

WATER is not naïve about the scope of such changes, nor are we unaware of the seriousness of the issues at hand. They herald a new moment in the history of Catholicism. It is upon us. Our task is to shape it using the best of our faith legacy and with the safety and integrity of our most vulnerable people foremost in mind.

Sister Sabbaticals at WATER

By Marge O’Gorman, osf

I chose to come to WATER for an internship as a part of my post-leadership sabbatical to utilize their extensive feminist theology library, to reflect with Mary and Diann, and to be in touch with the women with whom they collaborate. Being at WATER is one piece of a sabbatical that for me is focused on exploring the stories and rituals of women as they bring their faith to the concerns of their everyday lives.

The experience at WATER was mind expanding and life changing. My daily tasks involved being a support staff to Diann and Mary, learning new computer programs, and aiding Diann to secure copyright permissions for her book, *Return Blessings*. In addition to that, I was able to sit in on planning meetings for two national conferences, visit other social justice agencies, attend a local forum, a book reading, a symposium, and engage in prayer and protest for women’s ordination. And besides all of this, I had the opportunity to play each day with Catherine Fei Min, Mary and Diann’s newly adopted daughter.

I met women from Peru, Brazil, the UK, and the Netherlands. I heard speakers from Bolivia, Japan, Kenya and Nigeria. I read womanist theology, Asian feminist theology, Celtic spirituality and Jewish women’s rituals.

The pedophilia scandal dominated the news during my January through April stay at WATER. The breaking of this news happened at the same time I was reading about feminist sexual ethics. The vision these women presented gave me hope for the future as I watched the moral authority of patriarchy collapse under pressure.

As a result of my time at WATER, I feel an urgency to work for the affirmation of women as responsible moral agents, the promotion of feminist moral values, and an end to the sexual oppression of women.

Being at WATER has given me the time and space to inform my mind and become re-committed to the cause for justice in an environment of collaboration and support. I am grateful for the opportunity to be church and to build church with Mary, Diann and all the women who make up this discipleship of equals. I know that as we continue our faith journeys, the benefits from this mutual exchange will unfold more fully in our lives.

Contact WATER for internship information.

This Feminist Eucharist was celebrated with the Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of thirty-two Catholic women's organizations, who met in Dallas, TX, June 13, 2002. Use it as a model for the liturgy you and your community need.

Preparation: *Gather bread, wine and juice, baskets and cups, water bowl, pitcher, branch, three candles and place them on the altar in the center of a circle(s) of chairs.*

Welcome and Call to Gather

Disciples on the journey, Women-Church Convergence members, colleagues from social justice organizations, victim/survivors of clergy sexual abuse, justice-seeking friends, welcome to this historic liturgy, "Breaking Bread for Healing and Change."

We gather in the presence of the Holy One, Healing Creator. We come together in memory of Miriam's Child and Sophia's Prophet, Jesus. We answer the call of the Holy Spirit to break bread and do justice as a Discipleship of Equals who continue the tradition of the early Christian community.

Song: "Voices That Challenge" by D. Haas, from *I Shall See God*, c. 1989.

Call us to hear the voices that challenge,
Deep in the hearts of all people!
By serving your world as lovers and dreamers,
We become voices that challenge,
For we are the voice of God!

Creating the Circle

Listening to the voices that challenge, let us introduce ourselves to one another. Say your name, where you are from, your city, state and group, add the words "I am called to break bread for healing and change," then look to the person on your left.

Song: "Voices That Challenge"

Candle Lighting Prayer

(Three people each light a candle and pray:)

Person One: Let us call upon the Holy Spirit. Please respond: "Be with us now and always."
(Light a candle) Compassionate One, you who feel our pain and cry with us in our anguish,
All: Be with us now and always.

Person Two: *(Light a candle)* Just One, you who rage with us against injustices we experience,
All: Be with us now and always.

Person Three: *(Light a candle)* Loving One, you

who shout with us "no" to violence in all its forms, and "yes" to a Discipleship of Equals.

All: Be with us now and always.

Readings from the Headlines

Listen to the word of God recorded in the Headlines from daily newspapers:

"What the Bishops Knew and When They Knew It," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 17, 2002.

"Hundreds of Priests Removed Since '60s," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2002.

"Bishops' Committee Members Accused," Associated Press, April 12, 2002.

"Abuse Victims Sue to Avoid Secrecy Provisions of Settlements with Church," *New York Times*, June 7, 2002.

"What Would Jesus Do? Beyond the Priest Scandal: Christianity at a Crossroads," *Newsweek*, May 6, 2002. *(Add more headlines as appropriate)*

Song: "O Healing River" by F. Hellerman and Fran Minkoff, from Pete Seeger, *I Can See A New Day*, c. 1964.

O healing river, send down your waters,
Send down your waters upon this land.
O healing river, send down your waters,
To wash the blood from off the sand.

Readings from Justice Communities

Listen to the word of God in the press releases from the social justice community.

A Reading from Women-Church Convergence:

Children challenge the Catholic Church to be an institution that is faithful to the Gospel values of love, justice, inclusivity and safety. Revelations of priests engaging in pedophilia and church officials covering-up and spiritualizing such crimes cause many people to doubt the Church's credibility, much less the safety of Catholics. No quick fix will restore integrity to an institution that is morally bankrupt. *The word of Women-Church.*

All Respond: Thanks be to God. We are church.

A Reading from a joint statement by Catholics concerned about clergy abuse:

The church must change. In many aspects the church has been a source of hope and guidance for its people. But now, with its moral credibility in ruins, not just by the abuse committed at the hands of its priests, but by the hierarchy's unwillingness to admit responsibility, revolutionary change is required. We pray that the grace and wisdom of the Holy Spirit will guide us all through this difficult, yet monumental, opportunity for transformation. *The word of Catholics concerned about clergy abuse.*

All: Thanks be to God. We are church.

A Reading from WATER:

Pedophilia and sexual abuse perpetrated by priests are the straw that has broken the camel's back. Patriarchal Catholicism is in disgrace. Despite the Vatican's continued charade, religious people around the world are scandalized and outraged by many U.S. bishops' handling of abuse cases and by the sheer magnitude of the problem. Only wholesale change toward inclusive and participatory, democratic practices will be sufficient to restore any luster to this tawdry jewel. *The word of WATER.*

All: Thanks be to God. We are church.

Song: "O Healing River"

The Gospel from Matthew 5: 1-10.



Song: "O Healing River"

Reflection

All of what we have heard and more happens to women and men, girls and boys, and affects our communities. Listening challenges us to respond. What is one thing that you have heard that challenges you to participate in healing and change? *(Pause)* Turn to someone next to you and share your thoughts and actions. *(Sharing)*

Song: "O Healing River"

Water Blessing

(During the blessing, the blesser pours water from a pitcher into a bowl.)

Water is one of the earth's great resources for healing and change. Water has held us and moved us into being. Out of that water came a rainbow, a diversity of humanity. Come God, Source of Life, bless this water.

Water cleanses us, bathes us in love, and blesses us daily with newness of life. Come God, Source of Good, bless this water.

Water touches us, fresh on our foreheads, and calls us to live our commitments. Come God, Source of Change, bless this water.

(The blesser takes the bowl of water and a branch, and sprinkles the gathered.)

B
for H

Song: "O Healing River"

Prayers of the Faithful

Person One: Filled with the challenges and visions of this time in our church we pray: Come, Holy Spirit, Healing Wisdom, Regenerative Source. Let us pray together: Renew the face of the church.

All: Renew the face of the church.

Person Two: We ask You to bless us, Your priestly people, who, in the cry of the people and in the word of the community, are called to break bread for healing and change. Pour out Your Spirit upon us that we may see visions, dream

Breaking Bread Healing and Change

By Diann L. Neu

dreams, break bread, and do justice. We pray:

All: Renew the face of the church.

Person One: Give Your Spirit, Holy Wisdom, to women and men, boys and girls surviving from clergy sexual abuse, that they may feel supported, stand up to the powers and principalities of the church, ask for what is rightfully theirs, refuse to be silent or disappear, and experience healing. We pray:

All: Renew the face of the church.

Person Two: Give Your Spirit, Holy Wisdom, to cardinals, bishops, priests, ministers, pastoral counselors, supervisors, seminary professors and church representatives who have sexually exploited the faithful that they may recognize the harm they have done, seek help, ask for forgiveness, and offer restitution. We pray:

All: Renew the face of the church.

Person One: Give Your Spirit, Holy Wisdom, to church decision-makers, bishops, parish councils, and others that they may walk with truth-tellers. We pray:

All: Renew the face of the church.

Person Two: When the bread is not enough, when our hope is dim, when our energies are frazzled, refresh us with Your Spirit. We pray:

All: Renew the face of the church.

Song: "Ruah" by Colleen Fulmer, from *The Cry of Ramah*, c. 1985.

Refrain: Ruah, Ruah, Breath of God within us
Ruah, Ruah, Spirit of our God.

Eucharistic Prayer

Blessor One: Lift your hearts.

All: We lift them up to God.

Blessor Two: Let us give thanks to our Creator, Divine Wisdom, Justice-Seeking Spirit.

All: It is right to give Her thanks and praise.

All: Blessed are you, Merciful and Healing God, One-Who-Brings-Change. With joy we give you thanks and praise for creating a diverse world and for creating us in your image for healing and change. You call us to share your story, so we join all creation in singing your praises:
Song: "Ruah"

All: Blessed are you, Womb of All Creation, God of our Mothers and Fathers. You create women, men and children in your image. From age to age you form us in your womb; You breathe your breath of life into us. You call us to share your story, so we join all creation in singing your praises:
Song: "Ruah"

All: Blessed are you, God of those who have worked and died for change. You call diverse women and men to participate in salvation history: Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham, Miriam and Moses, Naomi and Ruth, Mary and Jesus, Tecla, Phoebe, and Aquella, Oscar Romero, Maura, Ita, Dorothy, Jean and countless others. You call us to share our stories, so we join all creation in singing your praises:
Song: "Ruah"

All: Blessed are you, Creator of all seasons and all peoples, Creator God. You call us each by name to be prophets, teachers, house church leaders, saints, to image your healing and challenging presence. You call us to share our stories, so we join all creation in singing your praises:
Song: "Ruah"

All: Blessed are you, Companion on the Journey, Wisdom Sophia. You have built yourself a house, You have hewn seven pillars, You have prepared a rich banquet for us. You call us to share your story, so we join all creation in singing your praises:
Song: "Ruah"

All: (*Extend your hands, palms up, toward the bread and wine.*)

Blessed are you, Miriam's Child and Sophia's Prophet, Jesus. In your abundant love, and out of your pain, you welcome all to the table to eat bread, created out of brokenness, and drink wine, born out of being crushed. You call us into your covenant saying: "Take this all of you. Eat and drink this all of you. And remember when you are broken, and life seems to pour out. I am here. I'm with you." We join all creation in singing your praises:

Song: "Ruah"

All: Come, O Holy Spirit, Wisdom Sophia, upon this bread and wine. Come as breath and breathe your life anew into our aching bones. Come as wind and refresh our weary souls. Come as fire and purge our church of sexual abuse, sexism, racism, heterosexism, and all evils. You call us to share your story, so we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song: "Ruah"

All: Come, Justice Seeker, Spirit Sophia, and bring the new creation: the breaking of bread, the raising of the cup, the doing of justice. You call us to share your story, so we join all creation in singing your praises:
Song: "Ruah"

Blessor Two: Let us eat, drink and partake of the banquet of life. Receive the healing and nourishment of a Loving God. (*Blessers pass bread and goblets around the group.*)

Communion Song: "This Day Is My Daily Bread" by Kathy Sherman, from *Singing My Soul*, LaGrange Park, IL: Sisters of St. Joseph, c. 1996.

This day is my daily bread. Take it, bless it, break it, give it to all I meet this day.

Sending Forth

Companions on the journey, take this healing power for revolutionary change to the city streets and country roads of the earth.

Go forth with compassion, mercy and justice.

Go forth to create a church where women and men are equal members, children are safe, and no one is privileged.

Diann L. Neu, D.Min. candidate, MSW, feminist liturgist and psychotherapist, cofounded and codirects WATER.



Children Lead the Way

Women-Church Convergence Statement on Pedophilia

WATER is a member of the Convergence, a coalition of thirty-two organizations. This group met in Dallas, TX, during the bishops' meeting.

Children challenge the Catholic Church to be an institution that is faithful to the Gospel values of love, justice, inclusivity and safety. Revelations of priests engaging in pedophilia and church officials covering-up and spiritualizing such crimes cause many people to doubt the Church's credibility, much less the safety of Catholics. No quick fix will restore integrity to an institution that is morally bankrupt.

Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of thirty-two feminist groups rooted in the Catholic tradition, is committed to a participatory, egalitarian and self-governing model of church. We insist on changes that are deep and broad. We suggest that these changes begin with the resignation and/or laicization of those priests and bishops who are found complicit either of sexual abuse and/or of covering up, paying off or otherwise compromising safety. Such minimal acts, still resisted mightily by some clergy who apparently do not understand the seriousness of such actions, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a renewed Church.

Women's voices have been conspicuously absent among victim/ survivors despite the fact that experts on clergy abuse believe troubled priests and other clergy are more likely to abuse females, especially adult women (*Sacramento Bee*, March 21,

2002). In a system that keeps secrets and dishonors women, it is no wonder that the claims taken seriously come from boys and men despite well documented cases of women of all ages, including nuns, subject to sexual abuse and rape by churchmen.

Women-Church Convergence urges women and girls to speak out, to tell their stories of abuse in the church so that the full picture, grim as it is, can be viewed. The panorama includes not only sexual abuse, but also payments to cover up such crimes, payments for children of priests, and in rare cases even payments to terminate priest-caused pregnancies. These decisions to pay off victims in exchange for silence reflect a dysfunctional system corrupted further by its own efforts to hide abuses.

In Dallas, the bishops will have an opportunity to write strong guidelines and plan enforcement on the "Protection of Children and Young People." But having male clerics try to right the wrongs of their own system is a blatant example of the problem. We expect that the bishops will produce very little that will rectify the wrongs now so widely known. Moreover, the Vatican will have veto power over any such document, demonstrating that the U.S. Catholic Church is not finally free to determine its own polity. This is another dimension of the complicated problem. It is intolerable, not to mention unsafe.

Women-Church Convergence calls for full participation of women and lay men in the development

of all future church policies with regard to sexual abuse and every other policy issue that touches on our common life. Anything less will be simply more of the same. We stress the principle of subsidiarity that keeps decisions and decision making as local as possible, culturally specific and communicated widely. We pledge our efforts to keep children safe including remodeling the priesthood to minimize the potential for abuse.

As feminists of faith we trace the root of the current problems to the hierarchical, kyriarchal system. It is a pyramid of power with the pope on top, the cardinals and bishops next, followed by priests. Lay people, including religious sisters and brothers, lay men, women and children are at the bottom. This monarchical model is far from the democratic, egalitarian model of a "discipleship of equals" practiced by Jesus and his companions.

We have a new vision and are already creating inclusive structures. Our vision is of a democratic and participatory church where tasks are assigned and taken on according to ability and need, not gender and sexuality. We live this out now in our base communities and organizations. It is not impossible and it is Catholic.

Our children's well being is at stake. There is no excuse to tarry. Let the reforms necessary to assure our children's physical and psychological safety be simply the first of many that will assure all of our spiritual well being.

What Do Catholic Women Say?

By Mary E. Hunt, Ph.D.

The following is an excerpt from an Op Ed that appeared in the Dallas Morning News, June 15, 2002, during the meeting of the Catholic bishops that focused on pedophilia in the priesthood.

As the Roman Catholic bishops gather in Dallas next week to address the priest pedophilia and cover-up crisis that is rocking the Catholic Church to its foundations, the sea of black-garbed men offers a powerful visual of what's missing from the debate: the voices of women. As the gravity of the situation comes into focus and the need for substantive structural changes in the Church becomes more obvious, Catholic women have important thoughts on the matter. No one speaks for all Catholic women, but I am in touch with enough to report some trends.

Progressive and conservative Catholic women alike want our churches, schools, hospitals and centers to be safe for all children. This springs not from an exaggerated, romanticized maternity that

the Church has pushed on women for millennia. Rather, it is a minimal expectation of any institution whose professionals have unfettered access to children. Pedophilia is simply too risky to tolerate. Either the model of priesthood has to change so that priests are limited in their unsupervised contact with young parishioners, or a strong signal, the much debated "zero tolerance," needs to be in place to restore confidence in Catholic priests...

Revelations of duplicity have laid bare the practices of leaders that result in serious harm and criminal misconduct. Tawdry tales expose the dubious quality of many priests who have been chosen from an ever-shrinking pool. It is time to move beyond people who embrace a seminary to cemetery lifestyle, including mandatory celibacy that is now widely understood as unnecessary for the job. Leadership comes in many forms from many people. A lay-led church is an idea whose time has come for Catholicism, with ample room for theologically trained clerics to participate as equals.



Many Catholics already practice their faith this way. Women-Church is one such movement, made up of small base communities that worship at home and activist groups that work for social change based on Gospel values of love, justice and inclusivity. Such groups function well without centralized authority and priestly privilege, each member contributing her time and talent. This is wisdom the hierarchy could use as its role is being phased out by moral attrition and theological reimagination...

The Catholicism of our children will be participatory and egalitarian as a result of today's painful chapter. A meeting like the Dallas one will be unthinkable. Women and men will gather along with their children. Good will and technology will combine to let them meet across the miles in sacrament and solidarity, whether in cyberspace or church. They will do business, of course, but they will also dance. They will celebrate the fullness of life in which they will believe so fervently, but only if we all begin to model it for them now.

Behr-Sigel, Elisabeth and Kallistos Ware. *THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 2001 (96 pages, \$7.50).

A tough struggle ahead begins with the basics outlined in this book. Female and feminine imagery will be hard to unload and overcome, but it can be done.

Brakeman, Lyn. *THE GOD BETWEEN US: A SPIRITUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS*. Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 2001 (160 pages, \$14.95).

In this midrash God is the one who makes the connections between/among us. A creative approach that will please those who revel in a good story.

Brock, Rita Nakashima and Rebecca Ann Parker. *PROVERBS OF ASHES: VIOLENCE, REDEMP-TIVE SUFFERING, AND THE SEARCH FOR WHAT SAVES US*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 (257 pages, \$26).

Two women ministers look at the difficult matter of suffering that redeems through the lenses of their own experiences of violence. A provocative and well-written challenge to received wisdom.

Davis, Patricia H. *BEYOND NICE: THE SPIRITUAL WISDOM OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001 (131 pages, \$15).

Listening to the voices of teenage girls reveals a great deal about the pros and cons of religious teachings. They take the words and deeds seriously enough to accept or reject them on their terms.

Eck, Diana L. *A NEW RELIGIOUS AMERICA: HOW A "CHRISTIAN COUNTRY" HAS BECOME THE WORLD'S MOST RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE NATION*. NY: Harper-Collins, 2001 (404 pages, \$16.95).

Essential and elegant reading for all who wish to understand the U.S. religious landscape and be part of it in a respectful way.

Edwards, Wynne and Dianne Linden, Editors. *RUNNING BARE-FOOT: WOMEN WRITE THE LAND*. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Rowan Books, 2001 (176 pages, \$16.95).

A Canadian jewel by women who embrace the land like a lover. They are inspired and accompanied by activist singer/songwriter Carolyn McDade.

Etheldsattar, Karen. *EARTH-WALKING AND OTHER POEMS*. Jersey City, NJ: Xlibris Corporation (www.Xlibris.com), 2001, (139 pages, \$17.84).

Powerful, lovely, inspiring words that add luster to the world. High praise.

Furlong, Monica, Editor. *WOMEN PRAY: VOICES THROUGH THE AGES, FROM MANY FAITHS, CULTURES AND TRADITIONS*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2001 (241 pages, \$19.95).

A lovely little book to tuck away and pull out when the mood strikes. From Bridget of Kildare to Starhawk, from Lynn Gottlieb to Alice Walker, women articulate their deep longings.

Harrington, Ann M. and Prudence Moylan, Editors. *MUNDELEIN VOICES: THE WOMEN'S COLLEGE EXPERIENCE, 1930-1991*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001 (311 pages, \$16.95).

A marvelous history of Mundelein College. Women's college alums will recognize the issues. Happily, the spirit and resources continue through the Ann Ida Gannon, B.V.M., Center for Women and Leadership at Loyola University.

Resources

Kalechofsky, Roberta. *THE VEGE-TARIAN PESACH COOKBOOK*. Marblehead, MA: Micah Publications, (72 pages, \$13).

Every feminist kitchen needs this when Seder time comes around.

Livingston, David J. *HEALING VIOLENT MEN: A MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002 (129 pages, \$17).

A good start on the difficult question of how to handle batterers after the victim/survivors are safe. Livingston incorporates the insights of feminist scholar activists in his proposals.

Matlins, Stuart M. and Arthur J. Magida. *HOW TO BE A PERFECT STRANGER* (2 volumes), Woodstock, VT: Skylight Oaths Publishing, 1999 (400 pages, \$19.95).

For all the talk about religious pluralism, we all need basic etiquette lessons. Here they are albeit minus any nuanced liberationist perspective.

O'Grady, Ron. *THE HIDDEN SHAME OF THE CHURCH: SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Press, 2001 (73 pages, \$9.90).

In light of current events, a timely and concise introduction to the issues. The author takes the long and broad view of a crisis that won't go away without theological change.

Paulsell, Stephanie. *HONORING THE BODY: MEDITATIONS ON CHRISTIAN PRACTICE*. NY: Jossey-Bass, 2002 (192 pages, \$19.95).

An intelligent approach to the body that relies on smart scholarship and sensitivity to cultural pressures to craft a useful, highly recommended volume.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *JESUS AND THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION*. NY: Continuum, 2000 (180 pages, \$22.95).

A critical discussion of how and why the cottage industry of Historical-Jesus stories arose. Elisabeth brings her consistent commitment to justice to a scene that is full of sexist, colonialist and anti-Jewish assumptions. The resulting Divine Wisdom approach promises much more.

For more, don't miss her *WISDOM'S WAYS: INTRODUCING FEMINIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001 (229 pages, \$20).

This practical guide, written in a reader-friendly way, provides an accessible way into complicated questions. Perfect for study groups and classes.

Tatman, Lucy. *KNOWLEDGE THAT MATTERS: A FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL PARADIGM AND EPISTEMOLOGY*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001, (269 pages, \$18).

A critical look at the work of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Carter Heyward and Sallie McFague shows that when taken together they provide a workable alternative to the prevailing Western Christian mindset. This careful exploration lays a foundation for the next wave of feminist theological work.

Wijngaards, John. *THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: UNMASKING A CUCKOO'S EGG TRADITION*. NY: Continuum, 2001 (208 pages, \$22.95).

The kyriarchal arguments against ordaining Catholic women look sillier by the year. This approach, by a priest who resigned in protest over such intellectually embarrassing claims as bride and bridegroom imagery, points toward a new understanding of priestly ministry.



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