

# New Women, New Church

WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

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## Knock, Knock. Who's there? The Vatican Suffragists!

BY KATE MCELWEE

The XV Ordinary Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment approved a final document calling the inclusion of women in decision-making structures a "duty of justice" and recommended "making everyone more aware of the urgency of an inescapable change." This is a big deal.

No mention of the feminine genius. No mention of complementary gender roles.

However, make no mistake: the bishops did not just decide to include a line or two about women in the final document — those came from the voices outside the synod—the knocking on the doors, from the grassroots.

On the opening day of the synod twenty-five activists from around the world gathered outside of the Sant'Uffizio gate (located in front of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). Under the guise of a touring prayer group, we gathered together and recited two "Hail Mary's" as a nod to Pope Francis' call to all Catholics to pray the Rosary in October.

With no hesitation, we began our own prayer, a litany of the bishops participating in the synod process, followed by the chant: "Let women vote!" After five names, we shouted our rallying call: "Knock, knock! Who's there? More than half the Church! Knock, knock! Who's there? More than half the Church!"

I constantly scanned the streets for police or someone who would tell us to stop, but the "Synod Singers" got through our entire songbook of names, and started again at the top.



*WOC supporters witness outside the Vatican gates as prelates walk in to the Synod.*

"Cardinal Tagle: Let women vote! Cardinal Cupich: Let women vote!" We recited until our voices were hoarse. We pumped our fists in the air when we cried out "Knock! Knock!"

Our peaceful demonstration called out the exclusionary policies of the Vatican's Synod of Bishops that deny women a vote. While thirty-four women were allowed to join the 267 male members to participate in their discussions, none were granted voting rights. This was despite the fact that two non-ordained men, both religious brothers, were full voting members.

While we roared, two Irish prelates detoured from their path to the synod and embraced Ursula Halligan, a familiar face from the Irish media and part of our delegation.

The police arrived and the head officer came up to me as the organizer and shouted into my face:

BE SILENT! BE SILENT! BE SILENT!

I stared at him and hesitated only for a moment before returning to chant alongside the group: "Knock, knock! Who's there?"

After I refused to be silent or give over my passport, the scene quickly escalated. I tried to walk away and was grabbed and forcibly held by my arm.

In an amazing act of solidarity and strength, members of our group surrounded both me and the police officer and offered up their passports in my place. Eventually I escaped the officer's grasp and stood to the side while the rest of our group was detained, harassed, and forced to delete camera footage. Some in the group prayed the rosary while the police brought in horses to intimidate us.

After everyone had been processed by the growing number of police officers (including a van unit with bulletproof vests),

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# From the Executive Director



DEAR WOC MEMBER,

This issue of *New Women, New Church* reflects our commitment to sharing and celebrating the stories of women called to a renewing priesthood and ministering to people and communities on the margins.

Throughout 2018 we launched the Catholic Women Called video series featuring short messages from women called to priesthood. Rev. Dr. Victoria Marie shared in the series her difficult discernment to leave her religious community to serve those who feel left behind. We find more of her story starting on page 7. We also hear from Rev. Kori Pacyniak, who shares a radical path toward liberation and reminds us that even within so-called inclusive spaces and language, some people can still feel unheard (page 4). Jennifer Reyes Lay helps us unpack these unconscious biases within ourselves and the progressive Catholic movement with her report on page 14. In a new section, *Emerging Voices*, we hear from Felicia Hazzard in a reflective interview on race and gender in her experience in the U.S. Church (page 5).

Our campaign to amplify voices and stories of women called led us to the Vatican gates at the opening of the Synod on Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment this past October. Our witness for women's voting rights at the synod is featured on the cover and a presentation from our roundtable discussion, "Discerning Women: Voices Outside the Synod," just a few paces from St. Peter's, can be found on page 3.

This issue continues our series from our sisters in RAPPART with Dr. Georgia Fuller and Kathy Sullivan Vandenberg recounting their call stories on pages 10-11. The RAPPART series continues with a special feature on page 9 from Andrea Johnson on WOC's encounter and friendship with Ludmila Javorova, who was ordained in 1970 in the underground church of Czechoslovakia.

Amid the noise and action outside the Vatican, the heartbreaking revelations of abuse and pain in the Church, and the crisis of leadership with the USCCB, I think you will find this issue of *New Women, New Church* a powerful touchstone of hope, or a least a reminder of why and how we strive for transformation. The testimonies of women called are not just stories, but glimpses into the ministries of so many who continue to serve those who have been silenced, erased, or abused. I am grateful for our community of priestly people who model radical love and communion to our Church and world.

Blessings and gratitude,

Executive Director

P.S. New year, new look, *New Women, New Church*! I hope you enjoy this refreshed design of our newsletter. Give us your constructive critique—we're always aiming to grow and better serve our WOC community.

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# Discerning Women: Voices Outside the Synod

BY PAOLA LAZZARINI

A presentation at WOC's Synod event in Rome.

Good morning to all. It is a great joy to be here with you to breathe the fresh air of a young, lively, walking Church!

I am Paola Lazzarini and I represent Women for the Church, a new group, born about a year ago when forty women from different parts of Italy met through social media and wrote our Manifesto. After the publication, many local groups started and maintain their own active groups of women for the church in Rome, Milan, Turin, Naples, Genoa, Cagliari, Catanzaro, and Lugano, Italian Switzerland (in these groups we train, share and advocate).

What is perhaps useful to remember here, in an international assembly like this, is that in Italy there has never been feminine awareness in the base. We have excellent theologians and small advanced groups of believers, but most of the women who attend parishes, associations and ecclesial movements have never expressed critical positions, at least not in an organized way.

The reason for this is that in the Italian imagination there is still the Catholic woman as mother, wife, and angel of the hearth. This image is carried forward by successful writers even today. It is not easy in Italy to say that women must be assertive, that we can have no fear about speaking clearly and asking to be able to hold positions of responsibility in Christian communities. When we do, we are immediately labeled “aggressive,” “nuisances,” or worse in our culture, “feminist.”

Yet something is changing and I can measure it through my travels in Italy among our newborn groups. I discovered common problems and sufferings. Italian women are tired of keeping pastoral care, charity, training, and systematically being excluded in rooms where church decisions are made. Things are changing and the success of our initiative brings evidence of this. This is the premise, to say that you must not feel strangers in this city of Rome. Even in this diocese, there are women who are starting to express their impatience and their will to speak.

As for the topic of our meeting here today, we recognize we are no longer on solid ground as in days gone by—our structures have been crumbling around us.



Jamie Manson, Paola Lazzarini, Zuzanna Radzik and Jacqueline Straub in Rome for WOC's "Discerning Women: Voices Outside the Synod event October 4, 2018

The news of clerical child abuse is growing like a wave, and bishops all around the globe have undermined not only the institutional church, but our very own idea of church. At the same time we have under our eyes the power games, the pettiness, and the pitfalls hosted by the ecclesiastical hierarchy at its highest levels. I am convinced that this is a time of grace, a Good Friday that we can travel with Easter faith, “with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand,” willing to do our part (small or big) to rebuild on the rubble that has crumbled before us. It is clear and undeniable that this Easter will be announced, once again by a woman, as well as by women, and that it will be a woman who brings the announcement to Peter, not vice versa.

I do not look forward to this synod with great confidence. With the exhortation of Pope Francis’ *Episcopalis communio*, that this final document might become a magisterium, without women’s voice or vote, is one more reason to be discouraged. Although pervaded by good intentions I do not see good news in this, and I expect nothing decisive. But there is some good news: the synod on young people is not just taking place at the Vatican.

The synod of young people takes place every time young believers pray together, serve the poor, teach the catechism for their younger children. As a mature woman (I am a mother, so do not identify with youth), what can we offer to young people and especially to young women? We take our responsibility to convey our strong faith as well as healthier models of church.

Young people ask us to accompany them—it emerges in the *instrumentum laboris*—and they need adults who

will accompany them and help them discern in these uncertain times their vocation in the Church and in the world. This, I believe, is where we have an urgent need to be fully present.

Of course young people can and must be protagonists and act proactively. Still I think we have a special responsibility. Young people have been betrayed by abusive fathers (that is, priests, bishops, cardinals, and Pope) but they must not be betrayed or experience the silence of mothers. It is up to us women who have found the strength to position ourselves as interlocutors, to support them and help them find their places in the church—to make them feel that it is their home and no one has the right to make them feel otherwise. Their battles must be our battles: young people are ashamed of a church that is hostile to LGBT people; we are also ashamed and need to join them in that struggle. Young people find no nourishment in a church that forgets the gospel and promotes moralism. We must become transmitters of the Word of God, call priests to proclaim the Gospel that Jesus preached rather than focus on sin and exclusion.

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them in that struggle

We must offer ourselves the bread of the Word, which no one can stop us from doing. Young women want to feel that their vocation, their spiritual life, is as good and as recognized as that of their male peers.

*continued on page 13*

# Walking with My Call

BY KORI PACYNIAK

My God, I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
Nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.  
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.  
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,  
though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.  
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

-Thomas Merton



Kori Pacyniak

“My God, I have no idea where I am going...” Few words better describe my vocational journey than this opening to Thomas Merton’s prayer. Though there have been times in my life when my stubborn nature wanted to embody the idea of “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead,” the reality is that my life, particularly my journey of vocation, has often followed the road less traveled, even when the path was overgrown. On more than one occasion, the only prayer I could say with authenticity was “I have no idea where I am going.”

As someone who identifies as trans, nonbinary, and queer, I’ve often felt out of place within the church—especially since I’ve felt called to the priesthood since I was a child. When I was eight, my grandmother asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up and I told her that I wanted to be a priest. She informed me that only boys could become priests. Well then, I declared, when I grow up, I want to be a boy. To my mind, it was that simple. My parents had assured me girls could do anything boys could do and that I could be anything I wanted to be when I grew up. No exceptions. Why should the priesthood be any different?

Inspired by Thérèse of Lisieux’s Story of a Soul, I began to think that if I couldn’t be a priest, the acceptable alternative was to become a nun. The orders I was looking at insisted I go to college and in the fall of 2000, I arrived at Smith College, proudly marched up to the chaplain (an amazing lay Catholic woman) and declared, “I’m planning to enter a convent, but they told me I have to go to college first, so you have me for the next four years.” To her credit, the chaplain didn’t miss a beat, gave me a warm smile, and said, “Well, I look forward to the next four years.” Little did I know what would happen in those four years.

A class on women mystics introduced me to the writings of Edwina Gateley and Pauli Murray and the concept of women’s ordination.

I became involved with WOC, Pax Christi, and Call to Action. Pandora’s box had been opened. Thoughts of becoming a nun faded and the desire to become a priest was back full force. I read about the ordination of the Danube seven and wondered, what did I have to do to become one of them? There were no easy answers, no well-trodden path.

After college, I struggled to find a faith community that was as supportive and life giving as my college chaplaincy had been. I drifted away from the church because I didn’t know if there was room for me in the church as a young queer person. Years passed but the pull of my vocation remained despite my best attempts to bury it. I applied to graduate school, thinking that if God was calling me to something, seminary was the place to figure it out.

The choice came down to Weston Jesuit School of Theology and Harvard Divinity School. I knew that if I attended Weston, I would spend much of the three years of my M.Div. degree crying and banging my head against that stained-glass ceiling because I didn’t just want to study with Jesuits, I wanted to *be* a Jesuit. I ended up at Harvard, studying Queer Theology and often worshipping with the Episcopal/Anglican fellowship, in awe of a denomination that sought to maintain a balance between scripture, tradition, and reason, and strived to be a church that embraced the call to the priesthood among all peoples, regardless of gender or sexuality, a church where the laity had a voice. I saw women and transgender people in positions of leadership—both lay and ordained—and began to question

whether to stay Catholic when there was a denomination here in which I could pursue ordination.

Instead, I focused on academics, hoping that my vocation would sort itself out. I ended up in Texas for a PhD program in Pastoral Theology, but when the program ended up not being a good fit, I started looking for alternatives.

A friend forwarded me a job posting from San Diego—a progressive Catholic community was looking for a pastor, ordination not required. I didn’t think I had a chance, but there was nothing to lose by applying. In January of 2017, I started as pastor of Mary Magdalene the Apostle Catholic Community and started the discernment process for ordination with RCWP. I never envisioned myself as a parish priest, but the year and a half I’ve been with the community so far has exceeded my expectations. I am their first pastor from outside the community and just like a new relationship, there have been challenges and there have been joys as we have gotten to know each other and worked on blending liturgical styles and theologies. Serving what my father affectionately calls a “rebel Catholic church” was certainly never in my five-year plan, but it has been a transformative experience.

In the words of Merton: “I cannot see the road ahead of me. I do not know for certain where it will end.” Sometimes I don’t know where, or if, I fit within Catholic feminist organizations. Sometimes I describe it as identifying with women but not as a woman. As someone whose gender is outside the male/female binary, whose identity is discounted and erased (even in so-called inclusive language),

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# An Interview with Felicia Hazzard

Felicia shares insights into growing up in African American Church and "normative whiteness" in Catholicism with Kate McElwee.

**Felicia, tell us about yourself and growing up attending Catholic schools in Chicago. What role did religion or faith play in your life?**

I grew up on the Southside of Chicago in the Auburn-Gresham community, which to this day is a predominately African American community. My mother and my aunt worked for the Chicago Public School system and education was very important to my family. As a single mother who wanted the best for her daughter, my mother enrolled me at St. Sabina Catholic School on the Southside of Chicago starting in the first grade. I felt very special wearing my uniform and participating in Sunday Masses and Holy Days.

During my time at St. Sabina, I was asked by my teacher in the third or fourth grade to become a Catholic. I told my mother about this and I told her I was interested in becoming Catholic but for whatever reason, my mother did not allow me. I think it was the idea that she felt I was getting a good education in a safe environment and I should be the one to decide when I got older if I wanted to become a Catholic. This is an assumption because my mother never told me why I could not become Catholic.

I stayed at St. Sabina School until I graduated in the eighth grade. The journey in the Catholic school changed my life for the better and my love for the Catholic faith has never ended. The prayers I learned in school as a child stayed with me because not only were they repetitious but I had a personal relationship with God that made it so real for me.

**Do you have a formative memory or experience of Church or faith that you carry with you today?**

When I was younger most of the kids in my neighborhood were not familiar with the Catholic saints and assumed Catholics worship statues! Today I know how important the saints should be in our lives. I also later learned that statues to saints were used by enslaved people in the United States, to pray to African deities since their own culture was prohibited.

**You've mentioned attending non-Catholic services and hearing women preach. What is that experience like for you as a Catholic woman? Are you called to preach?**

I admire anyone who can stand before an audience and speak! I admire women of other faiths who speak the word of God and live it! I admire them for being knowledgeable of scripture and speaking from the Holy Bible and putting it in practical words for people to understand. Many times I pictured myself speaking before an audience and talking about Jesus and how good he has been to me. So, I feel if it is a calling for me to preach, then that is what I have to do. I don't have to have an audience to speak the word of God. Throughout my life, I have spoken and tried to encourage people who are down on their luck with healing words and I have prayed with them, too.

**Many theologians and scholars have commented on the "normative whiteness" or Euro-centrism in US Catholicism, and you've shared that often people assume you are Baptist. Do you find that your African American heritage is expressed in your Catholic church? If so, how? If not, what would you find meaningful?**

I see my African American heritage expressed in Catholic churches in the African American communities. St. Sabina School was a prime example of a 100% African American student body that had guest speakers come on the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from the civil rights era and other prominent and local African American leaders speak to the student body and parishioners of St. Sabina Church. When I lived in Chicago, I was a member of Holy Name Cathedral Roman Catholic Church. It has the largest congregation in the city of Chicago. It is located in downtown Chicago where all ethnicities attend Mass and there are several groups offered. One of those groups is the African-American group that promotes the presence of our heritage through special events and Masses.



*Felicia Hazzard*

The African American community of Catholic churches need to know that there is such a movement [for women's ordination] and that they are included and needed

**What could the movement for women's equality in the Church do better to be more racially inclusive?**

I honestly think having a representative from the movement reach out to Catholic churches in the African American communities would be a great approach. The African American community of Catholic churches need to know that there is such a movement and that they are included and needed.

**Why is women's ordination and inclusive leadership important for the Church today?**

Women have stood by on the sidelines way too long. We are leaders in our own right. Women are the heads of corporations, women are running for political offices in record numbers, and more women are college graduates and receiving advanced degrees. In Ancient Egypt there were women leaders and queens! So it is time that our children see women who are mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, friends and neighbors, but also understand that we can speak from the Holy Bible as priests and deacons.

*Felicia M. Hazzard runs Fragrance Belles-Lettres Magazine and is the author of the play HERspectives. She lives in Atlanta, Geor.*

...the officers came back to me and yelled that I had two options: get in the car, or show my ID. They cornered me against a barricade as I kept repeating: "We're walking away. It is over. We are leaving." I knew I did not want to get into the car and go to the station — I wanted to stay with the amazing group and continue my witness — so I finally handed over my passport.

The officers wrote down every detail about me: blue eyes, brown hair, passport number, etc. and called the station to verify my visa.

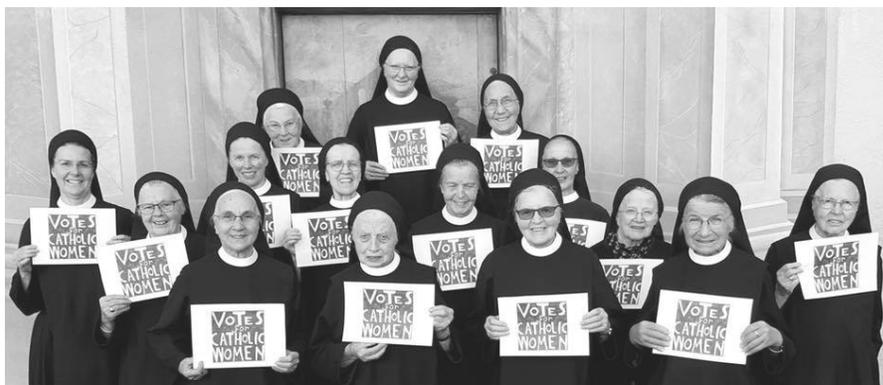
Imagine the scene: two men on horses, a group of women holding hands and praying the rosary, journalists and tourists tweeting and taping the scene, while the bishops stayed safely behind closed doors.

The knocking outside the Synod Hall echoed for a month in Rome and around the world. Our witness and the video footage of several of us harassed and mistreated by police raised awareness of just what was happening in Rome. WOC and FutureChurch quickly launched a petition, co-sponsored by eleven organizations, that advocated for women religious voting rights at the Synod. It garnered more than 9,500 signatures in just two weeks. We were featured in every major news outlet (and many minor ones) as the "Vatican Suffragists" — you can imagine my surprise when I saw my photo in *Our Sunday Visitor*!

At nearly every daily press briefing, the question of women's voting rights was raised. All major news outlets covered the witness and the call: let women vote! In fact, we educated the bishops who thought they could comfortably respond to the journalists' questions by saying: "Well, it is a synod of bishops... that's why women can't vote," pointing out that two non-ordained men have full voting rights. Clerical error?

After our witness we held a roundtable discussion, Discerning Women: Voices Outside the Synod, just five minutes from the Synod Hall, with four theologians. Jacqueline Straub, a young German woman called to priesthood; Paola Lazzarini, the Italian co-founder of Donne Per La Chiesa (her presentation is in this issue); Zuzanna Radzik, a Polish theologian, author, and feminist leader; and Jamie Manson, NCR books editor and columnist. Their testimonies challenge not only the sexist voting practices, but the closed-door clericalism and patriarchy that damages our church and rejects women in their wholeness.

I appreciated South African theologian Nontando Hadabe's question



*Benedictine nuns from the monastery Fahr – Switzerland rally in support of #votesforcatholicwomen.*

about introducing women into the current system and the value and danger of a familiar adage: "add women and stir."

Jamie Manson argued that adding women and stirring would bring incredible renewals and that simply, we need to get women into the system as equals.

Similarly, paving a path for women religious to vote at the synod would not uproot patriarchy, but in such a fragile system, every brick we remove weakens the structure. When it falls, it will seem like one final brick caused the crash, but we know, it will be from our persistent labors.

During the three weeks of the synod it was reported that the Union of Superiors General (USG), representing about 185,000 priests and brothers, and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), representing about 600,000 sisters and nuns, were drafting a proposal to put before Pope Francis to address the disparity in their voting rights. Sr. Sally Hodgdon of UISG, the only woman present at the synod who could have voted if women religious superiors were granted that right, described the proposal at a press conference following the synod: equal representation between men and women religious, equal voting rights, and freedom to select the delegates (this year, the UISG were directed by the Vatican to select women from specific countries; the men had no restrictions).

After three weeks of listening, debating and sharing experiences, a drafting committee pieced together the final synod document. We know now that an early draft contained language of reconciling the inequality of women and men religious voting rights. *Knock, knock...*

The final synod document — released only in Italian — included bold

language to include women in decision-making structures, particularly where there is no "ministerial responsibility," calling it "a duty of justice."

We know that separating ordination from decision-making roles would greatly help the Church heal from the sins of clericalism and misogyny.

However, a "duty of justice" must also confront the denial of the institutional Church to recognize many women's calls to priesthood. This discrimination deprives our church of women's gifts and preserves a patriarchal culture that subordinates and oppresses those outside of the clerical caste.

Going forward, we should take seriously the document's call for "courageous cultural conversion," which requires the Church to have the courage to acknowledge and remedy the grave harm it has caused through its refusal to ordain women. Let us hold our bishops and institutional leaders to the document they approved.

Our grassroots action, the #VotesForCatholicWomen social media campaign, the petition, and exceptional media work had an undeniable impact on the synod culture and the final document. As a "duty of justice" we disrupted the Vatican's normalization of the absence of women from decision-making bodies and globally shamed the process through community organizing and social media.

The document also acknowledged the "impoverished discussion and path of the Church" because of the absence of women's voices. Of course, we at WOC agree. And yet, any credible path forward must begin with equality for women: May our voices be heard, may our votes be counted, and may our vocations be celebrated.

*Kate McElwee is the Executive Director of WOC. She lives in Rome, Italy.*

# Aspiring to Servant Leadership

BY THE REVEREND DOCTOR VICTORIA MARIE



*Rev. Dr. Victoria Marie*

I am a Roman Catholic Woman Priest. I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. In 1965, when I was 20, I left home and came to Canada. On my mother's side, I'm African American and German. On my father's side I'm African and Native American. My mother's side of the family is Catholic. My father's mother is Baptist and his stepdad is Muslim from Borneo in Indonesia. I was raised by these paternal grandparents. My mother made them promise to send me to Catholic school. I attended Catholic grammar and high schools. From grades 1 through 6, I was the only African American in the school.

My early religious formation was based on lessons from the Baltimore Catechism. It presented a picture of God and humanity that was very exclusionary and individualistic. A result of this type of indoctrination into God-talk, was to make children afraid of offending God, rather than encouraging us to love God. The picture was of a stern father figure, ready to pounce and punish if I make a mistake; a celestial accountant, who kept a ledger of my behavioral debits and credits.

The theological climate began to change with the Second Vatican Council when Catholic theologians, many of them women, began to broaden the discussion. I became one of those growing number of women who felt that Eurocentric patriarchal traditions and representations of God as "old White Guy in the sky" alienated them from God as mother. Women, especially women of color felt— there is a conscious need to reclaim the holiness of female embodiment and recognize the sacredness of Mother Earth as well.

God is Love and always invites us into that Love, as the Sufi mystic, Rabia of Basra wrote,  
How long will you keep pounding on an open door  
Begging for someone to open it?

There is a need to remember that not only was 'the Word with God' but 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'. (Anderson, Sherry Ruth, and Patricia Hopkins. (1992). *The feminine face of God: the unfolding of the sacred in women*. New York: Bantam Books, p. 128)

For me, that was a turning point.

Through my studies at the Vancouver School of Theology (VST) and the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, I came to know God by other names than Yahweh, Lord and Father. I came to understand the God of Scripture also as Creator, Ruah, Breath, Word, who is described by St. Bonaventure as a God who is Self-Diffusive. Looking at scripture through this lens (a bit adjusted), I think of Creation as God's self-giving/diffusion: speaking, breathing, loving creation into being. The God I know through scripture is a God who wants justice for all who are oppressed. In our time, this includes not only creatures but the earth itself (and beyond, if we consider "space junk").

As I grew more in love with God, I realized that God is revealed to me not only in scripture but also in nature (plant, animals, humans, waters, mountains, etc.), and in my bones/heart. God is also revealed to me through the words and works of others. From the Trinity portrayed in *The Shack*, the hurts of my child self were healed. I was actually made in the image of God as the First Person in the Trinity in Young's book. Likewise, Jesus in this book actually looks like someone from the Middle East, and the Holy Spirit is embodied in the image of another Othered people – She is Asian. While the book is fiction and I don't subscribe to any portraits of God, somehow it was still comforting to the little girl, who so long ago was taught to internalize the "whiteness" of holiness. However, what surprised me was the reaction of some of my friends of European descent who were upset by the personification of God as other than European.

Some people know from an early age that they are called to the priesthood. For others, the road is not so clear. For me, there were a few intermediate calls that required a "yes" response on the way to my present state. The first was to say "yes" to the invitation to sobriety. That "Yes" occurred in 1990 and I have by God's grace, remained sober since then. Even in the early stages of my sobriety, I thought that gratitude was a verb. If I was truly thankful, I should show it.

I became a member of a parish in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) but I felt it was not enough. It was if, again, God was calling me to become a nun; a call that I first heard as a teenager. While I was at VST (the first time), I joined a Franciscan religious order. The next year, I co-founded the Vancouver Catholic Worker (VCW). I served the DTES as pastoral assistant for the RC parishes located there for six years (1996-2002) and as a volunteer until 2011. We have lived and shared our home and love at the VCW for 15 since 1998. Each of these endeavors was a "yes" opportunity.

For me the call was to serve those who, for whatever reasons, felt abandoned by the "official" church but yearned for community

There were also opportunities to say "yes" to invitations to see a wider picture of things. For me social justice activism, research and advocacy are faith and love in action.

*continued on page 13*

# News and Notes

## CATHOLIC WOMEN CALLED

Central to WOC’s mission is the conviction that we must believe women: believe their stories, believe in their call, believe in the ways God is working through them and with them. Through our Catholic Women Called video series, launched on May 11, we have had the joy and privilege of sharing more than seventeen videos featuring what women with a vocation to priesthood want the world to know about their calls.

For some, their calls were crystal clear from their childhood. For others, God’s invitation came as a surprise. In each woman’s story, what is evident is the sense of profound joy and peace they experience through becoming who God has meant them to be. They become the face of God to the people they serve—a face that looks very different from the male God that dominates the Catholic imagination. And they delight in serving God’s people—those who are left behind, those who long for a more inclusive sense of community, those who know that the Church is more than the hierarchy.

Women called to priesthood must be made visible. If Catholics could see the varied faces of these women—crossing generations, races, and continents—our image of “priest” would break open into myriad faces of all genders who know God’s call to sacramental service.

Find our Catholic Women Called video series on YouTube at [youtube.com/OrdainWomen](https://youtube.com/OrdainWomen)



## WELCOME TO WOC’S NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS



**Abby Rampone** is a Vermonter, a writer, and a feminist Catholic. She’s concerned with creating radical, resilient communities in the face of environmental degradation and patriarchal violence. After graduating from Williams College last June, she moved to New York City, where she is pursuing an M Div at Union Theological Seminary. At Union, she enjoys living and working with the Women’s Interfaith Residency Program.



**Sabrina McLaughlin** was raised in her mother’s Italian American Catholic parish, and after several years as a member of the United Methodist Church, she discerned a return to the Catholic Church to better serve God and her conscience by being a voice for change from within the Church. Sabrina holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in literature and has worked as a classroom instructor in community colleges and trade schools, and on political campaigns and for political organizations. For the past five years she has served on a Congressional staff in Pennsylvania.



**WOC AWARDED GRANT TO EXPAND “LISTENING TO WOMEN” PROGRAM FOR SPANISH SPEAKERS**

WOC is thrilled to announce a recent \$15,000 award from the JustPax Fund, an organization focused on enhancing effective change in the areas of gender, environmental, and economic justice.

The fund will expand our “Listening to Women” sessions program by creating Spanish-language resources and funding a dedicated outreach coordinator to Latinx communities for women to share their joys and challenges as women in the Catholic Church. Those reflections will be shared with the bishops in order to create opportunities for greater inclusion and understanding within the Church.

Given that one-third of the Catholic population in the U.S. identifies as Hispanic, we recognize that any effort to listen to women in the Catholic Church is incomplete without the input of Latinx/Hispanic women. With this funding, WOC will be able to provide a Spanish-language website, a Spanish translation of the resource guiding participants in listening sessions, and Spanish-speaking part-time, temporary staff to assist with outreach and data collection.

The English-language “Listening to Women” project is a collaborative effort with the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, Dignity USA, FutureChurch, RAPPORT, and the Australian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform.

# Ludmila Javorova and the Ongoing Struggle for Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church

BY ANDREA MAGAZZU JOHNSON

In 1991, I was serving as a member of WOC's Board of Directors. Our National Coordinator at that time, Ruth McDonough Fitzpatrick, announced to our board that she had learned via a *New York Times* article of the ordination of a Roman Catholic woman, ordained for the underground church during the Communist era in Czechoslovakia. The woman's name was Ludmila Javorova. Through the *Times*, Ruth was able to make contact with a laboratory chemist in Connecticut by the name of Frank Miekc, who told her the story of the underground church movement in Czechoslovakia during the decades of the 1950s through the 1980s. Miekc himself had served as a married priest of the underground church.

The leader of this movement, approved by the Vatican, was a priest, Felix Davidek. Also a medical doctor and research scientist, Davidek had been instrumental in leading an underground university system to combat the takeover of Czechoslovakia's universities by the Communists. Captured by the Communist government, Davidek was imprisoned for a number of years. When he returned to his native Moravia after being released, he immediately took up his work of forming an underground resistance. This time, he was focused on seminary training for Catholic priests because the existing seminaries and hierarchical structures had been infiltrated and compromised by the Communists. The Vatican took note of his efforts, and decided to bless the movement to create an underground church. They devised a plan to get him ordained as bishop so that he could move forward with his work of ordaining priests who could operate without the constraints placed on the official hierarchy by the Communist regime. Davidek immediately set about building the underground church. Among the people he chose to assist him was a young Moravian woman with whose family he had been acquainted for many years, Ludmila Javorova.

During the years of the underground church, priests were prepared in seminaries that were the homes of many of the faithful. Training groups were comprised of small cells, and classes were conducted at off hours—all to prevent detection and infiltration by the Communist government.



*Ludmila Javorova*

Ludmila became the vicar general for the underground church. She alone had all of the information about the program.

Much of it was committed to memory to reduce the risk of detection of a paper trail. Bishop Davidek and the other bishops and priests depended on her.

The underground church stayed in touch with the proceedings of Vatican Council II, and were aware of the discussion surrounding the possibility of married priests. Many of the underground communities were largely made up of people from the scientific academic community. They were very familiar with, and had an affinity for, the writings and theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. At some point early in their development, they made a decision to ordain married men as priests.

By the end of the 1960s they were ordaining women deacons, and considering ordaining women priests. Bishop Davidek was a strong proponent of this. His reasoning was that when he was in prison in the period 1948–1955, it had been possible to get the sacraments to men in prison by disguising priests as janitors or other workers, but it had not been possible to reach the women prisoners.

Women priests could also have been disguised as ordinary workers on the women's side,

he reasoned, and would have been a great blessing.

By 1970, Ludmila had discerned with Bishop Davidek a call to priesthood in order to serve the women in prison. It is documented that she was ordained by him as priest on December 28, 1970.

In 1992, when WOC became aware of the rudiments of this story, the Board commissioned our National Coordinator, Ruth Fitzpatrick, along with three other WOC women: Dolly Pomerleau (board member), Sr Martha Ann Kirk, and Carolyn Moynihan, to go to what was by now the Czech Republic to find Ludmila. For this undertaking, they enlisted the help of Frank Miekc. They set off for Prague, where they were met by a group of Jesuit theologians from the University of Prague, who insisted that Ludmila was no longer alive. (By this time, Bishop Davidek had been dead for several years.) Not to be deterred, the women replied that they were very desirous of meeting with the whole community that Davidek and Javorova had served in the city of Brno in Moravia. They were offered a translator, and off they went to meet with the remnants of the underground group. For several days, they met with the folks, asking many questions and listening to many stories. They expressed their deep regret that Ludmila was no longer alive to share her story with them. After several days of conversations, the Brno community group surprised them by admitting that Ludmila was not dead; in fact, she was among their interlocutors! So, the conversations and stories continued. When the WOC women returned home, they reported back to the Board, which felt that it was very important to follow up with a future visit, to invite Ludmila to come to share her story in the US.

It seemed very unlikely at the time that Ludmila could be convinced to do such a thing. Her very existence was shrouded in secrecy, as if she had already passed on. The official church had brought significant pressure on her and on the people of the underground church communities to resume business as usual—reintegrating into the official church parishes as if the entire Communist epoch had never occurred.

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# My Story of Call

BY KATHY SULLIVAN VANDENBERG

My education began in a one-room school with eight grades in the town of Waukesha, Wisconsin. In 1959 I graduated from high school in that same city, followed by college at the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh to pursue a degree in teaching.

Growing up in the countryside was full of wonders! I experienced God with me always as I explored acres of wetlands with rivers and birds and animals. It was there I found God in nature and in wild things. One image of my youth that stands out for me is sitting along the river seeing a deer running to water—it made me think that is how as our hearts run also—to living water and to a God who loves us. Organized church services didn't speak to me, nor did they have a lot of influence on my spiritual growth. Rather, after going to Mass I would read my books and sit under trees behind my house. I knew I was safe and I knew God was with me.

After graduating from college I taught third and fourth grade in a rural school for three years, until I became pregnant with my first child. In those days, women were not given employment when the school system found out they were with child, so I stayed home until my second child was born, and then I worked as a substitute teacher.

When my girls were older I began a pre-school program at St. Mary's in Waukesha. I would continue to teach there for many years, where I also helped write the program and served as the administrator.

I was active in church ministries and politics even when I became a parish council member with responsibilities for the Liturgy Committee. At that time the church was committed to changing the regulation for Reconciliation. I was astonished that the Vatican had the ability to change decades-old regulations and provide new instructions for such an important sacrament. This then naturally led me to think that if the church could change her thinking about Confession, why couldn't the church change the requirements for other sacraments? Why didn't the church ordain women?

During this time of my life, my perception of the church started changing. I had lots of questions: What attributes does a priest need in order to be considered for ordination? Why were there no altar girls? How could I reconcile my call to priesthood with my life as a wife and mother? These questions led me to conversations with three key people in my life, including my spiritual director. I asked each of them if they could help me discern my call that seemed to be coming from God. All three recognized and confirmed that they too, thought God was calling me to the priesthood. How could a married woman with two children have that call, and what was I going to do with it?

So to be sure I had the right credentials, I went back to school and earned a Masters degree in Counseling from the University of Wisconsin at Whitewater. After graduating I applied to St. Francis Seminary in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. After submitting my request for entrance I was admitted as a graduate student. During those years of study I experienced many difficulties from professors including one that forbade me from asking questions during class. Unlike the men, who were given permission to ask questions, I had to submit mine prior to class. At the end of the 1980s I received a Master of Divinity degree with over one hundred twenty credits. I also earned a certificate to be a Trauma Specialist from the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. I wanted that additional accreditation in trauma and its effects on families because I had started a program for Parents of Murdered Children at the parish where I had been working and this certificate complemented that area of study.

Meanwhile in 1978 I attended the WOC meeting in Baltimore with hundreds of other women who also felt called to ordination. I listened, observed, and recognized that my calling to ordained ministry was similar to many of the other women at the conference. I felt like I was beginning a new journey. When I came home from that WOC gathering I felt very encouraged, no longer alone in my call to ordination.



*Kathy Sullivan Vandenberg*

I soon learned that the men in my diocese were being ordained to the priesthood in May of each year and I began to hold prayer vigils outside the Cathedral to pray for them but also to pray for women's ordination. About twenty to thirty people would join in those prayer vigils. This went on for sixteen years.

In 1986 I joined RAPPORt—other women with the same call and wanting to both work for women's ordination as well as change or eliminate Canon 1024, the church's law that only lists men as able to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. RAPPORt began meeting three times a year to strategize and meet with Catholic bishops. We also met with two Episcopal bishops. RAPPORt often met in Washington, D.C. to attend the U.S. Bishops meetings held at the Omni Sheraton. We invited a group of bishops to meet with us at a retreat center to hear our stories of call and to deepen our dialogue with them.

Throughout those years my call to priestly ordination became stronger and more compelling. In my personal journal, God would lead me to write the words, "Great times are coming beyond your wildest dreams!" My understanding and determination continued to grow stronger by the day. Soon I would meet Bishop Patricia Fresen and together we discerned that I would move forward in the process toward ordination. I was ordained a priest on July 31, 2006.

How could a married woman with two children have that call, and what was I going to do with it?

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# Like all Things Spiritual, It was a Process

BY GEORGIA E. FULLER, PH.D.

I heard a voice in September 1976. That voice sent me to WOC a month later and then to RAPPORt in 1986.

Like all things spiritual, it was a process.

My husband, Hugh, and I have lived in the Washington, D.C. area since 1967. In 1974 the struggle to ordain women in the Episcopal Church made national news. My husband was a recovering Episcopalian, a graduate of St. Alban's Boys School. The School's headmaster had assisted at our wedding. When the first women were ordained in Philadelphia on July 29, 1974, my husband was excited.

"At last my church is doing what it preaches!" he declared.

On November 10, 1974, Father William Wendt, rector of St. Stephen and the Incarnation Church, obeyed the recommendation of his vestry and invited the Rev. Alison Cheek to preside at mass. Alison had been ordained irregularly (illicitly—without the approval of the local diocesan bishop but with valid apostolic succession) in Philadelphia. Bill obeyed his vestry but disobeyed his bishop, who brought him to trial. The jury included the headmaster of St. Alban's. We were sure he would vote to acquit Bill. But he didn't. And Hugh was so mad that he actually went to church. We began attending St. Stephen's in order to support Alison, Bill, and the congregation.

On September 7, 1975 Hugh and I were part of the security staff at St. Stephen's when the second wave of women were ordained irregularly. I was also chair of a local task force on Women and Religion for the National Organization for Women (NOW). I was soon co-chair of the national Task Force. My NOW co-chair and I went to the Episcopal General Convention in Minneapolis the following September. This is the Convention that legalized the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy.

I arrived in Minneapolis the day before the Convention started. I wandered around the display hall and felt the spiritual pulsing of a great, complex machine whirring in my head. I envisioned wheeled-gears within different sized gears all grinding toward the ordination of women. I didn't know where I fit in. I said, "God, why am I here? They don't need me."

"You're here for my Roman Catholic sisters and brothers," was the answer.

"Okay," I said. So I carefully observed the workings of the convention and took good field notes. (Cultural anthropology was my doctoral minor.)

From these observations I addressed the WOC Board in 1977, soon joined the Board, and eventually became a member of RAPPORt. I have continually worked to avoid the problems I had seen in the Episcopal struggle. One was that, of the women and bishops who went ahead, very few had known one another. They had to form community on the fly and under fire. For this they paid an enormous spiritual and emotional price. In not knowing one another, the women who were lesbians felt compelled to stay in the closet. They paid a steep price.

I also observed that changing a cultural structure requires different kinds of work—education, politics, pastoring, as well as disobedience. Each effort was indispensable to the success of the whole. But rather than see this underlying reality, people saw each other as enemy. We now recognize this as "vertical violence engenders horizontal hostility."

Another observation was that the Episcopal movement centered around "my call," not on justice. So when the women were finally recognized in 1977, they went back to their own dioceses. They and their supporters were again separated. The movement for justice in the church subsequently faltered.

Since 1988, when WOC named me as a "Prophetic Figure," I have worked within the Roman Catholic reform movement to build community, to be inclusive, to encourage networking among reform communities despite their different strategies and tactics, and to focus on justice.

*Georgia lives in Virginia with her husband Hugh. She is a troublemaker in the tradition of Quakers, and she is currently a visiting lecturer at Friends Theological College in Kaimosi, Kenya.*



*Georgia Fuller*

## My Story of Call... continued from page 10

God has seen to it that I have flourished in my ministry. Now I plan, preside, and preach in a small, rural church in Allenton, Wisconsin at Jesus Our Shepherd. I share the ministry with another priest who also gives me guidance and encouragement and I reciprocate for his ministry. We have about thirty-five people of many ages. Our community gathers each week and we also hold monthly meetings to decide where we contribute money and goods to individuals and groups in need. People appreciate my ministry and are glad that a woman is one of their priests.

A few weeks ago while I was preaching, people noticed a deer running in the field outside the church behind the altar. I couldn't help thinking this was a sign that, as a deer runs to living water, our hearts continue to run to a God who loves us.

*Kathy Sullivan Vandenberg lives in Wisconsin where she stays close to family and pastors in a small rural church. She's been a member of WOC for many decades, and part of RAPPORt since the mid-1980s.*

## Ludmila Javorova ... continued from page 9

The underground community was in deep shock and mourning. The married priests and Ludmila were being treated as if they should just go home and forget everything they had done to preserve the church through the crisis.

In 1996, an opportunity presented itself to create another visit by representatives of WOC with Ludmila. By this time, WOC had celebrated its 20th anniversary with The Gathering held in the fall of 1995 outside of Washington, DC. It was announced by some European conference participants that the First European Women's Synod would be held in June of 1996 in Gmunden, Austria. All at the gathering were cordially invited to participate as guests. WOC decided to send a delegation to the European Women's Synod, including among them, myself as the new Executive Director and Dolly Pomerleau and Maureen Fiedler, SL as board members. Dolly, Maureen, and I decided to reach out to Ludmila to try to set up a meeting with her during our trip. After the Synod, the three of us drove to Brno. We had a lovely afternoon with Ludmila and a colleague of hers whom she called Libuse, and introduced as one of the underground women deacons. Ludmila told us the story of her meeting in 1989 with the pope's nuncio to Eastern Europe.

The nuncio informed Ludmila that her ordination as priest was not legal under canon law, and that she needed to sign papers stating that her ordination was invalid. Ludmila responded that she would accept the pope's orders that she not present herself publicly as a priest, but that she categorically refused to agree that her orders were invalid. She said that there were at least four other women priests who had not had the courage to do the same, so they agreed to sign the papers. We talked about the work for women's ordination that we were doing in the U.S. at WOC. We told her that we supported her and the remaining people from her community in their efforts to remain a community. We ended our visit by celebrating Eucharist together, with Ludmila presiding.

Soon after our return from our visit with Ludmila, Dolly, Maureen and I met to discuss follow-up efforts. We began what became a series of phone calls with Ludmila, in which we were able to convince her to make a visit to the U.S. to meet with a few select small Catholic communities that were favorable to women priests.

We offered her the possibility of meeting with and telling her story to some supportive Catholic bishops.

After much dialogue and many assurances that there would be no press to "out" her by presenting her as an active priest, she agreed. So in the fall of 1997, Ludmila and several accompanying women arrived for a month-long visit. Ludmila met and dialogued with progressive Catholic men and women in a half dozen venues.

She was the guest of progressive Catholics in Cleveland, Ohio, northern New Jersey, Connecticut, Baltimore, Maryland, and with RAPPORTR in Washington, D.C. During her visit to Cleveland, she made the acquaintance of Sr. Miriam Therese Winter. Sr. Winter and Ludmila renewed their contact through WOC, and eventually, agreed on a book contract. The book, *Out of the Depths*, published by Crossroads in 1998, tells the story as told by Ludmila to Sr. Winter.

During Ludmila's four-day visit with RAPPORTR, she shared her story with RAPPORTR members as well as three progressive Roman Catholic bishops. All of us—RAPPORTR members and the bishops—were astounded by her story. We were stunned by the sheer courage and devotion to the exigencies of the Gospel displayed by her and her colleagues. This extraordinary woman stood her ground when it came to protecting the underground movement from the Communist authorities, and also had the presence of mind and the grit to demand that a full report of the activities of the underground church be made to the Pope after the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia, which was one year after Bishop Davidek's death. Ludmila wrote the report which was submitted by Bishop Jan Blaha, Davidek's successor, because no report written by a woman would be considered by the Vatican. RAPPORTR was and will always be eternally grateful to Ludmila for the prophetic work she carried out.

During that visit, RAPPORTR gifted Ludmila with a white priest's stole, the artistic theme of which was the vine and the branches.

Her gratitude was expressed with great humility and humor. While she said she could not wear the stole publicly, she planned to be buried in it.



*Andrea Magazzu Johnson*

Both Ludmila and we who heard her story were immensely grateful for the crossing of our paths and the opportunity to share our stories and encourage one another on the path to recognition of Catholic women as ordained priests. Ludmila's story has had an enormous impact on the events of the past twenty years in our movement.

The discovery of Ludmila coincided with the timing of the linking up of Catholic women's ordination organizations from around the globe—a new coalition called Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW)—began at Gmunden in 1996! WOW has been a powerful voice in connecting women around the world with what has already happened in this struggle in which we are engaged. Women and men around the globe can now access papers given and books published throughout the world on the WOW website and the websites of its member organizations. Out of the WOW conferences (Dublin 2001; Ottawa 2005; Philadelphia 2015) have come many, many connections and opportunities.

People are now able to access by internet homilies by women. Most remarkably of all, the WOW coalition, through its sharing of information beginning with the Ludmila story, opened the door to sharing of strategies of women in different countries for finding the Catholic bishops to do the ordinations of women. One such success story is the growth of Roman Catholic Womenpriests. From seven women ordained on the Danube River in 2002, this group has grown to nearly 250 members in 2018, living on five continents.

*continued on page 13*

## *Servant Leadership... continued from page 7*

When I first heard of Catholic women priests, I could not see becoming a priest and being estranged from my worship community. Neither could I see becoming a priest to make a statement, no matter how prophetic. Then a directive from the hierarchy resulted in my worship community becoming fractured because some were no longer welcome.

I began to realize that there are a great many Catholics who are abandoned by or excluded from the Church in Vancouver who want deeply to practice their faith and receive the sacraments in a truly inclusive church. Now being both prophetic and of service to people resonated with me.

For me the call was to serve those who, for whatever reasons, felt abandoned by the "official" church but yearned for community, liturgy and the sacraments in the Catholic tradition. The renewed model of priesthood of the RCWP resonated with that call. The RCWP is not just a gender change of an old hierarchical structure but an inclusive restructuring.

Roman Catholic Women Priests cannot be ordained unless they are called by a community. The initial community that called me were members of the Vancouver Catholic Worker, some gay members of local Catholic parishes and a few who remain parishioners of traditional Catholic parishes. The community has grown to include members who attend Baptist, Anglican and Catholic churches as well as some who were not affiliated with any of church previously.

Prior to my ordination, the community agreed that our "parish" would take the name Our Lady of Guadalupe Tonantzin, it allowed us to honor our Catholicism and the Indigenous spiritual heritage of this continent. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared on Tepeyac Hill. It was the place of worship dedicated to Tonantzin, the Great Mother of the Aztecs. The community's acknowledgement of Indigenous people goes beyond our name. Each liturgy and meeting begins with an acknowledgement that we respect and are grateful to be able to have our services on the unceded land of the Coast Salish Nations.

Our community consists of small but diverse group of 25 people, ranging in age from students in their 20s to retirees in their 70s. We are a socially and ecologically conscious community but small in number.

Hence, we collaborate on these issues with other Downtown Eastside churches.

We are members of the Metro Vancouver Alliance to work on local issues and members of Kairos to work on national and global issues. We believe that our faith calls us to work to bring about the Beloved Community where all are related (human and non-human). At this time, I cannot say whether the RCWP movement is the beginning of a new denomination or if we will one day be accepted by the Roman Church. Whatever the future holds, we are serving the spiritual needs of people right now.

*Victoria Marie is co-founder of the Vancouver Catholic Worker, on unceded Coast Salish Territory. She is a Roman Catholic Women Priest, spiritual director, pastor of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Tonantzin Community and author of Transforming Addiction: The Role of Spirituality in Learning Recovery from Addiction (Riga, Scholars' Press, 2014).*

## *Voices Outside the Synod... continued from page 3*

Women must accompany these young women and be ready to defend them when they experience calls to priesthood.

I envision these priorities for young people as the same priorities for the church of the future. We need to build an egalitarian church, a church that puts the Gospel at the center, and one that is inclusive. I doubt the male hierarchy will be able to create the conditions for young people to find what they are looking for, so we must do it. We will succeed when we are able to break the old patterns and glass ceilings in our cathedrals. I hope we can also do this in alliance with all people of good will, some even who exist among male priests and other lay Catholics in our Holy Mother Church.

*Paola Lazzarini is a sociologist and co-founder of Donne Per La Chiesa. She lives in Calgiari, Italy.*

## *Ludmila Javorova... continued from page 9*

Ludmila Javorova, now 87 years old, has been kept aware of what has transpired. She is still very much alive, and in 2011 in Vienna, Austria, she, together with a bishop ordained by Davidek, accepted on behalf of the late Bishop Davidek a posthumous award for "promoting freedom in the church" in the underground church of Czechoslovakia during the Communist regime. The award was given by the Herbert Haag Foundation, and was personally presented by the Reverend Dr. Hans Kueng, a significant hero of the progressive church in his own right!

*Andrea Magazzu Johnson was WOC Executive Director from 1996-2000, has been a long-time member of RAPPORT, was ordained a priest in 2007 and bishop with the RCWP in 2009. Her call story is published in a book, Women Find a Way, The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, eds. Elsie McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, Ida Raming (VBW Publishing, 2008).*

## *Walking with my call... continued from page 4*

I know that my liberation is tied up with the liberation of others and the ordination of women remains a cause dear to me. But I want to push the boundaries. I want to make sure the church ordains people of all genders. I want a church where queer and trans persons are not just accepted and welcomed, but one where they can thrive and flourish. I continue on the path less traveled, encountering the holy on the margins and trying to discern how to be a priest in this ever-changing world while living as my true, authentic self.

*Kori Pacyniak lives and works as a pastor in San Diego, Calif.*

Passionate about women's priestly equality? Looking for a deeper way to show your support for a Church where all are welcome?

Consider applying to join the WOC National Board of Directors!  
Find more information at [bit.ly/wocboard](http://bit.ly/wocboard)

# Educating about Unconscious Bias, Microaggressions, White Supremacy, and Colonialism Report from the Call To Action Conference in San Antonio, Texas

BY JENNIFER REYES LAY

Our Catholic faith calls us to be people who work to incarnate God's love in the world and dismantle systemic oppression so that God's reign of justice and peace can be realized. Yet we know there are many obstacles that can get in our way despite our good intentions. Many of us do our best to promote equity and inclusion in our faith communities and the wider world but we've got a stiff learning curve to achieve those goals. At the recent Call To Action (CTA) Conference in San Antonio, Texas I had the opportunity to discuss some of these topics as a member of the CTA Anti-Racism Team through breakout sessions and a pre-conference workshop.

The pre-conference workshop was a day-long retreat entitled "Wrestling with the Legacy of White Supremacist Colonial Christianity." The leaders used the guiding image of "wrestling" with these tough topics and legacies we have inherited comes from the Genesis story where Jacob wrestles with the unnamed man in the desert (see Gen 32:22-42). The workshop began with prayer and reflection centered in this Scripture passage and then moved through three areas of focus: whiteness, colonialism, and white supremacist colonial Christianity.

The instructors led us to understand how the functionality of whiteness is theological, and they demonstrated this through the lens of creation and history as those concepts are handed down to us. The Roman Catholic Church created theological meaning out of encounters with those labeled "other" that continue to impact the theologies and structures of our church today in ways that perpetuate systemic racism and white supremacy.

Our church's partnership with Western European colonial empires also gave their theological stamp of approval for colonial expansion into all non-Christian territories through papal bulls, propagation of Manifest Destiny, and the Doctrine of Discovery, to name a few.

The workshop then traveled through a brief history of colonial expansion, looking at how patterns of colonial thinking and behavior would show up in the world at large, and ultimately in our consciousness as people of faith.



*Jennifer Reyes Lay*

The final section of the day combined those lessons and then placed the concepts into how that legacy is found in our modern day churches and faith communities. Workshop participants then reflected on how these ideas and patterns of white supremacy and colonialism are evident in church structures, images, language, behaviors, teachings, and traditions.

In each of the three sections there were four main divisions: commentary on the content we covered, personal reflection, paired listening, and small-group sharing. Participants were encouraged to bring a journal or notebook to write down their reflections and questions for further study or concern. The retreat closed with a large-group sharing and ended with a closing prayer ritual.

The second workshop I offered was entitled: "Are All Really Welcome? Unconscious Bias and Microaggressions in Faith Communities." For those of us in the progressive Catholic movement and faith communities it is common to hear the phrase "all are welcome."

This speaks to our collective desire to welcome the diversity of God's creation. Yet all too often our unconscious biases work against our conscious actions. Unconscious or implicit biases are attitudes and stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in unconscious ways. Our brains take in millions of bits of information on any given day, but the majority of this information is not processed consciously, the information stays at the unconscious level.

We also live in a world full of biases directed at various identities such as race, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, so as a consequence it feels almost natural to say and do things that repeat those biases whether we are aware of them or not.

One of the ways unconscious bias reveals itself in harmful ways is through microaggressions. Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals simply because of their identity. They can be verbal, behavioral, or environmental and come in the form of insults, invalidations, and assaults. Because microaggressions often come from the unconscious level of our brains, we are usually not aware we have just committed one until someone points it out. Microaggressions are frequently small, seemingly insignificant insults and indignities unwittingly focused on certain groups of people (e.g., like seeing a poor person who is overweight eating an ice cream sundae—people can look at her derogatorily and without even uttering the words give a look that says, "why are you spending what little money you have gorging yourself on food that you shouldn't even be eating"—we know those looks, they can destroy a mood). And these humiliating moments are cumulative when a person or group experiences them over and over in different contexts.

How we respond to microaggressions, then, is important as we try to create spaces for deeper relationships to be built and change our behavior. We need to remember that our intent does not always match the impact of our words and actions, some of what we say and do has a harmful impact on marginalized people or groups.

It is natural to respond defensively when someone points out our microagreesions, but that is not ultimately helpful. Instead, we need a posture of gratitude to the person who helps us raise our conscious level to see what we're doing unconsciously—that is how we can learn to stop repeating harmful behaviors or or saying mean, hurtful things.

*continued on page 15*

*Catholic Women Speak, Visions and Vocations*  
ed. Tina Beattie and Diana Culbertson. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist  
Press, 2018. 329 pages. ISBN 978-0-8091-5416-6, \$22.95.

REVIEWED BY TRACY GARRISON-FEINBERG

I'm one of those feminist Catholics who has had a general sense of what is troubling about sexism and patriarchy in the Church, but hasn't had the deep dive into feminist theology that many of my sisters in the Church can cite passionately and eloquently. It is for this reason that I'm so appreciative of works like *Visions and Vocations*, the latest publication by the Catholic Women Speak network.

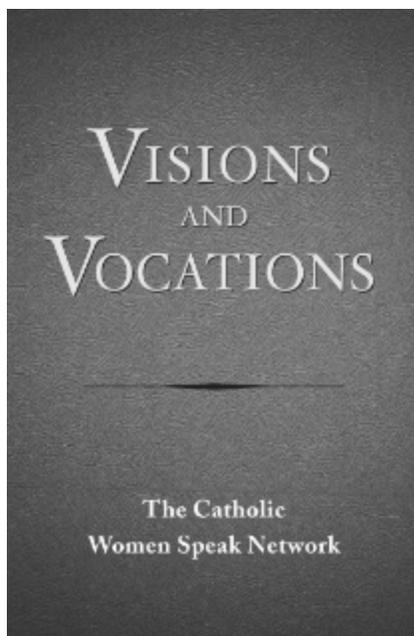
I am just beginning to immerse myself in this book, and I know it will be one I return to over and over. This thought from the introduction speaks deeply to where many of us are in insisting that the Church examine itself and be open to change (see page 3):

Nevertheless, we persist because we believe that ultimately the Church's survival depends upon women—not only as bearers of children for the Church of the future (a role that is more than adequately recognized already), but as bearers of visions and vocations that have yet to find space to flourish and grow in the sacramental, ethical, and social expressions of our Catholic faith.

The variety of voices in this book from all over the world, including different races and ethnicities, transgender and cisgender, as well as different generations, is inspiring. The essays in this book speak to many different experiences of feminist Catholicism and provide entry points for examining one's own personal journey through our Catholic faith practice.

The last two sections deepened my understanding of what a vocation is. There are many gems, but one of my favorite essays is "A Letter to Pope Francis—from Ten Young Catholic Women, Ages 14 to 17, Students of the Ursuline High School, Wimbledon." Gracious and eloquent, these young women take key points from *Amoris Laetitia* and respectfully offer their counterarguments. If these young women are future leaders in our church, then I am more hopeful than I have been in decades. I can only hope that Pope Francis and our other brothers and sisters in Christ will listen, read, and pray with open ears and open hearts.

*Tracy Garrison-Feinberg is a WOC board member and co-secretary and writes for us from Brooklyn, New York.*



#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Two of the articles in this book will be particularly of interest to WOC members: Executive Director, Kate McElwee, has contributed an essay titled "The Taboo of Women's Ordination," in which she tackles the prevalent phenomenon of seemingly progressive Catholics calling for women's "leadership" rather than ordination. As she convincingly argues, this "might seem like a tactical move, but it preserves the roots of oppression." WOC Board President, Sheila Peiffer, also has a contribution titled, "Musings in an Art Gallery - Responsibility, Freedom and Choice." Here, Peiffer is inspired by a painting of a walled garden to wonder how the kind of "truly free and responsible choices" called for by the Church itself in the Preparatory Document for the recent Youth Synod can occur in a Church that restricts the vocational options for women.

#### *Unconscious bias* *continued... from page 14*

My intention in this workshop was to help people understand our biases, accept feedback from people who point them out to us, and for people to commit to changing their hurtful behavior.

We are all going to make mistakes and commit microaggressions because bias and oppression permeates our culture and our environments, including our churches and the theologies underlying many teachings. But as we become more and more aware of what is harmful or working against our explicit values, we can also re-train ourselves by inputting new or different information to form new patterns of thought and behavior that more actually reflect our explicit values and beliefs. In our church communities we can change the images in our environment, we can change the language we use, we can change the messages we preach, and we can establish policies and practices that help hold us accountable to our stated values. In order to create truly welcoming and inclusive faith communities, we would do well to help one another make the unconscious conscious and be willing to change what might feel comfortable or "normal" because what often functions as the "norm" is rooted in systemic oppression.

*Jennifer Reyes Lay writes to us from St. Louis, Mo.*

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