Ibid seventy-five dollars!” I wanted the stole. Beautiful! Red and white and tasseled! Its charm attracted a less cautious buyer, who quickly raised the bid to $100. Gone! I knew my financial limitations. Suddenly, a woman unknown to me, spoke up, “I will buy the stole for Rita Lucey.” As my benefactor draped the stole over my shoulders, I asked her name. “Ann,” she replied as our photos were taken. Do I know her, I thought? A week later, a photo of us appeared online ... Ann Wright, military Colonel, who resigned her commission because of the United States handling of the Iraq War. We met while protesting at the School of the Americas (SOA), an institution whose graduates create chaos throughout Latin America. The human rights abuses perpetrated by these graduates — including coups, assassinations, kidnappings and murders — make us all complicit in violence that demands an end.

I have always felt called to denounce all forms of injustice, discrimination and inequality. In 1996 and 1997, I ‘crossed the line’ at SOA and was sentenced, along with 24 others, to six months in federal prison.

It taught me the injustices of our penal system. I learned, as a financially secure, well-educated white woman, about the women we imprison. The experience taught me that without an education, without adequate representation, with poor economic prospects, I, too, could be one of the 100,000 women we imprison, for non-violent ‘crimes’. When these women are released, most likely they will be denied education, often denied public housing and they will return to the same economic conditions. My interest in, my help, and complaints about their situation have never wavered.

At the age of 79, I chose to be ordained a Roman Catholic priest. The hierarchy refuses to recognize the right of women to hold this office. Yet I am worthy to birth these priests, these cardinals, these popes throughout the centuries just as Mary birthed the Christ … bringing forth their very beings, yet not worthy to be one of them?

We are all conscience bound to speak truth to power. Conscience bound … for to be silent is to be complicit, to be part of man’s inhumanity to man. As I proudly wear my stole, this 82-year-old wife, mother and grandmother will speak with gratitude to that Creator Spirit, that universal Oneness, that will continue to call me to work for justice, as it did Christ.

I give thanks to all who support me on this journey … the Anns of the world, my family, friends and so many with the courage to acknowledge that by being what we believe in, we can make a difference!

Elie Wiesel

New News

Pope Francis keeps insisting that Pope John Paul II has had the last word concerning women priests. “Never women priests!” Recently, after leaving an historic ecumenical religious ceremony in Sweden, and flying back to Rome, the Pope was asked by a reporter whether the Catholic Church might soon ordain women. “On the ordination of women in the Catholic Church, the last word is clear.” He then cited the words of Ordinatio Sacerdotum, by Pope John Paul II, that women could not be ordained because Jesus chose only men as his apostles. (Poor women of Galilee, Mary Magdalene, and Our Blessed Mother! Ignored again!)

My question is why is Francis’ decision less important than John Paul’s? They are both Popes. Francis’ word is as solid as John Paul’s. Where does Francis stand? All we are asking for is acceptance of our valid ordinations. We are neither heretics nor schismatics. We follow the Liturgy, and the spirit of the gospels. We are not dividing the Church … we are adding to it. We are the voice of fifty percent of humanity silenced in our Church by patriarchy.

Although not welcome by the Church, and suspected by conservatives, we are here and growing. Perhaps there is hope. Let us consider Pope Francis’ comments made on the same plane trip, about the plight of immigrants. “It’s not human to close doors! It’s not human to close the heart.”

Hmmmm! ✪

Rita Lucey, MA, Pastoral Studies, Loyola University, is a military wife, a mother and grandmother. She is President of a United Nations Chapter, member of the ACLU, board member of Amnesty International, and was bestowed with the Human Rights Award in 1998 for protesting against the United States government training of foreign military.
T
he ARCWP is a group of educated, experienced and seasoned Catholics dedicated to restoring equality, simplicity and inclusiveness to the Church. We do whatever brings the sacraments and compassionate help to those in need. Some of our seventy-six members choose social justice as their mission. Some teach in universities; others gather in small faith communities celebrating Mass and their lives together. One group comforts the sick and dying. Some speak softly and are quietly rational when others, such as Sophia, (in Ask Sophia) are seriously affronted by the state of affairs in the Church today, and say so. You will hear from them all.

We hope you enjoy our first newsletter, Leading. This issue’s theme discusses who we are, why we’re here, and what we do.

We are validly ordained priests and deacons, shunned by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church because of our gender. We are dedicated to a joyful theology, which is at odds with the Church’s preoccupation with sin, sex and dreariness.

We are a prophetic movement. Organized religion needs to be reorganized. Millions of Catholics have given up their faith in disgust. If we do not regenerate the interest in the simplicity of Christ’s message, who will? It is buried in over 1,750 man-made Canon Laws. Women and all their contributions have been ignored for nearly two thousand years. Enough!

Many of the following columns will appear every quarter: Spirit of the Season; Meditation material; Spotlight, an interview on the life work of one of our members; Book Review, conclusions of current theologians; Ask Sophia, pertinent questions about us, or our relationship with the Roman Catholic Church; New News, related events worth noting; Liturgy, history of the development of the liturgy; and, From the Editor, how all of the above hangs together.

Please recycle Leading by passing it along to an interested reader … post it on a bulletin board, give it to a friend, drop it off in a doctor’s office, put it on Facebook, Email it – anywhere it might be read. We are trying our best to inform all curious people exactly what we are about. Thank you for your interest.

From the Editor

A Meditation: The Glory of Being Positive Every Day

Winter is difficult for those of us who live in the cold north. Everything looks dead and gloomy … burdensome and often laden with dusty, whispering memories. Ah! But beautiful hope, as usual, is playing hide and seek!

Sap is slowly stirring in the trees. Bulbs buried in the earth are shooting forth their delicate roots. Longer days, sneaking around on tip toe, are edging out the dark. During this season, enjoy the mystery of change, of how the earth renews itself each year, and God renews our spirit each day. Remember that God works constantly to entrance and delight us with surprises, to shelter us from harm, to be intensely present in our lives.

And God loves to be loved for it. 

“Love all God’s creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.”  

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov
Liturgy

LITURGY: leitourgia in Greek, meaning “public service” or, “the work of the people.”

In ancient times, before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Hebrew religious practice contained many prayers of blessing. The Early Church, made up of Jews who followed The Way of Jesus, used these prayers when gathering to bless the bread and wine they shared at the Table. It was these faithful followers who came together in remembrance of Jesus’ life and promise of his Presence among them when they prayed. It took preparation and planning – liturgical work – to make this happen. Most of the prayer leaders at that time were women who offered their homes for liturgy. These women presided at the Table and provided the necessary items for worship.

The political and religious environment became very dangerous for the early followers of Jesus and, as they became victims of persecution, they found refuge in secret locations, many underground. Proofs of this activity are found in the many pictures painted on the walls in the Roman catacombs that portray women presiding at Eucharist and funeral rites. Along with the writings of Paul who praised women for being true apostles and evangelists, these underground frescoes have survived the centuries, and attest to the liturgical role of women in what would become known as ‘Christianity.’

The women priests of today testify to the presence of women in liturgical roles in our church’s history. As all were welcome at the Eucharistic Table in the early liturgical gatherings, women priests serving the faithful today are growing in numbers. They provide prophetic witness to how the Church in our day can be faithful to the living example of Jesus, who called men and women leaders in equal number, and turned away no one from the Table of Blessing. Our living example models the inclusive circular leadership the Roman Catholic Church is called to become today and for future generations. *

This is Part One of a continuing column that offers a brief history of liturgy in the Christian tradition and the roles women held in liturgical practice.

Ask Sophia

Q If the Vatican accepts you as women priests, will you study in seminaries, be obedient to your bishop, work in parishes, and be celibate, like the priests in the Church today?

Joan M. Taitte

A Why would we agree to accept the same archaic terms and conditions that we have dedicated ourselves to change? One of the major purposes of ARCWP is to divest the accepted patriarchal trappings from what has become the “Christian Empire” and return to the simplicity of the Early Church … of small faith communities, including liturgical celebrations in homes. Also, celibacy is not a virtue in itself. In some cases, it is a choice made to accomplish a feat that cannot tolerate diversion. It is important to note that intimate, loving relations with others, rather than dissipate our love of God, enhance it.

We are re-forming the Catholic Church … re-stating the importance of women’s work and place in the Church, which history has forgotten or conveniently erased. The significance of the irrereplaceable contributions of women deacons and priests and their influence in the Early Church is beyond the scope of this article. But, Jo Ann Kay McNamara, in Sisters in Arms, describing the first three hundred years after Christ, states, “Without their money and their labor and their witness, no religion would have been born and no Church could have been built.”

Our Association dedicates itself to returning to the simplicity of Christ’s message … love, service and gender equality. When the Roman Catholic Church accepts women as equal to men, eliminates the ‘second class citizen’ syndrome, and allows them to serve the faithful as ordained leaders, perhaps the havoc laid on women – sexual abuse, domestic abuse, unequal pay – may subside. With the dawning of women’s voices as ordained ministers, there comes a new vision of preparatory study, the role and service of the bishop, and the structure of governance in the Church. These visions and practices will be covered in our newsletter as future editions are published.

Seeing a woman behind the altar saying Mass can be shocking to some, but remember, the first human being to raise the Christ, adoring Him, and saying “This is my body, This is my Blood,” was not a man, but a woman, his mother Mary.

Joan M. Taitte is the owner and president of Teramar Corporation, a management and consulting firm.

Mary Eileen Collingwood, MTh, is a wife, mother and grandmother, who serves as bishop to ARCWP. She lives in the Cleveland, Ohio, area and serves the Community of St. Bridget as co-pastor.
“In Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

In 2002, on the Danube River, seven women were validly ordained Roman Catholic priests. The principle consecrating Roman Catholic male bishop, who ordained our first women bishops, is one with apostolic succession in communion with the Pope within the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, all qualified candidates, who are presented to our bishops for ordination, are ordained in apostolic succession by the laying on of hands. According to man-made Canon Law, the Church may consider us illicit, but our ordinations are valid.

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Spirit of the Season

In March, Lent will be upon us, and many of us, succumbing to old habits, will give up something. Living without dark chocolates or a glass of wine is fine for improving one’s self-control, but of little use to others, especially if deprivation makes us grumpy. If Christ didn’t like suffering, why should we? Better simply not to give up something, but to give something UP.

Let’s make our Lent positive.

“Our life is love and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusation against another, but praying for one another and helping another up with a tender hand.”

Isaac Penington, Quaker, 1616–1679

Good deeds are catching. Smile, be kind, listen, and think of others. Making life easier for those we live and work with is saintly. As we prepare for the glorious Resurrection of Christ, let us greet Him with joy and presence, not a feeling of self-satisfaction that we persevered “to give up something”. ✴

Tee Hee …

Sister Pat, RSM, and her service dog, Aggie, while walking down the corridor of the nursing home where she works, met a woman who exclaimed, “Oh! Look! There’s the dog that brings me communion.”

“Really,” Pat commented later to a friend, “I don’t know what to think. Should I feel put out?”

“Don’t worry,” her friend said. “She wasn’t talking about you. Aggie is much cuter.” ✴

Visit us at arcwp.org or bridgetmarys.blogspot.com

ARCWP is a 501(c)(3) organization eligible to receive tax deductible, charitable contributions in compliance with the IRS. If you wish to donate to our cause, please send to ARCWP, P.O. 2685, Orlando Park, IL 60462.