New News

The joys of Ordination! Abigail Eltzroth was elated when she was ordained to the priesthood on April 30, 2017, in Asheville, NC.

Since ARCWP was established in November 2010, the Association has grown from seven members to 80 members. As a branch of a universal movement covering several continents, the ARCWP missions are thriving from New York to California, from Colombia, South America to a group in Canada. There is also an ARCWP priest serving in Spain.

Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan is traveling throughout Ireland this summer with Rev. Mary Theresa Streck and support person, Joan Chesterfield. Last summer, when speaking to interested groups, Bishop Meehan caught the attention of radio and TV personnel who invited her back to learn more about the women priest movement. The three will be involved in several engagements.
From the Editor

Our theme this issue is exploring the meaning of missionary and how that calling applies to our lives.

The word missionary formerly brought to mind the picture of devout religious persons working in foreign lands, converting the natives to their particular sect and instructing and assisting them in every practical way. Although there are those who are called to devote their entire lives enthusiastically to this type of missionary work, not everyone can leave her or his position for parts unknown … health, aptitude and responsibilities interfere. We must be missionaries and bring the words, “Go and teach all nations,” to those surrounding us.

We teach by words, but more importantly, we teach by actions. There is no reason to believe we must preach in a church. St. Francis said, “Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.”

Jesus’ message is simple and clear … “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Consistently leading a good life is a mission in itself.

Besides writing out a check to a favorite charity, one could ask the cashier in the supermarket has he worked all day, when his shift ends, or complement a total stranger with, “You look smashing!” … or to a weary mother who is shopping with her young children, “You have a beautiful family.”

Everything that spreads true joy is worthy of a missionary. Seemingly small acts of kindness and consideration enable us all to join the Body of Christ. There is need all around us, calling us to get involved, to move out of our comfort zone. Anything positive causing joy and peace is missionary work. Never underestimate people’s gratitude for kindness. By giving and receiving kindness, we are twice blessed.

This issue’s Spotlight, instead of a biography, contains a letter written to our members from our bishop in Colombia. The works of priests mentioned on the ARCWP website under ‘Ministries’ tab will inform you of how we are spreading the word with a list of our missionary endeavors. The ‘Inclusive Catholic Communities’ tab will give you locations of where we are stationed. Many readers have asked for these.

Ask Sophia

Q

For sixteen years, since first grade through college, I received a Catholic education. I probably have a minor in theology. During that time, I never heard of women priests. Never. Always men. What proof do you have that there were women who served as priests? Are there any books I can read? Primary sources? Did women priests really exist?

Kathleen A. Brown

I

If your mind and heart are open to different truths and ideas, congratulations. The Church has a way of considering itself the final word, while discreetly passing over and neglecting sections of history.

The Roman Catholic Church is the last Christian bastion of male domination, unfortunately, and refuses to recognize that women and men were created equal in the eyes of God. Therefore, they fail to mention that women served as priests in the Early Christian Church. However, here are some primary sources, both online and in print that prove otherwise.

Gary Macy’s The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West. Macy has some light moments when he explains that the major proof of ordained women was found in clergy’s letters that insist certain bishops “stop ordaining women priests”. If there were none, why write such letters?


Also, Miriam Therese Winter’s Out of the Depths: The Story of Ludmila Javorova, Ordained Roman Catholic Priest. The struggle of a woman ordained during the Cold War in Czechoslovakia (now known as the Czech Republic).

And, Dorothy Irvin’s 2006 Calendar: The Archaeology of Women’s Traditional Ministries in the Church. This 12-month calendar combines archaeological and textual evidence in six full-color images depicting women’s leadership roles in the early church.

Kathleen A. Brown, a cradle Catholic, is constantly searching for the truth in her religion and the joy of Jesus.

A Meditation:

“Christ has no body but yours. No bands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks with compassion on the world.
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good, Yours are the bands with which He blesses all the world,
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.” St. Teresa of Avila
Hey, Everybody, Surf’s Up!

Women are currently riding the crest of a strong social wave. Never in my memory (which covers a great deal of history) have women’s issues been in the immediate, continuous, and socially acceptable forefront, not only in this country, but throughout the world. Observing the metamorphosis of women’s roles during my lifetime is like watching a seed sprout and grow.

In the Thirties, most women raised their children and maintained their homes. When World War II interrupted this regimen, women replaced the men gone to war and went off to work outside the home. Many women wanted to continue in the workplace. However, the Fifties was the decade when all social justice issues began to simmer. Women’s relegation to only domestic duties brought forth cries for equality, and use of their intelligence and gifts from seers like Betty Friedan author of The Feminine Mystique. Basically, the book pointed out that all women were not happy accepting roles of The Stepford Wives or Victoria’s Secret devotees. A little respect here, please.

Ah! The Sixties! Bra burning, picket lines, “Don’t hold the door open for me. I’m not helpless!” Too brash for the times? Perhaps. Did women’s actions open doors? Yes. My nieces and granddaughters never thought twice about their career choices. A doctor? Why not? Lawyer? Dad was, so why not me? It runs in the family. Engineer? Of course. I love taking things apart to see how they work … and making them work better. Mom could fix anything. I inherited her genes.

So much effort put forth and successes accomplished have been taken for granted. But now there is steady, sensible progress for women’s rights … not sporadic, as it has been in the past.

This is Our Time.

Women are approaching, and in some cases, have achieved equality in the media, workplace and politics. Women priests, have been validly ordained and wait to be recognized by the Church. We purport that they must be considered equal in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Equality for all in the eyes of God and in the eyes of others must start with the Church. Our Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests is a prophetic group … it envisions both reform, in the strict sense, and rebirth of our church … reform of shopworn beliefs, rules continued on page 4

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Liturgy

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

Prior to the twelfth century, ordination was primarily known as a call by the community to women and men for a particular ministry including, but not limited to, Table worship. With the emergence of the twelfth century and thereafter, ordination was formally defined as a male being ordained to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and to absolve sins. From that point on, ordination would be granted according to gender. In one large stroke of a pen, a thousand years of historical written references to women’s leadership at the Table, and their healing ministries within the community, were wiped away.

The reasons given to justify this drastic departure from women’s sacramental leadership are contrived. The protection of church property against inheritance rights by the wives and children of priests, and the theological gymnastics that purported women, carrying the affliction of Eve’s sin and viewed as inferior to men, launched the ban against women’s ordination which became church law. History refers to this as the “Dark Ages” and, indeed, they were!

As time moved on, the ritual altar was placed further away from the assembly. The spoken language of the Mass was Latin. Male priests faced the altar, not the congregation, except when delivering a sermon from a large, looming pulpit. The bread and wine were raised at the Consecration, and bells rung aloud alerting the assembly gathered in a long, narrow, and crowded church, as most were unable to actually see this “auricular communion.” Many parishioners left after the Consecration, as they did not feel worthy to receive the Body of Christ. The worshippers who did stay, knelt with tongue out and eyes cast down behind a rail that prohibited them access to the sanctuary. This style of worship would remain in practice till the mid-twentieth century.

But all is not lost. The Holy Spirit was at work in the hearts and minds of valiant women that raised their voices. Beginning with Brigid of Kildare in the fifth century, women such as Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Sienna, Julian of Norwich, Joan of Arc, Teresa of Avila, and the nineteenth century Therese of Lisieux, lived their lives in opposition to the oppressive regime of the Church. Their words and actions open doors? Yes. My nieces and granddaughters never waited to be recognized by the Church. We purport that they must be considered equal in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Equality for all in the eyes of God and in the eyes of others must start with the Church. Our Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests is a prophetic group … it envisions both reform, in the strict sense, and rebirth of our church … reform of shopworn beliefs, rules continued on page 4

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.
spirit still live on in women today. These courageous, visionary, mystical women were abbesses, scientific inventors, theorists of nature, healers, musicians, soldiers, spiritual gurus, counselors, mentors to the clergy, ministers to the poor and disenfranchised. They all spoke their minds and imparted the truth of the Spirit at work within them. Their lives have impregnated history and their truth is born in the prophetic witness of women priests in our midst now. We study their lives and use their insights and knowledge while answering the Spirit's call of reform within our church today. *

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

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.

Grandmothers, remember the days? They are not over yet. Let's work to make spiritual, then social, equality universal. Let's finish what we started and have been fighting to attain for centuries. Let us replace gender aristocracy, which promotes stultifying and degrading conditions affecting fifty percent of the world's population. Let us replace it with mutual respect.

Read *Leading* and share it with your friends and interested parties, online or in hard copy, if possible. Visit the website at arcwp.org. Select 'Newsletter', previous issues are posted along with the current one.

Ask your Facebook friends to share with others. It is our way to make ourselves known. If we don't continually pay attention, push for equal recognition, and nourish our message, who will?

Moving the Roman Catholic Church and society in the right direction is no easy task. Let's get to it. The surf is up. Let us ride the crest to reach equality for women priests in the Catholic Church and for all women throughout the world. *