Deconstructing and Reconstructing a Renewed Priestly Ministry that Welcomes Everyone
Bridget Mary Meehan

In his new book, *The Universal Christ*, Richard Rohr writes “you can only reform things long term by unlocking them from inside – by their own chosen authoritative sources. Outsiders have little authority or ability to reform anything. . . . We need to reconstruct and not just continue to deconstruct.”

He cites Jesus and Paul as examples of prophetic reformers who trusted their own experience of God versus the status quo of Judaism. They reframed the tradition for inclusion of more people. Our international Roman Catholic Women Priests Movement has been deconstructing a patriarchal male model of priestly ministry excluding those who don’t follow the man-made rules of the Church. Instead, the movement reconstructs a new model of inclusive ministry in which all are one in Christ, spiritual equals invited to celebrate sacraments.

In our inclusive communities, for example, the entire assembly is invited to pray the words of institution/consecration, in contrast to the institutional Roman Catholic Church where this is the role of the priest alone. Likewise, at our ARCWP ordinations, the people, not just the bishop and clergy, are invited to lay hands on the ordinands.

We are leading the Church out of a medieval clerical understanding of a male priest as *persona Christi* possessing exclusive power to “confect” sacraments because of his ordination.

According to contemporary theologians such as Bernard Cooke, author of *The Future of the Eucharist*, a fresh understanding of the resurrection has led people to accept Christ’s constant and active presence in the believing community, changing their view of “real presence” and opening them to accept the

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Barbara A. Duff was ordained a priest in June 2013. Retired from Veterans Affairs after years of nursing, teaching, and earning several college degrees. Currently working with the homeless, tutoring, and serving breakfast several times a week. Learned service to our sisters and brothers from twelve wonderful years as a Maryknoll sister.

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**Spotlight**

by Barbara Duff

Being six or seven, and draped in an old sheet, I meandered over to an old lady sitting on her porch. With a crucifix tucked through an old rope around my waist, I recall telling her I wanted to be a missionary. It was my first calling to a life of service.

Mom developed angina episodes when I was twelve. They were frightening experiences! In her nursing book I found that angina would commonly end in a person’s death. I started to cry from my soul.

Mom held me close as she spoke of trust in God and God’s love. She believed God would care for our family. I was fourteen when Mom had a massive heart attack, and then she was gone. I grew up on the streets with my friends – sometimes until late at night. I had no one to monitor my behavior.

Two Maryknoll Sisters visited our high school and spoke about bringing God to people in foreign lands. So impressed, I decided to join them. Since I was always getting into mischief, the teachers doubted that I would graduate, never mind become a nun. I did both with the assistance of the Almighty.

Then, the world beckoned and my spirit became restless. I left the convent to work and play hard, enjoying the “good life.” I quickly learned that type of living was not for me. Mother Mary Joseph (Foundress) had said, “Once a Maryknoller, always a Maryknoller.” A large part of my heart is still there. My loving sisters had instilled in me a desire to serve others …………wherever!

Being an adventurous soul, I joined the Air Force. Nurses were needed to care for our troops in Vietnam. Many prayers were secretly offered as I nursed the wounded and dying while transporting them from the battlefield. As diversions, I purchased my first motorcycle, and I earned a pilot’s license. My government service was completed in a VA hospital in Georgia, where I retired.

I encountered Roman Catholic women priests while attending a Call to Action Conference. WHAT?? Women priests!!! I pushed the thought way down into the recesses of my very self. I was too old (69), and who was I to dream or think I could be ordained a priest? The possibility ebbed and flowed within my spirit for four long years. Finally, I was accepted for ordination in 2013.

Today, my great joy is the liturgy and being of service to others. I truly have an attitude of gratitude for the calling of the Spirit. In my ministry of presence, I live out my calling. Serving breakfast and tutoring the homeless are most important.

“Who was I to dream I could be a priest?”

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Q: What is clericalism, and why is it such a hot-button idea these days?

by Lynn Kinlan

A: After five years of study, Australia’s Royal Commission cited clericalism as “a major factor contributing to child sexual abuse.” The Pope has condemned it for the same reason. We who have been ordained in the era of cover up must recognize clericalism and understand its origin so that we protect the innocent and open the Church to the gifts of the many.

The Pope describes clericalism as an “ailment” which equates Church with priests and bishops and ignores the laity. Richard R. Gaillardetz, theologian at Boston College, explains clericalism as an attitude of insularity and isolation by which clergy deem themselves so special and set apart that they are “exempt from criticism or accountability by those outside the clerical guild.”

How did priests catch this ailment? One source is scriptural interpretation that stresses the divinity of Jesus to the exclusion of His humanity. A clerical caste formed in the image of perfection had thus been created. That we are all made in the image and likeness of God gets lost. A tight circle of self-serving privilege forms when the role models emphasized in preaching are a dozen male apostles rather than the larger group of male and female disciples who helped Jesus spread the word. Limiting our liturgy readings to the usual suspects and four canonical gospels deprives us of the rich tapestry of voices who illuminate the life of Jesus and the call of God.

Eric Hodgens, a retired priest from Australia, traces clericalism through church history. He offers Baptism and Holy Orders as examples of how theology condones priests accruing more power and prestige than human beings can handle. First, Hodgens recalls the controversy of Christians who fled persecution and returned only with the imprimatur of Constantine. To those who had not fled, the membership status of returnees seemed suspect. Renewal through a second baptism was demanded of the returnees. The pastoral answer was to welcome believers back with expectations of penance but not to baptize them again. Theologians sanctioned this, reasoning that the seal of the Holy Spirit in Baptism irreversibly changes a person into a Christian so one need not be re-baptized. A priestly class that alone could confer the Spirit had grown in privilege and prestige.

In a second example, Hodgens points to Holy Orders. He reminds us that the Latin word for designate is ordinare. Once the earliest democratic designation of Church leadership evolved into consecration by ordination, it followed that a more sacred person had been created; an ontological change had purportedly occurred creating a higher class of more sacred men.

Perhaps unwittingly, the Church has eclipsed the power of God to create the sacred. In doing so, tiers of sacredness now exist between ordained and lay persons, between men and women. Clericalism has infected the bloodstream of the Church for centuries, sanctioned by theology and practice. We in the women priest movement are a part of a long-overdue transfusion that must occur if the Church is to look after the welfare of abuse victims and minister with the humility of Jesus.

L]heology condones priests accruing more power and prestige than human beings can handle."

Lynn Kinlan is a retired educator who enjoys writing spiritual poetry and meditations. She and her husband have raised three adult sons and are restocking their empty nest by caring for a grandchild part-time. Lynn co-presides at Upper Room liturgies in Albany, NY and in additional sacramental ministry for friends and family.

From the Editor

L}eadin} is pleased to welcome Debra Trees as co-author of the Team Paradise column with Shelley Gilchrist. Deb’s column on Paul’s benefactress, Lydia, brings to vivid life this early Christian leader. Complimenting Deb is Shelley’s enchanting column on St. Genevieve. Through Shelley’s charming first-person account, we hear the great French saint speak from the distant past. In sharp contrast, we have contemporary columns. With keen discernment, Bridget Mary Meehan deconstructs and reconstructs a priestly ministry welcoming all to the table. Ann Harrington offers an illuminating and thought-provoking portrait of current monastic life. An insightful Lynn Kinlan dissects the issue of clericalism at the root of so many problems in the Church today.

In a different vein, Barbara Duff shares with us her surprising and exciting faith journey. And for our book review, Holy Envy, Maureen McGill piques our imaginations with the latest from Barbara Brown Taylor, named to Time’s list of 100 most influential people in 2014.
The Monk Within
by Ann Harrington

I recently attended a program on the book The Monk Within – Embracing a Sacred Way of Life. I had been reading this book since early in the year and took advantage of hearing a vowed monk speak in this new paradigm of monasticism. Her name is Sarah Stein and, since the 1970’s, she has been a follower of author, theologian, spiritual teacher, and leader in the interfaith and inter-spiritual movements Beverly Lanzetta. Eventually, the loose group of people who had been “just showing up” for Lanzetta’s teachings coalesced into a new monastic community, Sarah among them. In 2012, eight women took vows to this monastery without walls. Their program has evolved into a two-year formation process and is “specific to each and different to each.” Currently, there are 20 vowed monks: 18 women and two men.

What I heard reminded me of ARCWP. These new monastics live all over the country, keep in touch by list serve, and gather in person twice a year. I came to a deeper appreciation of how what we are doing is unfolding similarly in other contexts. In particular, the monastics are deeply immersed in the understanding of mystical feminism. This new monasticism appeals to many who are spiritual but not religious.

One of the richest statements made by an attendee is that we always find time for our priorities. Sarah said, as a monk, the primary focus is to be on God, and so a self-emptying is necessary. She likened it to effacement in childbirth, the thinning of the cervix to allow for the baby to be born. As Julian of Norwich wrote, “Jesus is our mother from whom we are always being born.” Sarah also said that “patriarchy is crumbling; we are all disrupters, as God is trying to birth Godself.”

As a birther myself of a renewed church, it was heartwarming to meet and hear about other pioneers. Sarah, who is also a spiritual director, left us with some questions. What of yourself can you really let go? What would it mean to establish your own rule of life designed to pull you away from attitudes, practices, and beliefs that are diminishing? Have I earned my life? Have I earned the air I breathe?

I invite you to ponder these! ◆

Ann Harrington, wife, mother, grandmother, and ARCWP-ordained priest, is pastor of Free Spirit Inclusive Catholic Community. Her ministries include spiritual direction, interfaith dialogue, centering prayer, retreat leader, frequent letter-to-the-editor writer, and coordinator for the Greenville Advocacy Team. Continued from page 1

Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others
by Barbara Brown Taylor
A book review by Maureen McGill

It was the first day of class and every chair was full. Religion 101 was always full. Why was this? Do students sign up because they believe that their professor is an easy grader, or perhaps it was because of the free meals? Were they really interested in religions of the world? Did this class fulfill one of the general education requirements? Who knew? Nevertheless, here they were.

The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor begins her latest book with these questions. Before one delves in, it is essential to know more about her. She is an ordained Episcopal priest and author of New York Times bestselling books, An Altar in the World and Leaving Church. Barbara Brown Taylor no longer has a parish ministry. She is a university professor and has been teaching religion for almost 20 years.

In this book, the journey on which she takes her students and the readers encompasses Israel, Saudi Arabia, Asia, and many other countries by a study of their religions. The author begins this journey by relating some of her religious history. Her mother and father were not religious. Barbara rebelled by joining every church within traveling distance as soon as she received her driver’s license. She was Baptist for a while and then Presbyterian. During her college years, she hung out with Methodist seminarians and ate supper with Catholics on Sunday nights. She became a religion major, searching to learn as much about the divine mysteries of the universe as possible.

During her sojourn as a parish priest, the author lost faith in the institutional church. She puts it this way, “... the same Spirit that called me into the church called me out again, to learn the difference between the living water and the well.”

Barbara Brown Taylor tells readers that she found experiences of God in every faith tradition which she explored and to which she introduced her students. In fact, the author recognized in herself a Holy Envy which she described as “spiritual shoplifting.” There is more than that. She comes to realize that, although the study of other faith traditions has been helpful, the beauty lies in giving one an ability to reflect what is beyond them.

[T]he Spirit... called me to learn the difference between the living water and the well! ◆

Maureen McGill was ordained a priest in January 2014. She was a founding member of St Francis Ecumenical Catholic Church in St Petersburg, FL. Maureen is a retired attorney. She served as General Magistrate in the First Judicial Circuit of Florida and as Guardian ad Litem Circuit Director. Maureen is married to Gerald McGill, an admiralty and maritime attorney. They have 2 adult daughters and 5 grandchildren.
Reclaiming the Women of the Christian Scriptures
by Debra E. Trees

The women of the Christian Scriptures help us to understand how radical Jesus really was, even to this day. They were responding to Him in ways that were different from other women of their time. For example, several women followed the teachings of Paul as he moved about Greece and towns and cities around the Mediterranean. A woman named Lydia is mentioned twice, and it appears that she became a good friend, confidant, and supporter of the mission.

Lydia was a trader of purple-dye cloth and head of her household. Her status was not to be taken lightly, as she could offer Paul safety in a time of persecution. She possessed the physical home and the material resources to be one of Paul’s benefactors. He sought refuge in Lydia’s household before going on to his next journey. She was a strong and important advocate during those difficult times in the early church.

Lydia was also head of household and a businesswoman. The cloth she produced was available to — and purchased by — the aristocrats of the land, especially in Rome.

Purple dye was made from shellfish excretions. The process was dirty and smelly. Lydia’s entire household harvested the excretions, completed the process, and helped to run a busy family business.

Feeding and caring for her “employees” and their extended families added to her prominence.

That the Spirit of Christ touched Lydia’s heart is evident, since she followed what Paul was saying, had her entire entourage baptized with her, and then offered hospitality to travelers in their mission work of spreading the Good News. Lydia also celebrated Eucharist as the head of her own house church. No different than each of us, Lydia was living out her mission and celebrating her connection to Spirit.

Debra Trees is working on her Master’s in ministry through People’s Catholic Seminary and Global Ministries University. She is a wife, mother, and professional audiologist for the past 35 years.

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Leading is published four times a year.

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The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests consists of women and men committed to a renewed model of ordained ministry in an inclusive community of equals in the Roman Catholic Church. We seek equality for women in the Church that includes decision making and ordination.

“In Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

Shelley Gilchrist is a mother and a grammy. She has worked as an educator in speech, theatre, and English and is also a singer/actor/director. Expressing her love for the beatitudes has led her to serve with interfaith social justice organizations like F.A.I.T.H. in Volusia County Florida. She is also a member of the Federation of Christian Ministries and on an ordination path with ARCWP.

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