My road to ARCWP was circuitous. My love of religion began in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where I lived during second grade. In 1964, my mother and aunt enrolled me at St. Mary School and thus began my exposure to Catholicism. I was very drawn to the Mass, to religious music, the beautiful church, the mystery of it all, and to the spiritual presence I felt even at that young age. I made my first holy communion and began attending Mass regularly.

During junior high school, my mother told me it was time to find my own religion, and I was free to do that. I explored various paths before finally returning to Catholicism a few years ago, while working in a Catholic high school. I was so impressed with the social programs, community service, and commitment to spiritual formation that I knew it was time to come back! I was hesitant, though, because I don’t exactly fit the mold of a mainstream Catholic . . . divorced, lesbian, tattooed, and radical. How would this all work? Yet, intrinsically, I knew this was exactly what I was supposed to do. I signed up for Confirmation, was quiet about my personal life, and began regularly attending Mass at several parishes across the county, getting a feel for the nuances of each priest and each parish.

A close friend of mine is the founder of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion. I had approached them about entering seminary for ordination to the priesthood. However, at that time, they were only ordaining permanent deacons. I then entered spiritual direction with an Evangelical Lutheran pastor. This was a fantastic experience. During that time, I discovered ARCWP and was accepted to People's Catholic Seminary. My spiritual formation took off like a rocket! Radical changes reshaped my beliefs, my personality, and my understanding of the historical Jesus. This is the best thing I have done for myself, and probably others, in my adult life!

I can’t say the road to priestly ordination has been easy. There have been hiccups along the way. However, I am firm in the knowledge that what we are doing within the Roman Catholic Women Priests’ movement is profound, prophetic, and necessary. The Church needs to come into the light and to see women as leaders, not just strawberries off a cake to be consumed at the will of men.

My passions include recycling, the environment, and helping families who have children with disabilities. As an educational psychologist, I see firsthand the heartache, tears, and suffering of parents who are told news no one wants to hear. I can say with all of my heart that I have become a better psychologist, more understanding and compassionate to those in need, as a direct result of seminary, ARCWP membership, and spiritual formation.

I am about halfway through my priestly formation, in no rush to ordination. The journey is very important to me. As I quietly and deeply explore the contents of each class and reflect on the lessons, I come to an understanding of what has been taught and how I am personally interacting with the content. I have met the best mentors and friends while being a member of ARCWP, which has filled me with wonder, awe, and excitement in these latter years of my life.

We are forging a new Church and a new priesthood. Both will look very different in the years to come. I am excited and honored to be a part of this life path and the women’s priest movement!  

Spotlight
by Toni-Kay Attanasio

Dr. Ally Kateusz’ book, Mary and Early Christian Women, presents numerous texts and illustrations of women doing what men did in the early Church: preaching, baptizing, and leading worship. Dr. Kateusz’ focuses on Mary, mother of Jesus, as a woman with spiritual authority who leads the apostles, heals with her hands, exorcises evil spirits, officiates at Eucharist at the Last Supper with Jesus, and is depicted as a bishop. This portrait shatters the submissive woman stereotype and offers Mary as a role model for women’s empowerment that is egalitarian and perfect for the 21st century.

The Gospel of Bartholomew portrays Mary with spiritual authority over the male apostles. The author describes a debate among them on who should lead them in prayer. In the end, the author concludes that Mary’s liturgical authority is greater than Peter’s. In front of the male apostles, Mary states, “Let us stand up in prayer.” Then the apostles stand behind Mary who spreads her hands to heaven and begins to pray.

Scholars believe that the data support the conclusion that there were female and male leaders with equivalent authority around the Mediterranean in the early centuries of Christianity. Women were in significant ministry roles modeled after Mary. They were deemed apostles because they preached, sealed with the Spirit, and baptized. Women officiants, depending on their location and community, presided at Eucharist and were referred to as president, bishop, priest,
As always, we have wonderful contributors to our newsletter, and this time is no exception. Leading is honored to introduce Toni-Kay Attanasio in the featured Spotlight column and Silvia Brandon-Pérez, poet and author, in a personal reflection.

Special thanks to Bridget Mary Meehan for her jaw-dropping column on the early church, to Deb Trees for her thoughtful perusal of Scripture, and to Shelley Gilchrist for yet another delightful column on the saints.

Yours Truly has no previous experience with a newsletter and is essentially learning by the seat of her pants. This issue’s headache dealt with columns that are longer than usual. Make that markedly longer than usual. And excellent, to boot, so morally I can’t just prune them into oblivion. They’re trimmed to the bone as it is, and I can’t do more without severely compromising their messages.

Enter Maureen McGill, stalwart contributor and dependability incarnate, who provided a most sensible suggestion: make the newsletter longer. What a great idea! That way everyone’s column fits in. And we have ample space for Ever Juarez, our graphic designer, to let loose with his talents. No longer is he allotted only leftovers, an inch or two here or there, but he has a chance to do something truly creative! Not surprisingly, he does not disappoint.

On another note, when Lynn Kinlan asked to write on Mary the Magdalene, I could not refuse. IfTeam Paradise is a mitre over represented in this issue, so be it. Lynn’s splendid column on the great companion of Christ brought back a host of memories for me. In 2012, Dignity San Fernando Valley consecrated its chapel to Mary the Magdalene and named her its patroness. The entire supply clergy gathered for the event, and I was thrilled to be the principal presider. It was truly unforgettable.

Ask Sophia

Q: There is much conflicting information about Mary the Magdalene. Why is that, and what is the truth?
A: When it comes to discovering Mary the Magdalene, the hunt continues.

Imagine if a male apostle had been identified in the gospels as present at the crucifixion and a first witness to the resurrection. That might make of him a Super-Apostle whose steadfast loyalty to Jesus would be one for the ages. Leaving that hypothetical, let’s turn to what the record actually reports: Mary the Magdalene is present at the crucifixion; she is the first witness to the resurrection; and she is the first to announce it to the other apostles in all four gospels. Three gospels identify her as a participant/witness at the burial. And yet, she has been unjustly defamed for centuries with her reputation reclaimed only in the last 50 years by the saving grace of contemporary theology.

Now we exalt her as “the apostle to the apostles” whose first sighting of a resurrected Jesus gives her the role of ministering to the men in hiding. We belatedly see that she must be important if she is identified by name twelve times across the four sanctioned gospels (more often than most apostles) and is shown as following Jesus over years of ministry. She was likely a part of the inner circle of men and women who joined, financed, and supported the travels of Jesus across the region, sometimes helping him to escape from zealous crowds and to hide from the authorities.

Continued scholarship further enhances the reputation of Mary the Magdalene. Dr. John Dick, a retired theologian who taught at Ghent Catholic University in Belgium, points out the Aramaic meaning of Magdalene is ‘tower” or “pillar.” Greek language gospels speak of Mary as the Magdalene, employing it as an honorific title. English gospel translations mistakenly use Magdalen as a last name or as a reference to her supposed birthplace. But there was no such town in her lifetime; she was born in Tarichae in Judea. Dr. Dick indicates that, much later, a new town called “Magdala Nunnayah” was built over the Tarichae ruins. Therefore, Mary the Magdalene is actually a heroic or saintly title reflecting the importance of her companionship support and strength as a pillar of the early church. She was not named after a town. If anything, a town was named after her.

Still, the restoration of truth about Mary the Magdalene remains incomplete. If the Gnostic scriptures, including the gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary the Magdalene, and The Sophia of Christ tract, are considered, we begin to see Mary the Magdalene as venerated in sacred wisdom tradition. Theologians familiar with this material deem her “preeminent” among the apostles, one whose mystical understanding places her beyond the parables of the canonical gospels and their picture of jockeying jealousies among twelve male apostles. Indeed, the Gnostic material is metaphysical, more about how to believe than what to believe, according to Cynthia Bourgeault in The Meaning of Mary Magdalene.

In the Gnostic scriptures, the relationship between Mary the Magdalene and Jesus is described by the Greek term koinonos meaning partner, associate, comrade or companion. Other apostles refer to her in this literature as “beloved companion.” It is important to note that

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Elizabeth Seton
by Shelley Gilchrist

“O h, Dear God, please have mercy!” I found myself muttering this short prayer more times than I care to remember in the last few weeks. I’m not sure who said, “The world is too much with us,” but the truth of that phrase has been haunting my heart and soul. Who can be the balm we need today? As I mused on saints to explore, I came across St. Galentine. She is the patron saint of community among women (a real “glass ceiling breaker”) and of rosé wine; she seemed quite perfect. On further research, however, I don’t think she was ever canonized and may be only a lovely figment of some lively imaginations.

And then I was reminded of something said at the last Democratic debate; if we want to end gun violence, we need “red flags,” but we also need appropriate education in schools. Our focus should not be “duck and cover,” but compelling coursework in healthy communication, respect, and empathy for the Other. Ah, yes. We need the words and strength of St. Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton.

Born on August 28th in 1774, 200 years later Elizabeth was the first native of the United States to be canonized. Let’s explore this remarkable woman.

Pope Paul VI said, “Rejoice for your glorious daughter. Be proud of her! And know how to preserve her fruitful heritage.” Our beloved daughter had an interesting life. She came from an Episcopal family in New York; lost her mother at the age of three; but took solace as she grew in horses, nature, poetry, and especially the piano. Her journals show a young woman of deep reflection and contemplation. When she was 19, she married William Magee Seton and had five children before the age of 30. William fought tuberculosis and was eventually sent to the warmer climate of Italy. Elizabeth and her eldest daughter accompanied him and, sadly, William died in 1803. While in Italy, Elizabeth felt drawn to Catholicism and, upon returning to New York, she was received into the Catholic Church.

Elizabeth had some trying years and eventually moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland. With the financial support of a wealthy convert, Samuel Sutherland Cooper, Elizabeth established Saint Joseph’s Academy and Free School. She also founded a religious organization of sisters (the first of its kind in the United States) to care for the children of the poor; Elizabeth realized the profound importance of love and education. It was her work that laid the foundation for parochial schools in America. Mother Seton died at the age of only 46. She left us the fruits of her labor, and now we must fan the flames of her passion; it might be our last best chance.

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.

Reclaiming the Women of the Christian Scriptures
by Debra Trees

Junia, who appears in Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 16, is one of the saints that Paul mentions from Rome. She is a member of the Christian community serving the poor and the population in general, including Paul.

In WomanWord, Miriam Therese Winter mentions Junia in her chapter entitled “Women in Ministry in Rome.” Paul refers to Junia as an “apostle.” She is one of sixteen mentioned in his letter to the Romans. Speculation has it that Junia was male. Winter notes that this is highly unlikely, as the name Junia is exclusively a female name.

We reject the perception today that a woman cannot be a leader. Junia’s reference as an apostle in the letter to the Romans suggests an extremely high level of leadership: the top, the star, the highest responsibility. In a patriarchy, Junia must clearly be an exception. Paul says, “Greetings to Andronicus and Junia, those outstanding apostles, my compatriots and fellow prisoners, who were Christians before I was.” Romans 16:7 [Emphasis added.] Paul’s allusion to Junia as his mentor significantly relates to the fact that she was connected to Jesus before Paul. As Jesus opens our eyes to equality and spirit, Paul is gifted with the same vision, which he shares with us through his letters. His obvious friendship and special relationship with Junia become a window into equality.

Junia is sure of her convictions. Only highly motivated and dedicated persons end up in prison in order to be true to their beliefs. As a woman traveling with her companion Andronicus, Junia is a person of resources, connected to Hebrew society, and to the underground. A co-conspirator of Paul in prison, she is courageous and an obvious leader in her community. Junia is a pleasant surprise of apostolic leadership and an example of Christian love, following Jesus.
His for Hawk received glowing reviews and a plethora of best-of-the-year awards from the New York Times, Time, the New Yorker, the Los Angeles Times, the Atlantic, the Wall Street Journal, and the Seattle Times as well as numerous other publications. Maureen Corrigan, from Fresh Air with Terry Gross, found it to be “A wonder both of nature and of meditative writing.”

Perhaps the best description comes from Jan DeBlieu who wrote, “A beautiful book on so many levels. MacDonald fearlessly probes each facet of grief and traverses its wilderness to reach redemption. But most beautiful of all is the complex, layered bond that builds between her and Mabel, her hawk. ‘Who would have guessed that human and bird could share so much?’”

This book may be found in the naturalist section of your local book store, but don’t be fooled. There is much more to it than a discussion of the nature of hawks or their natural habitat. The author unpeels the story like an onion with many layers. A central theme is that a goshawk is not a pet. It has many needs: to hunt, to exercise, and to gain a proper weight for these activities. A second theme sets out the psychological aspects of the author’s relationship with her father. A third theme concerns T.H. White, the author of the best-selling The Once and Future King, who also raised, cared for, and published an account of his goshawk, named Gos.

In light of numerous references to T.H. White, it’s fair to say that the author is obsessed with him and Gos. White is a complex person who lived prior to World War II. His interest in falconry seems related to his desire to be an aristocrat. He takes to wearing tweed; he learns to fly an airplane; he trains to ride horses to hounds with British hunting club society. In other words, he does not know who he is.

A fourth theme, death, pervades the entire book. At the end of the first chapter, the reader learns that MacDonald’s father has just passed away. Throughout many succeeding chapters, the reader is brought into the planning of the memorial service. This is not an easy task for the author, as a parallel may be drawn with raising a goshawk, although the author seems to take pleasure in the latter experience. She is an experienced falconer. Her “new” hawk, Mabel, is a goshawk.

After the author’s meeting with Mabel, the narrative switches back to White, and to his mistakes and losses. Readers explore White’s sadistic tendencies and must come to their own conclusions regarding why he is the way he is.

So why is a narrative about such an outré topic in a newsletter for women priests? The book is recommended for anyone who chooses or feels called to a challenging path. The road to priesthood for women in any Christian denomination, especially in the Roman Catholic tradition, is arduous. Women priests are bucking an all-male priesthood. This exclusivity is in direct conflict with emerging women priests. H is for Hawk shows how one woman navigated just such a treacherous path.

Maureen McGill was ordained a priest in January 2014. She was a founding member of St Francis Ecumenical Catholic Church in St Petersburg, Florida. 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 two adult daughters and five grandchildren.
New News
by Nori Kieran-Meredith

ARCWPs annual meeting was a powerhouse event, with its theme of “Living Spiritual Leadership and Ministry in the 21st Century.” We were blessed to have 42 members and, for the first time, 10 Friends of the Association attend. As always, the loving kindness that infused every little detail was admirable. But the special joy was Pastor Dawn Hutchings, the first guest speaker at any of our annual meetings. Afterwards, I typed up copious lecture notes; I couldn’t bear forgetting her wit and wisdom. So many gems! Which of us would not treasure being labeled a “bad-ass woman?” And having that defined as “courageous, insightful, funny, down-to-earth, and willing to do whatever is needed . . . capable of creating a stink . . . having the audacity to speak truth to power in words and deed.” What a portrait she painted of us all!

And so it is that, with joy, we congratulate and welcome our newly ordained bad-ass members: Shanon Sterringer, Priest, ordained August 3, 2019; Julie Corron, Deacon, ordained September 7, 2019; Denise Hackert-Stoner, Deacon, ordained September 7, 2019; and our own featured writer Shelley Gilchrist, Deacon, ordained August 28, 2019.

Presbyter, deacon, and minister². Additional evidence concludes that women functioned in the roles of overseer or bishop of churches in various communities in the Mediterranean. For example, in the east, Epiphanius of Salamis reported that some Christians ordained women bishops and that they were not under the authority of their husbands.

In one striking mosaic, Mary is portrayed wearing an episcopal pallium, a bishop’s vestment worn during celebration of the Eucharist. It has a red cross, and she also wears red shoes. Both the pallium and the shoes are insignia of the bishop of Rome today. In recent times Pope Benedict XVI wore red shoes³.

According to the Life of the Virgin, an early biography of Mary, she and the women disciples were present at the Last Supper. During the meal, first Mary, and then Jesus, model a ritual of female and male co-priesthood. In this text, Mary is portrayed as the teacher of the women and, for this reason, at the supper, “She sacrificed herself as the priest and she was sacrificed, she offered and she was offered.” Then Jesus offers his body and blood. Dr. Kateusz concludes “This supper scene would appear to explain why Mary was widely portrayed as a Eucharistic officiant, for example, wearing the episcopal pallium or holding the Eucharistic cloth, as well as why she and her son were paired on Eucharistic utensils”.

Dr. Kateusz’ striking images of Mary and other courageous women leaders in our early Christian tradition are a rich treasure chest for reflection. The evidence that women were leaders in the early centuries of the Jesus movement is a clarion reminder that patriarchy has no place in today’s Church and an inspiration for all who are working for the full equality of women. ARCWPs is walking in the footsteps of our sisters as we use equal rites to achieve equal rights by ordaining women and men in a renewed model of priestly ministry in the Roman Catholic Church.

2See 1 Corinthians 1:11 for Chloe’s house; Colossians 4:15 for Nympha; Philemon 1:2 for Apphia’s; Romans 16:3 for Priscilla; 1 Cor 16:9 for the church in her house; Acts 16:40 for Lydia’s hospitality; Acts 12:12 for Mary, the mother of John Mark, and 2 John 1:1 for the unnamed woman. See Madigan, Woman Officeholders, 198. See also A Kateusz, p. 154, Madigan, Woman Officeholders, 193, Eisen, Women Officeholders 199-200.)
3See illustration Paul (balding) and Peter (bangs) standing next to Mary, (Mosaic 650 AD, San Venantius, Lateran Baptistery, Rome, A. Kateusz, p. 87.

Bridget Mary Mezher, ARCWPs bishop, is an author of 20 books on prayer and spirituality. She is dean of Global Ministries University’s Doctor of Ministry and Master of Divinity programs and co-founder of Peoples Catholic Seminary.

“A BAD-ASS WOMAN HAS THE AUDACITY TO SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER IN WORDS AND DEED. . . .”

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Reflection from a Social Justice Warrior

by Silvia Brandon-Pérez

I wake up to a story on Democracy Now about a book called The Torture Machine: Race Violence and Police in Chicago by Flint Taylor. He is an American human and civil rights attorney who litigated many high-profile police brutality, government misconduct, and death penalty cases. His book “... takes the reader from the 1969 murders of Black Panther Party chairman Fred Hampton and Panther Mark Clark through the dogged pursuit of Commander Jon Burge, the leader of a torture ring within the CPD [... created] to elicit false confessions from suspects.”

In Mississippi just after the August 2019 mass murders in El Paso, there was a mass arrest and incarceration of 680 people by ICE. Half of those arrested were released because they are US citizens; they were arrested because they “looked” Latino. These were immigrants who had just won a labor case against their billionaire employer.

A 40-year-old Mexican migrant dies while in custody. Children in the new concentration camps are also dying while in custody. Environmental leaders such as Rafael Correa in Colombia are seemingly murdered daily.

But it is the assassination of Fred Hampton while he slept, and the CIA and White House conspiracy (revealed by Taylor) to paint this murder as a shootout, rather than a shoot-in, that gets to me. Sadly, this further proof of national and deliberate atrocities appears to be a policy of murder of people of color and individuals willing to call out injustice who are therefore deemed dangerous.

Every day, politicians and world leaders who are brothers in murder, torture, and mayhem lead their countries in violence. Every day, there comes a moment when I can’t speak, when I am awash in a torrent of tears. Every day, there are times when I have to take 15 minutes before I can re-enter the fray.

I have taken a while to wake up today. As with every day, I am exhausted by casual and deliberate violence. Years of brutality during the Cuban revolution and the desaparecidos, the disappeared, tortured and murdered by a cadre of torturers trained at the United States Army’s School of the Americas, come to mind. I heard their first-hand testimony as a child after the triumph of the Cuban revolution in 1959. Years later, in the Dominican Republic, my pediatrician talks about her husband who was taken away for some ‘questioning’ and never returned, his charred bones thrown in the family’s backyard ...

How do we stop people who continue to excuse this type of behavior and, more importantly, how do we stop this type of behavior once and for all? As the late Jon Fromer used to sing, “Gonna take us all”, to which I add, “God help us all.”

Silvia Brandon-Pérez, ARCWP priest, was born in Cuba in 1949. She has been interpreting for torture survivors at SOAW for decades. Currently, she runs a Catholic Worker House and immigration/tenants’ clinic in California.

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this doesn’t necessarily mean consort, wife or romantic partner, and it doesn’t entirely rule them out either. Do we need to know more? As Bourgeault succinctly puts it, we have made mistakes about Mary the Magdalene before. “We cannot afford to do it again.” If we are to understand this pillar or tower of strength better, we should do so based on her deep spirituality as a thinking woman of great faith and not because of a relationship status with Jesus. There is more scriptural resuscitation ahead if we are to get at the heart of the ministry of Jesus and the mystery of Mary the Magdalene.

Lyndy Kinlan is a retired educator who enjoy 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. Lyndy co-presides at Upper Room liturgies in Albany, NY and in additional sacramental ministry for friends and family.

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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

In 2002, on the Danube River, seven women were validly ordained Roman Catholic priests. The principal 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.