"We are not leaving the Church; we are leading it."

Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan

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TEN YEARS AND COUNTING!
What a difference ten years make! ARCWP officially formed in 2010 as a small group of dedicated, socially aware, and accomplished women, ready to take the next step in their lives to step up and follow their calling. Within the first three years, they comprised a handful of priests and deacons with international flavor. Newsworthy right from the start, ARCWP was in the spotlight in the top ten stories of 2010 according to TIME magazine. By mid-decade, another 47 ordinations had been celebrated. The result in 2020: 88 women and men ordained with eleven candidates preparing for this life of service!

Through the years, diversity abounds in membership and ministries: social justice witness, post prison support, and active ministry in LBGTIQ communities. Development of inclusive Eucharistic assemblies, chaplaincy, and more are part of the sacred walk of ARCWP members. Education of the ordained and members of the Christian Catholic family have subsequently evolved through ARCWP’s People’s Catholic Seminary. Vatican and international inroads are happening actively through ARCWP representation and advocacy in Rome.

Here’s to the first ten years of ARCWP and many more holy and grace-filled years to come!

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.
A Call for Justice, Non-Violence, and Solidarity

by Bridget Mary Meehan, ARCWP

Racism, like sexism, is a dominator system that separates us from one another, oppresses people of color, and breaks our spiritual connection. It is rooted in hatred and fear. We all have a responsibility to take a stand now as members of the human race. This is a clarion call for action to change structures of inequality in our society in response to the evil of racism. Let us come together and advocate for justice, non-violence, and solidarity.

Every person is an image of God and should be treated with respect. We are all equals, connected in the circle of life in God’s family. Our unity and beautiful diversity are our strengths. I believe Jesus was about a love that reconciles, heals, and does justice.

Now is the time to come together to mourn the loss and heartbreaking of violence against our “sisters and brothers that have gone” for centuries, and to come together to work for justice for all who have suffered from racism in our country and in our world.

The travesty, the heartbreak, and the violence will end as we unite in loving solidarity. We shall overcome! Let us begin that journey now. If not us, who? If not now, when?

From the Editor

by Nori Kieran-Meredith, ARCWP

This quarterly edition of Leading was perhaps our greatest adventure yet. It all started with an aside from an assistant editor to the effect that we were celebrating our tenth anniversary. She suggested photo collages. That’s all very fine and well, but I hadn’t the foggiest notion how to create them. And the assignment fell to ARCWP’s own Deb Trees, who had no more expertise than I did.

I have to hand it to Deb, though; she produced a yeoman’s job. And she did it on faith. There was never a peep about Deb’s not knowing how to develop an illustrated feature story. Quietly and competently, she just kept gluing pieces together until one fine day, it actually came to be! Needless to say, I was pleased beyond words. And special thanks to our associate editors and to all who contributed photos for the project. Under Deb’s leadership and guidance, the feature article and the collages came to be as they were meant to, expertise or otherwise.

In the meantime, our remaining columnists contributed their usual excellent work. Bridget Mary Meehan’s call for social justice is timely and on point. Sharon Sterringer brings us a provocative column on God’s role. Ann Harrington cheerfully discusses the possibilities of Zoom, a great joy for those of us separated from our flocks. And Maureen McGill does double duty with two reviews in this issue, one introducing us to a stimulating reflection on Jesus’ private life, the other to a saintly modern-day woman priest.

We have had a terrific ten years. Please God, the wonder and the adventure will continue!
A Roman Catholic Woman Priest and a Saint for Our Times

by Judith A. B. Lee
Book Review by Maureen McGill, ARCWP

I have read many biographies and autobiographies. I had never read a book that was both. The author, Judith A.B. Lee, accomplishes this by weaving some of what Judith Beaumont wrote during her lifetime with what Judith A.B. Lee observed about her during their 29 years together as colleagues in ministry and life partners.

Judith Beaumont was born in 1937 into a devout and active Roman Catholic family in Chicago. She entered the Benedictine Order of nuns and so lived for 34 years. During that time, she became involved in peace, anti-nuclear, and social justice actions and was arrested for her participation. She spent time in prison in Connecticut and Rhode Island for her contribution to an action called “Trident Nein.” “Nein” is the German word for “no.” Judy and several others broke into a facility called “Electric Boat,” where Trident missiles were being produced. They took a boat, hammers, and with a vial of their own blood, wrote, “Thou Shalt Not Kill” on the Trident submarine. In an interview, Judy’s mother, Janice Beaumont, referred to her as “my daughter, the modern Joan of Arc.”

While incarcerated, Judy Beaumont worked courageously and successfully to improve conditions in the women’s prison. Shortly after her release in 1982, she helped establish a residence for homeless women and children called “My Sister’s Place” in Hartford, Connecticut. This name was chosen so that the women did not have to tell anyone that they lived in a shelter for the homeless, but rather in “My Sister’s Place.” Such was Judy Beaumont’s compassion and sensitivity to the women’s feelings. She became executive director of My Sister’s Place and was instrumental in the raising of two new buildings as residences, and programs for homeless women, families, men, and persons with mental illness. In 1998, having accomplished her work, she resigned. “The Judies” then moved to Fort Myers, Florida, where they continued their work with the homeless, poor, and outcast.

In Fort Myers, Judy Beaumont worked tirelessly. She became administrator and co-pastor of Good Shepherd Ministries of Southwest Florida in 2003. This endeavor grew and Good Shepherd Inclusive Catholic Community was established in 2008. The next year she worked to set up a residence for people transitioning from homelessness.

In 2012, Judith Ann Beaumont was ordained by the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests, Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan presiding. Over 400 people joyfully gathered. The process, spiritually and physically, that she experienced in stepping forward and accepting the call to ordination, was courageous and exciting. During that time, she also struggled with four bouts of cancer from 2003-2018.

The author describes the many facets of Judy Beaumont’s ministries from second grade teacher to social activist to executive director to pastor and priest. She also details the lives of the poor and homeless to whom Judy ministered.

I met “the Judies” through Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan in 2012. Although we spoke and socialized numerous times, I never really knew Judy Beaumont until I read this book. The depth of her commitment to those whom society had forgotten and her strong opposition to nuclear weapons will remain with me forever.

I heartily recommend this book!
The great German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner wrote: “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will cease to exist at all.”

It took me many years to understand fully what he meant by this. I believed that a mystic was someone who had a unique call to live a holy life and was somehow protected from the troubles of this world. Off in a cave, s/he was ecstatically basking in the Divine Presence. The mystic Karl Rahner talks about is quite the opposite.

In the first Book of Kings (19:9-14), there is a story of the prophet Elijah in a cave taking shelter from the troubles of this world. God says to Elijah, “What are you doing in here?” Elijah is challenged to get out of the cave and into the world, and it is there that he finds God. Not that God was not in the cave, but Elijah was not yet able to recognize the Divine Presence until his eyes were gradually opened by his experience. It is difficult for us to see the presence of God in the trials of life as they are unfolding. In the story of Elijah and the cave, God had been present the whole time; Elijah just could not see it. Is this not a beautiful image for the spiritual journey, especially amidst a pandemic?

The modern mystic Richard Rohr reminds us that God’s presence is never lacking, even in the midst of COVID-19. It is our awareness of God’s presence that is missing.

These last few months feel as if we have been forced out of our comfortable caves into the fires, winds, and storms of the pandemic. Many are scared and do not yet have the “eyes to see or ears to hear,” because the storms are still pounding. God is most definitely present, but we may not fully recognize this presence or be able to make any sense of it until the storms begin to die down. It is in the post-storm rubble that we will most clearly hear God’s voice in the whispers, if we are open to it.

A mystic has highly developed senses that perceive the real presence of God in every experience. This does not mean our lives are going to be paradise. The Scriptures, traditions, witness of the saints, lived experience, and the message of Jesus himself show us that we live in a fallen world marked by pain, suffering, and death. But fallen does not mean severed from God. It means we are not in Eden just yet, but our goal is to make our way back by doing our part to build God’s kin-dom of love, light, healing, and peace wherever we find ourselves. It is possible even to find joy in the midst of this pandemic, if joy is what we seek.

Where is God in the midst of all this? God is here walking through it with us.

As Virginia Woolf has been quoted, “Everything is the proper stuff of fiction.”

Sue Monk Kidd’s novel The Book of Longings is such a work of fiction. Yes, indeed, but what a wonderfully written and imagined tale! Kidd weaves historical facts into her story; these bring the narrative to life.

The account describes the sad and futile plight of women in first century Palestine. Ana is a teenage girl who does not want to marry. That she is able to read and write is unusual for a female. Apparently, her father hired a tutor for her when she was a child, but now that Ana should be thinking of marriage, she is encouraged to abandon her education.

Ana has an older brother, Judas, who becomes an outcast in the family because he is a revolutionary engaged in attempts to overthrow Roman rule of Palestine. The head of the family is an ally of the Roman puppet government, whereas Judas is an embarrassment to the family because of his opposition.

Yaltha, Ana’s aunt, is another member of the household. She is Ana’s confidant. As Yaltha shares her life story, the reader learns that, despite being advantageously related to Ana’s parents, Yaltha had been previously exiled to Therapeutae, a factual historic community of semi-monastic Jews, after being wrongfully accused of murdering her husband.

Although Ana’s parents are financially and politically well off, they want her to marry an older wealthy man who is only interested in Ana as a brood mare. There is no love between them. Ana wants no part of this. As she runs away, she happens upon Jesus, who seems to be an ordinary peasant. What transpires next is the essence of the tale.

Although Jesus is attracted to Ana, she is the pursuer. The story evolves describing a Jesus deeply in love with Ana. Over her parents’ objection, Jesus and Ana are wed. The young couple share the bliss and the difficulty of married life. They move in with Jesus’ family in Nazareth. Ana and Jesus’ mother, Mary, share a close relationship, but Ana does not get along with Jesus’ sisters-in-law. Those women are envious of Ana who was raised in a prosperous family beneficially associated with Herod Antipas, a puppet of the Roman occupiers. During Ana’s early days with the family, Judith, Jesus’ brother James’ wife, chides Ana because she does not know how to milk a goat, a regular duty of the household women.

Jesus must work to support the family and, frequently, business takes him from Nazareth. He and Ana have a daughter who dies in infancy while Jesus is away.

The novel takes some twists and turns that I will omit. I do not want to spoil the reader’s pleasure by revealing any more of the plot. Jesus’ association with John the Baptist, whom the author references as John

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Shanon Sterringer, Ph.D., D.Min., and ARCWP priest, is founding pastor of The Community of St. Hildegard at the Hildeshausen Haus Church and Shrine in Fairport Harbor, Ohio. She is the owner of The Green Shepherdess fair-trade gift shop and is a published author. Shanon is a sought-after speaker on the topic of St. Hildegard in the US and abroad and is married with three beautiful daughters.
New News:
Zoom and Beyond
by Ann Harrington.

My last piece for Leading ended with the question: who will find our community in 2020? Not in my wildest dreams did I imagine we would gather in a rich new harvest of souls. “Necessity is the mother of invention” has always rung true for me. In this time of quarantine, it has proved to be so. At Free Spirit Inclusive Catholic Community, we now celebrate our Eucharists via Zoom. Before the quarantine, we would gather twice a month for worship. Now we gather every Sunday, and our regulars include people from Virginia, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The feelings of connection and intimacy with God and one another are amazing!

I asked the community to share how Zoom liturgies have affected them. Liza, one of our founders, observes:

One of the most valuable aspects of Zoom, in addition to our now weekly gatherings, is to have expanded our Free Spirit family. Geography no longer limits us. I love that I can pick the bread and my favorite wine too. As long as I’m presentable from the waist up, no one cares what I look like from the waist down.

Linda, who joins us from Raleigh, 80 miles away, says:

Free Spirit meets my needs for both worship and community. Free Spirit has both the ritual and the sacrament of communion that I crave. We share before Mass, and I am feeling very connected. I feel I have found “My Tribe.”

An old friend, Kate, formerly from Greenville, moved to Pennsylvania three years ago and reflects:

Zoom liturgies have been a lesson in self-realization. My husband asked me incredulously, “Why are you wearing lipstick to Zoom events when you don’t wear lipstick normally?” I replied, sitting in front of the Zoom camera like staring into a mirror. It’s off-putting to see your face in reflection as you converse.

Barbara now bakes her communion bread. She reports,

There is something about the baking of my own bread that deepens the experience. At the consecration, this bread speaks to me very strongly of the transformation of all reality. During the communion hymn, I slowly consume the entirety of the Eucharist and gradually sip the wine. I feel more like a participant at a meal, using my imagination to place myself at Jesus’ table. I am very much aware of Christ’s presence holding my community and humanity in a sacred embrace that far exceeds the technological powers of Zoom.

And from Christina, another one of Free Spirit’s founders,

The Zoom liturgies have been an incredible light shining during 2020’s pandemic. We are a small community and being together in any possible way keeps us cohesive and supportive. The decision to celebrate Eucharist on Zoom was very important for us. This simple change makes the sacrament more personal and brings us together even as we are in our own homes.

My funniest moment with using Zoom for our liturgies was when I prepared my bread and wine for Eucharist. I put the plate down on the table next to my laptop and stepped away for a moment. When I returned, there was an empty plate, and my dog Honeybea was licking her chops! Fortunately, I had time to get more bread and sit down before our iturgy began. I now make sure my plate is either guarded or Honeybea is secured in another room.

From Gary, who helps us see the humor in life:

Using Zoom for our liturgies reminds us that history could have been different: Shakespeare said “To Zoom or not To Zoom, that is the question.” Jesus said: “Go ye and spread the faith; Zoom, if necessary.”

And, to this I add, we shall go a-Zoomin’ to that Promised Land, where there shall be joy, joy, joy! ♦

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.

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the Immerser, is recounted. Furthermore, the arrest, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus are also detailed.

I recommend this book because Scripture does not tell us anything about the life of Jesus from age 12 to approximately age 30. Perhaps he was married, perhaps he suffered the loss of an infant child, anything is possible. Thus his life is plausibly the “…proper stuff of fiction.” This is how it might have been. . . .

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.

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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.

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