The Greek word *ekklesia*, which refers to both the universal church and to local groups of believers, is found over 100 times in the New Testament. Acts 2:42-47 offers one of the most poignant and timeless images of what the Church should be: a space (not necessarily a physical building) where people are able to worship, engage in fellowship, service, outreach, prayer, and more. As we move into the 21st century, the Christian movement may increasingly resemble these early believers who were known as followers of the way of Jesus, rather than as members of a particular church. (Adam Russell Taylor, Sojourners, https://sojo.net/articles/it-s-time-rethink-american-churches)

After the first Roman Catholic women priests were ordained in 2006, inclusive Catholic communities have gradually emerged in over 35 states. Mary Mother of Jesus Inclusive Catholic Community in Sarasota, Florida, began with six people celebrating a Catholic Mass around my dining room table and grew to be an open community welcoming everyone to receive Communion. We meet at St. Andrew UCC weekly on Saturdays at 4:00 PM. During COVID times, we meet in cyberspace via Zoom with approximately 40 participants from around the United States, Canada, and beyond. Currently, we are exploring ways to gather for liturgies at St. Andrew UCC and to continue our liturgies on Zoom.

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

**Commentary re George Floyd Murder**
Compiled by Ann Harrington, ARCWP

After a recent prayer meeting at Tarboro Community Outreach, a mission to the needy located in North Carolina, we spent a few moments talking about the verdict in the George Floyd murder trial. Here are some of the comments people shared:

**Ty:** the officer did wrong, and I agree with the verdict.

**Mary Ann:** I am saddened that violence happens. I am pleased that the officer was held accountable and justice was done.

**Rebecca:** I am saddened by bad police officers. They need more training. Social workers need to be hired by police departments.

**Mary Ann:** the video of Derek Chauvin’s knee on George Floyd’s neck made the difference in the verdict.

**James:** Chauvin’s head policeman and fellow officers spoke out against him, and this made the difference. This had never happened before. So now he is in jail, under a suicide watch.

**Mary Ann:** we need the police.

**Johnnie:** sad thing is the video shows the bad things - there are good police.

**Rebecca:** police uniforms change the officer’s self-image. It would be better if they wore more civilian-like clothes.

**Mary Ann:** George Floyd’s murder opens up the discussion of inequality. Why do kings and queens have such an abundance of wealth when others have nothing? Because they went to other countries and stole what they wanted.

**Rebecca:** this whole case has brought to light that white privilege does exist.

We ended our time together with a prayer for Mr. Chauvin’s safety, well-being, and healing.

A few days later, I asked my friend Richard, who is Black and lives on the margins of society, if he had ever been treated unfairly by the police. He said you have to do what they say, and they will still “rough you up,” but if you don’t resist, you’ll be okay. He also said they try to provoke you so they can use more force. I am reminded of the Sam Cook song,

It’s been a long,
A long time coming
But I know (with God’s help) a change gonna come,
Oh, yes, it will.♦

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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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**Included Catholic Communities Offer Expansive Theology and Ecclesiology**

By Bridget Mary Meehan

The Greek word *ekklesia*, which refers to both the universal church and to local groups of believers, is found over 100 times in the New Testament. Acts 2:42-47 offers one of the most poignant and timeless images of what the Church should be: a space (not necessarily a physical building) where people are able to worship, engage in fellowship, service, outreach, prayer, and more. As we move into the 21st century, the Christian movement may increasingly resemble these early believers who were known as followers of the way of Jesus, rather than as members of a particular church. (Adam Russell Taylor, Sojourners, https://sojo.net/articles/it-s-time-rethink-american-churches)

After the first Roman Catholic women priests were ordained in 2006, inclusive Catholic communities have gradually emerged in over 35 states. Mary Mother of Jesus Inclusive Catholic Community in Sarasota, Florida, began with six people celebrating a Catholic Mass around my dining room table and grew to be an open community welcoming everyone to receive Communion. We meet at St. Andrew UCC weekly on Saturdays at 4:00 PM. During COVID times, we meet in cyberspace via Zoom with approximately 40 participants from around the United States, Canada, and beyond. Currently, we are exploring ways to gather for liturgies at St. Andrew UCC and to continue our liturgies on Zoom. ♦

(continued on page 3)
Raising Karen – A Sympathy-for-the-Devil Story  
by: Jill Striebinger

Commentary: In every era, there are socially acceptable people to shame or hate on. In Jesus’ time there were lepers and, in our time, there are Karens. The on-line definition of a Karen in the context of this story is: “Karen is a pejorative term for a woman seeming to be entitled or demanding beyond the scope of what is normal. The term also refers to memes depicting white women who use their privilege to demand their own way.” Several stories in the recent news of the year 2020 went viral, showing white women acting racist in their demands. The media referred to them as Karens. This article is a fictional musing that goes into the culture that produces a Karen. We don’t know exactly each woman’s personal story; however, we can be sure that it is cultural hurt that leads to family hurt that then leads to personal hurt. It is this compounded hurt that hasn’t been processed that results in this behavior. If we view the actions of Karens in the context of a legacy of a patriarchal culture, we can allow ourselves to have compassion. It doesn’t mean that we allow the bad behavior but, to move beyond judgment, we need to see how we all fit into contributing to her story, and the stories of those who will follow, should we continue to remain in a space of judgment. This story shows that Karen is an evolving person. The woman in the story is like Christ in that she found a healing place to work on conquering her demons, the demons that caused her to act out in the past. She reflects Christ as she rises, and she also reflected the “devil” as her past behavior was insensitive and cruel; but why did she act that way? Because she was a hurt person. “Hurt people hurt people.” Karens are hurt people. It’s popular to bash them. Christ does not bash Karens. In scripture, he asks us to go deep within ourselves and to find compassion for those whom we cast out.

The word isolation should have sent chills of cold fear down my spine, but instead tremors of excitement coursed through me. As someone who has been in a self-imposed, petulant seclusion for years, I thought, “I was made for this!” I gathered supplies, and yes, in the name of my savior, Karen, I even modestly hoarded toilet paper, for the ensuing apocalypse.

In my unemployed state, what I called my “retirement,” though it was actually my husband who was retired. I “leaned in” to Zoom meetings like a boss, as if I had been running business survival drills for years. After all, I used to be . . . with my university degrees . . . and now I was . . . what? Did I remember to get the extra bottles of the shampoo that I liked?

Busywork with no product or objective became my internet job. I took full charge in the form of: workshops dutifully attended, but not generated by myself; random classroom lectures listened to with copious notes taken, though no tests were ever pending; and an assortment of exercise classes that were recorded without my participation and that sat in my inbox unopened. I excelled and exceeded all expectations on my imagined performance evaluation.

“Am I being fair to myself?” The thought in my head, then later aloud, “Am I really being truthful with myself?” Then my mother’s voice in my head. “You are your own worst enemy!” I immediately got angry with her . . . Then, I leaned back in my at-home work chair, in front of my pretend work station . . . Was that something someone said to my mother? I pondered for a while the many difficulties of her early childhood, her life before she was my mom. Each comment and criticism of me I heard in the background of her past life that played out in front of me. Anger became yesterday’s emotion.

While the months rolled by, my mom was there with me, in my head with her rules about “how a lady is supposed to act” and other tidbits I used to bristle and scoff at in contempt. With my understanding and compassion for her journey, I began to relax. In a long walk down the beach, I discovered how the shells tinkle the most magical sound as the gentle tide tumbles them in, then back out. I saw in each morning how the unobstructed sky and tawny sand looked vastly different. Eventually, I learned that cloudy, gray dawns didn’t have to be an omen of dreariness but could be a predictor of a calm day of rest.

My momma began to sing comforting childhood songs to me. I would hear her in the voices of the different sea birds and in the rustle of the shoreline pines. The great evergreens emitted a scent that I recognized as the crisp, clean odor of momma’s skin when she’d scoop me up into a warm, snug hug. With my momma there holding space for me, I, hesitantly at first, then boldly afterwards, looked at my own life and saw why she said those things. It became blatantly apparent that she was right about the feminine guidance she gave to me, but by the measure of her own difficult life. Then I saw that her advice was sound, more often than I wished it had been, by the measure of my own journey. A trek filled with its own share of tragedy and with all the pain of a woman’s path, which felt like another lifetime before this virus-inspired isolation. Not much has changed, yet much has changed.

Emails from my pretend job began to pile up in my inbox as I explored new aspects of the natural world around me and then dove into the waters of my own nature. At the point that I began to have empathy and love for my mother’s journey, I started to allow myself to have compassion about my own. It was time to confront my feelings about Karen, my god. But Karen was nowhere to be found. She was no longer hoarding toilet paper; she was not in front of my home, yelling at Black people taking photos; she was not in my neighborhood calling the police on Black children who had a lemonade stand; she was not accusing a Black youth of stealing her phone that she left in the taxi.

In my very real isolation, I had healed and Karen had risen. ◆

Jill Striebinger, ARCWP, is a deacon and a Shinpiden Reiki Master. She attended People’s Catholic Seminary and has completed advocacy and peer advocate certifications through Parents in Partnership and Federation of Families. Jill holds a Master of Science in Management Information Systems, and her business background is in strategic, organizational, process, and system redesign. Jill is married to her wonderful husband, David, and is the mother of Eric, a beautiful angel. She volunteers as a parent advocate for other families with children who have autism.
Analysis of Canon Law 1379
By: Helen Costigane, S.H.C.J.

Since the revised Code of Canon Law was published in 1983, specific issues made necessary certain changes in canon law.

The latest revisions to Catholic Church law were published on June 1, 2021. Among other issues, the ordination of women was addressed.

Canon 1024 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law reserved ordination to baptized men only. No provision of the 1983 Code dealt with bishops ordaining women. Canon 1379 of the revised canon law incorporates measures previously outlined by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in response to this development.

Dr. Costigane points out that canon law decrees automatic excommunication “for those who attempt to ordain a woman and for the woman who attempts to receive sacred orders.” In addition, a cleric attempting to ordain a woman can be punished by dismissal from the clerical state. This is one of the few automatic excommunications reserved to the Apostolic See. Application for the censure to be lifted must be made to the Apostolic Penitentiary in Rome, which, in lifting this, would prescribe an appropriate penance.

Can. 1379 — § 1. The following incur a latae sententiae* interdict or, if a cleric, also a latae sententiae suspension:

1° a person who, not being an ordained priest, attempts the liturgical celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice;
2° a person who, apart from the case mentioned in can. 1384, though unable to give valid sacramental absolution, attempts to do so, or hears a sacramental confession.

§ 2. In the cases mentioned in § 1, other penalties, not excluding excommunication, can be added, according to the gravity of the offence.

§ 3. Both a person who attempts to confer a sacred order on a woman, and the woman who attempts to receive the sacred order, incur a latae sententiae excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See; a cleric, moreover, may be punished by dismissal from the clerical state.

§ 4. A person who deliberately administers a sacrament to those who are prohibited from receiving it is to be punished with suspension, to which other penalties mentioned in can. 1336 §§ 2-4 may be added.

§ 5. A person who, apart from the cases mentioned in §§ 1-4 and in can. 1384, pretends to administer a sacrament is to be punished with a just penalty.

* The term “latae sententiae” indicates that the penalty comes with performance of the action. It is not imposed. The literal translation is “of the decision (already) brought.”

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Canon 1379 – 1983 Code of Canon Law

Title III : Usurpation of Ecclesiastical Offices and Offences Committed in Their Exercise

Can. 1379 A person who, apart from the cases mentioned in Can. 1378, pretends to administer a sacrament, is to be punished with a just penalty.
Pope Francis missed an opportunity to take a first step toward the inclusion of women in ordained ministry in the newly revised Canon 1379 of the *Code of Canon Law* released on June 1, 2021. This canonical penalty is a shocking example of the abuse of patriarchal power, because it equates the ordination of faith-filled women with the clergy sexual abuse of children. Both are labeled grave crimes that incur excommunication. It is contradictory that, on one hand, Pope Francis set up a commission to study the diaconate for women on April 8, 2020, and one year later promulgated Canon 1379 which continues the denigration of women called to Sacred Orders.

This newly revised law should have removed all punishments against Roman Catholic women priests who have been serving the people of God in ecclesial communities and justice ministries around the world for the past 19 years. We are leading the Church toward a path of partnership in ministry that challenges the clerical abuse of power, a major factor in the horrific rape of thousands of children worldwide.

Since our first ordinations in 2002, women priests have been punished for claiming our right to be ordained equally and in the same way as men. The Roman Catholic women priests’ movement ordains women — *contra legem* (against the law) — because there is no other option available to us. While we have sought dialogue with Pope Francis over the years, there has been no response.

As we reflect on toxic misogyny in the updated Canon 1379, and the edicts that preceded it, one can conclude that Vatican officials are making every effort to stop our movement. Perhaps they realize that change is already here. The Holy Spirit and legions of Roman Catholics are calling women to the priesthood and embracing inclusivity and equality now. There is no stopping the spring. Women priests are here to stay!

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* stated that only a baptized man could be validly ordained (Canon 1024) and that penalties could be applied to those who attempt to administer sacraments while not being qualified to do so (see Canons 1378 and 1379).

These provisions predate the Roman Catholic women priests’ movement which began in 2002 with the ordination of seven women on the Danube River. Shortly after, the Vatican issued a formal excommunication of all involved. In 2006, 12 women were ordained in Pittsburgh. In 2007, the Vatican issued a decree stating the attempted ordination of women would result in automatic excommunication. Nonetheless, in 2009, four women bishops were ordained in Santa Barbara, California. In 2010 Pope Benedict XVI categorized the “attempted ordination of a woman” and the sexual abuse of children as grave crimes.

It is important to remember that the penalty of excommunication does not put one outside the Church, but forbids one to receive the sacraments. Since women priests celebrate sacraments, excommunication does not impact our lives, nor does it nullify our baptism, or Catholic identity. The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests rejects the penalty of excommunication. We do not accept the Vatican’s unjust laws that only men can be ordained, and only ordained men can make laws and declare doctrines that affect women’s lives and well-being. Neither excommunication nor unjust canon law will stop our Spirit-led movement from empowering women and liberating the people of God!

Like the mystics and prophets – Mary Magdalene, Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena and Joan of Arc – who were rejected by the hierarchy in their times, women priests are condemned for following the teachings and example of Jesus who welcomed everyone to the table including the rule-breakers and marginalized. Ordained Catholic women are offering a model of partnership in ministry that challenges patriarchal power and lives Gospel equality now.

The hierarchy excommunicated Sister Theodore Guerin and Mother Mary Mackillop in one century and then declared them saints in our times. Maybe this will happen to women priests too!!

*Bridget Mary Meehan, Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests, https://arcwp.org*
From the Editor
By: Nori Kieran-Meredith

This issue of Leading is striking in its wide-ranging diversity. Bridget Mary Meehan sketches contemporary inclusive Catholic communities. Ann Harrington brings us stark comments about the murder of George Floyd. Maureen McGill reviews The Holy Road, sequel to Dances with Wolves, both of which have a great deal to say to our world today. Jill Striebinger offers us a fantasy life in the time of isolation which leads to the resurrection. And an anonymous member of ARCWP asks whether we are willing to play the fool for Christ. With such adventurous and thoughtful spirits contributing to our newsletter, we are blessed indeed! *

A late addition of information concerning the 2021 revised Code of Canon Law has been added as pages 2a and 2b.

Nori Kieran-Meredith, M. Div., mother and grandmother, is a member of the ARCWP on the ecumenical front. She serves as a supply priest for Southern California Dignity chapters and in multiple capacities within ARCWP.

Bridget Mary Meehan (continued from page 1)

Our theology has evolved over 15 years to empower the entire community to celebrate Eucharist (popularly known as the Catholic Mass). This means that we invite everyone to participate in a shared homily and to recite the Eucharistic Prayers of Consecration of the bread and wine that are reserved for the priest alone in Roman Catholic parishes. Jesus invited all to eat and drink at the last supper; so do we. And he did not ordain anyone to represent him at this gathering; neither do we. All the baptized image Christ.

Roman Catholic women priests are helping to transition the Church from a priest-dependent to a community-empowered model that bears some resemblance to the diverse agape gatherings in the New Testament. In many ways, this new model is more like the early days of Christianity in which believers met in house churches.

As the Body of Christ gathers around the table and beyond, many inclusive Catholic communities today consecrate their own bread and wine and receive communion in weekly Zoom liturgies. In these gatherings, the women priests are animators of creative, participatory Masses in which the entire assembly celebrates the Christ presence. All are ministry partners who nourish one another and go forth to live Jesus’ message of love in action in our world today. *

Bridget Mary Meehan, ARCWP 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 People’s Catholic Seminary.

The Holy Road
by Michael Blake

Book review by Maureen McGill

I am certain that my readers have heard “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” A corollary is “Don’t judge this book by its title.” This is not a book of instructions on traveling a “holy” or “sacred” or “religious” path. This is a sequel to Blake’s work Dances with Wolves, adapted into a major motion picture starring Kevin Costner, which won seven Academy Awards. In the film version, the Native Americans are identified as members of the Sioux nation. In Blake’s books, they are identified as the Comanche Nation. At the conclusion of the film, Lieutenant John Dunbar, called “Dances with Wolves” by the Native Americans, is riding away from the Sioux village with his bride, Stands with a Fist.

As The Holy Road begins, it is eleven years later. Dances with Wolves and Stands with a Fist are living in Ten Bears’ village with their Comanche friends who have become their family. In the opening chapters, the reader learns that Stands with a Fist was a white girl who grew up in Ten Bears’ village. Dances with Wolves and Stands with a Fist have three children: a boy, Snake in Hands, and two girls, Always Walking and Stays Quiet.

At the end of Dances with Wolves, there is a hint of the arrival of the white settlers and the presence of the Army in the Native Americans’ territory. At the commencement of The Holy Road, the presence of the white settlers becomes clear. The friction between the two cultures sharpens. The other main characters in the story are developed. Kicking Bird wants peace with the white people while Wind in His Hair is ready to fight.

The Holy Road situates the reader in Native American culture, and the differences between white or European culture are evident. The Comanche Nation has reverence for God as the “Mystery” and looks upon white religion as putting God into a black book, the Bible.

At one point, the white leaders invite the Native Americans to Washington, DC, to meet the President, whom the Native Americans call “The Great Father.” They do not do well in Washington, DC, as they view the buildings as restrictive, not beautiful or impressive. The end result is devastating as Ten Bears, the leader of the Comanche Nation, dies because of a misunderstanding about gas lanterns.

As the Native Americans resist the railroad, which some call The Holy Road, they are increasingly and steadily being moved to a reservation. Most of the leaders would prefer to live and die on the prairie. There are many twists and turns as the story progresses. In the end, the reader realizes that the cultural differences cause too many problems to be resolved easily or quickly. *

(continued on page 4)
Maureen McGill (continued from page 3)

Although the Comanche unite with other native nations against the white settlers, they cannot withstand the white people’s weapons. The Comanche are reduced to skirmishes which merely annoy the settlers and the Army.

I encourage the reading of this well-written book, because aspects of Native American culture are remarkable. The use of councils to make decisions is clearly shown. The importance of the buffalo to the Native Americans is strikingly juxtaposed with the wasteful way in which these animals are killed. The white settlers eat only the tongues and abandon the carcasses to rot on the prairie. The Native Americans use buffalo for food, clothing, and shelter. In stark contrast, the general who ordered the slaughter of the buffalo, remarks, “To hell with the buffalo. Those hunters are saving the army time, trouble, and money. They’re killing the Indian commissary. No buffalo, no Indians, no problem. Simple as that.”

By the mid-twentieth century, the white settlers almost caused the buffalo to become extinct. Thankfully that did not come about.

Maureen McGill, ARCWP, 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 2 adult daughters and 5 grandchildren.