

Leading

"We are not leaving the church, we are leading it."

Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan

WWW.ARCWP.ORG

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Spotlight: Walking with My Wife to Ordination

Written by Kathleen Ryan in her husband's words

In 2011, I was diagnosed with posterior cortical atrophy. I was losing my eyesight. Eventually, the atrophy would spread throughout my brain. While struggling with this prognosis, my wife Kathie and I were also struggling to find a parish that would meet our spiritual needs.

In September 2013, she attended a presentation called "A Conversation with Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan," and came home so excited. Women priests were here. ARCWP, a group fighting for equality of women in the Church, was a fact. Mary Theresa Streck recently had been ordained in this very city of Albany, New York.

Kathie applied, became a candidate, and our journey of study began – a period of prayer and discernment for both of us. Because of my declining vision, Kathie started reading the works of many wonderful progressive authors and theologians to me. We continued "full speed ahead." She worked on the Units, wrote papers and shared everything with me. I was learning as much as Kathie and loved discussing all the new ways of seeing and believing.

In July 2014, she was ordained a deacon and on June 27, 2015, I sat in the front row and celebrated Kathie's priestly ordination. My son helped me prepare this testimony I gave in front of the congregation.

"In 1968 Kathie had just left the Franciscan Order of Sisters and was adjusting to the idea that she was not going to be a nun. I knew in my heart from the moment I met her that she was the one for me. It took us two years of dating and not dating until she said yes, and we were married on November 7, 1970.

Fast forward more than 45 years and I still know she is the one for me. We grew up together, raised our two wonderful sons together, and now we are together taking it day by day as my health continues to decline.

Kath has always been a seeker. She always asks the hard questions, always flexible, open to new ideas and ways of living and loving. This step to ordination is just one more wonderful step in life for Kath and me. I am on this journey with her and loving every minute of it. I am happy to say I will be married to a Roman Catholic Woman Priest."

From 2013 until the day I crossed over I was surrounded by a group of amazing holy women and men who were studying, praying and discerning just as Kathie was. Our local community, now celebrating liturgy weekly and called "The Upper Room Inclusive Catholic Community," was growing. I was always included and knew I too was part of the Call. I cannot

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Kathie and Ed Ryan

New News

Celebrating the Face of the Divine Presence In, Around and Among Us: Mid-July, the ARCWP celebrated its Annual Retreat in Cleveland, Ohio. Forty-one of our members plus three of their spouses gathered from several states: California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, North Carolina, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Our group included members from Colombia, South America and Canada.

Presentations were varied: Our 501(c)(3) Board explained our current budget; the professors from our seminary outlined their courses; and three of the 11 presenters included an interesting seminar about team work. An excellent video by a motivational speaker coupled with two spiritual sessions deepened our appreciation of our unique calling. The nine members of the Planning Committee had done well.

However, the highlight for me and many others was the opportunity to talk about our spiritual lives as priests, our ministries and how they shape us, and our deepest impressions of the graces we have received since we have been ordained or accepted as a member. Intense, intimate conversations between individuals or among small groups lasted for hours and even into the night.

We are so fortunate to be called as leaders, to help and assist all those we come across materially and spiritually, and to have each other. ♦



(L-r), Retreat attendees, Joan Chesterfield, Kathryn Shea, Peggy Alderman, Kathie Ryan, Kim Panaro and Dennis McDonald

Kathleen R. Ryan, BA, MSW, mother. Clinical Licensed Social Worker is retired from Parsons Child and Family Center in 2005, and has a private practice. Presently Circle Leader in ARCWP and Program Companion for Candidates, she is active in The Upper Room Inclusive Catholic Community in Albany, New York.



Mary Bergan
Blanchard

From the Editor

In this issue, the Liturgy and nature suggest *Leading's* two themes: the mystery of death and the celebration of new life. The liturgical season follows suit.

Summer is over. Those of us who experience the change of seasons notice the world around us slowly drifting off to sleep. Leaves on the trees, in a final splendid blaze of color, fade and drop lifeless to the ground. Naked and unadorned, stark branches face winter and await spring, and renewal of their life.

By instinct, animals, including us, head for warm shelter, and equip their dens or pantries with necessities. We bundle up and prepare for short days and sharp winds.

During the month of October we celebrate Halloween or "All Hallows' Eve". This feast was originated thousands of years ago and was celebrated by ancient Gaels and Druids to honor the gods in thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest, and also to honor the dead who they believed were hovering around that night ... some spirits being saintly and a blessing, and others mischievous. The first two days of November, accepting the somber mood, the liturgy celebrates the spirits of the dead on the feasts of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day, respectively.

But just how dead are the faithful departed? In the Apostle's Creed, we attest "I believe in the Communion of Saints." Really? Do we believe these words? If so why do we treat those who have passed on so shabbily? They might not be present here on earth to comfort us, but many are inclined to act as if their spirits also are gone forever, and that they have forgotten us.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a Doctor of the Church, claimed that she would spend her days in heaven doing good on earth. That should tell us that as a spirit, she believed she could come and go as she saw fit. Then why not my mother and dad, my husband and sister and all my loved ones who have left me here, but might want to visit occasionally? Do we give credence to our connection to these saints ... that we are in communion with them? Do we really believe

they can visit in ways beyond our comprehension? Do we invite them in? Feel their presence? Have conversations? Put stock in extraordinary signs? Keep the doors of our skeptical minds open? I hope so.

Please don't miss Kathie Ryan's story in *Spotlight*, as she relates her journey to priesthood through the eyes of her husband Ed, who died in February 2016. As we celebrate the feasts of All Saints and All Souls on November 1st and 2nd, let us also contact our loved ones who have passed on. They are not necessarily the faithful departed at all.

Our second theme is the celebration of new life. As the months move on, we prepare during Advent for the coming of Divine Light, the birth of Christ. The Old Testament is to be replaced with a new message ... love of neighbors (as contrasted to 'thou shalt not') ... goodness to others, "What you do for them, you do for me." ... community, "When two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am among them."

Also included in this issue, Bridget Mary Meehan explains the vision of our movement and the different approach to education of the ordained members of the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests in her article, *New Wine in New Wineskins*. We consider ourselves a prophetic movement, bent on scraping off the archaic barnacles that still cling to our history, extraneous rules and rites long outdated, while preserving its gifts, benefits to humankind and its eternal truths.

During the month of August, Bridget Mary Meehan, Mary Theresa Streck and Joan Chesterfield worked as missionaries, spreading the word in Ireland that "Women Priests Are Here," and explaining our new vision of the Church to those interested. Mary Eileen Collingwood concludes her brief history of the *Liturgy* of our Church, stressing, through recent theories of theology, the importance of rethinking the old ways and casting new light on our original rites.

Enjoy! ♦

Mary Bergan Blanchard,
MEd, LPC. Wife,
mother, grandmother,
teacher, author, mission-
ary. Counselor at parish
church for twenty years.

A Meditation:

"When I die, I will send down a shower of roses from the heavens, I will spend my heaven by doing good on earth."

St. Thérèse of Lisieux





Liturgy

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

The twentieth century was rich with spiritually inspired minds that examined liturgical practices in Catholic worship, encouraging its renewal in style and content. It took many decades of expressing ideas and gleaning insight from Christian scholars before any significant action was taken in rebirthing the sacred liturgical rites in the Roman Catholic tradition. Eventually, a new wave of thought and enthusiasm for Christian living and sacred worship was ushered in under the guidance of Pope John XXIII. The first session of Vatican Council II began in St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome, on October 11, 1962. The firstborn fruit of that Council was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, published December 4, 1963.

Some of the noteworthy changes brought about by this new liturgical Constitution were having the presider face the people while standing at the Table, recognizing Christ’s presence in the Scriptures and in the Assembly gathered, and speaking the prayers in the language of the people. Processing and standing when receiving Communion in the hand, and composing more prayers and hymns in a style that spoke to the People of God were implemented, inviting more active participation by the congregation in communal worship. An offshoot of these changes included inviting women and men from the pew to proclaim the Scripture readings, lead the assembly in song, and distribute Communion when more ministers were needed. Many countries also allowed girls to attend the altar along with the boys. All these changes and more provided an environment for a more inclusive and vibrant worship experience. These new developments in liturgical renewal spawned ideas for further revisions in the years that followed.

After many decades of implementing the renewed liturgical ritual, instead of continued progress in liturgical reform, the persistent restorative efforts of conservative members of the Vatican offices and other Catholic institutions effected a return to former practices. Ancient vocabulary and phraseology in the prayers, the priest as being the main focus of attention, and the gradual removal of the People of God from the sanctuary were returned to the present liturgical formulary.

A shimmer of hope has peeked through this morass as the Spirit continues to enlighten our Church. On Sept. 9, 2017, Pope Francis announced in the document *Magnum Principium* (“Great Principle”), that he is instituting a change in the man-made Canon Law that rules the Church, whereby the responsibility for the liturgical text translations will shift from Rome to local National Bishops’ Conferences. This is being described as a victory for the strength and vision of Vatican

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People’s Catholic Seminary: New Wine in New Wineskins



Can you become a priest if you do not have a formal degree in theology or religious studies? The answer is yes.

Some women who feel called to priesthood do not have degrees in theology. However, they have years of experience in church ministry and related fields such as social work, counseling, education, and health care. In many cases, they are self-educated through reading of contemporary theology and have spent a lifetime sharing their faith in living witness to the Gospel.

The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests’ Program of Preparation begins by accepting each person’s spiritual journey and experience of ministry as an integral part of their preparation for priesthood.

As Irish theologian, Mary T. Malone, reminds us in her book, *The Elephant in the Church*, “... the experience of the ordinary day-in, day-out women of Catholicism, can begin to be respected as among the primary bearers of the Faith, and respected, heard and treated as the significant theologians that they are. ... For women have always done theology, and ministry, in both word and deed. Their theology has not necessarily been expressed in tomes or lecture halls, but it is the daily living guide for more than half the Church.”

In ARCWP, our candidates for ordination complete a ten-unit, interactive sacramental preparation program in courses that are available on-line through People’s Catholic Seminary (www.pcseminary.org). Topics include contemporary scholarship on God, Jesus, women mystics, church history, sacraments, social justice and pastoral practice.

These courses foster an expanded world view of our liberating God of compassion present in all and working for justice for all through systemic change. As co-creators and companions on a journey, we share the wisdom of God in our sacred texts, theologies, practices, sacramental celebrations, and lived experiences. Our resources include scholarship by Elizabeth Johnson, Diarmuid O’Murchú, Ilia Delio, Matthew Fox and many more.

Our program continues for life and does not end with ordination. We are a community of life-long co-learners on a journey to spiritual transformation.

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The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests are 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 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.

Spotlight, continued from page 1

say enough about the loving support Kathie and I received from the women and men of ARCWP and The Upper Room. After Hospice members began coming to our home, our community continued to love and support us. They visited. We had meetings at our house so Kathie could participate. One couple brought weekly meals. As my time was running out, they came and stayed with me so Kathie could have a break from caregiving.

On Super Bowl Sunday 2016, I crossed over. Those to whom we were closest were at the house within the hour. They prayed with Kathie and our son and his wife. They anointed my body and when it was time for my body to leave the house they made a candle-lit path to the hearse.

The funeral was a wonderful celebration of life. Kathie and I had written the liturgy together. There was a time I worried that I would not live to see Kathie ordained. Not only did I celebrate her ordination with her, but we walked every step together.

I am still walking with her. ♦

Liturgy, continued from page 3

Council II, that supports prayers in the language of the people. It also reflects the truth that **Canon Law can change** to include the ordination of women as priests, deacons, and bishops.

The ordained Roman Catholic Women Priests of today are dedicated to a renewed priestly ministry within a community of equals, whereby all are welcome to partake at the Table. Exclusive language and prayers of sacrificial atonement can not be found in our liturgies, as such expressions do not reflect the Divine Presence abiding in, around, and among the People of God. We are leading the Church by giving credence to the evolving nature of the Spirit's existence in communities of faith that are fueled and embraced by the creative and energizing Spirit of Love. Ordained women stand as equals among men, and we serve as prophetic witnesses to what the Church can be now and in the future. ♦

This is Part Four, the final part of a continuing column that offered a brief history of liturgy in the Christian tradition and the roles women held in liturgical practice.

Mary Eileen Collingwood, MTh., is a wife, mother, grandmother and educator, who serves ARCWP as bishop. She lives in the Cleveland, OH, area and serves the Community of St. Bridget: An Inclusive Catholic Community, as co-president.

People's Catholic Seminary, continued from page 3

As new wine in new wineskins, People's Catholic Seminary is an innovative approach that is open to all who support a renewed priestly ministry in a community of equals. We are building a supportive community of learners for our inclusive Catholic communities – both inside and outside ARCWP. All are welcome to join us on this journey!

To read further, the link to our website is www.pcseminary.org. ♦

Bridget Mary Meehan, MA, DMin, a native of Ireland, is a Sister for Christian Community, a communications media specialist, and serves ARCWP as bishop. She is a founding member of People's Catholic Seminary, has authored many books on spirituality and prayer, and is a presiding team member at Mary Mother of Jesus Inclusive Catholic Community in Sarasota, FL.

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If you wish to direct your donation to a particular category, such as ordinations, newsletter, or education, please indicate and we will be happy to oblige. All interest and support of our movement is deeply appreciated.

Visit us at arcwp.org or bridgetmarys.blogspot.com