



The Seed Keepers

A Publication of the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE)

Réseau Catholique pour l'égalité des femmes

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To say that a lot has happened since publication of our winter edition would be understatement. What with Benedict XVI's resignation, we not only have seen the election of the first pope from the western hemisphere but so much more – including the plethora of journalists' questions about women's ordination to priesthood. We have seen many of our members speaking words of wisdom in response. We have seen the election of not just another pope, but one who stands out because of his choice of name, dress (including his well worn shoes), and personal bill paying habits. In addition, he is one who comes with a history of laudable service to the disadvantaged.

Were we, members and supporters of CNWE, going to get the news from him that we want to hear – validation of our status as adult female baptized persons and, with that, official permission to do what Jesus said to do: "Do this in remembrance of me"? Sadly, the answer is: 'No. At least, not yet.'

Pope Francis is after all a member of a strong brotherhood committed to carefully guarding its power by various means including supporting the edicts of each other even though many of them as individuals, and these in private, have been known to voice dissent. (Intellectual honesty?) As well, this brotherhood meets as a secret society (in conclave) when, as Ivone Gebara critiques, open dialogue is absolutely what's needed to right numerous weighty wrongs (www.adital.com.br). Also, we have come to know that Pope Francis has thrown "'The Nuns on the Bus' under the bus." (www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg)

No hope? Little. But some reason for hope may lie in the fact that Pope Francis is a member of the Society of Jesus. It was the Jesuit order after all which famously adopted at their 1995 General Council *Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society*. This document, which details key injustices against women and proposes remedies, ends with:

Above all we want to commit the Society in a more formal and explicit way to regard this solidarity with women as integral to our mission. ... [W]e hope that *the whole Society* will regard this work for reconciliation between women and men *in all its forms*.... (italics added)

Surely these words beg the question: Is Pope Francis Jesuit enough to make changes in accord with the proposals of that 1995 Jesuit declaration or will he continue to be more a member of his powerful sexist brotherhood?

About this our Spring edition of *The Seed Keepers*, we continue to endeavour to make this a causeway of conversation. (Your contributions are anticipated and they count!) Here you'll find information about the service of the Reaching Out team along with its Spring Tour schedule. You'll also find great reading - Christine Gervais' article on how long-serving women religious manage in a patriarchal church, Marion Douglas Kerans' personal sage reflection on Vatican II, and an article on primacy of conscience by Louise Akers, SC, one of the keynote speakers for our up-coming conference. And, on the back page, we have the registration form for the 2013 CNWE Conference and AGM to be held this year in Sudbury, Ontario. Finally, I can't help myself, I say: Think about coming! Join us! Let's spend time reflecting deeply about primacy of conscience - together, in Sudbury.

virginialafond@rogers.com

Virginia Lafond

Editor



‘Midwives of New Ways’: Women Religious beyond the Priesthood

by Christine Gervais*



Since the day I was born, my life has been inextricably linked with, and inspired by, Roman Catholic women religious.

Due to my fragile state at birth, I was baptized immediately by a nun because a male priest was not available. As a child and adolescent, I was always fascinated with sisters' missionary work abroad. As a young adult, it was my personal experience with their work in the Dominican Republic and Peru that inspired my current involvement in international development in Latin America. Over the last decade, it has been my collaboration with, and observations of current and former women religious' advocacy in the areas of gender equality and social justice that have led to my current focus on sisters' experiences as women in the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, it is my reflection on the sisters' words and actions that have left me facing an uncomfortable tension. While, on the one hand, women religious' frustration with gender inequality in the Roman Catholic Church has prompted me to speak out on the issue and to join CNWE, it is their resourcefulness and resilience that have shown me that alternatives beyond the institutional church, and particularly beyond the priesthood, are not only possible, but actually desirable. Within a university-based research project that I initiated in 2008, I have had the privilege of interviewing 32 current and former women religious, ranging in age from 49 to 91, and residing in the province of Ontario. In these conversations, I have come to know remarkable women, all of whom denounce the Roman Catholic Church's stance on women's ordination. Among these women, some have been strong advocates of women's ordination and/or have been proud members of CNWE in the past. While all of the sisters I interviewed believe that ordination is a woman's right, none of them desired to be a priest. In fact, a significant number of them were not in favour of women's ordination within the current Roman Catholic Church because they do not want to be affiliated with the institutional, patriarchal and hierarchical church and they refuse to imitate males or to participate on male terms. They all actually preferred their current positions as laity-based women religious supported by an inclusive community of forward-

thinking women. In their own words, some current and former sisters conveyed their position quite definitively:

"I wouldn't want to be a priest the way things are now ... it's hard, hard, hard to be part of the hierarchy." (current sister, age 79)

"I continue to be astounded that there are women who still want to join the club of the ordained in an institution that is hierarchical, patriarchal and dictatorial." (former sister, age 75)

"We do not need ordination and I'm convinced of that." (current sister, age 80)

"I'd never want to be a priest ... there are clergy and then there are the faithful ... the laity and I belong to the laity ... I'd rather be where I am." (current sister, age 80)

As I heard these opinions expressed with such conviction, I was both inspired and troubled. Ever since then, I have struggled to reconcile my CNWE-based hope for women's ordination and my nun-inspired appeal for far-reaching alternatives. While some may find it surprising that it was sisters/nuns who called to mind the more radical possibilities, it is an undeniable actuality for me. In my ongoing reflections on this issue, I am often reminded of certain sisters' tactics:

"We learned how to sidestep all of this stuff ..." (age 74)

"I by-pass the [patriarchal] nonsense that goes on ..." (age 72)

"A number of us just go ahead and do what we feel God is calling us to ..." (age 73)

Many sisters whom I interviewed take pride in being "midwives of new ways" (age 68), in working within "the underground church" (age 80), in embracing "feminist theology" (age 76), in developing "a circular model" of governance (age 74) and in attempting "to challenge unjust structures" (age 68) through their social justice

...there is no doubt that many feminist women religious are transforming consciousness and propelling change towards indispensable spiritual, institutional and societal renewal, and that countless people are benefiting from the inclusive initiatives they are engendering beyond the institutional church. The transformative potential of women religious' interconnected feminist-based spiritualities, governance and activism is propitious, given that, as a 75 year old sister reminds us, "the sisterhood is strong."

While the sisters' stances have been riveting for me, I know that the 'sisterhood' among CNWE members is also strong. While women's right to ordination remains a common cause around which many of us coalesce, I recognize that it is not the only issue that CNWE seeks to address, and that many of us have been enriched by the women-centered spiritual alternatives already present among CNWE initiatives. Thus, rather than continue to struggle between

seemingly different directions, I hope that the brief reflections that I have offered here can help us all be part of a wider sharing and deeper dialogue with everyone who seeks to move beyond the church's institutional constraints and to move forward inclusively and vitally. ♀

For a more complete consideration of the sisters' accounts and of the complex issues raised in this article, please consult the following publications:

Gervais, C. "Alternative Altars: Beyond Patriarchy and Priesthood and Towards Inclusive Spirituality, Governance and Activism among Catholic Women Religious in Ontario." Canadian Woman Studies. 29(1, 2): 8-15, 2011.

Gervais, C. "Canadian Women Religious' Negotiation of Feminism and Catholicism." Sociology of Religion. 73(4): 384-410, 2012.

*Christine Gervais is an Associate Professor in Criminology at the University of Ottawa; her teaching and research areas include children's and women's rights, the criminalization of women's ordination, and the collateral consequences to families of young people's offending. She is the founder of ACCESO International and she is a member of Ottawa CNWE.

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## 2013 CNWE Conference in Sudbury

will welcome

### Louise Akers SC

speaking from her own silencing experience



"Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise" – strong words reflecting a firm commitment to truths not acceptable by the institutional Church. Praiseworthy or to be condemned?

Expressed and echoing from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, these words of Martin Luther, Augustinian monk, theologian and professed reformer of the Roman Catholic Church, resulted in the emergence of Protestantism.

Centuries **earlier**, Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church and reformer within the 14<sup>th</sup> century Church tells all who would hear: "Cry out as if you had a million voices; it is silence that kills the world."

Centuries **later**, another reformer, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Martin L. King, Jr., Baptist minister and recognized contemporary prophet, proclaims: "Our lives begin to end when we are silent about the things that matter to us."

Dissent has been and continues to be a significant thread throughout modern church history. Words, filled with pain and steeped in conviction, continue to reverberate in today's church through the voices of women and men who take a conscientious stand for justice and against religious oppression. Why? Many internal and external factors have surely influenced this contemporary, increased dissent; an educated laity being a pivotal

factor ~ women and men who have imbibed and claimed the spirit, content and challenge of Vatican II (1962-65). In this process both an evolution and a revolution have taken place.

The people of God have been active in a transformation reflecting the vision of Vatican II that continues to call all of us *from* a subservient posture *toward* one of equality. This movement's progress can be measured as we move

| <u>From</u>                      | <u>Toward</u>               |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Passivity</i>                 | <i>Active Participation</i> |
| <i>Parent/Child Relationship</i> | <i>Mature Adulthood</i>     |
| <i>Clericalism</i>               | <i>Living Community</i>     |
| <i>Hierarchical Structure</i>    | <i>People of God</i>        |

Countering this movement has been the pervasive paradigm of a patriarchal worldview reflected in Church tradition, doctrine and structure. Evidence, it seems to me, that we are indeed in the midst of a paradigm shift; one that needs attention, direction and deliberate participation on our part if this shift is to be realized and to result in an effective, operative, alternative world view.

Church law, Council documents and Lived Experience – both individual and communal - all support conscientious positions on issues that relate to individual human dignity and the common good. The following brief excerpts illustrate the Church's belief if not its policy:

*In accord with the knowledge, competence and preeminence which they possess, the Christian faithful have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the church. They also have a right to make their opinion known to the other Christian faithful, with due regard for the integrity of faith and morals and reverence towards their pastors.*  
(Canon 212 & 213)

*The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all people should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, nobody is forced to act against their convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others . . . .*

*It is in accordance with their dignity that all human beings, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore bearing personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth once they know it and to direct their whole lives in accordance with the demands of truth.*

(*Religious Freedom Dignitatis Humanae*, Chapter 1, #2)

So, what will it take for the institutional church to resolve the inconsistency between its teaching and its practice? To recognize that its very existence is at stake in its stubborn maintenance of the status quo? Will the institution itself have to undergo the Death and Resurrection it preaches? Is this, in fact, what is happening as the popular church and women-church continue to emerge throughout the world?

What stand(s) do we, as women and men of faith, continue to take? What directions do we choose? We know courageous and authentic responses require taking new paths, relinquishing traditional institutions and building new structures which will bring growth and reverence life. This assumes openness and ongoing conversion - not an easy task but a necessary one. ♀

# ' Marion Douglas Kerans\*

contributes her

reaction to the outcomes of Vatican II



When I was asked if I would like to do an article on Vatican II, I replied that it did not mean much to me in my life currently. I did remember fondly the home Masses our Newman Club used to celebrate in my home in the late sixties and early seventies and also that many of us were delighted at the changes Vatican II wrought in our churches both in the liturgy and in the attitudes towards other Christians and Jews.

Then as the years went by the momentum for change that Vatican II had generated slowed and the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. The attention paid by Canadian Bishops to social justice weakened. Liberation theology got shut down. Most young people no longer relate to what is going on inside the church. Finally a reactionary church's protection of clergy who have abused children became the last straw for many Catholics. The contradictions between Christ's teachings and church policy and behaviour have become unacceptable to many. Benedict XVI (now Pope Emeritus) is described on the internet as preferring the move away from Vatican II.

I read Bishop Remi De Roo's recent book *Chronicles of a Vatican II Bishop*, and John W. O'Malley's *What Happened at Vatican II*, published in 2008. Then I asked two groups of women (mostly Catholic) what were their thoughts and reactions to Vatican II and finally I googled two documents deemed to be relevant to myself as a lay Catholic woman: *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

There are many admiring comments in the literature about the effect of Vatican II, however I felt left out when I could find only two references to *woman* and these only in relation to *man*. We are always subsumed into *man, mankind, and the family of man*.

John W. O'Malley tells us that there were four issues so sensitive or potentially explosive that Pope Paul VI withheld them from the council agenda: clerical celibacy; birth control; the reform of the Roman Curia (the central offices of the Vatican); and the mechanism to implement collegiality at the centre. While there were initially high hopes over the work of the Council, this unfinished business clearly was destined to result in the present tragic state of the church.

Regarding the liturgy, a basic principle of Vatican II was the encouragement of the full participation

of the whole assembly in the liturgical action. Bishop De Roo claims that Pope John XXIII transformed the dominant symbol of Vatican II from a pyramid with vertical lines of authority to a circle with all members equal in dignity and in capacity to serve. *Lumen Gentium* distributed authority beyond bishops to priests and lay persons, who were exhorted to exercise initiative and take a role in decision-making.

*The Church in the Modern World* was addressed not just to church members but to all persons of good will. It committed the church to spare no effort in working for the complete outlawing of war and to that end it supported and promoted every international organization - including the U.N. - designed to further humanitarian goals. The Council denounced the arms race and registered skepticism that stockpiling weapons was a deterrent to war. To those of us who are pacifists these were encouraging words.

Vatican II never raised the question of the possibility of ordaining women. It was taken for granted that women were not entitled to exercise authority in the Church in any official capacity. However Cardinal Leo Josef Suenens of Belgium was one of the first to raise that issue, reminding the bishops that women constitute the majority of Church membership.

Bishop De Roo has stated that the question of the future ministries of women in the Church is of such importance that it calls for the communal discernment of the entire people of God - not just the hierarchy. For this he was censured. De Roo sees the need to keep pursuing truth, especially when it becomes difficult or inconvenient. This bishop reminds us that "the ways of the Lord are not restricted by human frailty or opposition."

At present women agree that all the official movement is in the direction of a right wing patriarchal church. At the same time women represent much untapped power. It is for women to confront ecclesiastical power and change the structure to bring about equality in the Catholic Church.

The movement for women priests is a courageous attempt to right an unbalanced church. ♀

\*Marion Douglas Kerans is a tireless advocate for peace. She is a supporter of Ottawa CNWE and *The Seed Keepers*.

# Reaching Out



CNWE's *Reaching Out* initiative is certainly on track with its Spring 2013 Tour.

According to Rita Patenaude, *Reaching Out* 'is not a membership drive but a service to gatherings of like-minded women in various centres across the country.' She adds, 'Prayers for guidance and blessing for all involved are asked for by the Reaching Out team.'

The Vancouver gatherings took place in April. Going forward, here are important details:

- **Regina SK** Note that the date has been changed to **Sunday May 26 9:30 - 12 pm**  
Facilitator: Mary Ellen Chown.  
Contact: mechown@gmail.com
- **Antigonish NS Saturday June 1 9 - 3:30 pm** and **Sydney NS Sunday June 2 4 - 8 pm**  
Facilitators: Paula MacQuarrie and Mary Bardsley  
Contact: paulamacquarrie4481@bellaliant.net
- **Winnipeg MB Saturday June 8 9:30 - 3:30 pm**  
Facilitators: Veronica Dunne, Christina Cathro, Sheila Casey Houston  
Contact: Lois Perron wisdomretreats@shaw.ca
- **Calgary AB Monday June 17 7 - 9 pm**  
Facilitators: Lois Perron, Monica Kilburn Smith  
Contact: Lois Perron [wisdomretreats@shaw.ca](mailto:wisdomretreats@shaw.ca)

The Reaching Out team welcomes your inquiries. Don't hesitate! *Reach Out!*

"If I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink - to the Pope, if you please - still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards."

~ John Henry Newman  
in a letter addressed to the Duke of Norfolk ... (1875)



CNWE

CNWE Mission Statement: To enable women to name their giftedness and from that awareness to effect structural change in the church that reflects the mutuality and co-responsibility of women and men within that church.

TIME TO RENEW!

### CNWE MEMBERSHIP

Memberships are due for renewal on June 1. (If you are planning to attend the Conference, you can pay there.)

Renew! Join! Take a CNWE membership!

Mail in your cheque, payable to "CNWE" for \$50 or, if you are unwaged, pay what you can (\$25 suggested) with the following information -

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Send to:

CNWE  
P.O. Box 19594,  
55 Bloor Street West,  
Toronto, ON M4W 3T9

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Want to sow some CNWE seeds?

Please, think about this - gifting or re-gifting to someone (a new friend, an old friend, or someone you want to send a message to) with three issues of *The Seed Keepers*.

Fill in what's asked for below:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

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and then just make out a cheque for \$12 payable to

"CNWE" and mail it to:

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P.O. Box 19594,
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The Seed Keepers

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Time is running out!
 Register today! Gather with CNWE members and friends from across Canada to "be the change we seek" in our church and in the world! Come hear inspiring keynote speakers on the Primacy of Conscience.

CNWE 2013 National Conference
June 21 – 23
Cambrian College, Sudbury, ON

Registration Form

Last Name: _____
 Preferred Name: _____
 Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Special Dietary Needs: _____

Local transportation that is needed: _____
 Arrival mode: _____
 Arrival date and time: _____

Itinerary

Friday June 21

~ 4 pm Registration/Meet & Greet
 ~ 7 pm Opening Liturgy
 ~ 7:30 Keynote Address by Sister Louise Akers, *Primacy of Conscience* as it relates to her experience of being silenced
 ~ 8:30 Social

Saturday June 22

~ 8 am Breakfast
 ~ 9:30 am Morning Liturgy
 ~ 10:00 am Sister Louise Akers: "World Views", contrasting royal consciousness with prophetic imagination, based on *Prophetic Imagination* (Walter Brueggeman's book)
 ~1:30 pm Catherine Cavanagh on conscience as a part of who we are and the misconception of the never changing church
 ~ 2:30 pm Table Discussion
 ~ 3:30 Question & Answer period with Sister Louise and Catherine
 ~ 4:30 pm Liturgy
 ~ 6:00 pm Dinner
 ~ 7:30 pm Social / Entertainment

Sunday June 23

~ 8:00 am Breakfast
 ~ 9:00 am Morning Liturgy followed by informative AGM
 ~11:45 am Adjournment

Cheques & money orders payable to:

CNWE Conference 2013

Please send completed forms to:

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 275 Second Line West
 PO Box 24043 Market Mall
 Sault Ste Marie, ON
 P6C 6G7

Send questions to:
katherineadolph@gmail.com

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