



The Seed Keepers

A Publication of the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE)
Réseau Catholique pour l'égalité des femmes

Volume 35 Number 2, SPRING 2022
ISSN 1924-181X



Marcel Damphousse, Member
RC OLD BOYS

On this early sunny morning in Ottawa, as I looked at the friendly face expressions of the Archbishop of Ottawa/Cornwall, Marcel Damphousse, via Google, I felt once again wholeheartedly disappointed and angry. Why? Because, in February of this year, before I had a thought of taking part in the Synod of Synodality, in response to my email to him, he stated — through his vicar — that **the subject of women's ordination is closed**. Once more I was reminded that even the Holy Father, who holds by his papal office the keys of the Roman Catholic Church, has lost the keys that open doors. Therefore, we are faced with and expected to live in a stuffy 'old boys club' that is asking for our input but shutting us up at the same time. Soline Humbert, author of 'Of Synodality and Closed Doors, Pain and Hope' says it better than I can in her article, contained herein.

When you read this edition of *TSK*, I'll have made the turn into another decade of old age. I'm determined to be as wise as I can be as well as a user of humour. I realize I have experienced a momentous amount of blessing in my lifetime, including some that have been worthy of high celebration. The galas in my head include those for the Roman Catholic Women Priests movement. It has been one year now since my own commissioning as an RCWP Associate. I mention this on purpose because up until three years ago, I did not know of associateness in RCWP. Perhaps others of you are in the same position and might want to consider this avenue. As you know, **we have women priests now**. They, from time to time, need support. We can be there for them.

My faithful companion in publishing *TSK*, Jocelyn Rait, recently found in her treasure trove a copy of a talk she gave years ago. She offers it for us.

Please do keep on with your contributions. And by the way, humour is welcome!

Table of Contents

- 2 Rait: Living Wisely with Creation
- 3 In Memoriam: Rosemary Radford Ruether
- 4 Rosemary Ganley's Honorary Doctorate
- 5 Humbert: Synodality
- 7 Letters
- 8 CNWE Membership
- 8 CNWE AGM - June 4
- 8 Curteis: Sunrise



Virginia Lafond,
Editor

virginialafond@gmail.com

Treasure found...

Jocelyn Rait, pictured right - about 30 or so years ago, explains: "LIVING WISELY WITH CREATION is a talk that I gave to the women of Railton, Ontario, on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer, thirty years ago!"



Before I speak on today's theme, I would like to give a little background for those of you who are not familiar with the World Day of Prayer. It was started by a group of Presbyterian women in the United States in 1887 as a national day of prayer. Over the years more denominations joined in to pray together on the first Friday of March each year, and by 1922 the movement had spread to include Canadian women. By 1927 the day was being observed all over the world, and it came to be known as the Women's World Day of Prayer. It continued to grow and in 1967 an International Committee was formed and the preparation of the prayer service began to rotate from country to country. More than 170 countries are now involved - and many thousands of women. The word "Women's" has been dropped from the title so that men should not feel excluded from the worship, but the work is mainly done by women, who enrich each other by their prayer and action in today's world, support others in their commitment to peace and justice, hear issues of concern from other countries, and gather together once a year to celebrate in a special way. In Canada it is sponsored by the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada.

One of the women's main concerns, which is the theme for this year's World Day of Prayer, is the importance of living wisely with creation. Economic growth has been their primary goal and we marvel at German cars and machinery, at Swiss cameras and microscopes and other precision instruments. We were on holiday once on the edge of Lake Lucerne and one day went for a walk through the mountains. The path led us along a little catwalk that had been built sticking out from the side of the rock face so we followed it, admittedly with some trepidation, and at the end found ourselves facing a set of elevator doors, built right into the rock. The doors opened so we got into the elevator and pressed the button. We were shot up at high speed to the top of the mountain and on leaving the elevator we could see the whole countryside spread out before us - and have lunch in an excellent restaurant perched on the very top of the mountain. Only the Swiss could do that, we said in awe.

These peoples have suffered terribly from the technologies of modern society - their towns and cities destroyed by war, the natural beauty of their mountains and fields, forests and rivers threatened first by the

incredible industrialization which crowded the countryside following the Second World War, and secondly by tourism which increases annually. Like us they thought technology would be the solution to all their problems and like us they are now discovering that the Earth is too fragile to be treated in this callous manner, and that if we do not change our ways now, we are in danger of destroying it completely.

In the prayer we have just recited together we said that we have intellectual understanding, but no wisdom. We have applied the rules with our heads but we have not learned wise ways deep in our hearts. As the women of Europe found during and after the wars, the only really reliable things are those which come from God - the seedtime, the harvest, the changing seasons, the cold and heat. We thought we were too smart for all of that, that we knew better and that with our modern technology we could do better than God had done in creating and maintaining the good things on earth. How wrong we were. A few years ago the plant breeders tried to establish copyrights over the new hybrid plants they were inventing - plants and seeds which grew impressively for a couple of seasons but which then fell victim to some pest or virus which the breeders hadn't thought of. Luckily there were enough people with the wisdom to see that if this situation were allowed to continue it could spell disaster for farmers and gardeners everywhere. They were alerted and took action but if they and ordinary people like them hadn't protested and insisted on maintaining the diversity of the genes in the seeds that are grown and also saved in seed banks we might be in an even worse position than we are today. We see that if we are to take good care of our planet, this beautiful creation which our loving God has given us to enjoy, we must have wisdom. And how do we find wisdom? By prayer, speaking and listening to God, and by reading the scriptures. There are many references to Wisdom-Sophia throughout the Bible and if we study and reflect on the word of God we will find her, find life and win favour with God. In the midst of our busy lives we must slow down and take the time to get in tune with the rhythm of creation around us. We can learn

much here from our country's native peoples who have always tried to live in harmony with creation, and this month is a good time to start. Winter is almost over and

"[I]f we do not change our ways now, we are in danger of destroying it completely. ..."

In the midst of our busy lives we must slow down and take the time to get in tune with the rhythm of creation around us."

the miracle of rebirth that is about to explode, not in a noisy or obtrusive way, but very gently with small signs, mini-wonders.

I am a member of Amnesty International, an organization whose work is achieved by thousands of ordinary people doing something very ordinary indeed - writing letters. It seems such a small thing and yet the results are impressive - governments are shamed into giving prisoners better treatment, or stopping torturing them, or even, where they have been imprisoned illegally, releasing them. All because one person multiplied ten thousand, or even a hundred thousand times, wrote a letter.

We are called to be stewards of creation, cooperators with our God, nurturers of our fragile, beautiful planet. And it is the little actions, the faithful work of ordinary people, that will count in the end. Every can you rinse and recycle, every bit of old clothing you take to the thrift store, every piece of paper you save for the local daycare, every potato peel that goes in the compost and not in the garbage, every light or tap you turn out or off, every time you walk or bike instead of taking the car, every product you refuse to buy because the manufacturer is not taking his responsibilities seriously - these are the ways in which we will save the planet. And this is how, as Christians, we are supposed to be. If we are faithful in the little things, our reward will be great.

Seeing what has to be done and continuing to do it faithfully, that is good stewardship. We don't really have to worry about how God will achieve God's purposes. Who would have foreseen the dramatic turn of events in the world that has occurred over the last couple of years?

God's ways are certainly not our ways but if we are faithful in doing our part, God will not fail us.

We know that we are weak and that however good our intentions may be, the temptation not to bother is very strong. People will laugh at us or think us strange if we go too much against popular opinion. But Jesus told us that would happen. For if it does we know we are on the right track as far as being disciples goes. He is always there for us, with his healing power, to mend our brokenness and make us whole. And because he knows our weaknesses so well, that is why he sends us the Holy Spirit, who enables us to do all sorts of things we thought we couldn't. It is once we have committed ourselves to Christ that we can then be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

I will finish with a prayer from the preparation material for today's service:

**We are simply asked
To make gentle our bruised world,
To be compassionate to all including ourselves.
The way is open before us,
let us go:
with the love of God,
the grace of Christ,
the communion of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Jocelyn Rait is a longstanding, valued member of CNWE Ottawa and also serves on *The Seed Keepers* Publication Team. Editor's note: We trust she enjoys seeing again a now rather famous pic of herself. :-))



In Memoriam: Rosemary Radford Ruether



The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive.

Pioneering Catholic feminist theologian **Rosemary Radford Ruether**, accompanied by her daughters Mimi and Becky, died peacefully on Saturday, May 21, 2022 at 3 PM PDT in Pomona, California after a long illness.

Dr. Ruether was a scholar activist par excellence. She was respected and beloved by students, colleagues, and collaborators around the world for her work on ecofeminist and liberation theologies, anti-racism, Middle East complexities, women-church, and many other topics.

In the Canadian News:

CNWE's Rosemary Ganley

is awarded an Honorary Doctorate



Peterborough Examiner

By Examiner Staff

Thu., April 14, 2022

Examiner opinion columnist [Rosemary Ganley](#) is among six people receiving honorary degrees at Trent University's 2022 Convocation ceremonies from June 2 to 10.

After two years without due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University is returning to in-person ceremonies with events at both the Peterborough and Oshawa campuses.

"Convocation presents our graduates with an opportunity to reflect, not only on their time at Trent but also their future, and this year's extraordinary honorary degree recipients will no doubt contribute to the momentous occasion," Trent president Leo Groarke said in a release.

"These remarkable individuals have made meaningful contributions here in Canada and abroad as philanthropists, human rights activists, artists, environmentalists, and educators."

Ganley, a lifelong feminist activist and writer, is scheduled to receive an honorary doctorate of laws for her passionate advocacy for human rights and community engagement at the 10 a.m. ceremony on June 9 at the Peterborough campus.

Ganley lived for six years in Jamaica and Tanzania, and with her husband founded the development agency Jamaican Self Help, in 1980, which supported educational, health, youth and other community-based activities in Kingston, Jamaica.

Thanks to Marie Bouclín, RCWP

Of Synodality and Closed Doors,

*Pain and Hope**

*by Soline Humbert***



When I was asked several months ago to write an article on synodality, I was surprised but I agreed, albeit very reluctantly. I reckoned that after Christmas, when I would be actually writing it, that inner reluctance would have given way to a measure of enthusiasm. However the passage of time has done nothing of the sort, in fact quite the opposite. I also thought that by then I might be able to write about participating in an official synodal experience, but the archdiocese of Dublin is still in preparatory phase, so there was no help there.

I could of course attempt to write something theoretical, impersonal on synodality; after all I have studied ecclesiology and read enough learned articles, and listened to discussions about it. As I sat with and reflected upon this deep-seated reluctance, this lack of enthusiasm which was actually blocking me from even starting writing, what I discovered was a well of pain. For me, to write about synodality in an honest, authentic manner would necessarily mean engaging with this pain and listening to what it is telling me and sharing it, in all its vulnerability. There was no way of ignoring it.

By now, you who are reading this, will have realized that I am inviting you on a kind of journey, an inner exploration which is tentative, partial, not systematized, not offering you a worked out treatise. It will lead where it will....

The first thing which I have noted in myself is that I do not share in the enthusiasm that the word synodality and all that goes with it generates in so many, starting with Pope Francis. One Irish bishop was interviewed a few months ago on radio about it, and he was positively gushing about it. I would of course like to share in that enthusiasm, for it is an uplifting, positive emotion, but the reality is that I can't. The official guidelines for the Synod process state clearly that it must reach, include, people on the periphery of the church. I have asked myself: am I one of these people considered to be on the periphery? Yes, on the margins, and how did I come to be there? And where exactly is the centre of the church? Is the centre where the Pope, the curia, the bishop, the parish priest are? Who defines the centre, and therefore the periphery? I like to think that the

“I am now in my sixties, I have never lost that sense of vocation despite the determined efforts of church authority to kill it I am talking about church rules, teachings, practices which are destructive and anything but life-giving.”

Heart of Christ is the centre, and in that case I know there is room and a welcome for me there.

But in terms of the official, institutional church I am on the margins because the power centre has pushed me out there. Or as the authorities would argue, I have put myself there, by my own misguided obduracy. All of my adult life the official church has been a cold house, a very cold house indeed. Whenever I have seen posters about domestic violence warning about situations ‘When home is where the abuse takes place,’ I have thought about the church, my spiritual home ‘where the abuse takes place.’

As long ago as 1995 in a seminar on the ordination of women in Dublin I described myself as having been spiritually abused. I did not say it lightly then, it cost me a lot to acknowledge it first to myself and then publicly. Now, nearly thirty years later I cannot but reaffirm it: There is widespread spiritual abuse in the church.

I am now in my sixties, I have never lost that sense of vocation despite the determined efforts to kill it or of spiritual abuses committed by an individual confessor, spiritual director, or religious superior. I am talking about church rules, teachings, practices which do injury to one's spirit and conscience, which are destructive and anything but life-giving. They are so much part and parcel of the church culture, have been sacralized and decreed as divinely endorsed, they are mostly not even recognized consciously as being abusive.

From the time I experienced a sense of vocation to the presbyteral ministry in my late teens I have been at the receiving end of spiritual violence in the church and pressure by the authorities to ‘desist,’ to ‘recant.’ To put it somewhat crudely, I was to acknowledge I was either ‘mad, bad or sad.’ Being young and somewhat naively trusting it took me some time to realize that the church is a deeply patriarchal institution. My sense of call to an ordained ministry, the exclusive preserve of males, was perceived as a threat to this patriarchal power. It was quashed by all forms of exclusion and silencing. Pope Francis, who is all in favour of open doors, is only the latest pope to reaffirm that the door to women priests is closed. And while he is also in favour of listening and discernment, he has never extended an invitation to women like me to at least listen to our deep sense of calling and to our journeys with that vocation. Obviously he believes we have nothing of value

to communicate, no truth to share, no word from the Spirit. It has been the official church policy and practice to this very day to treat us as non-persons, to shun us, to freeze us out. In a patriarchal church we simply don't exist.

So what of synodality for women like me? The Irish bishop who was gushing with enthusiasm about the launching of the synodal process was also careful to explain there would be 'parameters' to be respected. I know full well that who I am and what I represent is outside these carefully defined

'parameters.' That much has been drilled into me at every opportunity over nearly half a century: 'You do not belong' or 'You can belong, but only on our terms and that means IF you agree you don't have that vocation.' Confronted with that ultimatum, I have chosen to sacrifice that kind of belonging to keep my integrity and to being faithful, as I perceive it, to the One who is faithful to me.

What does this synodal process mean for women like me after a lifetime of exclusion, threats, rejections, denigration? What does it mean when Pope Francis calls for openness to the Spirit and to new paths but repeats over and over again that the door is firmly shut in our faces?

Sr Nathalie Becquart in the Vatican Secretariat for the Synod recently said that two things were needed for the synod process: trust and humility.

I have faith and trust in God still. I trust in the Spirit wholeheartedly. But I have no faith left in the present church system and the leaders. It wasn't always like that: I started off full of trust. And then along the way I realized I had no trust left, it had gradually been eroded by the repeated abuses, deceptions, manipulations, and lies. Once that trust was gone, it was truly gone. Something precious had died. Once trust has been squandered, destroyed, it takes a lot of efforts to rebuild it. People who want to be trusted again must show themselves worthy of that trust. Appeals such as 'trust us, trust us' no longer work when they are not backed with very concrete actions. As far as I am concerned, and I can only speak personally, I have experienced nothing, absolutely nothing, to restore my own trust.

What about humility? After all, that and obedience and patience, are deemed the cardinal virtues for women in the church. And yes I know, if I had any humility (as defined) I wouldn't possibly think for a second God would call me, a (mere) woman, to be a priest. If I still do lack that kind of humility, it's not for want of having been admonished repeatedly. But is that really what humility is, the humility of Mary of Nazareth and of her Son Jesus? Decades ago I came across a definition of humility by a French priest which made instant sense to me: 'Humility is knowing one's place and taking it.' And with it, the painful

realization that there is no place for me in the institutional church as it is.

The Synodal process culminating in the synod of bishops in Rome in 2023 means that the ultimate discernment will be in the hands of some men (males). Many women fear, with good reason, that their voices will not be heard. And many men, too.

Nearly thirty years ago I initiated, with two others, a petition asking for all ministries in the church to be equally open to women and men. It obviously struck a chord because, although it was pre-internet days making the process very laborious, we quickly gathered 10,000 signatures. After the primate of all Ireland Cardinal Daly refused to receive them we raised another 10,000. We divided them and sent them to all bishops in Ireland. A handful acknowledged them.

Pope Francis has said, quoting Yves Congar, 'We don't need another church but a different church.' It is my profound conviction that a church where men continue to claim to have the final word in decisions and to arrogate to themselves the right to place restrictions on women is just more of the same patriarchal church where spiritual abuses of power are endemic.

Pope Francis, you tell me that this door which was brutally shut in my face by your predecessor Pope Saint John Paul II

will remain shut for ever. Why do you want me to take part in this synodal process when you have already indicated that whatever I might share of my spiritual life will be 'inadmissible' by you and your fellow bishops, and will make absolutely no difference to that door remaining shut?

Whatever trust and hope I have do not come from a pope but from the One who speaks in the depths of my being: 'See, I have opened a door for you that no one can shut' (Revelation 3:8).

Can the synodal process as presently framed and organized give birth to a Church of Communion for which we long, while insisting on closed doors for women? I remain in pain and in hope.

*First published in *The Japan Mission Journal*, Spring 2022, Volume 76, Number 1

** **Soline Humbert**, born in 1956, is a member of We Are Church Ireland. Since 2006, she has ministered as a spiritual director. She holds degrees in History, Business Administration, and Ecumenical Theology from Trinity College, Dublin and diplomas in Catechetics and Spiritual Direction.

“Pope Francis, you tell me that this door which was shut in my face by your predecessor Pope Saint John Paul II will remain shut for ever.

Why do you want me to take part in this synodal process ...?

Letters ...

From: MONICA CULLUM <monica.cullum@rogers.com>
Subject: Re: The Seed Keepers Winter Edition
Date: February 15, 2022 at 5:34:17 AM EST

I have just read this issue and as usual found that it made me question and reflect.

This time, with the situation in Ottawa at the moment, some of the messages certainly are timely but may require significant soul searching and not necessarily emulation. The first "poem" based on the prayer of St. Francis made me think critically of protest. We must always carefully choose our method of protest otherwise it leads to anarchy. So taking the words to heart requires judgement and not just blind acceptance.

The tribute to Sister Marie Trembley speaks more to protest than anything. She recognized that while she must identify the issues, protest against their existence and advocate for change, she must also take action to mitigate their impact.

I wish Rosemary Ganley had asked a specific question in her letter to the nun appointed to the Synod; that is, a specific question so that her letter would have been directed to change. This in no way implies that she should not have received an acknowledgment.

So let me say this issue gave me food for thought. Thank you.
Monica

Another note from Monica Cullum (May 21/22):

I have re-read [the Ottawa CNWE Annual Report written by your TSK editor as Ottawa CNWE contact] and I think it pretty well covers CNWE Ottawa's activities held in spite of Covid restrictions.

Just as an aside and given the rationale pointed out by Virginia* I have to say the Archbishop's response is not only disappointing but in my opinion rude when he is speaking to half the population of the world. There is no openness. More and more, I think the Church should erect signs in front of churches with the message "members not wanted". When will these men face the facts? Maybe as the Pope visits our country to make peace with the Indigenous people he could place another item on his agenda and apologize to women.

Monica

***Editor's Note:** At the end of my letter to the archbishop of Ottawa/Cornwall, Marcel Damphousse (Feb. 17/22), I thanked him for his apology to the Indigenous People of Canada, I introduced myself and asked, "Are you open to discussion about ridding the Roman Catholic Church of patriarchy?"

He had his vicar respond; in part, priest Geoffrey Kerlake included in his message that discussion about the ordination of women is a "closed subject".

I made sure when participating in various Synod on Synodality efforts to mention the archbishop's statement because for the Vatican to be asking to hear from everybody – even from those on the margins – but to exclude any talk of women's ordination appears mightily contradictory.

Special Notes ...

About your CNWE Membership...

If you received this issue of TSK directly from CNWE, your membership is most probably up-to-date! However, if you're not sure, or if a friend forwarded TSK to you and you're interested in becoming a member, please contact Christine Gebel at christinemgebel@gmail.com or call her at 437-345-5197.

CNWE membership expires March 31st of each year. We were reminded by the membership coordinator in January that it's time to renew!

**CNWE'S NWG has asked
us to attend the
2022 Annual General
Meeting
on
June 4nd**



Mark Your
Calendar

SUNRISE

Stop tiptoeing
around the closed door
of this locked room.
It's the silhouette
of your old self
telling you not to go there.

Chopping off
the rungs of a ladder
you need to climb higher
to where the wheel of your smaller self
spins upward.

In this holy air
you can be yourself
your soul
can be the matchbox
that sets your heart
on fire.

No longer stuck
in the wax
of a candle
you can glow now.

Eileen Curteis, ssa. 2018.
CCB Publishing. British Columbia, Canada



CNWE'S VISION:

Justice and equality for all persons manifested in word and action in the Catholic church and throughout the world.

CNWE'S MISSION:

As a Canadian organization, we connect, support and represent people who seek justice for all the baptized within the Catholic church, for women throughout the world, and for all of creation.

CNWE'S CORE VALUES:

Inclusivity

Creativity

Celebration

Compassion

Solidarity

Collaboration

Dialogue



The Seed Keepers

Vol. 35 No. 2 SPRING 2022

ISSN 1924-181X

Publication Team

Virginia Lafond

Jocelyn Rait

CNWE NWG

Louise Dowhan-Bertouille
Winnipeg MB

Shaunagh Gravelines
Sault Ste. Marie ON

Katherine Cameron
Regina SK

Therese Koturbash
Dauphin MB

Susan Roll
Buffalo NY, USA / Ottawa ON