

CWO e-news September 2009 issue 20

Welcome to issue 20 of the e-news. Editor Pat Brown. Please visit CWO's website www.catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk Previous issues can be seen there.

Please send items for October e-news by 15 October 2009. (A slightly later deadline so as any comments about the CWO Annual gathering can be included.)
info@catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk

This issue is largely concerned with the forthcoming Annual Gathering. You should all have received documents concerning the AGM. Please let me know if you haven't.

Please try to attend and be part of the AGM and discussions and reflections about St Therese. The articles in this e-news inform these discussions and remind us that women still suffer as Therese did.

First, Kate tells us of her own vocation and the response of her priest and bishop – where is God's love there?

Ianthe provides a briefing based on the writing of Monica Furlong.

Lastly, a disturbing report from WOC about Sister Louise Akers, who has been threatened with dismissal unless she abandons the cause of women's ordination.

CWO Annual Gathering Vocation to Love - Vocation to Priesthood

Saturday 10 October 2009 10.00am - 4.30pm

St Olave's Church Hall
Marygate lane, off Marygate, York, YO30 7BJ [map](#)

10.00am arrive, refreshments

10.30am -1.00pm AGM

1.00pm - 2.0pm lunch

2.00pm - 4.30pm An opportunity to reflect on the spirituality of St Therese of Lisieux and particularly her calling to priesthood. This will involve reflection on some of the key texts written by Therese and conversations with her sister Celine, the closest witness to her vocation. There will be the chance to discuss these together, pray and reflect with icons of St Therese, and share in a liturgy together.

On the occasion of her relics being in Yorkshire, we will be looking at the spirituality of St Therese with special reference to her call to priesthood and her wish for a renewed model of ordained ministry.

Leaving Liturgy

Like many of the readers of this newsletter, I believe that I may have a vocation to priesthood. Being a Catholic mother of two, it took a period of some considerable time, prayer and reflection and discussion with others to come to this conclusion, as you can imagine! None of us can be certain of something like this until it is properly tested of course, and knowing that, for me, there would be no rest until I had walked this path, I eventually decided to be received into the Church of England on July 19th this year. I came to feel that my vocation, if it is such, is to be an Anglican priest, but I do know that there are women whose priestly vocation is within Roman Catholicism.

I had been heavily involved in my RC parish (where I had worshipped for over 10 years), with RCIA, the SVP society, and administering the planned giving scheme. My two daughters had been baptised and received 1st Holy Communion in the parish. Leaving all this behind was not a decision to be taken lightly. It was a journey which took some 2 years.

Once the decision had been made, I attempted to manage the process of leaving as discreetly as possible, to spare my parish priest any difficulties, but was determined to include some proper goodbyes to people whom I hold very dear. To this end, I inexpertly devised a leaving liturgy, to which a handful of close friends and colleagues were privately invited. We intended to say this liturgy in the church one evening, after it was locked, and then to have supper together. However, the day before this was due to take place, my parish priest asked to see me, and informed me that he had been telephoned by Bishop Alan Hopes, one of the auxiliary bishops in my diocese. It transpired that a parishioner, whose identity I do not know, had found out about this private liturgy, which contained no mention of priesthood or vocation in it, and which they had not seen, and written to the bishop to complain at its taking place. One might hope that the bishop would care to find out a little more about the situation before making judgements about it, but he did not. His reason for calling was simply to inform the parish priest that the authorities were not happy for the liturgy to take place in the church, despite reassurances from the priest that it was uncontroversial, entirely private and had not been advertised to the parish. Of course we had to accede to the bishop's request.

I felt the need to respond to the bishop's intervention in my case, and wrote to him the same day. To date I have received no reply. Email requests some months earlier (sent to the general information address for my diocese and the Director of Vocations) for some explanation of the reasons why ordination in the Catholic Church is reserved for men, received the same treatment.

(Leaving Liturgy continued)

By contrast, I have found among the clergy of the Church of England a willingness to engage in conversation, and to take my situation seriously, which has been like a refreshing stream to one who has endured parching thirst - and which I have found very moving. Here there is no censorship of what priests can or can't discuss with their parishioners, and I am not an awkward problem to be dismissed and ignored, but a valued human being with a legitimate issue worth discussing. The Church of England is not a perfect institution either of course; no earthly organisation can be, and it will not be the answer for all Catholic women who feel a call to priesthood, but its open arms and open minds are where I have found God's place for me, whether I am ever ordained or not.

I can only give my sincerest admiration and support to those of you I leave behind to fight on, often, I am sure with but small hope of achieving what we all believe the Church should be practising as well as preaching; the God-given equality of every human being. I assure you of my prayers and best wishes in your difficult and challenging ministry. May God, and future generations, bless your efforts.

Kate Butchart

Gifts rejected

*I want to be a priest –
not dressed up and standing high -
but to be with you
when you need me*

*My God created me female,
in God's own image,
and gave me the gifts of a priest.
But my church denies my gifts.*

*What can I do?
If it was good that
my God created me female
but it not good enough for my church,
then I cannot help my church.*

*So I'll go
to be with those
who need my gifts.*

*Then shall I be
a priest for all
beyond my church.*

from prayermail

*I say
It's in the reach of my arms
The span of my hips
The stride of my step
The curl of my lips
I say,
It's in the arch of my back,
The sun of my smile,
The ride of my breasts,
The grace of my style.
Now you understand
Just why my head's not bowed.
I don't shout or jump about
Or have to talk real loud.
When you see me passing
It ought to make you proud.
I say,
It's in the click of my heels,
The bend of my hair,
the palm of my hand,
The need of my care,
'Cause I'm a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That's me.*

Maya Angelou from Phenomenal Woman

Briefing on St Therese Discussion

Monica Furlong, a leading spiritual writer and campaigner for the ordination of women in the Anglican Church during the last few decades of the 20th century, wrote an insightful biography of St. Therese. The concluding chapter of her "Therese of Lisieux" is particularly interesting.

She points out that, contrary to the many sentimental biographies, mainly by priests who stressed her submissiveness, Therese was surprisingly feisty for a girl brought up in the oppressive mores for women in 19th c France, and in a Jansenist though loving family. Her subversive tendency came out early when at 14 she argued with the Pope at an audience about her entry into the convent, and followed through to the astringent remarks she made on her death bed.

This biographer suggests that alongside the rigidities of class, time and calling "there is something strong, original and irrepressible in Therese", an independence of mind that transcended her meagre education. Further, having been a spoilt child at home she had a natural talent for getting her own way, without realising what was going on. In some ways she could be seen as "a model for the power, endurance and resourcefulness of women, a power which, even when intolerably constricted and crushed by circumstances reasserts itself with tenacity".

People are often put off by her fondness of the word little, particularly when applied to herself, for she was far from that – but the sentimentality of the bourgeois culture of the time accounts for a lot that many find alienating today. Furlong disputes that Therese found religious life uncongenial but (as still can happen today) its passivity conflicted with the side of her that would have loved to be a travelling missionary, a hero, a soldier, and above all a priest. Her ambitiousness suffered from her obscurity and lack of opportunity to go out and make an active impact on the world.

Some today resent Therese's collusion with a Church that oppressed women. Yet given the circumstances there was little that could be done save waging a surreptitious battle. the "Little Way" was not a tool of subservience but a way of turning having nothing, as with St Francis, into a way of freedom. Further, out from her obscurity she became a powerful voice.

Elsewhere in the book the author depicts the power struggles between the prioress and Therese, the one smacking of sadism, the other of masochism. In the terrible suffering of her final days of dying with TB Therese insisted, in the name of obedience, on carrying on with her heavy duties: the prioress refused her medical treatment or alleviation of her responsibilities, although she was well aware of the ravages of illness, until the very last when Therese actually asked for help rather than just revealing her severe symptoms.

(St Therese briefing continued)

This is a very interesting biography now out of print but Amazon Books has second hand copies in a good condition for under £4. One wonders why Monica only referred briefly to Therese's wish to become a priest, given the author's deep involvement in the Anglican Movement for the Ordination of Women, but in the book she edited, "Women in the Church (1984) there is an article by Fr Eric Doyle, a Franciscan advocate of women priests, on the issue which deals in more detail with this aspect of Therese.

This gives details of the witness of her sister Celine (Sr Genevieve) to the diocesan tribunal relating to the beatification process. On realising she had terminal TB Therese spoke of God taking her at an age before that at which, if it had been possible, she could have become a priest. God "let me die before I could exercise my ministry" The sacrifice of not being able to be a priest was something that grieved her deeply. While she was ill if her hair was cut she would ask for a tonsure. She had also said "why must I be a virgin, and not an angel or a priest? Oh what wonders we shall see in heaven! I have a feeling that those who desired to be priests on earth will be able to share in the honour of the priesthood in heaven".

Her desire to be a priest was not for her own glorification but so that she could better exercise the ministry she felt called out of her deep love for God.

Ianthe Pratt (CWO Publications and Resources)

God, you gave us our sister Thérèse, whose life, too short for us, was long enough to prove that no life, however brief, is without meaning.

Thérèse showed us a path to sanctity yet untrodden - her Little Way of life as a signpost to its fullness and completion. Through her we learned that in every moment of our lives the glory of the infinite is offered and may be grasped.

Grant us the simplicity of heart and let each of our moments dedicated to your service unite us with you. May our efforts be blessed by Thérèse who taught us how.



Sister Louise Akers

After 40 years in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Sister of Charity Louise Akers has been told by Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk to publicly disassociate herself from the issue of women's ordination if she wishes to continue making any presentations or teaching for credit in any archdiocesan-related institutions.

On August 10, 2009, Archbishop Pilarczyk met with S. Louise and outlined the following requirements: First, that she remove her name from our Women's Ordination Conference website. Secondly, that she publicly rescind her long-held stance supporting the ordination of women. As a matter of conscience, Sister Louise will not denounce her support for women's equality in the church.

Sister Louise current serves on WOC's National Antiracism Team.

Take Action

Write a letter to Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk telling him you disagree with his actions and request that Sister Louise be reinstated into her teaching position with archdiocesan-related institutions in a timely manner.

Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk, 100 East Eighth Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Phone Office of Archdiocese: 513-421-3131

email archbishop@catholiccincinnati.org

Please let WOC know you if you do any of the above. Copy us on your email or send us an email letting us you wrote a letter or called. Email Erin at ehanna@womensordination.org

See below letters sent by two of our members

Letter to Archbishop from Pippa Bonner

I was saddened to hear in the UK that Sr Louise Akers is being requested to refrain from allowing discussion of women's ordination in her role as educator within the archdiocese, or, will have to withdraw from teaching in your archdiocese.

The Vatican's stance on ordination is based on arguments that have been refuted time and again. In 1976, the Vatican's own Pontifical Biblical Commission determined that there is no scriptural reason to prohibit women's ordination. However, the Vatican ignored this finding and in 1994, Pope John Paul II officially forbade discussion of women's ordination. Women's ordination and discussion about it is something that cannot be suppressed and I believe the Holy Spirit is at work here.

(Pippa Bonner letter continued)

I have been helping to promote the idea of women's ordination in the UK for about 14 years with the UK organisation Catholic Women's Ordination. I would rather not have been given the call to do so as it is an uncomfortable lonely place to be and I have been verbally abused and threatened for doing so by other Catholics. Women can study theology and take an active pastoral and liturgical role in their parishes, (as I do,) but cannot test their vocation to a priestly calling which is a distinctive calling. Why do I keep being compelled to speak out? It may be the Holy Spirit working in me and many others. You and I cannot be sure it isn't. Why can you be sure that Sr Louise is not being called to teach and allow discussion about the role of women in the church?

I pray that you will reflect and reconsider this decision, and, if you are being pressured by the Vatican to take this stance I hope that your conscience and knowledge and the notion of collegiality re emphasised in the Second Vatican Council will permit you to speak to Rome with authority, if you decide this is an important issue in your archdiocese. From this distance in the UK I would be surprised if many Catholics in your archdiocese would say it is not important. The role of women in the church is an important justice issue for them as it is in many other dioceses in the USA and UK.

Letter to Archbishop from Myra Poole

I am writing a personal letter to you because in 2001 I was put in a similar position by the Vatican when I helped to arrange the first International Women's Ordination Conference in Dublin, Ireland. Joan Chittister osb, who I am sure you know of, and I were picked out as the two culprits who dared to challenge publicly the Vatican's views on women's ordination. In the end the Vatican climbed down via an email. When we Religious and laity hang together justice prevails: numbers do wonders. No matter what the 'official' church says there is no theology that supports the non-ordination of women. We can argue this till we are 'blue in the face' but the Institutional Church is totally wrong on this issue but refuses to listen. The only sin against the Holy Spirit that Jesus in the Gospel condemned is 'hardness of heart' - a refusal to listen to the experience and call of others.

There is no lack of priests the Church just refuses to listen to the voice of women. I am one of the co-founders of CWO, Catholic Women's Ordination and I know they would all voice support for Sister Akers and question your dubious actions.

Please meditate on this point and I look forward to a true answer from you not the 'official' line.

(Myra Poole letter continued)

You may like to know I am celebrating my fiftieth year as a Sister of Notre Dame so I am not a 'young' upstart but someone with great and reflected on experience. This email comes on behalf of all those who are called to priesthood and those who realise how much the church is suffering from a deep neglect of the voice of women. I am sure if women were in decision making positions in all areas of the church, especially in the Vatican and at any future Church Council, the Church would be far healthier and morally more acceptable. For example the paedophilia crisis is unresolved - a crisis caused by a totally male dominated church. This is the point that has to be raised and resolved if the Church is ever to gain any moral authority again.

I look forward to a personal response from you and the opening up of a meaningful dialogue between two people who love the Church but want the true voice of the Spirit to shine through. It is only by true, open and fearless dialogue that these questions will be resolved.

The Sacred Feminine

“Women stuff” is the hidden energy behind almost all the justice issues. The movement toward nonviolence and disarmament, the movements that deal with homelessness and refugee problems, with the raping of the earth and its resources, with sexual and physical abuse issues, with the idolatry of profit and the corporation, and with the rejection of the poor will not move beyond the present impasse until the underlying issues of power, prestige, and possessions are exposed for the lie that they are.

We are seeing that the power elites under any regime are just as opposed to change as are the wealthy and powerful under capitalism. That is surely why Jesus critiqued power itself, but not any particular form of government. Powerful domination in every system wants to maintain its privilege. So also maleness is not itself the problem, but male pretensions of power and winning and dominating. After all, half of God is “masculinity.” Patriarchy has cost men their own souls for too long—along with the bodies, spirits, and dignity of much of the rest of the world, but patriarchy and masculinity are not the same thing.

Richard Rohr

Prayer Link

Wednesday between 6.00 and 7.00pm, please pray for CWO, its members and its mission.

Saturdays at noon, join with women and men all over the world to pray for the work of Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW!)

Please take part in one or both of these prayer networks if and when you can

The CWO Prayer

*Moved by a compulsion of the Holy Spirit,
we cannot remain ignorant of this injustice in our midst.
We long for all humanity to be acknowledged as equal,
particularly among your community of the church,
so we pray grieving for the lost gifts of so many women.
We ask you, God of all peoples,
to bring insight and humility
to all those in positions of dominance,
and an understanding that the ascended Lord called us all to act
doing Christ's work here and now.
We ask this of you, God our Creator,
Jesus our Redeemer, Spirit our Sustainer*

Also on first Wednesday

A prayerful presence inside Westminster Cathedral is the logical progression of London CWO's witness outside the cathedral, which London CWO has persevered in for the last 14 years! This we hold in silence beneath the 8th Station with all its significance for us and wearing our purple scarves/stoles. Please join us if you are in London

The CWO Newsletter (That's the "physical" one with the purple cover)

In the last two issues of e-news, we requested articles, book reviews etc, perhaps developing some of the shorter items you've seen in or written for e-news.

Nothing has been submitted so far. The deadline can be extended longer but please contact Sue and Diana if you want to write something for the Newsletter.

Contact

info@catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk

Please recycle

any old how to join CWO forms. The Bank of Ireland has changed their address (for the second time!) so they can't be used. Please email me if you would like a copy of the form with the new address.

Websites

www.womenwordspirit.org

Women, word, Spirit (formerly Catholic Women's Network)

<http://www.gras.org.uk>

Group for rescinding the Act of Synod

www.womenandthechurch.org

Women and the Church

<http://ncronline3.org/drupal/>

National Catholic Reporter - Joan Chittester is a regular contributor

www.womenpriests.org.

You can sign up for their regular newsletter

www.spirituschristi.org

An inclusive Catholic Church where all are welcome