

Stones Cry Out

Faithful of Southern Illinois

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He said in reply, "I tell you, if they keep silent the stones will cry out!"

Lk. 19: 39-40

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An epidemic of restructuring and closing Catholic parishes is occurring in the United States and around the world. The Diocese of Belleville is no different as Bishop Braxton has instructed parishes to gather its people to vote on several different issues assessing their current status as a viable faith community, both now and into the future.

Parishioners were told that this is a crossroads moment in the Church; it's a time of deep crisis. Well, it's a little late for telling us we're in a crisis. The real problem, you see, is the priest shortage and it has been staring the Church in the face for a long time. It lies in the very foundation of the Church and its desperate insistence that nothing change, most especially, governance by and for an all-male hierarchy. When, in the last 20 years, have lay people been invited, much less instructed, to discuss solutions to the shortage of priests? Incidentally, 70% of American Catholics approve of married priests.

The Church rejects those who raise questions and new ideas in a system trying to preserve itself at all costs. It refuses to listen to those with vision for that vision threatens the Church's structure of elitist rule, power-as-domination and unquestioned laws and decrees.

Sr. Joan Chittister once cautioned, "Do not allow the ideas of the past to become the cement of the future." The Vatican's constant refusal to consider the consequences that would result from their rigid adherence to outdated regulations and world view has backed the laity into a corner, forcing them to do what the hierarchy itself, refuses to do - change. No doubt parishioners will conform, graciously or not, but we grieve for those whose parish community is more than a piece of real estate.

As American bishops travel to the Vatican in February for their "ad limina" visits to report on the state of their dioceses, will they have the courage to stop playing "follow the leader" and sincerely examine and discuss real church problems? Will they continue their vested interest in the status quo? Yes, this is a crossroads moment in the Roman Catholic Church; it has significant choices to make. Will the Church follow the path of Kodak, a once viable blue-chip company who made the biggest mistake of all - refusing to adapt and change?

Lives Lived In Conscience

Catholic Activists Share Their Justice Journeys

Nearly 300 people crowded into the Hilton Regency Conference Center in O'Fallon, IL on September 25th to hear Fr. Roy Bourgeois and Sr. Jeannine Gramick share their personal journeys in seeking justice for all people in the Roman Catholic Church.

Fr. Roy waits for the final decision of his Maryknoll community who are considering whether or not to dismiss him from the order where he has spent nearly 40 years, for his public support of women's ordination. Sr. Jeannine's work with gay and lesbian Catholics brought about her dismissal from the School Sisters of Notre Dame; she has since joined the Sisters of Loretto, continuing her work as co-founder of the New Ways Ministry in Washington, D.C.

The journey, for Fr. Roy, began with his military service in Viet Nam. After this experience, he joined Maryknoll and began his efforts to address grave injustices that were occurring. Eventually he focused on the U.S. Army's School of the Americas in Georgia. 'Graduates' from this school include some of the worst dictators and violators of human rights of the last centuries. Over time, Fr. Roy came to understand that the place of women in the Roman Catholic Church was yet another instance of injustice. "We are all of equal worth and dignity . . . a discipleship of equals," he said. "The great scandal that I and others are causing in the Church . . . is the message that we send to women that they are not equal in their Church." It was this inequality that moved him to embrace the cause of women's ordination in the Roman Church. It was this move – not his protests or arrests at the School of the Americas, but his public support for women's ordination – that raised the Vatican's ire and brought about Maryknoll's warnings of dismissal. He informed his



superior that he cannot recant his position without betraying his conscience, that most

sacred Catholic obligation. According to Roy, "Conscience is our lifeline to God."

After a standing ovation for Fr. Roy, Sr. Jeannine Gramick spoke. Her story, like his, is one of conscience. For 20 years, her assignment from the School Sisters of Notre Dame was to minister to the gay and lesbian community. She and Fr. Bob Nugent founded New Ways Ministry in Washington, D.C. for this purpose. Eventually, the SSND community was ordered to stop Jeannine's work. Jeannine found that the price for remaining was simply too high: silence – and thus complicity – on Vatican investigations and its stand on homosexuality. Several years later, she joined the Sisters of Loretto and today continues her ministry. "There's a diversity of voices (in the Roman Church). . . we are united in Christ. We need to listen to each other with respect, even when we disagree."

Sr. Jeannine ended with a familiar, paraphrased quote: When they came for the Jews, I didn't stand up because I wasn't Jewish. When they came for the disabled, I didn't stand up because I was able. When they came for the gays and lesbians, I didn't stand up because I was heterosexual. When they come for the women priests, I will stand up!

The afternoon ended with a viewing of the award-winning documentary film, "*Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*", a story of women's priestly ministry, past and present.

GOD'S GIFT OF FREEDOM

by Scripture Scholar Roger Karban

In his late 70's classic work, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann discusses a situation that certainly applies to the church today.

The well-known Scripture scholar zeroes in on a frequently overlooked dimension of prophetic ministry in the Hebrew Scriptures. Prophets constantly emphasize Yahweh's freedom. For them, God has no limits. What restricts us doesn't restrict God.

Deutero-Isaiah best summarizes this belief in chapter 55: "'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,' says Yahweh. 'As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.'"

Prophets are driven to stress God's freedom because they normally address people who belong to institutions that limit God's freedom. Brueggemann observes that religious institutions offer something to offset the limits they impose on God: accessibility. As long as we accept their restrictions, they provide us with a "doorway" through which we can pass in order to contact God.

For the ancient Israelites, access first revolved around being members of a Chosen People; but it also included the establishment of sacred places in which Yahweh was especially present, and 613 laws whose observance guaranteed happiness and fulfillment on earth.

Prophets didn't much care for the implications of these points of accessibility. Amos, for instance, blows away the Chosen People image in chapter 9. "'Are you not like Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel,' says Yahweh? 'Did I not bring the Israelites from the land of Egypt as I brought the Phillistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?'"

The same prophet, in chapter 4, treats the holy places issue in two short lines: "Come to Bethel and sin, to Gilgal and sin the more!"

These two shrines are occasions of sin, not of accessibility. And even Jesus quotes Jeremiah's famous chapter 7 temple speech in which the prophet demands to know, "Has this house which bears my (Yahweh's) name become in your eyes a den of thieves?" (Carroll Stuhlmueller always reminded us, "The den isn't the place where the thieves do their thieving. It's the secure, safe place where they gather after their thieving.")

Almost all prophets speak about Yahweh's "opening" to Gentiles: people who don't follow the Mosaic Law. At the end of Third-Isaiah, Yahweh promises, "I come to gather nations (Gentiles) of every language; they shall come and see my glory . . . From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all people shall come to worship before me."

Our biblical prophets are unanimous: God can do what God darn well wants to do.

Had our Christian faith ancestors not bought into this prophetic theology, few of us would be followers of Jesus today. Those who gave us our Christian Scriptures – beginning with Paul – constantly point out that the only way Yahweh could work through the risen Jesus present in our lives was by going beyond the restrictions religious institutions had imposed upon him/her.

Remember what John's Jesus tells Nicodemus? "The wind blows where it will and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Where is God leading us on the position of women in the church, same-sex relations, and the whole external structure of our church? Those who fight for God's freedom will always be in the minority, but, as we know from our scriptures, they're the people of faith who eventually win the theological battles.

GO TALK TO THE BISHOP

The following article was written by Mick Gibbar, long-time member of FOSIL's Steering Committee. Several times in the past, Mick has addressed his parish council about sexism in the Church, in the Liturgy and in prayers. Recently, Mick and his wife moved to another state and he sends his personal reflection on a meeting with his new bishop.

In October, 2010, FOSIL hosted an event featuring Sr. Theresa Kane who spoke on the theme of prophetic ministry in today's church. During the presentation, we discussed numerous strategies on how to counter the discrimination against women prevalent in our Roman Catholic Church. I remember her stating that whenever we hear the presider at the Eucharist say something during his homily that is sexist, whether intentionally stated or not, we should not remain silent and leave the church angry and disgruntled. Theresa insisted that we raise the issue with the homilist immediately on exiting the church and challenge him on his sexist remarks. At the time I thought Theresa's suggestion would not serve much purpose. Scarcely did I realize how soon her advice would play out significantly in my life.

Not long after Theresa's presentation, my wife and I moved and settled into a new parish in a new diocese. The congregation in our new parish was wonderfully inviting and friendly and we made friends readily. This parish is very conservative with the pastor and deacon leaving no doubt, that in this parish, God is male. Even the altar servers are all male.

After attending the 9:00 am Eucharist, Sunday after Sunday, and listening to a barrage of sexist expressions for God during every homily, I reached my limit. I made a simple commitment to leave the Church. I swore I would leave. I even congratulated myself as I walked out of the church, thinking that I would never again attend another Eucharist as a Roman Catholic. Suddenly, Theresa's words came to me – very clearly and powerfully: I did not have to remain

silent and leave in anger.

I immediately confronted the deacon – catching him by complete surprise – and told him, eyeball to eyeball, that his sexist language was exceedingly immoral and to stop. I turned to the pastor, adding that his sexism was killing the parish and destroying everything he was working to achieve. As if “out-of-body”, I saw myself standing in the church entrance, staring down both the deacon and pastor. I was flooded by a wave of peace and stillness; I never felt nearer to God.

Quickly regaining his composure, the pastor told me that the bishop directed the priests in the diocese to address God as male, as Jesus did . . . and if I didn't like it, I should go talk to the bishop.

The next morning I called the bishop's office and asked for an appointment to speak with the bishop. “About what?” asked the secretary. I thought it was none of her business, but none-the-less, I told her I wanted to bring to the bishop's attention the immorality of discrimination against women. She asked me to wait – all hope of success abandoned me. She returned to the phone stating, “He'll see you on Thursday, November 20, at 3:30 pm. Will that work for you?” I was dumbstruck. I had gotten what I had asked for and it suddenly scared the hell out of me!

I asked friends to petition the Holy Spirit for me; I sought grace to avoid making a complete fool of myself and doing more damage to the cause than good. I was totally intimidated by the Bishop. Secretly, I hoped a blizzard would shut down all roads on the 20th. I met with the Bishop as scheduled; he

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was cordial and accommodating. We discussed, without emotion or anger, sexism, women's ordination, the Church's two caste social order, its lack of financial accountability, the sexual abuse of children, and young adults. I felt at peace and, for a second time, never closer to God.

The Bishop defended the Church, countering every issue with the arguments familiar to all of us. He asked the source of my ideas so critical of the Church's teachings and warned me of approaching the threshold of excommunication. I presented a list of authors and books I had recently read and studied and he responded that mine was a list with which he had no knowledge. Hmmm.

The conversation went silent; I recognized it as my cue to leave. We shook hands and on

parting, the Bishop said he would pray for me. I thanked him. He further recommended that I abandon the authors I had been reading and start reading the Catechism. I didn't thank him for this.

I'm not sure anything positive came from our meeting, but something deep down and fundamental to my being changed. I no longer harbor anger or contempt of the hierarchy in the Church. I feel I have abandoned all resentment toward the Church and I am free. I will never again be intimidated by a priest or bishop. Never again. I now live in the belief that we must all regain our freedom. To do so, we need only to speak up and confront injustice. And let the Holy Spirit deal with the rest.

Thank you, Theresa Kane!



GUS AND ARLOU KOCH AWARD

At the Bourgeois/Gramick event on September 25, Diane and Carol Maertens accepted FOSIL's 2011 Gus & Arlou Koch Award in memory of their deceased sister, Loretta Garing. Loretta, a member of FOSIL for many years, died on Dec. 22, 2010. She was an ordinary woman who recognized God working in her life, thus enabling her to accomplish extraordinary things. Loretta helped form the Seeds of Hope, a ministry to help people with disabilities and served as a lay minister in the Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church in Belleville, bringing unconditional love, hope and justice to all people.

This award is given annually in memory of FOSIL members, Gus & Arlou Koch, a couple who lived the gospel message daily and advanced the issues of justice and equality.



Left to right: Loretta Garing, Carol Maertens and Diane Maertens.



When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters; one represents danger and the other represents opportunity.....John F. Kennedy

**FOSIL SAYS GOODBYE
TO SR. DOROTHY**

The Faithful of Southern Illinois will forever be indebted to Sr. Dorothy Hebling, OSU, as she leaves the Belleville area and moves to the Ursuline Motherhouse in Maple Mount, KY. For years, until the Ursuline Motherhouse in Belleville was closed, Sr. Dorothy generously opened its doors to host monthly FOSIL meetings. Her loving smile and gentle spirit will remain warm memories in our hearts.

Sr. Dorothy's new address is: Ursuline Sisters of St. Joseph, 8001 Cummings Road, Maple Mount, KY 42356 Email: msj@maplemount.org

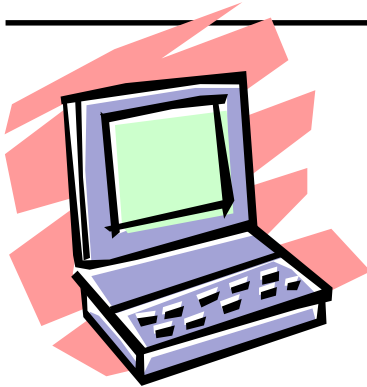


Sr. Dorothy Hebling, OSU

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2012 SYMPOSIUM: GLBT

From Water to Wine: Lesbian/Gay Catholics and Relationships, New Ways Ministry's Seventh National Symposium, will be held March 15-17, 2012, in Baltimore, Maryland. Major speakers: Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, Luke Timothy Johnson, Patricia Beattie Jung, Richard Rodriguez, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson will facilitate a pre-symposium retreat day. Workshop topics: marriage equality, transgender issues, youth and young adults, lesbian nuns and gay priests/religious, Latino/a issues, African-American issues, and coalition building. For more information: info@NewWaysMinistry.org, (301) 277-5674.



Send Us Your Thoughts...

Many miles separate us from one another. You are an important part of our FOSIL family and we wish we could meet each one of you. Many times we wonder what you're thinking about different Church issues. We'd like to invite you to take a few minutes and share your ideas, insights, thoughts, etc. on any church or world issue or articles in our newsletter. There is a "contact us" link on our website. We look forward to reading your comments.

Also, we understand how important the weekly columns of Richard McBrien and Roger Karban have become in your continued spiritual reading and growth. FOSIL depends on your generosity; it allows us to meet our financial obligations of supplying the columns, maintaining our website & newsletter, and sponsoring educational/faith enriching programs. If this is a good time for you to send a contribution in support of FOSIL's ministries, please send it via PayPal or to the address below. We certainly appreciate all donations.

FAITHFUL OF SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
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