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# History Of Women Religious

## News and Notes

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Volume 13—Number 2

June 2000

### *HWR NETWORK NEWS*

The Call for Papers for the fifth triennial conference of the History of Women Religious Network went to newsletter subscribers and others earlier this spring. Papers examining the theme, "Individuals in Community: Women Religious and Change-Past, Present, Future," are invited in the form of a one-page abstract accompanied by a one-page c.v., sent by letter, email or fax, by **August 1, 2000**. Panel proposals are encouraged but individual proposals are also acceptable. The language of the conference is English, but proposals may be submitted in French. Send all proposals to Elizabeth McGahan, University of New Brunswick, P.O. Box 5050, Saint John, N.B., CANADA E2L 4L5. Telephone 506-648-5600; Fax 506-648-5799. Email [emcgahan@nbt.nb.ca](mailto:emcgahan@nbt.nb.ca)

Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin will be the site for the conference which will convene **Sunday, June 17 through Wednesday morning, June 20, 2001**.

The location of the newsletter editor will change beginning **July 1, 2000**, from Los Angeles to 1884 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. Although three issues a year will continue to be published, there is a likelihood that the February issue will be delayed. In the interests of circulating timely information and inquiries, subscribers may wish to consider joining "Sistory," a moderated email list devoted to the history of women religious. Although relatively inactive, the list is valuable and on topic. If you would like to join this list, please contact Regina Siegfried, ASC, at [siegfr@slu.edu](mailto:siegfr@slu.edu)

### *PUBLICATIONS AND TALKS*

Alice Gallin, OSU, Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education since 1960 (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), affords the founding religious congregations as well as the present faculty and administrators of Catholic colleges and universities illuminating insights into developments over the past four decades. Colleges founded by women religious are integrated into the analysis in a manner seldom found in general treatments of the subject.

Recent publications by Helen Northey, OP, Living the Truth: The Dominican Sisters in South Australia 1868-1958 (Adelaide, Holy Cross Congregation of Dominican Sisters, South Australia, 1999); and Ruth Marchant James, Fields of Gold: A History of the Dominican Sisters in Western Australia (Perth, Dominican Sisters of Western Australia, 1999), "mark a significant contribution to the growing volume of works on religious congregations of women in Australia" according to network correspondent, Rose MacGinley, PBVM. Her review is due to come out later this year in the *Annual Australian Catholic Historical Society Journal*.

Laura Swan's The Quiet and the Quest: The Desert Mothers and Their Contemporaries is forthcoming with Paulist Press. It provides the stories and sayings of most of the women of this early Christian movement, along with an extensive bibliography for further research.

Papers presented at the Spring 2000 joint meeting of the American Society of Church History and the American Catholic Historical Association included:

- Diane Batts Morrow (University of Georgia), " 'To Contribute All the Means in Their Power for the Glory of God and the Religious Education of Girls of Their Race': The Oblate Sisters of Providence as Evangelizers, 1828-1860;"
- Sharon Elkins (Wellesley College), "The Virgin Mary in the Visions of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179);"
- Judith L. Bishop (Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, California), "Hildegard von Bingen: Privileging of Virgin State and Ambiguous Attitude Toward Human Sexuality;"
- Mary Beth Lamb (GTU at Berkeley), "In the Dakota Contact Zone: Accommodating Difference Through Imaginative Acts of Cross-Cultural Appropriation;"
- Kathleen Pitcher (Salt Lake City, Utah), "Negotiating Biological Family Dynamics in Religious Life: The Life and Letters of Sister Mary Eucharia Mitchell, 1921-1953;" and
- Courtney Carlson (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). "From Women Religious to Communities Around the World: the Cultural Meeting Places of Regis College Lay Apostles, 1950-1972."

Howard E. Crouch's memoir, This One Is For Gussie (forthcoming, Damien-Dutton Society for Leprosy Aid, 616 Bedford Ave., Bellmore, NY 11710), recounts the story of his friendship as a U.S. medical corpsman with Marist nun, Mary Augustine, in a West Indies leprosy hospital during World War II.

Recent presentations by Dolores Liptak, RSM, director of Historical and Archivist Services for the Sisters of Mercy in Connecticut, include "Spirit of Visitation: A Historical Perspective;" "Church History as Sacred History" offered in a workshop format; and "The Spirituality of Moving: Historical Perspective."

## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Mary Roger Madden, SP, is writing several articles for the New Catholic Encyclopedia, including entries on Blessed Mother Theodore Guerin; the Sisters of Providence; Ritamary Bradley, SFCC; and the Sister Formation Movement.

Work is underway on the fifth volume of Notable American Women under editor, Susan Ware, and her staff. All candidates for inclusion must have died before January 1, 2000. Between 500 and 600 women are to be selected from among several thousand candidates. Editors will be commissioning biographical essays about the women who are selected. Inquiries may be directed to the editor at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, 10 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Dana L. Robert, Boston University School of Theology, has just completed direction of a year of seminars on "Women and Twentieth-Century Missions," to be collected into a book on the same topic which she is editing. Contributors are Catholic and Protestant, with Catholic authors including Mary Motte, FMM; Angelyn Dries, OSF; and Margaret Guider, OSF.

Francis Assisi Kennedy, OSF, requests contact from anyone knowing the location of correspondence by Rev. John Stephen Raffener, vicar general for German Catholics in New York, 1845-1861. She may be reached at P.O. Box 100, Oldenburg, IN 47036.

A three-year research initiative on the topic of Catholicism in twentieth-century America, organized under the auspices of the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism with Lilly Foundation support, has generated a number of research efforts pertaining to the history of women religious. Research in progress, shared at a March 9-11, 2000 invitational conference, included:

- Patricia Byrne, CSJ (Trinity College, CT): "The Society of the Sacred Heart in 1914: A Moment of Transforming Change;"

- Amy Koehlinger (Yale University): "Race and Renewal in the Experience of Women Religious, 1950-1975;"
- Darra Mulderry (Brandeis University): "American Catholic Sisters: Ideals v. Lived Experience, 1945-1975;" and
- Ana María Díaz-Stevens (Union Theological Seminary): "Proclaiming the Good News, Educating in the Faith: Contextualizing the Missionary Work of Three North American Religious Congregations in Puerto Rico."

Commentary for this session which was introduced by Mary Oates, CSJ, Regis College, and chaired by Kathryn Kish Sklar, SUNY, Binghamton, was by Carol Coburn, Avila College.

Mary Jo Weaver is in charge of the Roman Catholic section of a new encyclopedia, edited by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, on the religious experience of women in North America. For further information on the project, contact Weaver: Dept. of Religious Studies, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405.

Mary Hayes, SND, Trinity College, Washington, D.C., has been on sabbatical this year conducting background research on Julie Billiart. The sabbatical is affording her an opportunity to do archival research this spring in France and Belgium.

## ***ANNOUNCEMENTS***

The Episcopal Women's History Project annually makes awards for research in the areas of the work and activities of women in the U.S. Episcopal Church and relating to women whose Episcopal identification influenced their lives and accomplishments. For information on 2001 Travel/Research awards, deadline **1 December**, contact Dr. Jane Harris, 4220 Raleigh Dr., Conway, AR 72023.

The third ACWR (Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious) conference, with the theme of "Memories, Millennium, the Message." will

convene **September 28**, in Cleveland, Ohio. Keynote speaker will be Clare Fitzgerald, SSND; sessions relate to such areas as computers for archives; doing oral history; moving archives; and policies and records management. For further information contact the ACWR National Office at Trinity College, 125 Michigan Ave., NE, Washington, D.C. 20017.

The National Association for Women in Catholic Higher Education will hold its fifth annual conference **June 30-July 1, 2000**, at Boston College. Entitled "Making Connections V: Women and Women's Studies in the New Millennium," the conference features Patricia Hill Collins, University of Cincinnati, as keynote speaker, and Mary E. Hunt, Georgetown University, as dinner speaker. For further information contact NAWCHE, Dept. of Sociology, Boston College, McGuinn 519A, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167.

The Communal Studies Association will hold its annual conference **September 28-30** at the Ephrata Cloisters in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. The site features several late eighteenth-century buildings constructed by the German Protestant pietist group whose austere monastic practices mirror some Catholic communities of the same era. The theme is charismatic leaders and family groups. For further information contact the CSA office at [csa@netins.net](mailto:csa@netins.net) or P.O. Box 122, Amana, IA 52203. Regina Siegfried will also be glad to respond to inquiries at [siegfr@slu.edu](mailto:siegfr@slu.edu)

The Academy of American Franciscan History and the Franciscan School of Theology are hosting a conference on "The Franciscan Family in the New World, 1524-2000." The conference will take place **November 3-4**, in Oakland, California. Papers are sought on all aspects of the Franciscan experience, and will be organized into sections dealing with activities of Franciscans in Latin America, the U.S. and Canada; early missionaries in the U.S. and Latin America; and the order in the twentieth century. For further information contact Dr. John F. Schwaller, Office of the Provost, The University of Montana, 32 Campus Dr., #3324, Missoula, MT 59812, or email [schwaller@selway.umt.edu](mailto:schwaller@selway.umt.edu)

## BOOK REVIEWS

Journey in Faith and Fidelity: Women Shaping Religious Life for a Renewed Church, ed. Nadine Foley, OP (Continuum, 1999), 304 pp.

Nadine Foley, OP, has brought together in this volume a collection of studies of religious life as it has unfolded since Vatican Council II. Twelve Adrian Dominican women trace the turbulent and exhilarating trajectory that brought women religious through renewal into a new understanding of self, God, world, and the demands of our epoch.

The contributors bring to the study the insights that degrees in fields such as the arts, theology, philosophy, sociology, psychology and social work afford them, but especially their lived experience in chapters of renewal, in forging processes of organizational change, in leadership, and in a wide variety of ministries.

Although the focus is sometimes fixed on the Adrian Dominican experience, most women religious will easily find their place in the general story and will relive the awakening and the struggle that accompanied the Church's directive to adapt to the changed conditions of our time. Candidates to religious life will find this retrospective enlightening as they seek understanding of the roots of some of our present challenges. Others who are interested in religious life, its history and its meaning, will find narratives, documentation and bibliographic leads to further their understanding of a fluid, persistent and fruitful way of life within the church. The editor hints, furthermore, that the experience of women religious who developed participatory and inclusive methods of governance may be of service to the church as a whole as we "dream toward a renewed future church" and "prepare for the challenges to faith and fidelity in a new millennium."

The chapters emphasize different aspects of renewal: charism, the influence of new methods of scriptural and theological reflection, mission and ministry, authority, and leadership. Still, there is an inevitable overlap and repetition as the contributors reflect on the historical climate, the social influences, and the Vatican II documents that reconfigured and revitalized religious life.

The last five chapters of the book move us beyond renewal and the influences that shaped it to issues that continue to engage us: participation in political processes, socially responsible investment, women's issues, cultural inclusiveness, a Latin American perspective on the theology of religious life, and the necessity of entering into dialogue with modern cosmology.

The authors are at pains to point out that it was in obedient response to the church's own directives that women religious undertook the changes that transformed them and their institutions. They point out, however, that some ecclesial leaders hampered the subsequent efforts of women to act and theologize out of their changed consciousness. Anneliese Sinnott writes, "Our relationship with the church...suggests that we, in a mode of collaboration, are not simply listeners. Women religious have rich, valuable and unique experience to contribute to dialogue within the church." Maria Riley observes that women's struggle for justice in the church and in the world continues to be compromised by the church's dual anthropology. She points out the many lines of tension that arise in relation to "questions of ministry, authority, and sexuality as defined and dictated by an all-male hierarchical structure."

Much of the comparatively recent literature on religious life attempts to reinvent or reinterpret it, to rename the vows, to rethink the purpose of vowed commitment now that we've lived through more than thirty years on the energy ignited by Vatican Council II. This volume rather analyzes in depth the historical, philosophical, scriptural and theological trends that shaped the renewal that took place from the 60s through the 80s, while touching more lightly on challenges that lie ahead as we face our collective future. It is a welcome contribution at a time when change proceeds at an ever increasing pace and women religious seek to uncover and hold fast to the truest core of their vocation even as they face forward, open to everything that promises to further the Gospel and nourish the human spirit.

Kaye Ashe, OP  
Sinsinawa Dominicans

Seeds of Hope: The History of the Sisters of Providence, Holyoke, Massachusetts, ed. Dolores Liptak, RSM, and Grace Bennet (Sisters of Providence, Holyoke, 1999), Pp. xxii +245.

Seeds of Hope is a multilayered history of the Sisters of Providence of Holyoke, Massachusetts, and its review is best organized by uncovering the layers. This story is related in an evenhanded tone reminiscent of Dolores Liptak's other works. Grace Bennett's introduction alerts readers to the narrative's implications. Early ministries were often the result of bishops' and priests' directives rather than community discernment. They were paid for by subjecting the sisters to overcrowding, overwork, lack of resources, and insecurity about the future--a harsh lesson in the mystery of Providence.

Part I, Beginnings of the Congregation, is a narrative. In the late 1820s, Emilie Gamelin, young widow, gathered about her companions dedicated to service of the poor. Her group became a formal congregation in 1844, mother of an institute in Kingston, Ontario, in 1861, and grandmother of the Holyoke foundation in 1873, when four Kingston sisters arrived in Holyoke. Recently revived Vincentian spirituality inspired Mother Gamelin; devotion to Providence started among the poor whom she served and was transferred to the sisters. Over time, a commitment to institutional health care emerged.

Part II, Responding to Providence, contains essays exploring the congregation's charism as expressed in devotion to Providence and in historical experience. Since Vatican II, the community has supported individual sisters in discernment of their ministries. Given the devotion to Providence, the ministries have emphasized flexible, personal responses to the needs of the poor. The ministries tend to be in health care, broadly interpreted to include spiritual health. In the same evenhanded tone as before, the section describes the practical difficulties and the moral qualms the sisters have in maintaining institutions in the current health care system. (It is to be hoped the sisters continue this struggle; in this day when the poor are often homeless, maintaining institutions where they can stay is a real service.) This is the book's most thought-provoking section.

Part III, Faces of Providence, features biographies of congregational leaders and sisters who create art, poetry, or music. There is also a table of current sisters and their ministries, and an essay identifying relatives in the congregation, which concludes that blood relation is not an incentive to join. The book's main disappointment occurs in the sister-artists' section. Photographs appear elsewhere in the book; perhaps it would have been possible to reproduce samples of the sisters' art.

Part IV's appendices are a handbook of time lines, reproductions of documents, pictures and descriptions of symbols used in the congregation, and lists of the congregation's members. The eclectic mix of contents suggests Seeds of Hope may find a home in many libraries, as it has material of interest for women religious, gender studies, health care students, and local historians of western Massachusetts.

Mary Elizabeth Brown  
Independent Scholar

## *PERSONALS*

Madonna Kolbenschlag's sudden death January 29, 2000, in Santiago, Chile, left many grieving friends and colleagues. A member of the sisters of the Humility of Mary, she was an internationally known writer on women and gender issues, cultural analysis, public policy, spirituality and religious issues.

We were also saddened to learn of the sudden death of Network member and frequent HWR conference participant, Ritamary Bradley, on March 20, 2000, in Davenport, Iowa. A member of the congregation of the Humility of Mary. (1933-- ) and later, of the Sisters for Christian Community (1972-- ), she co-founded the Sister Formation Conference in 1954, was a prolific writer; an intrepid promoter of justice and women's rights; and a friend to many. She will be very much missed by all who knew her.

Barbara Misner describes her travels and visits with members of her congregation in Europe and southeast Asia December, 1999, through February, 2000, an "an experience of a lifetime." Time at the motherhouse of the Holy Cross Sisters in Switzerland was followed by travel to India and visits to Holy Cross missions there, a trip that gave her much to think about "and also great hope."

Mary Ewens, OP, asked that her recent change of address be shared with the Network. She may now be reached at 2440 N. Lake Drive, Milwaukee, WI 53211; or email [Opmary@aol.com](mailto:Opmary@aol.com)

#### NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Please have copy for the **October 2000** issue to the editor by **August 15, 2000**.

#### THE HWR NEWSLETTER

Published by the Conference on History of  
Women Religious  
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St. Paul, MN 55105

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ISSN: 1504-545X

Annual Subscription: \$5.00

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