

# The Episcopal Women's Caucus



40th Anniversary  
of the  
Ordination of Women  
to the Priesthood

*Chronology, prayers, music, and articles*

## **A Chronology of Events Concerning Women in Lay Ministry And Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church and the world-wide Anglican Communion**

- 1855** Bishop of Maryland sets apart two deaconesses
- 1862 Bishop of London orders deaconess by laying on hands.
- 1885 Deaconesses set apart with laying on of hands in Alabama and New York.
- 1889 Deaconesses canon adopted by General Convention.
- 1890 Deaconess Training programs begin in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco
- 1919 General Convention recommends including deaconesses in Clergy Pension Fund, but Board says they are not "clergy"
- 1920 Lambeth Conference concludes "ordination" of a deaconess confers on her holy orders.
- 1925 Commission recommends licensing women lay readers, but "disclaims purpose or desire" to consider women's ordination. Convention rejects lay reader recommendation
- 1930 Lambeth changes its mind, asserts deaconesses are not in holy orders.
- 1935 Church of England commission finds no reason for or against ordination of women, but affirms all-male priesthood "for the church today."
- 1944 Florence Li Tim-Oi** ordained priest in Hong Kong by Bishop R.O. Hall. To protect Hall from censure, she agrees not to function as priest.
- 1946: First woman seated at General Convention.**
- 1948 Lambeth Conference refuses Hong Kong's request for "experiment" with women's ordination. 1948: Asks Bishop to ask Li Tim Oi to renounce her orders.
- 1949: General Convention refuses to seat women deputies.** Begins the process of constitutional change: "laymen" to "laypersons."
- 1959: ETS (Episcopal Theological School-which later becomes Episcopal Divinity School) admits women to BD program. VTS (Virginia Theological Seminary) follows in 1963
- 1964 General Convention changes deaconess canon to read "ordered" rather than "appointed."
- 1965 Deaconess Phyllis Edwards recognized as deacon by Bishop James Pike, San Francisco. He puts her in charge of a parish. House of Bishops commissions a study of the issue.
- 1966 House of Bishops receives report "**The Proper Place of Women in the Ministry of the Church**" affirming ordaining women, asks Lambeth Conference to consider ordaining women to the priesthood.
- 1967: House of Bishops receives study which sees no reason not to proceed with ordination. General Convention appoints "Joint Commission on Ordained and Licensed Ministries" to study matter further.
- 1968: Lambeth Conference approves ordination of women as deacons
- 1970: April: Conference of women meeting at Graymoor, NY calls for immediate inclusion of women in all order of ministry.
- September: Joint Commission meets and recommends immediate ordination of women to all orders of ministry.
- October: General Convention seats women as deputies. House of Deputies defeats Joint Commission recommendation in clergy order. General Convention passes resolution allowing ordination of women deacons.
- 1971: January: Women begin to be ordained deacon.
- July: Anglican Consultative Council approves women's ordination to priesthood in provinces that want to do it.
- October: House of Bishops calls for further study.
- October: Women meeting at VTS reject taking part in further study. **Form Episcopal Women's Caucus.**
- 1971: November: Two women priest ordained in Hong Kong.

**1972:** Women deacons attend House of Bishops on invitation of bishops' wives. House of Bishops approves women's ordination by narrow margin.

October: House of Deputies at General Convention rejects women's ordination in clergy and lay orders.

November: Women's conferences held at VTS and CDSP. Women deacons meet with bishops in New York to discuss next step. Women walk out of meeting when bishops hesitate to take further action.

December: Five women deacons present selves for priestly ordination in New York. When bishop refuse to ordain, 1/3 to 1/2 of the congregation walks out.

1973: Church of England approves "in principle."

**1974:**

January: Women demonstrate at Trinity Institute, NYC.

February: Presiding Bishop meets with women deacons. No progress.

**Episcopal Women's Caucus** meets and divides into 3 task groups

A) work toward '76 convention

B) ordination now

C) education of church people

May: Newly formed EDS opens faculty position for ordained woman.

June: Edward Harris and Charles Willie call for immediate ordination in widely reported sermons.

July: Eleven women ordained priest in Philadelphia by 3 retired and resigned bishops. One diocesan bishop participates as an observer.

August: House of Bishops meets. Declares July ordinations "invalid." Begins procedure to try four bishops for violation of canon law.

October: 3 women priests celebrate publicly at Riverside Church (Presbyterian), NYC.

November: Alison Cheek celebrates Eucharist at St. Stephens and the Incarnation Church, Washington, D.C.

December 3: Alison Cheek and Carter Heyward celebrate at Christ Church, Oberlin, Ohio

**1975:**

January: Carter Heyward and Suzanne Hiatt Join EDS as faculty.

April: William Wendt tried in Ecclesiastical court for allowing Alison Cheek to celebrate in his parish in November 1974. Convicted of disobeying his bishop's "Godly Admonition." Conviction later upheld by diocesan standing committee.

Sept 7: Four women deacons ordained to priesthood at St Stephen's & Incarnation, Washington DC, by another retired bishop.

Sept 19: House of Bishops censures all bishops who ordained women.

1976 Sept: General Convention approves the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate.

Nov 30: Anglican Church of Canada begins ordaining women.

1977 Jan: Women ordained in Philadelphia and Washington begin to be "regularized" and regular ordinations of women to the priesthood begin with 100 ordained by year's end.

**June 1: the Rev Beverly Messenger-Harris** becomes first woman rector, in Sherrill, NY.

Sept: Opponents to women's ordination form break-away church.

*Oct: Presiding Bishop Allin tells House of Bishops he "is unable to accept women in role of priests" and offers to resign. Bishops affirm Allin's leadership, adopt statement of conscience: assert that no one should be penalized for opposing, or supporting, women's ordination.*

Anglican Church in New Zealand begins ordaining women to priesthood.

1978 Lambeth accepts women's ordination, but recommends no province consecrate a woman bishop "without consultation with the Primates and overwhelming [local] support."

1979 **The Rev Mary Michael Simpson**, OSH, is candidate for suffragan in New York.

1981 Florence Li Tim-Oi emigrates to Toronto, resumes ministry in Anglican church.

Philadelphia ordinand **Jeannette Piccard** named **honorary canon in Minneapolis**, dies at age 79; **Nancy Wittig** named honorary canon in Newark.

1982 Church of Brazil begins ordaining women deacons.

1983 Unofficial ordinations of women begin in Church of the Province of Kenya.

1984 Florence Li Tim-Oi celebrates 40th ordination anniversary at Westminster Abbey in London

Unofficial ordinations of women begin in Church of Province of Uganda; Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire follow 1985 American Bishops vote not to withhold consent for woman bishop; Brazil begins ordaining women to priesthood.

1986 Anglican Church of Canada rescinds "conscience clause," prohibits discrimination against ordained women.

1987 Church of England eliminates separate deaconess canon and begins ordaining women deacons.

**The Rev Geralyn Wolf** of Philadelphia becomes Dean of Cathedral in Louisville KY.

Feb: Diocese of Liberia votes to ordain women to the Diaconate and Priesthood at its annual Convention.

Dec 30: **Theodora Nmade Brooks**, first woman ordained in the Diocese of Liberia and the Province of West Africa.

1988 Aug: Lambeth rejects measure prohibiting women bishops, and commits to unity despite differences on the subject.

Sept 24: The Rev Barbara C. Harris of Philadelphia is elected Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts.

1989 Jan: Despite vigorous opposition, necessary majorities of diocesan Standing Committees and bishops consent to Harris's election.

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**Feb 11: Consecration of the Rt Rev Barbara C Harris** in Boston, by Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning and 60 other bishops before crowd of 8,500, with the Revs Florence Li Tim Oi and Carter Heyward as concelebrants.

June: Church of Scotland approves allowing women ordained elsewhere to celebrate the Eucharist. Nov: Diocese of Dunedin, New Zealand, elects Penelope Jamieson diocesan bishop.

**1990 The Rt. Rev. Penelope Jamieson** consecrated Bishop of Dunedin, New Zealand; Ireland approves ordaining women to priesthood and episcopate; Provincial Synod in Kenya approves ordaining women; Uganda House of Bishops approves ordaining women (Kenya and Uganda had been ordaining women unofficially for years).

1991 Woman ordained to priesthood in Quezon City, Philippines.

1992 Church in Province of Southern Africa authorizes ordination of women.

**The Rev Jane Holmes Dixon** elected and consecrated suffragan bishop of Washington DC.

**The Rev Erica Wood** elected Dean and President of College of Preachers, Washington DC. Church of England Synod authorizes drawing legislation to permit ordination of women.

Anglican Church in Australia approves ordaining women. Another group of opponents to women's ordination forms another break-away church.

**Li Tim Oi** dies in Toronto at age 84.

1993 June 5: Vermont elects **Mary Adelia McLeod** diocesan bishop.

Nov: **Victoria Matthews** elected suffragan bishop of Toronto, in Anglican Church of Canada.

Dec: Kenya ordains first women priest after approval.

1994 Feb: Church of England canons on ordination of women promulgated;

**Mar 12: first women ordained to priesthood in England**

June: Episcopal Church in Scotland approves ordination of women to priesthood and episcopate. The **Rev Martha Horne** called as Dean of Virginia Theological Seminary.

July 29: Twentieth Anniversary of Philadelphia ordinations, with nine of original ordinands celebrating and Bishop Barbara Harris preaching in the Cathedral Church of the Saviour, Philadelphia (originally scheduled for the Church of the Advocate, the service had to be moved at the last moment because of roof problems).

Scotland begins ordaining women

1995 Province of West Indies begins ordaining women

1996 Three women consecrated as bishops: **Catherine Roskam**, Suffragan of New York; **Geralyn Wolf**, Diocesan of Rhode Island; **Carolyn Irish**, Diocesan of Utah

Church in Barbadoes begins ordaining women priests

Church in Wales approves women's ordination

1997 **Catherine Waynick** consecrated Diocesan of Indianapolis

**Victoria Matthews** translated to Edmonton as Diocesan, **Ann Tottenham** consecrated Suffragan of Toronto; Church in Portugal begins ordaining women deacons

1998 **Chilton Knudson** consecrated Diocesan of Maine

Eleven women join 700+ male bishops at Lambeth Conference

1999 First women ordained priest in Nippon Sei Ko Kai (Japan)

July 29th, 25th Anniversary of Philadelphia Ordinations, with most of original ordinands, several women bishops and international visitors, Bishop Barbara Harris preaching, at Church of the Advocate, the original site.

2001 **Katharine Jefferts Schori** consecrated Diocesan of Nevada

2002 **Carol J. Gallagher** consecrated Suffragan of Southern Virginia

2003 **Gayle E. Harris** consecrated Suffragan of Massachusetts

2004 **Bavi Edna Riverai** consecrated Suffragan of Olympia

2006 General Convention: **Katharine Jefferts Schori** elected as **Presiding Bishop**

**2006–2014** write in the names of those who have followed—giving thanks for their elections, appointments and ministries.

Women elected as bishops since 2006:

Deena Harrison  
Shannon S. Johnston  
Laura Jean Ahrens  
Mary Gray-Reeves  
Mary Glasspool  
Diane Jardine Bruce  
Mariann Budde  
Susan Ellyn Goff  
Anne Hodges-Copple  
Heather Cook

**2014: The Church of England approves Appointments of women bishops.**



Most holy and loving God, you sent your Child Jesus Christ that there might no longer be slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female: Be with us this day as we rejoice in the ordination of women to the diaconate, priesthood, and episcopate, giving thanks for their ministry among us. Fill our hearts with gratitude for those who worked and prayed unceasingly for the full and equal participation of women in our church in both holy and lay orders.

Strengthen those who still struggle for the full inclusion of women in holy orders in their diocese; in the name of the Source, the Word, and the Spirit. Amen. (Source: Galatians 3:28) -The Rev. Elizabeth Rankin Geitz

**Music**                      **God of the women**                      **Slane**  
 Words: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (b.1961); Music: Traditional Irish melody



1 God of the wo - men who an - swered your call,  
 2 God of the wo - men who walked Je - sus' way,  
 3 God of the wo - men long put to the test,  
 4 God of the wo - men who ran from the tomb,  
 5 O God of Phoe - be and min - is - ters all,



trust - ing your prom - ise, giv - ing their all,  
 giv - ing their re - sour - ces, learn - ing to pray,  
 left out of sto - ries, for - got - ten, op - pressed,  
 prayed with the o - thers in that up - per room,  
 may we be joy - ful in answer - ing your call.



wo - men like Sar - ah and Han - nah and Ruth \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ma - ry, Jo - an - na, Sus - an - na, and more \_\_\_\_\_  
 qui - et - ly ask - ing: "Who smiled at my birth?" \_\_\_\_\_  
 then felt your Spi - rit on Pen - te - cost Day \_\_\_\_\_  
 give us the strength of your Spi - rit so near \_\_\_\_\_



give us their cour - age to live in your truth.  
 may we give free - ly as they did be - fore.  
 in Je - sus' dy - ing you show us our worth.  
 may we so glad - ly pro - claim you to - day.  
 that we may share in your min - is - try here.

## **PRAYERS FOR A GATHERING**

Let us offer our prayers to God, who has created us and is transforming us and the Church.

We give thanks for Katharine, our Presiding Bishop; for all bishops, female and male; for the priests and deacons in our own churches; and for all those who minister in your name.

**We give thanks for the gifts of leadership which you have bestowed upon women and men in the Church.**

For all women and men in Episcopal and other communities who care enough to struggle for the transformation of the Church and the world.

**We give thanks for those who do not fear diversity but rather embrace all those who are created in your image.**

In thanksgiving for the activism of women, both lay and ordained, in the Episcopal Church and in particular this (diocese, church, place) who worked to bring about this gathering, or sought to bring someone here today:

*The people name aloud those for whom they are thankful.*

And for the contributions of women in all walks of life, in all churches, throughout all generations.

**We give you thanks, O God.**

We lift up and celebrate the work in this (diocese, church) where the mind, soul, heart and hand of a woman provided the mark of leadership, especially:

*The people name aloud those whom they celebrate.*

We give thanks for their courage and perseverance in remaining faithful ministers.

**To you, O God, we give honor and glory.**

For the gift of the continued renewal of our church -- for the grace of radical hospitality and the skills of evangelism,

**Give us the courage to proclaim and live the truth of God's unconditional love for all.**

For all people of minority cultures and ethnic groups in the United States who continue to be trivialized and endangered by the pervasiveness of racism and for all who are infected with epidemic of race hatred; for all who experience bullying, all who are made to feel unwelcome.

**Bring us to work together for wholeness, health and the welfare of every person in every circumstance.**

We pray for all who have died, remembering their courage and faithful witness:

*The people name aloud those on their hearts and minds.*

Gracious God, let your loving kindness be upon them.

**Who put their trust in you.**

The blessing of Martha's welcome, the blessing of Mary's listening; the blessing of action, the blessing of reflection, the blessing of a God who is in each of these, and in each one of us, be with us all. **Amen.**

**Music**      **There is a line of women, extending back to Eve**

Words: John L. Bell (b. 1949); Music: Seven Joys of Mary, English Carol Melody



1. There is a line of wo - men, ex -  
 2. So sing a song of Sa - rah to  
 3. There is a line of wo - men, who  
 4. So sing a song of Shi - phrah with  
 5. There is a line of wo - men, who  
 6. So sing a song of An - na who



tend - ing back to Eve, whose role in shap - ing  
 laugh - ter she gave birth; and sing a song of  
 took on pow - er - ful men, de - fy - ing laws and  
 Pu - ah at her hand, en - gaged to kill male  
 stood by Je - sus' side, who housed him while he  
 saw Christ's in - fant face; and sing a song of



his - to - ry God on - ly could con - ceive. And  
 Ta - mar who stood for wo - men's worth; and  
 scru - ples to let life live a - gain. And  
 chil - dren they foiled the king's com - mand. And  
 min - i - stered and held him when he died. And  
 Mar - tha who gave him food and space; and



though, through end-less age - s, their \_\_\_\_\_ wit - ness was re -  
 sing a song of Han - nah who \_\_\_\_\_ bar - gained with her  
 though, de - spite their tri - umph, their \_\_\_\_\_ sto - ries stayed un -  
 sing a song of Ra - hab who \_\_\_\_\_ shel - tered spies and  
 though they claimed he'd ris - en their \_\_\_\_\_ news was deemed sus -  
 sing of all the Ma - rys who \_\_\_\_\_ heed - ed his re -

pressed, \_\_\_\_\_ God val - ued and en -  
 Lord; \_\_\_\_\_ and sing a song of  
 untold \_\_\_\_\_ God kept their num - ber  
 lied; \_\_\_\_\_ and sing a song of  
 pect \_\_\_\_\_ till Je - sus stood a -  
 quests, \_\_\_\_\_ and now at hea - ven's

cour - aged them through whom the world was blessed.  
 Ma - ry who bore and bred God's Word.  
 grow - ing, cre - a - tive, strong and bold.  
 Es - ther, pre - vent - ing gen - o - cide.  
 mong \_\_\_\_\_ them, his wo - man - ly e - lect.  
 ban - quet are Je - sus fon - dest guests.

**A Reading from Ecclesiasticus** (The Wisdom of Sirach) 51:13-16,20b-22

While I was still young, before I went on my travels, I sought wisdom openly in my prayer.  
 Before the temple I asked for her, and I will search for her to the last.

From blossom to ripening grapes my heart delighted in her; my foot entered upon the  
 straight path; from my youth I followed her steps. I inclined my ear a little and received her,  
 and I found for myself much instruction.

For the Word of God in Scripture,  
 For the Word of God among us,  
 For the Word of God within us,  
**We give you thanks O God.**

*Silence*

*Let us now reflect on the wisdom of women throughout the ages,  
 those who have been close to us,  
 who have contributed to our wholeness and well-being,  
 and those who have supported and influenced  
 the life and growth of the Church.*

## **Prayers of Thanksgiving for Wisdom**

For the wisdom that fashioned the universe  
and can be read in the earth's dark depths  
and in heaven's infinity of lights ,  
thanks be to you, O God.

For the wisdom of teachers before me  
and their words and imaginative seeing,  
for the wisdom of those I have known  
and their silence and humility of speech,  
and for wisdom's wellspring in my own soul  
and in the soul of every human being  
from which ancient truths  
and new realizations spring forth,  
thanks be to you.

Let wisdom unfold in my own heart and mind  
and in the men and women of every nation.

Let us see the foundations for a new harmony  
within us and between us,  
the foundations for a recovered unity  
with the earth and all its creatures,  
for the ground of life is in you, O God,  
the ground of all life is in you.

*From John Philip Newell's Sounds of the Eternal: A Celtic Psalter*

**Prayers for Group or Individual Reflection**

For the strong arm of those who have given me shelter in my life, who loved me from the womb and carried me as a child, who guarded me like watchful angels and wept when I was in pain.

*name those who have been the presence of Christ to you*

For all these people,

**Thanks be to you, O God.**

For those who have encouraged me in my life and ministry, supported me by allowing me to be myself, trusted me with their souls, and loved me even when I was unlovable:

*name those who have been the presence of Christ to you*

For all these people,

**Thanks be to you, O God.**

For all those in my church, clergy, paid staff or volunteers, who give so much of their time, energy, and very selves in order to proclaim your Gospel.

*name those who have been the presence of Christ to you*

For all these people,

**Thanks be to you, O God.**

For the women and men whose passion for the poor is undying, whose prayer for the oppressed is tender, whose defense of the wronged is fierce.

*name those who have been the presence of Christ to you*

For all these people,

**Thanks be to you, O God.**

For all whose names we do not know, whose faces we do not see, who are mostly underpaid and overworked but who work to make our lives and our world a better place.

*acknowledge those professions or people*

For all these people

**Thanks be to you, O God.**

For those who died in the service of their country this past week; for all who have died as a result of violence, war, poverty or indifference; for all those we love but see no more.

*name those who live on in your heart and soul*

For all these people,

**Thanks be to you, O God**

For my all my sisters who are involved in women's ministries and for those men who support women's ministries —for their love of you, O Christ, and for their commitment to your Church, for their stewardship of your world, and for their care of all humankind.

*name those who support these ministries.*

For all these people,

**Thanks be to you, O God**

Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do to each other, we do to you; make us quick to help and slow to hurt, knowing that in our neighbor it is you who receives our love or neglect. **Amen.**

*Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio*

I was on my way to choir rehearsal when I first met a female priest. The cathedral where I sang was emptying after an ordination service, and I noticed a woman with a collar ahead of me.

"What do I call you?" I asked.

"My title is Reverend or Mother," she said, "But you can call me Pamela."

I was ten years old that Saturday morning, and I remember the encounter because I'd never called an adult by first name alone before. There was Mrs. Winston, my third grade teacher, and Miss Linda, my ballet instructor, and relatives like Aunt Stefanie and Uncle Artie, but all of them had a title, just like the priests at my cathedral did. It would be years before I graduated from the choir and went to college, then to seminary where I learned about the Philadelphia Eleven. Yet, I believe the spirit of the Philadelphia Eleven was present that day because when Pamela let me call her by her first name, I discovered that she was daring, that she didn't put too much stock in convention, and that she wanted to be a welcoming presence. In that way, her actions were very much like those of the Philadelphia Eleven, radical in a manner that I think Jesus would have smiled upon.

Even though The Episcopal Church recognized women's ordination over a decade before I met Pamela, the dynamics of my diocese made their presence scarce, and it would be another five years before I saw another female priest. Yet Pamela left her mark on me, just as the Philadelphia Eleven left theirs on our denomination. They remind us that living in the image of Jesus means taking risks, pressing against norms, being a prophetic voice.

Many years later, I found Pamela and thanked her for the impression she made on me, and when I got ordained myself, I was thrilled to see her in the congregation. I have never had a chance to do the same for the women who made up the Philadelphia Eleven, and yet, I know that female priests like myself owe them a tremendous gratitude not because they were the first to be ordained but because they were daring enough to do what they believed was most in the image of Jesus, even if society disagreed. They, and the men who supported them, are a reminder to each of us that we are called to live like Jesus, called to make bold and radical decisions, decisions that challenge our society and change our world both now and in the decades ahead.

*The Rev. Dr. Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio is an Episcopal priest and college lecturer who writes regularly on the intersection of religion and popular culture for sites including CNN and Huffington Post. Her first book, *God and Harry Potter at Yale* was released in 2010. Forward Movement Press will release her third book, *Expecting Jesus*, a series of Advent meditations, this winter.*



*Anne Lane Witt*

As a child, I was always encouraged to use my imagination and to dream big. My parents never cast aspersions on my desire to become Wonder Woman once I grew up; instead, they supported my dream, down to a years-long search for a pair of red boots for me—a quest that continues! I value imagination and vision for their transformative properties, providing hope and impetus for change along the way and leading to creation and recreation. Imagination and vision are part and parcel of building God’s kingdom here on earth, and the new realities they create serve to further inspire us.



From my earliest recollections, I have never been conscious of a time when I could not answer and live out my calling as an Episcopal priest, and thanks to the vision of many people, I have never had to. I was born almost three months to the day prior to the ordinations of the Philadelphia Eleven, allowing countless women and me to grow up in an Episcopal Church in which we could be ordained deacons, priests, and bishops, being who God has called us to be! I can only imagine how heartbroken I would feel if I could not serve as a priest in TEC, but thanks to all involved in ordaining these eleven women, my picture of clergy has included men and women as long as I can remember.

I am a lifelong Episcopalian and a 13-year product of St. Catherine’s Episcopal School in Richmond, Virginia. It was at St. Catherine’s that I first encountered a female cleric who has had quite an impression on me, the Right Reverend Susan Goff, who served as chaplain before moving on to my current call, Immanuel Old Church, in Mechanicsville, VA. I very clearly remember Miss Goff, as we called her—always distinctly herself and very much a woman of God. When we would have chapel, I would come home and tell my mother, “Mommy, we had chapel today, and Miss Goff did [this], but I wouldn’t do it like that; I would do it like this.” I distinctly recall thinking how I would lead worship and preach if I were in Miss Goff’s shoes. I had no idea that this imagining would be so Spirit-filled and a sign of my calling to the priesthood.

Miss Goff is now Bishop Goff, a friend and mentor. Just before I was announced as the new Priest in Charge of Immanuel Old Church, I shared my childhood chapel memories with Bishop Susan, who laughed heartily and replied, “See? The signs were always there!” I am ever-thankful for Bishop Susan and for all of those who have worked to make the ordination of women a reality. Because some imagined an Episcopal Church in which women could serve in all orders, I am now able to be a part of the modern reality in TEC. Who knows what little girl might be influenced by my sister priests and me?

*The Rev. Anne Lane Witt is a lifelong Episcopalian, born and raised in the Diocese of Virginia. Anne Lane holds a B.A. in Art History from the University of Virginia, an MDiv from the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, and a Ducktorate in Human Resource Management from the Walt Disney World College Program. Ordained to the diaconate in June 2010 and the priesthood in December 2010, she is currently serving as Priest in Charge of Immanuel Episcopal Church, Old Church Parish in Mechanicsville, VA.*

## **Laurie Brock**

I wore a cross underneath my alb when I was ordained to the priesthood 12 years ago. Probably not unusual. Clergy love to wear crosses of all types, as a reminder of whose we are, perhaps. The cross I wore wasn't mine. It belonged to Mary Redd who served the church as a deaconess beginning in the late 1930's. Its silver features were worn from years of use as a symbol of her ordained ministry. The four angels on each part of the cross weren't as detailed as they once had been.



Deaconesses were ordained (consecrated, set apart, blessed - the church got a bit nervous about the terminology when women started talking about being ordained to the priesthood) in the church in the late 19th century through the mid-20th century. When the bishop and other priests laid hands on me during my ordination and I was vested, I felt the cross underneath my alb and chasuble, and I wondered what she would think about my ordination. Had her call been fully to serve as a deaconess, or was that the only option given to her by her Church?

That isn't to diminish her ministry as a deaconess or any of the deaconesses. Our own Dictionary of the Episcopal Church notes that, "deaconesses were more purely diaconal than their male deacon counterparts in care of the needy." The Church and the world certainly benefitted from their yes to serve God and neighbor in that holy order.

Yet that yes was from a much shorter list of options than men who were called to ordained ministry. When women of the Church responded, "Yes!" to God's call to serve God and neighbor in an ordained ministry, the Church told them, "No," and instead, edited God's call for women to a much shorter list. We humans, throughout our experience with the Holy, have limited, excised, and tried so desperately to contain the movement of God into something we could control. And God responds by expanding, including, and bursting forth - sometimes quietly and unassuming, but sometimes with great flourish. God is, after all, God.

When the women knelt in Philadelphia, when bishops laid on hands, when the people said, "Amen!" 40 years ago, our selves and souls expanded. Our Church burst forth from one more self-induced tomb. No longer were women limited to a few separate and unequal opportunities to serve God. Girls and women of all ages who hold up half the sky could now listen to God whisper to ordained ministry, and say, "Yes!" And by joy, courage, and God's love, the Church could say, "Yes!" in return. I still have the cross. I wore it under my alb when I was instituted as rector, after I had responded yes to another call from God to serve. It is a treasured witness of the gift of women to our Church. I give thanks for Mary Redd and all the women through decades and centuries and even eons who never stopped saying, "Yes," to God, and I give thanks to God for never ceasing to call us forth from the tombs of our limitations.

*The Rev. Laurie Brock is an Episcopal priest serving as rector of St. Michael the Archangel in Lexington, Kentucky. She is the co-author of *Where God Hides Holiness*, blogs at *DirtySexyMinistry* and holds court as a *Celebrity Blogger* for *Forward Movement's Lent Madness*. She had keynoted ecumenical conferences and leads retreats that invite us to laugh with our souls and love the broken parts of our selves. An avid horsewoman, she let her horses teach her about God and life.*

## *Megan L. Castellan*



I am young enough that I have always known priests who were women. Priests who challenged me, taught me, supported me, and showed me what priesthood could look like when it wasn't wearing the guise of Father Tim in Mitford series. (No disrespect, Jan Karon.) And every one has been different; a different sort of gift to me.

But all I remember about the first female priest I knew was her voice. I was a small child in Virginia, and I remember that I liked to hear her chant the liturgy. After she celebrated, I would go home and chant to myself, strolling around the house, playing out in the yard. I don't remember much else -- not her sermons, not Sunday School lessons, not any profound personal interactions -- just her singing voice.

That mattered, though. In seminary, the music professor informed us with some chagrin that it had only been in the past few years that female students would sing soprano or alto. His theory was that we had all been listening to exclusively masculine voices sing in church for so long, we literally didn't know any other way it should sound, so without realizing it, or meaning to, instead of singing in our own, we'd all been echoing someone else's voice.

But me, I had this memory of this one priest, who sang the sursum corda in a different key, in a key I could follow. I didn't have to change it, or tilt my head and squint to make it fit. I didn't have to fake notes I didn't have. I could sing with the voice God gave me, and I had faith that the chant would sound like it was supposed to.

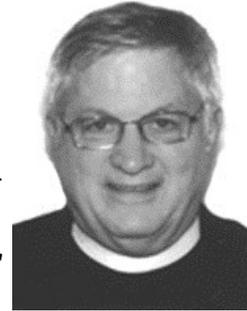
When I went to my first parish, on Easter, I cheerfully volunteered to chant everything: Exsultet, Great Alleluia, gospel, the whole nine yards. It was a rookie mistake, and when the morning was over, I was so tired I could barely stand up. But as I was heading to my car in the bright sunlight, an older lady stopped me. "Y'know, I remember reading that Jesus had women disciples, that there were women leaders in the early church. I've heard all the arguments for it; I just had trouble believing it. But when I heard you sing the gospel, for the first time, I could see it. I could believe it. So thank you."

Forty years of singing with our own voices-thanks be to God!

*The Rev. Megan L. Castellan currently serves as Associate Rector and Chaplain to the Day School at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Kansas City, MO. Previously, she has served as college chaplain in Flagstaff, AZ and as associate rector in Virginia Beach, VA. She can be found most days opining away on Twitter @revlucymeg or her blog redshoesfunnyshirt*

### **Tom Woodward**

As a male ordained priest in 1963, the moment I "got it" was while watching the piano-assisted monologue of comedian Mark Russell on television. He began his monologue by noting that "while the Roman Catholics cannot conceive of married priests, the Episcopal Church now has married priests who can conceive!" Then continued by saying "Can you imagine anything more ridiculous than what the Episcopal Church is doing by ordaining women to the priesthood? Can you imagine a woman baptizing babies, teaching and nurturing the young, guiding young adults through all they go through, feeding a family, healing the sick, supporting the troubled, and consoling the dying? Can you imagine anything more ridiculous than that?"



Before, for me the issue of ordaining women had been justice and equality. After that revelation there was the added concern for the fullness of the priesthood. And what a wonderful challenge that was, because as Mark Russell had made so very clear, the central functions of the ordained priesthood had always been feminine, or at least stereotypically feminine in nature. So the unspoken issue for our male clergy became, "What does it mean to be a male priest? If there is a masculine side of priesthood, what would it be like?" And because we men had no way of thinking or talking about that, many, many of us male clergy experienced what God was now providing the church as threat - and for good reason, because male dominance was going to have to die in order for the fullness of both ordained priesthood and our understanding of the Body of Christ could be achieved and lived out.

How had we (men and women, but mostly men) missed this? After all, in Luke's gospel the person of Jesus is lived out almost entirely through stereotypically feminine attributes. Our experiences of shepherding come much more from our mothers than from our fathers. I once asked a group of younger children who they would want with them if they were unfairly called into the principal's office. In unison they shouted, "Mom!" I then followed up with "And what would she do?" Equally loud came the reply, "Whatever was necessary!" The Good Shepherdess, for sure.

So what have been the implications in all this for the church and for the world? What the Philadelphia Eleven and their supporters set in motion was a long overdue revolution. At last we had recognizable models of ordinary holy women. Before the images of holy women consisted of nuns and heroines, often devoid of sexuality, but now ordinary women represented God and in representing God they also represented the rest of their sisters, inside and outside the church. In one of my plays, Harriet is trying to fend off a male sexual predator. When she finally says, "I am a priest, an Episcopal priest," he recoils by crossing himself and saying "Then you are holy." She steps forward and says to him, "Two minutes ago I was a piece of meat and now I'm holy? Listen to me. We women, we are all holy. You screw with me and you are screwing with God." That understanding, so lacking in cultures around the world including our own, is key to unraveling and redeeming the horrible sin of male entitlement and domination. That has not been part of the call to the priesthood for women, but it has been part of the gift - to both men and women - and may it grow and continue to transform our world.

With other men, I offer up alleluias for this anniversary and for all those courageous and determined women who have lived out the priesthood in ways which had been kept from men and women inside and outside the church for centuries upon centuries. May their unique witness to the goodness and healing power of God inspire more and more of those to whom they are sent. And may God also bless all those tears of joy from women around the church who have seen in this event and its aftermath that they, themselves, are fully of God and share completely in the image of God - spiritually and, yes, literally.

*Tom Woodward has served as parish priest and campus minister in dioceses across the country, including service on the Executive Council's Committee on the Status of Women. In his retirement he has had success as a playwright and librettist, with seven short plays produced and two operas. His play about lust, boundaries and intimacy, "Body and Soul," served as the keynote event at a recent national convention of psychotherapists.*

## *Molly James*

I was born in 1980, and so I am one of the privileged ones that grew up in a Church where the ordination of women was a given. I was particularly fortunate to have grown up in a parish that had a woman deacon for as long as I could remember and in a diocese that elected a woman bishop around the time I got my driver's license. This meant that when I was in college and began my own discernment around the possibility of ordained ministry, it never occurred to me to hesitate because I was a woman. Nowhere in my process was my gender ever raised, as the patterns of female leadership were so long established. What a blessing!



Even now, nine years into my ordained ministry, I have only had one instance where gender was a barrier to ministry for me. As a part of my PhD program, I spent time studying in England. I sought permission to be licensed to serve as a priest while I was there, but discovered that because the Bishop who ordained me was a woman, my ordination was not recognized by the Church of England. I was shocked and saddened by this. While I am fortunate enough to take the leadership of women in The Episcopal Church as a given, this is not true in many parts of our Communion. I hope this will soon change!

On this anniversary, I give great thanks for all those who have fought and continue to fight to make our Church and our world more reflective of the beautiful truth that we are all equal and beloved in the eyes of God. I am so tremendously grateful to all the women (and men!), lay and ordained, whose faithfulness, hard work and perseverance provided me with the privilege of growing up in a Church with so many ordained women leaders as examples. The triumph of those who worked for the ordination of women is an inspiration for us, an inspiration that reminds us how it is possible for those previously on the margins to be given an equal place at the table and the Table. Sadly, still in our Church, and most certainly in the world, there are women and so many others who are still on the margins, who have yet to have a place at the Table or in positions of power. There is still much work to do.

I hope this anniversary will be a time for us to pause, to reflect on how far we have come and to give thanks. I also hope it will be a time for us to ask important questions about how we live the next forty years. How do we work to ensure that nowhere in the Church are women still on the margins? Who else is on the margin and how can we be a part of the movement to bring them to the center and to the Table? To live into those questions is to honor those we celebrate on this anniversary.

*The Rev. Molly F. James holds a PhD in Theology from the University of Exeter (UK). She holds a Master's of Divinity from Yale Divinity School and Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Tufts University. She was ordained by The Rt. Rev. Chilton Knudsen in 2005. She has served as a hospital chaplain and a parish priest. She currently serves on the Bishops' Staff for The Episcopal Church in Connecticut as the Dean of Formation and the Secretary of the Diocese. Molly has also been involved in the diocesan witness to challenge violence and assists in maintaining a website of resources on violence (<http://www.challengingviolence.org/>) that came to the diocese in the wake of the Sandy Hook shootings. She is also a member of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship and its working group on gun violence. She is an adjunct professor at Hartford Seminary and the University of St. Joseph, focusing on ethics and pastoral care. Her doctoral research focused on suffering and grief. Her work, *With Joyful Acceptance, Maybe* was published in 2013 by Wipf and Stock. In addition to her work in CT, Molly serves on the Standing Commission for Ministry Development of the Episcopal Church and is a board member for The Young Clergy Women Project (an ecumenical organization of clergy women under 40). Molly and her husband Reade (a mechanical engineer) have two children.*

*Mary Koppel*

When I was about 12 years old I saw my first lady priest. I never knew that women priest even existed! I lived in New Orleans, and my small church still celebrated the Holy Eucharist with traditional language, facing east and we sang using the Hymnal 1940.

I could not believe my eyes when I saw this small woman step into the pulpit and preach with such authority. What was she doing there? What was she saying? I only remember some parts, but those parts shocked a young girl. She preached about Grace. She preached that Grace depended neither on my worthiness nor my sinfulness, but rather on the love of God. Somehow I feel that I never really understood about grace until after this woman preached.



I did not know who she was at the time, but as years past I came to know this “woman priest.” She became the rector of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in New Orleans, only a streetcar ride away from my home parish of St. George’s. As time moved on, and I went through the process of becoming an Episcopal priest, a “woman priest,” I often found myself inspired and strengthened by this woman’s example. From afar, I watched as she guided her congregation with brilliance, kindness and faithfulness to Christ all while embracing her femininity. In 2012, she invited me to participate in Holy Week and Easter festivities at her parish. I was so honored that she included me in that most holy time of the Christian year.

When I reflect on the anniversary of Women’s Ordination, I thank God for the witness and ministry of those several women who walked before me on this journey. I thank the Holy Spirit for opening hearts to receive these new servants of the Lord. And I give thanks for that first woman priest that I saw so many years ago, the Rev. Susan Gaumer, who taught me about Grace.

*The Rev. Mary Koppel is an Episcopal priest serving a congregation in Austin, Texas. Mary has written one book with the Rev. Laurie Brock for Church Publishing called "Where God Hides Holiness, Thoughts on Grief, Joy and the Search for Fabulous Heels." Most recently, she wrote the March 2014 devotions for Forward Day by Day and contributed to 50 Days of Fabulous.*

## *Amber Belldene*

I didn't meet a female priest until 1997, when I was a senior in high school. From the corner of my eye, I watched her for the duration of a weekend retreat. She was pretty, warmly Southern, confident, and reminded me of my mother. Later the same year, in a sunny lakeside chapel, I had a vision of myself presiding at the altar and knew in my teenage bones that it was a call. In hindsight, I can see these two events are entirely related. Meeting her opened my heart to the possibility God might want me to be a priest, a possibility made real by the courageous Philadelphia Eleven, who did not have to see other women priests to believe they were called.



Long before the day I first felt my priestly vocation, the Holy Spirit had given me another one—to be a novelist. I held a red clothbound mystery novel in my hand, and my grandmother explained my distant cousin had written it back in the 1960's. As I flipped its musty, yellowing pages, I realized authors were real people, and I could be one too. Seven-year-old me held up the hardback like the acolytes did the Gospel book and declared to my mother that I would be a writer.

I abandoned that dream early on for more practical pursuits, and studied hard through high school, college, and seminary.

It wasn't until years later, when I struggled with infertility, that the dream took hold again. My body had become a mysterious and frustrating adversary, betraying my longing to be a mother. I took refuge in novels, and it was romance in particular that spoke to me as a whole person—my heart, my mind, and my body. When I finally conceived, I kept reading love stories, and an idea took hold, demanding to be written. I suspected it was an urging of the Holy Spirit, so I complied.

Initially, I felt quite a bit of shame and fear about what I was doing—that some church folks would see these two vocations as conflicting. I had to trust my own experience: romance novels spark passion in marriages, free people to explore their sexuality, and celebrate healing and redemption. Romantic and erotic love give us a taste of divine love.

So far, no one has tried to shame me. Instead, I hear from women and men excited to believe desire and pleasure are gifts from God, and hoping for a church which will accept them as fully human, and fully sexual. People seek me out for reassurance after their pastor condemns them for reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Strangers approach me for pastoral advice, because they don't know any other Christians with whom they feel safe talking about sex. This message matters to all of them, so I've come to see it as a kind of good news. God loves love. And our bodies are where we experience it—as mothers, friends, and romantic partners. I preach this gospel proudly.

I also thank God for eleven brave women who put their own bodies in the path of ridicule and scorn so that others like them—with breasts, pregnant bellies, and women's longings—could be priests. Though our church is far from egalitarian, we've come unbelievably far in forty years. Now we can even buy pretty clergy shirts tailored for our breasts and bellies! We've become a church where a woman can claim her unique authority. What a blessing to be part of this transformation. Because we have become that church, I have found the courage to proclaim that our desires are divine and our passions sacramental, and to write racy stories about what it feels like to experience God's love in the arms of another person.

Amber Belldene is the pen name of an Episcopal priest and romance writer. She is a mom of twins, the author of contemporary and paranormal romance novels, and by necessity is constantly over-caffeinated. Amber's passionate interest in the relationship between spirituality and sexuality fuels her writing, directs her reading, and inspires her preaching. She can be found online blogging, Tweeting, Facebooking, and generally being silly about the many and messy blessings in her life.

## **Midwife of our Lives**

God of power and presence  
you are the midwife of our lives,  
always drawing us on  
to be born again,  
encouraging, exhorting, calming,  
containing even death.

You pull us, kicking into life,  
breath spirit into us.  
We thank you for the gift in our breath,  
the love that we make,  
the hope that we cherish,  
the grace that encompasses  
our darkest day.  
In smallness and splendor,  
in storm and serenity,  
we celebrate your care and creativity.  
We rest in you,  
as trustingly as any baby.

*Prayer by Kathy Galloway, Iona Community, Scotland*

