

Newsletter  
Vol. 39, No.1  
June, 2020

PASTORAL ministry  
NETWORK

## Pastoral Ministry in Time of Uprising + COVID-19

Dear Friends—

*The recent demonstrations for equal justice for African-Americans in this country reinforce the continuing urgency of our 2018 PMN Seminar theme, “Building Bridges across Cultural Divides.” Meanwhile we’re still living through another crisis, that of the novel coronavirus. The following story addresses the COVID-19 pandemic. SJR*

What is pastoral ministry in a “Safer at Home” era? It’s hard to know, which makes it hard to put together this issue of the PMN Newsletter. We’re not out-and-about, planning liturgies, giving classes or even visiting folks, for the most part. We are challenged to care for one another, the Sisters and neighbors we live among, in new ways, when we’re spending more time than ever with a select few whose habits may begin to wear on us...

In the end, I have assembled this issue from book reviews and

miscellaneous bits. I begin with a journal of these pandemic times from Sister of Mercy Patricia Pepitone. She lives alone about 25 miles from the Belmont HQ (former Motherhouse) of her community; she wrote the following to the Sisters in the convent whom she could no longer visit during the pandemic.

May 13, 2020. This letter is meant for all the sisters in the house. Thank you for the updates. It’s nice to hear about our Sisters and Belmont. I myself am keeping social distance as much as possible. I have spent the time cleaning every closet I have in the house, and repairing any small repair jobs.

I also go shopping every other week with mask, gloves, & face shield. My shopping is for myself, my sister, and two of my neighbors that are in their 90s. It takes a long time to do the shopping because of the lack of supplies in the grocery store. But I have managed.



Red meat, pork, and chicken are very limited. The toilet paper and paper towels are nowhere to be found. So it is challenging. If anyone can figure out why paper goods are totally gone even after the first rush, let me know.

The challenges of shopping also include getting home with the items, sanitizing all the groceries before taking them to the other people and taking a shower so that I do not walk in their houses after being at the store. The ladies I shop for have major issues, so they have only had me in and are staying home.

I go to my sister’s apartment as needed. I go while she is at dialysis to ensure her safety; before I leave, I sanitize wherever I have touched. We speak on the phone often and she is doing great. She often feels she left New York just in time. She believes the virus would have gotten to her if she were there.

I have also enjoyed my quiet mornings of prayer and have chosen to travel the country and world with Mass. It is different but nice to go to various locations to watch the celebration take place. Since this has happened so many places are streaming Mass. I have been to Queen of Apostles [Belmont], Holy Spirit, St. Thomas, St Patrick’s in New York, Jamaica, Rome and Ireland-- something I would not have done if not for the circumstances.

I have also been group meeting by way of Webex, Bluejeans, FaceTime and Zoom. I meet weekly by FaceTime with my ladies’ prayer group and we have time to pray together and catch up. Once a month I have been FaceTiming with the Denver Associate and the Concord Associates so we are keeping them going. Many of the women in these groups live alone so having the FaceTime has lifted their spirits. Although some have difficulties with technology it has been a blessing for them.

The board I am on is still meeting regularly by Webex.



The one thing I really miss is being able to see people face-to-face. Other than that, all is well. There is no tripping about except going from room to room and sitting outside or walking alone.

So as with all of you, life is a little different but the blessing is we are staying healthy.

Know you all are in my prayers. Sister Pat Pepitone,  
RSM

*I have also enjoyed my quiet  
& have chosen to travel the C*

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**NEWSLETTER published one or two times yearly by the School Sisters of St. Francis Pastoral Ministry Network.** Editor: **S. Jane Elyse Russell** ([janerussell@bac.edu](mailto:janerussell@bac.edu)).  
Printing & mailing: Information Services, U.S. Province Office, 1545 S. Layton Blvd, Milwaukee, WI, 53215. **Membership & Subscription:** (\$10 per academic year): **S. Carol Ann Jaeger** (4031 W Morgan Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53221). Other Steering Committee members: Sisters **Mary Boyd; Joelyn Hayes; Angela Ireland (Chair); Winifred Whelan;** Associate **Maureen Hellwig.**

## PMN Steering Committee Struggles with 2020 Seminar Plans

The Pastoral Ministry Network Steering Committee met in October, 2019, at Clare House in Milwaukee & held a conference call on Feb. 22, 2020; its scheduled May, 2020 meeting at St. Patrick's Convent in St. Charles, IL, was replaced with a Zoom get-together. The fall meeting continued to refine ideas for the 2020 Seminar based on one keynote speaker, but when the PA was moved to starting a day later, we had to change our Seminar date and, as it turned out, find a new speaker who could address the theme.



We eventually found an excellent speaker in Diane Millis, Ph.D.—only to be forced later to postpone the Seminar, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new date is **June 18, 2021**, before the next Province Jubilee celebration; stay tuned to Province communications for further refinements of date and place.

Attending the October meeting (pictured) were Sisters Carol Ann Jaeger, Mary Boyd, Joelyn Hayes, Jane Elyse Russell, Winifred Whelan, & Angela Ireland (Chair). Associate

Maureen Hellwig was excused because of other commitments.

In other Network news, Treasurer Carol Ann Jaeger reported that we have 62 members paid thru the 2019-20 year. See membership renewal form at end of this Newsletter to update your status.

**2021 PMN Seminar 6/18/21/** (watch Province communications to confirm date & place)

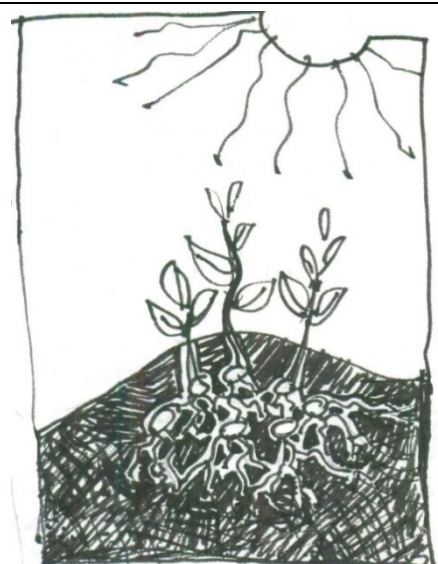
### 2020 Vision: Stories as Seeds of Hope

We'll build on S. Teresa Maya's 2019 address to the UISG: how personal & local stories can "restore the dignity of creation, one coral [or person, or ministry... ] at a time."

- **Keynote Speaker Diane Millis, PhD**

In her practice of teaching, spiritual direction & facilitating workshops, Diane observes, listens, and inquires as participants learn how to tell their most life-giving stories.

- Table sharing of seeds of hope in our own ministry stories



## Calling for Nominees: 2021 JoAnn Brdecka Award

While we have had to postpone the awarding of the next **JoAnn Brdecka Award for Pioneering in Pastoral Ministry**, we are still accepting nominations for it. Previous honorees since 1992 have been Sisters Mary Dingman, Marie Hodapp, Joanne Wolsfelt, Roberta Klesener, Evelyn Schnieders, Patricia McCarthy, Jane Russell & Winifred Whelan, Bernadelle Mehmert, Mary Garcia & Bernadette Kalscheur, Joselyn Brenner & Felicia Wolf, Mary Louise Miller & Bernadette Luecker, Bernadette Engelhaupt, Noel LeClaire & Roseann Wagner, Kathleen Donohoe & Kate Brenner.

Please think about & nominate a current or past member of the SSSF Pastoral Ministry Network who has been a *pioneer and exemplar* in some area(s) of pastoral ministry, helping pave the way for other sisters and lay persons to minister in this field.

**Please mail your nomination along with a supporting description to S. Angela Ireland (Chair) or e-mail it to quireami@gmail.com no later than October 1, 2020.**

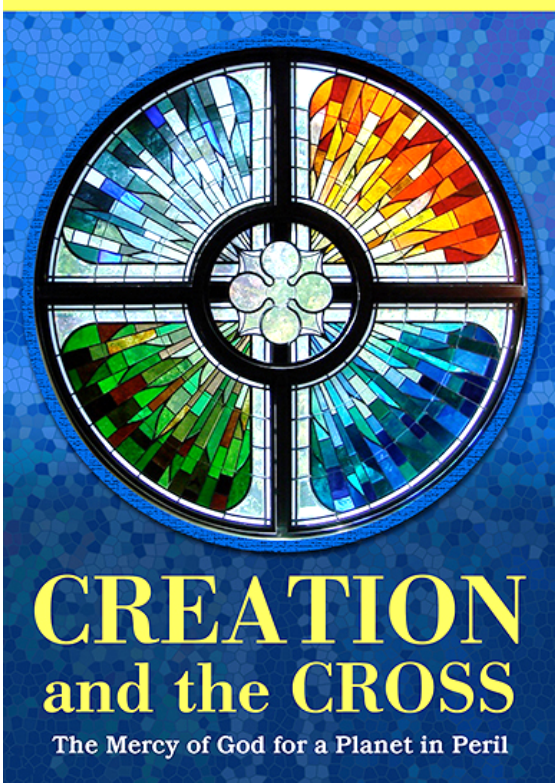
### Book Reviews:



Elizabeth A. Johnson, ***Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril***. Orbis, 2018.

--Reviewed by S. Jane Russell

**ELIZABETH A. JOHNSON**



As part of the “Introduction to Theology” at Belmont Abbey College, we look at the fundamental Christian question, “How does Jesus Christ ‘save’ us?” On this all-important issue, I always find most of my students wedded to the traditional view articulated by St. Anselm in the 11<sup>th</sup> century: Jesus saved us by giving his life as a sacrifice to make satisfaction for our sins, from the “original sin” to the whole sad history of sin.

Without knowing Anselm’s name, most students can state the gist of his “satisfaction theory”: since God’s *infinite* majesty had been offended by sin, only the sacrificial death of someone who was both divine and human could render a payment (“satisfaction”) of *infinite value* to restore the balance.

The textbooks I use (currently *I Believe in God* by Thomas Rausch) critique this theology for the harsh image of God it projects, yet most of the students stick by Anselm’s interpretation as *the* correct understanding of redemption. If modern people are troubled by this explanation, the news

has not yet reached my students!

To anyone stuck in the Anselmian paradigm, Elizabeth Johnson's *Creation and the Cross* will come as an eye-opener. For starters, she begins from a different question. Rather than asking "for what cause or necessity God became a human being, and by his own death, as we believe . . . , restored life to the world" through forgiving sin (Anselm, *Why a God-Human*, quoted in Johnson, p. 3), Johnson asks what good news the Christian message of salvation might hold for *all* of creation?

To address this larger question, Johnson playfully adopts Anselm's dialogue format, creating a conversation partner "Clara" as a composite of thoughtful students she has known. She explains to Clara the basis of Anselm's feudal society, whose "good order depended on respect for the honor of the Lord of the manor." If the relation between God and the world works in the same way, the dilemma of humans after sinning seems inescapable. By sin they have disrespected the Lord of all, and can never make satisfaction for the offense; "what do you give to God by your obedience which is not owed to him already?" And how could humans ever render the *infinite* satisfaction proportionate to God's infinite dignity (Johnson, 8)?

To this "grim dilemma," the divine condescension in becoming human and dying the death that the sinless Jesus did not deserve comes as a merciful revelation. Johnson underlines Anselm's intent to praise God's unimaginable compassion in finding this solution.

But Anselm's theory of satisfaction has lent itself to distortions over time; Johnson outlines no less than seven modern criticisms of the theory (pp. 14-26). Some are obvious, like the fact that the theory generates—despite Anselm's intentions—a "disastrous image of God," as resentfully obsessing over offenses to his honor. Theologians today also note that the satisfaction theory ignores both the resurrection and the public ministry of Jesus, the twin bases of why people started seeing Jesus as Savior in the first place. They criticize the theory's tendencies to *sacralize violence*, to foster a *morbid spirituality* (suffering becomes the best way to God), and to model "an *ethic of submission in the face of injustice*" (22).

But the problem that this book is most concerned to remedy is the satisfaction theory's "*ecological silence*" (26). Johnson asks,

At a time of advancing ecological devastation, what would it mean to rediscover [the] biblical sense of the natural world groaning, hoping, waiting for liberation? What would it mean for the churches' understanding, practice and prayer to open the core Christian belief in salvation to include all created beings?

Johnson begins by recalling the wealth of other salvation metaphors in Scripture, starting with Second Isaiah's encouraging portrait of "the creating God who saves." Text after text from Isa 40-55 assures Israel "that the God who created the people is now acting as Redeemer, claiming the people back from another's authority [in Babylon] . . . to restore them to their own life in God's covenanted family" (48). "YHWH who made all things" now "declares that Jerusalem will be inhabited and the cities of Judah will be rebuilt" (Isa 44:24, quoted in Johnson, 47).

“More than 500 years before Jesus’ death on the cross, 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah proclaimed that the God who created heaven & earth was redeeming Israel, forgiving their sin...”

While “this redeeming work clearly has a political dimension,” ending the Babylonian Exile also signals the *forgiveness of Israel’s sins*, which allowed them to be defeated in the first place.

Thus Johnson shows that “more than 500 years before Jesus’ death on the cross, Second Isaiah proclaimed that the God who created heaven and earth was redeeming and saving Israel and forgiving their sin out of the infinite depths of divine compassion. This God is forever faithful & does not need anyone to die in order to be merciful” (50). Countless other passages from Exodus, the Psalms and other prophets echo these themes.

In the New Testament, the life and ministry of Jesus sheds even more light on “the creating, saving God of Israel” (62) whose coming Kingdom would overturn the harsh rules of this-worldly kingdoms. The Kingdom of God the Creator “who loves the whole world... means... the flourishing of all creation” (82).

By heralding such a kingdom, Jesus came under suspicion from both the Roman occupiers of Palestine and their Jewish priestly collaborators.

Johnson takes pains to disentangle the probable historical reasons for Jesus’ execution (i.e. his perceived threat to the governing powers) from Christian interpretations after the fact. His followers combed the Jewish Scriptures for any possible clue to finding God’s presence in the seeming catastrophe of Jesus’ death. Of course, this early quest for understanding was never about the cross alone, but about Jesus’ death *and astonishing appearances* as risen from the dead. Against expectations, the creative power of God had proved stronger than “the unjust power of empire” (158). They began to see the risen Jesus as “a pledge of what is in store for all dead,” just as the first tomato from a garden tokens more to come (97).

In this surprising light, “interpretations blossomed” after Easter. Johnson samples the NT’s many metaphors to describe what had happened, from “salvation’s” root meaning of healing, to military and diplomatic (“Death... swallowed up in victory,” 1 Cor 15:54), to financial and legal (redeeming relatives from slavery; justification or acquittal in a court of law), and more.

Johnson builds a positive theology of salvation out of the materials mined from Scripture by developing the idea of “deep incarnation” (Chapter 5) and posing five “thought experiments” which might stir our imaginations to embrace earth-friendly action (Chapter 6). “Deep incarnation” rethinks what Christians mean by Christ’s “incarnation,” expressed in John’s famous line, “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). Johnson explains that, although God has always been present in the created world, “incarnation” brings “an unimaginable level of intensity” to that presence. “Through the incarnation the ineffable God acquires a genuine human life, a story in time, even a death... as a participant in the history of life on our planet” (178).

As the last phrase indicates, “deep incarnation” extends the significance of Jesus beyond the human sphere into the evolutionary history of humanity, born from “the whole matrix of the material universe” (185). “The flesh that the Word of God became as a particular human being is

part of the tree of evolving life on earth, which in turn is part of the vast body of the cosmos” (184).

If “the Word made flesh” connects to the whole evolutionary tree of life, then Jesus’ violent death and unprecedented resurrection also brings a new hope into the age-old story of struggling life.

Since God who creates & empowers the evolutionary world also joins the fray in Christ, personally drinking the cup of suffering and going down into the nothingness of death, affliction even at its worst does not have the last word. Hope against hope springs from divine presence amid the death. One with the flesh of the earth, Jesus Christ risen embodies the ultimate hope of all creatures in creation. The coming final transformation of history will be the salvation of everything, including the groaning community of life... (193)

Though she warns us against over-literalizing “heaven” as a grander version of life on earth, Johnson allows “that deep resurrection encourages us to include every creature of flesh in the hoped-for future” (192).

“Jesus Christ Risen embodies the ultimate hope of all creatures in creation.”

Chapter 6 draws out the “call to action” implied in the theology of deep incarnation and accompaniment that Johnson has built so far. To help us make “the profound step of conversion to the earth as God’s beloved creation” (195), she offers five thought experiments. First, we can contemplate the “blue marble” picture of earth taken from the moon, and appreciate the vast “network of living creatures” making but one great community on this precious planet. We can recognize that we humans have more *in common* with all other species than what separates us.

She invites us to “(step) down from the tip of a pyramid of human privilege and (rejoin) other creatures as (our) kin in the circle of life on earth” (203). We can stop thinking that God only cares about humans, and recognize that, as Pope Francis says, “other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes” (*Laudato Si’* 69, quoted in Johnson 209.) We can recall the relationships others creatures have with God, celebrated in so many joyful lines from the Psalms and the prophets. “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom” on the coming day of God’s salvation (Isa 35:1-2).

If we take these steps to expand our sense of connection to other creatures, we will be able to “bring this kinship relation to expression in pronouns” (216). That is, “reimagine ‘us’” in passages like “May God be gracious to us and bless us” (Ps 67:2). We mentally expand ‘us’ to include not just “our people,” not just “all people,” but “the community of creation with penguins, parrots, tuna and elephants included in the blessing” (217).

At the end Johnson returns the focus to the cross of Christ. She reiterates that “the mercy of God is not dependent on the death of Jesus” (224). Rather,

the living God, gracious and merciful, always was, is, and will be accompanying the world with saving grace, including humans in their sinfulness, and humans and all creatures in their unique beauty... and inevitable dying. The cross does not... occasion a shift in God’s attitude from betrayed honor to willingness to forgive. It does make the compassionate love of God’s heart blazingly clear in an historical event. (225)

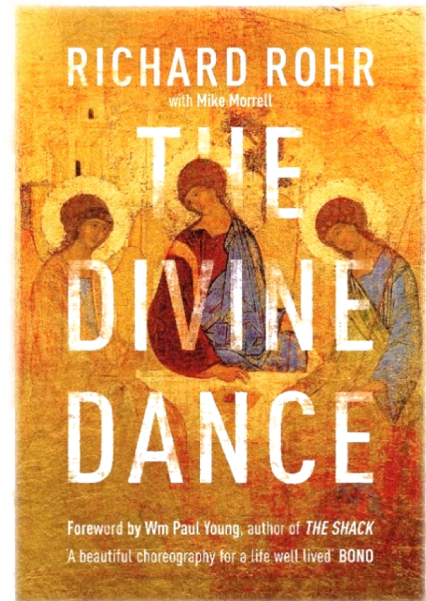
*Creation and the Cross* is a powerful argument for revamping our understanding of the core of Christian faith. If we begin to think of “salvation” as the gracious God accompanying us--all creatures--in our struggles and bringing new life out of disaster, it can inspire new attention to our “suffering neighbors, human and more-than-human” (223) in our imperiled world.



## Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance* –

*Editor's note: Sister Arlene Einwalter planned to present a class on THE TRINITY AND YOUR TRANSFORMATION 6 Mondays, March 2 – April 6, at Clement Manor in Milwaukee. She & her co-presenter held two of the sessions before further classes had to be postponed. This promo for the classes makes a nice invitation to the book.*

Christians are asked to believe in the Trinity. Yet, who can understand the Trinity? In *The Divine Dance*, Richard Rohr presents a compelling alternative to an aloof God (an old white bearded man in the sky) or belief in a fairytale God who will give us what we want if we are “good”. Using metaphors and creative writing, Rohr sees God as Community...as Friendship... as Dance. This book is beautifully written, challenging the reader to build a new, a different, an intimate Relationship with Trinity. This class will be held as discussion, sharing ideas and our own stories.

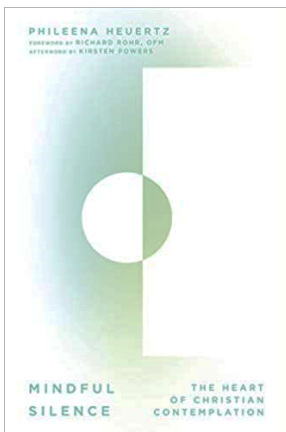


## Phileena Heuertz, *Mindful Silence: The Heart of Christian Contemplation*.

Forward by Richard Rohr, OFM. Downers Grove IL: IVP Books, 2018

--Reviewed by Sister Winifred Whelan (wwhelan@sbu.edu).

Phileena Heuertz claims that many people sleepwalk through life. They are very active, running here and there, but do not take time to contemplate their life path. She tells her own story of how she was introduced to the practice of silent meditation by Father Thomas Keating



In contemplative prayer, we learn how to be awake to our own suffering, to confront our "false self," as Thomas Merton described it. Mother Theresa of Kalkata (formerly Calcutta) is an example of how contemplative prayer shows the way to die to the false self, and in doing so, find the true, hidden reality. Heuertz recounts how Mother Theresa confessed to having a feeling of God's abandonment during periods of spiritual darkness and doubt. This was a painful time in which the false self was dying and the true self was being revealed.

This sense of God's absence may recur often throughout life. But God is not absent, rather, it is one's awareness that is dulled. Here Heuertz recounts the lives of St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila who speak of the dark night of the soul. In quiet meditation known as apophatic prayer, there are no concepts or images, there is only darkness. God is doing a hidden work. This type of prayer can be painful in the sense that one has to let go of control. It is an invitation to let go, to let God. In the chapter on "Finding Liberation Through Discernment" Heuertz cites St. Ignatius of Loyola, who is an expert on discernment. Through this type of prayer, we gradually discern our unique purpose, our unique destiny. Through this process of discernment, we can hope to recognize this hidden work of God.

*Meditation or centering prayer has been neglected in modern Catholic/Christian theology, but Heuertz shows that it has been central to Christianity from the beginning.*

A theme that flows throughout the book is the idea that meditation or centering prayer has been neglected in modern Catholic/Christian theology. This type of prayer is a part of many religions, including Buddhism, but Heuertz goes to great lengths to show that it has been central to Christianity from the beginning. She gives examples from the desert fathers and mothers.

Anyone interested in contemplative or centering prayer would profit from reading this book. It is highly motivational, explanatory, and at times can be a page-turner with examples and stories that illustrate the author’s ideas. At the close of each chapter, Heuertz inserts practical suggestions as to how to begin and continue with contemplative prayer-- for example, how to practice sitting still. She describes a type of breath prayer, a prayer of examen, the labyrinth. She also describes her hermitage experience. The book is inspirational as well as practical.

In our last Newsletter, we invited members to share a few thoughts on this **Reflection**

**Question:** In light of our 2018 PMN Seminar, how have you reflected on your white privilege? We received just one answer:

Mary Ann Albert. I live at Sacred Heart. Many of our service staff are black. Many need two jobs to be able to pay to live. I am aware that I want to share life here with them inclusively and respectfully.

Since this question remains highly relevant in 2020, please send us your latest insights on race, privilege, and justice!

### Abbreviated 2019-2020 Financial Report

	<b>Balance as of 6/1/19:</b>	<b>\$3339.14.</b>
<b>Income:</b>		
<b>From Dues</b>		<b>320.00</b>
<b>Total:</b>		<b>\$3,659.14</b>
<b>Expenses:</b>		
<b>Travel &amp; food</b>		<b>480.10</b>
<b>Newsletter:</b>		<b>79.16</b>
<b>Postage:</b>		<b>22.60</b>
<b>Balance on Hand (as of 6/7/20)</b>		<b>\$3,077.28</b>

If you wish to remain a member of the Pastoral Ministry Network, please use the form below to send your dues by Aug. 31, 2020. (Address inquiries to S. Carol Ann Jaeger.) Thanks!

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**PMN Membership Form 2020-21**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ministry \_\_\_\_\_  
 Enclosed is \_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00 for 2019-20

**MEMBERSHIP:** According to our records, most members receiving this issue are paid for 2019-20.

**Mail to: S. Carol Ann Jaeger.**  
**4031 W Morgan Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53221**