

Women & Christianity: Resilient Women, Emergent Church Hedgerow Seminar Spring 2017

History, who makes it and who tells it? Who decides the story line and cast of characters? Women's scholars such as Church historian Mary T. Malone retell Christian history with women widening the path of discipleship through the centuries. From the beginning a company of men and women accompany Jesus, follow him, and serve the emergent community.

In every generation women find their voices, claim authority, act creativity, confront heedless power, and participate in the upheavals of their times. Some are wives and mothers, some celibate; some reign, others preach and inspire. What do we inherit from these foremothers? What do their lives inspire in those of us who seek God today? To what is God summoning us from the future?

Join creative and resilient women in this 12-week seminar wrestling with the gospel message today, seeking the holy in a world many label secular, pondering what the Reformation asks of us at its 500th commemoration, reimagining women's leadership in our churches. Where will ecumenical dialogues take us?

When: February 6 to April 24, 2017, 6:30 pm-8:30 pm Mondays,

Where: Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Ave., St. Paul

Instructors: Susan Hames, CSJ, ABD; Rev. Barbara Lund; Mary Kaye Medinger, MA; Joan Mitchell, CSJ, PhD; Catherine Steffens, CSJ, MA; guests.

Texts

Mary T. Malone, *Women & Christianity*, Volumes I, II, III

From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 (Available online and handout in class)

“Deacons, Women, and the Call to Serve” (three segments), Fordham Center on Religion and America Media, panel, James Martin, SJ, moderator, catholicwomendeacons.org

Gary Macy, Santa Clara lecture (handout)

Supplementary Texts

Ute E. Elsen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity*

Elisabeth of Schönau, *Complete Works*

Gertrude of Helfta, *The Herald of Divine Love*

Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination*

Mary T. Malone, “Are the People of God Powerless”; *Praying with the Women Mystics*.

Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*

Hal Taussig, *The New New Testament*, which includes more than canonical early literature

Phyllis Zagano *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church*

Requirements:

- Read chapters in the syllabus. Prepare for table talk, class conversation.
- Bring to class your own questions and insights that arise in the reading.
- Create a poster of your favorite quotation

Sessions

February 6 Reading Women into History, Trajectories into the Future, Mitchell

The session will explore Women & Christianity, Vol. I, Chapter 1; it will overview the seminar and plan participants' involvement in later sessions.

1. How has restoring the Bible to Catholics furthered ecumenical dialogue in your experience?
2. What are the five stages of feminist methodology?
3. What is the importance of restoring women to Church history and Church history to women?

February 13 Women of the Gospels, Early Christian Communities and Mission, Mitchell

The gospels and other New Testament books include records of women disciples, apostles, prophets, deacons, widows, house church leaders, patrons, teachers.

Read *Women & Christianity*, Volume I, Chapter 2, "Women Disciples," and Chapter 3, "Early Christian Women"

1. How healthy is the New Testament for women? How can the bible be a saving word for women Christians?" (59)
2. How does exploring the discipleship of women affect your vision for women in the Christian Church today?
3. Describe your own ministry in the Christian community.
4. How has Ephesians 5.22-6.9 and Colossians 3.18-4.1 affected you?
5. What impedes the baptismal vision "no longer Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, man and woman in the first centuries? What impedes or animates its fulfillment now?

Research Option: Explore Lydia, Tabitha, Prisca, Phoebe, Lois and Eunice, Junia. Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*; Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament*; The books referenced in footnotes, for example, Bernadette Brooten's work.

February 20 Gnostic Heroines, Christian Martyrs, Women Using Their Heads & Hearts. Mitchell

Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Thecla, Perpetua and Felicitas; Blandina, deaconesses, Marcella; Paula; Olympias, Macrina

Read *Women & Christianity*, Volume I, Chapters 4-6

1. How do you react to the stories about Thecla and Mary Magdalene? What authority do the women claim and how? What unfinished issues of authority and ministry affect you? Who acts and speaks for God?
2. To what extent do you associate a spiritual life with an anti-body, other-worldly life that is more Gnostic than Christian? What is at stake for Mary in the proto-gospel of James?
3. What ministries did deaconesses do? What do women lose in the western Church's rejection of this ministry?

Research Option: Acts of Paul and Thecla, *The New New Testament and Searching the Scriptures*, 800-828. The Gospel of Mary Magdalene, *The New New Testament and Searching the Scriptures*, 301-634.

February 27 **Were Women Ordained or Just Blessed? Queens and Abbesses, Mitchell/Hames** *Marriages mix culture and religion. Monasteries preserve learning, create security, and places of prayer.*

Read *Women & Christianity*, Volume I, Chapters 8, 9.

1. What authority and creativity do women claim in these dark ages? How do women serve the Christian Church?
2. What about the office of deaconess? How does it persist? How does it change?
3. What authority do queens and abbesses exhibit? Who are peace-weavers? How are the women missionaries like them?

Research/Presentation Options: More on Clothilde, Radegund, Hilda, Walburga, Hugelberc, Leoba, Dhuoda, Pope Joan, and Hroswitha

Visit catholicwomendeacons.org. Watch “Deacons, Women, and the Call to Serve” Fordham Center on Religion and America Media, panel, James Martin, SJ, moderator. Visit FutureChurch.org and explore their work for women deacons.

March 6 **Second Millennium: Marriage, Celibacy, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Medinger/Mitchell** *The Gregorian Reform movement causes social upheaval in the Church and social world of the Middle Ages.*

Read *Women & Christianity*, Volume II, Chapters 1-3

1. How do the social roles of men and women change in the 11th and 12th centuries?
2. How does priestly celibacy redefine the nature of women? How do women compete with God for the souls of men?
3. How does the campaign for a celibate priesthood affect marriage? What are the uses of marriage?
4. Why is clerical control so valuable to the Church?
5. What happens to women deacons and abbesses? How do women persist in ministry?

March 13 **Mystics, Their Poetry and Purpose; Monastic Missionaries Medinger/Mitchell**

Read *Women & Christianity*, Volume II, Chapter 4
Gary Macy, Santa Clara Lecture

1. How do women express creativity, resilience, and commitment to Christian mission?

2. What happens to the role of deacons?

Research/Presentation Option: *Praying with the Women Mystics*.
View the film “Vision” about Hildegard of Bingen outside class time.