“One of the deepest forms of poverty a person can experience is isolation.”

Caritas in veritate
A Conversation with Mary E. Hunt
From a telephone interview conducted 15 September 2011

EM: Weren’t you at the GTU (Graduate Theological Union) in the 1970s?

MEH: I did the Ph.D. from 74-80 and the M.Div. at the Jesuit School of Theology (JST) from about 76 to 78. It took me about two years, because I already had the M.Div. from Harvard. I did my undergraduate at Marquette. But I was in both programs. There were a few other women in the M.Div. at JST before me. The other woman in my class was Eileen Delong. This whole question of women’s ordination was upon us and I just thought well, I’m going to have all the experience and all the credentials. I took CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) and field education, as well as courses in how to hear confessions and celebrate the sacraments. I took all of that so that I would be fully prepared, so the only way they could say I couldn’t be ordained was because I was a woman.

EM: Were you involved in Dignity?

I was aware that there was a Dignity group in the Bay Area. It was mostly men. I was also at the GTU so my spiritual life was really in conjunction with being there. For example, it was expected in the M.Div. program at JST that you would show up for the 5:00 p.m. daily mass, but there was also an active spiritual and social life at the GTU through the Office of Women’s Affairs. That name was later changed—to protect the guilty—to the Center for Women and Religion. I was part of things during the name change. I visited as GTU students tend to do, a number of Protestant churches, and maybe St. Joseph the Worker in Berkeley. But I can’t say I had much to do with the Dignity people.

EM: But you knew (Dignity’s) Eileen Delong…

MEH: I knew her because she was my classmate. I was deeply impressed with her sense of ministry and her experience in ministry. You know in some ways I was a young whippersnapper. I was in my twenties and I was a bit ahead of myself. I finished college in three years, and I did a master’s at Harvard in two years, so by the time I got to Berkeley in 1974 I was all of 23 starting a doctorate. And that’s pretty young to start a doctorate! What do you know at 23? I didn’t know much, as I look back on it.

And this was a woman who had had enormous experience in ministry with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, which had always worked with so-called wayward girls. And I think that was why she had such authority, and I don’t mean top-down authority, but was accorded such authority in terms of her ministry in the gay and lesbian community. She came to the ministry with a lot of experience. This was not her first encounter with the institutional church issues; it was not her first attempt looking at hard things; it was not her first time dealing with people who were distraught because of social conditions. So she brought enormous gifts to the ministry. And she was beloved. She was literally a beloved minister, someone gay men, especially, confided in, “confessed” to, talked over their lives with, shared with. I think she really was for many people the church, in its best sense.
EM: Do you have any sense of Sr. Eileen’s sexual orientation?

*I think she was probably straight."

*I also don’t think some people of that generation, especially the women, really reflected on themselves vis-à-vis their sexual orientation. I don’t think they had the tools to do that. That’s my impression. I remember the founding conference of what became the Conference for Catholic Lesbians. The keynote speaker was Sr. Teresa Kane, the nun who was the president of the Sisters of Mercy and the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. And she certainly wasn’t identified as a lesbian. I have no idea of her sexual preference, but she said as a Catholic woman religious her sexuality had been obscured from her. And she said she went to the New Ways Ministry workshop and saw gay and lesbian people there who loved each other and as a Christian she had to take notice. So that’s how she handled the question.

The Conference for Catholic Lesbians started in 1983 I believe, and CLOUT—Christian Lesbians Out Together—circa 1990. Those were the two major groups. I am also in possession of a SLUTS t-shirt—Seminary Lesbians Under Theological Stress. They were black t-shirts with pink dayglow letters.

[Links provided]

A number of us participated in a program for women in theological education at Grailville. It was held in the summer on a women’s farm. Some went in the summer of 74. I went in 75, others in 76. It was a six weeks program where we met with women from all over the country. Many of us were lesbians and that gave us national connections.

[Links provided]

EM: Did you know Sally Gearhart?

*Sally Gearhart wrote the first essay that I know of dealing with lesbians and religion, but then she dropped right out because she was really more interested in gay politics than in religion. There was a woman named Peggy Cleveland who was a good friend of Sally Gearhart’s, and so that was how we got to know Sally. Sally loved the radical seminary women. We were sort of an answer to her prayers. But she moved in a different direction in terms of her own spirituality, much more nature-based.*

[Links provided]

EM: What are your thoughts about “separatism” in this period?

*Many women found the primary contradiction in our spiritual lives had to do with being women, while the secondary contradiction had to do with being lesbian or bisexual, whereas for gay men the primary contradiction was in being gay. There is virtually no contradiction associated with being male in patriarchal religion. And that accounted in my view for why the women and men were so separate. It was not lesbian separatism of a political sort, though there was some of that, but it was mostly that our experiences were different. All women were alienated from the church.*
as women, whether you divorced and remarried or used birth control or had an abortion or were a lesbian, whereas for men, the fundamental alienation was related to being gay. I think the rise of people like Troy Perry and John McNeill was the rise of men who were very self-consciously and self-admittedly gay who otherwise found themselves fitting into the structures of their churches. That’s the kind of analysis I run on that period of time, especially before AIDS.

The other person who was pivotal in all of this was Kevin Gordon. He was a good friend, and he moved out to the East Coast later in his career. He came back to New York to finish a doctorate, which I guess he had started some years before at Union Theological Seminary. And by that time I think he was HIV+ and eventually had full blown AIDS and died, but during his time in New York he and I and John Boswell and Gabriel Moran and Ann Matter who teaches at Penn, among others, were a group that met every three months for a Saturday afternoon meeting and shared materials. In fact I just sent a manuscript from that group that never got published to the GTU library and the archivist there has it. Early unpublished Boswell is exciting stuff to have. Kevin was the spearhead of that. He knew all of us and brought us all together. He died, and the group continued though not as regularly and eventually, as groups do, it kind of fell apart. You know Boswell died, and Kevin died, and so forth. But I think he was a very important figure. He had been a religious brother, but then he had a psychotherapy practice and worked with a lot of Catholic men, like John McNeill did. As I said he moved to the East Coast, and was working on his doctorate when he died. Kevin headed up the task force on gay and lesbian issues under Abp. Quinn.

Mak Nyah Mariology
By Joseph N. Goh
josephgoh.org

It was almost the stuff of fairy tales. Fatine, a 36-year-old Malay woman met and fell in love with 30-year-old Ian Young, a Briton who visited Malaysia in 2006. In June 2009, they entered into a civil partnership in the United Kingdom. Fatine soon encountered immigration troubles and faced the possibility of having to return to Malaysia to reapply for a visa. The couple panicked. They worried that if Fatine returned to her home country, she would face persecution and imprisonment. Fatine was born Mohammed Fazdil bin Min Bahari, and her partnership with Young as a mak nyah was considered a violation of the tenets of Islam. Despite assurances that she would not be harmed, Fatine had every reason to fear for her safety. Malaysian mak nyah activist Nisha Ayub has described the humiliation, torture, and mental as well as sexual and emotional abuse she endured in Malaysia while being incarcerated for being who she was: “I [couldn’t] say anything, because in Malaysia, if you are a transgender person you have no rights.”

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Due to their liminal identities, mak nyahs – or male-to-female transsexuals – undergo considerable discrimination and persecution in various aspects of their lives. This is particularly true of Muslim mak nyahs, as Islam is Malaysia’s official religion and plays a major role in shaping public perceptions. Islam obliges all persons of Malay ethnicity to adhere to its teachings, with penalties for acts of transgression. As seventy to eighty percent of mak nyahs in Malaysia are Malay Muslims, Islam is a major determining factor in the tensions surrounding mak nyah issues.

Yik Koon Teh claims that a tolerant attitude towards mak nyahs was present in the colonial period from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. A total reversal occurred in 1983, when the Malaysian Conference of Rulers issued a fatwa which prohibited cross-dressing and genital reconstruction surgery (GRS) as a reaction of the Malay monarchy towards the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, who challenged their traditional rights. The fatwa was aimed at re-establishing the Malay monarchy as the ultimate Islamic moral authority. Consequently, there were new rigid definitions of khunsas (intersex persons) and mukhannas (males whose behavioral patterns mimic those of females). For Muslim mak nyahs, only khunsas were permitted to undergo GRS. All Muslim mak nyahs who were born with primary male sexual characteristics but who were seen as persistent in cross-dressing and mimicking women were considered to be sinfully obstinate. Muslim mak nyahs soon fell victim to a plethora of penalties that were often obtrusive and illogical.

The moralistic rage that is hurled against Muslim mak nyahs is one that bespeaks a gamut of complexities. The sin of mak nyahs lies in the double transgression of muddying strict binaries of gender as typified by choice of attire, comportment and bodily modifications, and of deviant sexual activity. Mak nyahs offend Islamic sensibilities that do not want to see homogender and homosexual relations in subject-positions (Michael G. Peletz). Despite fervent assertions by mak nyahs that they understand themselves as heterosexual women who desire men, Malaysian Islam continues to see them as men, based on their genitalia at birth. As far as Malaysian Islam is concerned, mak nyahs are men, and men do not marry men as it is illegal and sinful.

Fatine Young’s case is a classic example of the greater moral policing that occurs in Malaysia and which drastically affects men who desire men, women who love women and transpersons. Marriages are deemed lawful and divinely sanctioned only if they involve unions between bio-

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3 See Yik Koon Teh, “Politics and Islam: Factors Determining Identity and the Status of Male-to-Female Transsexuals in Malaysia,” in AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities, ed. Fran Martin, Peter A. Jackson, Mark McLelland and Audrey Yue (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 85.
4 “‘Malay’ means a person who professes the religion of Islam.” Federal Constitution of Malaysia, art. 160, no. 2. By constitutional definition, all Malays are Muslim. In Malaysia, Muslims constitute 61.3% of the total population.
5 See an example of a penalty for cross-dressing, for which mak nyahs are often arrested, in the Syariah Criminal Offences (Federal Territories) Act 1997.
7 A religious edict based on an Islamic matter of concern.
10 See Yik Koon Teh, The Mak Nyahs: Malaysian Male to Female Transsexuals (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2002), 100.
logical males and biological females. Evidently, the antagonism towards any attempt by *mak nyahs* to enter into relationships with male-bodied persons is completely dismissive of the inner workings of their “soul gender.”

Marcella Althaus-Reid’s queer/feminist but thoroughly indecent theology of intimacy affords me the language to parse the body trust that I see inherent in *mak nyahs* who form intimate relationships. Her theology is grounded in a body that is at once spatial and temporal, one that speaks of the “concreteness of hunger and pleasure,” and might I add for *mak nyahs*, of pain, devaluation and illegitimacy. Her concept of touching God in an intimate, erotic manner in order to affirm a theology that restores the centrality of the sexual subject gives me permission to locate the sac-credness of body trust in the intimate liaisons of *mak nyahs*, which are already by their very perform-ance transgressions of restrictive conventions and thus invalidated by mainstream religiosity. In challenging this theological violence, in deconstructing this “old alliance of theology and heterosexuality,” I propose as a model the person of Mary, especially as she figures in “the Annunciation.”

The sacred traditions of Islam and Christianity both present highly hagiographical accounts of Mary’s pregnancy, and speak of her virginity as an absolute condition for the conception of Jesus. More importantly, these traditions suggest an elevated view of women. In glorifying the miraculous event, however, the queer dislocation and transgression of Mary’s womanhood is closeted in favor of an exalted image of feminine purity.

Mary is not the passive victim of a divine insemination. The *mak nyah* reality is that a woman makes the choice of surrendering her body based on her personal faith. Mary is a daughter of dis-sension who discovers her inner holiness in the strength of decision informed by the promptings of the God that she finds in her core personhood, and whom she has known by a personal spirituality through years of lived experience. This Mary cannot be eclipsed by depictions of her as a sexless, languid, “decent” *Perawan, Bonda* or *Ratu* (Virgin, Mother or Queen) in Malaysian Islam or Malaysian Christianity.

Like all relationships, Fatine’s relationship with Ian began as one that involved multifaceted risks. Nevertheless, I posit that the risks taken by *mak nyahs* who try to forge commitments with others are unique. Their position as “non-entities” signals the insignificance and ludicrousness of their bodies according to Malaysian norms. As Nisha recalls: “I was told to walk through the [prison] cells topless…every day, vulgarities were thrown at me – the words they use are unima-

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14 Ibid.
15 Compare the Quran (19: 19-22) and Luke (1: 26-38).
17 In “Indecent Theology,” Althaus-Reid uses more explicit terms.
ginable.”¹⁹ The stigmatized bodies of mak nyahs are positioned in an unusual vulnerability when they reach out to others as sexual beings. The apprehension that Fatine and Ian expressed was not unwarranted. Could they possibly entrust Fatine’s mak nyah body to representatives of a greater body politic solely interested in condemning her as aberrant?

It is the image of the queer Mary that I reiterate to refute the criminalization that befalls mak nyahs as “desiring subjects.”²⁰ The sexual sacredness of Mary that I have depicted does not require heteronormativity. It requires a body trust that is informed by a godliness intrinsic to each human being, a spirituality that manifests a profound sense of “self-transcendence..., inner peace [and] harmony,”²¹ a spirituality that undergirded Fatine’s choice to enter into a civil union with Ian Young. It is a spirituality that must be acknowledged as responsible, mature and autonomous, that goes beyond fairy tale endings (Fatine and Ian parted ways in 2011) to a recognition of mak nyahs as Malaysian Muslim persons who are their sacred bodies.²²

God vs. Gay?
Reviewed by Deacon Brian


Tired of meeting so many people wounded by the conflict between religion and homosexuality, interfaith religious scholar Jay Michaelson has written God vs. Gay to refute the idea that the Bible opposes homosexuality. He also makes the case that religious people should favor gay rights because of religion, not in spite of it. Born into a conservative Jewish family, Michaelson eventually accepted his sexuality after a long period of self-hatred and self-deception. He learned the hard way that living a closeted life can be detrimental to developing an authentic spirituality (i.e. if people hide in the closet, then they go to the gutter for release). So his book is part autobiographical narrative based on his own coming out story, but also an accessible scholarly analysis revealing that God versus gay is a false dichotomy, and that Judaism and Christianity must ultimately embrace LGBT difference.

The book is well-written and researched, and quite persuasive (not to mention possessing a wonderful bibliography of most of the major works in this field). The first third of the book explores why fundamental Jewish and Christian values support rather than oppose LGBT inclusion. The second third shows how the clobber passages—biblical verses used to attack LGBT difference—have been misunderstood. It also explores other stories (i.e. David and Jonathan; Jesus’ healing of the centurion’s servant) that actually support loving gay relationships. The final portion argues that the full inclusion of LGBT persons is consistent with religious values.

²² A reference to Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel’s claim that “we are bodies” in I Am my Body: A Theology of Embodiment (New York: Continuum, 1995), 1.
There is nothing really new here. Yet I can honestly say this book is the best single piece of apologetics for LGBT religious welcome that I have encountered, and I think I’ve read them all! It is also refreshing to consider this material from a Jewish perspective. His grasp of the New Testament verses is excellent, and his treatment of the Hebrew Scriptures—especially Leviticus—is superb. He quotes New Testament scholar Dale Martin, who writes that “any interpretation of scripture that hurts people, oppresses people, or destroys people cannot be the right interpretation, no matter how traditional, historical, or exegetically respectable.” Following this hermeneutical principle, Michaelson presents readings that are both plausible and in accord with fundamental religious values that promote life and righteous living. Again, he relies on familiar scholarship, especially in support of the notion that most biblical texts condemning homosexuality are really opposed to idolatry and the lascivious, pansexual behavior of “pagans,” though his analysis is always presented in clear, crisp and understandable prose.

Certainly advocates of marriage equality will find this book useful since almost all the arguments against gay rights use religious texts and reasoning to back up their prejudices. In Michaelson’s view, gay subculture is often characterized by vulgarization, tawdry sex, and the fraying of personal bonds. He believes that if religion would embrace sexual diversity and allow marriage, it would begin to sanctify sexuality, combat its degradation, and create real family values within the LGBT community. Marriage equality strengthens family values, and does not destroy them as anti-gay activists claim.

It would be hard for a reasonable person to read this book and not be convinced that gay and God do go together, but sadly critiques of gay rights often involve irrational components that are difficult to refute. It is unlikely that people from the religious right will be reading Michaelson, but for LGBTs and progressive Christians in “dialogue” with the religious right, this book would be an excellent reference work and resource.

I’m hoping that this book, while representing the summit of the gay apologetics movement, might also be the last of its kind, as I can't imagine a more substantial and convincing presentation of this subject. The next phase of the discussion needs to be what LGBTs might contribute from their own sexuality and marginalization to show how all religious people and communities might benefit from these experiences. Certainly this inquiry has begun and in the penultimate chapter of his book, Michaelson gives brief attention to some of the work being done in queer theology. He does acknowledge several gay spirituality movement leaders (Toby Johnson, Harry Hay, Christian de la Huerta) and how they have helped LGBTs express their spirituality and “explore the possibilities enabled by their sexual identities,” but only fleetingly and it’s actually the weakest section of his book (though justifiably making the point that there is no single queer theology just as “there can be no single religious case for equality”).

Michaelson’s comment early in the book that he refuses to choose God over gay, as much as he refuses to choose gay over God, expresses his belief that the chasm between God and gay doesn’t really exist if we are true to our religious values, especially love, compassion, honesty, integrity, and justice. God and gay do go together, and “opening to one leads to opening to the other.” We can be thankful to Michaelson for helping us reconcile LGBT difference with our Jewish and Christian religious traditions, so that sexual diversity can be understood as part of God’s plan.
I See Hope
By Anya Delventhal

Note: Anya is the 9th-grade granddaughter of a parishioner at Newman Berkeley. This is a speech she gave at a recent school assembly.

Fear is a steel cage; confining, suffocating. You feel trapped, like there's no escape. In this world there are plenty of things to be afraid of—war, illness, poverty. One thing that you should never be afraid of, however, is being yourself.

I have a story to tell. It is of a good friend of mine who was scared of being himself. It was two years ago, I was sitting at my desk waiting for the class to start. My friend, who sat next to me, passed me a note. It said “Can you keep a secret?” I wrote back, assuring him that I could. When the note was given back to me, I saw three little words written in the corner. They said “I am gay.” When I looked back at him, he seemed so sad as if it were something to be ashamed of. Then he did the saddest thing of all. He asked me if I would still be his friend. All I could do was gape at him. How could he ask such a ridiculous question? I always stood by my friends, and I still do, so to hear him ask me that, as if I would suddenly turn my back on him, practically broke my heart. After all, we had been friends since the 2nd grade. Why would his being gay change anything? But I soon learned that not everyone felt that way.

It was about a month later that my friend made the decision to come out to his mother. When he came to school the next day he said to me, “You'll never guess what happened.” Expecting good news, I begged him to tell me. It was not good news. His mother had kicked him out of the house and locked the doors. He had been forced to call the police, just so that he could get back into his home. It was the knowledge a mother could do something so awful to her own son that helped me realize the world is not a perfect place. The world is not an accepting place. Why are we not allowed to be ourselves without facing ridicule and hatred? How is it possible that when gay teenagers are bullied by other students, teachers just stand by and watch? It is because of people like these that teenagers and adults alike are afraid to come out; that parents have to experience the pain of children taking their own lives; that there is so much ridicule and hatred.

Now, I have found several things during my short months at my new school. I have found a community filled with laughter. I have found a community that is wholesome and caring. But unfortunately, this isn't the world. But we can change all that. All we have to do is look at each other for who we are, and not the labels given to us. It may take several years, perhaps even our whole life time, but at least we would have started the change.

Do you know what I see in this new future? I see hope. I see a world where I won't have to hold my friend as he cries on my shoulder. I see a world where I won't have to stand up to strangers for calling him a fag. I see a world where, instead of swearing me to secrecy when he came out, he held his head high and proclaimed it to the world. I see a world that we can all share together. Now I won't ask you to get in a fight, or start a riot in the streets. Instead, I ask you not to let someone lock themselves in the cage of fear because they are gay. Instead, give them the key. Instead, tell them that they are safe. Instead, be their friend.
On February 18th Dignity San Francisco presented its annual Pax et Bonum awards to Rev. Jim Mitulski, Emmanuel Romero, and COLAGE.

Rev. Mitulski was a founding member of Dignity New York (1972), and has continued to work closely with Catholics and Catholic issues. A pastor for 27 years, he has served churches in New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco (1986-2000). He is currently the pastor of Berkeley’s New Spirit Community Church, which is affiliated with the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ and the Metropolitan Community Churches. He holds a B.A. from Columbia University, and the M.Div. from Pacific School of Religion. He was appointed by Mayor Willie Brown for a two-year term as head of San Francisco’s Ryan White HIV Health Service Planning Council. A close ally of Catholics for Marriage Equality in California, he led memorable reflections on the Luminous Mysteries at a CME rosary vigil at the Cathedral of Christ the Light in Oakland. He also participated in a high level Graduate Theological Union summit with GTU administrators, Oakland Bishop Salvatore Cordileone and Maggie Gallagher.

Dignity also presented an award to playwright and filmmaker Emmanuel Romero, who became involved with Dignity while he was living in Boston. After moving back to his native San Francisco Bay Area, he joined the local Dignity chapter in the fall of 2010. In coordination with Dignity and the Young Adults group at Most Holy Redeemer parish, Romero recorded and posted Catholic-oriented videos in the spirit of the It Gets Better Project. He screened several of the videos at a PFLAG panel at Christ the King church in Pleasant Hill last September. Dignity San Francisco co-chair Veronica Abrickis described Romero as “a gift to our community.”

Romero is a member of Bindlestiff Studio, which produced “Viewer Discretion Advised (Tape 96),” Romero’s LGBT-themed play, excerpted in a earlier issue of this newsletter. The work was eventually adapted into an award-winning short film by Drew Stephens, a member of San Francisco’s Scary Cow film co-op. It was shown at four film festivals in 2011, and will continue on the festival circuit in 2012. Romero volunteers at Martin de Porres House of Hospitality, and works full time as a science writer.

Dignity presented a third award to COLAGE, a national movement of children, youth, and adults with one or more LGBT parents. COLAGE began in 1990 when six youth who had attended the annual Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International established Just for Us, a predecessor to COLAGE. They also started a newsletter. Today, with its national headquarters in San Francisco, COLAGE has chapters in many U.S. cities, including New York, Boston, Washington DC, Seattle, and St. Louis.

H8 Update

In a two-to-one decision, a panel of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has concluded that Proposition 8 violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, serving “no purpose” and having “no effect, other than to lessen the status and human dignity of gays and lesbians in California.” The decision upholds an earlier ruling by Judge Vaughan
Walker. The proponents have requested a hearing before the full 9th Circuit. A recent Field poll cited in the Sacramento Bee found that 59% of Californians support marriage equality, while only 34% are opposed.

Washington

Catholic Gov. Chris Gregoire recently signed marriage equality into law in Washington State. Gay Catholic Sen. Ed Murray of Seattle, who sponsored the bill in the Senate, welcomed everyone to “the other side of the rainbow,” noting that whatever the future should hold, “nothing will take this moment in history away from us.” Within hours, opponents filed the paperwork for a nullifying ballot measure. They must gather 120,577 signatures by June 6. If they do, same-gender couples will not permitted to marry until after the issue is decided by popular vote in November (assuming a victory).

Maryland

Today at 5:00 p.m. Catholic Gov. Martin O’Malley will sign marriage equality into law in historically Catholic Maryland. O’Malley has defended marriage equality as consistent with what we know to be the teaching of the church concerning universal human dignity: “This issue has taken a lot of energy, as well it should, and I’m very proud of the House of Delegates and also the Senate for resolving this issue on the side of human dignity, and I look forward to signing the bill,” O’Malley said when the Senate approved the legislation 25-22.

Catholics for Equality credits the “leadership and determination of our Catholic brother and bill lead sponsor, Maryland State Senator Robert Garagiola.” Other groups and individuals who lobbied for the legislation included Maryland Faith for Equality, Sr. Jeannine Gramick, and Tyler Clementi’s Catholic cousin Jennifer Segro, who published a terrific op ed in the Advocate.

http://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2012/02/02/sister-jeannine-gramick-in-annapolis/
http://www.advocate.com/Politics/Commentary/Oped_Marriage_Equality_Corrects_What_Stands_Against_Love/

Edwin Cardinal O’Brien described the historic achievement as “a grave threat to the future stability of the nuclear family and the society it anchors.” He promised that the unelected church hierarchy would “eagerly and zealously engage its 500,000 members in overturning this radical legislation, and will join with the hundreds of thousands of others in this Archdiocese and throughout Maryland in aggressively protecting the God-given institution of marriage.” Anti-gay activists plan to gut Maryland equality by referendum in November.

Maine

WhyMarriageMattersMaine.org

These ballot initiatives are no longer something to fear, as so many recent polls confirm a sea change in U.S. attitudes regarding marriage and LGBT civil rights. LGBT activists in Maine have thus decided to seize the initiative. They have drafted a marriage equality ballot measure to be decided by voters in that State in November. They recently submitted 105,000 signatures, significantly more than the 57,277 required for verification by the Secretary of State. Statewide polling shows that support for marriage equality in Maine is now at 54 percent. The coalition work-
ing to pass the initiative includes Equality Maine, Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders, the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, the Maine Women’s Lobby, Engage Maine, and the Religious Coalition Against Discrimination (RCAD).

DOMA

U.S. District Court Judge Jeffrey S. White has ruled that the Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional. The decision was aptly summarized by Tara Borelli, staff attorney in Lambda Legal’s Western Regional Office in Los Angeles: “The Court recognized the clear fact that a law that denies one class of individuals the rights and benefits available to all others because of their sexual orientation violates the constitutional guarantee of equality embodied in the Fifth Amendment. The Court agreed with us that sexual orientation discrimination by the government should receive heightened scrutiny under the constitution. It then concluded that DOMA could not meet that standard, and that there was not even a rational justification to deny Karen Golinski the same spousal health care benefits that her heterosexual co-workers receive.” Golinski, a longtime employee of the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, had not been allowed to enroll her wife, Amy Cunninghis, in the employee health plan. The anti-gay side of the case was argued by attorneys retained by the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives. The Obama administration announced last year that it would no longer defend DOMA. A similar ruling that found DOMA unconstitutional is on appeal in the First Circuit.

Letter from John McNeill

My documentary Taking a Chance on God is making the rounds of film festivals. Next to play it will be the Miami festival on May 3rd. Other festivals that have agreed to show it include Durango in Colorado, Vancouver, London gay pride festival, etc. A trailer can be seen online at www.TakingaChanceonGod.com. God bless.

Letter from Tom Luce

Wide awake since 4 a.m., it's now 6:20 a.m. Thursday, on my 3rd day of anti-pneumonia antibiotics, still wheezing and I'm seething over your having seduced me with your education piece in Communion.

You tricked me into reading the papal bull on youth and “Educating for Justice and Peace.” I took unavailable time and energy from very necessary work on Haitian social justice making because I thought you had a revelation about this Joseph Ratzinger's treatise. I was seduced by one of our most powerful emotions, holiness, sublimely connecting with all that is so good about existing, breathing (I'm much more aware of this particular feeling as I gurgle). Aspiring to be good and doing good, thinking/feeling/existing by embracing life with its most ugly aspects and making it whole.

Boy this is the stuff that gets those of us who have given our lives in the service of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, in celibacy, in family, in poverty, the whole nine yards, saving the world for Jesus. I've been seduced. And I'm seething. Because I've been tricked into thinking that people like us (would-be theologians, but gay) have to now start the latest soul-jerk and ignore,
whitewash, segregate, disappear, the filthy soul-killing actions of this man who is the chief au-
 thor of anti-gay screed and orchestrator of world-wide hatred of gays.

Maybe if I went back and read again I might find that you were heading in the same direction as I right now, but my first reading told me over and over again that this man omitted restating his killing actions (in the same issue when you feature another suicide) as he held out and up the lofty calling of youth and all of us to doing social justice. I think this is seduction maybe not classic, personally by you, but seduction just the same that got me to read nothing new because this is not a holy man opening up to a significant change that will save us all.

From Eugene:

Thanks, Tom. Your letter raises a question I cannot answer.

I hesitated to present my reading of the pope's message, but I was indeed “won over” by it. Not won over to the pope necessarily, but to the message. I do think the global RC campaign against LGBT civil rights is a direct contradiction to the message. On the other hand, the papacy is a symbol and instrument that Catholics cannot really do without, anymore than Anglicans can do without the Book of Common Prayer.

One of the principles I took from the message is that dialogue and openness are requisite to the work of peace and justice, and if the pope would actually practice what he Preaches he would have to engage the LGBT community and be willing to change.

In general, I want to show imperiled LGBT Catholics how to read and translate the tradition; in other words, how to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Shrimp Stew
By Mirabelle Vergara

Whole, unshelled shrimp
Long beans (or string beans)
Japanese eggplant
Red bell pepper
Onion
Garlic
oil
1 can thick coconut milk
Salt and pepper
Chili paste
Fish sauce (patis)
Lemon

Thaw shrimp (if frozen) and drain. Fry shrimp in a little oil until partly done. Remove from skil-
let and set aside. Sauté minced garlic and chopped onion. Add coconut milk, salt, pepper, and a little chili paste. Let reduce. Add string beans. Re-add shrimp. Add eggplant and bell pepper last. Adjust final taste with patis and lemon (if desired). Sauce should be thick.
Sisters Exhibit Sacramento
www.womenandspirit.org

Through photographs, artifacts and documentary material drawn from the archives of many congregations, “Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America” tells the story of religious sisters in the U.S. from colonial days through the present. The exhibit will run through June 3 at the California Museum of History, Women and the Arts in Sacramento. The museum is open 10-5, except on Sundays (when it is open 12-5), and is located at 1020 O Street, one block south of the State Capitol Park.

Lenten Soup Speakers SF

St. John of God 1290 5th Avenue at Irving in San Francisco is hosting its annual Lenten soup series Fridays at 6:30 p.m. (speakers at 7:00). This year’s theme is “50 Years Since Vatican II: Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Going.” Tom Buckley addressed historical issues this past Friday. The remaining speakers are (in order) Vincent Pizutto, Lizette Larson-Miller, Mariana Farina, Mary Ann Donovan, and Jorge Aquino. They will address theology, liturgy, ecumenism, women, and liberation theology, respectively. To insure there is enough soup, please RSVP to Broad_W_Ba@yahoo.com and judithgrady19@gmail.com.

New Ways Symposium March 15-17
http://www.newwaysministry.org/symp2012.html


LA Congress Anaheim March 23-25
www.recongress.org

The annual Archdiocese of Los Angeles-sponsored Religious Education Congress will take place March 23-25 at the Anaheim Convention Center, 800 West Katella Avenue in Anaheim. This year’s theme is “Voice Infusing Life.” Workshops include “Christian Morality 2012: Relationships Trump Rules” by Richard C. Sparks, CSP (Friday); “Catholic Identity and Homosexuality” by Greer Gordon and panel (Saturday); “The Death Penalty is a Pro-Life Issue” by Sr. Helen Prejean (Saturday); “The Prophetic Voices of Mary, Elizabeth and Anna” by Sr. Barbara E. Reid (Saturday); “Religion and Politics” by Thomas J. Reese, SJ (Sunday); “Feeling God’s Voice Through Physical and Mystical Touch: Some Sacramental and Mystical Images” by Ron Rolheiser, OMI (Sunday); and “No Greater Love: The Path toward True Intimacy” by Fran Ferder, FSPA, and John Heagle (Sunday).

Catholics for Marriage Equality was established in June 2009 to advance civil marriage equality through prayer, presence and education. Address newsletter submissions and correspondence to co-editors Eugene McMullan (wmcmullan@ses.gtu.edu) and Kara Speltz (kara4peace@aol.com).