

Who Me, Tired?

by Christine Schenk, CSJ

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People often ask me: "Don't you ever get tired and want to give up? It seems impossible that the Church (the government, the world bank, the school board...insert selection of your choice) will ever change... and isn't the deck already stacked against you? Change happens so slowly, why bother?" When I hear this question, it reminds me of a quote by A.D.T Whitney that has stayed with me since I first heard it as a young nun: "It is almost always when things are all blocked up and impossible that a happening comes. If you are sure you are looking and ready, that is all you need. God is turning the world around all the time."

It's not that I don't get tired of my work at FutureChurch. I do. And I get discouraged too. But after ten years of education and advocacy in behalf of a more inclusive priesthood so that the Eucharist (in all its fullness of meaning) remains at the heart of our Catholic tradition, I can honestly say that the mission energizes me more than ever. In fact, the last ten years have provided the best schooling in faith that I have ever received.

You see, each time my fatigue and discouragement threaten to overwhelm, a happening comes. Once when our computer was stolen shortly after the Pope announced it was definitive all time teaching forever that women could never be priests, I really thought I would lose it. To top it off, there was a raging snow-storm in Cleveland and when I left the office at 9:00 p.m. my car battery had died. As I tromped through the snow to the nearby Catholic Worker house for help, I didn't disguise my sour, bitterly complaining mood: "Just what do you think you are doing anyhow, God," I asked angrily inside. At the Catholic Worker house, a young woman responded to my knock. She quickly got her car keys and proceeded to help me jump start my car. Engine humming nicely, I thanked her and asked her name before she left. "Grace," she said simply. "My name is Grace."

A coincidence? Yes. But also "a happening" or as Carl Jung would call it a "synchronicity." (A "synchronicity" is a high falutin word for grace manifested in the material plain right at the moment you need it most). Whatever you call it, it was what I needed that night to know that our mission at FutureChurch was part of the work of God's Spirit. I was not to give up because "Grace" would always be there to help me, and indeed grace has always been there. There are many other stories I could tell. Someday I would like to write them down in a book of "learnings" received in the Spirit's school of faith.

All of my stories have a similar theme. If our calling or mission really is from God, then God knows what to do to protect and nurture it. In the end the energy for doing good is God's own, not only or solely ours. We do good because we must, because it is what gives us joy, because it gives joy to the God we love. We do not tire of doing good because doing good is actually a positive addiction. It is participation in the goodness of God and is its own reward. When we tire, we return to the God place within to reconnect with the Spirit energy which leads and guides. Isaiah 40: 28-31 says it best: "Trust in the Lord you shall not tire, serve the Lord, you shall not weaken...for the Lord's own strength will uphold you. You shall renew your life and live." Let's hear it for God's own strength. Without it life is very boring. With it, who knows what can happen? "God is turning the world around all the time."

Christine Schenk, CSJ, is director of FutureChurch and coordinator of the "Call for National Dialogue on Women in Church Leadership" project.

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Plan a St. Mary of Magdala Celebration This July

With over 280 celebrations of St. Mary of Magdala last year and widespread media coverage in both secular and diocesan papers, grassroots planners are hoping to increase the number of prayer services this July. The Mary of Magdala celebrations are an outgrowth of the *Women in Church Leadership* project which was developed by FutureChurch in partnership with Call to Action. Started three years ago, this project has attracted nearly 5000 grassroots activists who educate about the radical inclusivity of the historical Jesus and advocate in behalf of lay ministers in the Catholic Church, over 82% of whom are women.

Last year's July celebrations were held in parishes, religious communities, schools and private homes. Many parishes expected to attract only ten or twelve people and were pleasantly surprised when forty or fifty came even in mid summer. Optimally, the celebration includes a presentation by a local biblical expert showing that nothing in Scripture says that Mary of Magdala was a prostitute. Instead all four gospels name her as the first witness to the Resurrection.

Since the feast falls on a Sunday this year, the service also features prayers which could be used for the Saturday evening Mass, as well as a Sunday prayer or vesper service. The new resources now available include videos, a script for a ten minute vignette, a prayer service featuring Jesus' women disciples, and two audio tapes featuring biblical scholars Fr. George Smiga, author of *Pain and Polemic: Anti-Judaism in the Gospels*, and Sr. Mary Thompson, author of *Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader*.

There are also various ways to support this project. Send for a free St. Mary of Magdala prayer service and brochure. Ask your local parish, religious order or small faith community to sponsor a celebration. Encourage priests, pastoral ministers or lay leaders from several parishes to sponsor celebrations at the same time. Encourage the religion writer in your secular and diocesan papers to do a story or write your own op ed piece—FutureChurch has a sample op ed piece and organizing kit. If July isn't the best time for your worshipping community, use the resources to sponsor a celebration anytime during the year. And notify FutureChurch about your celebration so it can be posted on the Call to Action and FutureChurch web sites (www.cta-usa.org and www.futurechurch.org).

For more information, contact Future Church, 15800 Montrose Ave., Cleveland, OH 44111, telephone (216) 228-0869, fax (216) 228-0947, e-mail info@futurechurch.org, website www.futurechurch.org.

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