

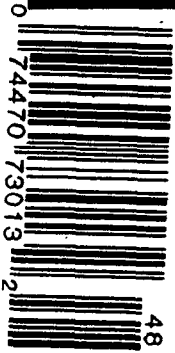
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Women and the Bible

Groups strive to 'break open' their stories

Pam Thomas keeps playing over in her mind the Bible story about a woman who suffered a hemorrhage for 12 years — and thus was shunned for being “unclean” — until Jesus healed her on the Sabbath (Mark 5:25).

“We do a lot of prejudging, and worry about how people are judging us,” Thomas said. But one lesson learned from the story, she said, was that no matter what our opinions are of our brothers and sisters, “We need to reach out and offer something, take a risk.”

The reason she remembers the scene so well is she played the part of Jesus in a role-playing at Our Lady of Mercy Church, Greece, in a women’s spirituality circle this fall. She still sees the other women involved moving away from the suffering woman, who during Jesus’ time would have been considered ritually unclean.

“Everybody got a different perspective than just reading the story,” she said. “I am finding some wonderful parallels in our own life and the 1990s, and the lives of the women in the Bible, their feelings, reactions, situations, in spite of distance and time between us.”

Similarly, Kati Tobin recalls playing the part of the synagogue leader who was indignant that Jesus healed the bent-over woman on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10). The role-playing was in a women’s spirituality program called “Women of Hope” at St. John the Evangelist Church on Humboldt Street in Rochester.

“My spirituality from it has benefited greatly,” Tobin said. “It has brought the Bible to life for me. I didn’t have the attitude I had when I was a kid. By the time I was a senior in high school I was tired of reading it.”

Not all women’s spirituality groups involve role playing. But it is one way such groups are studying women of the Bible and what their stories have to say about their own lives. Participants also have named the unnamed women of the Bible; journaled from the perspective of the biblical characters; meditated and prayed; quilted; and studied and discussed the scholars’ latest books.

The groups’ aim, said Sister Chris Treichel, OSF, is “to break open the story.” She added, “It’s filling in blanks. You only have a kernel of the story. It’s filling in feelings a person might have had.”

Sister Treichel and Pat Curtis, pastoral associates at St. John, started Women of Hope to give women a chance to gather, share experiences, and explore spirituality, Sister Treichel said. It expanded from a continuing education session they offered teachers five years ago. Now the two offer multi-week fall and winter programs and a weekend retreat — three programs a year.

The program is the chance for “touching the God which gives them courage to be assertive, grace-filled women in the world, to know they have power within them in the church, society and their life,” said Sister Treichel, also chairperson of the diocesan Liturgical Commission.

“When I heard about it, I was drawn right away,” Tobin said. “I feel there’s a real need for people in general, not just women, to

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STORY BY KATHLEEN SCHWAR
PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREG FRANCIS



I commend to you
Phoebe our sister, who is
(also) a minister of the
church at Cenchreae ...
Greet Prisca and Aquila,
my co-workers in Christ
Jesus ... greet also the
church at their house. ...
Greet Andronicus and
Junia ... they are
prominent among the
apostles.”

— Romans 16:1-7

Roni Antenucci, left, both small photos, and Fran Otis during a “Conversation with Women of the Early Church” meeting at St. Catherine of Siena Church, Mendon, Dec. 2.