

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE BOOK BY JO PIAZZA—IF NUNS RULED THE WORLD**

*By Sister Jane Zoltek*

I began reading this powerful book on Ash Wednesday and read a chapter each day of the first ten days of Lent 2015.

Jo Piazza writes candidly about hardworking women in today's world who devote their energy and time into making other people's lives better. These nuns she writes about have a calling of a faith they use daily to create change in our world. In my eyes these are just amazing women who possess a certain type of heroism and show it by their love and concern for the poor and underprivileged in our society.

The women reviewed are very determined to make a difference in our world today. They are devout and, yes, proactive women who are in their own way addressing social issues in our society. In my estimation these nuns are the very best hope for our Church in 2015 if we, the Church, want to remain relevant in the world in which we live.

As I read each account, I found a deep respect inside of me for every one of those women. I became acutely aware of the activism and compassion they execute every day.

Who will ever forget 84-year-old Megan Rice, born in 1930 and a member of the Holy Child Jesus Order. She was sentenced to nearly three years in prison for breaking into a nuclear weapons complex and defacing a bunker holding bomb-grade uranium. She wanted to call attention to the money the U.S. government spends on weapons and the military, which is far more than necessary.

An advocate of the poor, Sister Simone Campbell, age 70, an attorney and Executive Director of NETWORK since 2000, organized NUNS ON THE BUS. She traversed parts of the country in the summer of 2012 challenging Paul Ryan's Republican budget that threatened to severely undermine the well-being of the hurting poor and struggling middle-class people. She is a member of the Sisters of Social Service.

Then we have Sister Jannine Gramick, born in 1942, who was a Notre Dame sister and now belongs to the Sisters of Loretto. Her fight is for gays, lesbians, and transgenders. She believes with all her heart that they are denied basic human dignity. She focuses not on sexual ethics but on social justice. What is done to them is a clear affront to the social justice teachings of the Church, she says.

I was surprised to find out that Sister Madonna Buder is known as the “Iron Nun.” She ran her first race at the age of 48 and since then has completed 340 races. She became a Sister of the Good Shepherd but has since left that order to become a member of the Sisters for Christian Community. They are a group of religious women that calls for a more participatory vocation in which all women are considered co-equals.

Hats off to Sister Joan Dawber, the Executive Director of LifeWay Network which she founded in 2007. A Sister of Charity in Halifax, she tries to combat human trafficking by providing safe housing for women who have been trafficked and to offer them an education. She also educates the public about human trafficking.

Sister Nora Nash is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis in Philadelphia. She is manager for the congregation’s assets in community development loans, social justice grants, and active shareholder advocacy, and is a member of Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. She is acutely aware that corporations have so much control over the lives of ordinary people, the meek, the hungry, and the poor that they should have a responsibility to take care of them. Kudos, Sister Nora Nash!

I’m still reeling from Sister Dianna Mae Ortiz’s account of how she was raped and tortured during Guatemala’s years of internal oppression while she served as a missionary in Guatemala in 1989. She was born in 1961 and belongs to the Ursuline Order. Today she lives with those scars and works with survivors of torture and coalitions for the abolition of torture.

WOW! What a ministry! Sister Tesa Fitzgerald, a Sister of St. Joseph, is dedicated to transforming the lives of female offenders and their children. She works in Long Island City in Queens and spent 25 years as the founding Executive Director

of Hour Children. She became a foster parent in 1989 to eight children of incarcerated mothers. She runs a very successful organization.

I can easily relate to Sister Maureen Fiedler, a Sister of Loretto and the host, executive producer, and creator of a public radio program, "Interfaith Voices," which is heard on 62 radio stations in North America. For more than three decades she has been involved in interfaith activities. She works for social justice, racial and gender equality, and peace. Sister went on a five-week hunger strike in the last northern state (Springfield, Illinois) to hold out on ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment. It failed to receive the 60% vote which was necessary. She herself has no desire to become a priest and believes that Pope Francis will uphold the Church's stance on women priests.

Sister Donna Quinn, a Sinsinawa Dominican, was born July 26, 1937 and champions rights of women to use contraception, seek ordination, and end unwanted pregnancies. I salute her for her tenacity about causes that receive little approbation from today's clergy.

These 10 women have earned my admiration, respect and support. Their lives and prophetic voices remind me of the call to serve and be with the poor. Their individual lives are a demonstration of the ultimate witnessing to this call. These sisters continue to serve as modern models of faith, service, and justice through action. They offer inspiring, provocative counter-stories that certainly will cause debate from many sectors of life.

They are great human beings with so much love and empathy for their fellow humans living on this earth today. They have dedicated themselves to the betterment of everyone living in this world. They certainly didn't settle for a peaceful, quiet, sheltered life in a convent. They live their lives imitating Christ each day and aren't afraid to speak their truth.

I wholeheartedly believe these nuns are challenged to make present the joy of the gospel today, and to offer timely inspiration to others and to the life of an imperfect church.

We live in a society constantly searching for ways to live an authentic life. These nuns certainly are living authentic lives in their own unique ways. I was greatly surprised when reading about these women and what they have accomplished to date. I am in awe of them and wish them the best as they continue to minister in their various ways.

Reading this book has been a wonderful and enlightening adventure of my spirit. As you read the pages of this book, you may want to share the journey of these 10 women with others. You may find that discussing the ministries of these women may add a wonderful adventure to your experience.

I found these women are on a unique life journey... on a quest to live a life of meaning and purpose, of ever-increasing love and connection to the poor and disadvantaged. I found each account a fascinating profile of a sister in her chosen ministry. They overcame any fears they may have had and took risks, creating new visions for their lives. They planted the seeds and took action to bring them to fruition. They listened to their inner voice and their intuition, which encouraged them to follow their heart's song, seek their own truths, and speak them aloud... with action.

After I finished reading the last account of the ten women featured in this book, I experienced an epiphany! I began to wonder why the writers in our own congregation have not picked up a pen, perhaps boarded a plane, and gone off to interview and write about our own SSJ-TOSF's who have a story of their own to tell because each one of them also is creating change for the betterment of our society in 2015. We do have women who face challenges with strength, and they do it in their own way, gaining courage and wisdom in the process.

I am saddened that I completed reading this mind-blowing book about the 10 sisters on a mission. I wish that I could have read many more accounts of women religious in our world today who are continuing the mission of Jesus. Perhaps there will be a sequel of other sisters who are doing marvelous things and changing the world one ministry at a time. I hope that reading this book will also make you speechless when you read the amazing, enlightening stories of the nuns. This book is clear, easy to read, and is one ah-ha moment after the other.