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about women word spirit

The aim of **women word spirit** is to provide a network of support which will:

- *empower women to grow and mature in their spiritual life*
- *create new ways of worshipping together*
- *encourage and enable women to engage in theology*
- *work towards the participation of women in every aspect of church life*

Women Word Spirit was founded as Catholic Women's Network. In November 2005, following consultation with the membership, the Annual Gather voted to adopt the name Women Word Spirit - a more inclusive and descriptive name which also recognises that the membership has always included many women from other denominations or none.

Catholic Women's Network was founded at a conference in 1984, "*Called to Full Humanity*". 66 women attended and went through a process of 'denouncing' aspects of church which inhibit women's participation and 'announcing' a new vision of how church could be. The group identified strategies for bringing about change in ourselves and in our church institutions and identified 'networking' as the organising principle. That is we seek to bring together like-minded women but leave them free to structure their activities as seems best to them.

From the beginning CWN, now WWS, has been a national network of local groups as well as individuals. The quarterly journal *network* is the main way we keep in touch, share news and ideas, and test out our theology. There are regular events,

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including the annual gathering, weekend meetings, public lectures and day workshops. Local groups offer support to members, and a place in which to share experiences and celebrate women's liturgies. In 1990, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2006 we held our own remembrance of the Easter mysteries over four days.

WWS feels that the contribution women can make as responsible Christians, gifted in the spirit, to the RC Church is often ignored; in particular women are excluded from the ordained ministry and thereby from the leadership in the church. Many women have found that they had to leave the church, or sit on the margins, in order to be true to themselves. WWS offers a place for these women as well as for those who remain active in Catholicism, each group bringing insights into women's spiritual needs and how they may be nurtured in believing communities. We find strength from sharing experiences, feelings, ideas and visions.

We have made links locally, nationally and internationally, with other groups of Christian women, women of other faiths and with women's organisations working for equal rights and justice for women in society.

By embracing those who stay in church structures and continuing to dialogue with those who have moved on, WWS is a sign of hope for women.

Membership is open to all women who support the aims of WWS. Men can subscribe to the Journal.

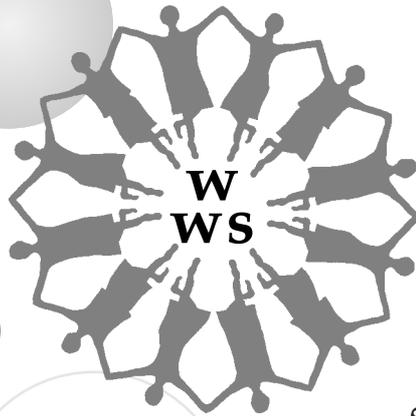
in sisterhood



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links and networking with other women's organisations



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links with other women's organisations

National Alliance of Women's Organisations

NAWO is an alliance of around 200 women's organisations representing approximately five million women, and providing a unique opportunity to women's groups and organisations promoting women's rights and equality to come together. Their aim is to encourage networking and mutual support and to ensure that the voice of all women is heard in all areas of public life. NAWO works at European level through the European Women's Lobby and is one of four official co-ordinating bodies for elections and liaison with the lobby based in Brussels. It can effectively represent the priorities of the women's movement in the UK at European level.

www.nawo.org.uk

National Board of Catholic Women

NBCW is a consultative body of The Bishops conference, a forum for dialogue to represent the views of catholic women in the broadest possible way to the Bishops and convey back their views. Membership is for national catholic women's groups, national catholic lay organisations with a significant number of women members, and reps from each diocese who network locally. It is recognised by the United Nations as an NGO and has sent delegates to international meetings so there has been a catholic non-Vatican voice. WWS members have been very active in supporting and contributing to the work of the Board.

www.nbcw.org



European Women's Synod

EWS is an association for all women living in Europe regardless of ethnic, national, religious or social origin. The objective is to have a part in building Europe - bigger than the European Union - as a continent of peace and justice for everyone living on its soil. The Synod aims to empower women to discuss their own affairs in their own ways and to set the agenda in the churches and society. The name 'synod' is used in its original Greek sense - to be on the way together - and to reclaim the word to denote a more inclusive process than the present synodical structures operating in most churches. The EWS works through national and European assemblies of women. Any woman may attend.

www.synodalia.net

Other networking groups (women and men)

Association for Inclusive Language lumen@globalnet.co.uk

Catholics for a Changing Church brydenbrook@talk21.com

Catholic Women's Ordination / Women's Ordination Worldwide

patbrown19fv@hotmail.com

RC Caucus of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement

lgcm_rccaucus@hotmail.com

Living Spirituality Network spirituality@ctbi.org.uk

European Network - Church on the Move brydenbrook@talk21.com

Catholics for a Free Choice www.catholicsforchoice.org

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starting a group

1. getting going

(a) **personal contact** is the most reliable method not only at the beginning but through the life of the group. Discuss the idea of a group with one or two women you know well and can trust. Talk about what you might accomplish together. See if you can enlarge this group to four or six women. You have started!

(b) **look at the existing groups** in your parish or diocese, neighbourhood or nearest large town for groups which may have attracted women like yourself. For example, Women in Theology groups, Justice and Peace groups, Adult Education classes especially to do with women's issues or religion, etc.

(c) when you have gathered a half dozen women, you might **plan an event which you could then advertise and so attract further women.** For example, a picnic or an outing, a few meetings to discuss a particular book, or to hear an invited speaker and discuss her talk. Every meeting should include an element of liturgy and celebration; see suggestions from existing local groups. Try advertising in your parish bulletin, in the diocesan newsheet, the local paper or local library notice board, etc.

(d) **talk over your plans** and any difficulties with other members of WWS, starting with the contact secretary or area contacts.

2. important decisions to be taken as soon as possible.

(a) **where to meet.** This may be in one member's home or by turn in different homes. Or there may be a parish meeting room or parlour in a convent you can use. Weigh the pros and cons of 'personal' space and 'impersonal' space. Try to be comfortable and uninterrupted and private.

(b) **frequency of meetings.** Monthly tends to be the general norm. However, a four week interval between meetings can be too long. Try a series of meetings every three weeks.

(c) **golden rules** for each meeting:

- (i) begin at the advertised time and finish on time.
- (ii) plan at least four meetings in advance, agreeing on the dates, the place, the time and the topic.
- (iii) exchange names addresses, phones &/or emails of participants.



- (iv) be inclusive! Develop a policy of welcoming new members.
- (v) nurture friendship and trust among members by setting aside the first ten to twenty minutes of every meeting to sharing in pairs 'what has been happening in your life since the last meeting'.
- (vi) allow time at every meeting for prayer/liturgy - see suggestions included in this pack

3. *networking*

- (a) **watch for the dates of the Core Meeting.** Send news of your meetings, your triumphs and despairs to be included in the round-up of news from local groups. Send directly to the Editor of *network*.
- (b) **watch for the copy dates for the next issue of *network*.** The editor of the newsletter, Pat Pinsent, is always very pleased to receive articles, book reviews, poems, cartoons or letters from individual members or the group. Use the newsletter to advertise your meetings.
- (c) **encourage your members to attend the Annual Gathering,** and any WWS weekend or day events, so as to be in touch with what is happening around the country.

4. *some suggested books & sources*

<i>20 Years of Spiritual Journeying</i>	WWS
<i>death and renewal of creation: a womem's 4 day Easter event</i>	WWS
<i>Making Liturgy: creating rituals for worship and life</i> edited by McEwan, Pinsent, Pratt & Seddon	CANTERBURY PRESS
<i>Introducing Feminist Images of God:</i> Mary Grey	SHEFFIELD ACADEMIC PRESS
<i>Outrageous Pursuit of Hope:</i> Mary Grey	DARTON LONGMAN & TODD
<i>Rediscovering Friendship:</i> Elizabeth Moltmann Wendell	SCM
<i>Celebrating Women:</i> edited by Ward, Wild, Morley	SPCK
<i>Dissident Daughters:</i> edited by Teresa Berger	WJK PRESS
<i>Models of God:</i> Sally McFague	SCM PRESS LTD
<i>Super, Natural Christians:</i> Sally McFague	SCM PRESS LTD
<i>Faith & Feminism:</i> Nicola Slee	DARTON LONGMAN & TODD
<i>Praying like a woman:</i> Nicola Slee	SPCK
<i>Introducing Body Theology:</i> Lisa Isherwood & Liz Stuart	SCM PRESS LTD
<i>An A to Z of Feminist Theology:</i> ed. Lisa Isherwood & Dorothea McEwan	SHEFFIELD ACADEMIC PRESS
<i>Outrageous Pursuit of Hope:</i> Mary Grey	DARTON LONGMAN & TODD
<i>Sexism & Godtalk:</i> Rosemary Radford Ruether	SCM PRESS LTD

LUMEN BOOKS; also WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRE (Ianthé Pratt)
MAIL ORDER: 36 Court Lane, Dulwich, London SE21 7DR tel: 0208 693 1438

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examples of local groups

WOMEN GATHER FOR WORSHIP IN LONDON

We meet in the hall of Our Lady's Church, Fulham, on the first Friday of every month except July (when we meet in a member's garden) and August. The time is 7.30pm and we bring food to share. At each gathering a woman or two women together plan the liturgy for that evening. Each has a different style and there is no set format apart from always going round the circle for each woman to say her name. Hopefully, this encourages new women to feel welcome and immediately part of the group. Each liturgy provides a format for participation of those present often in pairs or in groups of three or four. We share some food, not always bread and wine but appropriate to the theme. We eat our meal together after the ritual and it feels an integral part of the liturgy. There are usually about a dozen women present on any one evening. We come from a variety of Christian denominations. Some women attend their local church while others have left organised religion behind. The occasion is always one of great variety and richness. One of the group acts as co-ordinator and makes sure there is always a planner for the liturgy. Everyone helps with the clearing up and we leave by 10pm. *contact:* Lillalou Hughes tel: 020 8764 6743.

TYNE AND WEAR GROUP

The Tyne and Wear group meets on the first Friday of the month. We have a shared supper and the evening generally ends with a liturgy. On some evenings we are joined by a speaker; on other nights we talk about issues of mutual interest and concern. Numbers at meetings vary from a handful to a dozen.

In the last year we've had a meeting with a former MEP who talked with us about the moral dilemmas of being a politician. We've talked about CWN/WWS over the past 20 years with a story-telling session on our CWN/WWS journeys and we've looked at what our focus should be in the coming decade. We've celebrated the Epiphany with a Wise Women party - everyone has to come as a wise woman and tell her story - been led in a special Candlemas liturgy and celebrated summer with a barbeque.

Members have been involved in supporting the Make Poverty History campaign. A number of us helped out at an event in the

centre of Newcastle to collect signatures on Fair Trade postcards - and despite one of the wettest days of the year we were very successful. Several of us also travelled to Edinburgh for the rally on July 2nd.



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A number of members also continue to be involved with the North East Ecumenical Women's Group which is currently working to raise awareness about domestic violence, in partnership with the Child Protection Officers from the north east churches. They organised a conference in May and are now planning a training programme for clergy and church workers. NEEWG also organised a quiet afternoon for prayer and reflection 'Preparing for Christmas'. New members are always welcome.

contact: Brid Fitzpatrick, tel: 0191 243 1782,
e-mail: bridfitzpatrick@blueyonder.co.uk

Brid Fitzpatrick 2005

EAST MIDLANDS

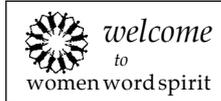
Because most of us are carers or have family responsibilities that make evening meetings difficult, we usually meet on the first Wednesdays at Ruth's house. Ruth is the 'anchor' and provides tea, the rest of us bring cakes. Four or five people come although if we were ever all present the number would be nearer ten.

The primary purpose of the group is to spend time together, and talk and listen. Several of us are also involved in justice and peace in the Nottingham diocese, and in social action such as work with refugees and asylum seekers, so current political and social issues are discussed. We often talk over what we've been reading. We had one interesting afternoon on saints, and another discussing our mothers' lives and how different their experience had been.

Some of us have been on trips to Noddfa for weekends, as North Wales is not too far from us, as the crow flies, though we have been known to get lost coming home! Several of us went to Edinburgh to encourage the G8 to Make Poverty History - and closer to home we encircled the Council House with a white band and got some good TV coverage.

The East Midlands group is a relaxed affair, a touching place for busy people, and people in need of space to unwind. For me it is one of the best aspects of living in Nottingham *Patricia Stoaat 2005*
contact: Patricia Stoaat tel: 0115 950 9773

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examples of local groups

TEESSIDE GROUP

Numbers in the group have fallen for a number of reasons. Some people have other commitments; there was a time when the venue and the meeting night changed, and two of our members, Imelda and Philippa, both IBVM sisters, have moved on. We are looking forward with interest to see how Imelda's new work in Albania progresses. We are still an ecumenical group with a broad spectrum of church.

The programme has been varied. Reflective evenings at the Lady Chapel at Mount Grace, Osmotherly have been replaced by walking on the beach and creating liturgies from what we find there.

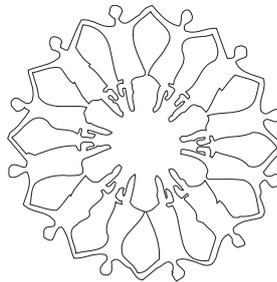
Various types of spirituality have been investigated with different members sharing their particular interest, culminating in an evening with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Using the Churches Together in England material *What is this Place?* we did Bible Study round the issue of domestic violence and followed this with considering abuse in general including bullying in the Church and in the workplace.

The Church Festivals have been celebrated in various innovative ways and a variety of liturgies practised. Although numbers have dropped, enthusiasm remains high and views are aired and welcomed in a secure environment where everyone is valued.

Kathleen Howard and Judith Winn

contact: Judith Winn tel: 0191 586 8589



prayers



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A CREED *Veronica Seddon*

I believe that God is
and that she is good.
I believe that God created me
and I am good.

I believe in Jesus, my redeemer
who lived out his life with integrity
and so was put to death.
But this was not the end;
he was raised:
out of darkness comes light.

By his life we will judge ourselves.

I believe in Woman Church,
my community,
through which I am healed
and which gives me life.

LORD'S PRAYER *Lala Winkley*

God, lover of us all
most holy one,
help us to respond to you
to create what you want
for us here on earth.

Give us today enough for our needs;
forgive our weak and
deliberate offences,
just as we must forgive others
when they hurt us.

Help us to resist evil
and to do what is good;
for we are yours,
endowed with your power
to make our world whole.

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BLESSING (from WWS brochure)

Spirit of Life,

bless us as we bless each other.

We are on a journey to bring justice and liberation
to all women of the world.

We have a vision that the struggles of our foremothers will
not be in vain.

We dream dreams for the women who come after us
that they may be upright and strong in their lives and work.

We are carriers of a new vision
committed in our efforts to become a community
which lives simply, loves tenderly and acts justly;
which calls us to be creative, loving and free.

To that end, expand the horizons of our imagination;
awaken in us dangerous dreams of a new tomorrow;
rekindle in our hearts the fire of prophetic enthusiasm
so that **women word spirit** may continue to be a sacred
place where God and women meet. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER *Veronica Seddon*

The dying vegetation drops to the ground and forms the
new fertile earth for the sowing of the next year's crop.
The grain is planted and breaks in the earth, sending sown
roots and sending up a shoot. That shoot bears a myriad of
grains. For something to grow, something must die. May
we, as bringers of life, know when to let go in order to
have new life.