

Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ

A Life of Transforming Grace

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The life of Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ is distinguished by the grace with which she has woven together fidelity to her vocation as a Sister of St. Joseph, a passion for theological learning and teaching, and Catholic feminist activism. As a respected systematic theologian and author, Dr. Leonard's work has made a significant contribution to the academy. Her deeply held belief in the dignity of each person, made in God's image, and her recognition of experience, particularly the intersectional complexity of women's lived experience as a source for theology, is at the heart of her excellence in teaching and mentoring. Sister Ellen's integrity and wisdom have enabled her to hold in tension her lively participation in the life of her religious and academic communities while also co-founding a Canadian Catholic feminist reform movement in 1981 that continues today.¹

This portrayal of Sister Ellen's life is organized around five broad strands: i) her family life and religious vocation with the Sisters of St. Joseph; ii) the impact of the Second Vatican Council; iii) learning, teaching and mentoring at the University of St. Michael's College; iv) her feminist theological activism; and v) her awards and accolades. A questionnaire was emailed to colleagues and former students of Sister Ellen's to capture qualitative examples of the profound influence she has had in

their lives and beyond. The metaphor of ‘weaving’ is used throughout to emphasize how Sister Ellen continually integrates the multiple strands of her life into a rich tapestry of transforming grace.



Image 1: Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ at the University of St. Michael's College (USMC), University of Toronto, 2001 (Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph [CSJT] Archives, used by permission.)

Strong Threads: Toward a Religious Vocation

Family Life

The eldest of two daughters to Hugh and Mary (née Barry) Leonard, Ellen Leonard was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1933 “under the eye of Sister Vincentia,” a Sister of St. Joseph at St. Michael’s Hospital (“Sister Ellen Leonard, CSJ Ministry Records,” CSJT Archives). The Leonard family were fourth- and fifth-generation Canadians of Irish ancestry. They had a strong Catholic identity within the triad of

home, school, and parish in their north Toronto neighbourhood (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

Ellen and her younger sister Anne had a happy childhood. Ellen, who was a responsible and kind older sibling, often invited Anne to tag along when she played with her friends in the nearby ravine. The girls grew up during the Great Depression, when one in five Canadians depended on government relief for survival (Canadian Museum of History n.d.). While Ellen and Anne knew that money was not plentiful in the family, they never felt deprived. Ellen's practical mother sewed most of her daughters' clothing and Ellen's father succeeded in keeping his job through the Depression, although his income was significantly diminished (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

Ellen went to the local elementary school run by Loretto sisters. For high school, however, Ellen's mother preferred that her daughters attend St. Joseph's College School. Mary Leonard had high esteem for the Sisters of St. Joseph, having herself been educated at St. Joseph's Academy, Lindsay, Ontario. She soon learned that this religious order would play a central role in her eldest daughter's life.

In a feature about Sister Ellen published for the Sisters of St. Joseph on the occasion of their 150th Anniversary, ("Feature: Sister Ellen Leonard," 2001, 19-20, CSJT Archives), Ellen recalled that, during her high school years, she was "impressed by the kindness, competence and dedication" of the Sisters of St. Joseph. She excelled as a student and was a gifted pianist, earning her Grade 10 piano certificate from the Royal Conservatory of Music of Toronto in 1949. In a speech on the occasion of the publication of a *Festschrift* in Sister Ellen's honour in 2000, Mechtilde O'Mara, CSJ recalled the time she spent with the Leonard family: "During my years as a student in Toronto, the family welcomed me often for a home-cooked meal and delightful conversation: Ellen's father, especially, was a great story-teller" (O'Mara, "Ellen Leonard," CSJT Archives). Anne Leonard recalls that, although her mother would not have defined herself as a feminist, her kind, unflagging encouragement of her daughters was an affirming foundation for both young women (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto

Strong family roots and the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph planted a seed within Ellen that gradually blossomed into a religious vocation. Her decision to enter the convent at the end of high school in 1951, at age 17, was difficult for Ellen's parents, who wondered if she was too young to make a lifelong commitment. Anne was devastated to lose the presence of her older sister at home, especially since the strictures of religious formation only permitted family

visits once per month (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020). Although Ellen missed her family deeply during the years of formation, she had a profound desire to live her Christian calling in a religious community and she gradually adjusted to the expectations of her new life. Ellen completed the mandatory six-month postulancy period and entered the novitiate, receiving her religious habit and the name “Sister Loyola” on March 19, 1952. Over the next three years, she immersed herself in the life of her religious community, learning about Catholic teaching, growing spiritually, and making lifelong friendships within her community (E. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

Sister Loyola (Ellen) came “from a long line of women educators” (Anderson and O’Mara 2000, 5). Her mother and three paternal aunts were all respected schoolteachers. After completing teacher’s college at Toronto Normal School (1954–55), Sister Loyola was an elementary school teacher, principal, and religion resource teacher in Niagara and the Greater Toronto Area for most of the next 18 years (1955–73). She remembers that, at Holy Rosary School in Toronto (1955–1957), “When I started to teach, we had large classes. I had 51 children in Grade One.”² Sister Ellen also recalls that, when she was an elementary school teacher at St. James Catholic school in Colgan, Ontario (1957–59), a small town northwest of Toronto, the school and convent were next door to each other. Sometimes, after school, children would knock on the door of the convent to ask if “Sister Loyola could come out to play” (E. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).



Image 2: Sister Loyola teaching Grade 1 at St. James School, Colgan, Ontario in 1958 (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

Sister Loyola continued to teach elementary school at St. Joseph's in Merritton, Ontario (1959–62) and at Holy Spirit School in Agincourt, Ontario, where she became principal (1962–69). Over the years, it became apparent to Sister Loyola that some of her students did not have the strong foundation and opportunities she had been given, which sparked in her a lifelong commitment to social justice. While working as a full-time teacher, Sister Loyola pursued undergraduate studies on evenings, weekends, and in the summer, completing her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Toronto in 1967. As Ellen's colleagues would later note: "Her pedagogical training, and her experience in the challenges of introducing children to the concepts and skills on which their whole education would be based has borne fruit in the excellence of her teaching at the university level" (Anderson and O'Mara 2000, 5).

Weaving a New Vision: The Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council refers to meetings of the world's Catholic bishops from 1962–65 that resulted in the promulgation of sixteen documents. However, it is more accurate to see Vatican II as a movement of renewal that began decades before and has yet to be fully realized. Vatican II encouraged a dual dynamism in the church of *ressourcement* ('a return to authoritative sources') and *aggiornamento* ('bringing up to date') (Lavin 2012, 3–4).³ Regarding religious life, the Vatican II document "Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life" stated: "The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time" (*Perfectae caritatis*, 2).⁴

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto embraced this dynamic of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. As Sister Ellen states: "We replaced the attitude of rejection and suspicion of the world that had characterized pre-Vatican II religious life with one of solidarity with the world and all humanity. This was in keeping with the vision of our founder and the first sisters, who reached out in service to the 'dear neighbour'" (E. Leonard 2007, 236). In the years following Vatican II, Sister Ellen participated in the restructuring of religious life within her community. In a video interview conducted by Mary Klein and Shaunagh Gravelines ("Paths of Transformation: Sister Ellen Leonard," June 11, 2009, CSJT Archives), she says that aspects of this time were "painful because many of the things that had been important in my life were being questioned." She later recognized that this discomfort was a necessary stage in personal transformation. While there was loss of the familiar, there was also exhilaration at the possibilities these changes opened up for women. Furthermore, the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" positioned religious life within the "life and holiness" of the church but outside the "hierarchical structure of the Church" (*Lumen gentium*, 44). Sister Ellen notes that many women religious preferred to see their vocation aligned with the laity. Others, however, felt excluded from the hierarchy and unsure of their place in this new way of "being church" (E. Leonard 2007, 237). Although the changes of Vatican II did result in a significant number of priests and nuns leaving their religious vocations, in Sister Ellen's experience of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, "reception of Vatican II was well done within the order" (E. Leonard, pers. comm., November 15, 2019). Sister Ellen sums up the watershed experience of Vatican II in her own life: "I exchanged my religious name, Sister Loyola, for my baptismal name, Ellen; I set aside the distinctive habit and veil to join the rest of God's people; I moved from the big motherhouse on Bayview to a small

community of six sisters; and I left elementary education for the study of theology” (“Feature: Sister Ellen Leonard,” 2001, 19-20, CSJT Archives).

Strands of Learning, Teaching, and Mentoring

After Vatican II, catechists at the Toronto Metropolitan Separate School Board were encouraged to update their religious education. Sister Ellen took advantage of this opportunity by enrolling in a master’s degree program in religious studies at Manhattan College, New York, New York (1970–71). Classmate Margaret Small recalls, “it was certainly exciting for all of us to be studying together, asking questions, and wondering about the future shape of church and theology” (M. Small, pers. comm., February 1, 2020). It was during this time that Sister Ellen developed a love for theology, and she returned to Toronto with newfound biblical and theological insights to assist religious education teachers with integrating the changes of Vatican II. Increasingly, Sister Ellen felt called to further studies in theology and, in the fall of 1974, she enrolled in a PhD program at the University of St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto. Sister Ellen was among the first women in Canada to study systematic theology.

While doing her doctoral work, Sister Ellen began her teaching career at the University of Toronto. She was appointed to the Department of Religious Studies as a teaching assistant in 1974. In the last year of her PhD program, she was appointed as a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael’s College (USMC). She progressed to be an assistant professor in 1978, an associate professor four years later, and a full-tenured professor at USMC from 1991–97. To supervise graduate work, she was cross-appointed to the Graduate Faculty at the Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, in 1994. Sister Ellen continued teaching as a professor emerita at USMC from 1999–2007 (Anderson and D’Angelo 2000, 5).

Catholic Modernism

It is not surprising that Sister Ellen developed an interest in Catholic modernism, because the questions that modernism raised about Catholicism “in some ways anticipated the Second Vatican Council” (Leonard 2010, 828). Modernism, a label first used pejoratively by Pius X, was an intellectual orientation among Catholic scholars primarily in England, France, Italy, and Germany (1890–1910) as they grappled with the advances of science, philosophical ideas about individual autonomy, and changing methods of biblical interpretation. Sister Ellen began her

exploration of modernism by exploring the work of George Tyrrell (1869–1909), an Irish-born Jesuit priest, theologian, and philosopher. She identified Tyrrell as “one of the persons most committed to the reinterpretation of Catholicism in response to the challenge of (biblical) historical criticism and what he considered the legitimate demands of the modern world” (E. Leonard 1979, 6). Tyrrell was the topic of Sister Ellen’s PhD dissertation (1978), which formed the basis for her 1982 book, *George Tyrrell and the Catholic Tradition*.

Sister Ellen’s book discusses George Tyrrell’s ideas on “the place of the episcopacy within the universal Church, a more active role for the laity, a clear recognition of the limits of ecclesiastical authority, and the acceptance of criticism and dissent within the Church” (E. Leonard 1979, 12). Sister Ellen argues that Tyrrell’s impetus was essentially a pastoral response, rather than a systematic theology for reform, and his “greatest contribution to an understanding of Catholicism was his vision of what Catholicism *could* be” (13).⁵ Tyrrell experienced harsh ecclesiastical censure for his ideas. He was expelled from the Jesuits in 1906, excommunicated in 1908, and denied burial in a Catholic cemetery after his death. Yet, as Sister Ellen points out, “Tyrrell boldly tackled many of the difficult questions concerning ecclesiastical authority with which the Roman Catholic Church still wrestles” (E. Leonard 1982, 120). Sister Ellen first presented a paper on George Tyrrell as a member of the Working Group on Roman Catholic Modernism at the American Academy of Religion conference in 1979. Over the next 30 years, Sister Ellen presented conference papers and wrote several essays in refereed journals on aspects of modernism.⁶

Ellen Leonard’s second book on modernism was *Unresting Transformation: The Theology and Spirituality of Maude Petre* (1991). Maude Dominica Mary Petre (1863–1942) is often mentioned tangentially as the friend and literary executor of George Tyrrell. Sister Ellen’s extensive research of Petre’s personal journals, her numerous published books, more than 90 essays, and her extensive correspondence with other modernists reveals, however, that Petre herself made a significant contribution to the modernist movement (E. Leonard 1991, 2). Ellen Leonard’s work about Petre contributes to “the search by feminist historians and theologians for women’s stories which either have not been told or which have presented women as supportive of and secondary to men” (1). Sister Ellen discusses the chronological evolution of Petre’s theology and spirituality and her evolving feminism, modernism, and political thought in the “cultural matrix” of her times. Sister Ellen notes that Petre published extensively and was active in issues of social justice despite the limits that Victorian society placed on women. Like her friend George Tyrrell, Maude Petre experienced the Catholic Church hierarchy’s censure for her ideas and was deprived of receiving the sacraments.

Sister Ellen concludes her book on Maude Petre by listing aspects of Petre's theology and spirituality that are relevant in the contemporary context:

a trust in her own experience as a source for theology, a mystical approach to God and prayer, a practical rather than a theoretical or dogmatic approach to truth, a sense of the political, social and economic implications of Christianity, a dialogical openness to the experiences of other persons, traditions, and world-views combined with a refusal to limit God to particular categories, and an integration of loyalty and criticism with a spirit of independence and freedom. In many ways she was a pioneer, moving ahead of the Church and society in her response to the events of her day. (E. Leonard 1991, 207)

Sister Ellen's third book on modernism was about the life and work of Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925), a Roman Catholic independent theologian. *Creative Tension: The Spiritual Legacy of Friedrich von Hügel* (2005) details Von Hügel's life and the theological and spiritual implications of his ideas. Sister Ellen focuses on Von Hügel's work *Mystical Elements of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends* because it is central to Von Hügel's philosophy of mysticism. Von Hügel saw three interconnected elements as vital to religious thought and human existence: the historical/institutional, the intellectual/speculative, and the mystical/experiential. Sister Ellen's biography of the Austrian-born aristocrat discusses his theoretical and practical influence as both a scholar with "access to the Western European ecclesiastical and scholarly world" and a "spiritual guide in the movement" (E. Leonard 2010, 1296).

Study of these modernists allowed Sister Ellen to reflect on how she might participate in the theological and ecclesial questions of renewal in her own time. The modernists' faithfulness to their convictions inspired Sister Ellen to be "open to transformation" and "willing to be surprised" ("Paths of Transformation," CSJT Archives).

Ecumenism

The Second Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, reflected a renewed enthusiasm for ecumenical collaboration. Father Elliott Bernard Allen, CSB, the dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of St. Michael's College, was instrumental in harnessing that enthusiasm to cooperate in developing the Toronto School of Theology (TST). TST consists of seven colleges from Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, and United Church denominations and, in Sister Ellen's experience, it made for fertile ground for ecumenical collaboration

between colleagues. For students, it meant that elective courses could be taken from affiliated colleges.⁷ Dean Allen also appointed several women to the faculty at St. Michael's during his tenure (1969–80), and Sister Ellen has remained grateful for his encouragement. Professor Emerita Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM (Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary), a close colleague of Sister Ellen's at USMC, describes the positive atmosphere at TST in the 1970s:

It was a magnificent time in the history of the TST. We were well appreciated and accepted by our Dean, Elliott Allen, CSB and our male colleagues. There were several women professors at the other TST Colleges, too, and we got to know each other through our shared departmental meetings. We shared leadership for these regular departmental meetings and within our Colleges with our male colleagues. We were well trained in our fields, and particularly in the Vatican II agenda that we knew was so important to convey to the current generation of students ... (M. E. Sheehan, IHM, pers. comm., April 2, 2020)

In recognition of her commitment to ecumenism, Sister Ellen was appointed by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to serve from 1975–84 as a member of the Roman Catholic-United Church National Dialogue. As an accredited visitor, she attended the Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Vancouver, Canada (1983), and in Canberra, Australia (1991). Unfortunately, she was not a voting delegate because the Roman Catholic Church was, and is not, a member of the WCC. Reflecting on the Vancouver Assembly, Sister Ellen said: "Women from Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, as well as North America made valuable contributions to the Assembly. The voices of women speaking on behalf of their people and especially of their children were very moving. It is these voices which remain with me" ("A Message from the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver 1983," *Community Update 1, Sisters of St. Joseph*, CSJT Archives).

In her 2006 article "Feminist Voices in Theology," Sister Ellen describes her experience at the opening of the 1991 WCC Canberra Assembly. Chung Hyun Kyung, a young Korean theologian, engaged the Assembly, asking them to acknowledge that they were on "holy ground" by removing their shoes. Kyung then incorporated Aboriginal Australian dancers as well as Korean dancers in a ritual calling on the spirits of the ancestors. Since the assembly occurred during the time of the Gulf War, Kyung followed with an inclusive litany invoking spirits past and present who had died due to violence. The names were then ceremonially burned. Kyung's message was a call to "metanoia: a change from anthropocentrism to life centism, from dualism to interconnection, and from a culture of death to a culture of life" (E. Leonard 2006, 53). For Sister Ellen, this

experience reinforced the need for Western feminist theologians to acknowledge and critique “the traditional Eurocentric approach to theology” by listening to and learning from feminist theological voices worldwide (54). She quotes theologian Kwok Pui-lan’s 2005 essay, “Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse,” saying “feminist theology will be strengthened by the multicultural, multivocal and multireligious character of women’s expressions of faith that bear witness to the inclusive compassion of God” (56).

Feminist Approaches to Systematic Theology

During Professor Ellen Leonard’s career, she taught courses in feminist theology, Christology, ecclesiology, dogma, historical consciousness, sacramental theology, and “Religious Life and Lay Communities” (Anderson and D’Angelo 2000, 5). She accorded both women and men the utmost respect and encouragement in their studies. In her course entitled *Feminist Approaches to Systematic Theology*, students had the opportunity to become familiar with a diverse range of feminist critiques of Christianity. They assessed feminist methodologies and practiced applying these methodologies in assignments. Students were also encouraged to read the texts in the light of their own experience. Many of the women who took this course went on to doctoral work in feminist theology and pastoral ministry. Some were ordained in other denominations and worked in the areas of social justice and feminist activism, including becoming members of Canadian Catholics for Women’s Ordination/Catholic Network for Women’s Equality.

Dr. Leonard’s own feminist theological research focuses on the themes of lived experience as a source for theology and recognition of emerging voices in theology and Christology, particularly Canadian voices. In her 1990 essay “Experience as a Source for Theology: A Canadian and Feminist Perspective” for the journal *Studies in Religion*, she defined experience as “all that contributes to our situation, both our political and personal contexts and our near and distant histories.” Furthermore, she quotes theologian Karl Rahner, who said “any authentic experience can be interpreted as an experience of God” (E. Leonard 1990, 143–5). Christian scripture and tradition as “codified collective human experience,” a term Dr. Leonard draws from theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether’s 1993 book, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, is continually “renewed or discarded through the test of present experience” (E. Leonard 1990, 144). Sister Ellen also asks the vital question posed by theologian Monika Hellwig: “Whose experience counts in theological reflection?” This question is significant because when marginalized persons or groups share their experience, it challenges the

dominant narratives of Western theology that had been presumed to be normative (E. Leonard 1990, 148).

Dr. Leonard's emphasis on experience as "pluralistic and deeply influenced not only by gender but also by race, class and culture" brings her to a hope-filled stance. She says, "Across all differences, women's ways of being in the world, often ignored, denied, or subsumed under male experience, are becoming a resource for new understandings of human life and new insights into the Christian tradition" (E. Leonard 2016, 49). In her 2006 essay highlighting feminist voices in theology, she recognizes the work of Chung Hyun Kyung (Korea), María Pilar Aquino (Mexico), Ivone Gebara (Brazil), Stella Baltazar (India), and Kwok Pui-lan (United States), as well as the "Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians." She discusses the contribution of eco-feminists Heather Eaton (Canada) and Sally McFague (United States). Reflecting on her own experience with the neurological disease Parkinson's, Dr. Leonard also looks to the work of Elizabeth Stuart (England) who challenges the Church to see "the full humanity of the disabled person and their place in the body of Christ" (E. Leonard 2006, 58-71).⁸

Just as Dr. Leonard recognizes that there is a diversity of feminist *theologies*, she also asks if our Christologies are inclusive of the diverse experiences of women, of interfaith dialogue, and of urgent ecological concerns. She recognizes that Christological ideas held by individuals, the academy, or faith communities have a function in people's experience of faith. The dualist worldview prevalent in Western Christology for centuries made the ideal of 'maleness' normative. It ascribed to the male the realms of spirit, objective rationality, power in the public sphere, and, ultimately, divinity. In this patriarchal framework, women are seen as inferior and often associated with sin and evil. Sister Ellen quotes from the work of feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock: "The doctrine that only a perfect male form can incarnate God fully and be salvific makes our individual lives in female bodies a prison against God and denies our actual, sensual, changing selves as the locus of divine activity" (E. Leonard 2016, 49). Furthermore, Dr. Leonard sees that a Christology that calls Christians to emulate a model of Christ as a passive victim, or that emphasizes the doctrine of atonement (God as father, handing over his son to death), is harmful and, in the context of intimate partner violence, can be dangerous for women (E. Leonard 2016, 49-50). In her 2000 essay, "Contemporary Christologies in Response to Feminist and Ecological Challenges," she says: "As we enter the second millennium and reflect on the history of Western Christian thought, we must acknowledge how Christology has contributed to both human oppression and the destruction of nature. The Christ symbol needs to be redeemed if it is to offer salvation. The task of redeeming the name of Christ is a serious challenge to theologians ..." (E. Leonard 2000, 24).

In Dr. Leonard's 2008 essay "The Emergence of Canadian Contextual Feminist Theologies," published as the lead article in the book *Feminist Theologies with a Canadian Accent*, edited by Mary-Ann Beavis with Elaine Guillemin and Barbara Pell, Sister Ellen notes, "Although Canadian feminist theologies are indebted to the pioneering work of our sisters in the United States, our history is different" (E. Leonard 2008, 24). She analyzed the years 1970–2000 in Canada and the influence of Canadian Christian feminist groups in giving women a sense of solidarity as they navigated a religious tradition with deep patriarchal roots. Sister Ellen also cites the 1976 ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Canada and the election of Lois Wilson as the first woman moderator of the United Church of Canada as pivotal moments in the history of women's religious participation in Canada. Secondly, she highlights the work of academics in developing courses in feminist theology and feminist methodologies, such as the application of a hermeneutic of suspicion with biblical texts in which women have not been named or seem to have been omitted. Professor Leonard also describes the rich variety of doctoral theses that Canadian theology students have developed in examining aspects of their lives and their research through a feminist lens. Her essay concludes with a reflection on the controversial sculpture 'Crucified Woman,' erected on the grounds of Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto. This sculpture has become a place of gathering to remember the fourteen women massacred by an anti-feminist gunman while the woman attended their engineering class at Polytechnique Montréal in 1989 in Montréal, Quebec.

Interweaving Teaching, Mentoring, and Collaborating

The transformative impact of Professor Leonard's teaching, mentoring, and collaboration with students and colleagues within the Toronto School of Theology was a consistent thread in every questionnaire response received for this biographical essay. Regarding Sister Ellen's teaching, Margaret Small says "she seemed to have a talent for summarizing and explaining abstract concepts. Her thinking was precise, and so were her words" (M. Small, pers. comm., February 1, 2020). Dr. Veronica Dunne, RNDM (Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions), adds: "Ellen was not a flashy or a fiery lecturer, but a comprehensive teacher, a personable communicator of emerging horizons, and a caring guide to the new terrain. In addition to all I learned from Ellen, I also came to recognize and deeply value that she cared for me/us as persons—not just students making a quick pass through her classroom. She personified what she taught" (V. Dunne, RNDM, pers. comm., March 28, 2020). St. Mary's College, Notre Dame Professor Emerita Phyllis Kaminski, whose doctoral committee Sister Ellen chaired, says: "Her interest in my

work and in that of all her students embodied for me that theological education is relational to the core” (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020). The priority of relationship for Sister Ellen was rooted in her Catholic/Christian faith and spirituality that instilled in her a profound respect for the human person. Sister Ellen continued to supervise students as a professor emerita, and former student Bertha Yetman, PhD, notes: “True to her reputation, when I submitted my thesis to the Toronto School of Theology, one Friday in June, early the next week, before the sun rose she had it thoroughly read, examined, commented on and returned to the Toronto School of Theology” (B. Yetman, pers. comm., January 29, 2020). Sister Ellen says of her own teaching experience: “When I taught elementary school, I taught Grade 1 and teaching people to read is a very empowering thing to do. It’s the same kind of thing in terms of learning theology and feeling comfortable doing your own theology” (“Paths of Transformation,” CSJT Archives).

As Sister Ellen also recalled in the 2009 video interview, there were women students who, in the words of American feminist theologian and civil rights activist Nelle Morton, needed to be “heard into speech” (“Paths of Transformation,” CSJT Archives). Sister Ellen was well aware, however, that opportunities for Catholic women graduates were limited. In the newspaper article “RC Women Assail Church Stand” by Patti Tasko in the *Globe and Mail* on August 13, 1983, Sister Ellen says: “The Catholic men are going to be ordained, and the Protestant men and Protestant women are going to be ordained—and the Catholic women ... aren’t sure what they’re going to be. They have the same education ... but there’s no sort of official recognition of the fact that they are people who have prepared for the ministry and there’s no kind of structures that are waiting to receive them” (Tasko 1983).

Sister Ellen’s teaching and mentorship offered women the opportunity to understand their experience in the light of feminist theology. Former student Sylvia Skrepichuk says, “It was through Ellen and other feminist scholars that I began to understand in a more systematic way, the patriarchy of Church structures, the need for women to claim their own voice and to be in leadership positions and the call of all the baptized to priesthood. Her influence changed my worldview and encouraged me to continue growing on this journey” (S. Skrepichuk, pers. comm., February 3, 2020). Furthermore, Veronica Dunne, RNDM, comments: “While I was a student, Ellen taught several courses in feminist liberation theologies (a theological discipline I was just discovering), and I took them all. One of the places Ellen steered me was to the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and her vision of an *Ekklesia* of Wo/men, and how that is lived out in a discipleship community of equals. Even more, I saw how Ellen was embodying that *Ekklesia*” (V. Dunne, pers. comm., March 28, 2020).⁹

Sister Ellen lamented the elitism and financial and bureaucratic burdens that prevented some women from studying theology. She encouraged students to apply for scholarships and advocated for the development of part-time studies for women with busy careers and family responsibilities.

In the article “Feminists at Work: Collaborative Relationships Among Women Faculty,” authors Sagaria and Dickens point to four ways that feminist academics collaborate. They are: pedagogical (mentoring), instrumental (working collectively to complete an academic project), professional (a shared research agenda), and intimate (friendship) collaboration (Sagaria and Dickens 1997, 71). Sister Ellen engaged in all of these forms of collaboration during her career.

Within the USMC faculty, colleague Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM recalls: “Along with Margaret O’Gara, Ellen and I offered courses in Feminist Theology so that there was at least one offered each semester. We all worked together on planning those courses” (M. E. Sheehan, pers. comm., April 2, 2020). Regarding Professor Leonard’s initiation of a *Festschrift* in memory of beloved colleague Professor Joanne McWilliam, her co-editor Kate Merriman says, “Ellen is a remarkably modest person with a great capacity to keep a healthy perspective and stay focussed on the larger goal. Our collaboration on the *Festschrift* could not have gone more smoothly” (K. Merriman, pers. comm., January 29, 2020).

Professor Emeritus Dennis O’Hara, who had Professor Leonard as his doctoral thesis co-chair and became her USMC colleague, recounted her academic and ecclesial collaboration at the convocation where she received an honorary degree in 2014:

She was a board member of the Catholic Theological Society of America for several years and she served for seven years as a representative of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Churches’ Council on Theological Education in Canada (1993–99). Sister Ellen also was a member of the Association of Theological Schools’s Council on Theological Scholarship and Research. Sister Ellen chaired the theology department of the Toronto School of Theology for two years and served on many, many committees at both the Faculty of Theology and the Toronto School of Theology. (O’Hara 2014, 2)

Sister Ellen realized the importance of support as she journeyed through the changes in her own life, saying in the 2009 video interview by Klein and Gravelines: “That’s an important part of transformation, that you are not by yourself, you need other people in order to pass through these stages” (“Paths of Transformation,” CSJT Archives). This capacity for relationship extended to Sister Ellen’s life outside of academia as well. She enjoyed biking, cross country skiing, tennis, films with friends, and a regular bridge group. She also continues to celebrate milestones in

the lives of her religious sisters and friends (M. Small, pers. comm., February 1, 2020).



Image 3: Dr. Ellen Leonard, CSJ, with students at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto in the 1990s (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

Feminist Theological Activism

An Evolving Feminist Consciousness

With gratitude, Sister Ellen often says that she “came along at the right time” in terms of the expanding opportunities for women in the post-Vatican II theological academy and Canadian society. She states, “For me, Vatican II, the study of theology and the women’s movement all came together to completely transform my life” (E. Leonard 2011, 1). She speaks of these events as being experiences of “transforming grace.” This expression is borrowed from the work of feminist theologian Anne Carr, who argues that, while women’s experience is incompatible with *patriarchal* models of Christianity, it is not incompatible with the Christian message itself. For Carr, as for Sister Ellen, a feminist understanding of Christianity

can be a “transforming grace” in the lives of individuals and the life of the church (Carr 1996, 214).

As early as Grade 8, Sister Ellen recalls that she had a sense that girls and women did not have the same opportunities as boys and men (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020). In a video made about the Catholic Network for Women’s Equality (CNWE) in 2013, Sister Ellen says: “I was interested, and had always been interested, actually, in ordination and would have liked to have been ordained. I told my mother I would like to be a Jesuit. She said I would be a good one. Anyway, this was not a realistic aim for me, but it was something that was central to my heart” (Catholic Network for Women’s Equality, 2013). Furthermore, Sister Ellen recalls:

My study of theology and a growing feminist consciousness came together in the seventies. As a graduate student, I joined a group reading Mary Daly’s powerful critique *Beyond God the Father*. Increasingly I saw the need for a feminist critique of the tradition and for the reconstruction of theology. With Rosemary Radford Ruether, I realized that it was not simply that feminist theology should have a piece of the theological pie but that a new recipe was required. (E. Leonard 2006, 55)

The Canadian Context

Western countries experienced second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. It is helpful to highlight some of these societal and ecclesial changes to contextualize Sister Ellen’s feminist activism in the 1980s. At the international level, the United Nations (UN) signed the *Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* in 1967, which was adopted as a UN convention in 1979. International Women’s Year was celebrated in 1975 with a UN world conference on women in Mexico City, followed by the inauguration of the UN Decade for Women (1976–85) (De Haan n.d.). In Canada, women’s groups lobbied the federal government for a public inquiry into the status of women. In 1967, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was established, which led to significant legislative reforms toward equal rights for women in Canadian society (Canada’s Human Rights History 2020).

In the Canadian Catholic ecclesial context, a coalition called Edmonton Catholic Women’s Groups asked the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) to recommend to the 1971 Vatican Synod of Bishops the establishment of a representative commission to study “the question of ministries for women in the Church” (Dias 2019, 6). In response, the Holy See established the Study

Commission on Women in Society and in the Church in 1973. As Dr. Cathy Holtmann, a former student of Sister Ellen's and CNWE member argues, "The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops had been at the forefront among the Catholic hierarchy in the world calling the institution to transform itself in terms of gender equality from the early 1970s to the 1980s" (Holtmann 2008, 201). The CCCB responded to the Vatican's study commission by developing a survey for parishes regarding women's participation in the Church. More than a decade later, the CCCB published a follow-up discussion kit, *Women in the Church: Discussion Papers* (1984). The kit was designed to offer parishioners the opportunity to reflect on their lived experience, examine that experience in the light of scripture and church teaching, and then consider actions to be taken (Dias 2019, 19).¹⁰

The Pontifical Biblical Commission concluded in 1976 that women's ordination could not be ruled out on the basis of scripture. Yet, that same year, in reaction to the growing support for women's ordination, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the declaration *Inter Insigniores*. It stated that the hierarchy was not authorized to ordain women because male-only ordination belonged to the constant tradition of the Church. It also argued that the ontological and symbolic significance of priesthood only permitted men to function *in persona Christi* (*Inter Insigniores* 5:15).

Concurrent with secular feminism in the 1970s was a movement among Catholic women in North America and Europe for the ordination of women. The 'irregular' ordination of Episcopal women in the United States in 1974, who became known as "The Philadelphia Eleven," and the ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Canada in 1976 bolstered Catholic feminists' optimism (Dunne 2002, 90). Sister Ellen hoped that ordination for women in the Catholic Church was imminent and she enthusiastically attended the first Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) gathering of over 1900 participants in Detroit, Michigan, in 1975. She notes, "Many of the participants, like myself, were Catholic sisters, women with excellent academic backgrounds and years of pastoral experience." Sister Ellen was sent by Dean Elliott Allen to attend WOC conferences, which, she says, "indicates the climate at the time" (E. Leonard 2011, 1).

Founding Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination

When Sister Ellen began lecturing at the University of St. Michael's College in 1977, most of the students enrolled in the Master of Divinity program were Catholic male seminarians. When married laywoman Alexina Murphy took Sister Ellen's sacramental theology course a few years later, she brought her husband Marcus to the class to participate in the seminar on the sacrament of marriage. Sister Ellen

saw this as evidence that opening the study of theology to lay people enhanced the classroom experience, making it more reflective of the church as the *whole* people of God. When Alexina invited Sister Ellen to her home and suggested planning a conference about women's ordination in the Catholic Church, Sister Ellen remembers that they broke out a bottle of champagne to celebrate that "something new was being born" (E. Leonard 2011, 1).

Sister Ellen and Alexina Murphy joined with Bernadette McMahon of Toronto and Judy Maier of Ottawa to send the following invitation, entitled "Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination," in January 1981 to contacts across Canada:

We are writing to share with you our plan to start a Canadian organization to work for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. We are four women studying theology and active in ministry. We each know several other women keenly interested in the ordination of women and willing to be drawn into active support of the issue. We judge the time to be ripe for some formal structuring of our enthusiasm and for a concerted effort to reach out to all other individuals and groups who are ready to support each other and promote the ordination of women. (CNWE fonds)

This invitation led to a gathering of 30 women from across Canada in Toronto, July 3-5, 1981. As CCWO/CNWE member Pamela Roth said at the 2001 CNWE National Conference in Toronto, "Prayer and ritual, serious deliberation and joyful celebration marked this weekend and twenty-two pages of carefully recorded minutes speak to the vision of these women for a renewed Catholic Church" ("The CNWE Story: A Presentation at the 2001 Twentieth Anniversary Celebration," June 9, 2001, CNWE fonds). The final statement and press release, "Ordain Women or Stop Baptizing Them," (1981) said:

We, the Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination affirm women's personhood in Christ's church. We recognize our equality in Christ. We desire that all have the opportunity to participate in the life of the Church. We maintain that this participation requires the ordination of women to Sacramental Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. We witness to the presence of priestly ministry. We, therefore, ask our sisters and brothers: Will you publicly support the ordination of women to Sacramental Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church? Will you work towards the ordination of women in our Church? (CNWE fonds)

Over the next seven years, Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination (CCWO) local groups sprang up across the country. Organizers developed a committee framework and a newsletter and contacted Catholic women's ordination organizations in other countries. Sister Ellen was a core group member

of CCWO and, in 1982, she was part of a delegation that met with Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter of Toronto to share CCWO's vision of a renewed church. After the meeting, Sister Ellen remarked in a letter to member Joyce Kennedy, dated June 16, 1982, "You would have been proud of us—quiet and determined" (CNWE fonds).

Sister Ellen was instrumental in getting the word out about feminist theology beyond academia's walls to the broader Catholic community. She offered a parish workshop with Dr. Mary Malone in 1982, entitled "Woman and Roman Catholic: What Does it Mean?" In the article mentioned above in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper (Tasko 1983), Sister Ellen is quoted: "I don't see it as a women's problem. I see it as a problem facing our church. How do we use the gifts of the whole community? Do we eliminate 50 percent without looking at them?" Sister Ellen also presented the second annual CCWO public lecture, "Women and Catholic: New Visions," at St. Paul's University, Ottawa, in 1984 (CNWE fonds). In April 1986, fifteen CCWO members demonstrated with placards and pamphlets outside Varsity Arena, where Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was the speaker for the inaugural St. Michael's College Lecture Series. Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination garnered national media attention and "mixed reactions from the waiting crowd" (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation n.d.).

While Professor Leonard's full-time teaching and research at St. Michael's College required that she step down from the core group of CCWO in 1986, she continued to introduce interested Catholic women students and some members of her religious community to the movement. As Veronica Dunne, RNDM, summarizes: "Ellen was an engaged academic—i.e., she took the insights of gender studies and early feminist theologians and forged those new awarenesses into action for gender justice with other women and men. Being a founding member of CCWO/CNWE is a classic example of her praxis" (V. Dunne, pers. comm., March 28, 2020).

Catholic Network for Women's Equality

Sister Ellen notes that, by the mid-1980s, it "became obvious that ordination was not the only theological issue that needed to be addressed by feminist Christians. There are deeper theological questions about the nature of humanness, the nature and mission of the church, and even the ways we think and talk about God" (E. Leonard 2011, 3). Veronica Dunne, RNDM, adds, "The same conviction that originally brought women to CCWO and launched a nationwide effort to open the priesthood to Roman Catholic women now led them to question the *kyriarchal* structures of ordained ministry itself, which seemed contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ" (Dunne 2002, 103).¹¹ After a process of discernment that was, at times,

contentious, members voted at the CCWO conference in 1988 to change the name of “Canadian Catholics for Women’s Ordination” to the “Catholic Network for Women’s Equality” (CNWE). Members ratified a constitution in 1990 that established a federated model, with a collaborative national work group responsible for collecting and disbursing membership fees, coordinating annual conferences, and representing CNWE in the media. Regular CNWE gatherings at the local level continue to involve feminist learning, prayer and ritual, and planning for initiatives according to regional charisms. The initiatives range from dialogue with bishops to petitions and protests against the Church’s exclusion of women, as well as broader initiatives to raise awareness about human trafficking and to support refugees, women’s shelters, Indigenous reconciliation, and environmental sustainability.

Sister Ellen was a keynote speaker at the 20th anniversary CNWE conference in 2001. She was also featured in a video about CNWE developed for the 2013 conference in Sudbury. At the 2015 CNWE conference in Toronto, “Women Rising: Shaping a Way Forward,” she was enthusiastically honoured as a co-founder. She was lauded for her pioneering work by keynote speaker and Canadian author, journalist, and human rights advocate Sally Armstrong. Sister Ellen continues to support CNWE with her membership and by encouraging individual members as they strive to continue her legacy.

Dr. Becky Lee, in her 2016 article “On the Margins of Church and Society: Roman Catholic Feminisms in English-Speaking Canada,” draws on African American feminist bell hook’s idea that groups on the margins, like CCWO/CNWE, have the vantage point of being both insiders and outsiders (Lee 2016, 3). Most CNWE members have grown up steeped in Catholicism, making them insiders. However, their feminist consciousness also makes them outsiders in the patriarchal structures of the Catholic church. As both insiders and outsiders, they are able to critique systemic sexism and misogyny in the church from a place of having experienced aspects of it. The intransigence of the Catholic Church hierarchy toward opening ordination and decision-making roles to women has led many women and men to leave the Catholic Church in frustration. However, Sister Ellen has found a silver lining in the context of her own life: “The fact that our tradition has refused to even consider ordaining us has actually forced us to look at these deeper issues. I would probably not be a theologian today if I could have been ordained in my own tradition” (E. Leonard 2011, 3).

CNWE currently faces the challenges of an aging and declining membership and the limitations of an organization largely comprised of middle-class, educated, White, cisgender women. Sister Ellen’s example of welcoming culturally diverse, ecumenical, interfaith, secular, and younger feminist voices is an ongoing inspiration for CNWE itself to explore new ways to be inclusive and relevant. As

Sister Ellen observes with hope, “Communities of women have always existed within the church, sometimes almost submerged by the male hierarchical structures, but never totally submerged” (E. Leonard 2011, 4).

A Rich Tapestry of “Transforming Grace”

Dr. Ellen Leonard was a productive scholar who authored three books, ten chapters in books, twenty articles in refereed journals, and numerous papers in refereed conference proceedings on topics related to Catholic modernism, feminist theology, Christology, ecclesial religious communities, and the role of experience in theology. She was a lecturer, professor, and professor emerita for 33 years, chairing 15 doctoral theses, 12 master’s theses, and serving on 30 doctoral examination committees (O’Hara 2014, 2). According to this list of achievements, her life’s work is notable by any standard. However, Sister Ellen’s capacity for generous mentoring and collaboration, rooted in a faith-filled and joyful desire to encourage women in theology, is equally worthy of notability. Phyllis Kaminski says, “Ellen’s contribution to theology through her research, her teaching and her life call for recognition beyond our professional societies and national boundaries” (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020).

Woven into the very fabric of her being is Sister Ellen’s vocation as a Sister of St. Joseph. Colleague Dr. Marilyn Legge, professor emerita at Emmanuel College of Victoria University, Toronto School of Theology, concurs, “Wherever she has been and goes as a Sister of St. Joseph, Sister Ellen contributes with deep integrity the charism of her community” (M. Legge, pers. comm., January 21, 2020). On the occasion of the Congregation’s 150th anniversary celebrations in 2001, Sister Ellen said: “My membership in the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph during the past fifty years has given me the opportunity to develop my gifts and to share them with others through my ministry of theological education. I am grateful for this rich ministry and for my sisters with whom I live in community who continue to inspire me” (“Feature: Sister Ellen Leonard,” 2001, 19-20, CSJT Archives). Sister Ellen has welcomed the transition of religious communities “from a triumphal image of people set apart and immune to the world, to a people who are in solidarity with the whole struggling people of God, and with all humankind in its fragility and pain. Today we include not only humankind but all of creation” (E. Leonard 2000, 178).

In 1997, Sister Ellen was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, yet she continued to teach for ten more years. As Veronica Dunne, RNDM, recalls: “Ellen did not seek to hide her illness, nor did she broadcast it. She simply lived it with quiet courage and determination. She also learned from it—ever a student as well as a teacher” (V.

Dunne, pers. comm., March 28, 2020). Former student and colleague Phyllis Kaminski notes, “I have been most inspired by Ellen’s spirit as her teaching career ended and she continued to grow in wisdom and grace within the increasing limits of Parkinson’s” (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020).

A *Festschrift* in honour of Ellen M. Leonard, CSJ, was published in the *Toronto Journal of Theology* in 2000 to recognize her significant contribution to the life of the Toronto School of Theology. As stated in the introduction of the *Festschrift*, “Loyalty and a continued interest in those whose lives she has touched is a highly predictable quality in Ellen” (Anderson and O’Mara 2000, 5). Although Parkinson’s disease currently presents formidable challenges for Sister Ellen, many of her former students, colleagues, the women of her religious community, and co-activists keep in touch with her. Bertha Yetman says about Sister Ellen, “She continues to encourage and inspire women to study theology, to advocate for women’s equality in the Church, and do what their heart and spirit urges them to do for the sake of the good of all” (B. Yetman 2020, pers. comm., January 29, 2020).

Sister Ellen was the 2004 recipient of the Ann O’Hara Graff Award from the Women’s Seminar in Constructive Theology of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA). The award recognizes women who integrate their faith, scholarship, and mentorship of and advocacy for women in the “broadest sense of church,” and who contribute to the “renewal of theology.” As noted in the CTSA Women’s Seminar minutes, “Dr. Leonard was praised for her scholarly efforts to integrate studies in modernism, feminism and ecumenism as well as her patient mentoring of graduate students” (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020).

In 2005, Sister Ellen was one of eight women to receive a YWCA Women of Distinction Award in Toronto. She was recognized for her advocacy of women in the church and in academia. A former award recipient and student of Sister Ellen’s, Brigid O’Reilly, commented in the *Catholic New Times* (Sheila M. Dabu, “A Woman of Distinction: Sr. Ellen Leonard,” April 10, 2005, 13), “She has opened new doors to women in ministry, in theological scholarship and in coming to an understanding of God through the lenses of feminism.”



Image 4: Sister Ellen receiving the YWCA Women of Distinction Award, May 31, 2005, at the Metro Convention Centre, Toronto, Ontario (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

As reported on the Sisters of St. Joseph website “What’s New” news for 2012, Sister Ellen received the inaugural Becoming Neighbours Annual Margaret Myatt, CSJ, Recognition Award, named in honour of Sr. Margaret Myatt, CSJ, who worked in collaborative ministry to assist newcomers to Canada. Sister Ellen was a prayer partner and companion to newcomers and developed and facilitated a monthly process of theological reflection for participants. She did not let her stature as a distinguished professor prevent her from being of service to the “dear neighbour.”

Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard received a Doctor of Sacred Letters degree (*honoris causa*) from the University of St. Michael’s College (USMC), Toronto, Ontario, in 2014 which was followed by a prolonged standing ovation from family, friends, colleagues, her religious community, and CNWE members. This was an affirmation of her contributions to the academy, her enrichment of the lives of students, and her enduring legacy as an advocate and visionary for the full participation of women in the life of the Catholic Church. Sister Ellen had experienced USMC as “a welcoming place, an exciting place to come to do

theology” (“Paths of Transformation,” CSJT Archives). During her tenure, Professor Leonard offered the same in return to her students.



Image 5: Dr. Ellen Leonard, CSJ, after receiving the Doctor of Sacred Letters degree, *honoris causa*, at the Convocation for the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael's College, November 8, 2014, at St. Basil's Church. Sister Ellen is surrounded by CNWE members (L to R): Rita Patenaude, Aileen Smith, Thelma D'Souza, Mary Ellen Chown, Bonnie O'Brien, Phyllis Parr, Joanne Kelly, Anne Leonard, and Brigíd O'Reilly (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

In conclusion, Mary Rose D'Angelo, Professor Emerita of New Testament and Christian Origins, University of Notre Dame, a colleague of Sister Ellen's at USMC (1980-83) and a long-time friend, offers a succinct description of the breadth of Dr. Leonard's academic life work:

Ellen Leonard's theological investigations began with her studies of Roman Catholic Modernism and ranged through the renewal of Church life and theology through the Second Vatican Council, the commitments of liberation theology, and the emergence of feminist theology and Canadian theology. From her first explorations, she was engaged by theological thinking that recognized the centrality of history and human experience in the search for the divine. The thread that connects her work is that focus on experience as a source of theology, with increasing focus on the specificity

and particularity of the experience of the marginalized and especially of women. (M. R. D'Angelo, pers. comm., April 8, 2020)

Sister Ellen's deep commitment to feminist theology and praxis continues to be amplified by her legacy of work in the academy and by the students and movement she has inspired. Her ongoing focus on relationship above all else offers one a sense of joy and belonging in her presence. As her friend and colleague Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM, concludes, "Perhaps the most important thing I could say about my friendship with Ellen is the utter amazement I have for her courage. She has always been a kind of "even" person in temperament, but as I see her now, she is radiant to me as a witness to her love of God in the radical acceptance of her illness" (M. E. Sheehan, pers. comm., April 2, 2020). The threads of Sister Ellen's influence continue to be woven into the lives of all who know her and beyond, ensuring that her gifts as a Canadian scholar, mentor, and feminist activist will be a "transforming grace" for generations to come.

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Notes

1. Since 1970, members of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto have been referred to by their baptismal names, i.e., “Sister Ellen.” While it might be customary for a biographical essay to refer to Ellen Leonard as “Sr. Leonard or “Leonard,” Sister Ellen’s preference for this essay is to be called as she is known (E. Leonard, pers. comm., March 9, 2020). This usage is in no way intended to diminish her distinguished stature as a professor and theologian but rather to include her identity as a Sister of St. Joseph. In this essay, Ellen Leonard is referred to as “Ellen” through 1952, as “Sister Loyola” during her elementary school teaching years (before Vatican II), and otherwise as “Sister Ellen” or “Dr. Leonard.”
2. By comparison, current provincial education legislation in Ontario caps Grade 1 class size at 23 students (Province of Ontario Education Act 2019, 5:1).
3. Throughout this essay, the word ‘church’ is used in two ways, differentiated by the use of a lower case ‘c’ and an upper case ‘C’. The lower case “church” is used to describe the Vatican II understanding of church as the whole “people of God” (*Lumen gentium*, 13) and the upper case “Church” is used to refer to the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy.
4. Sister Ellen points out that, although the majority of Catholic religious were women, they were not permitted to formally participate in the development of *Perfectae caritatis*. She does note, however, that by the third session of the Council in 1964, 23 women were permitted as auditors, including USMC graduate Carmel McEnroy, RSM, author of *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* (1996). The women auditors had a significant influence in the crafting of “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” *Gaudium et spes* (Leonard 2007, 234).
5. In 1907, the Vatican’s Holy Office issued *Lamentabili sane exitu*, a syllabus condemning as heretical 65 “errors of the modernists,” followed two months later by Pius X’s lengthy encyclical, “On the Doctrines of the Modernists,” *Pascendi dominici gregis*. In 1910, Pius X issued an “Oath Against Modernism” that was required to be taken by priests and was only formally cancelled by Pope Paul VI in 1967.
6. Sister Ellen took a research leave in 1983–84 in England, Scotland, and France to research modernism, and she was a visiting fellow at St. Edmund’s College, Cambridge, during the Lent term of 1988 and the Easter term of 1991.

7. Even before Canadian Confederation (1867), Toronto had established, church-sponsored higher learning institutions. St. Michael's College (Roman Catholic), as well as Knox College (Presbyterian) and Wycliffe and Trinity Colleges (Anglican), were permitted in 1887 to federate with the non-sectarian University of Toronto. Emmanuel College (United Church of Canada), St. Augustine's Roman Catholic seminary, and Regis College—a Jesuit seminary at the time—were all similarly established in the twentieth century. The Toronto School of Theology was incorporated in 1970 as an ecumenical centre of theological studies in North America, consisting of St. Michael's, Knox, Wycliffe, Trinity, Emmanuel, St. Augustine's, and Regis Colleges.
8. Sister Ellen recognizes that her particular social location as a White, middle-class, Catholic woman religious, teaching theology in an ecumenical setting in central Canada, both shapes and limits the theological questions she asks (E. Leonard 2016, 48).
9. In her subsequent PhD dissertation, "A Cyberspace Room of Our Own: On the Significance of Cyberspace for Feminist Ecclesial Communities," Dr. Veronica Dunne, RNDM, draws on the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in *Bread Not Stone* (1984, 1995, Boston: Beacon Press, 174), who differentiates two understandings of "church" from ancient Greek: *ekklesia* ("democratic assembly of full citizens") and *kyriarke* ("belonging to the Lord Master"). It is this second meaning of church as *kyriarke* that Catholic feminists claim needs reform, to become an 'ekklesia' (Dunne 2002, 4).
10. Reception of the discussion kit by bishops was mixed. This negatively impacted the effectiveness of the kits. Only 32 of 70 dioceses appointed a "contact person for women's issues" as recommended and, in the end, only 19 of 70 dioceses submitted a report about using the kit (Dias 2019, 21).
11. cf. Note #9.