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BLOODY JOY:
HOW DOES THE EXPERIENCE OF BIRTH AND
MOTHERING ENRICH OUR UNDERSTANDING
OF PRIESTHOOD?
ARE THE VOICES OF MOTHER/PRIESTS
BEING HEARD?

Abstract

My experience of ordained ministry within the Church of England has led me to believe that the picture of priesthood the Church accepts as normative, still reflects a predominantly male perspective. Birth is the central metaphor of the Christian story and a powerful experience in the lives of those who are priest/mothers. In my own life mothering and priesthood are inextricably intertwined and the birth and subsequent mothering of my children is a rich resource for my ministerial practice. I want to find out if this is the case for other mother/priests, and if their stories are being heard by the wider church.

Using a questionnaire I begin to unearth the thoughts and experiences of a number of mother/priests with regard to how they hold their mothering and ministry together. Through stories from my own experience of being both priest and mother, and through the medium of art and poetry, I attempt to show what a rich resource the experience of birth and mothering is for our understanding of priesthood. I highlight the reality of 'painful joy' embedded in the living out of both motherhood and priestly ministry.

The process of writing this dissertation has alerted me to the layers of silence that would appear to exist within the Church with regard to the experience of women priests. This silence seems to extend to mothering and also to those women who struggle with loneliness, childlessness and relationship difficulties. It is my hope that by allowing the experience of mother/priests to enrich and challenge the patriarchal picture of priesthood we live with today, a more inclusive model of priestly ministry could emerge that honours a multiplicity of experience.