

Mary's Pence Summer Reading List 2014

Thought-Provoking Fiction:

Bitter Grounds, Sandra Benítez (1998)

Mary's Pence board member, Pat Rogucki, recommended this book to us. *Bitter Grounds* is an epic saga of a poor servant family, and their wealthy employers in El Salvador between the years of 1932 and 1977. The book, although fiction, is a good introduction to the recent history of El Salvador, contrasting the experience of the poor and the rich during decades of political turmoil. Pat was particularly moved by the depiction of the resiliency of women across generations – a theme throughout the book.

Breath, Eyes, Memory, Edwidge Danticat (1994)

Last year, Renate Schneider, liaison to the ESPERA group in Haiti recommended anything by Edwidge Danticat, and after reading Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, we couldn't resist including another selection from this powerful author on our 2014 list. A short but magical read, this novel explores the themes of mother-daughter dynamics, generational trauma, and immigration. Both heartwarming and troubling, this book puts the reader in touch with the experience of one family of women in Haiti.

The Invention of Wings, Sue Monk Kidd (2014)

Sue Monk Kidd is another author making a second appearance on our book list, this time with a novel as well. Kidd's new novel follows the story of Sarah, the daughter of a plantation owner from South Carolina, and Handful, a slave "gifted" to Sarah by her parents. This book was inspired by the true story of Sara Grimké, one of the first abolitionists and suffragists who stood up for the rights of African Americans and women as early as the 1830s. Kidd's graceful storytelling will surely move you.

Listening to the Voices of Women:

Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women, Wilma Mankiller (2004)

In the introduction to this book, Gloria Steinem writes, "[This book] could be the most important of this new century if it were to get the mindfulness it deserves." Consisting of a series of reflections by Indigenous Women of the United States, this book provides space for these women's voices, which are so often dismissed or made invisible in our society. The women's wisdom gives insight into topics of love, family, community, governance, and womanhood, among many others. This book was recommended by Katherine Wojtan, Mary's Pence Executive Director.

Each and Her, Valerie Martínez (2010)

Suggested by Mary's Pence supporter Carolyn Daniel, *Each and Her* is a powerful collection of poems that seek to pay homage to the hundreds of women who have been murdered in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. While these pieces can be haunting and difficult to read, they humanize the women who are victims of these femicides, connect us to their stories, and challenge us to respond to their suffering. This book was awarded an Honorable Mention in the 2011 International Latino Book Awards.

Exploring Church:

Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis (2013)

Recommended by Mary's Pence supporter Nancy Olson, Pope Francis's latest encyclical touches on several timely issues including the need for improved preaching, the importance of the preferential option for the poor, and a call for creating justice-oriented systemic change. Pope Francis elaborates in writing on many of

the beliefs, actions, and values we have come to admire him for. Nancy found this encyclical refreshing – she said it was “readable, wonderfully written, thoughtful and full of joy.”

Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints, Elizabeth Johnson (2003)

The Leadership Conference of Catholic Women (LCWR) has chosen theologian Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ as the recipient of LCWR’s 2014 Outstanding Leadership Award. In honor of this award, the service Johnson has provided for the Catholic Church, and her role in enhancing the place of women within the Church, we include just one recommendation from her long bibliography. *Truly Our Sister* is a robust and empowering interpretation of Mary. In this work of theology Johnson asks us to consider this interpretation of Mary as an example to follow in our church and world. The American Catholic Booksellers stated, "If you read only one book on Mary in your lifetime, let this be the one."

The Underground Church: Reclaiming the Subversive Way of Jesus, Robin Meyers (2012)

If you’ve been feeling a little less than inspired by the prophetic voice in your faith community lately, then this book may be for you. But beware – you may find within it a challenging call to action! Tired of lackluster sermons within the Christian Church, UCC Minister, Robin Meyers, challenges our common notions of the person of Jesus and his message. Meyers puts his reader in touch with the anti-establishment, justice-oriented radicalism of the early church, and suggests ways to live as the “Underground Church” in our current age. Thank you to former Mary’s Pence board member Roxanne Meshar for this recommendation.

Fighting for Justice:

A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power, Jimmy Carter (2014)

After years of traveling the world, engaging in diplomacy, and organizing major development programs, former United States President, Jimmy Carter, has stated that he will dedicate the rest of his life to working for the rights of women and girls – an issue he believes is at the crux of improving our world. In *A Call to Action* Carter puts on display the universal oppression of women and girls, regardless of nation, culture, or ethnicity. He ends his book by issuing recommendations for action and asks you to join him in the fight for women’s rights. This book was recommended by Anna Zaros, Mary’s Pence Development Liaison.

The Shriver Report: A Woman’s Nation Pushes Back from the Brink, A Study by Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress (2014)

While Carter’s book gives a global picture of the injustice women still face, *The Shriver Report* focuses specifically on the struggles of women in poverty in the United States. This report, filled with accessible research, personal stories, and essays from experts, lays out the full complexity and consequences of women’s inequality in the United States. And the pieces are written by diverse voices, including singer Beyoncé, Sister Joan Chittister, and fashion designer Tory Burch - who has a chapter on microfinance! What we like best about this report is that a good portion is dedicated to tangible and possible solutions at the governmental, private business, and personal levels. The report argues that as the economic security of women rises, the overall economic picture in the United States improves; women’s equality is an issue that impacts everyone. As you make your way through the books on this list you may be left thinking, *what next?* *The Shriver Report* gives us a place to start.

We received many more book recommendations than we could fit on our list. We are grateful for each of you who took the time to share books that have inspired you. If you would like to see the full list of book recommendations, check out our blog at www.maryspence.org/blog and look for the post titled “Books to Fill Your Summer with Wisdom, Inspiration, and Challenge.”