

A Courageous Sisterhood: Women of Grace in Southampton, Pennsylvania



cting like a man is no way to be a woman.

This core belief is what unites more than two dozen women from suburban Philadelphia, a true “sisterhood” of grace who are not at all afraid of putting the world in its place when it comes to the subject of authentic femininity.

Take 47 year old nurse, Demetria Liddy. When a doctor once told her every woman has a right to abort her own baby, she promptly replied, “Get behind me Satan!”

Cathy Gross, 68, was devout all her life but knew she had reached a new threshold of

grace when she could finally admit: “I just can’t watch Katie Couric anymore!”

Forty-two year old Cathy Kelly made a similar discovery about the world’s idea of female icons. After taking the Women of Grace® Foundational Study, she realized there was someone she needed to follow in life. “And it’s Jesus Christ – not Oprah Winfrey.”

Pat Boyle, 70, decided one day that she’d had enough of being spoken to in an unkind manner by her husband. In the middle of an argument, she jumped up and declared, “You can’t talk to me like that! I’m a child of God!” Not only did she stun him into silence, but he never spoke to her like that again!



Front row L/R: Cathy Kelly, Cathy Gross, Pat Doyle. Back Row L/R: Carolyn Iuliano, Demetria Liddy, Marian Bello, Marianne Escabar, Pat Hosey, Arleen Patton

All of these brave souls found their way together in 2005 when an unusual announcement in the parish bulletin at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Southampton, Pennsylvania posed the question: "Is someone calling you? Could it be God?"

It was an invitation posted by parishioner Gloria Wingel, 75, to attend the Women of Grace® Foundational Study. Dozens of women responded. They formed themselves into three separate groups, all meeting on Thursday evenings.

They've been together ever since.

All three groups were baptized in the Spirit and enrolled in the Scapular and still meet regularly to listen to Johnnette's DVD's or read books such as *Divine Intimacy* by Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, OCD, and *Sober Intoxication* by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM. Cap.

"It's a sisterhood," said Gloria, who serves as facilitator of the group. "There's such a support system here. None of the women knew each other before coming here and now they're so close knit. We're here for each other, encouraging, helping, reinforcing each other and helping one another to grow."

It's a tough mission in a world dominated by secular feminism. "Modern women have lost their vision of what a woman is supposed to be," Gloria says. "They want to be like men. They don't want to be the nurturer, the mother."

But for most women, this concept just leaves them empty.

"I got to a certain point in my life when I had attained certain goals, but I still had this emptiness inside," said member Cathy Kelly. Raised on a steady diet of radical feminism, she admits that it never attracted her. "I never wanted to be a media mogul or an executive. But I didn't desire to be a mother either because

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-- Gloria Wingel, Facilitator

I was raised in a broken home. I was very confused."

Her search for meaning brought her to the Study where she learned the truth about femininity.

"I am physiologically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually different from a man," she said. "I'm not supposed to try to be a man."

For the first time in her life, she feels free to be the woman God created her to be.

Marianne Escobar, 51 was in the same place. "Growing up in the 60s and 70s, I realized that equality totally squelched dignity for women," she said.

As far as she was concerned, Scripture was the only truth. "So I asked myself, who am I, as a woman, scripturally? That's what I wanted to know."

One particular line from *Full of Grace* seemed to answer all of her questions. "As women, as we aid humanity in not falling, then we become healers to our world."

"When I read this, I knew that I was in the right place," Marianne said. "It's okay to have done what I've done with my life. I know who I am as a woman."

Cathy Gross always had a strong faith but she didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. She grew up, got married, started her own family but felt she was just "plodding along" in her faith. "I needed to do something more."

She found what she was looking for in Women of Grace®. The emphasis on building a strong prayer life resulted in helping her to establish a personal relationship with Jesus for the first time in her life.

"It changed my life," she said. "Instead of getting up in the morning and turning on the TV, now I take a quiet moment to talk to my personal friend, Jesus."

Pat Hosey, who admits her age of 57 only as a "personal penance," was also raised in the faith. Her mother was completely devoted to Our Lady and raised her family to depend on Mary for everything.

As a result, "Mary and Our Lord in the Eucharist were my best friends," she said.

In fact, her brother, an ordained deacon, experienced a miraculous healing of cancer through Our Lady's intercession.

"I often prayed to Our Lady to make me the woman I need to be. I always had a thirst to be closer to Jesus and Mary – went on retreats, entered the church ministry institute, longed for more holy conversation with holy woman. So when I read Gloria's ad in the bulletin, I decided to join."

Now she's a "regular" who thrives on the good Catholic companionship that surrounds her at each meeting.

Carolyn Iuliano, 48, who describes herself as a "EWTN junkie," said Women of Grace® gave her the courage to step out in faith.

"I'm shy, except when I'm talking about God, but I felt like I wasn't doing enough," she said.

After graduating from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Church Ministry Institute, she became involved in an apostolate at

Philadelphia's Sts. Peter and Paul Basilica which involved greeting visitors and giving them a tour of the Cathedral.

"I love the Church – the old Church – and I love a beautiful church. Since becoming involved in this program, I've gotten into some great conversations and have many opportunities to tell people about the faith, EWTN, good Catholic books."

For Doreen Ringers, 42, the Study was personally revealing. "Women of Grace spiritually opened my mind, allowing me to receive forgiveness and to forgive others, something that I didn't even know I had an issue with until I went through the Study."

Demetria Liddy, a surgical nurse in a local Catholic hospital, came to the group from the front lines of the battle for life.

"God puts you where He wants you to be," says Demetria, a former classmate of Terri Schindler Sciavo, the mentally disabled woman who died in 2005 after a court allowed her husband to disconnect her food and water.

She often feels very alone while working in the midst of medical situations where Christian ethics are not always respected – even in Catholic facilities. But that doesn't stop her. She often takes copies of Breaking News reports from the Women of Grace® website and distributes them to medical personnel in the hospital, many of whom thank her for doing so.

"Women of Grace has given me great courage," she says.

They're all active in the parish now, becoming Eucharistic Ministers and Lectors, teaching in the parish prep program and RCIA, hosting Light Weigh courses or enrolling in the Church Ministry Institute.

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