

Religion

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'Pope Joan'?

Author Donna Woolfolk Cross began pursuing a Catholic legend and wound up believing in the existence of a ninth-century female pope.

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Chosen Women seek own voice

Leaders reject comparison to male Promise Keepers

By Timothy Ruthstiver
Religion News Service

Yes, it will be a stadium rally: thousands of women in the Rose Bowl. And, yes, there will be nationally known speakers and an emotional tribute to Ruth Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham. And, yes, there will be lots of merchandise aimed at deepening the spiritual life.

But don't call the Chosen Women event, expected to draw more than 50,000 evangelical women to Pasadena, Calif., on May 16 and 17, the female version of Promise Keepers. Organizers say the two have little in common.

FYI

For more information on Chosen Women or the rally, call (714) 245-2591.

Instead, said Susan Kimes, the group's executive director, the name was taken from the New Testament — 1 Peter 2:9 and the phrase, "But you are a

chosen people." Its inspiration came from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) — 2 Chronicles 29-31 — which tells the story of King Hezekiah of Judah assembling the people in Jerusalem to reinstate worship of Yahweh, restore the temple and cleanse the land of rival gods.

"I believe in the same way that the Lord is inviting this generation of women to come together for that purpose," Kimes said.

Chosen Women is an outgrowth of Kimes' Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry (NEWIM), an organization that emerged from her work on the staff of Calvary Church in Santa Ana, Calif.

Groups from Australia, Russia, Indonesia, Tennessee and Georgia are among those planning to attend the rally. At least 40 women from Arizona already are registered, and more are expected to, organizers said.

Francesca Green and four other women from Christ's Church of the Valley in Phoenix plan to attend out of curiosity as much as anything.

Chosen Women 'gifted to serve'

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mountaintop experience and renewal for Christian women.

"For our church, we've sent over 100 men to the Promise Keepers experience. They all come back and say, 'Wow, we wish there was something like this for our wives,'" said Green, a Phoenix resident.

Although Chosen Women says the event is open to all women, communications director Joanne Herdrich said that the target is women already in the church and that "our statement of faith is definitely evangelical."

Unlike Promise Keepers, which emphasizes men's traditional role as head of the household, Chosen Women is not advocating any particular role for women.

"We're gifted and equipped in many ways," Kimes said. "We can be single and serve the Lord, married, have children and serve the

Lord and our families — there is no place where having a stronger relationship (with God) cannot benefit."

Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of Ruth and Billy Graham and the keynote speaker at this month's event, also stressed that the agenda of the rally is not about defining a woman's role in the family and church.

"God did not mean to keep us subservient," Lotz said. "He created men and women equal, he gave them dominion over the Earth."

On the other hand, she added, the secular women's movement offered a "false liberation . . . a counterfeit to the right solution."

The result has been that "more born-again couples are divorcing than those in the secular world" as they are "apparently facing the pressure to be somebody, to make a name for themselves, to have an identity apart from husband and family. When they're told they need a career plus a

family, they're frustrated, not fulfilled. They're frustrated and angry inside."

The church, too, needs to change, said writer Jill Briscoe, who will be a featured speaker at the rally.

"I think there is male domination in leadership and that men are making the decisions about what women can or cannot do," she said.

Briscoe, author of more than 40 devotional books, said, "A woman is able to go to seminary, Bible college, missionary training school — but the church isn't willing to welcome her to put her to work. I think there's some frustration among women today who want to serve in the church."

Unlike Promise Keepers, which holds rallies continually, there are no plans for Chosen Women beyond the Rose Bowl event.

Contributing to this article was Kelly Ettenborough of The Arizona Republic.