

RCWMS Essay Contest History

Year	Theme Summary	Theme	First Place	Second Place	Third Place
2023	Repair, Release, Renew	Essays should focus on themes of repair, release, or renewal. Each of us writes amid torn hearts, fractured communities, and broken systems. When do we repair? What do we release? How do we renew? We invite essays that explore, complicate, and/or write against this theme.	"Bead by Bead" by Sarah Woodford	"Morning Glories" by Eileen Leamy	"Watching California Burn" by Lindsey Danis "Madonna With Scars" by Linda Wisniewski
2022	Autonomy	Essays should focus on the theme of bodily autonomy. Writers could focus on their own experience or on someone who spoke out for their personal rights or bodily integrity.	"Everything I Can" by Liddy Grantland	"Bodily Autonomy" by Allison Kirkland	"Marching Forward" by Jeri Dunman "Named" by Heather Williams (honorable mention)
2021	Identity	Essays should focus on the themes of identity and belonging . Oppressive systems and structures seek to prevent us from living into the complexities of our identities and lived experiences. How do you know when you are showing up as your full self and experiencing true belonging?	"Stand Up for Jesus" by Karen Sandler	"A Vixen's Prayer" by Olivia Brown	"Searching for Identity: Finding Words" by F.I. Goldhaber
2020	Pandemic	Essays should focus on the theme " What has changed for you during the COVID-19 pandemic. " We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. What has changed? What have you lost or abandoned? Is there anything that used to bother you that doesn't anymore? Have there been any benefits? What has sustained you during this time?	"Lullabying" by Sarah Swandell	"I Will Survive" by Tsharre Sanders	"Questions and Quarantine" by Katy King
2019	Democracy	Essays should focus on Activism, Protest, Citizen Engagement, or Holy Anger . We hope that people will write about the ways that they	"The Courage to Say No." by Joan Tilghman	N/A	

		participate in democracy and how they understand faith or spiritual practices as inspiring or supporting their activities in the public square.	"Dispatches from the Front" by Mindy Oshrain		
2018	Roots	Essays should focus on the theme " Roots & Branches. " We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. What grounds you? What helps you reach out? What sustains you in your personal or professional life? How does spiritual community help to nourish you? Where might you need pruning in order to thrive?	"Outside Eden" by Angela Yarber	"Roots: Beet" by Lisa Richey	
2017	Ecofeminism	Essays should focus on the theme " Ecofeminism " or " Spirituality and the Natural World. " We invite submissions that consider these themes in creative ways. You might consider how your spirituality or faith has been shaped by your experiences in the natural world. Does your spiritual practice include a relationship with nature? Does your spirituality or faith inform your concern for the earth?	"Roosting" by Heather E. Goodman	"White Crane Spreads her Wings" by Judith Sornberger	"White Blaze" by Galia Goodman
2016	White supremacy	Essays should focus on the theme " Experiencing White Supremacy. " We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. How have your experiences been shaped by being privileged or oppressed by institutional or other forms of racism in our country? How do your intersecting identities affect your faith, values, work, or spiritual practices? How have you addressed or worked to dismantle racism in your family, your religious community, or your city?	"Hand Wringing and Reckoning" by Danyelle O'Hara	"Layers of White Privilege" by Karen Erlichman	
2015	Embodying faith	Essays this year should focus on the theme Embodying Faith. We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. How do you embody your faith as a woman? How do you embody your faith or your deeply held values in	"How to Pet a Porcupine" by Rebecca Lanning	"Finding the Vesperbild" by Sarah Woodford	"Mockingbird" by Lauren Kilbourn "Etched in My Mind" by Lucille Gaither

		your life, your work, or your spiritual practices?			(honorable mention)
2014	Intergenerational	Essays this year should focus on the theme of intergenerational relationships among women. If you are a young woman, how have you been influenced by older women? What relationships and situations have helped you grow and enriched your life? Likewise, for older women, how have you been influenced by young women? How do intergenerational relationships and communities benefit women of all ages?	“Like a Tumbling Stream” by Liz Dowling-Sendor	“Gratitude” by Mary Edwards	“The Joy of Grace” by Deana Vassar
2013	Home	Essays this year should focus on the theme of “home.” Writers may choose to write about a physical home, a spiritual home, the desire to feel at home, or other topics connected to home.	“Thick Places: Annalee’s Kitchen” by Julia Sendor	“Sabbatical” by Martha Abshire Simmons	“Soaring” by Anna LaSala-Goettler
2012	Elders	Essays this year should focus on grandmothers or elder women in the writer's life. We welcome writing about being a grandmother, having a grandmother, or having been influenced by an elder woman.	“...And Grace Will Lead Me Home” by Kara Scroggins	“Mimi” by Hadley Kifner	“Ms. Dawson and My Search for <i>Pietas</i> ” by Julia Sendor
2011	Pauli Murray	Essays should be inspired by Pauli Murray’s idea of drawing strength from all our roots. They should focus on or exemplify issues embodied in Murray’s life, work, witness, and ministry. For example, essays could focus on issues that lie at the intersections of faith, race, gender, or sexual orientation.	“Rooted in Being” by Karen Ziegler	“Hear Her Roar” by Diane Daniel	“Renewal of Spirit: A Cultural Legacy” by Marion Thullbery
2010	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2009	Feminist spirituality	Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist perspectives on spirituality and life. Write about your life, grace, how you experience God, or how you make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.	“Rich” by Judith Valerie	“Pilgrimage” by Marion Thullbery	N/A
2008	Feminist	Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist	“My Holy Ghost”	“Little Miss Grace”	“Divided I Fall” by

	spirituality	perspectives on spirituality and daily life. We want women to write about their lives, grace, how they experience God, or how they make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.	People ” by Ashley Makar	by Linda Tefend	Karin Weir (Maggie McKinney)
2007	Feminist spirituality	Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist perspectives on spirituality and daily life. Write about your lives, grace, how you experience God, or how you make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.	“Waiting for Nothing to Change” by Libby Fosso	“Steve, Psych, Sanctity” by Kathryn Banakis	“Chilies, Please” by Alison Louise Harney “Here I Am” by Kristen Rademacher (honorable mention)
2006	Feminist spirituality	Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist perspectives on spirituality and daily life. We want women to write about their lives, grace, how they experience God, or how they make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.	“A Mother to Be” by Linda Gupton	“The Red Couch” by Claudia Horwitz	“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: The Sweater” by June Ellen Haslip “Guilt and Grace” by Katarina Whitley (honorable mention)
2005	Feminist spirituality	Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist perspectives on spirituality and daily life. We want women to write about their lives, grace, how they experience God, or how they make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.	“Invisible Heart” by Carol Shumate	“I Just Want to Say Her Name” by Marya McNeish	“Revitalization” by Becky Holtzman
2004	Feminist spirituality	Essays should focus on or exemplify feminist perspectives on spirituality and daily life. We want women to write about their lives, grace, how they experience God, or how they make it through the hard places. No sermons, please.	“Second Chances” by Joyce Hollyday	“Mailing Fudge” by Liz McGeachy	“The Sabbath—at My House” by Sally Hicks “My Favorite Bedtime Story” by June Ellen Haslip