

WHAT WE STAND FOR

Climate & Our Common Home

LAUDATO SI' – SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY YEAR

May 24, 2020 to May 24, 2021

Promoting Integral Human Development, from the Vatican

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A LIFE ISSUE

**CLIMATE POLLUTION IS A Greater pandemic than
COVID-19**

***COVID-19 Kills Many Quickly – Climate Kills Many
More Slowly***

We Must Care for Our Common Home, NOW!



Father Emmet Farrell writes about “Climate Change – From Principles to Action.” **[Read his thoughts here, published by the AUSCP.](#)**

A Tale of two Pandemics:



The parallels between the coronavirus and the climate

crisis by John F. Kerry, [Read the article here from the Boston Globe](#)

Pope Francis links virus and climate concerns:

Coronavirus could be a reaction to Climate Change

- “This is the time to take the decisive step, to move from using and misusing nature to contemplating it,” he said.
- “I believe we have to slow down our rate of production and consumption and to learn to understand and contemplate the natural world,” he said. “We need to reconnect with our real surroundings. This [the coronavirus] is the opportunity for conversion.”
- The pope said he wanted a response from world leaders that focuses more on humans and the environment than the economy.



A2A Assembly to Action: As part of the AUSCP promotion of the “Season of Creation,” September 1 – October 4, 2019, the AUSCP Climate Change Working Group has prepared an A2A Newsletter, **Eating Choices & Climate Change**. You are welcome to use it as a bulletin insert or for small group discussion.

CLIMATE CRISIS CRASH COURSE MATERIALS

Care for Our Common Home/Laudato Si` • by Pope Francis

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

“A Catholic Response to Global Warming” by Catholic Climate Covenant

<https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/resource/catholic-response-global-warming-booklet> Steven Coleman, Citizen’s Climate Lobby. This 24-page publication is designed to provide a basic understanding of Catholic Social teaching on care of creation, the science of Global Warming and the actions we can

take to fight climate change. It may be read in an hour. There are references at each step if the reader wishes to go into greater depth on the topic.

NEW YORK TIMES CRASH COURSE

The science is clear: The world is warming dangerously, humans are the cause of it, and a failure to act today will deeply affect the future of the Earth. [Link to an image:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/19/climate/climate-crash-course-1.html>

Editorial: Trump's assault on the environment tramples years of progress, BY NCR EDITORIAL STAFF, APR 23, 2020

While the world struggles against a microbial menace, nature itself is under attack from the deliberate and steady overthrow by the Trump administration of environmental regulations, some in place for decades.

At 50 years, Earth Day becomes a digital outpouring of urgent resolve

BY BRIAN ROEWE, JESSE REMEDIOS, BILL MITCHELL, APR 22, 2020

People across the world logged onto their computers to follow along with livestreams and join virtual meetings to take part in the annual Earth Day, dedicated to protecting our common planetary home.

Creation is sacred gift deserving respect, care, pope says on Earth Day

BY CAROL GLATZ, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE, APR 22, 2020

Celebrating Earth Day, which fell during the “Easter season of renewal, let us pledge to love and esteem the beautiful gift of the earth, our common home, and to care for all members of our human family,” he said during his livestreamed weekly general audience from the Vatican.

Climate activists to emerge stronger from coronavirus crisis, says Greta Thunberg BY **MEGAN ROWLING, REUTERS,** APR 22, 2020

“Today is Earth Day and that reminds us...we need to tackle both the corona pandemic ... at the same time as we tackle climate and environmental emergency.”

An Earth Day activist looks back: How far have we come?

BY **JAMES DAILEY,** APR 22, 2020

Women religious model the Christian ecological vocation

BY **DAWN NOTHWEHR,** APR 22, 2020

Prize-winning photos from opposite sides of the globe tell grim stories of climate crisis, BY **THE GUARDIAN,** APR 21, 2020

Earth Day 50 years on: It's all about the questions

BY **LUKE HENKEL,** APR 21, 2020

Hymns, teach-ins and a horse ride to school: Catholic stories of the first Earth Day, BY **BRIAN ROEWE,** APR 21, 2020

Our common home needs you on the frontline today

BY DEWY SACAYAN, APR 20, 2020

FOR DIGGING INTO CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME/Laudato Si'

From ASSEMBLY to ACTION occasional papers (A2A)

"Climate Change – From Principles to Action" by Fr. Emmet Farrell

<https://uscatholicpriests.ourpowerbase.net/civCRM/mailling/view?id=811>

A Catholic Response to Global Warming" by Catholic Climate Covenant

<https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/resource/catholic-response-global-warming-booklet> Steven Coleman, Citizen's Climate Lobby

Maryknoll Office for Global Concern

<https://maryknollogc.org/alerts/earth-day-2020-pray-study-act>

Earth Day over 50 Years: National Catholic Reporter offers a series of articles. [CLICK HERE](#)



The Green Commandments of Laudato Si'

Fr. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, a featured speaker at the June 2019 Climate Conference held at Creighton University jointly sponsored by Creighton and the Catholic Climate Covenant, wrote a book titled **The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si'**. Here are the first five:

- **Earth, our common home, is in peril. Take care of it.**

- **Listen to the cry of the poor who are the disproportionate victims of the crisis of our common home.**
- **Rediscover a theological vision of the natural world as good news/gospel.**
- **Recognize that the abuse of creation is ecological sin.**
- **Acknowledge the deeper human roots of the crisis of our common home.**

The book is available from Amazon and other sources.

Books that can inform, inspire, and Guide

The Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril by Elizabeth Johnson

Silent Spring by Rachel Carson. Fuse that started concern about climate, still inspiring and relevant. Available on Amazon for \$2 on Kindle.

Latest Posts About Climate & Our Common Home

[New biography of Thomas Berry reasserts importance of his work](#)

17 May at 3:10 pm

[A call for climate](#)

11 May at 5:17 pm

Immigration

Purpose: To inform members about Immigration issues and to support the efforts of the USCCB to promote and advance Comprehensive Immigration Reform through public actions and support of positive initiatives. Pete Ruggere MM is the AUSCP delegate to the USCCB Committee, *Justice for Immigrants*.

Latest Posts About Immigration

[How immigration affects the three Americas](#) 

23 Oct 2019

Clericalism

Latest Posts About Clericalism

Clericalism: The Death of Priesthood

26 Jul 2019

Priests ask bishops for end of secrecy, cleric

4 Jun 2019

Gospel Non-Violence

Ben Salmon conscientiously objected to World War 1 and all war in opposition to the majority of US citizens, the US Government, and his own Roman Catholic Church. Ben's conscience earned him lengthy imprisonment, solitary confinement and broken health. One hundred years ago, he wrote extensively on Christ's command: "Thou shalt not kill." His life, work and witness are chronicled on this site.

<http://www.bensalmon.org>

Latest Posts About Non-Violence

500 Muslim leaders denounce terrorism

19 Jul 2019

End Racism & White Supremacy

Deconstructing White Privilege

All of us must seek the light of God, the light of truth in recognizing oppression. We begin to do so in this session, which focuses on the oppressive behavior that is born out of white privilege. Dr. Robin DiAngelo is transparent about white privilege couched in explicit and implicit biases in the video “Deconstructing White Privilege,” the first in a series of Vital Conversations on Racism.

Dr. DiAngelo describes the most obvious and explicit aspects of racism and white privilege, while going beyond the surface of racism. Her video serves as a foundation on understanding racism and white privilege for the remaining six videos in the Vital Conversations series.

<http://www.gcorr.org/video/vital-conversations-racism-dr-robin-diangelo/>

Latest Posts About Ending Racism & White Supremacy

Anti-Racism Webinar

18 Feb at 5:58 pm

Women & Church

In its national assembly held in Seattle, in June 2013, the Association of United States Catholic Priests passed a resolution to promote the ongoing discussion of the ordination of women as permanent deacons and agreed to ask the U.S. bishops to give public support to the restoration of the first millennium practice of ordaining women as permanent deacons.

AUSCP STATEMENT REGARDING ORDINATION OF WOMEN DEACONS

We who are entrusted with leadership on behalf of the one thousand members of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, welcome with praise and prayer the recent decision by Pope Francis to establish a commission regarding the possible ordination of women deacons.

We believe the ordination of women deacons will enhance pastoral ministry and serve the common good of the People of God. Our association has supported the ordination of women to the diaconate with a resolution adopted in our 2013 assembly, and with a letter to the U.S. bishops in 2014. We noted that many priests “find ourselves very stretched in ministry with more and more demands being made on us daily One way to help assist us in our duties would be to allow the ordination of women to the diaconate, a practice that was familiar to the early church, in order to help us better serve the people entrusted to us.”

We believe that ordination is a matter of justice for women who are our associates and partners in providing ministry. Women have traditionally done 80 to 85 percent of the ministry of our Church. Since the restoration of the permanent diaconate following the Second Vatican Council male candidates were chosen among those who were already performing diaconal service. We see it as a matter of justice that women who likewise are leaders in such ministries not be deprived of the graces of the Sacrament.”

Today we continue to speak on behalf of our members serving in dioceses and religious communities with day-to-day ministerial joys and challenges. Our experience leads us to believe that having men and women deacons as parish administrators would be more effective than closing parishes and establishing super parishes.

We value the position of FutureChurch and other organizations of Catholics concerned about pastoral ministry. FutureChurch states that many women who lead parishes and serve as catechists and chaplains and in other ministries should be ordained. “In light of mission opportunities and pastoral needs, local Churches should be empowered to call forth women for the ordained *diaconia* of liturgy, word and charity.”

(Signed)

The Leadership Team: On behalf of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests

Father Louis Arceneaux, Congregation of the Mission

Father Bob Bonnot, Diocese of Youngstown

Father Kevin Clinton, Archdiocese of St. Paul – Minneapolis;

Father David Cooper, Archdiocese of Milwaukee;

Father Dan Divis, Diocese of Cleveland

Father Frank Eckart, Diocese of Toledo;

Father Jim Kiesel, Archdiocese of Baltimore

Father Daniel Ramirez Portugal, Diocese of Laredo

Father Joe Ruggieri, Diocese of Youngstown

Father Jim Schexnayder, Diocese of Oakland.

Father Bernie Survil, Diocese of Greensburg;

Father Clarence Williams, National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus

Sister Jackie Doecker, a member of the Franciscan Sisters, Tiffin, Ohio, serves the AUSCP as Executive Secretary.

Related Links

NEW: *Posted January 26, 2019, Opinion piece from NCR: [Phyllis Zagano: It's not about women priests](#)*

NEW: *Posted January 26, 2019: [Download a Study Guide: Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future](#)*

NEW: *Posted January 25, 2019: [The CARA study](#)*

NEW: *Posted January 24, 2019: [FutureChurch: Why not now?](#)*

NEW: Posted January 24, 2019: Crux reports most US bishops would ordain women deacons, if Vatican gives OK

NEW: Posted January 24, 2019: America reports one-third of US bishops believe Church 'should' ordain women

NEW: Posted January 24, 2019: Catholic News Service, on survey results, published by Catholic Philly

NEW: Posted January 21, 2019: Papal Commission members discuss women deacons at Fordham. Report from NCR

Watch the Fordham video: Salt and Light Media 1 hour 42 minutes

Ministry, not power: Report in Central Minnesota Catholic

Deacons, Women and the Call to Serve, Part I: History and Present Practice *From Fordham Archives*

Deacons, Women and the Call to Serve, Part II: Women Deacons and the Papal Commission *From Fordham Archives*

Deacons, Women and the Call to Serve, Part III: The Diaconate and the Future of Ministry *From Fordham Archives*

NEW August 2018: Major Superiors: Ordination of Women Deacons 'theoretically possible'

NEW Posted January 21, 2019: What's the problem with women deacons? Nothing, says a scholar

Latest Posts About Women's Roles

Women theologians back Cardinal Ouellet: Women are needed in seminary formation

11 May at 9:08 pm

End Death Penalty

The AUSCP adds priests' voices to the call of the U.S. bishops to end the death penalty.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops • November 2005

“This is a time to teach clearly, encourage reflection, and call for common action in the Catholic community to bring about an end to the use of the death penalty in our land.

“... We reaffirm our common judgment that the use of the death penalty is unnecessary and unjustified in our time and circumstances.

“Our nation should forgo the use of the death penalty because

- The sanction of death, when it is not necessary to protect society, violates respect for human life and dignity.
- State-sanctioned killing in our names diminishes all of us.
- Its application is deeply flawed and can be irreversibly wrong, is prone to errors, and is biased by factors such as race, the quality of legal representation, and where the crime was committed.
- We have other ways to punish criminals and protect society.

“... We renew our common conviction that it is time for our nation to abandon the illusion that we can protect life by taking life. Ending the use of the death penalty would be one important step away from a culture of death toward building a culture of life.”

Among recent efforts against the death penalty is a new book by Sister Helen Prejean. She was interviewed by Religion News Service.

<https://religionnews.com/2019/08/20/sister-helen-prejean-on-new-book-getting-rid-of-death-penalty-and-getting-jesus-right/>

Priesthood Issues

Priesthood Formation

To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry

WHO WE ARE

AUSCP Working Group Chair: Ron Chochol, rcchochol@aol.com

AUSCP Facilitator: Marty Marren, mtmarren@comcast.net

AUSCP Leadership Team Liaison: Kevin Clinton, kevin.clinton@npcatholic.org

WHY WE ARE WORKING

Since the December 8, 2016 Congregation for the Clergy's release of *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation (Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis–3rd Edition)*, with its mandate that each conference of bishops update its Program of Priestly Formation, we of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests (AUSCP) have felt called and duty-bound to contribute to this important process. Our 2017 Assembly in Atlanta made addressing it one of our three top priorities for 2017-2018. A Working Group was established and has worked diligently since August 2017 to prepare observations, concerns, and proposals regarding five crucial components of priestly formation.

WHAT WE SAID TO U.S. BISHOPS

[LETTER TO THE USCCB AND THE FULL DOCUMENT HERE](#)

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

NEW: January 14, 2019: **[Read Part I of an NCR series on seminary formation](#)**

NEW: January 22, 2019: **[Read Part II of an NCR series: Seminary opposition to Pope Francis](#)** **NEW:**

January 28, 2019: **[Read Part III of an NCR series: Scandal galvanizes seminarians' resolve](#)**

NEW: February 8, 2019: **[Read Part IV of an NCR Series: Seminary formation: Screening, service and reflection part of antidote to clericalism](#)**

[AUSCP Leadership Team Member says priesthood reform must begin addressing clericalism](#)

Reported in NCR August 13, 2019

*August 11, 2019, from NCR: **[Pope Francis is a priests' priest](#)***

March 11, 2019, NCR: **Seminaries evolving**

Posted February 7, 2019, from NCR: **Clergy warned not to place themselves above laypeople**

The following communique has gone out into the public realm, according to Thomas Groome, Professor of Theology and Religious Education. “Let’s hope it reaches far and wide,” he said. “And feel very welcome to give it a ‘push’ at your end – if you have the opportunity.

This communiqué reflects discussions within the conference, but final responsibility for its content rests with the co-chairs of the event, not with the participants. Co-chairs: Richard Gaillardetz, Thomas Groome, Richard Lennan.

Read the document [HERE](#)

Married Clergy/Viri Probati

Purpose: To encourage the American Bishops to petition the Pope to change the present law requiring celibacy of all Roman Catholic priests by opening ordination to married men of proven quality (*viri probati*). The Ad Hoc Working Group has drafted and referred a letter to the Leadership Team, to be communicated to the appropriate USCCB Committee.

Priestless Parishes

Priestly Formation

The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests eagerly awaits the action of the U.S. bishops who are expected to approve new guidelines for priestly formation the dioceses and archdioceses of the United States. The bishops meet in mid-November.

Father Louis Arceneaux, C.M., commented:

“Our U. S. Bishops are preparing to vote on a revised edition of the Program for Priestly Formation, the document that guides all bishops in establishing priestly formation programs in their dioceses. While working on this document, the bishops’ committee invited recommendations from interested groups and individuals. The Association of U. S. Catholic Priests responded with a lengthy document offering significant proposals touching five areas of concern:

- Faithfulness to Vatican II, as presently articulated by Pope Francis.
- Focusing on call to service and not superiority.
- A pastoral model of formation rooted in an environment where candidates study and interact with laywomen and men.
- A more professional focus on psychosexual development of candidates preparing to live a celibate life, especially in view of sexual abuse and cover up in the past.
- A discernment process for candidates and faculty to assure that the focus is on God’s call to service and not individuals private wish.

Sadly, we have no idea if any of these concerns, written up in greater detail in our document, have been addressed in the revised document. In fact, we do not know how many bishops have seen the proposed revision. We look forward to seeing and reviewing what the bishops approve.”

Father Peter Daly, a member of the AUSCP leadership team, recently penned an opinion piece for National Catholic Reporter.

https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/priestly-diary/tackle-clericalism-first-when-attempting-priesthood-reform?fbclid=IwAR2jotKQVxTol5d4WM8DIXRq4ohmriZdj9AG_vJT3EVV3jV8RQABiAawjoM

Church & Labor

The Catholic Labor Network has announced a “Church-Labor Partnership Project.” Learn more about the effort to say “thou shalt not” to an economy of exclusion and inequality.

<http://catholiclabor.org/2019/02/3101/>

Association of US Catholic Priests' Declaration on the Status of Women in the Church

On May 28, 2019, the Leadership Team of the Association of US Catholic Priests (AUSCP) approved a Declaration on the Status of Women in the Church. We invite you to read the document and discuss it in your parish or community.

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AUSCP DECLARATION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

April 2019

PREAMBLE

“The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (Gaudium et Spes 1).

Joy and hope spring from our faith in Jesus Christ who promises to be with us until the end of time (Matthew 28:20). As a working group called together by the Association of United States Catholic Priests (AUSCP), we trust that with the help of the Holy Spirit we, the People of God, can overcome the grief and anxiety caused by the crises in our Catholic Church today, but only if the institutional Church engages women as equals in dealing with those crises and overcoming them.

The signs of the times suggest that what were once considered to be the most effective ways of spreading the Gospel are no longer sufficient. We need new models of universal and parochial leadership to stimulate Church renewal. Such models must be developed in such a way that, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

We have every reason to hope for the possibility of change. A thorough examination of the official status of women is necessary to regain trust and credibility in a world that so badly needs their witness. In union with the Synod on Youth 2018, we hold that “we cannot but reflect on the conditions of women within the Church and consequently within society. Young men and young women ask for it with great force. It is a duty of justice.”

The Holy Spirit speaks to us through various disciplines and our own experiences. Historical, cosmological, anthropological, biological, scriptural, philosophical, theological, sacramental, liturgical and pastoral reflections all

support our conviction that this is a moment when we can engage in a process that recognizes our common Baptism and the vital role of women in the present and future of Church ministry. We offer contemporary insights in the following sections for your consideration and discussion.

May we engage in genuine dialogue as men and women of faith? We call upon the Holy Spirit to guide our dialogue and action so that our joy might be complete (John 16:24). We invite you to join us, in the words of the Synod, in a work of “courageous cultural conversion and change in daily pastoral practice.”

HISTORY

Discovering the status of women throughout history in society and the Church is a daunting task. Until the mid-twentieth century, history has been constructed and recorded mostly by men. The androcentric bias of historical texts reflects the priorities and worldview of men with power, distorting and even obscuring what we can know about the actual experience and authority of women of the past. The contemporary response to that bias by both female and male theologians has been to generate a new field of theological thought called feminist theology, which has provided a new lens for examining both Scripture and our Tradition.

Theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether have asserted that human experience is understood as the basis of all theology. Traditionally, such experience has been identified with and defined by men; feminist theology includes the experiences of women, and therefore exposes the male-centered bias of classical theology and articulates an understanding of faith that incorporates all of humanity. Whereas the traditional paradigm of theology supported domination and subordination in relationships between men and women, feminist thinking enables a mutuality that allows for variety, particularity, equality and mutual respect in and among women and men. The goal is not to diminish males but to affirm both sexes as whole, along with all races and social groups.

Scripture and other early Christian writings provide primary literary sources for the understanding of women's historical status in Judaism and early Christianity. Each is subject to androcentric limitations. Although they offer windows into beliefs, practices and proscriptions at various times and places, contemporary biblical scholars and historians should be careful to distinguish between the patriarchal bias and historical interpretation of those texts and what happened in the actual lives of women.

This distinction is key to understanding the way we interpret the texts themselves. Indeed, the meaning of Greek and Latin masculine plurals often function grammatically as gender neutral in describing groups of men and women. Historically, androcentric readings of the texts rendered the Greek for words such as “saints” and “elect” as inclusive of both women and men, but words such as “apostoloi”, “didaskaloi” and “episcopoi” applied exclusively to men.

The status of women in society, culture, and the Church has varied significantly through time. At no time have women lived completely free from this patriarchal context. Social, ideological, religious and other factors were defined largely by distinct and strongly enforced gender roles. Nonetheless, while the patriarchy ruled and restricted all women, including Jewish and Christian women, the extent of those restrictions was mitigated to some extent by a woman's socioeconomic status, cultural context and geography rather than by her religious affiliation. Ironically, this could lead to those poorest in society enjoying greater freedom than the higher-born.

Women, such as Mary, the mother of Jesus, were born poor and lived a subsistence agrarian existence under Roman rule. Heavy taxation and the political machinery that kept that system in place rendered Mary's contemporaries some of the poorest, most oppressed, and most brutalized in the world. But this agrarian existence, by necessity, created a social network where women exercised various degrees of equity in comparison to women of a higher social status.

Jesus' behavior toward women, even when viewed through the androcentric bias of first- and second-century texts, is extraordinarily egalitarian. Women, both single and married, were part of his inner circle and traveled with him and his other disciples carving out a new movement as a community. The Gospels tell us of a Samaritan

woman who was the first missionary in her town (see John 4); a Canaanite woman who begged that Jesus acknowledge her share in God's plan for salvation (see Matthew 15:21-28); and Mary Magdalene, who was the first messenger of the Resurrection according to all four gospels.

Christianity, this first century reform movement within Judaism, was attractive to women in part because of the equity it embraced as central to the reign of God. As the movement grew to include Gentiles, Paul wrote to the Galatians that, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Thus, women played a critical role in the expansion of Christianity. Paul's greetings to acquaintances in his authentic letters offer solid information about many Jewish and Gentile women who were prominent leaders within the movement.

Although there is no evidence that women led synagogue worship in Palestine, Ross Kramer's seminal study of the epigraphic, papyrological and archaeological sources found that in the second century, both women and men in the Jewish diaspora held synagogal offices.

While women have always exercised some form of leadership and authority within a patriarchal power structure, they were in conflict with the systematic degradation of women in these societies. These ancient cultural and social mores continue to influence contemporary culture, and, as a result of deep-seated sexism, Catholic and Orthodox Christianity constitutionally and legally exclude women from ordained authority in church leadership and ministry.

In various parts of the world today women have achieved status much closer to equality with men than has perhaps ever been experienced in history. Despite imposed limitations in the

Catholic Church, women have made extraordinary contributions to both the Church and society.

We, along with many Catholics today, judge that the misogynistic attitude embedded in Catholic Church culture must be uprooted to make room for women.

How can we open those doors that are currently closed to women for the good of the Church and the world?

COSMOLOGY AND SCIENCE

God is unchanging. What *does* change is our perception of God. Science has an important role in the ongoing discovery of the immensity of God's creation, and our ability to recalibrate our worldview accordingly.

Early Christians used the Greek word *catholic* (*Kata*, meaning “through”, and *holou*, meaning “the whole”) to signify universality, wholeness and attunement to the cosmos. Scientist and theologian Ilia Delio, whose research focuses on the intersection of science and religion, contends that the term *catholic* signified “an open system” where Jesus was understood as a new creation making a fragmented and broken humanity whole in Christ.

With the rise of Constantine in the fourth century, the open system that had characterized the early Church increasingly became identified with notions of law, order and orthodoxy, a fixation that continues today. According to Delio, fixation on law, order and orthodoxy impairs the institutional Church's ability to interact and adapt to shifts in modern biology, evolution and quantum physics. As a result, the cosmological framework for mainstream Catholic theology retains its pre-Copernican, Platonic notion that the body is inferior to the spirit. Furthermore, the ancient assumption that women are inferior to men and the source of sin persists. Additionally, sex and sexuality are seen as lesser attributes of human personhood that need to be closely monitored, rather than embraced or honored.

Delio warns of what will happen to the Church if it does not open itself to new ways of understanding and being in the world. In Vatican II terms, she makes a strong case for reading the “signs of the times.” Similarly, in affirming the authority of women in an institution where they are officially banned from priestly ordination and therefore most decision-making, Elizabeth Johnson writes that Pope John XXIII realized that one of the “signs of the times” was women’s growing realization of their full “human dignity and their concomitant power to speak” As women lay claim to their authority within the Church with greater and greater conviction, Johnson believes this “new phenomenon” is “rooted in God’s design for the world” and that “God continues to speak and act in and through human history.”

Can we as the Church be a legitimate player on the world stage if we choose to be out of step with scientific findings and a world that is evolving toward gender equality? Is it possible for us as the Church to claim our role in service to the Gospel if we continue to embrace institutionalized sexism and gender discrimination supported by outdated theology?

ANTHROPOLOGY

Although a person’s biological sex is largely fixed at birth, there is an expanding amount of research that indicates that culture can transform presumptions about the “inevitable” consequences of one’s sex. Early anthropological studies presented differences and division between men and women as “natural” and based on being born male or female. Later studies challenged those judgments. A great variety of feminine and masculine ideals were found across populations and cultures. Eventually scholars and students in the field articulated a distinction between sex and gender, the former defined by biology and the latter by culture. The once fixed expectations of men and women loosened and became more fluid. In most of western culture it is no longer legal to deny or limit opportunities on the basis of a person’s sex.

Today’s global society is increasingly open to various roles being played by both men and women, depending on their qualifications and abilities. This is true for heads of nations, doctors and nurses, road crews, soldiers,

NASCAR drivers and astronauts. The Final Document on the Synod of Bishops on Young People 2018 reaffirms that:

God loves every person and so does the church, renewing its commitment against every discrimination and sexually based violence. Equally reaffirmed is the determinative anthropological importance of the difference and reciprocity between man and woman and it is held to be reductive to define a person's identity only by their 'sexual orientation.'"

Sexual differentiation and distinct biological functions certainly influence the way a person fulfills the requirements of the roles one undertakes in life, work, and society. For example, parenting. But to suggest differences permit discrimination is intolerable in modern and secular society. Catholic social teaching calls us to examine systems that produce inequality and to bring the Gospel to bear on the life and structures of the Church as well as in society. Without equality, the credibility of the Church is rightly questioned. "Young men and young women ask for it with great force. It is a duty of justice." And the Synod document concludes, "The absence of women's voices and points of view impoverishes discussion and the path of the church, subtracting a precious contribution from discernment."

Can we as Church continue to render more than half of our members second-class citizens unworthy of equality in governance and ministry?

BIOLOGY

A view of earth from outer space has profoundly changed our sense of our universe and ourselves. Similarly, the disciplines of modern science, especially biology and chemistry, have revolutionized the biological understanding of human beings from the moment of conception.

When a child is conceived and begins development as a fetus, Catholic teaching regards the developing baby to be a fully human person deserving of respect and dignity. Theologically speaking, all persons are loved and created in God's image and likeness, one in Christ where there is neither male nor female. In the words of St. Bonaventure, "All things are said to be transformed in the transfiguration of Christ ... since in his human nature he embraces something of every creature in himself when he is transfigured."

Outmoded understandings of the biological basis of sex itself, and what these mean for the differences between men and women, affect not only Church teachings but also the way in which the Church governs itself and behaves in the world.

Is it time for a comprehensive reckoning of all Church teachings on nature, gender and personhood, informed by scientific evidence and Catholic moral tradition, to ensure the full inclusion of women?

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:27 tells us that humans were created in God's own image, male and female, with no mention of hierarchy or gender roles until after the Fall. In the Hebrew Scriptures God called women as well as men to lead, and sometimes even to save, all people. We encounter this in the roles of women, such as Deborah (see Judges 4-5, Hebrews 11:32-34), Ruth (see Ruth 1-3), Esther (see Esther 1-50), Tamar (see Genesis 38) and Huldah, the prophetess (see 2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chronicles 34:22). We also hear Miriam shed insight into women's struggle as leaders when she raises her indignant question, "Does the Lord speak only through Moses?" (see Numbers 12:2).

In the New Testament we find Jesus, a faithful Jew, leading a renewal movement within Judaism in which he regards Jewish women as part of his inner circle, both as disciples and leaders. According to Elisabeth Schussler

Fiorenza, Jesus drew new followers from outside of Judaism, many of whom were women and slaves drawn by the “discipleship of equals” they experienced. After the resurrection Jesus sent Mary Magdalene as the first person to preach the resurrection to the other apostles.

There are many other examples in the New Testament of holy women who have various leadership roles in ministry: Prisca and her husband, Aquila, founded house churches in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome (see Romans 16:3-5); Phoebe was named as a deacon in the Church (see Romans 16:1-2); Lydia of Philippi began the first house church in that city (see Acts 16:6-40); Priscilla instructed a Jewish man, Apollos. (see Acts 18:24-26, 1 Corinthians 1:11); and Chloe and Nympha were named as the heads of churches that met in their homes (see Colossians 4:15).

Unfortunately, many Catholics are unaware of these leadership roles of women because Lectionary readings rarely mention them, especially in the Sunday readings. Yet Galatians 3:28-29 makes it clear, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs to the promise.” As adopted children of God, we are all one in Christ and heirs to the Kingdom. There should be no hint of subordination or hierarchy in the Church.

Theologian James Bacik writes that the Bible has long been used to justify patriarchy. Composed by males and largely about males, it speaks from a male perspective to the neglect and even denigration of women, their role, their experience and their perspective. God is primarily described with male names and roles. That pattern grows stronger as the original language is translated into other languages, especially English, where God is always “he”. The bias is clear: Women are not equal to men.

Among other benefits of contemporary scholarship is the development of ways of speaking of God that are not just from a male perspective. Feminist theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson writes that:

God is spirit, yet the daily language of preaching, worship, catechesis, and instruction conveys a different message: God is male or at least more like a man than a woman, or at least more fittingly addressed as male than as female. This exclusive speech about God serves in manifold ways to support an imaginative and

structural world that excludes or subordinates women. Wittingly or not, it undermines women's human dignity as equally created in the image of God. Inherited Christian speech about God has evolved within a framework that does not prize the unique and equal humanity of women, and bears the marks of this partiality and dominance.

Because the Bible is God's gift to us "for the sake of salvation" (*Dei Verbum* 8), contemporary readers can, but also must, recognize patriarchal biases and take steps to offset and correct them. Biased and especially sexist texts should not be normative for believers. Texts that are favorable to women and ground claims for the equality of women with men deserve attention and affirmation. Large numbers of feminist Scripture scholars, both male and female, have been able to bring into the open and affirm truths regarding women long hidden behind or beneath patriarchal and masculine bias.

To what extent can new discoveries about women's authority in early Christianity help us carve out greater roles for women today?

PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Gospel of Christ calls for a just, responsive and inclusive society. The Church cannot excuse itself from this call. In the process of answering the call, we must explore a variety of perceptions, including those related to the status of women in the Church.

According to the *Catechism* (1268), "The baptized have become 'living stones' to be 'built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, a holy nation, God's people, that [they] may declare the wonderful deed of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light.' (1 Peter 2:9). *Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of*

all believers.” Male or female, all baptized persons have the indelible spiritual character that cannot be temporary or repeated. If there is a Thomistic ontological change, both male and females experience it at Baptism.

Although Christian philosophy has never been static and has grown and developed over centuries (and continues to do so today), a wide range of Christian thinkers has always engaged in debates over the same questions as ancient philosophers. What does it mean to be human? What is the relationship between body and soul; the mind and matter?

Origen was the first Christian philosopher to explore the integration of philosophy and theology. Plato and the School of Alexandria heavily influenced him. He posited that wisdom and knowledge are accessible by faith and, thus, through the Church. Augustine, a follower of Plato, formulated the concept of Original Sin, concluding that humans could be moral only through the grace of God, which is only available through the Church. Thus, he taught, there is no salvation outside the church. Thomas Aquinas, like Aristotle, held that truth is truth no matter where it sits. His doctrines draw from Greek, Roman, Jewish and Islamic philosophers. Unlike Augustine, he believed that the world could be known as it is and saw the complex interaction of subjective thinking (senses, imagination) and objective reality as both bearing on the production of knowledge. He is responsible for the concept of ontological change. He is also responsible for male understanding regarding the role of women—not just in the Church, but also in the world. All three of these Christian philosophers postulated that the church leadership, which was then exclusively male, was the arbiter of truth.

While the Roman Catholic Church never made Thomism its official philosophy, it gave pride of place to Aquinas’s work. Thomism, an integration of philosophy and theology, became the dominant and representative form of Catholic philosophical thought in 1879 with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. Here is what Thomas wrote about the nature of women:

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect

in the active force or from some material indisposition (ST Ia q.92, a.1, Reply to Objection 1)

Theologians have certainly challenged this view, especially since Vatican II, but the Church has not yet completely purged itself of this view of women. A residue remains. For some church leaders, at some level of consciousness, this thinking prevails. But contemporary Christian philosophers are challenging it. Feminist Philosophers such as Pamela Sue Anderson, Elizabeth Johnson, Judith Butler, Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, and others work to rectify the male-centric approach to reason and authority. Christine Schenk reminds us: “Women do not have to wait to be ordained as deacons or priests to begin exercising our authority in the church. Because you see, Christ has no body now but ours.”

The Catholic Church has a powerful message, and there are many ways to convey it. It has been shared primarily from a male and, since the late eighteenth century, Thomistic perspective. How might the Church move beyond the narrow and scientifically disputed notion of what it means to be a woman? How might we formulate the equality of men and women more fundamentally? Are there valid reasons why both males and females cannot both be equals in Church leadership? Is ordination necessary for Church leadership?

THEOLOGY/ECCLESIOLOGY

Both power and authority are necessary for governing all human communities. We hold that all authority comes from God the Author of all that exists. God gave authority to Jesus, who always exercised his authority in the manner of a servant. By his humble service, Jesus sought a radical transformation of power and authority. He taught his disciples that they were not to lord authority over others, but that the first among them must be the slave of all (Mark 10:42-45, Matthew 20:20-28).

Up until the time of Constantine, the Church was the *ecclesia*, the Christian community. The members were all baptized, inseparably linked with their bishop, without subordination or superiority, in loving obedience to Christ. There was no distinction between “lay people” and clerics in the vocabulary of the New Testament. Leaders

within the community included Apostles, disciples, men and women, some of whom were named deacons. In this way the word of God continued to spread.

In the third century, St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, wrote, “The ancient liturgy had no ‘I’ distinct from ‘we’ of the whole community. The presider, as the head of the community, speaks in the name of all, for he is one with all its members.”

All Church members took part in the election of bishops and the choice of ministers. They supplied information for councils and shared in the institution of those customs by which various communities regulated their lives. Their intervention was willingly accepted since the early Church “wanted to be ready for any movement inspired by the Holy Spirit.”

Later in the century, following the peace of Constantine in 312, the Roman Empire established the Church’s leaders with imperial privileges and invested bishops with secular authority. Over time, many in the clergy succumbed to the human tendency to see themselves as a class set apart and experienced the temptation to protect themselves and use authority in service to self rather than the Gospel.

From the 11th century onward, authority, and in particular the supreme authority of the pope, borrowed many of the features of the vocabulary, insignia, ceremonial style and ideology of the imperial court. Protests for “less pomp and more of the Gospel” circulated.

In the centuries leading up to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the increasing authority of prelates continued to be questioned, denied and attacked. Anti-ecclesial spiritual movements gained momentum and added to the outcries. It is of some significance that the interpretation of the identity of the “rock” in Matthew 16:18-19 raised questions that had been wrestled with as early as Augustine and Cyprian. For centuries it was accepted that Peter was the “Rock” on which the Church was founded. But at this time of unrest, the old controversy re-emerged and Reformers claimed Christ as the “rock”. Critics of Church leadership refused the right of any human authority to

intervene in one's relationship with God. Authority was simply that of God's word in Scripture. Ultimately, Martin Luther's challenge sparked the Protestant Reformation. Under such threat, Church leadership "circled the wagons" and re-asserted its absolute authority.

At and after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Church authority became even more centralized. Unquestioned obedience to Rome was established to such a degree that, from the sixteenth century on, God's will was identified with institutional authority. Power was exercised from the top down. The First Vatican Council (1869-1870) virtually confirmed this full centralization of authority. Over the centuries, the structures necessary to carry out the mission of the Church had developed hierarchical offices that distanced the bishops from the people they were called to serve.

There was no major crisis in the Church to convene a council in the middle of the twentieth century. So, it came as a surprise to the world when Pope John XXIII called for the Second Vatican Council in 1962. His *aggiornamento* (updating) called for a *ressourcement*, a return to the sources of our Catholic faith.

The renewal the Council called for was defined in sixteen documents. Signs of reform were immediately evident in the active participation of the laity in liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Consilium* 11). *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church opened the way for lay leadership: Rights and duties of the laity were articulated (see also Canon Law 212 #3) and new ministries were opened to lay men and women in the temporal affairs of the parish and beyond (including pastoral and financial councils). Restoration of the ancient process of initiation in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as well as the restoration of the permanent diaconate was declared.

A fresh way of describing the institutional Church turned the past definition on its head. Before naming the structure of the Church as an organized and hierarchical society, a perfect society, it is first described in *Lumen Gentium* as the People of God, clergy and laity together as one pilgrim people on a journey in service to the Gospel and the world. As was evidenced by Scripture in the early Church, authority is viewed in terms of service rather than domination. Apostolic tasks are defined as a participation in the saving mission of

the Church itself. “Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself.” (*Lumen Gentium* 33).

Richard Gaillardetz writes, “One of the most important and frequently overlooked contributions of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council was its recovery of the biblical insight that all the baptized were called to be priestly; all were called to make of their very lives an offering to God.”

By virtue of Baptism, the People of God are empowered by the same authority as the clergy in all matters related to the life of the Church. This concept is not meant as a power struggle or a mentality of us against them, clergy versus laity that causes people to seek positions of authority for exerting power over others. Rather, it means that all are to be servants of Christ in promoting the reign of God.

Gaudium et Spes, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, written for the whole of humanity, states that the solitary goal of the Church is “to carry out the work of the Lord Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit.” (*Gaudium et Spes* 3). It further states that, “to carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel.” (*Gaudium et Spes* 4).

The current “signs of the times” point to a critical need for reform. Trust in the moral authority of Church leadership has eroded with revelations of abuse and subsequent cover up. To this day, all decisions of governance are exclusively in the hands of the Church leadership, celibate men in ordained priesthood. At the same time and in contrast, the world has witnessed the leadership of women in every area of secular life. The lack of women in leading roles weakens the Church’s claim of dignity and equality for all people.

If sacred pastors truly know how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church ... and also know that they themselves were not meant by Christ to shoulder alone the entire saving mission of the Church toward the world ... it is their noble duty so to shepherd the faithful and recognize their services and charismatic gifts. (*Lumen Gentium* 30)

Bishops today are challenged to reflect on the pastoral and spiritual needs of the faithful. It is time to incorporate lay people, and especially women, in every position possible in order to be, in word and deed, the People of God, called to renew the face of the earth.

What positions for women can be promoted to let grace abound in every aspect of the Church's governance and ministry? How can women's role be formalized and included with authority for the benefit of the good news of the Gospel? How can we, the Church, be the *ecclesia* that Jesus called us to be?

SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

Although sacramental theology underwent an enormous transformation as a result of Vatican II, it has been and still is a largely male-dominated field, closely tied to the institutional Church where women have virtually no official voice or established authority. Indeed, except for Matrimony, women's presence is not a necessary component in any sacrament. Because sacramental theology has not properly addressed women's official exclusion and invisibility, many women have found the potential for the transformative nature of the sacraments constrained or, even, non-existent. Indeed, if the sacraments are to be both valid and transforming vehicles of grace for women and men, they must be open to new lines of inquiry and new models of theological analysis.

The challenge the feminist approach raises for sacramental theology lies not simply in its import for the argument for women's ordination to the priesthood or diaconate, or even women-inspired liturgies and

sacramental actions. The challenge lies, more fundamentally, in how the critique exposes and transforms the ways in which we understand symbols, how God is revealed in the world, and how the sacraments relate to our lives in our service to the mission of the Gospel. Acknowledging the embodied/incarnational character of sacramental life, both how we interpret symbols and how we understand the experiential basis of the sacraments, has serious implications for the lives of not only women but all people.

In a pre-Vatican II definition, the sacraments were “outward signs, instituted by Christ, to give grace.” Grace was understood as being necessary to get to heaven and the communal dimension of sacramentality was subordinate to the spiritual life of the individual. Today, liberation and feminist theology define the sacraments in relationship to justice, understood as right relationships. What is celebrated in the sacraments is not an other-worldly reality but what the community strives for: a community where all eat and drink together at a common table, where justice is a lived reality, and where Christians find the grace to reflect and inspire God’s vision for everyone.

These current theological insights point to an earlier sacramental tradition and vision: that of the Franciscan Order. Indeed, Franciscan models of sacramental causality provide us with an opening to reconsider the current Church discipline that restricts sacramental roles primarily to ordained celibate male ministers. Franciscan sacramental theology takes as a starting point the abundance of divine love and grace in all of creation. God’s abundant life and love are a continuous free and generous gift to all. Accordingly, institutional structures of the Church are meant to enhance, rather than limit, access to this abundant life.

Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Church teaching has used an Aristotelian physical and instrumental model for sacramental causality. In this model, God is the principal agent and source of grace. The ordained minister is an instrument, one moved by God and through whom the sacramental graces flow. This flowing of grace is independent of the moral state of the minister (i.e. whether or not the minister is in the state of grace). Because any instrument must be appropriate to its role, the male gender of the priest is seen to be essential so that he can “image” Jesus Christ. Such thinking leads to the Church’s stance that only a male can be a priest. However, the Franciscan masters did not embrace the Aristotelian, physicalist model of instrumental causality for sacramental life.

The Franciscan approach privileges divine initiative and generosity over human physical resemblance. The physical (male) resemblance to Jesus is not essential to the identification of those designated for ordination. The resemblance to Christ is proper to all the baptized. Indeed, in Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. All are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

Blessed John Duns Scotus suggests an alternative account to instrumental causality when he considers the role of the minister in the conferral of sacramental grace. He argues that because of the divine covenant, when the minister says and does certain things, God *directly and inevitably* brings about a certain supernatural effect. The minister plays an active, yet *non-instrumental* role in the sacraments or the conferral of grace. The concurrent co-causal relationship, divine and human, is the result of the covenant.

Franciscan sacramental causality is not instrumental causality. It is relational causality. It is covenant causality, based on the divine promise to “be with us always, even to the end of time.” (Matthew 28:20). The minister plays a role that gives witness to the power of God in the life of the believer and the believing community.

Duns Scotus does not hold that the character conveyed in ordination can be instrumental in bringing about a supernatural effect since there are no powers other than God’s. Priestly character is a relationship of the divine will performing certain actions whenever the priest says certain words and does certain actions. Together, divine action and human action give birth to the presence of grace in the believer and in the community. While he does not conclude to the ordination of women, in *Ordinatio* IV, d. 25, q. 2, Duns Scotus argues that were ordination extended to women, the accessibility of divine grace would be enhanced.

There are several implications to be drawn from this model of relational causality:

1. Divine action is primary in the life of the Church and the lives of believers. Whatever can be done to maximize occasions for sacramental reception should be done.
2. The primacy of divine action in sacramental reception reduces the role of instrumental, physical causality for the ordained minister, thereby eliminating the need for resemblance or image in a physical sense.
3. The baptized have a right to enhanced sacramental opportunities. Limiting ordained ministry to males is an act of injustice to the baptized.
4. Likewise, depriving one half of the human race of the capacity to serve as ordained ministers is an act of injustice.
5. While one might argue that there is no place in Scripture where Jesus chose to ordain women, one can equally argue that there is no place in Scripture where Jesus chose to forbid it.

The Magisterium has the authority to revise sacramental discipline. Do the current crisis of vocations to ordained ministry and the needs of our time call for a revision of this discipline?

LITURGY

Liturgy is the public worship of the People of God and the Church made visible. Liturgy is something that the whole of Christ, Head and Body, celebrates: Christ, the one High Priest, together with his Body, the Church in heaven and on earth. In the Mass, the celebration of the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of Christian life.

The International Theological Commission writes in “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church” that the connection between the *sensus fidelium* and the Magisterium is particularly to be found in the liturgy. The faithful are baptized into a royal priesthood exercised principally in the Eucharist. The bishops are the “high priests” who preside at the Eucharist and regularly exercise their teaching office. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the life of the Church. It is there especially that the faithful and their pastors interact, as one body for one purpose: to give praise and glory to God. From early Christian times, the Eucharist

underpinned the formulation of the Church's doctrine because there most of all the mystery of faith was encountered and celebrated.

Vatican II's *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy (Sacramentum Concilium)* initiated a dramatic reform of the liturgy and the active participation of the faithful in the removal of the altar railing separating people from the sanctuary; the use of the vernacular; and the allowing of men and women to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, lectors, altar servers, prayer leaders and sacristans. Women and laymen stepped into these new roles with enthusiasm and gratitude.

Today's circumstances demand further consideration and renewal. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states, "The Council...desires that, where necessary, the rites be carefully and thoroughly revised in light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times." (*Sacramentum Concilium* 2).

The signs of the times demand a response to the status of women in and out of the Church. How can the faithful express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church when gender stereotypes continue to exclude important scriptural passages relevant to women in cycles of the Lectionary? When inclusive language is not used where appropriate in the Missal and various rites? When women's voices are not allowed to preach from the pulpit? Liturgy has the capacity to "marvelously fortify the faithful in their capacity to preach Christ." (*Sacramentum Consilium* 2) To outsiders, the liturgy thereby reveals the Church as a sign raised above the nations.

The permanent diaconate enhances the gifts and benefits of the Church by engaging men in the ministry of Baptism, marriage, funerals and preaching. All of these are actions in which women by their very nature have always been engaged. In August, 2016, Pope Francis commissioned 12 members to review the theology and history of the office of deacon in Roman Catholicism and to question whether women might be allowed

to become deacons. The findings have yet to be released, but indications point to the possibility that women can be ordained to the permanent diaconate.

Would ordaining women to the permanent diaconate further endorse and sanctify the rights and duties of half of the people in the pews? Could it be a visible sign of the whole Christ, all the People of God, for the benefit of the Gospel and the world it seeks to serve?

PASTORAL MINISTRY

All that we believe and proclaim to be true is manifested in our actions. Pastoral ministry is the visible sign of the Gospel imperative to care for all God's people and creation. It means being with people as they journey, enabling them to feel a caring presence in the face of fears, hurts, violence and neglect, offering ourselves as sisters and brothers who seek to be vessels of God's love.

A latecomer to the field, feminist analysis of pastoral theology began in earnest in the 1990's, several decades after it had already taken hold in biblical studies, moral theology and other disciplines. But, as a lens, it offers important insights into women's status in the Church.

The first insight of feminist analysis recognizes that the very model of pastoral care has been rooted in a patriarchal framework in which the twin syndromes of sexism and clericalism operate. Metaphors such as "shepherding the sheep," while certainly valuable, have too often fostered dependency and paternalistic attitudes whereas feminist pastoral theology recovers and proposes a more mutual understanding of pastoral care rooted in accompaniment and solidarity.

Feminist pastoral theology starts with women's experience and takes up topics that are too often left out of traditional pastoral theology. Life concerns such as motherhood; eating disorders; violence; rape and abuse, including clergy sex abuse; and many others had not been prioritized in the past. From 1983 through 1998, when women began entering the field of pastoral theology in greater numbers, more resources were published on these topics than ever before. Insights from feminist pastoral theology help us to understand why many women have been physically and emotionally abused; those who abuse them can go a lifetime without hearing a pastor preach against violence against women from the pulpit and preachers rarely suggest ways to heal victims and survivors of violence within a parish community.

Further, feminist pastoral care seeks to go beyond parish boundaries and integrate the need for care with justice. Fostering a sense of urgency, nurturance, liberation and empowerment helps shift the focus of pastoral theology and care from being the sole responsibility of the pastor within the parish to the wider cultural, social and religious context in which the faithful function every day.

Sensitivity to the issue of gender should be a priority in all pastoral theology. Every area can benefit from the question, "How does a gender perspective affect this issue?"

For most of history pastoral theology was not a distinct branch of theology, and it was regarded as primarily the work of priests. Recently, Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego spoke about "Pastoral Theology for a Post-Modern World":

We are privileged to witness this moment in the Church's life, and to recognize that it is a moment of explicit theological renewal that will contribute enormously to the spread of the Gospel in this new millennium. For we are seeing an emerging pastoral theology at the very heart of the life of the church which both links us to the pastoral action and ethos of the Lord himself and yet is highly attuned to the challenges and cultures of the twenty-first century.

Quoting Pope Francis, McElroy adds that:

The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle ... [First] you have to heal wounds. This is the mission of the church, which includes the whole body of the faithful in relationship with God, based on the lived experience of the faithful in the concrete call of discipleship: to heal wounds of the heart, to open doors, to free people, to say that God is good ... as the pilgrim people of God journeying together.

Pastoral theology should imitate the words and actions of Jesus. Jesus met people where they were and often in their greatest suffering: the woman at the well in broad daylight; the Pharisee Nicodemus at night; and the lame, the blind, and the grieving crying out along the roadsides. Jesus loved and honored them all. He embraced them, healed them and called each one to repentance. Bishop McElroy concluded that, “We will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious and laity—into this art of accompaniment which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.”

How might the institutional Church meet women where they are pastorally?

How might the Church welcome their insights as prophets and preachers, as priests

in the universal priesthood of believers taking part in rituals collaboratively with their male counterparts, as leaders with an authoritative place at the table where pastoral decisions are made?

Summary Statement

The Declaration on the Status of Women began with “the joys and hopes of this age.”

With hope for our future, the members of our group, a collaboration of four priests, two women religious and two lay women, were attentive to the “signs of the times” and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Each one reflected on the status of women in the world and in the Church. From multiple perspectives and disciplines a common theme emerged: the role of women has evolved with a growing demand for the justice of equal dignity and equality with men.

Knowing they are created in the image and likeness of God and are baptized into Christ, women are demanding the rights that have been denied them based on their gender only. Separate but equal status no longer meets the needs of the world today. The gifts that women can bring to the Church are thwarted when none are given the authority to minister or govern beyond limited possibilities. Granted, women always have the power to serve and to witness the Gospel of Jesus. But new models of universal and parochial leadership are emerging.

The challenge for the future of the church is to institute pathways to shared governance and ministry that have been open to male, celibate clergy alone. To do so begins with conversation and dialogue among all the People of God.

How this is to be accomplished is the work of all the Church—inclusive of all the baptized. This can be done according to Pope Francis’ vision for a church that is synodal at every level, in dioceses as well as in the universal church. We offer questions and concerns to raise awareness and bring people together to listen and to learn from one another, and ultimately to discern the will of God.

With joy we anticipate a vibrant community of inclusiveness that not only celebrates the power of men and women collaborating in spreading the Gospel, but also endorses that reality with visible signs of reform.

DISCUSSION RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

Discussion Guide

Closing Prayer

Where you can add your comments

Additional Resources

Opening Prayer

(Can be modified or shortened as needed)

Sing together

All Are Welcome by Marty Haugen © 1994, GIA Publications, Inc.

Sign of the Cross

Prayer leader (while making the sign of the Cross):

The grace of Jesus the Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

All: And also with you

Prayer leader: Let us welcome one another with a sign of peace.

Opening Prayer

Prayer leader: In every generation, women have and continue to faithfully and generously respond to the call to serve God and God's holy people. They have been apostles and disciples, leaders, preachers, educators, counselors, musicians, artists, writers, comforters, pastoral ministers, chaplains and yes, priestly people offering their gifts to the Body of Christ.

Yet, our Church now suffers a poverty of spirit brought about by the exclusion of women from full participation in the life, ministry, and leadership of the church.

Today, we women and men, sisters and brothers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers, godparents – members of the Body of Christ – gather together as one family to pray for a Church that is truly inclusive and alive with the gifts, spirit and potential of all its members.

All: We gather in thanksgiving for and celebration of the women who came before us – our foremothers in faith – whose too often forgotten stories instruct and inspire us.

We gather in solidarity with the women of today whose demands for justice and inclusion call us to conversation.

We gather in hope that generations to come will know the Church as a place that offers a model of justice to the world by being a model of justice herself.

Prayer leader: Good and Loving God, Creator of women and men in your own image,

ALL: Create in us a desire for the wholeness you planned;

Prayer leader: Word made flesh and born of a woman,

All: Empower us to hear and speak Your redeeming truth

Prayer leader: Spirit companion of women throughout space and time,

All: Guide us as we work to build a Church for all women and men, AMEN.

Readings from Women in the Church

First Reading: On our Foremothers in Faith

A Reading by Christine Schenk in Catholic Women Speak

Contemporary biblical scholarship has uncovered important roles held by women in the early Jesus movement. Luke tells us that Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Susanna and many other women accompanied Jesus and ministered with him in Galilee. Yet this Lukan reading is rarely heard on Sunday. Mary of Magdala's commissioning to "go and tell my brothers" that Jesus has risen does not appear on Easter or on any Sunday in the Easter Season in the United States but is relegated to Easter Tuesday.

St. Paul worked closely with women leaders like Phoebe, Junia, Lydia, and Prisca. Unfortunately, Romans 16, a passage that names ten women and identifies some of them as deacons, apostles, and coworkers, is never proclaimed on a Sunday. Nor are the accounts of women leaders in the Acts of the Apostles.

And where are the biblical stories of the strong women leaders of salvation history? Couldn't we include the story of Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives who saved a nation of boy children, perhaps even Moses, by defying Pharaoh's law to kill all male infants born to enslaved Hebrews?

Proclaiming Lectionary texts that exclude or distort the witness of women, particularly in a church where all priestly liturgical leadership is male, is dangerous for our daughters and our sons. Young girls can hardly avoid internalizing the notion that God must have created them less important than their brothers. If all-male liturgical leadership and Sunday Lectionary readings are subtly seeding subordination in our daughters, what is being planted in our sons?

From: “It’s Not All About Eve: Women in the Lectionary” by Christine Schenk, in *Catholic Women Speak*. Edited by the Catholic Women Speak Network. Copyright © 2015 Catholic Women Speak Network. Used with Permission.

Second Reading: From Catholic Women Today

A Reading by Sr. Rhonda Miska in Catholic Women Speak

As women raised in the 1970s and 1980s, we were taught that there was no limit to what we could be when we grew up. The Church is one of the last places where that rings false and where we struggle to be seen as what we are: professional Catholic women, serving in ministry. This tension becomes particularly clear in interfaith settings, working alongside women leaders in other traditions; do we “count” as clergy or not?

While I personally have never felt a call to ordination, I have seen peers (after much difficult discernment) seek ordination in other denominations. This is a tremendous loss to the Church because these are smart, committed, talented women. I trust their response to God’s call, yet it saddens me that they have to leave their tradition in order to serve.

We young Catholic women, hope for the acknowledgement of our dignity as women with a call to ministry and for the respect of our voices and experiences. The blessings that enlarge our hearts and the challenges that wound us are equally real. Many of us have been deeply formed in, and treasure the riches of, different stream of Catholic tradition – Franciscan, Ignatian, Dominican. As millenials in a postmodern world, we appreciate the deep, rich grounding our Catholic identity offers. We have been graced in our encounters with God mediated by the Church and treasure our calls. And yet our experiences of sexism and injustice within our Catholic identity create internal struggles. We hope our naming of that struggle can be heard and creatively engaged.

From: “Young Catholic Women Working in Ministry” by Rhonda Miska in *Catholic Women Speak*. Edited by the Catholic Women Speak Network. Copyright © 2015 Catholic Women Speak Network. Used with permission.

Third Reading: On Women’s Equality as a Gospel Value in Korea

A Reading by Sr. Mina Kwon of South Korea from her intervention at the 2019 Synod on Youth

A Catholic community was established [in Korea] without the direct intervention of foreign missionaries. About 200 years ago, when a very rigid status hierarchy of society dominated, some ‘young’ scholars were fascinated by Catholicism. One of those Catholic ideas was ‘equality’ based on the principle ‘all human beings are children of God.’

Moreover, Catholicism brought new opportunities for women to become leaders and teachers. In other words, women were given an almost equal place in the initial stage of the Korean Church. I was a new and revolutionary thing in the feudal times, and it became a main cause of persecution. The Korean Monarchy regarded these new ideas as a dangerous power which could threaten the Confucian-based social order.

Despite the massive anti-Catholic persecutions, Catholicism spread quickly, jumping from the scholars to the women of their household, their slaves, and into the wider Korean community.

Overtime, a growing number of female religious played a significant role.

Yet, It is ironic...that we, who inherited the evangelical value from our ancestors of the faith, seem to rebuild a new medieval hierarchy.

Young people are sensitive to the issue of inequality and exclusion. They would love to learn to cultivate the power of solidarity-community through the collaboration of their priests and sisters.

From: Sr. Mina's synod intervention can be found at <https://focus-futurechurch.org/?s=modern+day+gospel>

Gospel Reading

Gospel: Luke 13:10-17

READER: God is with you

All: And also with you

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Time for Shared Reflection: *Prayer leader invites all who are gathered take a few moments of silence and then share a sentence or two that was important to them about the readings.*

Prayers of the People

Response: Hear us, O God

Prayer leader: Inspired by the hope that all Catholics may know radical inclusion and justice, equality without qualification, and a Church institution that transforms oppression into love without bounds, we place our needs before our good and loving God.

For leaders of the institutional Church, that they may recognize that all people are created in God's image and strike down every oppressive practice, teaching, and law that assigns women and girls to a subordinate status. We pray:

For the Christian community, that we may come to know God and ourselves more deeply through spirituality, language, and imagery that is more fully representative of our inclusive God, we pray:

For those who work for justice for women in the world, that the Church may stand with them to build structures that support and sustain the basic needs of all including access to clean water, clean air, adequate housing, food, security, education, the workforce, political and social engagement, and freedom of movement, we pray:

For the poor and those most vulnerable, the majority of whom are women, that the Church may stand in solidarity with them and work to dismantle all structures, systems, customs, forces and manifestations of human oppression and exploitation, we pray:

For those in our communities who are marginalized by the institutional church and for those whose voices have been silenced because they support women's equality in the Church including ordination. That they may come to know the Church as a place of radical inclusion that deeply values to the primacy of conscience; affirms the spirit of the divine in their identity, gifts, needs and dreams; and welcomes them as full partners in the life of the Church, we pray:

For those who have died and particularly our foremothers in faith –those in Scripture, those in our tradition, and those who have walked with us in our time, that their stories and witness may always be remembered, celebrated and honored and that they may know the peace of complete unity and wholeness with God, we pray:

For all of us gathered here, that our vocations and ministries, expertise and experience, and contributions of mind, body, and spirit may be welcomed and celebrated for the benefit of all God's people we pray:

For what else shall we pray?

Prayer leader: Loving God, Mother and Father,

We make these prayers confident in your endless and transformative love for all your people.

All: AMEN

Prayer Leader: As we begin our discussion, let us speak courageously, truthfully, and lovingly. As we begin our discussion let us listen deeply and respectfully to one another.

May we engage in genuine dialogue as men and women of faith. May the Holy Spirit guide us so that our joy might be complete (John 16:24). May we, in the words of the Synod, engage in a work of “courageous cultural conversion and change in daily pastoral practice.”

And let us pray

All: Our Mother, Our Father

on earth and in heaven

blessed be your compassionate presence,

Your images and names.

Fill us with your Spirit,

Show us the wisdom of Your ways.

Forgive us.

Teach us to forgive.

Shield us from temptation

and protect us from all harm.

Prevent us from hurting the ones we love,

from injuring other in word or in deed,

from desecrating our planet.

Be with us and within us now and always. Amen

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. After reading the AUSCP declaration

1. What brings you joy or hope?
2. What challenges you?

1. Have you ever felt dissatisfaction regarding women's status in the Church?

1. What precipitated the dissatisfaction?
2. Has that feeling subsided or grown stronger?

2. How has the Church upheld the dignity of women and benefited their lives? Where could the Church grow in its relationship to women?

1. The section on history states that Jesus' behavior toward women, even when viewed through the androcentric bias of first- and second-century texts, is extraordinarily egalitarian. Women, both single and married, were part of his inner circle and traveled with him and his other disciples carving out a new movement as a community.

1. How have you understood women's contributions in the early church?
2. Were you aware that women were part of the inner circle of Jesus?

3. How does that awareness impact you personally?

4. What could it mean for the Church today?

2. The section on Scripture states that in there are many other examples in the New Testament of holy women who have various leadership roles in ministry: Prisca and her husband, Aquila, founded house churches in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome (see Romans 16:3-5); Phoebe was named as a deacon in the Church (see Romans 16:1-2); Lydia of Philippi began the first house church in that city (see Acts 16:6-40); Priscilla instructed a Jewish man, Apollos. (see Acts 18:24-26, 1 Corinthians 1:11); and Chloe and Nympha were named as the heads of churches that met in their homes (see Colossians 4:15). Yet, many Catholics are unaware of these leadership roles of women because Lectionary readings rarely mention them, especially in the Sunday readings.

1. How aware are you of the role of women in the early Church?

2. For centuries, Mary of Magdala was known as a repentant prostitute. In 2016, Pope Francis elevated her memorial to a feast day (<https://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2016/pope-elevates-memorial-of-st-mary-magdalene-to-feast-day.cfm>)

3. calling her the “Apostle to the Apostles”, the first to be entrusted to proclaim the message of the Resurrection. What has been your understanding of Mary of Magdala? How could the Pope’s decision to raise up Mary of Magdala’s role as evangelizer affect you personally? What impact could it have on the life of the Church?

1. How does the awareness that Paul called women co-workers, apostles, prophets, etc. affect you personally? What could it mean for the Church today?

2. In Romans 16:1, Paul refers to Phoebe as a deacon. Could the Church benefit from making better know the fact that Phoebe was a deacon?

2. The Theology/Ecclesiology sections states that up until the time of Constantine, the Church was the *ecclesia*, the Christian community. The members were all baptized, inseparably linked with their bishop, without subordination or superiority, in loving obedience to Christ. There was no distinction between “lay people” and clerics in the vocabulary of the New Testament. Leaders within the community included Apostles, disciples, men and women, some of whom were named deacons. In this way the word of God continued to spread.

1. Could this early Christian model of community be useful in today’s Church? If so, how? What would be the benefits? Challenges?

1. In the section on sacramental theology, the possibility that our sacramental life might be enriched by a more conscious inclusion of female experience is raised. Such inclusion could transform the ways in which we understand symbols of how God is revealed in the world and how the sacraments relate to our lives in our service to the mission of the Gospel. It is proposed that acknowledging the embodied/incarnational character of sacramental life, both how we interpret symbols and how we understand the experiential basis of the sacraments, has serious implications for the lives of not only women but all people.

1. In what ways can you imagine the sacraments being enriched by a more conscious inclusion of women's experience, wisdom, and voices? How would Baptism be changed? The Sacrament of Reconciliation? Eucharist? What could you imagine would be gained? Or lost?

1. In the section on Liturgy, it is proposed that the signs of the times demand a response to the status of women in and out of the Church. The writers ask how the faithful can express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church when gender stereotypes continue to exclude important scriptural passages relevant to women in cycles of the Lectionary. The writers also suggest the need for inclusive language in the Missal and various rites. They suggest there is a negative effect when women's voices are not heard from the pulpit.

1. What do you think the effects of inclusive language would have on the Liturgy and the Lectionary?

2. Have you ever listened to a woman preaching? What was your experience? What do you think a more inclusive preaching presence would mean for the Church?

2. In the summary, the writers propose that based on the fact that they are created in the image and likeness of God and are baptized into Christ, women are demanding the rights that have been denied them based on their gender only. Separate but equal status no longer meets the needs of the world today. The gifts that women can bring to the Church are thwarted when none are given the authority to minister or govern beyond limited possibilities. Granted, women always have the power to serve and to witness the Gospel of Jesus. But new models of universal and parochial leadership are emerging.

The writers suggest that the challenge for the future of the church is to institute pathways to shared governance and ministry that have been open to male, celibate clergy alone. To do so begins with conversation and dialogue

among all the People of God.

- To what degree do you agree or disagree with these suggestions for the way forward? What would you propose could be done at your parish? In your diocese? At the national or international level?

Take a few moments to consider all that has been said. Go around the circle and ask each participant to say in just a sentence or two, what they have learned and what they hope will happen as a result of the conversation.

After the final round of comments, spend a few moments in silence to prepare for the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer Leader: As we close this circle, let us remember we are companions on the journey and give thanks and praise to God who is both mother and father to us; to Jesus who heals and saves; and to the Holy Spirit who guides us.

All: Let our lives be guided by the life and example of Prisca who with her husband Aquila worked with Paul and helped spread the good news of the Gospel throughout the ancient world. Let us follow their model of egalitarian leadership remembering that when the disciple Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue, it was Prisca and Aquila *together* who “took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18: 27).

Prayer Leader: We ask today and always for the gift of openness to that same Gospel as we strive to live its meaning ever more deeply in our lives.

A Psalm of Partnership in Ministry

Side A: We are partners in the mystery of redemption, partners in the mystery of reconciliation, partners in the misery of the world's population, partners in the way of the cross.

Side B: We are partners in the ministry of service, partners in the ministry of justice and peace, partners in the liturgy of church and life, partners in healing and hope.

Side A: Together we stand up to preach right practice.

Side B: Together we practice what we preach.

Side A: Ours is the gift of gentle company on days when there's nobody else there beside us.

Side B: Ours is the gift of affirming the ways of the God Who is working within us.

Side A: Blessed is the partnership rooted in love that spills over, spreads over, covers over everything negative and uninspiring.

Side B: Blessed is the partnership rooted in respect and love for all our individual and collective gifts as we work together for the Gospel in our world and in our Church.

Side A: God of Relationship, bless our relationships, strengthen our partnerships, deepen our communion, let our love and respect for one another be a symbol of Your mode of Being.

Side B: God of Companionship, may we bring to life all the best in each other so that we might be a true blessing to each other and to those who are in need in our world.

All : Thank You, O God for the gift and the grace of partnership in our parishes, in our communities, in our dioceses and in our Church for the good of the Gospel in our world.

Closing Song

Companions on the Journey, vs 2 and 4

Adapted by FutureChurch from Miriam Therese Winter's WomanWord, c. Crossroad, 1990. Available from Medical Mission Sisters mms@hartsem.edu, 860-233-0875.

HOW TO ADD YOUR VOICE TO THIS CONVERSATION

The goal of this project is to foster discussion in our church about the status and roles of women in the Church.

We would like to hear from you.

Go to XXXXXXXXXXXX to complete our survey???

THANK YOU!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity by Christine Schenk, CSJ.

<http://fortresspress.com/product/crispina-and-her-sisters-women-and-authority-early-christianity>

Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church by Bradford Hinze, SJ.

<https://www.orbisbooks.com/prophetic-obedience.html>

She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse by Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ.

<http://www.crossroadpublishing.com/crossroad/title/she-who>

**Women theologians back Cardinal
Ouellet: Women are needed in**

A call for climate priority
11 May at 5:17 pm

**When church lead
presidential apolo**

seminary formation

6 May at 11:33 pm

11 May at 9:08 pm