



# Why Ordain Women?

## **Jesus included women as his partners in ministry.**

Women including Mary Magdalene, Suzanna, Salome, Mary of Bethany, and Mary the wife of Clopas played prominent roles in Jesus' ministry. The women were the last to stay at the foot of the cross and the first to witness the Resurrection. Mary Magdalene is known as the "Apostle to the Apostles" for her role in telling the apostles that Jesus had risen from the dead. Jesus modeled radical inclusivity of women in a culture where they had subordinate, second-class status.

## **Women in the early Church were leaders, including as deacons, priests and bishops.**

In early Christianity, followers of Christ met in small house churches, and the letters of St. Paul name more than eight women, including Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, and Prisca, as leaders of these churches. Archaeological evidence, as well as historical research, demonstrates that women were priests and bishops even after ordination was historically established (though the nature of ordination itself remained fluid for centuries).

In Rome and throughout the Mediterranean, archaeologists have found images on frescoes<sup>i</sup>, mosaics, and tombs<sup>ii</sup> that depict women serving in roles specifically reserved for deacons, priests, and bishops. Found in catacombs and early Christian churches, they date from 100 to 820 A.D.

## **Women are fully capable of imaging Christ on earth.**

Women as well as men are made in the full image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Imaging Christ does not mean sharing his male anatomy; it means sharing his full humanity, sharing our status as adopted children by the Spirit, and seeking to be Christlike in our words and deeds. (For example, we don't require priests to be circumcised Jews, or Middle Eastern, both of which were also central characteristics of the historical Jesus.)

St. Paul reminds us that the divisions we make among people are abolished through the grace of Christ: "There is no longer Jew nor Greek slave nor free, male nor female. All are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28)

## **The Church has changed before, and it can change now.**

Slavery. The rotation of the Earth around the Sun. The salvation of non-Christians. The death penalty. All of these are subjects about which the Church has changed its teaching, and rightfully so. Cardinal John Henry Newman taught that doctrine develops over the lifetime of the Church – it does not remain stagnant.

The Vatican II document on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, writes that the Church must be attuned to the "signs of the times." Our understanding of the fundamental equality of women has grown in modern times, and more and more Catholic faithful are calling for the ordination of women. Increasingly, the "sense of the faithful" is that women's equality should not end at the doors of a church. And the Church itself, in a 1976 pontifical commission, determined that there is no Scriptural basis for banning women's ordination.

## **God calls Catholic women to be priests.**

Just like the male priests you know, women discern a vocation to the priesthood. This call is just as powerful and just as real as those experienced by men. Who are we to reject or dismiss the ways God works through each person? To suggest that God is incapable of calling women – that it is beyond God’s power to do so – is inconsistent with our understanding of an omnipotent, loving God. Nothing is impossible with God.

## **Equality for women and girls changes the world.**

Right now, all decision-making and “voting” roles in the Catholic Church and within the governance of the Holy See (which enjoys a permanent observer seat at the United Nations), are reserved for men. Now imagine if this global power, with its 1.3 billion members, unequivocally proclaimed that women are equal to men and were granted every opportunity to make decisions about their faith, vocations, and family life.

Until women are able to make decisions, hold positions of authority, and answer their call within the Church, the institution not only dismisses the gifts and talents of half of its members, but it models inequality, subordination, and injustice to the rest of the world.

---

<sup>i</sup> For example, at the catacombs of Priscilla in Rome, the fresco “Fracio Panis” shows a group of women celebrating a Eucharistic banquet.

<sup>ii</sup> A fourth century floor mosaic covering the tomb of Guilia Runa in the cathedral at Annaba, Algeria, includes the inscription, “Guilia Runa, presbytera (priest).”