



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.

Women in the early Church were ordained ministerial leaders.

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

In Rome and throughout the Mediterranean, archaeologists have found images on frescoes¹, mosaics, and tombs² that depict women serving in roles specifically reserved for deacons, priests, and bishops. Found in catacombs and early Christian churches, these images date from 100 to 820 C.E.

Women are fully capable of imaging Christ on earth.

Women as well as men—and people of all genders—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, being "clothed with Christ" through baptism (cf. Gal. 3:27), and seeking to be Christlike in our words and deeds. It is not a matter of physical resemblance. For example, we do not require priests to be circumcised Jews or from the Levant, 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)

¹ For example, at the catacombs of Priscilla in Rome, the fresco "Fracio Panis" shows a group of women celebrating a Eucharistic banquet.

² A fourth century floor mosaic covering the tomb of Guilia Runa in the cathedral at Annaba, Algeria, includes the inscription, "Guilia Runa, presbyteria (priest)."

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 rightly so. Doctrine develops over the lifetime of the Church; it does not remain stagnant, because the Holy Spirit continues to deepen our understanding of our revealed Tradition.

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" (4). 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 Biblical Commission, determined that there is no Scriptural basis for banning women's ordination.

God calls Catholic women to be priests.

Just like male priests, women discern a vocation to the priesthood. These calls are just as powerful and 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. All things are possible with God.

Equality for women and girls changes the world.

All decision-making and "voting" roles in the Roman Catholic Church and within the governance of the Holy See (which enjoys a permanent observer seat at the United Nations) are reserved for men. Imagine if this global power, with its 1.3 billion members, unequivocally proclaimed that women are equal to men and granted them 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; it models inequality, the subordination of women, and injustice around the world.