

Hope arrived for women in the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Pope John XXIII called the Church to open the doors and windows and to “read the signs of the times”. When Pope Francis recently called for a global synodal process, we, the women bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, dared again to hope that the leadership of the Church would listen and walk with all the People of God.

In a November interview published in **America** magazine, Pope Francis attempts to justify the exclusion of women from ordained ministry utilizing the archaic, patriarchal theology that Jesus was a man and he chose men as his apostles, therefore, priests must also be male. He appealed to the medieval spousal imagery of an active-receptive relationship, in which the Church is the bride and the priest the bridegroom. This disregards the fundamental message of the Gospel and contradicts our baptismal oneness in Christ: “. . . there is no longer male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) Baptism rests on faith, not on gender, not nationality, nor any other form of discrimination.

In the interview, Francis fails to acknowledge the many times in Scripture where women are chosen by God or Jesus to minister. Mary of Magdala was proclaimed ‘Apostle to the Apostles’ and a host of other women named in Scripture went out to proclaim the Good News in the early church. The argument that maleness is necessary for ordination damages the Church and greater society. A church subjugating women with their structures supports similar subjugation in the world. In this the Roman Catholic Church violates its own words from the Second Vatican Council which states that, “Forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed or eradicated as incompatible with God’s designs.”(Gaudium et Spes 29) Francis’ attempt to justify the exclusion of women from ordination is a failure to “read the signs of the times” and to understand the basic human rights of all members of the Church.

Roman Catholic Women deacons, priests and bishops have answered the call of God and their communities through valid ordination in apostolic succession. We are providing a vibrant experience of community and sacraments where we live. We are not responsible for people leaving the Church, we are bringing people back to the faith. We heal those grievously wounded by physical, emotional and spiritual abuse and exclusion. We offer a model of church easily recognizable as

Roman Catholic, but offering transparency of governance, the inclusion of those marginalized, and recognition of gender equality.

We call on Pope Francis and the Conferences of Bishops in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia and Oceania to meet with us, the Roman Catholic Women Bishops serving across the world. Despite his call for dialogue, Pope Francis refuses to engage in authentic conversation with us. Francis can use his Petrine key to unlock that door.

On behalf of Roman Catholic Women deacons, priests and bishops around the world:

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