

Questions and Answers for Priests and Parish Leaders On “Roman Catholic Womenpriests” Ceremony

What is the ceremony that will take place on July 31st?

According to an organization called “Roman Catholic Womenpriests” a ceremony will take place on the rivers of Pittsburgh on July 31, 2006 that is represented to be an “ordination” to the priesthood. Among those taking part in the ceremony is Joan Houk, currently a parishioner at St. Alexis Parish, Wexford.

What is Roman Catholic Womenpriests?

Roman Catholic Womenpriests is a group founded in Germany. In June 2002, excommunicated Argentine Bishop Romulo Braschi, founder of the schismatic Catholic-Apostolic Charismatic Church of Jesus the King, conducted an ordination ritual for seven women under the auspices of Roman Catholic Womenpriests. In August 2002 the Holy See issued both the notification of excommunication for those involved and declared the ordinations null and void, which was upheld after an appeal in January 2003.

During the year following their alleged ordination, two of those women, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger and Gisela Forster, claimed that they were consecrated bishops in a secret ceremony by several bishops whose identities they have not revealed. Patricia Fresen, a former Dominican nun ordained by Mayr-Lumetzberger and Forster in August 2003, also came to consider herself a bishop.

In July 2005, Fresen, Mayr-Lumetzberger and Forster conducted a ritual on the Saint Lawrence Seaway in which they claimed to ordain four women as priests and five women deacons. Roman Catholic Womenpriests announced that it would conduct such rituals in ceremonies in Switzerland on June 24, 2006 and in Pittsburgh, on July 31st. In Pittsburgh, 12 women are expected to take part in such a ceremony with the claim that eight will be ordained to the priesthood and four to the diaconate.

What are the essential elements of the teaching of the Church on ordination of women?

“(The Catholic Church) holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in Sacred Scripture of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching author-

ity which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God’s plan for his Church” (Pope Paul VI, 1977).

Ordination to the priesthood must be conferred by an ordained bishop on a baptized man. A candidate must receive the blessing of the Church, which has the authority and responsibility to determine if a true call to the priesthood exists. The ordination of males to the priesthood is not merely a matter of practice or discipline within the Church. Rather, the Church has determined that this is part of the Deposit of Faith handed down by Christ through his apostles. The Church is therefore bound by it and not free to change in this regard.

Participation in this event is therefore a very serious matter with very serious consequences.

What are the consequences for those participating in this event?

As this unfortunate ceremony will take place outside the Church and undermines the unity of the Church, those attempting to confer Holy Orders have, by their own actions, removed themselves from the Church, as have those who present themselves for such an invalid ritual. Additionally, those who by their presence give witness and encouragement to this fundamental break with the unity of the People of God place themselves outside the Church.

This separation is not a discipline, judgment or mandate of the Church. Nor is it the result of opinion or advocacy of a theological view by those involved. Rather, by conducting and taking part in such a ceremony, it is the choice of the participants to place themselves outside the community of believers.

Additionally, if those present as witnesses to the event serve in ministry in the Church – as teachers, administrators, catechists, chaplains, etc. – they will be deemed to be in violation of the Cardinal’s Clause and/or the Code of Pastoral Conduct. As such, the most serious consequence would be dismissal from ministry and/or loss of employment.

What constitutes “participation” in this event?

The women conducting the ceremony and claiming to be bishops, and the women who present themselves for ordina-

tion to the priesthood and diaconate are the direct participants. Those who, through their presence at the ceremony, encourage and openly defy Church teaching, are also considered to be direct participants.

Practically speaking what does it mean to say that they place themselves outside the Church?

It means that they are not to participate in the life of the Church, including reception of the sacraments, until they are reconciled with the Church. For those attempting to confer Holy Orders and for those presenting themselves for Holy Orders, their reconciliation must come through the Holy See. For those present as witnesses, their reconciliation must come through their pastors in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Does that mean that anyone who attends this ceremony must be denied the Eucharist or removed from ministry in the Church?

It is the responsibility of those receiving the Eucharist to make certain that they are properly disposed to receive the Sacrament, not the priest or the Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist. It is also understandable that those distributing Holy Communion may not be aware of all those who attended the event, or whether they have been reconciled, or whether there were circumstances surrounding their attendance that might serve to mitigate their individual responsibility.

However, it is clear that those conducting the ordination and those being ordained must reconcile through the Holy See. They could not be properly disposed to receive the sacraments or take part in the life of the Church until notification has been made by the Holy See.

Aren't we really just punishing these people because of their views?

Those who take part in the ceremony are removing themselves from the community as an immediate and direct consequence of their own actions. This has nothing to do with what they may think or their views. They have chosen to take part in a public ceremony that abuses the Sacrament of Holy Orders and undermines the unity of the Church. In doing so, they have chosen to remove themselves from the Church by their actions, not their views.

Isn't denial of the sacraments and excommunication extreme? The Church doesn't excommunicate those clergy who abused minors. And politicians who vote in favor of legal abortion are not denied Communion.

Those who present themselves for Communion are expected to be in communion with the Church. People can be "not in

communion" in several ways. Those who have committed mortal sin and are not in the state of grace are out of communion and should not present themselves until they are reconciled through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Those who deny a core tenet of the faith either by publicly espousing something contrary to the faith, such as the denial of the divinity of Christ, or by a public action that repudiates the laws, teachings or morals of the Church are also not in communion.

There are certain actions that by their public nature, by their immediate threat to the unity of the Church, by their explicit undermining of the sacraments, and by their conscious break with the apostolic authority of the Church derived from Christ, result in removing oneself from the community of the faithful. In regard to this ceremony, engaging in a public – and highly publicized – abuse of the sacrament of Holy Orders that threatens Church unity, and to take such action knowingly and willingly in defiance of the apostolic authority of the Church, does place oneself outside the Church.

However, even in these cases, the goal of the Church is reconciliation. Announcing that there are those who have removed themselves from the community of the faithful is not a punishment, but a call to conversion.

Supplementary Material

Advocates of women's ordination justify their position with several arguments, including:

"Through baptism, women and men share equally in the new priesthood of Christ, and this includes openness to Holy Orders. "

Response: Through the Sacrament of Baptism all Christians, both men and women, share equally in the "royal priesthood" of Jesus Christ. Priests share with the laity in the royal priesthood of Christ, but also share by virtue of their ordination in the "ministerial priesthood" of Christ the High Priest. This being said, it is not the right of an individual to become a priest. Rather, the gift of priesthood derives from the economy of Christ and His Church. Only baptized men whom the Church discerns have a vocation, may receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders in order to share in the "ministerial priesthood" of Jesus Christ (which is distinct from the royal priesthood). According to Catholic theology, a male priest is ordained in the person of Jesus Christ (*in persona Christi*). He becomes a literal "icon" of Jesus Christ as he ministers in His person, which must include the fact of his manhood, but includes so much more than that.

“At the Last Supper Jesus, empowered both women and men, so both can be ordained to preside at the Eucharist. The Church’s practice of not ordaining women as priests was based on prejudice against women that affected the judgment of Church leaders. “

Response: Both Scripture and Tradition as understood by the Catholic Church attest that Christ conferred the dignity of priesthood at the Last Supper on those whom he called intimately to share in His ministry, precisely the twelve apostles. Though the holy women may certainly have been at the Last Supper, and certainly may have partaken of the Holy Eucharist, it was only the apostles who were given the gift of the priesthood in order to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and confer the other Sacraments of the Church. This has been the constant understanding of the Churches of the East and West, which are the inheritors of Apostolic succession and received Tradition from the teaching of Jesus Christ.

“Until at least the ninth century, the Church gave women the full sacramental ordination of deacons. “

Response: Although Deaconesses did exist in the early Church, their role has mostly been understood to have been for the assistance of the ordained ministers with Baptisms, specifically with adult women when they were fully immersed in the waters of Baptism. There is no solid historical evidence that demonstrates that deaconesses actually ever conferred any of the Sacraments. The Sacraments were only conferred by the bishops and priests.

“The ancient devotion to Mary as Priest shows that, according to the “sense of the faithful,” in Mary the ban against women has already been overcome.”

Response: The Mother of God is and was venerated by the Church for her person and the privileged mission given her by the Lord. Nevertheless, she was not accorded the privilege of being one of the twelve apostles and neither was she accorded the privilege of being a priest. That was not her given role in the history of salvation. The *sensus fidelium* remains as such and never accorded to the Mother of God the title or the role of priest, rather, she has been referred to in Roman Catholic devotion as the “Mother of Priests,” or the “Queen of the Clergy.”

“Canonical and theological arguments against ordination are just baseless attempts of the male-dominated hierarchy to maintain the status quo. The current crises of cler-

gy sexual abuse and clergy shortages force the issue of women’s ordination. “

Response: The Church ordains after the practice and teaching of Jesus Christ Who intended and willed to institute the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The Lord Jesus fulfilled His ministry often counter-culturally and not to satisfy the respect of men or the religious leaders of His age. Thus, He even associated with women in situations that were not considered acceptable for religious teachers, for example, the Samaritan woman. Christ chose to ordain only men who were His closest associates. Those apostles in turn ordained other men after the practice and teaching of Jesus Christ, which was handed on to them from the person of Jesus Christ Himself. Again, historically this has been the constant teaching of the Church received from Jesus Christ. The Church cannot change this teaching, which does not derive from simple custom.

General Statement

In responding to the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood, the Church responds with the wisdom that derives from the whole of its existence down through the ages. Responses are not compartmentalized into theological, biblical, canonical or ecclesiological opinions. Rather, the Church seeks to address a question with the one font of Scripture and Tradition that includes all of the Church’s understanding found in Her living, organic existence for two thousand years. She does not act apart from Christ but acts with the one mind and heart of Jesus Christ.

The Church has definitively stated that women cannot be ordained to the priesthood because it was not the will of Christ. The differentiation of roles is not an issue of “empowerment,” but, rather, an opportunity to cooperate harmoniously in the various roles undertaken by the members of the Church for the advancement of the Kingdom of God and the salvation of souls.