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One woman's takeaway from the Call to Action conference

Sharon Abercrombie | Nov. 21, 2012 NCR Today

Curiosity and excitement prompted Shirley Rhodes Patterson, a Lutheran and a former Catholic, to attend the recent Call to Action conference Nov. 9-11 in Louisville, Ky. Her denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ordains women, and for many years, Patterson has been heartened by the guidance of women pastors at her congregation in Fox, Ark.

So when she learned from Catholic friends that Patricia Fresen, an ordained Catholic woman priest from South Africa, would be speaking at the CTA, Patterson signed up. Patterson grew up Catholic. After her high school graduation in 1958, she joined the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Ky., for a time, but after Vatican II, she left her community, married a former priest, settled in Fox and began attending the Lutheran church. She and her husband, Ray, are dedicated environmentalists who also support liberation theology and women's ordination.

Because the CTA conference featured talks by Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* *[1]* eco-theologian, and Aimee Upjohn Light [2], a young interreligious scholar and eco-feminist, Patterson said her weekend experiences at CTA proved to be mind-blowing.

"It was so amazing," she emailed her circle of friends. (I am honored to be included in that circle. Patterson and I were classmates at Presentation Academy in Louisville.)

Describing the convention as "marvelous," Patterson wrote: "It seems that since this pope and all the bishops he has appointed are not following the dictates of the Vatican Council in the '60s, many Catholics are proceeding as though the hierarchy doesn't exist and doing what their consciences tell them. It was so very refreshing -- even Ray got enthused."

She continued: "The theologians present were of a mind that the Church hierarchy today are in schism and do not need to be obeyed. That is why a legitimate Catholic bishop has already ordained women priests and has consecrated two women bishops. They are all proceeding to act as if the excommunication of such actions does not matter one whit. The women who are ordained are simple people, older, who look like you all. We heard Pat Fresen, former Dominican, now and a Bishop and born in South Africa, ordained and consecrated in Europe ... We attended a mass celebrated by about 20 women priests. "

Patterson hailed these developments "as a new time for many Catholics and very encouraging for church members who try to hang on to the old way. Maybe they too will break free and more priests will follow in the footsteps of these new leaders. For awhile, they cannot or they too will be booted."

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