Vatican



Pope Francis and participants pray at the start of the afternoon session of the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon at the Vatican Oct. 8, 2019. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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About two-thirds of the prelates attending the Vatican's Synod of Bishops for the Amazon are in favor of ordaining married men to address a severe lack of Catholic ministers across the nine-nation region, one of the bishops taking part in the three-week gathering estimated.



Retired Bishop Erwin Krautler gestures during an interview in Altamira, Brazil. (CNS/Paul Jeffrey)

In a short conversation with a group of journalists after a press briefing Oct. 9, Brazilian Bishop Erwin Krautler also said that some of the prelates are in favor of opening up the diaconate to women.

"I don't know exactly, but I guess that two-thirds are in favor of the ordination of married men," said the bishop.

"Many of the bishops are in favor of the ordination of female deacons," he added later.

Krautler is one of 185 bishops, priests and one religious brother taking part in the Oct. 6-27 Synod of Bishops as voting members.

The possibility of ordaining married men to meet the sacramental needs of the Amazon region has emerged as a key topic of the synod. Its lead organizer, retired Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, even brought up the issue by name in his Oct. 7 address opening the business of the gathering.

Originally of Austrian origin, Krautler has lived and work in Brazil since the 1960s. He is known to be outspoken on two primary issues: the vast environmental destruction taking place across the Amazon, and the need for more Catholic ministers to address pastoral needs across a vast, hard-to-traverse region.

The bishop, who led the prelature of Xingu, Brazil's largest Catholic territory, from 1981-2015, is also known to have the respect of his fellow prelates.

According to a knowledgeable source, the synod gathering was headed to elect Krautler as a member of its final document committee Oct. 7. But, before the vote was finalized, another prelate raised a point of order about there already being a Brazilian in the group, and Krautler was not elected.

During the Oct. 9 briefing, Krautler focused on the need for Catholics to have the possibility of receiving the Eucharist.

"There are thousands and thousands of communities in the Amazon who do not have the Eucharist except one or two times a year," he said. "These people are practically excluded. They are excluded from the context of the Catholic Church."

Krautler said that the practice of celibacy was being "put above" the need for Catholics to have access to the Eucharist.

The bishop also said that about two-thirds of Catholic faith communities in the Amazon are led by women.

"We need concrete solutions," said Krautler. "And I'm thinking about the women's diaconate."

Although women are currently not allowed to serve as deacons in the Catholic Church, many church historians have said there is abundant evidence that women served as deacons in the early centuries of the church. The apostle Paul mentions such a woman, Phoebe, in his letter to the Romans.

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Pope Francis created a commission to study the issue in 2016, following a request from the umbrella group representing the world's Catholic sisters and nuns, known as the International Union of Superiors General.

The pontiff gave a report from the commission back to the umbrella group in May. The report has not been released publicly.

While the synod gathering is being held behind closed doors, it is known that the issue of women deacons has been mentioned at least once. According to the Vatican summary of the themes being addressed each day, one prelate brought up the subject Oct. 8.

"Among the proposals advanced was also that of thinking of the possibility of a diaconal ordination for women, so as to better give value to the ecclesial vocation," said the summary.

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