Opinion
Letters to the Editor

by NCR Editorial Staff

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Including women in the ordained priesthood may not be the answer to all Catholic problems, but it would be a start, says theologian Mary E. Hunt. NCR readers respond to this commentary with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

I agree with Mary Hunt's excellent analysis of the institutional church's position on women's ordination. For 20 years, Roman Catholic Women Priests have been leading inclusive communities and ministries that have provided pastoral care of Catholics around the United States, Europe, Latin America, South Africa and Asia. We are serving inclusive Catholic communities who want to stay connected to sacramental rituals, the spiritual legacy and social justice witness of our cherished faith tradition.

In this insightful article, Hunt debunks the flimsy arguments of the hierarchy against the ordination of women and clearly names the main problem as clerical domination and failure to accept human equality.



While I agree that women in the ordained priesthood may not be the answer to all Catholic problems, Pope Francis could take a courageous step forward by removing the penalty of excommunication against women priests who are creating new models of ministry in people-empowered faith communities of equals now.

BRIDGET MARY MEEHAN, ARCWP
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Recently, I attended the wake and funeral of a relative. There were some prayers at the wake, but was not listed as no one knew if and when a deacon would show; many missed the moment. A priest said the funeral Mass. The internment was led by a different deacon. Three events, three different males.

When the family most needed the church, it was there in bits and pieces. This shows not only the decline of the clergy, but puts a light on the arrogance of the church. Gone are the days of a parish priest able to comfort a family in need.

At one point I thought there was no need for more clergy as the church has been so good at emptying the pews that few attend. However, the traditional priests lead me to believe, if we are to continue with a clerical norm, the clergy needs to be opened to more people. The trad priests are providing a self-fulfilling prophecy of leading to decline but for the very trad oriented individuals they attract. Can you imagine what kind of bishop they will make in another generation, or less?

The great irony is that those who proclaim Roman Catholicism as the one true faith, are the ones prohibiting people from experiencing what the church has to offer by a pre-eminent doctrine of an all male single clergy. Beholden to this model shows that the church is more interested in who can be a priest, than in preaching and living the Gospel.

THOMAS D. HOVEL
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Progress in the church is evolutionary, not revolutionary, although in some quarters any change, no matter how gradual from an historical perspective, is from their standpoint a radical revolution. Although I support the ordination of women, I think the church hierarchy would be wise to approach this in an evolutionary way such as ordaining women deacons. The fact that the early church had women deacons is easily one way of reaching out to our history in order to realize our future.

Certainly, many clerics' reactions to the idea of women priests ranges from disdain to apoplexy. Their rationale if not motivation to oppose something, which is seen by many in the laity as common sense, underscores the paternalism with which the laity are all too often subjected. If the synod does nothing else but address this dichotomy it would be a welcome step forward toward relevancy.

Given the recalcitrance of many of our prelates to even acknowledge the progress made by the Second Vatican Council, let alone embrace those changes, it is unlikely that ordination of women on any level will be easily adopted in the United States. I would hope the international episcopal community will vote at the synod to ordain women to the diaconate and that will have the effect of opening the door to a much more inclusive hierarchy which will truly reflect the body of Christ.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN
Granger, Indiana

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Mary Hunt's opinion piece reminded of the following spoken by Howard Zinn in 2008:

"We've never had our injustices rectified from the top, from the president or Congress, or the Supreme Court, no matter what we learned in junior high school about how we have three branches of government, and we have checks and balances, and what a lovely system. No. The changes, important changes that we've had in history, have not come from those three branches of government. They have reacted to social movements."

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