Opinion
Guest Voices



Democratic presidential nominee and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris takes the stage during the Democratic National Convention at the United Center in Chicago on Aug. 22. (OSV News/Reuters/Mike Segar)



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The Catholic Church is in a bad way when the Democratic Party in the United States brings more hope and joy to people — especially to women — than Pope Francis.

Kamala Harris, the smart and highly articulate candidate for the U.S. presidency, electrified her audience with her acceptance speech Thursday (Aug. 22) at the Democratic convention in Chicago. She talked about "not going back" and promised to "chart a new way forward" because "the future is always worth fighting for."

Meanwhile, Francis, though a crowd-pleaser himself, is saddled with a confusing *instrumentum laboris* for the second session of his synod on synodality. The document, a working agenda for the bishops, priests, religious and lay Catholics who will gather in Rome Oct. 2-27, contains ample mention of the role of women, but says the question of women deacons will be left to the unnamed members of "Study Group 5."

Related: Vatican synod agenda focuses on participation and inclusion, not hot button issues

It is worth remembering that Francis gave a resounding "No" to the prospect of women deacons in his May CBS television interview with Norah O'Donnell. His "not now, not ever" declaration, seemingly based on a long-disputed interpretation of history, removed from synodal discussion one of the most consistent requests by Catholics around the world in the local listening sessions that began the synod three

years ago.

Restoring women to the ordained diaconate would place women within the ranks of the hierarchy. As the *instrumentum laboris* states, "In a synodal Church, the responsibility of the bishop, the College of bishops and the Roman Pontiff to make decisions is inalienable since it is rooted in the hierarchical structure of the Church established by Christ."

Pope Francis greets Norah O'Donnell before an exclusive interview with the "CBS Evening Ne

Pope Francis greets Norah O'Donnell before an exclusive interview with the "CBS Evening News" anchor at the Vatican April 24 for an interview ahead of the Vatican's inaugural World Children's Day. An hourlong special based on the interview aired on CBS May 20. (OSV News/Courtesy of 60 minutes, CBS NEWS)

So for all the talk about including women in decision-making, the door to real participation remains locked.

While the paragraph in question goes on to strongly define and defend the need for "consultation," even to suggest a change in the Code of Canon Law, it is still a case of everyone discerning and the hierarchy deciding. Because women are not allowed past the hierarchical fence, women cannot be included in governance.

Therein lies the root of the problem. If Francis cannot see his way to re-authorize the sacramental ordination of women as deacons, which several of his predecessors and councils approved throughout the years, then all the talk about including women in decision-making falls flat.

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Saying women can participate while restricting governance to the ordained drains any excitement, even interest, in synodal discussion from the hearts of women.

Is it possible Francis has something else up his sleeve? He is, after all, a man of surprises. He hinted at a non-ordained "diaconate" of women in his televised interview, but that is a disaster waiting to happen in that it would require his stating that women cannot be ordained because they cannot image Christ — that they are not made in the image and likeness of God.

Which returns us to the Democratic convention and Kamala Harris, who forcefully defended the rights and dignity of all people.

Related: If women cannot be deacons, we should stop ordaining men deacons

For all its inclusiveness, one image stands out to demonstrate the most moving affirmation of the value of the person, the wonder of family life and the possibility of a joyful, hope-filled future for everyone, including women: When vice presidential candidate Tim Walz's mildly disabled son stood crying and clapping as Walz accepted the nomination and shouted, "That's my dad!" no one in the family box told him to sit down.



Democratic presidential nominee and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris reacts during the Democratic National Convention at the United Center in Chicago Aug. 22. (OSV News/Reuters/Elizabeth Frantz)

The next evening, Kamala Harris took the stage. She echoed Francis' embrace of "*Tutti*," but her overriding message was: "forward."

Would that the pope would adopt it.