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Archbishop explains why he barred nun-catechist

by NCR Staff



Louise Akers

The decision by the archbishop of Cincinnati to bar Sister of Charity Louise Akers from teaching catechetics on behalf of the archdiocese because of her public support of women's ordination in the Catholic church has "garnered international attention" for the archbishop and the sister, according to a report by *The Catholic Telegraph*, the official organ of the archdiocese.

Update Sept. 15: **Volunteer catechist ousted after voicing support for Sr. Akers.**

Questions have been raised about the role of a diocesan bishop and the teaching of catechetics in his diocese, Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk told *The Catholic Telegraph* Sept. 3. "It is a bishop's responsibility to provide authentic and orthodox Catholic teaching in his diocese. Persons who are not in accord with the teaching of the church should not expect to be allowed to teach catechetical leaders or others in the name of the church."

Her public position, he told the newspaper, is in defiance of the church's teaching.

"We don't hire people to teach only infallible doctrine; we hire people to teach what's in the Catechism

of the Catholic Church," he explained. "As a result, Sister Louise may not teach in the name of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati or at any venue for which the archdiocese is responsible."

Akers joined the Sisters of Charity in 1960. Since 1979, she had served in a number of archdiocesan posts related to the Social Action Office and had been frequent teacher on justice issues the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization as well as an adjunct and visiting professor at Mount St. Joseph and at Xavier University..

The news about an Aug. 10 meeting between Akers and Pilarczyk was first made public with a story posted to the NCR Web site Aug. 31, where it quickly became the most popular article on the site.

The Catholic Telegraph ran its story, titled "A bishop has the responsibility to insure teaching is authentic," Sept. 4 and updated it Sept. 8.

Akers had told NCR that She had requested a meeting with Pilarczyk after being informed that persons upset with her teaching had registered official complaints with church officials. Central to those complaints were both the presence of her name and photo on the Women's Ordination Conference Web site and her membership on its advisory board.

Pilarczyk asked that Akers remove her name from the ordination Web site and that she publicly rescind her support of the ordination of women. Akers complied with the first request, but not the second. "To do so would go against my conscience," Akers told NCR.

"For four decades I have devoted my ministry to advocating on behalf of the marginalized through religious congregations, justice organizations, ecumenical and interfaith groups," Akers told NCR. "Women's ordination is a justice issue. Its basis is the value, dignity and equality of women. I believe this to my very core. To publicly state otherwise would be a lie and a violation of my conscience. I love, support and cherish the part of Church that upholds the gospel mission and vision of Jesus."

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She reiterated her stance to *The Catholic Telegraph* Sept. 8. "Foremost it, for me, is primacy of conscience which has always been of paramount importance in the history of our church," she said. "For me to publicly support the current church teaching forbidding women's ordination would be a lie. The value, dignity and equality of womanperson is at the core of my stance."

Akers told *The Catholic Telegraph*, "I believe historically we have seen an evolution of doctrine in other areas of church teaching. This has happened for a number of reasons - some scientific, others through a dialogue of theologians and scripture scholars with the magisterium of the church," Akers said.

"I believe even though it is difficult within the climate of our church and our country it is vitally important that dialogue continue," she told the newspaper.

She also said: "If there are penalties for raising questions - which many are doing including some bishops and priests - then, yes, I will accept them. However, I do not understand why this is happening now. I have been public for over 30 years regarding the role of women in the church."

The Catholic Telegraph carried a statement from Sr. Barbara Hagedorn, president of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, that called Akers "a member in good standing of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati." The statement confirmed the facts of the case but made no further comment, stating "Because this is a

personnel matter of the archdiocese, the issue remains between the archbishop and Sr. Louise Akers.

?The Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati support Sr. Louise and all those involved in this difficult situation with our prayers and concern.?

Read NCR's earlier story on this: Cincinnati nun given ultimatum over ordination views

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