

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

May 31, 2013 at 10:44am

We still don't know where Pope Francis is on gender equality

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NCR Today

There's a lot to admire about Pope Francis: his simplicity, his "off the cuff" preaching (like when he speaks inclusively of atheists), his emphasis on economic justice, the real probability that he will canonize Archbishop Oscar Romero, to mention but a few new papal developments.

But when it comes to gender equality and women's issues, there's still a blank slate. Well, almost: Cardinal Gerhard Müller reported Pope Francis approved the plan for what amounts to a hostile takeover of LCWR. I still don't believe Francis really knows the facts of that case. He needs to sit down with the LCWR leadership -- in private -- and hear the real story.

Then I read about more ordinations of Roman Catholic women priests June 22 in Virginia. Where does Pope Francis stand on the issue of women's ordination? OK, OK, I'm not so naive that I think he'll come out in favor of it tomorrow, but does he have any ability to be incremental? What does he think of women deacons, for example? We still don't know.

After all, when same-sex marriage was an issue in Argentina, he opposed marriage but was at least in favor of civil unions.

Will he appoint any women to high offices in the Curia? No signs yet, but who knows?

And when it comes to contraception, is there any give at all? After all, Catholics use it at the same rate as those of other traditions.

And what about abortion? Pope Francis is not likely to change church teaching on that issue, but does he

believe church teaching must always become civil law? (The church opposes remarriage after divorce, for example, but no one is campaigning to enact that into civil law.) And recently, the complexities of that issue came to light with the case of "Beatriz" in El Salvador, who doctors say needs an abortion to save her life. On Friday, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in her favor. I wonder what Francis might think in this case.

I don't expect Pope Francis will reveal himself as a flaming feminist on any issue, but it would be nice if he spoke out for gender equality now and then.

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