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## New day dawning for women priests 20 years after 'Ordinatio Sacerdotalis'

by Janice Sevre-Duszynska

Commentary

Twenty years after Pope John Paul II issued the May 22, 1994, apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* reserving priesthood for men only, the women priest movement in the Roman Catholic church is rising up. A new day is dawning.

"Like Deacon Phoebe, Junia the Apostle, Mary Magdalene and the women of the Gospels, women priests today are following the call of Jesus by serving inclusive eucharistic Catholic communities where all are welcome to receive sacraments," said Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan, who will ordain six women -- four to the priesthood, two to the diaconate -- on Saturday in Cleveland.

The unswerving desire and sense of urgency from the Spirit's calling continues. Despite 20 years of blatant discrimination of women and denial of women's basic human rights as spiritual equals before God, women priests are serving in priestly ministry. With almost 200 Roman Catholic Womenpriests, a renewed priestly ministry is flowering in 10 countries. Catholics worldwide are ready for a new model of church led by women and men. In the United States, approximately 150 women priests are serving in 60 inclusive liturgical communities and providing sacraments.

While some women priests are former nuns, others are single, married or divorced; converts to Catholicism; gay or straight. They have made their living as teachers, school administrators, professors, nurses, counselors, attorneys, chaplains, social workers, artists, authors and more. Some are Catholic Workers caring for immigrants and the homeless. One is an architect. Several have done resistance and spent time in prison and/or jail. Others have worked for the church in various capacities.

Mary Collingwood of Boston Heights, Ohio, is one of the women who will be ordained as a priest Saturday in Cleveland. Collingwood is a wife, mother and grandmother who, with her advanced degree in theology, has served for 40 years in church ministry and taught theology at high school and college levels. In the parish, she was director of religious education, coordinator for marriage preparation, and a pastoral minister. On the diocesan level, she was an administrator and served on various boards and councils and as an activist for church reform.

"Women are being called by the Holy Spirit to image the Divine Feminine through ordained priestly ministry thereby restoring the wholeness of God's presence in our church," Collingwood said.

"Personally, this entails ordination and embracing circle leadership as an egalitarian model of decision-making within Roman Catholic communities."

Mary Bergan Blanchard, once a teaching Sister of Mercy in the Albany, N.Y., diocese, left the order in the late 1960s to teach the disadvantaged in Boston. She later married a widower with five children, and they eventually had a son of their own. She and her husband retired to Albuquerque, N.M., where she worked as a mental health counselor for 20 years at her parish church. Blanchard wrote a memoir, *Eulogy*, calling for changes in canon law. She complained that the "greatest sin of the Catholic Church is its failure to treat women as equals."

Upon hearing about the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests at age 82, she studied to become ordained. "If we are truly the Light of the World, it's time to flick the switch," she said.

With advanced degrees in theology, pastoral counseling, and family therapy, Irene Scaramazza of Columbus, Ohio, is currently working as a hospice chaplain.

She is being ordained a priest "because God continues to call me to deeper union lived out in service to others," she said. "For me, ministry means immersing myself in the life of the people I serve and together discovering our living God."

For 35 years, Marianne Therese Smyth of Silver Spring, Md., has worked as a para-educator with special needs students. She has been serving the Living Water Inclusive Community in Catonsville, Md., and has a Master of Education in counseling.

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"I am becoming a priest because God asked," Smyth said. "God's inclusive love cannot be expressed or shared from a strictly male point of view. That was not the message of Jesus. My love is hospice ministry, and I will be expanding into bereavement work and healing modalities such as Reiki."

As the women are ordained, communities rise up around them.

During his 2013 Easter homily, not long after he was elected to the papacy, Pope Francis affirmed women as the first witnesses to the Resurrection. "This tells us that God does not choose according to human

criteria," he said. " ... The women are driven by love and know how to accept this proclamation with faith: they believe, and immediately transmit it, they do not keep it for themselves."

Women who have accepted the call from God to priesthood and who have become women priests want to share, as Francis said, "the joy of knowing that Jesus is alive, the hope that fills their heart."

[Janice Sevre-Duszynska is a Roman Catholic Womanpriest, peace and justice activist, and a retired teacher.]

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