

Ordination: A Fresh Look At What's Possible

*A modest proposal, a radical impact?
...and a healthy detachment from the outcome!*

"The church that preaches the equality of women but does nothing to demonstrate it within its own structures, that proclaims a theology of equality but insists on an ecclesiology of superiority is out of sync with its best self and dangerously close to repeating the theological errors that underlay centuries of church sanctioned slavery."

Discipleship For A Priestly People In A Priestless Period, Joan Chittister, osb

I *Imagine* for a moment - *What if* we could individually and collectively Find A NEW Way to move ahead on the topic of Ordination in the Catholic Church...and get beyond the black-and-white dualism in our current faith practice?

This paper is a call for all who care about Women's Ordination to jointly create a *dynamic MOVEMENT* to take committed action to fund the next generation of women leaders in the Catholic Church and to set the stage for the forthcoming wave of women's ordination.

As Werner Erhard said: *THIS is a "Conversation for Action..."*(We begin by accessing) language creating futures where none seemed possible."

When people contribute to this endowment, the women priests and church leaders of today and tomorrow will experience the community's solidarity and financial support that they deserve as they pursue their divine call to ministry. This foundation will be called: "Dawn Without Darkness" to represent the radiant new light and future emerging in the church.

Today's false dichotomy is oftentimes now framed as *Either* I actively reject the status quo and leave the church that I love because it is fundamentally unjust and flawed *Or* I passively accept the status quo and I stay and put up with it; and thereby feel powerless and out of integrity because I personally did too much waiting—and took too little action—to advance the conversation about who is eligible or who has a call to ordination.

For the millions of Catholics who have left the church many know that there is something lingering in their leaving and searching to find a new church home, knowing that in many cases, their search for a new faith community just doesn't taste right, ... for I will always be a Catholic, always touched by the power of the sacraments, rich tradition, stirring ritual, sacred yearning, shared community experience, ...

As I thought about those in exodus, their hunger, unmet need and longing to be in alignment and membership in a vibrant Catholic community that is true to the full gospel message, many come to realize that their searching for a new faith tradition has fallen flat

and “it just doesn’t taste right”. My friend Pete Vanni succinctly describes the stay or go dilemma: “**Nothing else will do.** Many Catholics today are ill at ease with the state of the church, whether they stay or go. There is hole in their soul that seeks to be made whole.

Let me be crystal clear, I wholeheartedly admire priests and nuns who live out a celibate lifestyle with compassion, authenticity, maturity, grace, generosity and justice. I just don’t see celibacy or gender as a requirement for priestly ministry. Instead, I embrace freely chosen optional celibacy and fully empowered women’s equality.

Genesis 1 highlights the divine spark and goodness in each of us. Men and Women are of Equal Worth! Yet so far, the Roman Catholic Church, for whatever reason(s), has chosen to overlook, undervalue and underutilize this bountiful feminine resource.

Perhaps you are like me, and you were too young or busy to take committed action on the essential social justice and civil rights issue of organizing voter registration and empowerment of the marginalized in the 1960’s.

Today, with astounding clarity, I see that I’m at a perfect age to do my part starting this year to honor all women by planting seeds of enduring faithfulness *And* seeds of creative disruption around this sacramental question of ordination.

I see that by exercising non-dual thinking, I can embody both a healthy loyalty *And* a discerning questioning toward the Roman Catholic church that I love around Fresh Ordination possibilities. Deep, committed and balanced relational love has room for both sacred support and prophetic challenge. I can also do my part to engage others – *You* perhaps? - in this question, and invite you to follow your conscience and take committed action with others that will ultimately shift the status quo.

Theologian Richard Rohr's reminds us that “In Franciscan theology, the best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. Just go ahead and do it better. If you really believe in the values you say you believe in, then put them into practice. Oppositional energy only creates more of the same.” What you resist, persists.

Let me offer an alternative stance that might become a tsunami rippling out to Roman Catholics all across the globe, one choice at a time, one day at a time, one interruption at a time.

When something is unjust and imprudent what are each of us and all of us called to do? Pray, collaborate, dialogue, listen, question, discern...and then take prudent action, individually and communally for justice.

One recent example: Progress in accountability, transparency, structural transformation and restorative justice around the pedophilia scandals has had many key contributors, not the least of which is a responsible, committed, democratic and empowered grassroots-led

laity. A committed group of Catholics rose up and called forth transparency and accountability.

This is a current example of Catholics giving up their passivity and endless waiting for others to lead the way going forward. *They are taking responsibility, albeit reactively to illegal behavior*, and actively shaping the future of OUR Catholic church community. This movement is led by Catholics who see themselves as *committed members*, aligned to a divine mission, *holy communal purpose* and daily spiritual practice; not primarily *Sunday consumers*, easily satisfied at coming to church to get their *personal juice* for the week like “filling up their spiritual gas tank”. Mind you there is nothing inherently wrong with a consumer mentality, it just doesn’t lead to transformation and miraculous results.

In contrast, *this Women’s Ordination movement is a Proactive movement* - from the ground up – to BE a church that inspires them to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6)

“Action springs not from thought, but from a “readiness for responsibility.”
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Are Catholics around the globe at a ‘tipping point’ of readiness for responsibility (See Vince Rush, [The Responsible Christian](#)) to take committed action, individually and collectively, to substantially shift the dialogue on ordination possibilities? I, for one, can no longer remain silent. It’s time to speak up. What say you?

Richard Rohr poses the question: “What can we do in the face of resistance? I believe contemplation or nondual consciousness can help us approach change with creativity, openness, and courage.”

New possibilities can then emerge and transform us, our relationships, our communities; and Yes, even our institutions.

Theologian Walter Wink suggests we faithfully search for a Third Way that engages and organizes nonviolent resistance to move ahead (<https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/road-peace/walter-wink-our-best-teacher-christian-nonviolence>).

Today, I see a New Third Way emerging in the Roman Catholic Tradition to collaboratively:

- 1) call forth, and rigorously prepare, the best of leaders for ordination
- 2) continue to support my local parish and archdiocese, albeit perhaps to a different degree, while we also
- 3) seed the change to take a real, tangible and committed non-violent stand for a more just, equitable and representative ordained clergy.

Focusing on the *What actions we can take* now, here is my modest proposal:

Follow your conscience to support your local parish with your time, energy, finances AND also let them know that your contribution going forward has changed.

One example of tangible prophetic action: Instead of giving the local church \$1000 annually; you will now be giving \$500 locally, with the other \$500 annually going into an international endowment fund, aptly named the Dawn Without Darkness^o Endowment for Women's Ordination.

This Dawn Without Darkness endowment, to be hosted by fiduciary, Sunrise Bank (The World's Most Socially Responsible Bank), is in the idea stage of being formed. A lay led committee will annually discern a prudent and just way to provide academic and vocation scholarship money now for Catholic women worldwide who are already ordained or are called and committed to taking all of the graduate level educational and ministry formation work necessary to be an ordained leader in our Catholic faith tradition in the days ahead.

This Dawn Without Darkness fund is a dynamic incubator and social catalyst to empower and embolden the Next Generation of Women leaders in a Catholic Church that stands for Justice and Equality of all its members, without distinction. (Tell me again, why should men get their Graduate level University ordination preparation expenses paid for while women have to self-fund their ordination preparation expenses?)

In honor of the wisdom of non-violence in Spiral Dynamics, as each level of fundamental priestly ordination justice is reached in the Catholic Church, see below, the endowment will *transcend and integrate* the previous levels of priestly service. We thus make active waiting and rigorous preparing of new female church leaders a sacred act of faithfulness. The Dawn Without Darkness endowment will release these funds annually, in descending order, when the following SEVEN women's ordination benchmarks are met:

- *Starting in the year 2020, up to 10% of the endowment's total monetary value is released annually to educate, train and equip emerging women leaders to be ordained deacons.
- *Once women deacons are ordained, up to 20% of the endowment is released annually to educate, train and equip emerging women leaders to be ordained deacons and priests.
- * Once women priests are ordained, up to 30% of the endowment is released annually to educate, train and equip emerging women leaders to be ordained deacons, priests and bishops.
- * Once women bishops are ordained, up to 40% of the endowment is released annually to educate, train and equip emerging women leaders to be ordained deacons, priests, bishops and cardinals.
- * Once women cardinals are appointed, up to 50% of the endowment is released annually to educate, train and equip emerging women leaders to be ordained deacons, priests, bishops, and appointed to be cardinals as we prepare married couples to be ordained.

* Once married couples are ordained, up to 60% of the endowment is released annually to educate, train and equip emerging women to be ordained deacons, priests, bishops, and appointed to be cardinals, married couples to be ordained priests; and as we prepare women to be selected pope.

* Once a woman is selected pope, up to 100% of the endowment is released annually to educate, train and equip emerging women to be ordained deacons, priests, bishops, and selected cardinals, married couples to be ordained priests, and prepare women to be selected pope.

This YES/AND proposal allows individuals, and families to CONTRIBUTE ***financially, structurally and prophetically,***

- *Starting NOW to our rich faith tradition* and local parish to help offset the daily costs of running a parish and doing necessary, vital, sacramental and healing ministry work
- *Starting NOW to our rich faith legacy* by non-violently calling forth an evolving conversation to inclusively ordain the best of faith leaders, irrespective of gender or marital status

A more reserved example of funding *Both* the church of today *And* the church of tomorrow would be to freeze your current level of contribution to the local faith community; and then send any and all increases in your total giving going forward over time to the endowment.

This modest proposal is a simple way for each parishioner to discern your values and then take concrete action Now that honors Both your support of the current Church (Being) And also calling forth a future *JUST* church encompassing new ordination possibilities (Becoming).

These creative, provocative and committed actions by the people in the pews would undoubtedly "throw open the windows of the church and let the fresh air of the spirit flow through"! (Pope John XXIII).

Under this proposal, if and when the Roman Catholic Church ever chooses to freely and fully ordain women deacons, women priests, married priests, women bishops, and appoint women cardinals, and select a woman pope...there will be a predictable windfall of contributed finances already at work to support women's voices being empowered and heard all around the world...and I predict a renewal of energy that will undoubtedly unleash a new vitality in our faith communities all across the globe.

Visit www.catholicwomenpreach to hear the voices of catholic women reflecting on and preaching on the weekly scriptures.

A few benefits of this modest proposal:

This humble proposal offers no resistance, makes no demands, poses little threat, presents no self-righteousness and offers no pathological certainty of what is best, most needed or most timely for the wider Roman Catholic faith community in the days ahead.

It merely offers a positive vehicle for people to vote and follow their conscience today – *to actually DO SOMETHING NOW* – by *BEING* a stand for a church with a wide-open future that fully acknowledges, honors and cherishes the gifts of all women.

An under-appreciated side-benefit of each of us enrolling in this committed action is that whenever a person lives out their values, their self-respect unquestionably, irrepressibly and immeasurably blossoms. For Self-Respect is forever an inside job; an everlasting gift only you can give yourself. Live Your Values. No one can do that for you. Ever. If we say we believe in women's ordination and take no corresponding action, we have no integrity on the matter.

What is the likelihood that taking practical prophetic action to enroll in this paradigm shift will touch the lives of others? As a parent, or an advocate for the full equality of women, will it matter to your wife, your daughters, your sons, your mother, your sisters, your colleagues, your neighbors, your circle of influence, your legacy...that you took a stand at this crossroads of history, that you stood in solidarity and *ONENESS* on behalf of all women for full ordination possibilities in the Roman Catholic Church in 2020 and beyond?

The Dawn Without Darkness Foundation is a symbolic, structural and financial vehicle that supports future equality while also protesting current injustice of unequal ordination possibilities. It shines a perpetual light on a harsh darkness. Now, all around the globe, adults and children will be able to vote with their feet, finances and integrity by supporting their local faith community while also prophetically calling forth change.

The two words I want on my tombstone are: "No Regrets". In that vein, I'll be able to say: *When I was alive, I didn't just watch Rome burning – I actually took committed ACTION to move the church ahead by promoting the full equality of women in leadership.*

Joining this movement recognizes that as an individual I have zero control of what the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church will do, or what my peers will do...and I have total and absolute control of what I will choose to do. I consciously choose to exercise non-violent non-cooperation to interrupt the current 'bottleneck' state of ordination candidates; by actively planting, funding and cultivating seeds of justice and equality to cast a wide net FOR who else will be our sacramental faith community leaders in the days ahead.

The indwelling Spirit gently nudges each of us to remember that we always have the Power of One! My life. My vote. My choice(s). Yes, don't be grandiose about your personal power; and Yes, don't be powerless. Do your part. Just DO It!

If you were to be courageous to repeatedly take the risk to act "as if" your one life truly matters and your life energy is never wasted; would *causing* women's ordination be a worthy endeavor??? As the poet Mary Oliver asks: '*Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your **one** wild and precious **life?***'

A guiding principle to support our own mental health along this pathway of reform may be to look to step 1 in the 12-step spirituality, and also at the Serenity Prayer, where we begin by acknowledging where we are powerless...and then we acknowledge where we have abundant choice—and we act accordingly.

Perhaps someday soon more of these new ordained church leaders will emerge when The Holy Spirit generously moves the Ecclesia – *and Us* – to change. OR perhaps it will take the steady daily drip-drip-drip exodus pain of losing faith generations, and their local financial contributions, before there is an urgent call to also heed the divinely inspired voices of the assembly...and discern anew the charism of ordination in the Roman Catholic Church.

It occurs to me that the seismic power of the internet in expanding the instantaneous reach of a movement has only ever been rivaled in history by one other innovative technology moment: the invention of the printing press. It's now 2020AD. Power has shifted, again - no longer is it predominantly vertical, top-down and inside-out; it is increasingly horizontal, bottom-up and outside-in, empowering everyone – who is open and willing - immediately. Now! Now. Now!

Can you imagine the transformative power of an abundant global endowment that accepts these contributions freely and transparently posts them immediately? A fund that generously sustains women with a call to priestly ordination? Could we together create THE new favorite web-based homepage where in real time we see our brothers and sisters worldwide join in, take committed action, and watch their laser-focused contributed dollars and membership grow?

Overnight, this website just might become the world-wide-web's favorite screen saver ever; attracting the eyes and hearts of the multitudes who yearn for a church that reflects in its ordained leaders a mirror of who is in the pews; who is divinely inspired-and who is most prepared and ready to lead. This website could point to a Sacred Cause *that grows by attraction, not promotion.*

One caveat: It may be necessary to remind our self to focus on doing only our part in planting seeds of disruption. By all means we must be about a social search for the truth,

let it inform our conscience, dialogue, and then our conscience *demands* that we take prudent and unequivocal action to conform our lives to that divinely inspired truth. (Declaration On Religious Freedom *DIGNITATIS HUMANAE*, On The Right Of The Person And Of Communities To Social And Civil Freedom In Matters Religious Promulgated By His Holiness Pope Paul VI On December 7, 1965)

We each have to discern what sacred work is ours to do. So, we work a good internal and collaborative process to determine our next step(s). We commit to take ‘just’ action for a holy cause. We deliberate, educate, advocate, organize, demonstrate, agitate, pray, ...

We take action, create and persevere—and at the same time; we also let go of the process/outcome, repeatedly turning this *Fresh Look At Ordination Possibilities* over to the Holy Spirit and to God’s cosmic timing, God’s mysterious ways, not mine. We fully embody the Unjust/Just continuum, holding the blessed tension of *what Is* (today) AND *what Is Possible* (tomorrow).

Then, perhaps, we exhale and breathe, positively detaching again and again from the outcome; yet never detaching from our sacred call and holy anger that fuels our resolve to do our part in the process of transforming ordination possibilities for men and women.

We consciously choose to not ride an emotional roller coaster hitched to whatever the Pope and Roman Curia choose to do or not do; a ride that we didn’t sign up for and we can’t control, we just do our part in the dance of life as we individually discern, ardently pray, faithfully act, collaboratively move, and expectantly wait in hope and justice – for God is always at work, and we are ready for responsibility.

We live in a time when it is often said: “*Somebody should do something someday.*” That recurring complaint highlights the temptation to avoid responsibility. Lets just wait for Rome to “get it” and make a change to the status quo from the top down. Reminds me of how long the church took to acknowledge the truth of what Gallileo had to say.

I say its time, time for each of us to look in the mirror and for each of us, individually, and all of us collectively, **to actually Be in Action, BEING RESPONSIBLE – for us to BE CAUSE In The Matter of our life and the Life of our Church.** What are we waiting for? I say that *We will* proactively lead this change of direction, for the world is hungry and waiting for us to lead from the bottom up, from the outside in, from the edges...

Our collective voices are yearning to be acknowledged, heard and set free. UNLEASHED! It’s time that we stand for something, that our lives be given over to something bigger than oneself. Will you choose to take a stand,

contribute, and be counted as a radiant light among fellow believers in the Dawn Without Darkness movement? Will you take ACTION that shifts this from being *A Movement to being OUR MOVEMENT?*

Will you take the necessary action TODAY to live out your Gospel values, join up with OUR Dawn Without Darkness Justice MOVEMENT, make a Generous contribution and create your legacy of being one whose Actions shifted the 'tipping point' of what is possible for ordination in the Roman Catholic Church or the broader Catholic Church (See: Charis Ecumenical Catholic Community. <https://ectwincities.wordpress.com> and Spirit Catholic Church <https://www.spiritofststephens.org>)

All these distinctions will not matter if we do not make a crucial point here and now – As Alfred Adler noted, we must be about a Psychology of Use, Not of Possession. What matters here and now is not what we have or lack, but what we do with what we have. More concretely, consider the life of HELEN KELLER. Other people in history had the same physical conditions she had. She refused to let them unduly limit her. Her contribution would not be denied. She refused to be defined by what she could not do. It reminds me of my dear friend Trish Vanni, Ph.D., <https://ectwincities.wordpress.com>, who embodies another alternative way of being Catholic, faithful and free to be fully self-expressed as a person of faith

This psychology of use, not possession also applies to being responsible concretely. Responsible about faith matters like anger, money, loss, life dreams, ... what stories we choose to tell, nurture and live out, how we use our time and resources, ...

As Auburn Seminary reminded me today: Perhaps – RIGHT Now - is a time to examine the fine print and be open to a new source of divine inspiration embodied in women's voices, a time to: Trouble the waters. Heal the world.

What time do you say it is! Perhaps it is time to attend remotely this event: locbreakfast@auburnseminary.org

Contributions to the Dawn Without Darkness Fund may be made by ...
(steps to be determined)

° *name inspired from book title by Anthony Padavano*

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