

A REFLECTION AND STUDY GUIDE

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WOMEN DEACONS

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

Gary Macy,
William T. Ditewig,
and
Phyllis Zagano

FOREWORD BY Susan A. Ross



Paulist Press
New York / Mahwah, NJ

Acknowledgements

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the NRSV.

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How to Use this Study Guide

Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future offers a way to explore the history of women deacons in the Church through examples from Scripture, rites of the Church, ancient documents, and contemporary sources beginning with Vatican II, when the diaconate was restored as a permanent vocation. The book also presents some questions surrounding the restoration of women to the ordained diaconate today.

The purpose of this *Reflection and Study Guide* is to help the reader digest and reflect on the materials presented in the book. This *Study Guide* is best used for group discussion, with the expectation that each group member will read and prepare ahead of time. The group can decide on how many sessions it might need to complete the book and the *Study Guide* questions, although we suggest at least four. *Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future* has three chapters, an introduction and a foreword, and each chapter has sub-chapters. *Study Guide* reflection questions can assist in reading and discussing the material. While the *Study Guide* is aimed at group discussion, it can be used by individuals.

Timing of the Group

The group should meet for about one and one-half hours for at least four sessions.

Facilitators

We suggest having a facilitator or co-facilitators for the group. The facilitator who creates a welcoming and prayerful atmosphere will help members participate, keep the group focused, and monitor time. The facilitator should choose key questions from each chapter to keep the discussion moving. In our focus groups, we found that group members were amazed to find out about the topic of women deacons, the history, current scholarship, and renewed conversation about restoring women to the ordained diaconate. Key questions can re-focus groups that may stray off the topic.

Group Members

Each group member has responsibility for each session. Each member should participate, listen, and allow others to participate fully. Meeting space should allow all participants to hear the discussion. If the meeting in a parishioner's home, the host prepares a comfortable seating area. The facilitator also needs to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate.

The Questions

Each chapter in this *Study Guide* contains many questions intended to help participants get the most out of reading the book. Each chapter is very dense with information and the questions provide a guide to get the most out of each section. The groups need not discuss each question; the facilitators and group members should select a few to guide the discussion. The page numbers listed before each set of questions refer to the subtitles and pages in *Women Deacons Past Present Future* for that particular topic.

The Glossary

It can be helpful to quickly review the glossary at the back of the *Study Guide* before beginning discussion, so that everyone understands the terminology in the book and the *Study Guide*.

Prepare Ahead

Group members should prepare each chapter in advance of each session by reading and reflecting on the given chapter and questions. This ensures good discussion and full participation.

Sharing in the Group

Everyone is invited to share and contribute, but no one is forced to speak. It is important that everyone who wants to speak be given an opportunity to participate in the sharing so it can be helpful to ask group members to share once and then wait until everyone has had the opportunity to speak before speaking again. Be careful to listen.

Keeping focused

From time to time, it can be helpful to say, *"Let's look at the question (or topic) again to see if we are really getting to the heart of the matter,"* If one person dominates or presents himself or herself as an "expert," the facilitator (or even other group members) may gently remind the group of its primary purpose and redirect the conversation. For example, *"That's very true" or "You've really thought about that - let's hear what others have to say."*

Evaluation

The facilitator should help the group evaluate each session. Key learnings and evaluation questions are at the end of each session. It is also a good idea for the facilitator or another group member to contact those who could not make the meeting to let them know they were missed and encourage them to come the next week.

Prayer

Each section has six "stages: 1) opening prayer; 2) ice breaker; 3) discussion; 4) key learnings; 5) evaluation; 6) sending prayer. The musical suggestions are keyed to the discussion topics, should your group wish to sing or meditate on the songs. You may wish to set an environment of candle, a bible, a seasonal cloth to enhance the call to prayer.

A Word about Confidentiality

What is said in the group stays in the group! People grow in their depth of sharing as the trust level grows in the group, so each member should show the utmost respect for each member and for God who lives in each person. Respect each other by commitment to the meeting time and by honoring with confidentiality the personal stories and thoughts that are shared in your time together.

Women Deacons: Past, Present, Future is a groundbreaking book, in which the authors have studied and documented the history of women deacons and the need for them today in a changing world. The deacon is called to an ordained, non-priestly ministry of the Word, the liturgy, and charity. It is our hope that the *Reflection and Study Guide* will help you will allow you to participate more fully in the Church's ongoing discussions about women in the diaconate.

Session One

Introduction with Foreword by Susan A. Ross

Gathering Prayer

Welcome and Purpose of the gatherings: by Facilitator

Introductions: Your name, family, ministry, parish – Why did you come to be a part of this learning/discussion group?

Ice Breaker: Who are the women in your life who have had the most effect on your life and faith? Why?

Gathering Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the Hearts of Your faithful
and enkindle in us the Fire of Your love.

Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be recreated
--And You will renew the face of the earth,

Let us pray.

God of the prophets [and prophetesses],
in every age you send the word of truth.
Let us not be counted among those who lack faith,
but give us the vision to see Christ in our midst
and to welcome your saving word.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

—The Alternate Prayer Year B of the Fourteenth Sunday of
Ordinary Time taken from the Roman Missal

prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1998.



**Mary Magdalene
and the Blessed Mother**

Scripture **Luke 8:1-3**

Afterward [Jesus] journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

Loving God,

We gather in the name of all the women who have ministered in the Church for centuries. Their dedication to Jesus was from the very beginning. In their name we gather tonight to remember and to move forward in ministry in the Church. Amen

Introduction: Reflection Questions

Reflection Questions

1. Professor Susan Ross writes that “women are the backbone of the Church.” Do you know of women like this? Give examples.
2. Who are the women in your parish who have most influenced you?
3. In what ways have these women served and influenced the larger parish community?
4. Would their being ordained as deacons give them official recognition for service in the church? Why would that be important?
5. What are some governing roles in the parish and diocese that would be helpful to have the input of women? Give some specific examples.
6. How would having women deacons affect and influence the younger members of the parish?
7. In reading this Introduction, what are the key points in the struggles to consider the diaconate for women in the Church?

Sending Prayer (at the end of the session)

Presider Loving God
 Open our hearts to hear and respond to your call to ministry.

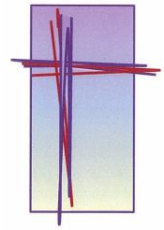
Reader 1 Open us eyes, Lord, Help us to see Your way
 Open our eyes, Lord, Help us to see

Reader 2 Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear Your voice
 Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear

Reader 3 Open our minds, Lord, help us to know your will
 Open our minds, Lord, Help us to serve

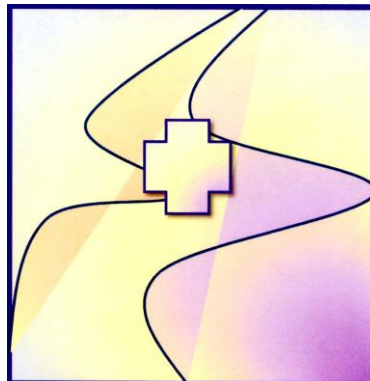
Reader 4 Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love like You
 Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love

All Send us your Spirit, Give us the gifts we need
 Send us your Spirit, Give us your fire!



Adapted from "Open My Eyes, Lord" by Jesse Manibusan

Music Selection: "Open My Eyes, Lord" by Jesse Manibusan, *Spirit and Song Album P*



Session Two

Chapter One Women Deacons: History Gary Macy

Welcome

Introductions

Gathering Prayer

Calling Forth the Women of the Gospels

"We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." Hebrews 12:1

Presider

A Reading from the Holy Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John...

Reader 1 **Matthew 1:16; 22**

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah... All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said...

Reader 2 **Matthew 15:22; 24; 27-28**

And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me! I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel... Please Lord, even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the master's table... Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith!"

Reader 3 **Matthew 26: 6-7; 12**

Now when Jesus was in Bethany... a woman came up to him with an alabaster jar of costly perfumed oil, and poured it on his head when he was reclining at table... In pouring this perfumed oil upon my body she prepared me for burial...

Reader 4 **John 4:27; 29**

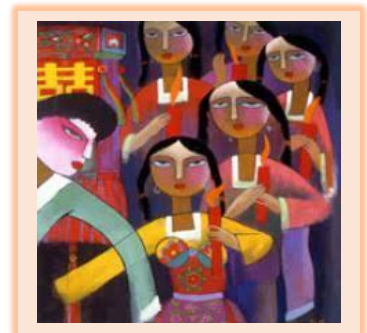
At that moment his disciples returned and were amazed that he was talking to a woman... The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have done..."

Reader 5 **Luke 8:42; 43-44; 46; 48**

As Jesus went, the crowds almost crushed him. A woman afflicted with hemorrhages for 12 years... came up behind him and touched the tassel of his cloak.... Someone has touched me; for I know power has gone out from me... Daughter, your faith has saved you... Go...

Reader 6 **John 19:25**

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his Mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene...



Reader 7 John 20: 15-16; 18

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came up to the tomb... “Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? Jesus said to her, “MARY!” She turned and said to him, “Rabbouni!” Mary went out and announced... “I have seen the Lord!”...

***Suggested Music Selection:** “Holy is Your Name” by David Haas *Spirit and Song* 3 (“The Magnificat”)*

Presider

Amen I say to you, whenever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be spoken in memory of her

All ...and of her...and of her!

Presider: The Gospel of the Lord...

All Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ

*The Lord
has done great things
for us;
we are filled with joy!*

Chapter One: Reflection Questions

Ice Breaker

Saint Augustine's phrase "ever ancient and ever new" applies to many aspects of Church life. Do you think that the study on the history of women deacons finds root in this phrase?

"Faithful in all Things."

Page 10

1. Who is Phoebe? (Romans 16:1-2)? Why is she important? Did you know about her?
2. The qualifications listed for male and female deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-11 include the women being "faithful in all things." How do you see women in your parish "faithful in all things"? How does their example of faithfulness strengthen and influence parish life?
3. In what ways do the passages from St Paul's Letter to the Romans and from Timothy's epistle inform you about women deacons in the early church?

Women Deacons in the Eastern Church

Pages 11-13

4. Olympias was ordained deacon in 4th century Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). How do the facts of history affect your understanding of women deacons in the Eastern Church? What insights have you gained?

Women Deacons in the Western Church

Pages 13-17

5. Early synods in the West complained about women being ordained as deacons. In what ways do the arguments against women deacons surprise you?
6. What key ideas do you find in this history of women deacons?

Ordination Rites for Women Deacons in the Eastern and Western Churches

Pages 18-23

7. The ordination ritual on page 18 has been judged as sacramental according to the criteria of the Council of Trent. Read the ritual aloud and imagine an early bishop pronouncing those words over a woman today. What do you hear in the words of this ritual?
8. Next, read the 8th century ordination prayer used by Bishop Egbert of York on page 20, and imagine a bishop pronouncing those words over a woman today. Do you think it would be unusual to say these prayers over a woman today? Why or why not?

9. Why are liturgical rituals important in the church? How do they affirm a public call to ministry?
10. What do you think about the fact that the office of women deacons disappeared in the West by the Thirteenth Century?

The Ministry of Women Deacons

Pages 23-27

11. The Acts of the Apostles tell us that the early apostles (not Jesus) chose the first deacons to meet the needs of the community (p. 24). Why is it important that the diaconal ministry was created by the Church to meet the needs of the Church?
12. Women and men deacons performed social ministry and this attracted members to the church. How does or could the Church's social ministry attract younger people to the church today?
13. Catholic social teaching is often (unfortunately) called the "Church's best kept secret", when it is actually central to the mission of Jesus. Why is it so integral to the Church?
14. In what ways do you believe that women deacons reading the Gospel and preaching would enhance the life of the parish?

Married Women Deacons

Pages 27-28

15. History records that some women deacons were married. Can you imagine a married woman deacon in medieval times? Can you imagine her ministering in the Church? Explain.
16. What saints come to mind when you think of medieval women ministers whether they were deacons or not?

Abbesses as Women Deacons

Pages 28-30

17. Medieval abbesses often presided over large, active monasteries that served the people of the area. Do you think the Church accepts that women can hold positions of authority? Why or why not?

The Disappearance of Women Deacons

Pages 30-36

18. What are arguments against women deacons? Can you connect the ancient taboos about menstruation with medieval resistance to women serving at the altar? In what ways?
19. How do arguments that women are “unclean” strike you?
20. Dr. Macy’s section has many footnotes (pp. 106-11). Can you find one that supports your beliefs about women in the diaconate?

Key Learnings in Chapter One for You and the Group

Take a moment to look over your notes on this chapter. What did you learn from the history of women in the diaconate?

What did you learn from the group discussion?

Evaluation of Your Group Experience

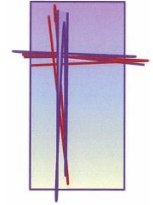
1. In what ways did the Reflection and Study Guide aid your reading of the Chapter One and your discussion?
2. What most surprised you in your discussion?
3. What ideas are you leaving with?

Group Dynamics

1. In general, the meeting was: Excellent Good Fair Poor
2. What worked well?
3. What we might improve?
4. Are there any questions or problems that need further attention?

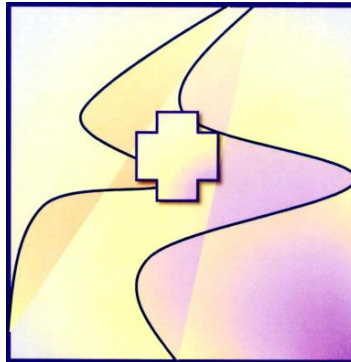
Sending Prayer (at the end of the session)

Presider	Loving God Open our hearts to hear and respond to your call to ministry.
Reader 1	Open us eyes, Lord, Help us to see Your way Open our eyes, Lord, Help us to see
Reader 2	Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear Your voice Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear
Reader 3	Open our minds, Lord, help us to know your will Open our minds, Lord, Help us to serve
Reader 4	Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love like You Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love
All	Send us your Spirit, Give us the gifts we need Send us your Spirit, Give us your fire!



Adapted from “Open My Eyes, Lord” by Jesse Manibusan

Suggested Music Selection: “Open My Eyes, Lord” by Jesse Manibusan, [Spirit and Song P](#)



Session Three

Chapter Two Women Deacons: Present Possibilities William T. Ditewig

Session Three

Welcome

Introductions

There are different forms of service but the same Lord

Gathering Prayer

Loving God,

As we continue to learn and explore about women deacons,
connect us with our gospel foremothers
that their zeal may continue to live in us,
to inspire us.

Gather the threads of faith, hope and love
that bind us together,
that we may continue to minister to all.
Amen



Pentecost by He Qi

Music selection: “Many the Gifts” by David Haas, *Living, Spirit Holy Fire*

Scripture 1 Corinthians. 12: 4-12

Now in regard to spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters,

I do not want you to be unaware.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;

there are different forms of service but the same Lord;

there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.

To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom;

to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit;

to another faith by the same Spirit;

to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit;

to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy;

to another discernment of spirits;
to another varieties of tongues;
to another interpretation of tongues.
But one and the same Spirit produces all of these,
distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

As a body is one though it has many parts,
and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,
so also Christ.

Intercessions

Presider O God, you have blessed us with valiant women in every age;
All Show us the way to encourage women today in their efforts to build the kingdom.

Presider Lord Jesus, you were nurtured and taught by Mary;
All Bless mothers and teachers that guide our children today.

Presider You had compassion on the sick
All Be with women in all the helping professions;
may their insight be recognized and listened to
and their ministry appreciated.

Presider You sent a woman to proclaim your resurrection to the other disciples;
All Let the women you send today be heard by the church.

Prayer

All Loving God,
We celebrate women and men in the Church
who have ministered side by side
to bring Christ and the Gospel to the world.

We pray that the gifts you shower on us through your Holy Spirit
may continue growth in the Church.

We also pray that women will be recognized for their ministry
and respond to the needs of our time.

May our lips give you praise,
our lives proclaim your goodness,
and our works give you honor.

May all we are and do be in memory of Jesus, your Son. Amen



Chapter Two: Reflection Questions

Ice Breaker:

In what ways has the renewal of the Church's tradition of ordaining permanent deacons affected or changed the life of your parish? Of your diocese? Give examples.

Reflection Questions

Diaconate as a "Proper and Permanent Order" Distinct from Priesthood **Pages 40-51**

1. To some people, the word "ordination" is a stumbling block to the restoration of women deacons. Do you think people understand that diaconal ordination does not mean the person is automatically eligible for priesthood? Explain?
2. Do the people of your parish understand the differences between the deacon and the priest? Do you think they would understand the role of the woman ordained to the diaconate as different from the priest? Give examples.
3. What did you learn about the efforts to study the possibilities of restoring the women to the diaconate over the years during and since Vatican II? Does this make you hopeful?
4. In what ways do the documents cited in the timeline on pages 43 to 45 help you to understand the reasons for the Church not ordaining women as priests? Do these documents affect the possibility for restoring women to the ordained diaconate? If so, how?
5. Does the study of these documents lead you to desire that the Church does further study? Do they help you to want to do further study? Why or why not?
6. At this time, do you think the church is having a serious enough examination of the question of ordaining women deacons? Why or why not?
7. Since this book was published, Pope Francis named a Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women. Do you feel that the Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women is a positive step and needed? Why or why not?

Vatican II and Its Vision of the Diaconate: Faith in Action

Pages 52-57

9. There were 101 propositions or suggestions from the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council about the diaconate (pages 53-55). What were their most important suggestions for the life of the Church?
10. Among Vatican II's documents, *Ad gentes* (On the Missionary Activity of the Church) speaks to the "sacramental grace of the diaconate." How does the theology of grace help the Church understand the need for ordained deacons?
11. *Lumen gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) provides that a key role for deacons, along with service, is evangelization. What are the ways women in your parish are engaged in the mission of evangelization? What do you see as the results of these efforts?
12. Would being ordained as deacons help women gain more authority in the Church? Explain.

Pages 58-62

13. Deacon William Ditewig cites the efforts of Cardinal Suenens to call the council to restore the permanent diaconate.

Can the descriptions of the diaconate for men also be applied to women? In what ways?
14. Are you aware that the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent vocation is relatively recent? Why or why not?
15. Can the description of the permanent diaconate for men also be applied to women? In what ways?
16. Deacon Ditewig lists six points to recall from the work of Vatican II regarding the diaconate (pp. 59-61). Which is most important? Does any eliminate the possibility of women deacons?
17. What is your experience of the permanent diaconate in your parish? In what ways do permanent deacons serve your parish most visibly?

18. Meet with a permanent deacon and ask about his ministry and how it contributes to the mission of the Church and parish.

Women as Deacons in the Contemporary Church

Pages 62-67

19. Deacons participate in the Church's three-fold ministry of *docendi, santificandi, and regendi* (teaching, sanctifying, and ruling), but not as priests. When the International Theological Commission concluded its second study in 2002, it did not connect the diaconate to the questions determined in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994), which ruled out women priests. Do you think the people of God still confuse the diaconate and the priesthood? Why or why not?
20. There are several statements on the possibility of ordaining women deacons cited on pages 64 and 65. The statements allow for the possibility for the Church to move forward with a special decision. In what ways does this give you hope that the Church could move forward?
21. Imagine... In your parish, how would women deacons influence Christ's mission among parishioners?
22. Not all women ministers would come forward to be deacons, but women already serve in key roles in your parish and diocese. Who are these women? Do you think they should be deacons? Why or why not?
23. What "signs of the times" necessitate women deacons?
24. What gifts do women bring to ministry?
25. In what ways do you see the Holy Spirit guiding the church in our day?
26. What graces would ordination bring to women ordained as deacons?

Key Learnings Chapter One for You and the Group

Take a moment to look over your notes on this chapter. What did you learn from the history personally?

What did you learn from the group discussion?

Evaluation of Your Group Experience

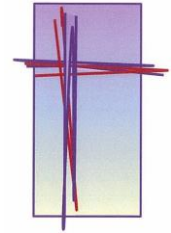
1. In what ways did the Reflection and Study Guide aid your reading of the Chapter Two and your discussion?
2. What most surprised you in your discussion?
3. What ideas are you leaving with?

Group Dynamics

1. In general, the meeting was: Excellent Good Fair Poor
2. What worked well?
3. What we might improve?
4. Are there any questions or problems that need further attention?

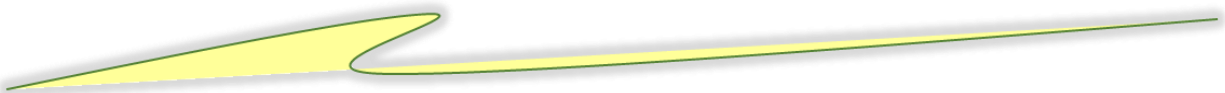
Sending Prayer (at the end of the session)

Presider	Loving God Open our hearts to hear and respond to your call to ministry.
Reader 1	Open our eyes, Lord, Help us to see Your way Open our eyes, Lord, Help us to see
Reader 2	Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear Your voice Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear
Reader 3	Open our minds, Lord, help us to know your will Open our minds, Lord, Help us to serve
Reader 4	Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love like You Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love
All	Send us your Spirit, Give us the gifts we need Send us your Spirit, Give us your fire!



Adapted from Open My Eyes, Lord by Jesse Manibusan

Suggested Music Selection: Open My Eyes, Lord Lyrics by Jesse Manibusan [Spirit and Song Album P](#)



Session Four
Chapter Three
Women Deacons: Future
Phyllis Zagano

Welcome

Introductions

...Receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones.

Romans 16:1

Gathering Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the Hearts of Your faithful
and enkindle in us the Fire of Your love.

Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be recreated
--And You will renew the face of the earth,

Let us pray.

God of the prophets and men and women
of every age, you send the word of truth.
Let us not be counted among those who lack faith,
but give us the vision to see Christ in our midst
and to welcome your saving word.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

—Adapted from the *Roman Missal*, Opening Prayer OT14



Scripture **Romans 16:1-16**

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is [also] a minister (*diakonos*) of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well.

Greet Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I am grateful but also all the churches of the Gentiles; greet also the church at their house.

Greet Andronicus and Junia, (Julia) my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me.

Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them.

Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the holy ones who are with them.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Commentary

Each of these persons mentioned by Paul in the letter to the Romans was a helper and friend to Paul in the preaching of the Gospel. They were significant in bringing their families and communities to Christ as well as traveling to other areas and even across the sea to proclaim the good news. They also supported Paul and his missionaries in the ministry that brought them far and wide through Greece, Turkey, Rome, Ephesus and more. Some were men, some were married couples and many were women that he entrusted the communities to their care through preaching and house groups.

Reflection

What do you know of any of these ministers so helpful to St. Paul? In what ways do hearing their names give you incentive to learn more about them? How many faithful ministers who are men, women, married couples, deacons, women and men religious do you know in your parish, diocese and family?

Suggested Music selection: "The Summons" by John L. Bell, *The Spirit and Song Album 5*

*Will you come
and follow me
if I but call your name?*

The Summons by John Bell

Chapter Three: Reflection Questions

Ice Breaker: Were you able to interview a permanent deacon about his ministry? What did you learn? Discuss.

Women Deacons

Pages 69-70

1. Some people think a woman cannot be ordained, period. When you read the statement “it wouldn’t take,” what does that say to you?
2. In our understanding of women today and women’s issues in society, what does the above comment say to younger generations? In what ways is this a “turn-off” to the church?

What Difference Would Ordination Make?

Pages 70-75

3. What are the needs of the church for the diaconal ministry of women?
4. What are the benefits of this ministry?
5. In 2002, a study of the International Theological Commission concluded that the decision on women deacons rested in “the ministry of discernment which the Lord established in his Church, to speak authoritatively on this question.” (pp. 72-73) What do you think that decision should be and why?

Objections to Ordaining Women

Pages 75-77

6. Pope Benedict XVI made the distinction between priests and bishops into law in 2009 (pp.75-76). In what ways do you think this helps the Church restore women to the diaconate?
7. What would be the difference between male and female clerics? Do you think there would be problems? If so, what might they be?

What does ordination mean?

Pages 77-79

8. What is the layperson’s understanding of priesthood? What is your understanding of priesthood?

9. Women now serve regularly as lectors and acolytes. How has the restoration of women and girls to these ministries helped the Church to see greater possibilities for women?

Diaconal Ministry

Pages 79-81

10. Women ordained as deacons could do ordinarily what laypersons can do only with special permission, such as baptize and witness marriages. What difference would the ministry of a woman make in your parish?

Diaconal Identity

Pages 81-85

11. What do you understand as “Diaconal Identity” as presented by Phyllis Zagano?

Why is the Ordination of Women Good and Necessary?

Pages 85-89

12. Apostolic women religious in the United States have traditionally performed “what in other terms is diaconal ministry.” Dr. Zagano asks (page 98) “Were these women religious the deacons American bishops intuitively needed?” What has been your experience of the history, work, and ministry of women religious?

A Note about History

Pages 89-91

13. Do you think history supports the inclusion of women in the ordained diaconate? In what ways?

Who would become a Deacon?

Pages 91-93

14. What is a “lay ecclesial minister (LEM)?” Who can you identify as one?

15. Who are those involved in service and charitable works in your parish?

16. Only an ordained cleric participating in a Mass can preach a homily. A woman deacon would be a cleric. How would women preachers enhance the Sunday Liturgy?

17. In what ways would women preachers would speak to younger generations? Why is this important?

What would the Church look like with Women Deacons?

Pages 93-96

18. What would the ordination of women to the diaconate say about the nature and ministry of the Church?

19. How would ministry be enhanced if women, as deacons, could preach, baptize and witness marriages?

20. What are the needs of the church today where a woman deacon would serve best?

21. Can you name women in the Gospels, saints in the church, and those in your own family, friends, and parishioners whom you see as providing diaconal ministry?

Women Religious Ordained to the Diaconate?

Pages 96-99

22. Some people think there is no need for women deacons because the Church has women religious. How is the vocation to religious life different from the vocation to the diaconate? Can these two vocations coexist in one person?

Secular Women ordained to the Diaconate?

Pages 99-103

23. What complications could arise for secular women ordained as deacons? Are these possibilities insurmountable?

Does the Church need Women Deacons?

Pages 103-104

24. What are the tasks and duties that a woman deacon could undertake that a layperson cannot, even in exceptional circumstances. Do these help you understand the need for women deacons.

Married Women Deacons

Pages 27-28

25. In today's society would married women deacons be an issue? For whom?

26. The wives of men deacons join in the formation the candidates for the diaconate. How could you see a married couple working together as deacons?

Key Learnings Chapter One for You and the Group

Take a moment to look over your notes on this chapter. What did you learn from the information personally in Dr. Zagano's chapter?

What did you learn from the group discussion?

Evaluation of Your Group Experience

1. In what ways did the Reflection and Study Guide aid your reading of Chapter Three and your discussion?
2. What most surprised you in your discussion?
3. What ideas are you leaving with?

Group Dynamics

1. In general, the sessions were: Excellent Good Fair Poor
2. What worked well?
3. What we might improve?
4. Are there any questions or problems that need further attention?

Going Forward

Throughout this reader's guide, we have been focusing on the history of women deacons in the Church. Our world and society today has pressing needs. The question remains, is this a conversation that we must continue? Why or why not?

A few questions to keep reflecting on:

1. What is the need for women ministering in the Church?
2. What do you believe the universal Church most needs from women today?
3. What is the unique contribution women deacons can make? What difference do you hope women deacons will be able to make in the Church?
4. In the age of the "NONES"* and many societal pressures, do you feel the conversation by the Church regarding women being admitted to the diaconate is long overdue?
5. Given your understanding of the Church's record on the role of women and putting all the historical and ministerial information aside, what are your expectations of changes that are needed?
6. How do you think the discussion on the admittance of women to the permanent diaconate is going to end?

*NONES is the nick-name given to Americans who do not identify with any religion. One fifth of the US public, and a third of adults under 30, are religiously unaffiliated today, the highest percentages ever in Pew Research polling.

Pew Forum, October 9, 2012

Sending Prayer (at the end of the session)

Presider Loving God
 Open our hearts to hear and respond to your call to ministry.

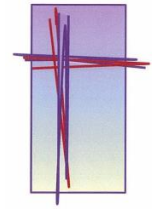
Reader 1 Open us eyes, Lord, Help us to see Your way
 Open our eyes, Lord, Help us to see

Reader 2 Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear Your voice
 Open our ears, Lord, Help us to hear

Reader 3 Open our minds, Lord, help us to know your will
 Open our minds, Lord, Help us to serve

Reader 4 Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love like You
 Open our hearts, Lord, Help us to love

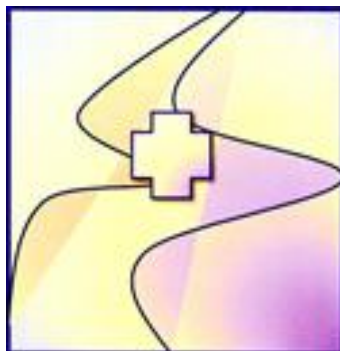
All Send us your Spirit, Give us the gifts we need
 Send us your Spirit, Give us your fire!



Adapted from "Open My Eyes, Lord" by Jesse Manibusan

Suggested Music Selection: "Open My Eyes, Lord" by Jesse Manibusan *Spirit and Song Album P*

Closing Hymn: "Send Us Your Spirit" by David Haas, in *Living, Spirit Holy Fire*



Glossary

Abbess

An abbess is a female superior of an abbey or monastery of nuns. Hers is generally an elected position.

Abbot

An abbot is a male superior of an abbey or monastery of monks. It is generally an elected position.

(Arch)bishop

The (arch)bishop oversees the (arch) diocese and is the chief administrator of the local church. The (arch)bishop, known as the local ordinary, ministers the sacraments of ordination and confirmation. Auxiliary bishops share in the (arch)bishop's ministry.

Canon Law

The Catholic Church has two Codes of Canon Law, one for the Roman or Latin Church, the other for the 23 or so Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with Rome.

Cardinal

A Cardinal is an advisor to the pope, usually but not always a bishop, who is one of the 120 papal electors. Cardinals older than 80 cannot participate in the election of a pope.

Cleric

A cleric typically an ordained member of the Church. The ordinary means of entering the clerical state is by ordination to the diaconate.

Deacon

Deacons are sacramentally ordained to minister through the Word, the liturgy, and charity. While there is only one order of deacon, some men are ordained as deacons as a step on the way to priesthood. Other deacons accept the diaconate as a permanent vocation.

Lay Ecclesial Minister

Lay ecclesial ministry is the term adopted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to identify non-ordained professional pastoral ministers who are coworkers with the bishop, priests and deacons and other diocesan and parish staff members.

Nun

Nuns are women who live solemn vows, typically of poverty, chastity and obedience in a cloistered (enclosed) abbey or monastery. Their contemplative life is one of prayer and they support themselves with simple silent work, such as baking altar breads, light farming, and creating greeting cards.

Priest

Priests are ordained to sacerdotal ministry. In parish work, priests are pastors or parochial vicars (assistant pastors) and are representatives of the diocesan bishop.

Sister

Sisters are women religious who live simple vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, typically in convents of religious institutes dedicated to apostolic works. Both nuns and sisters use the term "sister" as a form of address.

It's not about women priests

By PHYLLIS ZAGANO



Pope Francis arrives for an audience with members of the International Union of Superiors General at the Vatican in May 2016. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano

The question of women deacons has nothing to do with women priests.

What? And, why?

Well, to begin with, historical documents — canons, liturgical texts and other writings — speak freely and regularly about women deacons, not priests, “ordained” or “blessed.” Facts are facts.

Fact No. 1: The terms “ordained” and “blessed” were used interchangeably in both the East and the West. For example, Canon 21 of the Council of Auxerre (561-605) places restrictions on a priest “once he has received the benediction.” We see the same for women deacons: Some documents call them “ordained,” some call them “blessed.” A few revisionist historians have attacked the evidence. A New York seminary priest-professor insists women were “only” blessed. His authoritative text is a book published in 2000 by a former prefect of the Congrega-

tion for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Gerhard Müller. More about that book later.

Fact No. 2: Women deacons performed some tasks akin to those performed by men deacons, but women deacons also performed tasks men deacons did not. Women deacons anointed women during baptism; women deacons anointed ill women and brought them the Eucharist; women deacons took charge of women in the assembly; women deacons catechized women and children and they looked after their needs. And we know of a woman deacon who managed a local church’s finances. Not every woman deacon did all these things in every time and place, but across space and time they regularly performed diaconal duties.

Fact No. 3: Women deacons were involved in liturgical tasks. We know women were at the altar because Pope Gelasius I complained about it in the fifth cen-

ture, and some later popes and bishops repeated his argument. But there is no evidence they were priests. Later complaints document women handling sacred vessels and priestly vestments, much like sacristans. Others focused on women deacons offering the chalice to the faithful. The problem was women — still “unclean” in many cultures — being near the sacred.

Fact No. 4: The so-called “transitional diaconate” ended the practice of ordaining women as deacons. As the priesthood absorbed the tasks and duties of the diaconate, only men destined for priesthood could be ordained as deacons. Because women were not so destined, we have little evidence of women ordained as deacons beyond the 12th century or so in the West.

Fact No. 5: One result of the Second Vatican Council is the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent vocation, now lived by more than 45,000 men worldwide and some 18,000 in the United States. While at least two council fathers attempted to include women in the restored diaconate, only after the council closed did Pope Paul VI manage to get a definitive answer on the history of the work of women deacons and the facts of their ordinations. The answer, rendered by a member of the International Theological Commission, Cipriano Vagaggini, was yes. That is, women were ordained and functioned as deacons.

Fact No. 6: Unlike the various statements about women priests, the church has not overruled restoring the tradition of ordaining women as deacons. From time to time and place to place one or another local bishop or synod outlawed the practice, but even these were merely ecclesiastical laws, not theologi-

cal determinations. In 2002, the most recent International Theological Commission document argued: women deacons were not the same as men deacons; the church’s tradition clearly distinguishes priesthood and diaconate; this is something the magisterium must decide.

Which is where we are now. Two successive pontificates — those of John Paul II and Benedict XVI — have left the matter dormant, following the 2002 International Theological Commission document, which Müller had a hand in writing. The document includes sentences paraphrased or lifted whole from Müller’s book *Priesthood and Diaconate: The Recipient of the Sacrament of Holy Orders from the Perspective of Creation Theology and Christology*, which conflates his argument against women deacons with his argument against women priests.

So, what’s next? In May 2016, Pope Francis told the assembled membership of the International Union of Superiors General he would form a commission to study women deacons. In August that year, he named 12 scholars to the Pontifical Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women. For the first time in the church’s long history, an official commission was equally male and female. It provided a report for the Holy Father several months ago.

In speaking to media in late June, the current prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Luis Ladaria, said it was not the place of the commission to make a recommendation to the Holy Father.

That’s up to you.

Phyllis Zagano is an internationally acclaimed Catholic scholar, author and lecturer on contemporary spirituality and women’s issues in the church. She is a member of the Papal Commission for the Study of the Diaconate of Women. Her columns can be found at NCRonline.org/columns/just-catholic.



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