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Worldwide network challenges Pope on excommunications and sexism in the church

Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) expresses profound dismay at the recent decree by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, which automatically excommunicates anyone involved in the ordination of women priests. With this decree, the Vatican attempts to reinforce its ban on the discussion of women's ordination among faithful Catholics who are gravely concerned for the future of pastoral ministry.

In its obstinate refusal to test women's priestly vocations, the Vatican fails in its duty to ensure the faithful receive the sacramental pastoral care to which they are entitled. The conviction of the Church has always been that genuine vocations come from God. Though no one has the right to be ordained, the Vatican persists in its flagrant discrimination against women by refusing even to consider their call to priesthood. The fact that many responsible women, together with their communities, discern vocations to ordained ministry is a sign from the Holy Spirit. Vatican actions which block such a sign show nothing but contempt for the *sensus fidelium* and demonstrate that the hierarchy is tragically out of touch with the people it is called to serve.

In baptism, women and men share equally in the priesthood of Christ. Baptism implies a fundamental openness to all sacraments, including Holy Orders. The history of the Church documents the ordination of women. Jennifer Stark, coordinator of WOW, commented, 'This is a global issue. In many countries around the world, the exclusion of women from ordained ministry, and thus from the decision-making structures of a worldwide church, has profound effects for their position and well being, and that of their children. It signals that they are lesser beings in the eyes of God.'

WOW calls on all to act against the unjust laws that exclude women from the sacrament of Holy Orders. We ask Pope Benedict XVI to follow Christ's gospel imperative by liberating the church from the sin of sexism. We urge bishops throughout the world to recognize and act on their episcopal responsibility to their people. We further urge them to use their voice to challenge the legitimacy of this decree and the ban on discussion of women's ordination.

Women's Ordination Worldwide was established during the First European Women's Synod in Gmunden, Austria in 1996. It is a network of national and international organisations working for the inclusion of women in all ordained ministries. WOW has hosted two international conferences (Dublin 2001 and Ottawa 2005) and plans to hold a third conference in California in 2010.
