

April 6, 2018

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
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Dear Bishops of Canada,

We are a group of women in Hamilton diocese who have been meeting for more than five years. We pray together, share experiences and support each other on our spiritual journeys.

In 2017 we watched the CBC news special about women priests in Canada - women who feel called by God to minister in the Catholic church. Their conviction inspires us. They have much to offer. We were also shocked to hear of their excommunication. Why is the Catholic Church closing its doors to them? Why are their gifts not welcome?

We want to support women who answer the call to minister to the spiritual needs of the Catholic community. We believe that they should not be cast out, but welcomed and affirmed for responding to the Holy Spirit's prompting. When we are baptized we are called to be prophets, priests and royalty. We commend them for heeding this call.

We believe that women in ordained priesthood can provide much-needed guidance and leadership for us and our families. When we went to a mass presided over by a woman priest, we heard inclusive language and a wide range of images of God. This opens up a greater sense of connection with God than what we hear in our parish masses. Her presence at the altar also inspires our children, both daughters and sons, to a vision of inclusion and equality - principles that Jesus exemplified in his words and actions.

We also support the use of inclusive language and women's inclusion in priestly roles for the good of the broader Catholic community. We have friends, co-workers, students and neighbours who no longer participate in the life of the Catholic church. They have voted with their feet. They feel that the Catholic church is out of touch with contemporary life. Michael Higgins talks about the "silent departure of multitudes from the institution, a departure defined not by anger, animosity, or resentment but by a sadness grounded in a sense of their own irrelevancy" (Commonweal, Letter from Canada, *Why is Canadian Catholicism So Muted?* August 16, 2017, www.commonwealmagazine.org/letter-canada). Without the voices of women at all levels of discussion, it will be difficult for the Church to maintain a vibrant relevance for people, especially the younger generation.

The fact that language affects thoughts and behaviours has been well documented and researched. Many institutions in our society have made changes in their language to show inclusion of women. Yet in our mass we continue to refer to God nearly exclusively as a male figure, and in a way perpetuate exclusivity. We know God is an incomprehensible Mystery, yet in the male language we restrict the mystery of God and verge on idolatry. Naming God in various ways - the Creator, the Omega, Mother, Father, Cosmos etc. portrays a much more wholesome, inclusive image. Using a variety of images in our language of worship would help us develop a richer and more connected spirituality.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, in his book *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power* (2014) writes about discrimination against women all over the world. He states that the violence that results is "...based on the presumption that men and boys are superior to women and girls, and it is supported by some male religious leaders who distort the Holy Bible, the Koran, and other sacred texts to perpetuate their claim that females are, in some basic ways, inferior to them, unqualified to serve God on equal terms."

We have chosen to remain in the Church. We have hope that things will change. Using inclusive images of God in the mass would not be difficult. It has been done very well in the *New Companion to the Breviary, the Liturgy of the Hours with Inclusive Language*.

Many people, both in our parish and around the world, agree that the Catholic Church should stop restricting women from being priests and believe that it will happen eventually. We would like to see it happen soon. To quote Fr. Orabator from Nigeria, "My hope is that we don't drag this out for another decade." (*National Catholic Reporter*, Dec. 19, 2016) Although the Catholic Church has made attempts to silence dialogue on this issue, we can no longer be quiet.

To that end we decided to send this letter. We would like to see inclusive language used in the mass, and we would also like to see women priests in our churches. We ask you, will you help Catholics in your dioceses expand their use of God-language (and their spirituality) and will you speak out for women's ordination in the Catholic Church?

Respectfully,

The Blue House Group
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