

OPINION

Catholicism's Need for Women | Opinion

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Women were the first evangelists for the Catholic Church. Consider that Mary of Magdala arrived at Christ's tomb, and seeing that he was gone told the disciples — all of whom were skeptical that he had risen. While the 12 apostles are the all-star cast for the life of Jesus, many women have assisted him in spreading “the good news” and founding one of the most popular religions in history.

Women have been stalwarts of the mission of the Catholic Church, serving not only her, but building and running other organizations committed to education, health care, social services, and charity, among others. In fact, the Catholic Church afforded women leadership positions well before secular organizations. Women religious were named school principals, presidents of colleges, heads of a hospitals or nonprofits, much before secular organizations allowed them to take such titles.

For the sake of the future of the Church, it is time that she allow women to take more leadership roles. A good and expedient start is to prepare and appoint women as deaconesses.

In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 6, the Church leaders established the ministry of deacon to assist in the efforts to help the widows, the poor, and needy in the community, and eventually to assist in the ministry of the Word. Initially seven men were appointed; later women were included. In Romans 16:1-2, Paul writes: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to

receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.”

The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, called on the laity to discern the gifts given to them in baptism and to use them in service of the church's mission. In 1972, Paul VI issued the document “*Ministeria Quaedam*,” which allowed laypeople to serve as lectors, assist the priest within the sanctuary during Mass, and distribute communion. For the most part, deacons serve in parishes, oftentimes as a kind of part-time associate pastor, a “mini-priest,” a cleric but with limited faculties on several sacraments.

It is hard to argue that the duties described above cannot be accomplished by women. The rationale is much more than simply “adding extra hands” to the work of the Church, but admitting that to disenfranchise half of the faithful as servants of the Lord and the people of the Church is not only bad form but not in keeping with encouraging the faithful to be servant leaders.

In his recent apostolic [exhortation “Christ is Alive,” Pope Francis](#) states that it is “just” to allow women to take leadership positions and be involved in decision making. It would be refreshing for the Pontiff to act, instead of proselytizing on contentious issues as he has preached, and appoint women deacons. Such a movement is not to provide for reparations for the male domination of past but to continue to allow women to exercise the many roles they played in the scriptures.

The fact that the Pope’s exhortation from the October worldwide synod of bishops makes overtures to women taking on more leadership roles in the Church, alongside what to do about “priests in difficulty” from abusing children is uncanny. Appointing women deacons could be the most significant act by the Church since Vatican II. And such an act could be the first authentic and impactful step to ensuring a healthy future of the Church — a Church that is struggling to be relevant to young adults who refuse to accept the patriarchy and authoritarianism of past centuries.

While the apostles were men, this must be contrasted by the many roles women played in the church, albeit not at the extent of men but certainly in its nature. Paul preached in Galatians 3:27-28: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

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