

PROMOTION OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP ROLES FOR WOMEN

The LCWR Executive Committee provides the leadership and direction for the work of the Conference. Members are:

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1. The call for greater involvement of women in the church and in society is based solidly in the history of the U.S. church and in conciliar and post conciliar church teaching. **Study of the history of the roles of women in the U.S. church and of the theological foundations for the equality of women should be included at every level of Catholic education: in elementary and high school; in seminaries, colleges, and universities; in religious and ministry formation programs; and in religious education.**
2. We urge the U.S. bishops, church institutions and agencies, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and other national organizations to continue to recruit and appoint women to significant leadership positions at national, diocesan, and parish levels. Women should be considered for the positions of general secretary, associate general secretaries and secretaries of departments within the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference; the chief executive officers of national Catholic health care, social service, and educational organizations; the presidents of Catholic colleges and universities; the chief executive officers of sponsored health care systems, health care facilities, and social service agencies; the chancellors of dioceses and heads of diocesan offices. Church employers must aggressively seek qualified women candidates for positions that have traditionally been reserved for clergy or laymen, but that women are competent to hold.

Women ordained to the permanent diaconate, moreover, would be able to exercise ministries and to hold offices from which they are now excluded, but which are in keeping with the services women currently provide in the church. They would be given the added assistance of sacramental grace as a result of ordination, in the same manner that men already involved in church service have received this sacramental aid through their own ordination as permanent deacons.

The Canonical Implications of Ordaining Women to the Permanent Diaconate, Section V, 7, Canon Law Society of America, 1995

Lay members of the Christian faithful can cooperate in the exercise of (the power of governance) in accord with the norm of law.

Canon 129.2

An ecclesiastical office is any function constituted in a stable manner by divine or ecclesiastical law to be exercised for a spiritual purpose.

Canon 145.1

3. Women are limited by common perceptions of what they may do, what they can do, or what is appropriate for them to do. Those stereotypes can be corrected by providing information about the accomplishments of women in traditional and non-traditional roles and by enabling the church community to experience accomplished women. **We urge the staffs of national and diocesan newspapers, church-related television programs, and parish bulletins to assess their coverage about the work of women, particularly those in leadership roles, and to report on women in the church. We ask Catholic organizations that sponsor national conventions or regional or diocesan assemblies to see that their programs feature women in prominent roles.**
4. Ordination to the permanent diaconate would open the way for women to exercise ministries and to hold ecclesiastical offices from which they are now excluded. Moreover, it would provide women with the added grace of the sacrament and the standing in the church to perform those functions. **We encourage the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to invite the U.S. church to engage in serious dialogue about the ordination of women to the permanent diaconate and urge the laity, the national conferences of religious, and scholarly organizations to participate in that dialogue. If a national reflection on the issue indicates that ordaining women would have positive pastoral results, we encourage the U.S. bishops to petition the Apostolic See for the canonical derogations that would make it possible to ordain women to the permanent diaconate in the United States.**

For in truth it must be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,
Par. 29, 1963

The church desires for her part to contribute to upholding the dignity, role and rights of women not only by the specific work of the Holy See's official delegation to the Conference in Beijing, but also by speaking directly to the heart and mind of every woman.

Letter to Women, 1, John Paul II, 1995

My wishes are for the success of this conference in its aim to guarantee all the women of the world "equality, development and peace," through full respect for their equal dignity and for their inalienable human rights, so they can make their full contribution to the good of society.

Appeal to the Church on Women's Behalf, John Paul II, 1995

The Christian faithful can legitimately vindicate and defend the rights which they enjoy in the church before a competent ecclesiastical court in accord with the norm of law.

Canon 221.1

It is very desirable that whenever someone feels injured by a decree, there not be a contention between this person and the author of the decree but that care be taken by common counsel to find an equitable solution between them, perhaps through the use of wise persons in mediation and study so that the controversy may be avoided or solved by some suitable means.

The Conference of Bishops can determine that in every diocese some office or counsel be permanently established whose function is to find and suggest equitable solutions in accord with norms determined by the same conference; but if the conference has not done this, a bishop can establish a counsel or office of this kind.

Canon 1733.1-2 (See also Canons 132-139)

PROTECTION OF RIGHTS

5. One of the complaints voiced frequently by women engaged in church ministry is that they have been terminated unfairly, or that other work-related rights have been violated. Often these women feel they have no recourse in the church and this perception contributes to the belief that the church does not value their dignity.

It is imperative that dioceses publicize their offices of conciliation and arbitration, grievance procedures or processes for negotiating solutions to conflict and that women understand how to gain access to those resources. Moreover, justice demands that all church employers, including all dioceses, have accessible, well publicized procedures for settling grievances.

6. Persons who seek the resolution of grievances through due process procedures do not always need a canon lawyer, but they often need the assistance of an advocate. **Religious institutes would serve the cause of justice by training personnel to serve as advocates.**
7. Going through formal due process procedures can be time consuming and is often adversarial. **We encourage religious institutes to train members in negotiating skills and conflict resolution and in the use of those skills as a primary means to protect rights and resolve conflicts.**
8. When employers have parallel sets of personnel policies for employees, according to their state in life, they risk discriminating against some persons. This is true in the case of dioceses that have separate policies for clergy, for religious, and for laity; it is equally true in the case of institutions sponsored by religious which have separate policies for religious and for lay employees. **We challenge all church employers to develop comprehensive personnel systems that are based on competency, not ordination or state of life, and that apply equally to clergy and laity, men and women.**

Looking to the future, we especially want to encourage women to pursue studies in scripture, theology and canon law not only that the church may benefit from their skills in these areas, but that they themselves may benefit from their own scholarly efforts.

Strengthening the Bonds of Peace, U.S. Bishops, 1994

Investment in the care and education of girls as an equal right is a fundamental key to the advancement of women...

I appeal to Catholic universities and centers of higher education to insure that in the preparation of future leaders in society they acquire a special sensitivity to the concerns of young women.

Appeal to the Church on Women's Behalf, John Paul II, 1995

Who can imagine the great advantages to pastoral care and the new beauty that the church's face will assume when the feminine genius is fully involved in the various areas of her life?

On Fully Fostering Women's Roles in the Church, 2,
John Paul II, 1995

There is reason to hope that a fuller acknowledgement of the mission of women will provide feminine consecrated life with the heightened awareness of its specific role and increased dedication to the cause of the Kingdom of God. This will be expressed in many different works, such as involvement in evangelization, educational activities, participation in the formation of future priests and consecrated persons, animating Christian communities, giving spiritual support, and promoting the fundamental values of life and peace.

Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life, 58, John Paul II, 1996

EDUCATION AND FORMATION

9. If women are to participate fully in church leadership roles, they must have the requisite education. However, the lack of financial resources and/or the policies of admission to formation programs often make that education inaccessible to women. **In allocating the resources of the local church, dioceses are urged to invest in lay ministers, particularly lay women ministers, by establishing formation programs for lay ministers, by setting aside funds for tuition subsidies, and by making other resources such as the diocesan seminary and its library available to lay ministers.**

10. Many leadership roles require advanced degrees in fields such as theology, scripture, canon law, ethics, and language. If women hope to fill those roles in the future, they must acquire the appropriate education now. **We urge religious institutes to encourage members, especially those who are changing ministry, to consider undertaking serious study in preparation for church leadership. Further, we encourage institutes to commit the resources to such study for the future of the church.**

In many cases, this financial commitment may not be possible for a single religious institute. **However, we encourage religious institutes and dioceses to establish joint funds to support the advanced education of women for church leadership.**

The Christian faithful since they are called by baptism to lead a life in conformity with the teaching of the Gospel, have the right to a Christian education by which they will be properly instructed so as to develop the maturity of a human person and at the same time come to know and live the mystery of salvation.

Canon 217

Lay persons also possess the right to acquire that deeper knowledge of the sacred sciences which are taught in ecclesiastical universities or faculties or in institutes of religious sciences by attending classes and obtaining academic degrees.

Likewise, the prescriptions as to the required suitability having been observed, lay persons are capable of receiving from legitimate ecclesiastical authority a mandate to teach the sacred sciences.

Canon 229.2-3

Lay persons who devote themselves permanently or temporarily to some special service of the church are obliged to acquire the appropriate formation which is required to fulfill their function properly and to carry it out conscientiously, zealously, and diligently.

Canon 231.1

11. In parish communities, women ordinarily outnumber men in paid professional roles, in lay leadership roles, as volunteers, and as regular church goers. If clergy complete their seminary education without having experienced competent women teachers, formators, or spiritual directors, they enter the world of the parish ill-equipped to work collaboratively with the women leaders who play significant roles in that community. **We challenge dioceses to engage women in seminary education because of the contribution they can make to the formation of clergy as well as for the ultimate positive effects on parish life.**
12. Many women are trained and experienced spiritual directors. When only men are engaged in spiritual direction, the church is deprived of women's gifts and thus, impoverished. **We urge dioceses, religious institutes, and parishes to make use of the gifts of women in spiritual direction.**

As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic state.

Letter to Women, 4, John Paul II, 1995

(Lay persons) have a right to a decent remuneration suited to their condition; by such remuneration they should be able to provide decently for their own needs and for those of their family with due regard for the prescriptions of civil law; they likewise have a right that their pension, social security and health benefits be duly provided.

Canon 231.2

JUST COMPENSATION

13. A basic expression of the relationship between the church and those who are engaged in church ministry is compensation. The majority of lay church workers are women and the level of their compensation testifies to the value the church places on both their work and their dignity.

Justice demands and the law of the church requires that all church employers – dioceses, parishes, institutions, religious institutes and agencies – provide for their employees compensation and benefits deemed just by external measures (cost of living, wage and salary survey, etc.).

Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the church, let the layman (sic) take on his (sic) own distinctive role.

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Par. 43, 1963

Without discrimination, women should be participants in the life of the church and also in consultation and the process of coming to decisions.

Apostolic Exhortation on the Laity, 51, John Paul II, 1988

An important issue for women is how to have a voice in the governance in the church to which they belong and which they serve with love and generosity. This can be achieved in at least two ways that are consistent with church teaching: through consultation and through cooperation in the exercise of authority.

Strengthening the Bonds of Peace, U.S. Bishops, 1994

To a large extent it is a question of making full use of the ample room for lay and feminine presence recognized by the church's law. I am thinking, for example, of theological teaching; the forms of liturgical ministry permitted, including service at the altar; pastoral and administrative counsels; diocesan synods and particular counsels; various ecclesial institutions; curias and ecclesiastical tribunals ...

On Fully Fostering Women's Roles in the Church, 2, John Paul II, 1995

It is therefore urgently necessary to take certain concrete steps, beginning with providing room for women to participate in different fields and at all levels, including decision-making processes, above all in matters which concern women themselves.

Apostolic Exhortation on Consecrated Life, 58, John Paul II, 1996

Qualified lay persons are capable of assuming from their sacred pastors those ecclesiastical offices and functions which they are able to exercise in accord with the prescriptions of law.

Canon 228.1

EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION

14. The church provides a variety of opportunities for the participation of lay persons in consultative bodies. These bodies include the U.S. Bishops' National Advisory Council; diocesan synods; diocesan pastoral councils; the boards of universities, hospitals, and Catholic Charities agencies; parish councils and parish finance committees; and school boards, to name a few. Some of these groups, like parish finance committees, are called for by the law of the church; others have been created by bishops, pastors, religious leaders, and church administrators who recognize the importance of considering the experience of the laity in church decision making. **Justice requires that bishops, pastors, religious leaders and administrators take appropriate steps to see that both women and men are equitably represented in all church consultative bodies.**
15. In the past several years, Pope John Paul II has repeatedly affirmed the dignity of women and called for their greater participation in society and in the life of the church. **In response to this call from the Pope, we ask U.S. bishops to include in their quinquennial report, prepared for their *ad limina* visit, in the section on the laity, a description of the progress each diocese has made in the previous five years to promote the participation of women in the public ministry of the local church.**