

Ellie Hildago—Mar. 21, 2024 Forum

"Restoring Catholic Women to the Permanent Diaconate—Is the Time Now?"

I want to express my thanks to Fr. Tom Lumpkin for his introduction; to Bishop Tom Gumbleton for inviting me to Detroit. I'm just delighted to be here; and I want to thank Bridget Deegan-Krause, one of the leaders here in Detroit, for sparking the idea that I could come to Detroit. And I'm just delighted to be here; and I want to thank all of you Elephants in the Living Room for your perseverance. And I was very moved by the song that we sang that actually brought tears to my eyes – an incredible song. And I feel like you embody that song so well. So, thank you for having me here today.

We're going to be talking today about Restoring Catholic Women to the Diaconate; and now is the time; and this is the question that each of us gets to hold, because we're in the moment of synodality in our Church, where we're considering many things and many questions. And this is one of those questions we all are asked to hold. What about the diaconate in it; and now is the time to restore women to that order?

So, I want to share with you a little bit about myself, that part of the fire in my belly is very much the Holy Spirit. And growing up in a Cuban American family, I had a grandfather who would often talk about in the vein of reveals the Holy Ghost and the reign of God with so much passion.

The reign of God is where every child has a home, and enough food, and parents have a decent job with a decent wage; and how is a beautiful environment; and how we take care our world. And the next part of the picture was: help, we are the hands and feet of Christ to bring about change in the world. And he just painted this picture.

But then the next part of this picture was: God can't do it by himself. The other image that has moved me is the theme the glory of God in the human person fully alive. I've always felt like that's the call of our Church that each one of us is gifted. Each one of us comes into this world with gifts and charism and talents.

So, I am here as a bridge builder. I have built many bridges in my life, bridges between North America and Latin America, and the Caribbean, bridges between the east coast, I now reside in Florida, and the west coast, I lived in Los Angeles for twenty years, bridges between laity and clergy, between men and women, between Catholics and all the other religions of the world.

And so, I just want to invite you to go on this discernment journey with me that we're about to go on together.

What is the Holy Spirit up to? What is the Holy Spirit up to in our times? And imagine, if we could, actually discern that. So, what I am going to do is, I have for you a number of slides that I am going to show you all, in part because women's roles often go invisible; and so, I want to make women visible in terms of what women are doing in the Church, and some women that I want to spotlight. And then, am going to ask you to, just you know, let's spark our imagination about what is the Holy Spirit up to in our times; and what and how is the Church being invited to continue to grow? Especially, we just entered a new millennium, the third millennium; what is the Holy Spirit inviting us to do as a Church?

And then also, this particular question, that I'm investing so much of my life, is: what the Holy Spirit is doing? Might it be that part of it is to restore Catholic women to the diaconate? And what difference that would make? What difference that would make for our parishes, for our campuses, for our families? So, I want to invite you to consider that question.

And so, after I finish my presentation, I do want to make sure that we include a synodal moment. That's very much we're learning the practice of synodality, the practice of listening. So, after my presentation, I will invite each of you to pair up with a neighbor or two or three of you to kind of reflect on what was at least one thing that really resonated that speaking to you. How is the Holy Spirit trying to touch your heart from some of what is present today? And to be able to, you know, hear one another? What's really resonating with you?

And then, we'll have a short break and then I'll do a question and answer. So, if you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer those.

Phoebe and Paul

So, we're going to begin by centering ourselves in the witness of Phoebe and Paul, and I'm so glad that she was raised up in that song; and that we actually listened already to these words that are just remarkable words by St. Paul, lifting up a woman in ministry, and entrusting her with his letter to the Romans, one of his most important letters; and he is not able to go to Rome. She's a leader of the house church in Cenchreae; and she gets his letter to her; and she makes the journey, over 700 miles from Greece, to Rome, Italy, to deliver this letter to a fledgling Roman community, Christian community. And one could imagine that she was likely the one to read it.

She would have known St. Paul's handwriting and likely will want to help interpret the letter if they had any questions. She knew St. Paul. She was Greek like him; they're working in ministry together. So, when he says to the Romans, "Receive her in the Lord," I think that is such a profound statement. And it is still true today, that women were asking for women to be received in the Lord and our faith communities.

And the other important note is that in the in the original text, he refers to her as *diakonos*, which is known as a leader. She is a ministry leader. And that's where we get our word deacon from.

Laments

So, before we continue on, I do also think that this is a moment in time in our Church where there's a lot of laments, a lot of laments especially for many of you. I was a very young girl when Vatican II happened. And I remember my parents being so excited that now they could hear Mass in either Spanish or English.

And there was just a lot of excitement and hope about the promise of Vatican II and it hasn't, six years later, maybe evolved the way everyone had hoped it would. There's been some hard things along the way. And I'll just mentioned a few of them: that clergy sex abuse crisis that we're still very much healing from; many women's ministries were opened up in the 80s; in the 90s, women were preaching, pastoral associates, parish life directors, lots of different things being tried. And yet, in many places, women's ministry then got constrained. So, it's an expansion, and then of constraint for many women today. They hear the call; God is very much calling them to all kinds of ministry.

And yet, there's no real direct, clear path to answer the call. So, a lot of women are doing all kinds of different workarounds to try to answer their call as best they can and make whatever contribution they can make; but it's hard. Those workarounds, sometimes workouts, and things don't work out. And it can take a lot of emotional energy. There's the expansion and contraction of women's ministry that can be very discouraging for the women themselves, but also for our communities. We did have a woman preach and then, suddenly, we didn't. What is that about? There's confusion, as the bishops themselves sometimes undo each other's work. And we realize that even among the bishops, there isn't a real consensus about what do we really believe in, think about, women in ministry.

So, I just want to hold this space, this few moments here, for the lament to acknowledge it, and to recognize all of you who have persevered through all of this, and are still holding on to hope, maybe, by your bare knuckles; but here you are. And so, one of the songs that I love is Psalm 42.

This is one of those songs, when I'm feeling my own limits, that I turned to; and I just want us to take a moment.

I'll read it out loud. And then we'll just pause for like 30 seconds of silence just to connect with your own lament, *i.e.*, what is one of the limits that you carry? And I think I'm so glad that I'm here this week because we're just about to head into Holy Week. And Holy Week is a very important week in which we do bring our laments to God. And so let me just read this first; and then, I'll say something else. "As the deer longs for streams of water, my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God? My tears have been to my bread day and night, as they asked me every day, "Where is your God?"

Synod on Communion, Participation and Mission

One of the things I love about being Catholic is that our laments do not have the last word. We are part of the resurrection people; we are part of the paschal mystery. Even in our deepest laments, the Holy Spirit is there trying to sort some new things, trying to help us out of the momentum into the promise of new life. And so, on May of 2021, when Pope Francis announced the global synod on communion, participation and mission, I was so overjoyed. And me and my co-director, Casey Stanton, and amazing other women around the country, we had just launched Discerning Deacons in April 29, St. Catherine of Siena feast day; and here we were a month later, finding out that Pope Francis was planning a global synod, and it was just like, WOW!, the Holy Spirit is truly doing a new thing. Because this is our opportunity to be listened to **hashtag** listening church, the pope has this long vision, which will take a generation; and I say, this as somebody who's coming from Miami for whom synod is still barely mentioned. And I don't know what it's like here in Detroit, but I'm hearing that it's not that different.

And so, there is this need to hold the long view of what is the hope of the Synod and what is the new culture that Pope Francis is imagining? That is building on the hope and promise of Vatican II. It's like, how do we keep carrying Vatican II forward? There's still much more work to do. And this is one of those ways. So, again, the question was, "What is the Holy Spirit up to" as we listen to one another in our times?

And millions of people did have the chance to be heard in all the continents; and I hope some of you who were able to attend listening sessions are contributed in some way.

And one of the things that kept coming up over and over and over in every continent was women's participation. What are we going to do about women's participation? There's not enough of it. And so, there were seven paragraphs written that helped to summarize what women in the world, and men, all the Churches were saying about women's participation. I want to spotlight one—in particular one—of those paragraphs in which you begin to see a little bit of consensus he named and it's the one with that I've highlighted:

Women in “Enlarge the space of your tent”:

Almost all reports raise the issue of full and equal participation of women. “The growing recognition of the importance of women in the life of the Church opens up possibilities for greater, albeit limited, participation in Church structures and decision-making spheres (EC Brazil).

However, the reports do not agree on a single or complete response to the question of the vocation, inclusion and flourishing of women in Church and society. ***After careful listening, many reports ask that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions: the active role of women in the governing structures of Church bodies, the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings, and a female diaconate.*** Much greater diversity of opinion was expressed with regard on the subject of priestly ordination for women, which some reports call for, while others consider [it] a closed issue. (64)

”After careful listening, many reports asked that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions:” First, “the active role of women and governing structures in church bodies.” Second, “the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings.” Preaching is being lifted up as a second request. Third, “a female diaconate.’ So, these are three specific concrete things that people around the world are asking the Holy Father, the bishops, and the Church to discern. Can we imagine the pathways for all three of these things?

What can ordained permanent deacons do?

- Direct charitable and justice work
- Proclaim the Gospel and preach
- Baptize
- Celebrate wedding services
- Celebrate funeral services

So, I want to just take a moment to highlight; so, what is the permanent, deaconate? What can deacons do? Now, it won't solve all our laments, restoring women to the deaconate, but it could contribute in important ways to the renewal of the Church; and so, that's what I want to focus on. Deacons can direct the charitable justice work of a parish or Catholic institution that can help animate the people of God, to get involved in discerning what are the needs of our community and how to respond in concrete ways to those needs. Deacons can proclaim the gospel and preach. So, this could be a pathway for women to be able to preach if they could be ordained deacons. And this is something that in particular, young women are asking for. We hear young women saying over and over again, I don't understand this expectation that I would only ever go to Mass and hear from a male creature that just doesn't make sense to me; and my heart yearns and longer longs to hear women breaking open the Word of God. So, that would help with that. And then women can also do, they would be able to do some sacramental services: baptize, celebrate weddings and celebrate funerals.

“The deacon is to be the conscience of the Church, dragging the ambo to the streets and the streets to the ambo.

I love this quote by Deacon Bill Ditewig, because it really tries to summarize, especially the core charism of the diaconate. “The deacon is to be the conscience of the Church, dragging the ambo to the streets, and the streets to the ambo,” For the deacon is that mediator of what's happening in this community. What are the needs? Who is at the peripheries? Who's at the margins? Who doesn't get listened to? How could we make sure we're a Church that is attending to those needs? And then, based on what you're hearing and learning and listening and doing, you come back, and you share how the Holy Spirit is working in your community, with your community.

On World Day of Peace, January 1, 2024

The world “needs to look to mothers and to women in order to find peace, to emerge from the spiral of violence and hatred, and once more see things with genuinely human eyes and hearts.”

*I love this quote by Pope Francis on the first day of 2020 for its World Peace Day: and he said, “The world needs to look to mothers and to women in order to find peace, to emerge from the spiral of violence and hatred, and once more see things with genuinely human eyes and hearts. This is a tall mission! And I know that many of us are heartbroken by the endless wars that we seem to be stuck in as a people and a planet. What's happening in Sudan, Ukraine, Gaza, Israel? And a pardon me I when I read this from Pope Francis. Yes, where are the women leaders? The women peacemakers? Will we ever get out of this spiral of violence and wars unless we have many more women being formed and trained to be peacemakers in our families, our communities, our countries, our nations?”

Delores Mission and Homeboy Industries

So, I want to share with you some women who have done just that, and I am so privileged to get to work with Dolores Mission Church in East Los Angeles for 12 years. I served there as a pastoral associate and worked very closely with the women of Dolores Mission. And how many of you know about the work of great Father Greg Boyle with Homeboy Industries? I read one of his books; I figured there would be a lot of people in Detroit. And so, by the time I got to Dolores Mission, which was in 2008, Homeboy Industries had its own building. A couple miles away from Dolores Mission; but, by the work of Homeboy Industries, that started at Dolores Mission in the mid 80s, and Father Greg Boyle was pastor; and he worked very closely with the women who were part of numerous sharing communities; and there was so much violence. There were eight rival gangs in the small parish boundaries, as many of you know. And the question that the women kept asking each other as they would read the gospel is, “What would Jesus do?”

They were terrified of the gang members; they were terrified for their children. But, as they kept asking that question, “What would Jesus do?” And Fr. Greg, inviting them to keep answering and praying with that question. They started coming up with things like, “Well, maybe Jesus would get to know their names.

Well, maybe Jesus would find out why they dropped out of school; and help them get to an alternative school. Well, maybe Jesus would visit them in juvenile jail; or maybe Jesus would feed them.”

So, there was one woman who made tacos and developed relationships with these young people at risk.

So then, little by little, transformed a community that started with a bakery, and then a café, and now does solar paneling. All these businesses, young people who get out, any age really, who get out of prison are invited to stop by Homeboy Industries to see if they can get a job, learn employable skills after 18 months, get that letter of reference that says, “I’m employable and I have a skill,” and began to start a new life. Thousands of young men and women have gone through Homeboy Industries from Southern California. The community of Dolores Mission, it's there's, still some problems with violence, but much, much less. You really see a community transformed; and Homeboy Industries is now the largest gang intervention rehabilitation program in the country and in the world.

This started at a parish, the parish that put the *alquimia* into action. This is what Catholics are capable of. This is who we are. But it's going to take all of us; and it will take women. One of my conversion moments I started attending. So, one of the things the parents didn't do at one point, there were people being killed every week by the time I got there in 2008. It was just a few times a year but still too much. I moved into the neighborhood and Jonathan Rebuttal gets gunned down at PKM Park. He was 18 years old. And one of the things that we would do in your parish is he would always have an outdoor mass wherever somebody got killed to claim that ground for holy ground. And so, we I participated in that Mass, and watched the women go around blessing all the young people who were angry that their friend got killed, and just trying to minister to them to help try to break the cycle of vile of retribution and vengeance.

The next week we did another Mass in the opposite side of an opposing gang’s territory. That gang had likely killed Jonathan.

And as we were doing that Mass outdoors, as a gang member who was mad dogging the priests celebrating the Mass. And I got really scared. Why are we here? And I turned to Rosa Campos, who was one of the key women leaders, “Why are we here?” And she said to me so serenely she was really a deacon for me in that moment.

She really ministered to me in a moment of great fear, and she said, “What can build us on restless equals *la schemata Lhasa sama* battles, because they're all our children, the ones that get killed, and the ones that kill.”

And in that moment, all my fear just left me because I'm never going to hear this from anybody else. But somebody like Rosa, and I just got to hear a truth from God that they are all our children. And it was remarkable to just feel an incredible sense of peace. And Rosa for years has welcomed immersion students from high schools and colleges all around the country who want to come to Dolores Mission and Homeboy Industries. In the end, they do a whole week of immersion, and she talks to young people over and over and over again just sharing the good news that every single young person is her child, no matter how much they may have messed up. And then we're all called; and God is ready to forgive us and help us transform our lives wherever that might be needed.

In 2018 some of the key women of Delores Mission got recognized for their religious education conference; and Archbishop Jose Gomez actually invited them to come and put the altar together for Mass and recognize them as remarkable peacemakers who had helped to transform Southern California. Again, this is who we are. This is what we're capable of.

As Catholic women and lastly, to me, this is the best recognition of all. Fabian Debora, when he was a teenager caused all kinds of havoc in the neighborhood. In and out of prison, he eventually gets into rehab, transforms his life, becomes a very important muralist in Los Angeles. And he comes back to Dolores Mission and paints this mural, “Mother of the Gardens;” and he hosts a lunch for the women of Dolores Mission and the mother and the mothers of the community and ask for forgiveness. He comes to Dolores Mission to two Masses and publicly asks for forgiveness, and says to the mothers, “I know I scared you for many years. And I just am sorry for what I did. And I asked you to forgive me; and I thank you for never giving up on me and helping me to transform my life.” And in both Masses a woman jumped up and said to him, “We forgive you.!” Of course we forgive you. Welcome back; we are so glad you've transformed your life. And we're happy to welcome them back.

Women deacons in the Amazon

So, I just want to take you for a moment here to the Amazon because the Amazon is another region that I've been following very closely in our work with discerning deacons. Sister Ciria, had the permission of her bishop. He gave her like a canonical exception to do everything a deacon can do: preaching, directing, charitable and justice work, baptizing, celebrating weddings and funerals. She for nine years was pastoring 140 small river communities. There's these incredible winding Amazon rivers and she had a couple of these rivers; and she'd go from community to community to community just helped him to form the catechist, celebrating liturgies, baptizing children, weddings. She did this for nine years.

So, and I went to visit her in September 2022 and got to see her; and if you've never seen a Catholic woman baptizing a child, here she is. It's all very humble. These are small, humble communities. But isn't it amazing how sometimes it's the peripheries that seek to the center? Because this is what's happening in rural Bolivia in the Amazon. And she traveled with us to Rome, she and several other women from the Amazon. We traveled to Rome for the opening of the Synod. We wanted to make sure that Pope Francis knew we were there, a delegation from Canada, the US and Latin America; and he actually wanted to meet us. And so, we presented with him this framed image of St. Phoebe. St. Phoebe proclaiming St. Paul's letter to the Romans. He was very happy to meet us and when Sister Ciria explained to him her ministry, just held her hands and he said, "Feed my other lambs. Go forward. Keep going." It was a remarkable moment. So, we take that now is one of our phantom adelante.

All right. I want to introduce you to Sister Laura Vicuna. Sister Laura is on the front lines of helping indigenous people in Brazil, protect the rainforest. It really is the indigenous communities that are most committed to protecting the rainforest; and I went there in June, this past June, spent a week with her. We visited the Gaudi Buena tribe. How beautiful the river was with the trees; it was just really like a Garden of Eden. We were there at a time when the butterflies were, like it was a season of the butterflies, and there were just thousands of butterflies everywhere. I've never seen anything like it. As soon as we got to the end of the Garifuna territory. What we saw next was just the deforestation; it was heartbreaking.

And so, Sister Laura, she has the support of the Brazilian bishops; she and many other religious sisters, to organize indigenous tribes to fight for their human rights and land rights, because they're the ones that are so committed to preserving the Amazon, which is the largest rainforest in the world, often referred to as the lungs of the planet. So, the fate of the great Amazon rainforest impacts us too.

Sr. Vicuna in Rome

Sister Laura and two other indigenous women wrote to Pope Francis and said, "Can we meet with you directly?" And they met with him last June. And they talked to him about the work that they are doing in the Amazon. He cares so much about the environment; so, he really wanted to listen to them. They also talked to him about the diaconate; and they said, "It would help us to be authorized by the Church as deacons. We're going into their front lines; they're in dangerous situations. And it would help us for it to be even more clear that we are authorized representatives of the Church; we are working on behalf of the Church."

The Synod

So here we come to the Synod. It just took place in October, 365 delegates from all the continents for the first time ever. They're in round tables, first time ever; and they're taking turns listening to each other. And when they took up an issue, a new issue, everybody would have three minutes to talk; and a cardinal/archbishop had three minutes; a layperson had three minutes. It was equal amounts of time to talk and to be heard and listened to.

Also remarkable is when Pope Francis first announced the Synod, there was going to be one woman voting. But as the synod reports came in, one of the big requests was it can't possibly just be one woman voting; you have to appoint more women voting; and he heard; and he listened. And all told, there were 54 women voting delegates. [applause]

Characteristic of a synodal Church is the ability to manage tensions without being crushed by them, experiencing them as a drive to deepen how communion, mission and participation are understood. [64]

*And one of the things I love about the synod documents, the Synod is trying to do something we haven't yet learned how to do. And I like this characteristic of a synodal Church: “The ability to manage tensions without being crushed by them.” Who wants to sign up for that? I want to sign up for that program, “Managing our tensions without being crushed by them, experiencing them as a drive to deepen how communion, mission and participation are lived and understood;” and developed the actual synodal methodology, how are we going to listen to each other? And basically, it's called conversations in the Spirit. They were practicing conversations in the Spirit six hours a day for a month.

Conversations in the Spirit

- **Centers listening**
- **Convergences—Agreements**
- **Differences—Disagreements**
- **Questions**
- **A possible pathway forward**
- **Include time for sacred silence and prayer.**

So, I'm hoping that some of this stuff, and basically, it's centered listening, noticing convergences, where do we actually agree? noticing differences, where do we disagree? asking questions; what new questions are being generated as we talk about something; and then, noticing a possible passive way forward? We can't just let our disagreements keep us stuck. What's a possible next step? What's a possible thing we could do next together? And then, there were also including time for silence and prayer.

And then I heard from talking to a bunch of synod delegates, this was really important, that sometimes it was in the silence, and in the prayer, that the Holy Spirit would really begin to stir in somebody's heart. And they would begin to maybe imagine a step forward, or imagine a place where they could agree a little more. Just what's at stake became very real for me.

Toward a Synodal Church

I was in Rome in October during the global Synod, I was participating in the public activities; and one of those public activities was Saturday night rosaries for peace. And October 7, when the war in Gaza and Israel broke out,

that Saturday night rosary went from being a few hundred people to several thousands of people, people just coming out from Rome, and processing clergy religious, lay people, young people, old people; you could really feel it praying the rosary; and multiple languages, praying for the Synod and praying for peace.

The Synod in the synthesis report talks about becoming more aware that each of us is a bearer of dignity derived from baptism.

So just censoring baptism more, that each of us has full dignity as a Catholic, as a person centered on our baptism; and then it also talks about a lot about how each of us then, because of our baptism, are co-responsible for this Church and to begin to claim that we are co-responsible for the Church that we have in the Church. We want to have the Church we envision for our children and our grandchildren.

This co-responsibility is essential for synodality; and is necessary at all levels of the Church. And then, they did an amazing thing. More than two thirds of the synod delegates, and this included many bishops and cardinals, who said, "Let's keep doing theological and pastoral research on an access of women to the diaconate. Let's keep this conversation going; and they included that paragraph in the section on "Women in the Life and Ministry of the Church; but they included something in the section on priests and deacons.

Again, saying deeper study on the theology of the diaconate will shed light on the question of the access of women to the diaconate. So, that's very notable that it got included in that section on the diaconate and it isn't, we're talking about the ordained diaconate.

Some people ask me, "What are the main things to keep in mind and I think if you're somebody who kind of likes talking points, what are the key things I want to keep in mind about this? I'm going to just share a few a few with you that I think about a lot. So, first of all, the renewal of the permanent diaconate could animate synodality and the Church's social mission, need to reanimate the Church's social mission for this third millennium, but *diakonia*, the ministry of service; and the second thing, to revitalize the acronym that includes men and women in a stable ordained ministry. So, that word stability: again, how do we help to make women's ministry more stable? Women having adequate access to training for preaching is a critical thing that the people of God are asking for. And this year, 2024, is a super important year to bear witness is now the time to renew the permanent diaconate for a synodal Church and the Church's social mission that includes men and women as deacons.

And if you do think that now's the time, then your own pastors, and deacons, and people of God need to hear that you think so. We need to begin to socialize this conversation more and do what St. Paul was asking for St. Phoebe: receive her in the Lord. Is your parish ready to receive a woman in the Lord, a woman deacon in the Lord?

And if not, or you're not so sure that that means, there's more work to do. There's more work to do to get ready to till the ground.

We have heard that this shifts the more they know that the ground is ready, the easier it becomes to make that decision. We're not alone, the religious leaders of all of Latin America put out a position paper calling for women in the diaconate.

*While we were in Rome, Discerning Deacons, we organized a symposium on a synodal of the diaconate with the women of the Amazon and were invited to host this symposium at the Jesuit headquarters. And that sent a very important message. And we invited synod delegates and theologians, religious sisters. This conversation is a live conversation; it's been discussed. And I like the Orthodox Christians. They have also come out with a position paper on restoring women to the diaconate, So, they also are considering it now at this time. There is one permanent deacon, he isn't a delegate deacon here, Deacon Geert de Cubber, from Belgium; and we got to see him. We had a group of young adults that we took to Rome with us for the public activities of the Synod. We met him there; and he is in favor of the restoration of women to the diaconate. So, we have an ally, a deacon, who is publicly in favor of the restoration.

Phoebe Day

Some of you may have heard of Phoebe Day. This is one of the things we've organized this past year. Her feast day is September 3. We had approximately 175 Catholic churches, schools universities celebrate St. Phoebe's feast day, some point in September, this past September. And is Rebecca Meadows here? She recently preached at St. Peter and Paul, and Gesu, but she works at St. Peter and Paul. And she recently preached two weeks ago.

Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity

Where episcopal conferences deem it opportune, the order of the diaconate should be restored as a permanent state of life according to the norms of the Constitution "De Ecclesia" (23) For there are men who actually carry out the functions of the deacon's office, either preaching the word of God as catechists, or presiding over scattered Christian communities in the name of the pastor and the bishop, or practicing charity in social or relief work. **It is only right to strengthen them by imposition of hands which has come down from the Apostles, and to bind them more closely to the altar, that they may carry out their ministry more effectively because of the sacramental grace of the diaconate.** Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes* (1965).

I don't think that there isn't that much different that needs to be written. And the new paragraph just says, "Add women."

"Repeatedly during the spiritual and theological reflections, which took place during the Assembly, the point had been made that Jesus, in his invitation to women, as disciples and witnesses to the resurrection, produced a paradigm shift for the treatment of women in a culture of this time. Most in the Synod Assembly felt that the time has come for just such a shift in the life of the church." —Cardinal Robert McElroy at the 2024 Los Angeles Religious Education Congress.

Cardinal McElroy has said that he could feel in the Synod, just as Jesus ushered in a paradigm shift as to how women were to be treated; and you think about the stories like the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, Mary Magdalene being chosen to be the one who witnesses his resurrection. Is the Church now ready for a new paradigm shift in how we think about women?

Conclusion

And so, I'll end with this question.

When you imagine a Church that has revitalized diakonia by ordaining men and women to a prophetic, synodal diaconate, what difference would that make for you?

And so, I want to actually invite us to a synodal moment. So, if you could just either talk to your neighbor, either twos or threes, and just ask each other that question; and take turns listening. What difference would this make for you? And let's take about 15 minutes to just dialogue with each other. But, before we do that, I just shared a lot; and so, I want to actually just take two minutes of silence. This is one of the practices of synodality that I'm just leaning more and more. So, I want to give you a chance to just collect your thoughts and notice your heart; what is stirring in your heart from everything that I've just shared. And let's just hold silence together for two minutes and then I'll invite you to share.

Okay, so what most resonated for you? And when you imagine the possible way, that illustration of the diaconate to include men and women for the Church's social mission, what difference might that make for you, and for your parents, for your faith community? is now the time to ordain women to the diaconate? Why not? Just see if you can gather with another person two or three and listen to each other on this question. And make sure you take turns everybody has a chance. And then we'll gather back together in 15 minutes.

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