

Women's draft

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Dolores Leckey, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat on Laity and Family Life, called the second draft "a very helpful document" that helps Catholics "grapple with relationships between men and women, mothers and sons, husbands and wives, and between co-workers."

She applauded recommendations in the draft that call on dioceses to develop their own plans of action on women's concerns and establish women's commissions. "That can help shape pastoral response at the local level," Leckey said.

She said no one she knew expected the bishops to challenge church teaching on women's ordination or birth control in the pastoral. "It would be unrealistic," Leckey said.

As Catholics, "we are part of a universal fabric... We have limits, we have givens, and I'm not convinced that's a bad thing," she said.

Leckey said that while criticism of priests' attitudes toward women in the second draft doesn't reach the level of "priest-bashing," in her view there should be acknowledgement that some women have had their consciousness raised on women's concerns by priests "who worked quietly, establishing positions for them" within the church.

On the other hand, Monsignor Joseph Gremillion, director emeritus of the Uni-

versity of Notre Dame's Institute for Pastoral and Social Ministry, said "priests, as a group, deserve" criticism of their treatment of women.

Priests today, he said, include men who studied in the seminary years ago and "had no opportunity to work with women and appreciate their talents. We were taught women were out there and to stay away from them. We were almost trained to be afraid of women," he said.

Helen Hull Hitchcock, coordinator of the St. Louis-based Women for Faith and Family, said more extensive quoting of papal documents in the second draft made it an improvement over the first.

She said it appeared to her the bishops were "trying to appease women's rights activists" with their document, saying essentially "we can't give you priesthood but we'll give you everything else we can."

Where the draft accuses the church of "fostering patriarchy," she said, it reflects the concerns of women who are church employees or in leadership positions within the church "not those of us in the real world."

Rosemary Radford Ruether, theology professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Chicago, said the draft proved bishops "are so hampered" by the ban on women priests and birth control "they can't make a consistent contribution to alleviating sexism in church and society."

She said it was "fundamentally contradictory and unacceptable" to declare

that men and women are equal and then "claim women cannot be priests because they don't image Christ."

Allowing women to be ordained deacons is "only important" if it becomes "a steppingstone to full ministry" as priests, said Ruether.

Phyllis A. Willerscheidt, executive coordinator of the Commission on Women in the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis, was "thrilled" with the document's recommendation that each diocese establish a commission on women. The majority of dioceses nationwide have no such commission, she said.

She applauded the draft's request for studying the ordination of women as deacons and its emphasis on inclusive or non-sexist language. "Language shapes your thinking and attitudes about women," Willerscheidt said.

Franciscan Sister Patricia A. Keefe, director for justice and human development for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, praised the bishops for saying in the second draft that there exists a "good form of feminism."

Saying there should have been more emphasis on "women who don't see themselves defined as mothers," the nun applauded the bishops for "acknowledging the terrible tension" existing on the ordination issue.

Call to Action, a Chicago-based group of some 5,000 Catholics, issued a statement April 4 criticizing the draft pastoral, saying it demonstrated a "retreat of the U.S. bishops from dialogue with the American

people."

"We want the bishops to become more open to women's ordination... However, the bishops appear to be more interested in parroting the views of Rome than in listening to the real concerns of American Catholics," said Mary Ann Savard, president of Call to Action.

Priests for Equality, a group based in Hyattsville, Md., that claims a membership of bishops, priests, brothers and deacons, in a statement issued April 6 called on the bishops to "cancel the pastoral," saying the second draft was "riddled with Vatican influence."

"By pointing to society's evils, original sin and macho cultural practices as the causes of sexism and not accepting any institutional blame for excluding women from fullness in the church, we have a pastoral whose dead bones not even Ezekiel could raise to life," the group said.

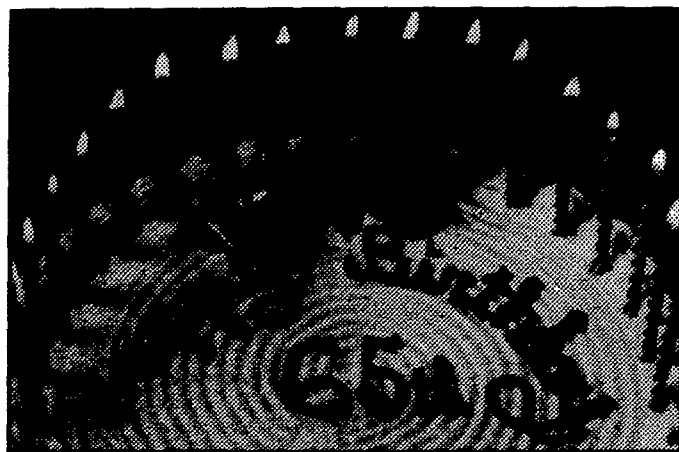
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