



# Catholic Courier

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## ...infallibly...

### Ordination statement stirs mix of reactions in diocese

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff Writer

Diocesan Catholics offered a mix of reactions to the Vatican's declaration that the inadmissibility of women to the priesthood is a part of the church's infallibly taught deposit of faith.

For those who have long supported women's ordination, the statement was greeted with dismay, caution and bewilderment.

Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, president of St. Bernard's Institute in Rochester, expressed anxiety over how women in the church would accept the teaching.

"My deepest concern is how will we pass on the Catholic faith to our daughters and future generations of women in a way that will make ours a credible church to belong to in the future," she said in a statement.

But those who supported the church's teaching that only men may be priests welcomed the Vatican's Nov. 18 statement.

Michael J. Macaluso, events chairman of the Western New York Chapter of Catholics United for the Faith, noted that his lay organization agreed with the Vatican statement. He expressed concern, however, that women's ordination supporters may not let the issue rest and would be unwilling to accept that the church has declared the inadmissibility of women to the priesthood as infallibly taught.

"This is for all time," he said of the teaching.

But such certainty may lead to problems for some Catholics, speculated Sister Joan Sobala, SSJ, pastoral associate at St. Mary's Church in Rochester. She warned that the pronouncement could be the final

straw for women who had remained in the church with the hope that the church might someday ordain women.

"I think many women will find reason to move on, and that will be sad," she observed.

Sister Sobala emphasized, however, that she will not join any exodus of women's ordination supporters from the church.

"I am here for the long haul," she said.

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Father William J. Cosgrove

Other women's ordination supporters expressed concern about what would happen to sacraments, given the growing shortage of males willing to be celibate priests.

"I am mostly concerned about how we, the church, will continue to make the Eucharist, reconciliation and anointing of the sick available as we have fewer priests," commented Denise Mack, pastoral associate at the parishes of St. Anne in Palmyra and St. Gregory in Marion, in a statement.

Despite such concerns, however, one supporter of the church's teaching,

Father William J. Cosgrove, said the Vatican's statement should finally end speculation about women's ordination.

"There's a role for women and a role for men in the church," said Father Cosgrove, pastor of St. Dominic's Church in Shortsville.

He explained that he believes women should be allowed to hold any church position, including that of diocesan chancellor, but he made an exception for the priesthood. He likened the role of the priest to that of a male head of a family.

"I think the priest exercises a certain paternal role in that function," Father Cosgrove said, noting that Christ, as a male, serves as head of the church's family.

Father Cosgrove also predicted that support for women's ordination would eventually wane among the faithful, even though the debate continues at this moment among Catholics.

"I know it's not over, but I think it's going to die eventually," he said.

Many observers contended that the Vatican wanted to settle the issue of women's ordination once and for all with this latest statement. Yet, ironically, the manner in which the teaching was declared "infallible" may have created more confusion than clarity among some of the church's faithful, a number of commentators noted.

Father Joseph A. Hart, associate professor of systematic theology at St. Bernard's, said that there was no indication the church's barring of women from the priesthood was considered an infallible teaching when the pope issued his May 1994, letter, "On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone."

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### Bishop assents to declaration on priesthood

Bishop Matthew H. Clark issued the following statement Nov. 20 regarding the recent Vatican pronouncement concerning the ordination of women as priests.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has issued a letter to all bishops in an effort to clarify the Pope's teaching on the inadmissibility of women to the ministerial priesthood, set forth in May 1994 by the publication of the Apostolic Letter "Ordination to Priesthood."

That teaching was that "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women." The Congregation states that the teaching is founded on the written Word of God, has been preserved in Church tradition, and has been set forth infallibly by the Magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church). Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation, notes that Pope John Paul II approved this determination, and ordered it published.

I accept this teaching with respect and reverence. I ask all Catholics of the Diocese of Rochester prayerfully to invite the wisdom and understanding of the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and guide our common life as church.

I renew my call to the Catholic community, issued in January 1995 with the publication of our five-year Pastoral Plan, to "recognize and value the dignity of women both in our church and in society." Conscious effort to ensure that women have the opportunity to use their God-given gifts benefits everyone.

The reaffirmation of this teaching is an opportunity for a renewed reflection on the nature of both the ministerial priesthood and on the common priesthood of all the faithful, based on Baptism. It also reminds us that the most important and fundamental Christian calling — the call to holiness — is open to all, and that both women and men of every state of life have been honored by the church for answering it.

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### Doctrinal expert explains Vatican reasons

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Dominican Father Gus DiNoia, secretary for doctrine and pastoral practices for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said a new Vatican document clarifying papal teaching against women's ordination, "does not say anything new about the church's teaching" on whether women can be ordained priests.

But, he said, it does rule out a purely disciplinary interpretation of that teaching, and links it directly to papal infallibility and the fundamental deposit of faith the church must guard.

In a commentary issued in Washington Nov. 18 — the same day as the new Vatican statement — Father DiNoia said an accompanying letter from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation, indicated that "the occasion for (the

document's) issuance is the persistence of doubts about the definitive character of 'Ordinatio Sacerdotalis,' the 1994 papal statement against women's ordination."

The following is an abbreviated version of Father DiNoia's commentary.

**Q: How might we understand that this teaching against women's priestly ordination pertains to the deposit of faith?**

A: To say that a teaching about a particular sacrament belongs to the deposit of faith is to affirm that it belongs to what the church has received from Christ. Scriptures, doctrines, sacraments: in essence, these are gifts which the church has received and must guard. Here we can understand the point of saying

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