

Defying Roman Catholic Church, Woman Ordained as Priest

In an emotional ceremony filled with tears and applause, a 70-year-old Kentucky woman was ordained a priest on Saturday as part of a dissident group operating outside of official **Roman Catholic Church** authority.

Rosemarie Smead is one of about 150 women around the world who have decided not to wait for the Roman Catholic Church to lift its ban on women priests, but to be ordained and start their own congregations.

In an interview before the ceremony, Smead said she is not worried about being excommunicated from the Church—the fate of other women ordained outside of **Vatican** law.

“It has no sting for me,” said Smead, a petite, gray-haired former Carmelite nun with a ready hug for strangers. “It is a Medieval bullying stick the bishops used to keep control over people and to keep the voices of women silent. I am way beyond letting octogenarian men tell us how to live our lives.”

The ordination of women as priests, along with the issues of married priests and birth control, represents one of the big divides between U.S. Catholics and the Vatican hierarchy. Seventy percent of U.S. Catholics believe that women should be allowed to be priests, according to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll earlier this year.

The former pope, Benedict XVI, reaffirmed the Catholic Church’s ban on women priests and warned that he would not tolerate disobedience by clerics on fundamental teachings. Male priests have been stripped of their holy orders for participating in ordination ceremonies for women.

In a statement last week, Louisville, Ky., Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz called the planned ceremony by the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests a “simulated ordination” in opposition to Catholic teaching.

“The simulation of a sacrament carries very serious penal sanctions in Church law, and Catholics should not support or participate in Saturday’s event,” Kurtz said.

The Catholic Church teaches that it has no authority to allow women to be priests because Jesus Christ chose only men as His apostles. Proponents of a female priesthood said Jesus was acting only according to the customs of his time.

They also note that he chose women, like Mary Magdalene, as disciples, and that the early Church had women priests, deacons and bishops.

The ceremony, held at St. Andrew United Church of Christ in Louisville, was attended by about 200 men and women. Many identified themselves to a Reuters reporter as Catholics, but some declined to give their names or their churches.

‘New Era of Inclusivity’

The modern woman priest movement started in Austria in 2002, when seven women were ordained by the Danube River by an independent Catholic bishop. Other women were later ordained as bishops, who went on to ordain more women priests and deacons.

“As a woman priest, Rosemarie is leading, not leaving the Catholic Church, into a new era of inclusivity,” said Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan during her sermon Saturday. “As the Irish writer James Joyce reminded us, the word *Catholic* means ‘Here comes everybody!’”

Smead had to leave the rigorous Carmelite life due to health reasons, and earned a bachelor’s degree in theology and a doctorate in counseling psychology. She taught at Indiana

University for 26 years, and works as a couples and family therapist.

During the ordination ceremony, Smead wept openly as nearly everyone in the audience came up and laid their hands on her head in blessing. Some whispered, "Thanks for doing this for us."

During the communion service, Smead and other woman priests lifted the plates and cups containing the sacramental bread and wine to bless them.

A woman in the audience murmured, "Girl, lift those plates. I've been waiting a long time for this."

One of those attending the service was Stewart Pawley, 32, of Louisville, who said he was raised Catholic and now only attends on Christmas and Easter. But he said he would attend services with Smead when she starts to offer them in Louisville.

"People like me know it's something the Catholic Church will have to do," said Pawley.

Editing by Tim Gaynor and Mohammad Zargham

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