



# DEACONCHAT

A CONVERSATION ABOUT WOMEN DEACONS



## Conclusions of 1995 Canon Law Society of America Study

### THE CANONICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ORDAINING WOMEN TO THE PERMANENT DIACONATE

This study has been designed to determine the canonical implications of ordaining women to the permanent diaconate. It has found the following:

1. Historically, women have been ordained as deaconesses. While it would be anachronistic to call "deaconesses" the women whose ministry is recorded in the New Testament, by the third century there clearly were women deacons. What their ministry involved has varied from place to place, and from century to century. Although some debate whether they were indeed "ordained," the evidence points to an ordination parallel to that conferred on men to be deacons. Although this past experience does not require that women be ordained to the permanent diaconate today, it does indicate that this possibility is not foreclosed to the Church.
2. Cultural factors play a significant role in decisions to introduce the permanent diaconate today. Cultural factors were also significant factors in the decision to ordain deaconesses in local churches in the past. It is appropriate, therefore, that contemporary cultural factors recognized by church officials involving women be taken into consideration in determining whether to ordain women to the permanent diaconate today.
3. The diaconate is presented in canon law as a sacrament, a grade in the sacrament of holy orders. It is a permanent or character sacrament, and those ordained deacons stand in a different kind of relationship within the community and not just a difference of degree. Ordination provides sacramental grace for the witnessing presence of the ordained, but does not impede or denigrate the proper role of laypersons in the Church or in the world.
4. The supreme authority of the Church is competent to decide to ordain women to the permanent diaconate. It would require a derogation from canon 1024 that restricts all ordinations, including that to the permanent diaconate, to males. This can be done by legislation or individual indults to episcopal conferences.
5. It would not be necessary to adopt ordination of women to the permanent diaconate throughout the entire Church; as with the ordination of men to the permanent diaconate, this is a question properly left to decisions by the episcopal conference and individual diocesan bishops.
6. Women ordained to the permanent diaconate would be bound by the canon law which applies to men ordained to the permanent diaconate, and women who are members of religious institutes would be bound by the law which applies to male religious who are clerics. Some adjustments would be required in some specific provisions concerning clergy that are currently expressed in masculine terms.

---

7. 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.

In light of these conclusions from its research, the committee has reached the conclusion that ordination of women to the permanent diaconate is possible, and may even be desirable for the United States in the present cultural circumstances.