

Fordham Center on Religion and Culture

The Future of Women Deacons: *Views from the Papal Commission and the American Pews*

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Moderator:

Father Thomas Rosica, CSB
President of Salt and Light Media

Speakers:

Professor Phyllis Zagano
Commission Member; Senior Research Associate-in-Residence at Hofstra University and Author of several books on women deacons

Father Bernard Pottier, S.J.
Commission Member; Faculty Member at the Institut D'Etudes Théologiques in Brussels

Sister Donna Ciangio, O.P.
Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Newark and Principal and Founder of Church Leadership Consultation

DAVID GIBSON: Good evening and welcome. My name is David Gibson. I'm the Director of the Center on Religion and Culture here at Fordham. I want to thank you all for being here for this evening's panel discussion on the Future of Women Deacons.

As you can tell from the size of our audience, this is obviously a topic that generates much interest and of a very positive kind since we've been having to turn people away for a couple of weeks already.

Why so much enthusiasm on this topic? Why so much passion on this topic? That's a question perhaps our panel will help to answer, and certainly the role of women in Catholicism has long been a hot-button topic.

But I think that finally elevating and broadening the role of women in the church, as Pope Francis has said we must do, is especially critical today if we're to answer the call of the Spirit in this time of epochal change and challenge for the Catholic Church. It is a call as well that our nation and our world must respond to.

Just the other day, I saw the new Ruth Bader Ginsburg movie, *The Basis of Sex*. Anybody else seen it? Really stunning. I saw it with my thirteen-year-old daughter, who is an altar server, and what a lesson in how far we've come and what a lesson every single day's news in how far we still have to go when it comes to the treatment of women.

How that change will happen I don't know, but we are ready to explore a potentially historic aspect of that shift with tonight's panelists. We're also very pleased to be live streaming this event thanks to our media partners for this discussion, Salt and Light Television, a Canadian foundation that's committed to advancing the new evangelization.

The live stream, which you can find on Salt and Light's website, will make this discussion available to thousands more viewers, many of whom reached out to us from around the world expressing interest, as far as Sri Lanka, I think, and many other places. This is a global topic.

Our moderator for this evening's panel is the president of Salt and Light Media, Father Tom Rosica, a priest of the Congregation of St. Basil, the Basilian Fathers. Father Tom is a native of Rochester, New York state, but a Canadian by citizenship now, and he has a very distinguished pedigree as a multilingual Bible scholar, lecturer, retreat speaker, and writer.

Father Tom is especially beloved by journalists around the world, who greatly appreciate his own media bona fides and his understanding of the 24/7 needs of other journalists, especially those who cover the Vatican. Tom Rosica often helps out in Rome on communications issues for major events like the synods. Goodness knows, anybody who has been following the headlines knows they could use the help.

Father Tom will lead us through the rest of the evening's presentations and discussions, and we would like to, of course, field some of your questions as well. So while the panel is speaking, please write down your questions on the index cards provided on your seats. Our student workers will collect them, I'll sort through them to find questions that have not yet been addressed, and then during the question-and-answer period after our formal presentations, Father Tom will pose some of your questions to our panelists. Please write clearly and succinctly; if we can't read them, we can't ask them. And please silence your cellphones.

Now, over to you, Father Tom Rosica.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Thank you, David Gibson, and I thank Fordham University and the Center on Religion and Culture for sponsoring this evening and inviting us to be here. I think I can say with a great degree of joy that this is our second event, and only yesterday did we finalize our relationship with the United States by establishing our Salt and Light office here, next door at St. Paul's, Salt and Light Catholic Media, USA, and I think there's a need for an alternative to Catholic media, and we're very happy to be here.

We have a distinguished panel of eminent scholars, pastors, leaders, professors, those engaged in ministry, those who know and love the church and who are concerned about the church of the present and the church of the future. I could also say that the three people on the panel with me are colleagues and friends.

[Speaks in French]

There's a little bit of an error. It says, "A View from the American Pews," but because we're addressing the other country, where I live and where our operation is, and I know that many people in France are watching this this evening [speaks in French], and then we have an outstanding priest from Belgium who will be part of our panel tonight, so every now and then a little French will be sprinkled into this.

Let me introduce our first presenter this evening. In one way, she doesn't need introduction. She's beloved around the world. Her passion for this evening's topic and cause has made her one of the world authorities on the question of the diaconate.

Professor Phyllis Zagano. Let me tell you about her formally. A Senior Research Associate-in-Residence at Hofstra University and author of several books on women deacons, including *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church*. She also wrote *Women Deacons? Essays with Answers*, a collection of twelve essays, five translated from Italian, three from French, and four in their original English, that answer questions about the history of and possible future of women deacons. She is a leading expert around the world. For that reason, she was appointed to the Pontifical Commission two years ago.

Prior to arriving at Hofstra in 2002 she had joint appointments to the faculties of theology, communications, and international relations at Boston University. A baccalaureate graduate of Marymount College in Tarrytown, New York, she holds a PhD from the State University of New York with three master's degrees.

She has published hundreds of articles and reviews in a wide variety of journals and in Catholic publications such as the *National Catholic Reporter*, where she is a columnist. She is also one of our television personalities on Salt and Light Television, having been featured for the past year and a half on two outstanding programs, the *Witness* series and also our very special book show, *Subject Matters*.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, Professor Phyllis Zagano.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: Thank you, Tom, and thank you all for coming out in the cold, where I've been working for the past thirty years or so. [Laughter]

You got it. Am I going too fast?

We're here to talk about women deacons. A lot of my work has been on women deacons past; some of it has been women deacons present; and I would like to think about women deacons' future, but I have no promises for you. I can tell you that Father Pottier and I spent about two years as appointees by the Holy Father to the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Women in the Diaconate, and I can tell you that we turned in a report, and the Holy Father has it.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Phyllis, can you tell us anything else?

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: No.

For the past two years, the Holy See actually asked me not to give public lectures. I'm delighted to be here at Fordham University, where I actually taught for four years many years ago, and since Fordham bought Marymount I'm kind of a Fordham graduate anyway.

The Holy Father's decision to establish this commission is unique in and of itself. This is the first commission in the history of the church that is 50 percent male and 50 percent female. We met in the conference room of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). I was the only person to be asked to come from North or South America to the commission meetings, which were held over the past two years.

I also had a lot of foundation support, so I was able to live in Rome for about four-and-a-half months over the past two years, and I lived in the home of the Holy Father in Casa Santa Marta, which gave me the opportunity to meet and speak with cardinals and bishops from around the world, from every continent, from every country you can name, including many Eastern Catholic patriarchs. As I speak now, I have in my mind the

Patriarch of Damascus and Syria, the Archbishop of Damascus and Syria, a Maronite, who said: “Yeah. No big deal.” Women deacons are part of our history.

What do we know about women deacons? We know they existed. There is ample literary, epigraphical, and historical evidence that women deacons ministered in the West to the 12th century, actually a little longer in the East, I think.

We know that they existed, and therefore we have three questions posted: What do we know about the liturgical ceremonies that bishops used to create women deacons? What do we know about the tasks and duties of women deacons? What do we know about the theology of the diaconate that would admit or restrict women from diaconal ordination?

I’m not going put you to sleep with footnotes, so let me quickly go through these and try to explain the way in which these items address the question.

So, the liturgical ceremonies. There are several liturgical ceremonies, several ceremonies apparently used in the past by bishops for the creation of women as deacons. These ceremonies are evidenced by manuscripts from the fourth through the 16th century. Some rituals include all of the elements of sacramental ordination, even according to the criteria established by the Council of Trent.

The earliest ordination ritual for women deacons is in the apostolic constitutions, which direct the bishop to “lay hands on her in the presence of the presbyterate, the deacons, and the women deacons,” and to pray a prayer that parallels the one used for the ordination of a deacon, including the epiclesis or the *epiklesis* as the Greeks would say. The epiclesis is the calling down of the Holy Spirit on the *ordinandā*.

The candidate is named in the succession of biblical prophets — Marie, Deborah, Anna, Huldah — and God is asked to bless her in regard to her ministry. And the ordaining bishop places a stole around her neck, and he calls her a deacon. As I say to many people, “If she wasn’t a deacon, they would call her something else.”

Other rituals for women deacons are in many well-known manuscripts from the East and the West. They’re in the Vatican library; they’re in libraries in France; they’re in libraries in Vienna; they’re in a library in Cologne; there’s a library in Mainz; there’s another library in Rome, actually in a church that I walked past many times. I never got in to see it.

While there’s no doubt that women deacons existed, there are differing opinions as to the nature of their ordinations. I had it explained to me just a week ago by a priest who teaches at a local seminary that women deacons were only blessed; they were never ordained.

Well, there are plenty of manuscripts, plenty of documents, and plenty of canons that say priests were only blessed and not ordained. The fact of the matter is the terms we use interchangeably, and when one was considered blessed in the documents, that person is ordained.

The history of the word “ordination” is conflicted and conflated to the point that we seem to think that only men are ordained. This is kind of revisionist history that Father Bernard can speak to better than I.

In any event, the retrospective contention about the nature of these historical ordinations

seems to have begun around the 17th century, and you have Jean Morin explaining — and I saw the book; it's a big book, and I read the whole the thing, of all the ordination ceremonies — and his determination in the middle of the 17th century was these ordinations were sacramental according to the criteria of the Council of Trent.

A hundred years later, in the middle of the 18th century, we have another scholar saying: “No. Even though it looks like they were ordained, they couldn't be ordained.”

Why can't they be ordained? Because they're females. As I like to say, “Did the Holy Spirit say, ‘I can't do it; it's a girl’?”

Anyway, the debate continued more recently, and there were a couple of priests in the middle of the 1970s and 1980s, Roget Gryson wrote affirmatively and then Georges Martimort wrote negatively, but the bottom line is it's not decided.

What's not decided? It's not decided whether they were ordained or blessed. However, the words are used interchangeably. Even Martimort at the end of his work says, “There is no decision on what happened.”

I think that's the biggest problem because history alone to me is not dispositive. We cannot go back in history as if we're in some kind of time machine and try to assert that we know expressly what the bishop meant. For me, if a bishop is laying hands on a woman, invoking the Holy Spirit, putting a stole on her, giving the chalice for her to self-communicate, and calling her a deacon, I don't know what else to say.

More recently, there were two quinquennia, two iterations of the International Theological Commission (ITC), which is a group of scholars appointed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to examine specific questions, and in 1997 the first quinquennia, the first group, finished its report, and the then-current prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, refused to sign it. It was seventeen pages long, and by all accounts it said, “Yeah, women deacons are no big deal.”

But instead, the prefect appointed a second subcommittee which reported out in 2002 basically three things: One, women and men deacons didn't do the same things. They're not exactly the same in terms of what we know they did; second, the diaconate and the priesthood really are two different things, and therefore this is something that magisterium has to decide. At the time, that would be John Paul II, and then the magisterium became headed by Pope Benedict XVI.

That's 2002. The question went to the Holy Father, and in 2016 the International Union of Superiors General was invited to give six questions to the Holy Father in advance. It was very important that he got these questions in advance. And the first two questions involved women in ministry, specifically, what about women deacons, and why not have a commission?

“Yes,” he said. “I think I'll appoint a commission.”

So on the second of August in 2016 I got an email from my friend Father Tom Rosica in Italian giving me congratulations, and I had no idea what he was talking about until I read the list, and because it was in alphabetical order there was my name at the bottom of the list.

So I will tell you, I went into the public relations office at Hofstra University. I said: “I

know you're really busy with the Clinton-Trump debate, but I just got named to a papal commission, and I'm the only person from the Western Hemisphere." So there you go.

So what did women deacons do? We can talk more about it because I'm going to run out of time soon, but basically when people say to me, "Women deacons didn't do what men deacons do," I say: "Yes you know, you're right. Men deacons didn't baptize. Men deacons didn't really have that much to do in baptism."

Women deacons got involved with Chrismation and baptism. Men deacons didn't anoint sick women. As far as I know, men deacons didn't anoint anybody. Men deacons didn't bring the Eucharist to sick women.

Men deacons did not — and this is something the Holy Father brought up, and I was astonished; I'd never heard it before. He said a Syrian professor told him that when a woman was accusing her husband of beating her, the woman went to the woman deacon, and the woman deacon examined the bruises and then gave testimony to the bishop. To me, that's an annulment. Her testimony would allow the bishop to render a judgment of nullity, and right now no woman can do that. No woman can sign the paperwork because no woman is a cleric.

So, women deacons may not have done exactly all that the men deacons did, but the fact of the matter is all over the world women deacons did different things in different places. Men deacons didn't do the same things all over the world either.

The third point that I'd like to make — and we can certainly come back to these — is the theology of the diaconate. The diaconate is affirmed and restored as a permanent, sacramentally ordained ministry following the Second Vatican Council.

In *Lumen Gentium* it's clear. At a lower level of the hierarchy is the diaconate. This causes a problem because of the argument about the unicity of order. If you can ordain somebody a deacon, the argument goes, you can ordain her a priest.

Whereas I say: "Well, you're right. I'm stupid." But I think that when I heard the Holy Father speak in 2006 to the priests of Rome, he said they were *dua binari*, there were two tracks; the diaconate is different from the priesthood.

In fact, in 2009 there was a *motu proprio*. On his own account, Benedict XVI rewrote basically canon law, canons 1008 and 1009, to reflect what's in the catechism, that the diaconate is different from the priesthood and the bishop and the episcopacy.

What we find actually is the fact that the church itself is trying to break away from the problems created by the *cursus honorum*.

What does that mean? Well, around the 12th century you have Gratian codifying canon law. What he codified was basically the progression of order. In order to be ordained a deacon one had to be on the road to priesthood.

Well, women were never really on the road to priesthood. Women never participated in the *cursus honorum*, so gradually, particularly in the West, the female diaconate died out. We do have evidence in the 12th century in Lucca in Italy of Attone ordaining women deacons, but for the most part women deacons were relegated to monasteries and to monastic places.

Coincidentally, the work of the deacon became increasingly liturgical. That is, as the diaconate became subsumed into the priesthood, the deacon was more an honorary — I hate to say “honorary” because it’s denigrating the order, but the deacon was more a participant in the liturgy in very formal ways. In the eighth and ninth centuries the deacon would ride on horseback in front of the pope; the deacon would kiss the pope’s foot. There were all sorts of things going on.

But the *cursus honorum* really is to my mind what ended the diaconate for women.

I think we can decide — among us if not among anyone else — that the main argument that I’ve heard, another main argument I’ve heard, “Women cannot image Christ,” and for that I say, “Please read Number 48 in the Baltimore Catechism that ‘all are made in the image and likeness of God.’”

When we talk about the diaconate, we’re talking about *in persona Christi servae*, in the person of Christ the servant, not *in persona Christi capitis ecclesiae*, not in the person of Christ the head of the church.

I’ll stop now because Father Pottier has much more to say than I on this issue, but we’ll have questions at the end. Thanks so much. Thank you.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Phyllis, nothing made me happier than that morning of August 2nd when I woke you up, a male cleric that I am, and informed you of your appointment to that commission, but I strongly advised you to learn Italian immediately.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: Which I did.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: It’s now my pleasure to introduce to you our second speaker. Shortly before you came in this evening, I had the privilege and pleasure of doing a long *Witness* interview *en français* with our next guest. It’s a marvelous interview that will appear shortly on our television network on the French division, *de moi avec* Father Bernard Pottier, a member of the Society of Jesus, a native of Liège in Belgium.

He’s a faculty member at the Institut D’Etudes Théologiques in Brussels, and a permanent member of the Vatican’s International Theological Commission. He is an eminent scholar who has published many works on philosophy, psychology, patristics, with a specialty on Gregory of Nyssa.

Since the year 2003 Father Pottier has been a member of the Doctrinal Commission of the Bishops’ Conference of Belgium, and he serves as a vicar of the Church of Saint-Jean-Baptiste au Béguinage in Brussels.

Being a Jesuit and Belgian he speaks many languages including French, Dutch, German, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and flawless English I must say as well. It’s my pleasure to introduce to you Father Bernard Pottier.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: You did not wake me up.

FATHER BERNARD POTTIER: Good evening, everybody. *Bonsoir à du monde.*

Many scholars never questioned the received wisdom that women have never been ordained in the Christian West in the years before the Council, but it’s a reality. It’s a very popular topic now. Between 1960 and 2000 about 800 books and articles have been written about that, among them the books of Phyllis Zagano and mine here about

diaconate.

It's true that never have they been ordained priests. That is true. But for the scholars, even the idea to be ordained was a fantasy. It was not possible.

But really, after all the scholarship we have produced it's possible to see that there is much evidence of various kinds of literature, etc., that ordination was a real ordination during about twelve centuries, more or less eight or nine centuries in the Eastern church. It began later in the West, more or less in the fifth century, but it continued until the 11th and 12th century.

I think in the history — I am a theologian; I studied a lot of history, too — it's very important to examine the roots of our faith. Our faith is not whatever, what we think, what we have pleasure to do, etc. It has roots first in the Bible, in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ, and the apostles, and what the church has done. We have not to be afraid before history.

In history we have not a source of rigidity and immobility. On the contrary, we have a lot of arguments to progress and to understand the past, the future, and the present, of course.

The Second Vatican Council is a milestone in the reflection about the church and about the sacrament of ordination. I think so. Why?

The relations between priest and bishop are completely differently conceived after the Council. The conception of Saint Jerome is past. It's not the actual conception now.

For example, the Order of the Consecrated Virgins is now again an order lost for centuries and centuries. It was restored after the Council, and today there are more or less 3000 consecrated virgins in the world. It's not a lot, but it's new and very old.

For the deacons, the married deacons, also the permanent deacons, it's also a big deal because the text restored the possibility of a diaconate of married men and for a permanent state of life during all the life, not as a step to priesthood.

So it was only in 1967 and 1922 the text giving the authorization to do that, and now we have 45,000 deacons in the world and 18,000 in the United States. So, after fifty years we see a very big change in the church.

But there are questions coming mostly from Germany and from the United States about the diaconate, not only the men but also the possibility of a diaconate of women. The Bishops' Conference of Germany three times asked the pope to reflect about that. Is it possible to ordain women deacons? The U.S. Bishops' Conference did the same.

The answer was they cannot be ordained priests. The question is deacon, and the answer is priest. Yes.

That doesn't matter. Another question, the same: Is it possible, and it was the answer of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), in 1976, and now it's Pope John Paul II himself in 1994, and the answer was again, not priests.

But the reflection continues. I think the reflection continues with the documents of the ITC. Professor Zagano spoke about that.

With the decision of Pope Benedict XVI with the change in canon law, the definition of the sacrament of ordination is different. Before all the mentality of the theologians, there was a unity of the sacrament. And it's true; there is a unity, but that unity is not deacon is a future priest and is perhaps a future bishop. That is not the unity of a sacrament. The unity is we are representing Christ on Earth with the grace of God.

But in a different way deacons as Christ are humble and priest and bishop as Christ the leader and king in the governance of the church, as the head of the church. So there is really a difference between deacon, diaconate, and priesthood and bishop. That is progress I think, and Pope Benedict XVI recognized that with big honesty because intellectually he is very honest. He wanted to make the point on that issue.

In the history there is another huge turning point in the Gregorian reform. The Gregorian reform, 12th century, Gregory VII initiated a reform, and that reform had many consequences. At that time, in 1054, West and East churches separated, the big Schism of the Orient and the Occident.

For me, that was very important because the Western church began to think on its own without the mystical spirituality of the East, thinking that rationality and law and legalistic thought were more important. We have had a series of important administrative laws but also sacramental and theological issues, for example, the big *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, of course, that are very beautiful products of the Western church.

But on the other side, we have lost a little bit what is the sacrament, what is the spirituality, the grace of the sacrament. The West wanted to do everything clear and everything simple, so the sacrament of ordination is very simple. You have a *cursus honorum*, a sort of scale. You have to pass by all the steps, not missing one, of course, and the deacon is only a step to priesthood.

So diaconate lost completely his substance, his own definition, and for me, so we can say that the diaconate disappeared as diaconate. It was only a step.

Some say: "No, no. Male diaconates existed always." Yes, always, but not like in the beginning, not always like male and female diaconates like in the past.

The Western church has resisted a lot against the deaconesses. An example: We can read in a book there the Council of Burgundy in 533 — the Council is here in Latin — the bishops gathered there say, "We don't want to have that kind of widow deaconesses in our region." Yes.

Two years later, 535, Emperor Justinian explained that in the cathedral, in the Church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, the number of clerics would be a maximum of 425, among them a maximum of forty deaconesses. Two years later in the East, a maximum of forty deaconesses, and they are known in dioceses. So the mentality was very different.

I will stop here perhaps. I have more details from the history, but I think from the beginning East, West, and finally the Gregorian reform is the first big piece of the history, very important. Afterward, we have the reform, the Second Lateran Council, finally the Council of Trent, of course, the Second Vatican Council, and there we have a second very important turning point, and the tradition began not with the Gregorian reform.

Thank you.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: [Speaking French] The most important thing there at the beginning: Let us not be afraid of history. History is not meant to enchain us but to free us.

Our next speaker has been a friend of mine for over twenty years. Sister Donna Ciangio is a Dominican Sister of Caldwell, New Jersey, and was recently appointed as the chancellor of the Archdiocese of Newark by Cardinal Joseph Tobin. She is the director of lay leadership consultation and works internationally and nationally in promoting parish vitality and pastoral direction, congregational and leadership development, faith formation, small faith communities, consulting with parishes and dioceses, and in many other areas. She served as the international coordinator for the RENEW program of the Paulist Fathers.

When I first met Sister, she was working closely with Monsignor Philip Murnian at the National Pastoral Life Center here in New York. She has also been a consultant for the Jesuit Conference of the United States.

Sister serves in her spare time as the director of adult faith formation at St. Rose of Lima Church in Short Hills, New Jersey. She is an adjunct faculty member in Drew University's Doctor of Ministry program, and she has written widely for Catholic publications.

Ladies and gentlemen, Sister Donna.

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: First of all, I'd like to apologize for my cold. So I have a kind of alarm to call voice tonight, but hopefully it will work.

But I'd like to say good evening to all of you here and all who are participating through Salt and Light TV. The other day I sent out the link to this all over the world to all my friends in different places, so hopefully they'll be watching it or they'll be able to see it at a different time.

I'd like to thank the distinguished panel, who are way more distinguished than I am, for asking me to give a "people in the pew" view of women deacons.

I need to start off with a disclaimer, and the disclaimer is this: I am not an academic; I am not a scholar; nor am I a researcher. I've been blessed in my life to be involved and invited into many ministries that have formed me and produced a lively curiosity in myself about faith and church, especially where it has to do with forming people and bringing them closer to Christ. My main mission I feel is trying to figure out ways to bring people to an encounter with Christ.

I appreciate the scholarship of all the people who have been researching and writing on the topic of women deacons, especially Dr. Phyllis Zagano — we have become great friends; she has influenced me and formed me — and also Father Tom Rosica, who pointed me to Phyllis and to this very important topic.

So again, my part on the panel is to represent what I hear parishioners saying about the possibility of women deacons in the Roman Catholic Church.

I have to also give another disclaimer: I can't speak for the 19,000 parishes in the United States, but I have spoken to many people and have had many people speak to many

people and give me feedback around this topic. I also want to thank some of the parishioners who are here from our parish.

But I think back to early days when lay people and religious were invited to become Eucharistic ministers. Many of you will remember that. I could not believe at that time that we were able to participate in this great ministry. I never thought in my lifetime, when I was playing Eucharist with a button as a little kid, that it would ever happen and be such a significant ministry. It's still a very significant ministry for me in my parish. It brings me total great joy to be able to pass on the Eucharist to somebody else.

But I can remember that at that time I believed anything was possible in the church for women just from that simple allowing us to do this thing.

But as we know, as we hear here, things move slowly in the church. Yet today, think about this: We have women alter servers; we have women lecturers; we have women in key ministries and parishes, in dioceses; we have women as parish administrators — we'd like to see more of that; we have lay ecclesial ministers all around this country; we have women who are serving as hospital chaplains, and more.

I myself have seen and experienced so much growth in this area over the years. I am forever open, hopeful, and hoping that more will happen.

Just to set a context about my particular parish. The parish that I currently serve in is a mix of cultures and ecclesiologies. It's known as a wealthy parish, but most parishioners are middle class or retired and are of all ages. Our oldest, Helen, is 102 years old, and still comes to stuff envelopes and is in church every Sunday. She doesn't drive, however.

We have a large middle-aged population, younger middle-aged, with children and lots of new babies and baptisms. We have people moving in from Hoboken; we have people moving in from Jersey City; we have people moving in from Manhattan once they have their second child. We're right on the train line to New York.

I asked a few parishioners about the possibility of women deacons, and the first answer I got — I just want to show you Sister Sandy sitting here — “Aren't you and Sister Sandy deacons already?”

Sister Sandy is our worship director and the emcee of all the masses and liturgical events of the parish and many other ministries in the parish. Sister Sandy and I have the opportunity to work with young couples, preparing them for baptism of their children. We ask them when they come together — because we try to do an informal conversation with people — “Is there anything that keeps you from embracing the church fully?” We're trying to open up the conversation for them.

Here's what we hear. I'm going to do a lot of quoting, but these quotes to me are so significant and so heartfelt.

One young woman said: “My children ask me, ‘Why can't women be priests or deacons?’ I have no answer that satisfies them.”

I've actually — and I think you have, Sandy — had young girls ask us this on Sundays: “Why can't we be priests?” Or “Why aren't you a deacon?”

“Our women in the parish” — this is another quote — “do the bulk of the teaching and leading small-faith sharing groups. They are the teachers. They help us with our

spirituality and faith. If they feel God is calling them to be deacons, we would support them and be very happy.”

Another quote: “The women’s staff in our parish are visible and have important roles, but they don’t lead prayer or preach. I think they should.”

“Deacons are ordained for service. I would like to see our women, who do the bulk of the service and training of leaders, become deacons to both serve and be recognized for their calling.”

So that seems to be the big thing, about being recognized, and also to be able to preach: “We would like to hear women preach. They are more relevant.” It’s a quote. I didn’t make this up.

“We see our women staff leading faith formation, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), baptism, stewardship, and other ministries. We would like to see them as deacons.”

I’ll just give you another one: “All around in business and government women have significant visible roles except in the church. Why? It’s time for the church to catch up and recognize the full dignity and abilities of women.”

We recently had a very interesting reception in the diocese, and it was for law enforcement, all law enforcement — the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), everybody came. One of the women that I met, she was coming down the hall. I introduced myself and said, “Hi, what do you do?”

She says, “I’m the chief of police of East Orange, New Jersey.” I was like, whoa.

She says — nobody would mess with her, either. So then she said to me, “What do you do?”

“I’m the chancellor of the diocese because I’m new, five months and fifteen days as of today.”

She says, “Whoa.” So we had a great conversation about the glass ceiling going on.

Another person asked, “I wonder how the priests would receive women deacons.” It was very interesting.

One 22-year-old man — he’s a Millennial — has been very involved in the parish in service to the altar, very well trained by Sister Sandy. He reflected on this. He said: “One of the reasons I became so in love with my faith is because of the women in our parish. The sisters taught me what it meant to be an active person in my faith and how being spiritual isn’t just sitting and going to church in the pew.”

“The women religious taught me that there are so many ways to be spiritual, such as teaching religious education, assisting on the altar, running retreats, or performing acts of stewardship and service. The women don’t just encourage it, but they lead the charge and help us realize the many components of being Catholic.” That’s from a 22-year-old.

Let’s see. Here’s another one from another Millennial: “In our parish the women do so much whether they’re religious sisters or lay staff. They make our parish environment

spiritual and uplifting and fun. Having women as deacons would be such a breath of fresh air in our faith.”

So I have tons of quotes from various ages.

Sister Sandy and I were introduced to Phyllis Zagano in just the spring of 2018. In one way it was an accidental meeting. Father Tom Rosica had suggested to Phyllis that she get some catechetical materials to go along with the book *Women Deacons*. Father Tom gave my phone number to Phyllis, who called me.

I was shocked to have Phyllis call me because she’s the goddess of women deacons, right? So I have to say, when she goes, “Hi, Donna, this is Phyllis Zagano,” just like I knew her like forever, and I was like: “Phyllis Zagano?” You can imagine. It’s true.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Donna, that’s what I say each time she calls me.

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: Well, I was looking at her as an icon.

I called Sandy and I said to her: “Sandy, Phyllis Zagano’s on the phone.”

So here was Phyllis now asking for Sandy and myself to work on reflection as a study guide for the book *Women Deacons*, and Sandy and I just looked at each other in shock. She had no idea who we were, but I guess with Tom’s backing — you know, he said, “Let them do it” or whatever.

So we did produce the study guide. The best thing about the study guide — it was a lot of work truthfully to do the study guide because this little book is so jam-packed. So we tried to produce a study guide that was going to help people read this and then reflect on it.

The key thing that we did was after we produced the study guide we had a group made up of about twelve parishioners from different parishes around. This was exciting. My whole background in small groups, it’s very exciting for me to do something like that.

Their ages ranged from Millennials to Baby Boomers. One works in the parish as a director of religious education (DRE), others as parishioners, some in liturgical ministries, some who came to the faith through RCIA, whatever. We tried to get a whole bunch of different kinds of people in that. One of the reasons we were trying to get different people obviously was to have different opinions.

So in the beginning I have to say some were a little skeptical about the notion of women deacons and wondered why we invited them. As we discussed each chapter, this is what we noticed — we did it in four sessions — they became more and more interested, but they became more and more agitated.

The first chapter on the history of women deacons by Gary Macy, the DRE, very well-educated, said: “This makes me so angry. Why didn’t we know about the history of suppression of women deacons? What is this all about besides keeping women out of ministry?” That’s a direct quote. I didn’t make that up.

Then, the unfortunate news broke about the sex abuse scandal in Pennsylvania. This was all going on now at the same time we were right in the middle of our small group, and the news about Cardinal McCarrick, which obviously affected our diocese very much. The McCarrick revelations devastated our archdiocese and our parish because he was a

frequent visitor to our parish, and everybody loved him.

So what happened in the group now was a huge depression and even a questioning of the church and the faith. So Sandy and I had our hands full trying to hold everybody together and keep them settled down and focused on Jesus, keep our faith together.

As a result — and this was amazing — the group became convinced that it's no longer acceptable not to have women deacons in parishes or in significant leadership positions in the church. And it was not just reactionary — that kind of pushed everybody over the edge — but it was a result of the study and the education that they had through this book and through our small group together.

We did ask the group a particular question, the one that Phyllis and Bernard were talking about. The question is, would people mix up women deacons with priests? The answer was overwhelmingly no. Everybody said: "We have deacons in our parish. We know who they are. We know who the priests are. Why would we mix up women deacons with priests?" They were like, "Why are you even asking that question?"

We did make sure that the group understood — they read it in the book — that deacons are not a step toward priesthood as Bernard was talking about, but deacons are a permanent right in itself restored in the Vatican Council II.

We also talked a lot about this is a vocation. This isn't just, "Okay, I'm going to be a deacon." It's about a calling and a discernment to do that, just like in other vocations in our lives, whether it be parenting, whether it be religious life, whether it be priesthood, whatever.

One of the great things that happened through technology is that Phyllis was able to be at our last session via Skype. It was a very exciting experience for the group to have Phyllis there, to meet her, and to thank her for all her work and dedication, and I think it was good for you, Phyllis, to hear their appreciation and their insights and their questions. They still talk about it. They'd like to have you back.

At the time we had the group, there was an expectation — we were hoping — that Pope Francis would issue a statement in November as a result of the study and all the work that they've done on the commission about ordaining women deacons. Our group was hoping and still is hoping and praying that there would be a movement forward toward ordaining women deacons.

They said — this is a quote — they would be "devastated if this didn't happen." And they ask Sister Sandy and me constantly, "Is there any news from the Holy Father?"

We can only assume that with all the revelations about the scandal and other issues this is not on the top pile on his desk, but our group insists on going to talk to him. They would like to be there.

Anyway, it was a marvelous experience with the group.

I'll just give you a couple others. I'll give you one, my friend Jane, who is a pastoral associate here at St. Francis de Sales parish. One of her friends, who is a prominent artist and lecturer, wrote this to her: "Dear Deacon Jane, I've always been in favor" — Jane, are you here? Oh, there you are.

“Dear Deacon Jane, I’ve always been in favor of women being ordained as deacons and now more than ever at this point in church history. I believe we are in an age of reform just as monumental and church-shattering as the Protestant Reformation 500 years ago. Our current abuse crisis is not the problem; it’s merely a symptom of a much deeper, systematic, institutional problem, all related to clericalism and the irrelevance of power and authority. We need women leaders more than ever.”

That’s Mickey McGrath.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Donna, I want to thank you.

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: I got one more thing.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: All right.

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: So this engagement with Phyllis, the book, writing the study guide, and interviewing parishioners, has been a very fulfilling experience and an education for Sandy and myself. Phyllis, we’re really grateful, and Tom, for this call that we received, and we are planning to have another group of professionals. We’re hoping to see this happen in many other parishes.

So we continue to pray to the Holy Spirit for change, for guidance, and to renew our church that again we can say we can truly bring Jesus Christ to everybody and help all encounter him in ways that speak to our time. This really, I believe, is our mission. Amen.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Sister Donna, I’d like to thank you again for sharing with us reality from the pews, from the base, from where we all are.

I want to pose one question to each of our presenters before we open up the question to the audience. I’ll ask Phyllis the first question, which I know many people have written to me and said, “Ask her what it was like to be inside *Domus Sanctae Marthae* for those long periods of time with predominantly a male household, with one male there wearing white, and she was part of the group that was there.” Phyllis, what was it like? What was the food like?

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: The food was great. I was pretty easy to spot. Everybody else seemed to be wearing black. Actually, I was working in the library every day, and I wasn’t very dressed up.

But the experience of sitting with the working church at the hierarchical level of cardinals, archbishops, men who – I couldn’t believe their travel schedules, just to begin with. But the experience of sitting with them I think was humbling.

You know this. Many people don’t know. I spent thirty-one years as a naval officer as a Reserve officer in the United States Navy, and I joined the Navy to understand how the church worked. It’s a men’s organization. You may have heard about it. They drive ships. But I also learned how to work with men and to understand it’s a different dynamic.

So I would be at a table of cardinals and archbishops because they were in transit as well, and I wouldn’t speak, and the table would go around, and you are the archbishop of someplace, and you are the bishop of someplace, and you were the cardinal. And they would say finally, “And who are you?”

And I said, “Well, the Holy Father has appointed me to the Commission for the Study of Women in the Diaconate.”

And they didn’t leave. They sat and they engaged me in very interesting conversation. I remember one cardinal from South America. I said, “What do you think about women deacons?”

And he whipped out his cellphone, and he starts showing me pictures. I said, “What are you showing me?”

And he kept going and going and going. He said, “They’re driving me through a favela,” through a slum.

I said, “Cardinal, how many priests do you have in your archdiocese?”

He said, “Four hundred.”

I said, “How many Catholics do you have in your archdiocese?”

He said, “Five million.”

I can tell you that at least one French archbishop wanted to take me home with him. They need the help.

Father Sosa — I had an audience with the Father General of the Jesuits, and he explained to me that in Venezuela he knew of a parish with two priests and fourteen different chapels that they had to attend to. They couldn’t get to all of them.

So the experience of living with these men, I got very little pushback. They knew I did not mean women priests; they knew about the history of women deacons, I must say. In certain parts of the world some men from Southeast Asia, from very, very poor areas said: “We don’t even have deacons. We can’t afford to have men study as deacons, let alone women deacons.”

Other parts of the world, particularly Africa, actually one cardinal told me I was pushing an American idea on him. I said, “Nobody’s pushing anything on anybody because your Episcopal Conference would have to decide, and after that your individual bishops would decide.”

So, what was it like? I couldn’t encapsulate it. I was there for four-and-a-half months over the past two years in about five or six different trips, and it was extraordinary.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Thank you, Phyllis. A question for Father Pottier: As a member of the International Theological Commission, being a male, being a Jesuit, being a historian and a priest, how did you feel that your experience on the Theological Commission, the Commission for the Belgian Bishops, helped you at those Commission meetings for the women diaconate?

FATHER BERNARD POTTIER: Yes. It’s a very good experience already with the Bishops’ Conference in Belgium. In general we were only with men, it’s true, but now we have two or three women.

Personally, I work very easily when the group is mixed. I think we have better ideas and we are more aware of the problems and so on. It's not so easy. We have to collaborate more, but I think it's more productive.

Personally, too, before I continue with the commission, I worked for fifteen as a psychologist with a lady who is a psychiatrist, married, with five children. We have written a book together. It's very open-minded to work.

I think it's not a question of complementarity; I do what you cannot do, and she does what I cannot do. It's not that. It's a question of promotion. It's a question of dialectical promotion. I think I am more a man when I work with a woman, and I think women together they taught me that sometimes together they lose time or I don't know what. When a man comes, they think otherwise and better, and we, too. I think it's sort of promotion. It's not a question of power, or it should not be a question of power. It's a question of collaboration.

For the ITC, International Theological Commission, there are only four women out of thirty members, and in our subcommission we have two women, one from Austria and another from Canada, English speaking. There it was more difficult because in the ITC the question of the language is very difficult.

It's very interesting, but it's the reason why you have five years to write a document, and I think it's not too long because we have to understand the topic, etc., but also to manage with the languages. In Belgium it's already the case because the commission is bilingual, Dutch and French. We have to speak both languages already.

In this commission, fifty-fifty women and men. It was for me very interesting to see that women had more a consensus and more a common way of thinking than men. Men, every one has his manner of thinking and thinks that he is right with his manner of thinking, and it's very difficult to accept that the other has also a good idea. But together we go ahead, yes.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Thank you, Father. I was happy to be in solidarity with Sister Donna when she and I shared the same experience each time Phyllis calls us, and my receptionist and the secretary says, "It's Phyllis on the phone," and both Sister Donna and I say, "Oh, God."

Sister Donna, my question to you would be: You worked in two of the most progressive, hopeful groups in the Catholic Church in the past thirty or forty years, that being the RENEW Program, a great program of transformation using small groups and parishes, and then the wonderful work of the National Pastoral Life Center with Father Philip Murnian. How did those two experiences help you as you tried to envision women as deacons?

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: I would have to say that working with RENEW was very formative for me because I was actually working with RENEW before RENEW became RENEW, and the idea of being trained by Tom Kleissler, who actually put RENEW together with a group of people, and the whole idea of being able to work in small faith communities changed my whole way of thinking about church. Before that, I would see church probably more, I don't know, ecclesially or something like that.

And I have to tell you that my very first experience in small groups in a parish was one of fear because here I was, I was newly professed, and I thought, *They're going to ask me questions I don't know the answer to.* It's the people in the pews I would say that were

really very formative in my life to be able to do this.

I think also the people in the pews and all the places that I've been in the world working with Phil at the National Pastoral Life Center, there was never any kind of a thing where you weren't equal. I've worked with priests all my life. My whole life has been working in ministry with priests. I've trained pastors. I've done all that kind of stuff. I work in my diocese with many priests, and that whole notion of being equal in ministry has been very formative for me. I've had experiences that have not been so formative as well, but I can usually work with the guys.

The key thing is that I think it's the affirmation of the people because I thought about women deacons, talked to different people about it, but it was never something that was right here for me, but now it's right here. Like I said in my remarks here, so many people have said, "We thought you were a deacon already," so there's that kind of affirmation.

One of the comments I have also in the paper is about women preaching. I'm a Dominican. We're supposed to be the order of preachers, and over the years — 800 years that we have — we've always said, "Well, we preach in different ways." But that doesn't satisfy me anymore.

One of the comments here from one of the young people in the parish was, "The women religious are allowed to speak when it's time to do the collection for women religious," but there are so many other ways that we can do it.

So I'd say that for me liturgically to be able to preach would be something that would be very important, and I think Sandy would feel the same way that way. But it's all been very formative for me.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Thank you very much.

I'll now begin. We've received many questions, and we've grouped them together, some of the similar questions. So I'll begin, and I'll leave it up to the three panelists to decide who would answer. Someone may feel more called to answer a specific question.

"Do you anticipate that Pope Francis might give the green light for individual bishops and cardinals to ordain women deacons in their dioceses, or would it be wiser that the Holy Father allow the decision up to episcopal conferences to decide if this is a need and a possibility in a particular country?"

Father Pottier? [Speaks French]

FATHER BERNARD POTTIER: I think the pope has to make a decision, perhaps not right now. Perhaps it's not ripe; I don't know. But the pope has to speak before the Bishops' Conference I think. For the application for the practice, yes, it's up to the conferences.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: When the diaconate was rolled out it was up to episcopal conferences to discuss and request from Rome permission. Ireland only asked about six years ago to have deacons. Then, individual bishops would decide on their own whether they want deacons or not. I can tell you from discussions with some bishops in Ireland they don't want to have deacons until they can have women deacons.

But the only reason to ordain more deacons is a need for more deacons, and this has been

my interest all along. I think the church is crying for ministry. Should the Holy Father suggest to the episcopal conferences that they can request permission for women in the diaconate, I think it would be up to individual bishops to see what ministries they needed in their diocese.

And I can tell you, speaking with the cardinals and bishops in the Casa Santa Marta, they understood the need for ministry, and really that's what it's all about, as Donna said, bringing Jesus Christ to the people of God.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: “As a newly ordained permanent deacon for the past eighteen months, I've greatly benefited from deacon-oriented women in my parish who are Christ servant examples. What concrete actions can be done by laity and clergy and people like myself, a permanent deacon, to help the laity progress toward the ordination of women deacons?”

Sister Donna?

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: I would just start by reading this book with people and the study guide.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: If I can make a small commercial, I think Bob Burns is here someplace, and they do have books downstairs at a nominal fee. However, the study guide is available on my web page for a free download. I had thought about printing them all for you, but it got too expensive. But you can download this for free.

The book has also then published in Paris, France, and in Canada in French, and the study guide will be available soon on my web page and on the web page of Femmes et Ministeres in Canada. The study guide is available, and this book is also on Kindle and things like that.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: [Speaks French]

“Does the church have a moral obligation to ordain women deacons and priests when the church does not have enough male deacons or priests?”

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: I'm not sure I understand the question, but I think the church — by “church,” that's us, and we have the right to call forth people to service.

I can tell you that friends of the Holy Father have told me that the Holy Father wants women deacons discussed. He wants the matter discussed. Our moral obligation is to do whatever it is to bring the gospel to the people of the world. So however that works, that's what the moral obligation is, I think.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: *Père Pottier?*

FATHER BERNARD POTTIER: The document of 1972 proposed the two ministers of lector and acolyte for all lay people. The practice was no all-lay people but only men and only future seminarians. So it's not lay people. It's lay people becoming clerics.

I think it's a pity to see that the document opened a way, and we have not had the creativity to demand more ministers, more ministers for many more people. I think to create more ministers in the parishes, perhaps not officially, but the pastor can do that and so on, offer a service and engage himself very seriously in a manner to open the way to ordination of women deacons.

Also, the job of the male deacons is very important I think to explain by the practice that they need also women deacons next to them.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Thank you.

This is a question directed to Sister Donna Ciangio: “Being chancellor is at least as important as being a deacon. Talk about that. Is your authority as a woman chancellor of a major archdiocese recognized, challenged, or encouraged?”

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: First of all, when cardinal called me in to ask me, I thought he was — well, I was coming to complain about something. When he called me in and asked me, I thought I was going to work with my friend Father Tim here on getting some parish councils revived in our diocese, and the cardinal said, “You don’t want to be the delegate for religious, do you?”

I said, “No.”

He says, “Well, I’d really like you to be the chancellor.”

I was like, “What?”

I was like shaking because I was like, *This is the Archdiocese of Newark, my diocese. The chancellor?* So I was very kind of like nervous about it.

When I left, I thought, *He didn’t really say that.*

However, the reaction that I have gotten from parishioners across the diocese, from priests across the diocese, from people outside of the diocese has been unbelievable. Even yesterday, when we were downtown, I was at a RENEW presentation with a group, and I got a lot of affirmation there. They don’t even know me from a hole in the head. People are very happy.

I’m not the first woman chancellor in our diocese; I’m the third actually. So all the way going back to Archbishop Gerety, there was a woman chancellor and vicar of education, so there were people in those major roles.

It’s not the same as being a deacon. It’s a whole different thing, but I haven’t really come to grips yet with what it means to be the chancellor of the Archdiocese of Newark, to be honest with you. I know it’s a lot of work. We have a lot of stuff that we need to do. But I’d say it’s a very privileged position to be in. I’m very grateful to the cardinal for appointing me and still surprised every day about it.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: The cardinal, of course, she’s mentioning is Cardinal Joseph Tobin from the Archdiocese of Newark.

The next question: “As a woman with a desire to be a deacon, one who was called by community assent, I have serious questions about becoming part of a clerical system that is presently so very wounded and damaged. How can I reconcile my desire to be a deacon with the need for sacramental grace in a very highly troubled church?”

Phyllis.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: Thanks.

I think we're all struggling. It's a great testimony to your faith that you're here, even to think about it and talk about it as our wounded church moves through its own sinfulness.

It is hard to be — I always was told you're either part of the problem or part of the solution, and I think if the people of God call you, if you're able and can serve as a deacon, do it. If it is a vocation, I think that all the other things will fall away, not immediately and not forever. There are doubts in anyone's vocation.

But to have faith — I say to people, "Don't complain about the salespeople; just think about the product." We are people of the gospel, and I keep coming back to that. The job of the deacon is to preach, to preach the word of God, to preach the gospel.

I have often said the answer to every question is found in the scripture, and certainly in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who record for us a part of the story. I think that all of you here live the rest of the story.

To someone who has a vocation for church service, whatever it would be, please, you may be the only Christ people need today. So just keep on keeping on and think about the other one, think about the other person.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Father Pottier?

FATHER BERNARD POTTIER: Yes. I think that the same is for the young men who have the desire to become a priest or a religious today. I think they have to be very courageous. Fifty years ago it was perhaps easier, I don't know, or an honor to become a seminarian. Today it's very difficult to say to his parents or to his friends, "I engage myself in this church."

But precisely as Phyllis said, it's a question of faith and courage and confidence and trust in the grace of God. I think so. We have to engage ourselves with the poor we are, and so with the church of Jesus Christ.

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: And I would just like to add you gotta have a passion for it. It's gotta be your passion. You gotta have that sense of mission and ministry. If I'm never ordained a deacon, I've got the passion, you know? I've got the desire.

And I know that that's my calling. My calling is to try to do the best I can to bring Christ and witness Christ to all the people I'm called to work with. I think that's a real key thing. It's got to be that fire in the belly.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Father Pottier, this question is directed to you: "Can you say more about why the female diaconate, the women diaconate, died out? Is this related to the Great Schism in 1054? Was there a definitive point when it died out? Were there particular reasons that caused its demise? And if it was never formally abolished, why did it not reemerge?"

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: Wow. That's the history of the church.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: These are very simple questions. Thank you, folks.

FATHER BERNARD POTTIER: I think the disappearance of women deacons is the result of many trends, a confluence of many reasons.

For me, yes, the Schism with the East is a reason because the rationality and the spirit and mind of laws and so on is one thing. Theologians and canonists wanted to define exactly what is a sacrament with clear words, to say what is not, what is it, etc. That's one thing.

Another point is at that time the West was a little bit in struggle between church and kings and emperors and so on. So, whether "*la querelle des investitures*," it was a very big deal. Who is more powerful, the church or the emperor or the king and so on?

So I think the church wanted a hierarchy that was very strong, very organized, very male. It was sort of a challenge for the church to be at the level of the emperor or the king and so on, and to have a hierarchy mostly male is a sign that they are strong, no?

Within the church that struggle, that balance, was reflected with precisely the clergy only male, only men. So the clergy against the lay people, the families, the lords, the properties, and so on. This is a second factor.

A third factor is the series of steps to become a priest. Women were never engaged in a series of steps. To become what? No.

They were deacons. It was a state of life. From the moment you say the diaconate has no substance, service like Christ's servant and so on, that is not important. What is important is the aim to be a priest, to be the master of the game.

So that disappeared with this consistency, and reflecting that on the female side disappeared completely because it was nothing serious.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: A question for Phyllis: "We are speaking very much about sacraments and about orders. Why don't we talk about women cardinals who don't have to be priests?"

Phyllis, what do you think about women being appointed cardinals?

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: I was already nominated. Jim Keenan at Boston College, a Jesuit, nominated eight women to be cardinals. It's actually easier I think to have a woman cardinal than it is to have a woman deacon because a cardinal is simply an advisor to the pope. It's not a rank of the hierarchy; it is, such as I say, an advisor to the pope, and the pope can do what he wants.

Is it likely? I don't think so. It certainly would be a game changer in terms of saying to the world that women are equal.

I read every day in the paper that a woman has died in India in a hut that she had to stay in because she was menstruating; I read of women beaten to death because they had the wrong boyfriend in Saudi Arabia; I read of women who have had to run away from their families, Iranian women, because they were going to be forced to marry someone they didn't know; I read about child marriages.

The issue for us here is very pressing. It is ministry, but I think the larger issue is a mission to minister to the world of women, most of whom are not Catholic but who suffer under ancient taboos and ridiculous kinds of strictures that forbid their growth — their intellectual growth, their human growth — and their living full lives as people, and people

of God. It doesn't have to be of a Christian God, just to recognize that women are made in the image and likeness of God.

So anything, whether it's a woman cardinal, a woman deacon, I think would be helpful in that respect.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: "Many of us came here this evening with great hopes that we would hear some positive news about the real possibility of women as deacons. We still don't have an answer. Does the reliance on historical evidence weaken because of what has taken place through the commission's work? What has changed with this particular study in relation to the two previous studies on the same question?"

FATHER BERNARD POTTIER: I think we have more and more evidence that it was so, and perhaps two or three scholars knew that before, but now more and more scholars, more and more people, lay people, know that.

So it's important. That argument that it was not so before is not sustainable anymore. So I see in the opponents of the ordination of women other arguments are coming now about the theology of the sacrament, the unity of the sacrament, but with the text of Pope Benedict XVI that argument falls, too.

So I think it's like a slow reflection together to get the evidence that it is possible. So I think perhaps there is nothing very new, but it's more and more in evidence for everybody, also in the clergy.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: "If the papal commission, the report that has been placed on the pope's desk, receives a negative response or that the pope says the time is not right at this moment, what then should we do?"

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: I'm not the pope, and I'm certainly not the Holy Spirit. I think the church will call forth what it needs. To delay a positive answer is a negative answer.

I think it's up to the church to make noise, and he has said in other cases, make noise. Well, make noise.

But I have great sense that the Holy Father — and actually from having seen him up close — he's a man of deep, deep prayer, genuine prayer. This guy is for real, and I have a sense that he will know the time to say something.

We have coming forward actually, May 6-10, a triennial meeting of the International Union of Superiors General, the women who originally asked. If I were the pope, I wouldn't want to walk into 900 nuns without an answer.

And he also has the Synod on the Amazon coming up. I think it's paragraph 19 that has in its Lineamenta the working document question about ministry for women. If you look at paragraph 55 of the document from the Synod on Youth, very strong words about having women in ministry. So the church itself is making noise, and the pope is a man of consensus, but consensus in terms of not we all agree until everything becomes gray but rather consensus in hearing what the church needs.

I don't know what Bernard would like to answer more, but I am not afraid, and my hope is that the pope will do for the church what he thinks best.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: There are many women religious here in the room, and we

have a woman religious here at the table, so perhaps Sister Donna would answer this question: “When a woman religious feels that she has a calling to the diaconate, would this betray her initial calling to consecrated life?”

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: No. Actually, I learned a lot in the book, especially in Phyllis’ chapter — I feel like I’m the book salesperson.

There are many ways that it could happen, and what I found really fascinating was that a woman religious would not necessarily — if I have this right, Phyllis — be subject to the bishop but more to the religious order. So you could serve as a deacon in the religious order. You could serve it in the larger church as well. So there would be some kind of relationship in the diaconate that way.

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: The men do it.

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: Yes, right.

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: [Inaudible]

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: Ask a Jesuit. Right. But when you think of women’s roles or any religious roles within their congregations, they are doing these kinds of jobs anyway, so I think of people in our infirmary who are there when people are dying, and we have priests in our infirmary as well. They’re not anointing per se, but they are laying hands on people and praying for them and so forth. So there are many jobs already that women religious are doing within the congregations, let alone in the larger church. So to me it’s kind of a natural thing. But again, you have to feel called to be able to take that step to diaconate.

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: If I may say, I have two of my secret canon lawyers here, both priests, and one said to me about an hour ago, “It just depends on where she’s incardinated.” That’s the answer.

SISTER DONNA CIANGIO: Okay.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Before I turn it back to David Gibson, let me just offer you three points as I listen to our panelists this evening.

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: There’s more questions about [inaudible].

FATHER TOM ROSICA: About women’s ordination? That’s what we’ve been talking about. Oh.

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: [Inaudible].

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: I can hum a few bars while we’re waiting.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Just repeat the question for me.

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: [Inaudible]

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Okay. This question, we’ve been speaking about ordination to the diaconate for women. What about ordination to the priesthood?

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: Yes, that's it. If you don't mind reading [inaudible].

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: That has nothing to do with what we're talking about tonight.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Our topic this evening has been very specifically ordination to the diaconate.

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: [Inaudible]

PHYLLIS ZAGANO: We can't hear you, first of all.

DAVID GIBSON: I think we made it very clear. Again, we have an audience here. We have our online audience. They can't hear you. We've talked about these two different tracks. We're happy to speak with you afterward. The issue of women's ordination to the priesthood and women's ordination to the diaconate, two very different things, and I think we have to recognize that, and I think we need to respect the rest of the audience and our time, please.

AUDIENCE [off-mic]: [Inaudible]

DAVID GIBSON: I appreciate it. You're going to have to sit down.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Thank you very much.

DAVID GIBSON: Thank you very much.

FATHER TOM ROSICA: Thank you. Let me simply summarize three points that came up this evening.

My first life is I'm a scripture professor, and I specialized in the resurrection narratives and the passion narratives. One line from the resurrection story is, "Some women from our group have astounded us," and through this whole process of the consultation, of the commission, of working closely with Phyllis and Sister Donna, of meeting Father Pottier this evening, women continue to astound us because of their faith and their commitment, of their deep passion and love for the church, of realizing the limitations of the church but also the great hope that Pope Francis has engendered to the church.

So I wanted to thank you for the respect that the three of you have shown and the love for Pope Francis.

The second point is history is the great teacher, as Father Pottier reminded us each time that he spoke, and how important it is to take the long view of this discussion.

The third point is the question of women deacons begins at the parish. It begins in small groups. It begins in scriptural reflections. It begins to the deep commitment of people like Sister Donna working in parish communities and fanning the flame of hope, so I wanted to thank the three people, and I turn it back to David.

DAVID GIBSON: So many points to take away from this really wonderful, engaging, intellectually stimulating, challenging, and inspiring discussion. One I took away was that it seems that so much about restoring the diaconate, talking about women deacons, is about restoring a church of service, and that seems to be, especially under Pope Francis, the shift that we're making, and this may be a concomitant development with it.

The other point I would make is to thank Salt and Light TV, our media partners here, and thank our audience online. Thank you all for being here, for supporting us here at Fordham at the Center on Religion and Culture. I can't thank Father Tom Rosica enough for his wonderful skills at moderating this panel. I wish I could speak one other language. That would be terrific.

And above all, I hope you'll join me in thanking our three panelists, Sister Donna, Father Bernard, and Pope Phyllis, the goddess. Thank you all very much. Have a great evening.