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We claim equal rights by using equal rites

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Detail from www. romancatholicwomenpriests.org

A response

Rosemary Radford Ruether's recent article comparing the form of ordination [1] used by Roman Catholic Womenpriests with that which was used by the Mary Magdala Apostle Catholic Community in San Diego, Calif., in July, was both scholarly and informative. However, because the article presented only part of the issue regarding our understanding of apostolic succession and the reason for our choice to use the Roman Catholic Rite of Ordination, we wish to develop the ideas further.
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Bishop Patricia Fresen, the first bishop to ordain women in the United States, clearly expresses our viewpoint in her article, "Claiming Equal Rights by Using Equal Rites: a Response to Rosemary Radford Ruether [2]."

> "The main point about our claim to be ordained in apostolic succession is not that we believe that apostolic succession goes back to the apostles, nor that it passes on in some mechanistic way the power to 'confect' the Eucharist and not even that it is the only possible valid form of ordination. The main point from the beginning of RCWP was, in fact, to **claim equality for women in the church** and to bring about change in the Roman Catholic church with regard to the ordination of women. This meant, from the beginning, that we needed to be ordained **in exactly the same way as men**.

> It is the official church that regards ordination by a bishop in apostolic succession as the only valid form of ordination in the Roman Catholic church -- and therefore there was a need to use the same process if we were to claim equality with male priests and the validity of orders. Our insistence that ordination does indeed "take" in a woman, despite all the traditional and contemporary arguments against this (so well described by Radford Ruether) has clearly made some impact on the hierarchy and the people -- which would not have been the case, we believe, if we had bypassed the traditional, canonical teaching about a bishop being the minister of sacred ordination."

We believe that rather than our Roman Catholic Womenpriests' claim to apostolic succession being "faulty," it has been *necessary* in the context of claiming equal rites for women in the church: we claim equal rights by using equal rites!"

RCWP's mission to challenge the church with regard to the ordination of women is ongoing and we continue to use the Roman Catholic rite of ordination. We are, however, mindful and respectful of the right of all people to respond to their call of prophetic obedience through discernment within their communities. Community calling and ordaining of a member to serve as its priest is a tradition from the very first 300 years of Christianity, before Christianity became legitimate and accepted by Roman society. Thus, it is a venerable tradition that we honor, along with the later tradition that evolved over centuries, that of Apostolic Succession as part of ordination validity, which is what we follow.

We pray that God will abundantly bless the members of Mary of Magdala Apostle Catholic Community and we embrace, with great joy, our abiding relationship with them.

[This is the official response of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests' movementto Rosemary Ruether's article. Alice Iaquinta and Patricia Sandall are ordained members of the USA Roman Catholic Womenpriests and members of its media team. For more informaton, visit www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org [3].]

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[2] http://bridgetmarys.blogspot.com/2010/07/claiming-equal-rights-by-using-equal.html
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