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On banning girl altar servers

Heidi Schlumpf | Aug. 22, 2011 NCR Today

I hate waking up to this kind of news [1]: a headline about the rector at the Phoenix cathedral who has decided to ban girls as altar servers, even though nothing in current church law forbids it. Like the church isn't getting enough bad press already!

Already there have been some perceptive reactions (including from NCR's own Michael Sean Winters [2], who makes several important points) as well as from the Women's Ordination Conference [3] and U.S. Catholic magazine's blog [4].

Let me add my two cents.

They say you can't put the toothpaste back into the tube, but here in the church there are some who refuse to quit trying. Despite consistent moves toward more openness and acceptance (of laity, of women, of gays and lesbians) in both society and the church, these folks fail to recognize this movement as coming from the Holy Spirit.

I'm confident that eventually the Holy Spirit will prevail, but these interim steps backward are horrible PR for a church that is already suffering too much negative ink. Imagine what girls in the cathedral parish who previously served at the altar must think? It's one thing to not be allowed into something; quite another to have it taken away once you had previously been invited.

I also know that nearly every young, involved Catholic woman under 30 that I've interviewed in the past decade has cited her involvement as an altar server as instrumental to her decision to stay in the church. Whether serving at the altar promotes vocations is debatable, but it definitely encourages young people--male or female--to stay in the church.

Conservative/traditional Catholics may be cheering this latest decision, but if we follow the logical trajectory of their thinking, the church will go back to a time when no laity were allowed on the altar and women couldn't vote. Of course that won't happen, because the church and the world are moving toward the full equality of women (the world usually more quickly than the church), and there's no going back.

Curiously, the Phoenix cathedral is named SS. Simon and Jude. St. Jude, of course, is the patron saint of hopeless causes. Going backward--a hopeless cause, indeed.

Source URL (retrieved on *02/14/2016 - 09:01*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/banning-girl-altar-servers

Links:
[1] http://www.azcentral.com/arizonarepublic/local/articles/2011/08/21/20110821phoenix-catholic-diocese-girl-servers.html#ixzz1Vkk7ADes
[2] http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/no-altar-girls-phoenix-cathedral

[3] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/reactions-no-girl-servers-phoenix-story-0
[4] http://www.uscatholic.org/blog/2011/08/no-altar-girls-more-priests?utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=twitterfeed