

## Austrian bishops say no to lay-led Mass

Jonathan Luxmoore Religion News Service | Nov. 21, 2011

Catholic bishops in Austria have rejected a call by dissident church members for lay people to preside at Mass when parishes have no priests, but the bishops also pledged to maintain a dialogue over possible changes in churchlife.

Austria's reformist We Are Church movement had asked for lay presiders on Nov. 5, following a "Call to Disobedience" signed last July by 250 of Austria's 4,200 Catholic priests that urged the ordination of women priests and making Communion available to non-Catholics and remarried divorcees.

The bishops said Austria's dioceses were "taking opportunities to innovate" in response to "real and serious problems," and were confident they would "find answers to the questions asked today."

However, the bishops added that the summons to disobedience had "triggered alarm and sadness," and "left many Catholics shaking their heads."

"Some demands allied with this call for disobedience are simply unsustainable -- the call for a Eucharist without the Blessed Sacrament openly breaches the central truth of our Catholic faith," the bishops' conference said in their Nov. 10 reply.

The bishops also urged dissident priests and lay Catholics to "show goodwill and a sense of compromise," and to avoid demands that "contradict the church's identity and put its unity seriously at risk."

Hans Peter Hurka, chairman of We Are Church, told ENInews that recent opinion surveys suggested 80 percent now backed its demands.

"All of this is seen as irrelevant by the bishops -- they don't seem to realize the train has already left and they're still standing on the platform," said Hurka. "The situation is now beyond church control and the dangers of a schism are very real."

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**Source URL (retrieved on 02/08/2016 - 00:44):** <http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/austrian-bishops-say-no-lay-led-mass>