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Robes for Women: Demolishing the Gender Gap in Catholic Priesthood

The movement to get ladies ordained as priests is gaining ground—and it's all part of a master plan.

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Women priests stand on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral in London. (Photo: Mary Turner/Getty Images)

FEB 5, 2015 · 2 MIN READ



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Bio 

Despite the recent rebranding of the Roman Catholic Church, with the liberal Pope Francis [addressing climate change](#) and [recognizing the LGBT community](#), the church continues to ban women from preaching the gospel. But a group of rebel women is defying the rules of the Vatican by ordaining women as priests across the U.S.

The goal of [the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests](#) is to yank the Catholic church out of its time warp and bring gender equality to the priesthood—and the way things are looking, the group may just pull it off.

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Since the early 1900s, Christian churches—Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, and more—have welcomed women to serve as priests or ministers. Just last week, more than 1,000 people gathered to watch the [first female bishop ordained in the](#)

[Church of England](#). It's a movement that the Roman Catholic Church needs to take a cue from, according to [68 percent of American Catholics](#). So what's the holdup?

"I think it's sexism. I think it's misogyny," said Janice Sevre-Duszynska, an ARCWP member who was ordained in 2008. "Instead of being frightened of us, [the church] needs to be talking to us."

To drive that message home to the Vatican, the ARCWP is placing women at the altar—front and center. In January, 80-year-old Rita Lucey, grandmother, wife, and now priest, was ordained in a ceremony in Florida. She's the second woman to be ordained as a Catholic priest in the past month, and one of 165 since 2002. "Either the church will die or this will occur. In my lifetime probably not, but there is always hope," [Lucey told NBC](#).

For Lucey and these gutsy women, hope is all they need to keep the governing laws of the Catholic church—which state that [only a male](#) can be ordained as a priest—from deterring them from their mission. After becoming ordained, these women frequently receive letters of excommunication, and in extreme cases their photos are circulated to eucharistic ministers, who ban them from receiving Communion during mass.

In response, they befriend other churches that will allow them to preach (including Jewish temples), keep ordaining women, and establish a community of equals. Considering the Vatican's influence on the patriarchal world, the women's movement is just as political as it is religious.

"There is disorder, it's imbalance, and that is not what Jesus is about," said Sevre-Duszynska.

From 2013 to 2014, the ARCWP more than doubled the number of women it ordained as priests (including younger women in their 40s), and it is starting to attract younger generations through social media. According to Sevre-Duszynska, reaching young women is crucial to gender perception in the church.

"What happens to women's psyches? Young girls feel disempowered, less than, or unequal when there are no [female] images of God," she said. "It is critical that we remember God is beyond gender."

It's not just gender status the ARCWP is addressing; anyone is welcome at its table. Its plan is to pave the way for an inclusive, egalitarian Catholic church where anyone—gay or lesbian, married or divorced, artist or lawyer—can preach.

Though the movement may be [ruffling feathers in the Vatican](#), for Sevre-Duszynska, the message is simple: "Where is the sense of welcoming—welcoming gays and lesbians as children of God, and welcoming women as priests? This is something that our world is crying out for."

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