

FOR CONSIDERATION: Appoint a special commission to study, recommend, and implement concrete actions to create a more incisive presence for women in church leadership, decision-making, and governance

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis not only acknowledges the “indispensable contribution” of women in society and the Church but also expresses that “we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church” including “where important decisions are made” (No. 103).

In order to understand more fully the possibilities for women in decision-making in the Church, it is proposed that a special commission be established to study the issue and advise the Pope. The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, established by Pope Francis in December 2013, and the Study Commission on the Diaconate of Women, established in August 2016, are two superb models that could be replicated for this purpose.

1 SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 Complete a study to identify where women are currently serving in the Church.
- 1.2 Publish reports on the findings
- 1.3 Make recommendations to the Holy Father
- 1.4 Set up a permanent committee (perhaps within the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life) to oversee the implementation of accepted recommendations

2 SPECIFIC AIMS

- 2.1 Identify where women are currently serving in leadership
- 2.2 Identify key theological findings to support expanding women’s roles.
- 2.3 Identify how canon law supports or could be amended to allow for the greater presence of women in leadership

3 MEMBERSHIP

- 3.1 President
- 3.2 Secretary
- 3.3 Members by papal appointment (12), including at least eight women, based on recommendations from the Union of Superiors General, Voices of Faith, the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations and the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

Pope Francis is leading the Church forward seeking new avenues for women in decision-making. Establishing a special commission with women and men to help discern what is possible would be an important step toward that goal.

In addition to the above proposal, as the Council of Cardinals considers its own future as a consultative body to the Holy Father, we strongly recommend the presence of women on a Council of Advisers that not only includes Cardinals but also qualified lay faithful, especially women.

SELECTED RESOURCES

“Without women, the Church of this continent would lose its power to be continually reborn. It is women who keep patiently kindling the flame of faith. We have a grave obligation to understand, respect, appreciate and promote the ecclesial and social impact of all that women do. ...If we hope for a new and living chapter of faith in this continent, we will not get it without women. Please, do not let them be reduced to servants of our ingrained clericalism. For they are on the front lines of the Latin American Church, in their setting out with Jesus, in their persevering amid the sufferings of their people, in their clinging to the hope that conquers death, and in their joyful way of proclaiming to the world that Christ is alive and risen.”

-Pope Francis, [Address](#) to the Executive Committee of CELAM, September 7, 2017

“In today’s complex society, characterized by plurality and globalization, there is need for a greater appreciation of women’s capacity for educating towards universal fraternity. When women have the opportunity to fully pass on their gifts to the entire community, the very manner by which society is understood and organized becomes positively transformed by it, managing to better reflect the substantial unity of the human family. Here lies the most valid premise for the consolidation of authentic fraternity. The growing presence of women in the social, economic and political life at local, national and international levels, as well as the ecclesial, therefore, is a healthy process. Women have the full right to be actively included in all areas, and their right must be affirmed and protected, even through legal instruments wherever it may be necessary. It is a matter of making more room for a more incisive feminine presence.”

-Pope Francis, [Address](#) to plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, June 9, 2017

“Among the Officials, in addition to priests and consecrated persons, the catholicity of the Church must be reflected in the hiring of personnel from throughout the world, and of permanent deacons and lay faithful carefully selected on the basis of their unexceptionable spiritual and moral life and their professional competence. It is fitting to provide for the hiring of greater numbers of the lay faithful, especially in those Dicasteries where they can be more competent than clerics or consecrated persons. Also of great importance is an enhanced role for women and lay people in the life of the Church and their integration into roles of leadership in the Dicasteries, with particular attention to multiculturalism.”

-Pope Francis, [Address](#) to the Roman Curia, December 22, 2016

“The declericalization of power is very important in the Roman Curia and the administrations of dioceses. We must look at canon law and reflect theologically to see what roles require priests; and then *all* the other roles, in the widest sense possible, must be open for lay people, men and women, but especially women. In the administration of the Vatican, it is not necessary that clerics guide all the congregations, councils and departments.”

-Cardinal Reinhard Marx, [Interview](#) in America Magazine, February 4, 2015