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TO THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, THE VATICAN

I was very saddened by your letter dated October 21, 2008, giving me 30 days to recant my belief and public statements that support the ordination of women in our Church, or I will be excommunicated.

I have been a Catholic priest for 36 years and have a deep love for my Church and ministry.

When I was a young man in the military, I felt God was calling me to the priesthood. I entered Maryknoll and was ordained in 1972.

Over the years I have met a number of women in our Church who, like me, feel called by God to the priesthood. You, our Church leaders at the Vatican, tell us that women cannot be ordained.

With all due respect, I believe our Catholic Church's teaching on this issue is wrong and does not stand up to scrutiny. A 1976 report by the Pontifical Biblical Commission supports the research of Scripture scholars, canon lawyers and many faithful Catholics who have studied and pondered the Scriptures and have concluded that there is no justification in the Bible for excluding women from the priesthood.

As people of faith, we profess that the invitation to the ministry of priesthood comes from God. We profess that God is the Source of life and created men and women of equal stature and dignity. The current Catholic Church doctrine on the ordination of women implies our loving and all-powerful God, Creator of heaven and earth, somehow cannot empower a woman to be a priest.

Women in our Church are telling us that God is calling them to the priesthood. Who are we, as men, to say to women, "Our call is valid, but yours is not." Who are we to tamper with God's call?

Sexism, like racism, is a sin. And no matter how hard or how long we may try to justify discrimination, in the end, it is always immoral.

Hundreds of Catholic churches in the U.S. are closing because of a shortage of priests. Yet there are hundreds of committed and prophetic women telling us that God is calling them to serve our Church as priests.

If we are to have a vibrant, healthy Church rooted in the teachings of our Savior, we need the faith, wisdom, experience, compassion and courage of women in the priesthood.

Conscience is very sacred. Conscience gives us a sense of right and wrong and urges us to do the right thing. Conscience is what compelled Franz Jagerstatter, a humble Austrian farmer, husband and father of four young children, to refuse to join Hitler's army, which led to his execution. Conscience is what compelled Rosa Parks to say she could no longer sit in the back of the bus. Conscience is what compels women in our Church to say they cannot be silent and deny their call from God to the priesthood. Conscience is what compelled my dear mother and father, now 95, to always strive to do the right things as faithful Catholics raising four children. And after much prayer, reflection and discernment, it is my conscience that compels me to do the right thing. I cannot recant my belief and public statements that support the ordination of women in our Church.

Working and struggling for peace and justice are an integral part of our faith. For this reason, I speak out against the war in Iraq. And for the last eighteen years, I have been speaking out against the atrocities and suffering caused by the School of the Americas (SOA). Eight years ago, while in Rome for a conference on peace and justice, I was invited to speak about the SOA on Vatican Radio. During the interview, I stated that I could not address the injustice of the SOA and remain silent about injustice in my Church. I ended the interview by saying, "There will never be justice in the Catholic Church until women can be ordained." I remain committed to this belief today.

Having an all male clergy implies that men are worthy to be Catholic priests, but women are not.

According to USA TODAY (Feb. 28, 2008) in the United States alone, nearly 5,000 Catholic priests have sexually abused more than 12,000 children. Many bishops, aware of the abuse, remained silent. These priests and bishops were not excommunicated. Yet the women in our Church who are called by God and are ordained to serve God's people, and the priests and bishops who support them, are excommunicated.

Silence is the voice of complicity. Therefore, I call on all Catholics, fellow priests, bishops, Pope Benedict XVI and all Church leaders at the Vatican, to speak loudly on this grave injustice of excluding women from the priesthood.

Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was assassinated because of his defense of the oppressed. He said, "Let those who have a voice, speak out for the voiceless."

Our loving God has given us a voice. Let us speak clearly and boldly and walk in solidarity as Jesus would, with the women in our Church who are being called by God to the priesthood.

In Peace and Justice,
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