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Rome — October 3, 2024

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The U.S. representative of a women's ordination movement said she is encouraged by people praying that the Catholic Church will open the priesthood to all who feel called to the ministry — particularly women.

"What I feel right now is excitement and solidarity because I feel like there is a lot of good energy and movement in the greater body of the church that really wants to see equality come in so many different ways," said Rev. Angela Nevitt Meyer of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA. She is in Rome as the synod on synodality begins its final gathering Oct. 2-27 at the Vatican.



Rev. Angela Nevitt Meyer, of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, poses near St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 2. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Meyer joined women from other countries Oct. 2, who gathered to pray near the Vatican so that synod participants would consider the importance of ordination to the priesthood and other roles for women, even as talk of women's diaconate was taken off the synod agenda.

"It's not just standing here on the street corner, but there's so many people here in Rome right now that are on the periphery, guided by the spirit, to let these voices be known," she said. "And even if we don't have a space at the center, the Spirit's not

given up, so I'm not giving up either."

Women, and some men, from Poland, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, the U.S., England, Wales and South Africa are participating in events organized in Rome by Women's Ordination Worldwide movement as the synod, a four-year worldwide consultation process, is taking place at the Vatican, Meyer said. Many, including Meyer, were disappointed when Pope Francis responded "no" to a journalist's question about whether he supported the diaconate for women. Some had been hopeful that opening the diaconate to women meant the church would one day be open to women priests.

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"When someone speaks their truth, I believe them," Meyer told National Catholic Reporter Oct. 2. "And I believe that there is no intention to truly and sincerely consider women's vocations [to the priesthood] at this point in time, because if there was any sincerity, our conversations would be open. They wouldn't be relegated to spaces inside."

"It's disappointing to hear reports leak about what could possibly take place in the future to appease those fighting for ordination of women and tease that perhaps it will happen decades from now. In the end, it has much to do with those in clerical positions who feel that their gender attaches them to their sense of purpose," Meyer said.

"It's not their genitalia," she said. "It is the personhood and the gifts that come within and how you're moved by the Spirit. Discernment needs to be about something so much deeper than your chromosomes."

Being moved by the Spirit is what Meyer said she experienced at age 10 as one of her diocese's first female altar servers in her Bartonville, Illinois, parish.

"I've loved Mass my whole life. I hung on the Liturgy of the Word. Participating in the Eucharist always felt deeply personal, deeply meaningful to me," she said, closing her eyes.

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> —Rev. Angela Nevitt Meyer

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For a while, she thought that meant following a vocation as a woman religious but it was different, she said, and she talked with her mother about it, "about what was possible for me." That's when, through discernment, she realized that her vocation instead was to "stand up for my gender in my church, because this isn't right, we are all equal" and she found a different way to follow her calling.

"I was working with the Sisters of St. Francis, and I started to have friends tell me, 'Angela, you would be such a good priest.' And I kept thinking, that's ridiculous. That's just ridiculous," she said. "My initial reaction was, 'Why would anybody say that?' Because in my head, my imagination was still stuck in this … well, a priest is a guy."

But that's not really what priesthood is, she added. "Priesthood isn't a gender. It is a vocation. It is how we provide care for one another and create a sense of pastoral safety and theological reflection and growth and community."



Rosemary Ganley, left, and the Rev. Angela Nevitt Meyer hold letters as part of a group that spelled out "Ordain Women" near St. Peter's Basilica as the synod on synodality began Oct. 2 at the Vatican. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Meyer started talking to her spiritual director and learned about a woman ordained in Indianapolis.

"I learned about Roman Catholic women priests. And then I learned that there were several actually very close to me. So, I started in conversation with them," she said.

After spiritual direction and formation in the spirit of Vatican II, in 2019, she was ordained deacon at Holy Wisdom Monastery in Madison, Wisconsin, and was ordained a priest in 2021. Organizations such as Roman Catholic Womenpriests and the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests have helped her find community, even if they're on the periphery of the church, she said.

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Officially, the church does not recognize the ordination of women to the diaconate, nor the priesthood. Roman Catholic Womenpriests acknowledges that on its website, which says, "Yes, we have challenged and broken the Church's Canon Law 1024, an unjust law that discriminates against women." They say they believe their ordinations are valid.

"There are those who will say we're not really Catholic," she told NCR. "But what we're doing is we're creating a space where people can come and be and participate in a way that they don't feel their morality compromised, and that they can receive and participate co-equally in community care, pastoral care and sacramental care."

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At one time, she said, it was "extremely hurtful" not to be recognized by a church she so loves.

"I carried a lot of hurt and a lot of pain because of that sense of rejection, of not being good enough, or not enough, not right enough, not whole enough," she said. "Right now, I don't personally feel pain, but I feel the pain and recognize the pain that so many other people carry like I did. And that deserves to be healed. Nobody should have to carry those feelings around."

What she feels the most these days is joy at being part of Brownsburg Inclusive Catholic Community in Indiana.

"I have the just tremendous blessing to preside as priest … it feels like something has been just deeply liberated within me. And for me, it's about connection," she said. "It's about facilitating spiritual wholeness and healing and co-support. I deeply believe in the part of Jesus' prayer, 'your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven.' I feel like that 'on Earth' piece is often so discarded when so much of Jesus' ministry was about healing and being in relationship here and now. For me, the Gospel is so earthy and lived and relational and I feel like I get to do that in such an authentic way, to be supported by our community. And I love to preach. I love to preach!"

Late on Oct. 2, she sat by a column at St. Peter's Square, praying with others that the synod taking place in the buildings nearby will respond to women who feel excluded by a church they love.

"I know myself as a Catholic and I know that I won't always be recognized as such by central authority figures," she said. "It's a complicated thing … but I also believe that evolution is always happening. And so long as we continue to show up, we can continue to have some influence."

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