

[Opinion](#)



by Maureen Fiedler

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

December 6, 2017

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

It's welcome news, though it is short of any goal favored by feminists, whether Orthodox or Catholic. Patriarch Theodoros II and the [Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria](#) have decided to [reinstate the order of deaconesses](#) in the Greek Orthodox Church.

Granted, this is not a full acknowledgement of the equality of women and men, but it is a step in the right direction. And it's a step from which the Catholic Church can learn. Indeed, Pope Francis expressed interest in this prospect in 2016, when [he appointed a committee](#) to study the matter. (It's not clear where that committee is today in its deliberations.)

[According to NCR's reporting](#), the Greek Orthodox Church is expanding rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa (who knew?) and is in need of clergy in many locations. By the same token, the Catholic Church could use more clergy in many parts of the world. But even if church membership were static in either denomination, this move is both desirable and necessary because it is a move toward gender justice.

Both the Orthodox and Catholic churches have been resistant to the equality of women in ecclesial roles that require any kind of ordination. This move eases that resistance in the Orthodox world and hopefully in the Catholic world, as well.

But the diaconate by itself is a baby step in relation to what is really needed: women serving in all roles at every level of the church — deacon, priest, bishop, cardinal ...

If any pope has the potential to change the status quo in the Catholic world, it is Pope Francis. Yes, he surely faces strong resistance to any such moves from cardinals inside the Vatican. But there are plenty of bishops, especially in the developing world, who would welcome a chance to increase the number of deacons and/or priests in their dioceses. And there are plenty of women who would welcome the opportunity to fill such roles.

Maybe Francis should sit down and talk to Patriarch Theodoros II about this latest decision and take steps of his own to open the Catholic Church to women in ordained ministries.

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Women deacons** feature series. [View the full series.](#)