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Supporters of women's ordination stage small protest near Vatican

By Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Representatives of several groups supporting the ordination of women as Catholic priests staged a small demonstration near the Vatican Oct. 15.

While 25 women experts and observers participated in the Oct. 5-26 world Synod of Bishops on the Bible, the protesters called for the synod, at the very least, to urge the Vatican to allow women to proclaim the Gospel and preach at Mass.

Anne Brown, a member of the New Wine organization in Great Britain, told a press conference she personally feels called by God to the priesthood.

While she said she did not expect any movement toward women's ordination anytime soon, "the ministry of preaching the word at the Mass could be opened up to laypeople."

"The voices of women, in particular, need to be heard with their own perspectives and stories, breaking open the Scriptures for the people of God in our time," Brown said.

Church norms restrict preaching the homily at Mass to ordained priests or deacons.

Inside the synod hall Oct. 14, participants heard from a variety of women who serve the church, but they did not call for ordination.

Dominican Sister Mary Viviana Ballarin, president of the Italian Union of Major Superiors, spoke to the synod about the way many women express their fidelity to God's word, share it with the world and serve the church.

"There is a mysterious and very close bond between the word and women," she said.

Like Mary, many consecrated women have heard the word of God and have not hesitated to carry it "to those who hunger and thirst for the truth, to all, even to those who do not know how to seek it."

Many women in the church, she said, know their strengths and are happy to place them at the disposition of the church so that "hope, love, dignity, tenderness and also beauty can inhabit every human heart."

Sister Ballarin said there is "a multitude of women" teaching in Catholic schools, nursing in Catholic hospitals, running AIDS clinics, caring for women victims of human trafficking, assisting the homeless and the sick "in very corner of the globe."

"This multitude of women, tirelessly dispensing the word with a mother's hands and hearts, are the face of the church as mother; they are its fertile womb, the space in which God can encounter the human person and the person can encounter God," she said.

At the press conference on women's ordination, Aisha S. Taylor, the 27-year-old executive director of the U.S.-based Women's Ordination Conference, said she was pleased so many women were invited to the

synod, but they represent fewer than 10 percent of the participants and none of them have a right to vote on the synod propositions.

Taylor said that by excluding women from ordained ministry, "the church is operating in the world as incomplete, with only one leg to stand on and one arm to extend."

"The radical equality" of all people proclaimed in the Gospel, she said, requires the church to open ordained ministries to women.

In 1994 Pope John Paul II issued a document saying that because Jesus chose only men as his apostles, the church is not authorized to ordain women. He also said the position was a definitive, ordinary church teaching that must be firmly held by Catholics and is not subject to change.

Still, Taylor said she expects women to be ordained Catholic priests in her lifetime.

Angelika Fromm of the Purple Stole movement in Germany told reporters, "the Bible itself calls for the full and equal participation of women" in the church and "any other interpretation is incorrect and unjust."

After their press conference, nine women supporting ordination walked to the Vatican carrying a sign that said: "Ordain Catholic Women."

Several of the women dressed in purple and pink togas and carried signs with the names of women who are described as leaders in the Christian communities of the New Testament, including Mary Magdalene, Phoebe and Junia.
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