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Campaigners for Women's Ordination Protest at Vatican

ROME (RNS/ENInews) A group of women demonstrated in Rome's St Peter's Square on Tuesday (June 8), saying they want "full and equal participation" in the Roman Catholic Church.

The small group held a banner stating, "Ordain Catholic Women," to the apparent curiosity of passers-by in the Via della Conciliazione, the boulevard that leads to the square, before they were asked to move on by police.

Tuesday's protest followed a media conference organized by groups campaigning for women's ordination in the Catholic Church, to protest against a Vatican celebration to mark the end of a "Year for Priests" proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009.

"Our church urgently needs large numbers of male and female pastors to serve our parishes. Charisma should be important, not gender," said Angelika Fromm, a German representative from the International Movement We are Church.

Fromm said the past 12 months had been "a disastrous year," referring to the sexual abuse crisis that has rocked the Catholic Church.

"The current global crisis within the church demonstrates that the clerical hierarchy alone can't serve any longer as the foundation of the Catholic Church's institutional structure and authority," said Fromm.

In a statement, the groups said they want "full and equal participation in the Roman Catholic Church, including ordination as deacons, priests and bishops."

Vatican Radio has reported that 9,000 priests from 91 nations are to join Benedict on Thursday and Friday in the final ceremonies in Rome for the priests' year.

"The absolute hypocrisy of the `Year for priests' celebration cuts to the core of what is wrong with the hierarchy today," said Erin Saiz Hanna, executive director of the U.S.-based Women's Ordination Conference.

-- Luigi Sandri

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