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## Reinstating the Diaconate for Women

An international Petition to the Pope asking for reinstatement of the ordained women's diaconate will be handed in to the Vatican on **Wednesday, October 15, 2008**. A press conference in the ADISTA news agency in Rome will follow at 11 am that day. Dignitaries representing signatory organizations from around the world and representatives from various countries will be present at the function. A demonstration in Saint Peter's Square by women dressed in ancient Greek/Hellenist clothing representing women deacons of the early Church will also be held.

## Historical Background

It is historically documented that the diaconate of women existed in the Church since Apostolic times (Romans 16, 1; 1 Tim 3, 8-11). Tens of thousands of women deacons served in parishes during the first millennium as is witnessed in literary records, inscriptions on tombs and twenty two women deacon saints in the current liturgical calendar. Hundreds of women deacons are known to us by name. Ancient manuscripts have preserved the exact rite of ordination of women deacons (for more, see: <http://womenpriests.org/deacons/default.asp>)

## Why is the Vatican is Suppressing the Historical Facts

Analysis of the ordination rite shows that the ordination of women deacons was a true sacrament with a bishop laying hands on the candidate and invoking the Holy Spirit. In all essentials the ordination of female deacons was identical to that of male deacons -- the sacramentality of whose ordination cannot be disputed. This means women did receive Holy Orders. For on July 15, 1563 the Council of Trent defined that the diaconate, as much as the priesthood and the episcopacy belongs to the sacrament of Holy Orders. "If anyone says that in the Catholic Church there does not exist a hierarchy, established through divine ordination, which consists of bishops, priests and deacons, let him be anathema." (Denzinger no 966).

## Break with Tradition?

In an interview, John Wijngaards, author of *Women Deacons in the Early Church: Historical Texts and Contemporary Debates* (Continuum 2006) confirms: "In no way can the official Church claim that ordaining women deacons would be a break with tradition. The diaconate for women is needed today as much as it ever has been. Hundreds of thousands of women all over the world perform pastoral ministries that should be supported by the sacramental grace of ordination," he said.

## Signatories:

Signatories of the Petition include at least twenty six international Catholic movements representing a membership of more than 40,000 people. In addition, more than fifteen hundred individuals have endorsed the Petition.

A text of the Petition (in six major languages used in the Church: English, Spanish, German, French, Italian and Dutch) can be found here: <http://womenpriests.org/dreamshareact/phpPETITION/> The exact details of the signatories can be found her: <http://www.womenpriests.org/dreamshareact/phpPetition/results.php>

Signatory representatives who will be present at the function include Jennifer Stark (UK), Coordinator of Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW), Aisha Taylor (USA), President of Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), Anne Brown (UK), New Wine, along with others from countries around the world including Austria, Australia, Germany, Netherlands, Japan and other countries.

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