

Province of Southern Appalachia

Diocese of Knoxville

January 5th, 2025

✠ Episcopal Statement on the Ordination of Women ✠

January 6, 2026

TO: Province of Southern Appalachia
Diocese of Knoxville and
Cathedral of Emmaus Abbey Church

Beloved in Christ,

The modern movement to ordain women is not rooted in apostolic tradition, apostolic faith, or historic sacramental order. It is a **recent innovation** that arose 173 years ago entirely outside the historic catholic consensus. The first recorded instance occurred in **1853**, when the Congregational Church ordained a woman—an act without precedent in the universal Church’s two-millennia practice. This innovation spread gradually: the **Presbyterian Church (USA)** and the **Methodist Church** began ordaining women in **1956**, the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** in **1970**, and the **Episcopal Church** in **1974** through the irregular ordinations of the so-called *Philadelphia Eleven*. In the decades since, other mainline Protestant bodies have adopted similar practices. Even within Roman Catholic circles, occasional speculative voices—most recently associated with discussions under **Pope Francis**—and most recently Pope Leo XIV have entertained reconsideration of the question, though the Magisterium has consistently reaffirmed the impossibility of ordaining women to the priesthood.

Taken together, these developments represent a **continuous and deliberate departure** from the apostolic pattern and the universal practice of the Church for nearly two thousand years. They arise not from Scripture or catholic tradition, but from modern cultural pressures and new hermeneutical approaches foreign to the historic faith.

In order to clarify the Province of Southern Appalachia’s position on the ordination of women as deacons or priests, I submit this biblical analysis. A number of mainline sacramental churches, woke bishops and Protestant bodies have issued statements asserting that the ordination of women represents “genuine catholic continuity” and arises “because of Scripture.” After careful theological review, I must state plainly that these claims cannot be reconciled with the apostolic witness, the catholic tradition, or the historic practice of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

1. On Catholic Continuity

The assertion that women’s ordination is “catholic continuity” is historically and theologically untenable. For nearly two millennia, the Church—East and West—ordained only men to the presbyterate and episcopate. This universal and unbroken practice is not incidental but rooted in the apostolic pattern established by Christ Himself. A practice introduced in the late twentieth century cannot credibly be

called “catholic continuity.” Denominations that have broken the “Catholic Continuity” of their governance have failed the ancient church. We in the American Orthodox Catholic Church believe only in the “ordination sacerdotalis,” holy orders to men since Jesus chose only male apostles.

The claim that women’s ordination represents “catholic continuity” collapses under the weight of Scripture and history.

Scriptural Witness

- **Christ chose only men as Apostles** (Mt 10:1–4; Mk 3:13–19; Lk 6:12–16). This was not due to cultural pressure—Christ routinely defied cultural norms (Jn 4:27; Lk 7:36–50)—but divine intention.
- **The Apostles appointed only men** as presbyters and bishops (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5–6; 1 Tim 3:1–7).

Apostolic & Patristic Witness

- **St. Irenaeus** affirms the threefold ministry as received from the Apostles and transmitted through male bishops.
- **St. Clement of Rome** (c. AD 96) describes apostolic succession as a chain of men appointed by the Apostles and their successors (*1 Clement 42–44*).
- **St. Ignatius of Antioch** (c. AD 107) speaks of bishops, presbyters, and deacons—all male—appointed by apostolic authority.

A practice unknown for two millennia cannot credibly be called “catholic continuity.”

2. On Apostolic Order

The apostolic witness is clear: Christ chose men as Apostles, and the Apostles appointed men as presbyters and bishops. This ordering is not cultural accommodation but divine design.

To depart from this pattern is to depart from apostolicity, one of the four marks of the Church confessed in the Nicene Creed.

The apostolic witness is unequivocal: Christ established a male apostolic ministry, and the Apostles perpetuated it.

Scriptural Witness

- **1 Timothy 2:12–13** — St. Paul grounds ministerial order not in culture but in creation: *“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man... for Adam was formed first.”* Paul’s argument is theological, not sociological.
- **1 Timothy 3:1–7** — The qualifications for presbyters and bishops are explicitly male (“husband of one wife”).
- **Titus 1:5–6** — Titus is instructed to appoint male elders (“husband of one wife”) in every town.

Apostolic Practice

- **Acts 1:20–26** — When replacing Judas, the Apostles did not consider the many faithful women who followed Christ; they selected a man.
- **Acts 6:1–6** — The first deacons were men, chosen and ordained by the Apostles.

To depart from this pattern is to depart from apostolicity, one of the four marks of the Church.

3. On the Representation of Christ

Many contemporary statements claim that the priest represents Christ not in His incarnate identity but only in His “kenotic love.” This is **a reduction** of the Church’s sacramental theology.

The priest acts *in persona Christi*, representing Christ the Bridegroom to His Bride, the Church. Christ’s maleness is not incidental but integral to the nuptial mystery of redemption. To deny this is to sever priestly ministry from the Incarnation itself.

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Scriptural Witness

- **Ephesians 5:25–32** — Christ is the Bridegroom; the Church is His Bride. The nuptial mystery is intrinsic to the sacramental priesthood.
- **Romans 8:29** — Christ is the “firstborn among many brethren,” establishing a representative brotherhood.
- **John 20:21–23** — Christ commissions the Apostles to exercise sacramental authority in His name.

Patristic Witness

- **St. John Chrysostom** teaches that the priest stands as an icon of Christ the Bridegroom.
- **St. Thomas Aquinas** affirms that sacramental representation requires natural resemblance to Christ in His humanity.

Christ’s maleness is not incidental but integral to the sacramental economy.

4. On the Gifts of the Spirit

These churches often argue that women’s ordination is justified by the Spirit’s gifting. This is a category error.

Women and men alike receive charisms of prophecy, teaching, evangelism, and leadership. But the sacramental office of presbyter and bishop has always been distinguished from general gifting. The Spirit does not contradict the order He inspired in Scripture.

The Spirit grants charisms to all believers, but charisms do not determine sacramental office.

Scriptural Witness

- **Acts 2:17–18** — Sons and daughters prophesy, but prophecy is not ordination.
- **1 Corinthians 12** — Charisms vary widely and are not identical with ecclesial office.
- **1 Corinthians 14:33–40** — Paul distinguishes between charismatic participation and liturgical order.

Apostolic Witness

- **Phoebe** (Rom 16:1) is a *diakonos* in the sense of servant, not an ordained deacon.
- **Priscilla** teaches privately (Acts 18:26), not sacramentally.
- **Junia** (Rom 16:7) is honored among the Apostles, not counted as one.

The Spirit does not contradict the order He inspired in Scripture.

5. On Biblical Interpretation

Appeals to Mary Magdalene's witness or daughters' prophecy at Pentecost are frequently used as grounds for ordination. These texts do not address ordained office.

Witnessing and prophesying are not equivalent to presbyteral governance or sacramental presidency. The apostolic texts that *do* address these offices (1 Tim 2–3; Titus 1; 1 Cor 14) **are either ignored or reinterpreted** beyond recognition.

Texts often cited in support of women's ordination do not address the ordained office.

Scriptural Clarifications

- **Mary Magdalene** is a witness to the Resurrection, not a presbyter.
- **The daughters of Philip** prophesy (Acts 21:9), but prophecy is not sacramental presidency.
- **Deborah** is a judge, not a priest; Israel's priesthood remained male.

Texts Directly Addressing Ordained Office

- **1 Timothy 2–3** — Governs teaching authority and presbyteral qualifications.
- **Titus 1** — Establishes male leadership in every town.
- **1 Corinthians 14** — Regulates liturgical order, distinguishing roles within worship.

These texts are either ignored or reinterpreted beyond recognition by proponents of women's ordination.

6. On Ecclesial Unity

It is often suggested that differences in ministerial order "need not fracture communion." Communion is indeed precious, but unity cannot be maintained by redefining apostolic order.

True unity is grounded in shared obedience to Scripture and the apostolic tradition—not in accommodating innovations that contradict both.

Unity must be grounded in shared obedience to Scripture and apostolic tradition.

Scriptural Witness

- **Acts 2:42** — The Church is united in "the Apostles' teaching," not in innovations.
- **Ephesians 4:4–6** — Unity flows from fidelity to "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

Patristic Witness

- **St. Cyprian** teaches that unity is preserved only through adherence to apostolic order (*On the Unity of the Church*).
 - **Communion cannot be maintained by redefining apostolic order.**

7. On the Authority of Christ's Word

Some churches claim women's ordination arises "because of Scripture." This reverses the plain sense of the very texts that govern ministerial order.

Confidence in Christ's call must include reverence for His Word and fidelity to the apostolic pattern. The Spirit does not lead the Church into practices unknown to Scripture and rejected by the entire catholic tradition until modernity.

Claims that women's ordination arises "because of Scripture" invert the plain meaning of the texts governing ministerial order.

Scriptural Witness

- **2 Thessalonians 2:15** — “Stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught.”
- **1 Corinthians 11:2** — Paul praises the Church for maintaining apostolic traditions.
- **1 Timothy 6:20** — Timothy is charged to ***guard the deposit***, not innovate upon it.

The Spirit does not lead the Church into practices unknown to Scripture and rejected by the entire catholic tradition until modernity. The bible states we are not to add or take away the scriptures to fit our cultural or personal narrative. **One recent example of blatant denial of God’s Word** is the 2012 edition of the “Queen James Version Bible” to accommodate homosexuality, queers, same-sex marriages in the church and to ordain lesbians as deacons, priests, and bishops.

Conclusion

The Province of Southern Appalachia affirms that the ordination of women, as practiced in many mainline sacramental and Protestant churches, represents a **departure from apostolic order**, a **break with catholic continuity**, and a **novel hermeneutic** that cannot be reconciled with Scripture or the Church’s historic witness.

The Province of Southern Appalachia affirms that the ordination of women, as practiced in many mainline sacramental and Protestant churches, represents:

- a departure from apostolic order,
- a break with catholic continuity,
- and a novel hermeneutic irreconcilable with Scripture and the Church’s historic witness.

We remain very cautious, yet committed to prayerful dialogue, mutual respect, and the hope of deeper unity in Christ. Yet unity must be grounded in truth, and truth requires that we name this teaching for what it is: **an innovation without apostolic warrant**.

May the Lord of the harvest grant His Church fidelity, humility, and courage to uphold the faith once delivered to the saints.

In His Service,

✠ Vincent P. Travis, Jr.

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