

On behalf of the Dutch Episcopate herewith I send you a statement concerning the ordination of women. This statement is also sent to the clergy and church boards of the Dutch Church province.

The episcopate has given this statement this morning, September 21st 2002, in the meeting of the clerical synod. The members of the synod have given their reaction and based on that reaction, the episcopate has the support of all the members who were present.

Herewith we inform you about the decision of the episcopate of the Dutch Church Province.

Peter O.Baaij
Chairman of the Dutch Clerical Synod
Libertate Mentis ad Lucem

to: all the members of The General Episcopal Synod 2002

from: the regional bishop for the Province of the Netherlands

date: Bilthoven, 21th September 2002

subject: The Sacred Offices for Women

Dear Brother in Christ,

The place of the church in society has become more and more insignificant, despite the growing spirituality and need of meaningful rituals and worship that touches on mysticism. It affects all churches, including ours. Of course, this is not something new to say, it is of deep concern to us. Much has been done and still is done to change the secondary position of women in society, activated mainly by women themselves. This also applies to the churches, although to a lesser degree, but not less significant.

Our church has realized this more than a quarter of a century ago; it resulted in an office of deaconess, and more recently in the sacred offices or stages for women in the Order of Mary. This has taken many years to achieve, given extremely serious consideration and supported by due experience with the proposed ritual. Nevertheless, the Dutch Province has never supported this separate female line within our Church and the office of deaconess was not effectuated. Instead, apart from female servers at the altar at a much earlier stage, during a brief period some fifteen women in the Netherlands were ordained to the office of cleric, using the existing liturgy, with an additional invocation to the Holy Lady Mary.

It is our firm conviction that a church dedicated to the Christ with a line of ordinations so far exclusive for men, now introducing a female line, dedicated to Our Lady and exclusively for

women, may have its great value but should not come instead of the more obvious 'solution' of opening the existing ordination to both men and women.

As far as we can see, there is no one single argument - apart from tradition - to exclude women from holy orders. The social and cultural acceptance should be there - which by no means is the case in all societies. The Netherlands would generally accept female clergy, which, among other things, is shown by the relative large number of women ordained to the office of cleric equally, the Clerical Synod will accept female clergy.

Realizing the different attitudes - socially and within the church - in the various church provinces, we would want the Provinces to become more autonomous, particularly in this case with respect to ordaining women. This opinion was also express during the recent church congress. Autonomous positions of Provinces within one church is not uncommon in other church denominations, e.g. in the Dutch Province of the Old Catholic Church, two female priests now serve the parishes, whereas other Provinces of the OCC do not have and do not accept women to the priesthood.

The Provincial Episcopal Synod in the Netherlands has decided to open thee existing ordination, at least of thee minor orders, also to woman. It is not our intention at this moment to pursue the ordination of women beyond the minor orders; our feeling is that female priests in the Dutch LCC will, as yet, not generally be accepted by the church community, a essential condition before doing so. It may take some years to deal with the issue of major orders. It is our intention to cause a schism within our Church; apart from more fundamental consequences, this would make our Church even smaller still.

We share fully the serious concern about the future of our Church as expressed in the recent letter of the regionary bishop Sten-Bertil Jakobson; in our province recently women left our Church. We therefore also fully support the conclusion at the end of the letter of our Swedish brother: ordaining wo-men to holy orders should be a matter of each Church Province.

Hopefully you are prepared to consider our views with its consequences given in this letter .

Brotherly greetings to you,

+ Philip Draaisma, regionary of the Dutch Province

+ Tom Degenaars, +Frank den Outer