

## "I count on the People of God"

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**Michaela.** She is number 141 in the book "Because God wants it that way." I am the good friend whose priestly ordination made her (almost) burst with envy and anger at the injustice. After all, she preached the sermon in my first mass. "You may be a bit shocked to see me standing here, in front of all people, but I hope you recover quickly from this shock, just as I hope I don't fall over with fear and excitement," she said. She didn't fall over. The thunderous applause after the sermon spoke for itself. For our Rhenish home parish, the dream couple was united at the altar - the young nun, the young priest. That was 34 years ago. "You are called to service, to spread the message of salvation, to let others feel through your life what God is like, not as a leader, but as a servant." That's right. Until today. Why shouldn't Michaela also be a pastor, lead a congregation, preside over the Eucharist or administer the sacrament of reconciliation? Charisma and competence were and are present. The acceptance by the people of God as well, even then. Doesn't that clearly show the calling of God?

**Wendy.** I spent a year at Arche Daybreak north of Toronto in preparation for ministry with people with disabilities. For the first time I saw a woman draw naturally from the richness and depth of the Catholic tradition and give it a feminine face as a female priest: my Anglican colleague Wendy. The Monday morning celebration of the Eucharist, community celebrations, baptisms and funerals were presided a female priest. Completely natural. Henri Nouwen had encouraged Wendy to bring her priesthood to the community. There were a few Roman Catholics who, out of loyalty to their denomination, did not receive the Anglican Eucharist. I found that hurtful. The core members of l'Arche, on the other hand, have an unerring sense of who means well and who stands by their side, like Christ. The representation of Christ is not a question of sex or gender. At the end of the foot washing ceremony on Maundy Thursday we pastors from different denominations knelt next to each other. The community stood around us and commissioned and blessed us for our priestly and pastoral ministry, women and men. It could be so easy.

**Petra.** We have been leading a medium-sized city parish together for six years – in tandem. She runs the finances, I run the ministry. It went well. I have renounced some power, i.e. the chairmanship of the board of directors and the voting rights. Working together in a tandem like this requires a shared vision and rules for making decisions together. Above all, it requires competence and trust. What really doesn't work: I get paid, she does it on a voluntary basis. Recently, at a spiritual impulse for the councils, there was a misunderstanding between the two of us as to who should take which part of the impulse. She then said: "That was strange tonight: You inform about facts, figures and structures, I say the prayers and the blessing!" No one complained. Most council members and parishioners would accept a female priest, whether for finances or for pastoral care.

I can name many more and tell stories of women who seem to have been endowed with charisms for priestly ministry, who have acquired competencies and who are willing to be serve. They don't take anything away from anyone, but they give so much. The discrepancy between the doctrine, which is claimed to be unchangeable, and the reality in our church is getting bigger and bigger. I cannot imagine that the church has a future in our culture if it does not find another answer to the question of gender justice in priestly ministry.

I count on the people of God, on congregations and communities for which the priestly ministry is important - and who trust women to do this ministry. They will no longer accept a ban from doing this. They will, in freedom of spirit, ask women to do the priestly ministry. A long way, perhaps outside the institution and the organization "Catholic Church", but committed to the movement of the Gospel. Participation through anticipation – that's what my social ethics teacher Wilhelm Dreier (1928-1993) called it. Maybe the Church is moving after all. I hope that she perceives and accepts the great offer of God.

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