

Woman Faces Excommunication For Breaking Church Law

15 U.S. Women Have Recently Gone Through Unsanctioned Ordination Ceremonies

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SAN DIEGO, Calif. -- A woman who said she has been ordained as a Roman Catholic priest led a service during the weekend -- despite the risk of being excommunicated.

Images

Jane Via, 58, is among 15 American women who have recently gone through ordination ceremonies that are not sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church, which bars women from becoming priests or deacons.

"If women like me don't stand up and do something for women in the church, no one else is going to," Via told NBC San Diego. "We've been waiting for the Vatican to do this for 40 years, since the second Vatican council. Not only has nothing happened, but things have gotten progressively worse for women since."

One hundred congregants attended her service on Sunday at the Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community in San Diego.

It was her first appearance since meeting with San Diego Bishop Robert Brom to discuss the consequences of her claimed ordination, which could ultimately include excommunication.

Via's congregation is not affiliated with the Diocese of San Diego, which does not consider a Mass celebrated by an unordained officiant to be valid, diocese spokeswoman Bernadene Carr said Monday.

Via was ordained June 24 under the auspices of the pro-female ordination group Womenpriests, which says it has arranged ordinations for dozens of women priests and deacons around the world, including 12 in a Pittsburgh ceremony in July.

According to the group, a male priest presided over the first ordination of seven women in 2002 in Austria. The women were excommunicated by the Vatican in 2003.

Via said such consequences were "unwelcome," but also, in a sense, liberating.

"I will accept the consequences," she told NBC San Diego. "They're unwelcome, but they're apparently necessary."

A majority of Catholic respondents to an Associated Press-Ipsos poll taken just after the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005 said they favored ordination of women.

A Roman Catholic canon says only baptized men may be ordained.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has not taken a formal position on the issue, but three of the American women who say they are ordained priests received letters from diocese officials warning that they had chosen to excommunicate themselves.

Via, a married mother of two, founded Mary Magdalene Apostle in November as an independent congregation.

"The church needs women," Via said. "The church needs women's voices."

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