



AS IT IS

Pope Says Women Can Read at Mass But Still Cannot Be Priests

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The leader of the Roman Catholic Church on Monday changed ancient rules governing duty requirements for religious service. The order from Pope Francis officially recognizes women as non-clergy, or lay, administrators during even the highest church service.

Francis amended the law to make official what is already common in many parts of the world: Women serve as lectors. They read passages of the Christian holy book to Catholics gathered for religious service. They also serve, like non-clergy men, to assist the **priest** during the most important ceremony: holy communion.

Francis said he was making the change to increase recognition of the “**precious contribution**” women make in the church. He added that all confirmed Catholics have a part to play in the work of the church.

The change comes as Francis remains under pressure to open clergy positions to women. Only men are permitted to serve as official leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, and make rules under which all followers are to live.

Religious history experts say women shared control of Catholic leadership in the early years of the ancient faith. Francis has ordered a group of experts to study whether women could be named deacons. Deacons are the lowest level of clergy. An earlier group had reported to the Pope about the history of women deacons.

People who support expanding the rules say Catholic females deserve greater say in the direction of the Church. They also say such a change would help deal with clergy shortages in several parts of the world.

Opponents want to continue the Roman Catholic tradition of only permitting men to officially serve.

Phyllis Zagano was a member of the pope's first study. She called the new rules important. She said they represent the first time the Church has given women **access** to the **altar** by religious law. She noted that high-level members of the church have long called for such a move.

"That's a very big deal," said Zagano, a professor at New York's Hofstra University.

Lucetta Scaraffia is the former editor of a Catholic Church publication directed at women. She called the changes a "double trap." She said they make official what is already happening, including at Pope-led services. She said the changes also make clear that the office of the deacon is an "**ordained**" ministry open only for men.

"This closes the door on the **diaconate** for women," she told Associated Press reporters in a telephone call. She described the change as a "step backward" for women.

I'm Ashley Thompson.

The Associated Press reported this story. Ashley Thompson adapted it for VOA Learning English. Katy Weaver was the editor.

Words in This Story

priest - n. a person who has the authority to lead or perform ceremonies in some religions and especially in some Christian religions

precious - adj. very valuable or important

contribution - n. something that is done to cause something to happen

access - n. a way of getting near, at, or to something or someone

altar - n. a platform or table used as a center of worship in Christian ceremonies and services

ordained - adj. related to officially making (someone) a minister, priest, rabbi, etc.

diaconate - n. the office of deacon
