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# An Open Letter to The Church

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On Monday, July 29, 1974, the Feast of Sts. Mary and Martha, God willing, we intend to ordain to the Sacred Priesthood some several women deacons. We want to make known as clearly and as widely as we can the reflections on Christian obedience which have led us to this action. We are painfully conscious of the diversity of thinking in our church on this issue, and have been deeply sobered by that fact. We are acutely aware that this issue involves theological considerations, that it involves biblical considerations, that it involves considerations of Church tradition, and that it raises the vexing question of amicable consensus in our household of faith.

We are convinced that all these factors have been given due consideration by the Church at large, and by us. We note that the House of Bishops is on record as being in favor of the ordination of women. We note that a majority of the clergy and laity in the House of Deputies is also on record as being in favor, even though an inequitable rule

of procedure in that House has frustrated the will of the majority. All of the foregoing factors, by themselves, would not necessarily dictate the action we intend. Nor, even, would this intended action necessarily be required by the painful fact that we know pastorally the injustice, the hurt, the offense to women which is occasioned by the present position of our Church on this issue. However, there is a ruling factor which does require this action on our part. It is our obedience to the Lordship of Christ, our response to the sovereignty of His Spirit for the Church.

One of the chief marks of the Church is its being the community of the Resurrection. Ours is a risen Lord. He was raised in the power of the Spirit so that we might participate, however inadequately, in His triumph against sin and separation, proclaim the good news of His victory, and occasionally ourselves walk in newness of life. His Spirit is the Lord of the Church. Hearing His command, we can heed no other. We gladly join ourselves with those who in other times and places, as well as here and now, have sought obedience to that same Spirit.

This action is therefore intended as an act of obedience to the Spirit. By the same token it is intended as an act of solidarity with those in whatever institution, in whatever part of the world, of whatever stratum of society, who in their search for freedom, for liberation, for dignity, are moved by that same Spirit to struggle against sin, to proclaim that victory, to attempt to walk in newness of life. We pray this action may be, as we intend it, a proclamation of the Gospel — that God has acted for us, and expects us, in obedience, to respond with appropriate action.

The Rt. Rev. Daniel Corrigan  
The Rt. Rev. Robert L. DeWitt  
The Rt. Rev. Edward R. Welles

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*“The responsibility now falls directly upon those who feel aggrieved ‘to make no peace with oppression’ and to redeem the General Convention from a foolish mistake. As blacks refused to participate in their own oppression by going to the back of the bus in 1955 in Montgomery, women are refusing to cooperate in their own oppression by remaining on the periphery of full participation in the Church in 1974 in Philadelphia.” — from Dr. Charles V. Willie’s sermon at the Philadelphia ordination.*