The following information is provided by Mr. Clarence Johnson, Deacon Candidate, in response to questions from RCIA students during his Holy Orders class presented on 18 Jan 24

**Question:** Throughout the history of the Church, has the Church ever had married priests?

**Answer**: See link here for details regarding the history of married priests. <https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_01011993_chisto_en.html>

**Question:** Over the centuries has the Church tended towards older men to become priests/bishops?

**Answer**, as we mentioned in class, the Apostle John was very young man, yet he was numbered among the Apostles (Bishops are the successors of the Apostles). Current Canon Law (Can. 378 §1) states, In regard to the suitability of a candidate for the episcopacy, it is required that he is:

1/ outstanding in solid faith, good morals, piety, zeal for souls, wisdom, prudence, and human virtues, and endowed with other qualities which make him suitable to fulfill the office in question;

2/ of good reputation;

3/ at least thirty-Five years old;

4/ ordained to the presbyterate for at least Five years;

5/ in possession of a doctorate or at least a licentiate in sacred scripture, theology, or canon law from an institute of higher studies approved by the Apostolic See, or at least truly expert in the same disciplines.

§2. The definitive judgment concerning the suitability of the one to be promoted belongs to the Apostolic See.

     As mentioned in class, both the Epistles of Titus (1: 5-9) and 1 Timothy (3: 1-7) provide the qualifications of Bishops (Presbytyrs are not mentioned specifically). While the suggestion is they must be spiritually mature, age is not specifically mentioned. 1 Timothy 3:6 does, however, say that the Bishop must not be a recent convert.

Note that Article 401.1 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law states that "A diocesan Bishop who has completed his seventy-fifth year of age is requested to offer his resignation from office to the Supreme Pontiff, who, taking all the circumstances into account, will make provision accordingly".

**Question:** What is the Church's position on women deacons?

**Answer:** The formal position of the Church presently is that women cannot be ordained to the presbyterate or the deaconate. I believe it is safe to say that both Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis have indicated that Holy Orders are reserved for men, and by extension women cannot be ordained as deacons or priests. However, there were studies launched during both of their pontificates on the matter. I believe the study launched during the pontificate of John Paul II was done in the 1980s by the International Theological Commission, and it established that the role of deaconesses in the early Church "was comparable to the benedictions of abbesses." Pope Francis formed commissions in 2016 and 2020 to study the question further and has expressed the need for continued dialogue on the subject. To be fair, it should that theologians have discovered the existence in the early Church of female deacons or deaconesses, and even an ordination rite for female deacons. Their roles and even the nature of their ordination rites continue to be in dispute. Interestingly enough, Romans 16:1 mentions a woman named Phoebe who is called a "minister of the Church at Cenchreae. The word minister is translated from the Greek word, diakonos, from which we get the word deacons. I prefer to use reputable sources from the Church when answering questions, but sometimes articles and publications capture good chronological facts that are useful. In a recent National Catholic Register article, "An Explainer: Synod on Synodality to Rehash Possibility of Women Deacons", discussing the question of the ordination of women, the Holy Father’s view on the subject was captured. Below are some excerpts from two publications/articles your students may find useful in understanding Church history related to female deacons, and what the Holy Father has said and where he presently stands on the matter of ordaining women Deacons.

The link below is to a really good article/discussion about the history of women deacons in the Catholic Church from EWTN: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/history-of-deaconesses-4813> History of Deaconesses

EWTN is a global, Catholic Television, Catholic Radio, and Catholic News Network that provides catholic programming and news coverage from around the world. [www.ewtn.com](http://www.ewtn.com)

In a recent National Catholic Register article, "An Explainer: Synod on Synodality to Rehash Possibility of Women Deacons", discussing the question of the ordination of women, the Holy Father’s view on the subject was captured. Below are some excerpts from the article your students may find useful in understanding what the Holy Father has said and where he presently stands on the matter of ordaining women Deacons.

The Pope’s Position

In 2016, Pope Francis endorsed Ordinatio Sacerdotalis, Pope St. John Paul’s authoritative 1994 statement that the Church is permanently precluded from ordaining women as priests, as the “final word” on the matter. But during that year, under the auspices of the now-Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, he appointed a commission to examine the historical role of female deacons, and in 2020, a second Commission on Women and the Diaconate focused on the theological aspects of this teaching.

No formal guidance from the two commissions has been made public. However, in 2019, shortly before delegates at the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian region pressed for approval of women deaconess as a solution to a regional priest shortage, Francis emphasized the dearth of historical support for this change. “[The] formulas of female deacons’ ‘ordination’ found until now,” he said “are not the same for the ordination of a male deacon and are more similar to what today would be the abbatial blessing of an abbess.”

And during an address to the Amazonian synod immediately after its final report had been approved with the inclusion of language supportive of female deacons, Francis suggested the document had failed to grapple with women’s full role in the Church, particularly “in the transmission of faith, in the preservation of culture,” he said. Rather, “we focus on the functional aspect, which is important,” but not everything.

Earlier in 2019, during the 21st assembly of the International Union of Women Superiors, he tackled the subject in an unusually direct manner as he explained why he could not upend tradition and doctrine. “I can’t do a decree of a sacramental nature without having a theological, historical foundation for it,” Francis told the assembly of women superiors, the Jesuit news outlet America reported.

“In regard to the diaconate, we must see what was there in the beginning of Revelation. If there was something, let it grow and it arrives, but if there was not, if the Lord did not want a sacramental ministry for women, it can’t go forward.”

The following year, his post-synodal apostolic exhortation Querida Amazoniaducked questions about deaconess, even as the Church’s first Latin American Pope recognized the role of many laywomen running isolated parishes in the Amazon where the faithful rarely saw a priest.

Women have a “central part to play in Amazonian communities,” including “access to positions, including ecclesial services, that do not entail Holy Orders,” Francis stated in Querida Amazonia.

“Here it should be noted that these services entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop. This would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood.” “Here it should be noted that these services entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop. This would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood.”

Francis sought to clarify his views about the role of women in the Church and the licitness of women’s ordination during a November 2022 interview with America. “And why can a woman not enter ordained ministry?” he asked during the interview. “It is because the Petrine principle has no place for that.”He emphasized, however, that the dignity of women reflected the spousal nature of the Church, which he called the “Marian principle.”

“The way is not only [ordained] ministry. The Church is woman. The Church is a spouse. We have not developed a theology of women that reflects this,” he suggested. The Holy Father framed the Petrine ministry and the Marian dimension of the Church as “theological” concepts. He contrasted these teachings with another practical path, which he called “the third way: the administrative way.”This administrative path, he suggested, provided an opportunity to properly address legitimate demands for women to play a greater role in Church governance. Indeed, Pope Francis has increased the number of women in senior, second and third-level management positions within the Roman Curia and Vatican City.

“[F]ive women hold the rank of undersecretary and one the rank of secretary of a dicastery,” Vatican News reported in May, in coverage timed to highlight the momentum of change within the Holy See.

In 2021, Italian religious Sister Alessandra Smerilli was appointed secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The appointment of the Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians sister marked the first time a woman was appointed to that position.

Likewise, Francis on March 9, 2021, named Sister Nuria Calduch-Benages, a Spanish religious sister of the Congregation of Missionary Daughters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and biblical scholar, the secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission; and on July 26, 2021, he appointed Emilce Cuda, an Argentinian theologian, the secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.

But while Francis has not endorsed proposals for female deacons, he has yet to issue formal guidance on the matter or present his insights on the many ways women enrich the Church and engage in work of evangelization as formators of culture. And that may help explain why the issue of women’s ordination remains on the front burner and why his efforts to broaden the discussion have failed to develop much traction.

5. New Catholic Answers Bible (NAB Version): What makes The New Catholic Answer Bible so unique is the answers to questions about Catholic beliefs and practices and their foundation in Scripture. From Where Did the Bible Come From? and Are the Seven Sacraments in the Bible? to Are Catholics Born Again? and Why Do Catholic Bibles Have Seventy-three Books?, these eighty-eight diverse topics answer tough questions Catholics are asked. The New Catholic Answer Bible: Thigpen, Paul, Armstrong, Dave: 9781592761869: Amazon.com: Books

6. Four Witnesses, by Rod Bennett

Available through Amazon.com, AbeBooks.com, and Christianbook.com (and other sources)

Amazon.com : Four Witnesses: The Early Church in Her Own Words by Bennett, Rod: Very Good Paperback (2002) | Half Price Books Inc. (abebooks.com)

What was the early Church like? Contrary to popular belief, Rod Bennett shows there is a reliable way to know. Four ancient Christian writers--four witnesses to early Christianity --left us an extensive body of documentation on this vital subject, and this book brings their fascinating testimony to life for modern believers. With all the power and drama of a gripping novel, this book is a journey of discovery of ancient and beautiful truths through the lives of four great saints of the early Church--Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus of Lyons.