

**ASIAN
HORIZONS**

Vol. 10, No. 2, June 2016

Pages: 300-312

LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN: ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO CHURCH MINISTRY

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Abstract

Pope Francis at various times has suggested opening new opportunities for women both in the Church and society which has inspired hope in women for beginnings of the long awaited change. Women, however, continue to be corralled in stereotyped roles in the Catholic Church, keeping them subservient, silent and compliant. The so called "feminine genius" is understood in terms of the stereotyped view of 'complementarity' which is a hindrance to women's equal and full participation in the Church.

Canon Law allows women to take on various roles in Church, but these are not given to women, particularly in India. Several encyclicals speak of women's dignity, equality, rights and freedom, but clericalism and cultic priesthood are the major roadblocks to women's equal and full participation in Church leadership and ministry. The SCC (Small Christian Community) where women are present in large numbers, modelled on the Early Christian Community that struggled to live according to the values of the Gospel, can develop into a discipleship community of equals that "witnesses to a counter-culture wherein power and domination are replaced by humble and loving service."

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We need more empowered and articulate women for the voice for full equality and participation of women in the Church heard.

Keywords: Community, Complementarity, Dignity, Equality, Feminine Genius, Ministry, Priesthood

On 25th Jan 2014, Pope Francis addressed an Italian Congress of Catholic women saying "I strongly wish that (opportunities and responsibilities) may open themselves up further to the presence and participation of women, both in the church as well as in society and the professional sphere," including a greater role in decision making, he added.¹

In May 2016, women religious of the Union of International Superiors General met with Pope Francis and asked him a series of questions on the role and leadership of women religious in the mission of the Church. The off the cuff responses by the Pope generated a lot of interest and speculation among women the world over, as they thought that his responses gave them some hope that he would take steps to make the Church more open to the inclusion of women in Church leadership. But with the passage of time, women wonder if he was saying what has already been said before about women's exclusion except that he promised to look into those areas where they could be included but were still left out because of the extent of clericalism that exists in the Church.

Women continue to be corralled by stereotyped roles. Pope John Paul II first coined the phrase "feminine genius"² citing Mary the mother of Jesus as the highest expression of this genius. He then reiterates that the genius of women should be emphasized as it is the ordinary women who reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives.³ Pope Francis stressed the importance of listening to women, giving them a voice, consulting them so that decisions in the Church could be "richer, stronger and more intuitive" because the Church needs the "feminine genius."⁴

¹See Glatz Carol in "Women Should Play a Greater Role in the Church, Says Pope," The Catholic Herald UK, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2014/01/27/women-should-play-a-greater-role-in-church-says-pope/> accessed on 2nd May 2016.

²John Paul II, *The Letter to Women* (1995), #10.

³John Paul II *The Letter to Women* (1995), # 12.

⁴Wooden Cindy, "The Church Needs the Feminine Genius, Says Pope Francis", published in the *Catholic Herald* on 18th May, 2015. <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/05/18/the-church-needs-the-feminine-genius-says-pope-francis/> accessed on 21.07.2016

Bishop Joshua Mar Ignathios points out that “The Church would be physically empty if women are not around. Yet, female leadership is almost conspicuous by its absence.”⁵ A Japanese Bishop also observed “If women go, we have to close the Church.”⁶ Another Indian Bishop said “the girl child will only gain value when she is able to become a bishop.”⁷ His remark shows that he is keenly aware of how women’s position in the Church affects her value even in society.

Each of these remarks implies that Popes and Bishops are aware of the value of women in the mission of the Church. But is their stereotyped view of complementarity a hindrance to women’s equal participation in the Church?

1. Current Roles Held by Women in the Mission of the Church

To begin with, we need to understand the term “ministry” in the Church. Ministry is derived from the Greek word *diakonia*, meaning “to serve.” Service is at its essence. All the baptized are called to do Ministry to others both inside and out the church. Ministry in the New Testament times was diverse and emerges from the life of the community.⁸

The roles readily given to women in the Church have been in keeping with the stereotypical qualities attributed to women as care givers, homemakers skilled in domestic tasks like cleaning, sewing, cooking, dependent, but lacking capacity to make decisions. While it is true that most of the time the clergy and hierarchy are also reluctant to give lay women positions of leadership in the Church, there have been times when women themselves have not been willing to come forward to volunteer or offer their services in responsible positions in the Church. A survey conducted with members of parish councils as respondents a couple of years after the publication of the Gender Policy by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in India, showed

⁵Bp. Joshua Mar Ignathios in “Role of Women in the Church,” in *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara CMI, Bangalore, India: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 151.

⁶Mateo Cora in “Sharing on Women in SCCs or BECs,” in *Discipleship of Asian Women at the Service of Life*, ed. Saldanha Virginia, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2007, 254.

⁷I prefer to keep the bishop anonymous. This remark was made casually to a small group of women, at tea break during a regional seminar on the empowerment of women organized during my tenure as Executive Secretary of the CBCI Commission for Women.

⁸Brazal Agnes in her paper “Ministry in a New Ecclesiology: Toward a More Expansive Participation of Lay Women,” presented at a Conference on “Gender & Ecclesiology: An intercultural Dialogue,” at Tagatay, Philippines, in July 2016.

that 52% of total respondents agree that women are reluctant to assume responsibilities in the parish.⁹

Gender inequality and role stereotyping is reinforced largely due to the socialization process that girls are put through. This socialization makes women vulnerable to domination, acceptance of violence, economic dependency, and reliance on the male for decision making. Women's socialization gradually leads them to develop a culture of fear, silence, and consequent disempowerment in order "to be protected" by the male, and often exploited and abused by him. He may be her father, husband, brother, son, or priest in the Church. This gives rise to the traditional attitude which allows men to be in leadership and take up responsible positions in the Church. Clericalism among most clergy/hierarchy ensures that women who will do the bidding of the priests/bishop are kept in positions of leadership. Women who raise questions or work towards equality for women are often labelled "trouble makers" and are marginalized.

There is no doubt that women have always engaged in service following Jesus' teachings of love and caring (Jn 13:34; Mt 25:40-45), whether it be in the family, neighbourhood, parish community and wider society to the extent that has been possible for them, even at the cost of their health and leisure. Most of the time women are multi-tasking — managing family care while doing household duties and negotiating time between one's job and work in the parish community. In the parish women are the majority of co-ordinators and animators in the Small Christian Community (SCC). They are also catechists in Sunday school, sacramental catechesis, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, readers, cantors, and they carry out other outreach ministries in the parish through traditional organizations like Legion of Mary, St Vincent DePaul Society, etc. A few are in diocesan teams of Liturgy, Women's outreach, justice ministry, etc. But only a negligible few are actually in charge of any one of these ministries where they are allowed some decision making responsibilities. The ultimate decision makers are the clergy and bishops. Since women are excluded from ordination they are excluded from the enclave of primary decision makers in the Church.

While most of the animators in SCCs and Parish catechists are women, those who represent these groups in the parish council are

⁹George Julie SSpS, "Situating the Theme, Living the Legacy of Vatican II," paper presented at the National Conference on "Women and Vatican II" in Bangalore, In January 2014. To be published shortly.

mostly men. The higher we go within the hierarchy of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, the fewer there are women. In the business world women are making significant contributions in the areas of finance and management, but they are absent from finance committees in parishes or dioceses. Pope Francis pointed out that “today more than sixty percent of parishes — of dioceses I don’t know, but only a little fewer — do not have a finance or a pastoral council. What does this mean? It means that the parish or diocese is led with a clerical spirit, by the priest alone, and that it does not implement synodality in the parish, in the diocese,” even though under Canon Law “the parish priest is obliged to have a council of laypeople, with lay men, women and women religious for pastoral ministry and financial affairs.”¹⁰

As pointed out earlier, laywomen are given secondary roles in the Church while the primary roles are given to men. This is evidence of the patriarchal culture in the Church that has sunk deep into women’s psyche and into the dynamics of the relationship of men and women.

The Church has allowed girls to be altar servers, but many dioceses have not inducted girls into this service. Lay people have been permitted to exercise certain ministries like ministry of the Word, to preside over certain liturgical prayers, to confer Baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion (Code of Canon law, Can. 230 # 3). A few dioceses, however, have permitted women to undertake these ministries.

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) brought out a Gender Policy in December 2010 wherein the CBCI committed itself to appoint lay men and women with the required qualifications as Secretaries of the various Commissions; reorganize the Diocesan Social Service Societies (DSSS) to include women in policy formulations and decision-making; to open doors to women in governance and administration wherever it is suitable according to the norms of the Church; to ensure adequate representation of women as office-bearers and members in Parish/Diocesan councils and financial committees, marriage tribunals, the Church’s Commissions at all levels and the DSSS and Regional Forums; to create avenues for women to participate in the decision-making

¹⁰Meeting of Pope Francis with the USIG in Rome on 13th May 2016 - text accessed at <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/05/13/0337/00782.html> on 21.07.2016.

processes of the Church at all levels. The CBCI is also committed to provide adequate training to women to enable them to assume leadership roles in the Church; use women-friendly timings, safe commuting and lodging arrangements and child-care facilities to enable women's participation in governance systems; foster positive attitudes among the clergy and the laity towards women's participation and leadership; make gender sensitization an imperative for all members of Church bodies.¹¹ This document looks wonderful on paper, but the reality is another story. With the absence of a framework for the implementation of the Policy, nothing of any significance has been achieved in any of the areas mentioned. On the other hand the CBCI Commission for Women that started as a Desk under the Commission for the Laity, has been progressively demoted to an Office and now as Council for Women and is back under the Commission for the Laity after the release of the Gender Policy. Moreover there has been no evaluation of implementation of the Policy, no allocation of a budget as promised, which makes one wonder about the seriousness of intent in the implementation of the Policy.

2. Roles Given to Women by Canon Law

Canon Law provides a number of roles that women are allowed to perform in the Church like being members of the pastoral council of the diocese (can. 512 § 1) and parish (can. 536 § 1); to be full members of provincial councils of bishops (can. 443 § 4), diocesan synods (can. 463 § 2 & 1.5), the finance committee of the diocese (can. 492 § 1) and of the parish (can. 537). To be financial administrator of the diocese (can. 494); consultors on the appointment of parish priests (can. 524) and the appointment of bishops (can. 377 § 3); preach in a church or oratory though not the homily (can. 766); assist at marriages under certain conditions (c.1112); assist the parish priest in exercising the pastoral care of the community, as parish assistants, or as chaplains in hospitals, colleges, youth centres and social institutions (can. 519); to be entrusted with a parish because of a shortage of priests (can. 517 § 2); administer certain sacramentals (can. 1168); hold offices in an ecclesiastical tribunal, such as being judges (can. 1421 § 2), assessors (can. 1424), auditors (can. 1428 § 2), promoters of justice and defenders of the marriage bond (can. 1435); hold the diocesan offices of a chancellor or a notary (can. 483 § 2). While there are some women

¹¹Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, *Gender Policy of the Catholic Church of India for the Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society*, CBCI, 2010, 32-34.

appointed to these positions in different parts of the world, in India women are rarely appointed to any leadership position in the Church. Women are mainly catechists (can. 785) and assisting the parish priest in the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children (can. 776). Another area where women are present in greater numbers is in exercising pastoral care to the community in the Small Christian Community (SCC).

3. Women's Lay Leadership in Church Documents

The first Pope to recognize women's dignity, position in society and her demand for rights was Pope John XXIII when he pointed out

Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons.¹²

In his closing message of Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI said

The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness, the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect, and power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women imbued with a spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid humanity in not falling.¹³

It was only after Vatican Council II that the responsibility of lay leadership in the church began to grow and develop. The Council asserted the full belonging of the lay faithful to the Church and to its mystery. At the same time it insisted on the unique character of their vocation, which is in a special way to "seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to the plan of God."¹⁴ All the baptized share in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly office.¹⁵ By virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, every person has a responsibility to participate in the mission of the Church, viz. to promote the values of God's reign in the world.

Pope John Paul II addresses the dignity and vocation of women in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*. He points out that "Christ

¹²Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 41, Vatican City, April 11, 1963. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html accessed on 23rd July, 2016.

¹³Pope Paul VI, "The Council Message to Women" (8th December 1965).

¹⁴Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 30.

¹⁵Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 31; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1546.

became a promoter of women's true dignity and of the vocation corresponding to this dignity.¹⁶ The entire chapter 5 is dedicated to Jesus' encounters with women and how he transformed them into his dedicated disciples.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II said, "it is important to underline the equal dignity and responsibility of women with men. In creating the human race 'male and female,' God gives man and woman an equal personal dignity, endowing them with the inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person."¹⁷

In referring to women's role he points out that,

a widespread social and cultural tradition has considered women's role to be exclusively that of wife and mother, without adequate access to public functions, which have generally been reserved for men. There is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justify women's access to public functions.¹⁸

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* of Pope John Paul II addressed to the People of God in Asia states:

*The contribution of women have all too often been undervalued or ignored, and this has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity. The Church in Asia would more visibly and effectively uphold women's dignity and freedom by encouraging their role in the Church's life, including her intellectual life, and by opening to them ever greater opportunities to be present and active in the Church's mission of love and service.*¹⁹

While acknowledging that women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection, Pope Francis stresses the need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because the "feminine genius" is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the workplace and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures.²⁰

4. Challenges to Women's Participation

Clericalism: While there is apparent 'progress' after Vatican II in women's participation in the Church, the basic problems of hierarchy

¹⁶John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 12.

¹⁷John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 22.

¹⁸John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 23.

¹⁹John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 34.

²⁰Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 103.

that is rooted in patriarchy resulting in clericalism is not addressed. This is what keeps women 'subordinate' in the Church. Excluded from ordained ministry, women are not part of the primary decision making in the Church and this results in the subordination of women. Even decisions about women are made by men in the Church.

Clericalism has kept women in a position of infantile subordination to the clergy and has effectively even ensured their silence even in cases of sexual violence by priests. "For many devout victims and their families the priests' power is considered of divine origin; for many of them it is identical with the power of God."²¹

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis lists clericalism under other 'ecclesial challenges':

In some cases, it is because lay persons have not been given the formation needed to take on important responsibilities. In others, it is because in their particular Churches room has not been made for them to speak and to act, due to an excessive clericalism which keeps them away from decision making.²²

The most dysfunctional aspect of the modern Church is clericalism. In his interaction with the sisters of the UISG, Pope Francis insisted "the priest is a servant of the community, the bishop is a servant of the community, but he is not the head of a firm. No!"²³ He points out that clericalism has thwarted the role of the laity, but that the laity have also been complicit in the development of clericalism. The critical question is how do we dismantle clericalism in the Church without changing structures?

Priesthood: Cultic or Ministerial?: Women theologians have struggled to understand the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood and found no convincing theological explanation or scriptural basis for this exclusion. They have come to the unanimous conclusion that women should seek a priesthood that is different from the kind of priesthood that is exercised today.

Women understand priesthood as service, modelled on the priesthood of Jesus. God's love was made manifest in Jesus' dealings with people. His compassion, caring concern, and reaching out to bring healing and hope is similar to that expressed by women. Women can more easily emulate the priesthood of Jesus because of the qualities of caring, nurturing, sacrificing and inner strength they have been encouraged to cultivate

²¹Conway Eamonn, "A Church Beyond Clericalism," (Unpublished paper).

²² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 102.

²³Pope Francis' dialogue with the religious of UISG in May 2016, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/05/13/0337/00782.html>.

down the ages. Precisely the qualities that are required for building people and community but which are not encouraged in men brought up in a 'macho' patriarchal society.

More than ever, our world today needs a 'healing priesthood'. People are subjected to a lot of stress and pressures from modern day living. The economic situation puts a lot of strain on families. Situations of conflict local and international, adds to the tensions within and between communities of peoples. Instead of attitudes of arrogance and superiority we need gentle understanding, compassion and forgiveness to heal and sustain people.

In India one finds women foremost in the areas of offering compassionate care, counselling, working for justice among the poor and marginalized, as catechists, and being with people in moments of need. The promotion of the Small Christian Community or Basic Community in the Church in Asia has developed women's leadership in the neighbourhood which provides the caring dimension in community building. This 'common priesthood' expressed by women is vital for healing and holding communities together. But woman's contribution has to go beyond the sphere of the family and neighbourhood to bring healing and wholeness to the Church and the world!²⁴

In view of the above, we have to understand the term "feminine genius" which the Popes John Paul II and Francis attribute solely to women hence they use the adjective 'feminine' to describe the qualities of concern, compassion and tenderness in women. What is important to note is that these qualities were very much part of who Jesus was to people, he fed them out of sheer concern (Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6:30-44; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6 1-15); he healed the sick (Mt 8:3;7; 16), he showed tenderness and compassion (Lk 7:11-17), he wept when his friend Lazarus died (Jn 11:33-35). These are qualities that men can also cultivate but are prevented from doing so because of the stereotyping of roles for women and men according to cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity. The Church unfortunately also uses this thinking in assigning women complementary roles to men and attributes these roles to women's biological role of motherhood. The challenge the Church faces with using this concept of complementarity is the alienation of the millennial generation. "With millennials gender roles are blurred so there is no male or female — as all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Sticking to the idea of complementarity, the Church can lose this generation."²⁵

²⁴Virginia Saldanha, "Priesthood and Community: The Feminine Dimension," in *Healing Priesthood: Women's Voices Worldwide*, ed. Angela Perkins and Verena Wright, London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 2003, 119.

²⁵Virginia Saldanha, "Women at the Grassroot Level of Church Leadership," (Unpublished paper).

According to Schillebeeckx, the New Testament ministries did not form or develop from and around the Eucharist but from the formation of the community. Therefore leadership structures of the community need to emerge on the basis of the gift of the Spirit, from which no one is excluded.²⁶ In the 4th and 5th centuries ministries that were once held by both the clergy and other Christians were now exclusively held solely by the clergy."²⁷ Later the hierarchy of the clergy emerged with the roles of Bishop, priest, deacon. The pertinent question women theologians ask, "Did Christ really institute the priesthood as we know it today?" In practice the exercise of the cultic priesthood evolved with the trappings of power in the exercise of authority which devolved from the sacramental power of the Eucharist. Sacramental power coupled with the revival of purity laws have served to exclude women from ordained priesthood. In fact Jesus broke the purity law when he allowed the woman with the flow of blood to touch him. Instead of chiding her, he gently called her 'daughter' and healed her (Lk 8:43-48).

The present day ministerial priesthood claims to originate with the Last Supper when Christ said "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). We need to examine more closely what Jesus really did. While he was at supper he got up, and washed the feet of his disciples (Jn 13:3-20) (that included all his close followers who were also women). He took on a role that was reserved to servants during his time, servants who were mostly women.²⁸ And he said, as I have done to you, you should do to one another (Jn 13: 14-15). This underscores the servanthood of Christian ministry in the Church. He then took bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying "Take and eat this bread, which is my body broken for you", "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). In the institution of the Eucharistic meal Christ gave us the lesson about the breaking of our body for the sake of others. A sacrifice that those who follow in his footsteps as ministers are exhorted to do in memory of him. "Hence it is clear that Christian ministry is not about cultic priesthood. The ministers were not priests nor mediators nor did they attempt to set up a priesthood that was parallel to that in the Temple."²⁹

²⁶Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, New York: Crossroad, 1982.

²⁷Agnes Brazal, "Ministry in a New Ecclesiology: Toward a More Expansive Participation of Lay Women," (Unpublished paper).

²⁸"Jesus empowered Women to Preside at the Eucharist," <http://www.womenpriests.org/psupper.asp> accessed on 20.05.2016

²⁹Paul Bernier, *Ministry in the Church: A Historical and Pastoral Approach*, Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications 1992, 29.

The goal of ministry was to be in service to the community. Secondly, Christian ministries were not honorific states but were functions in the community and therefore action-oriented. Thirdly what distinguishes ministry from other tasks is that it serves the promotion of God's reign by preaching the gospel and building up the community. Lastly, Christian ministry is a charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit, that is given both to the entire church and to individuals.³⁰

5. Concluding Statement

Only when we have a sizeable number of women, who are trained and articulate in the Church, that women can make their voice heard. Women should be well informed about the new directions regarding women's participation in the Church, and they should ask their bishop to open ministries for women as well as positions of leadership of women in the diocese.

Women have to be encouraged to theologize based on their life experiences. They have to speak up when they feel strongly that God is speaking to them through their lives. Theologizing is not limited to professional theologians. Catherine of Siena was named Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI, though she was not a professional theologian.

Nobody in Catherine's world, including Catherine, would have assigned that word to her during her life. She was not a theologian in terms of getting a degree at the University of Paris and becoming clergy. But she obviously knew she was talking about God. She knew the tradition and she knew that she knew the tradition. She was absolutely talking about God in a thoughtful, reflective way.³¹

Catherine is truly a role model for modern day women though she lived in medieval times and died at the early age of 33.

Throughout her life and ministry, Catherine broke a lot of boundaries about what was acceptable. Especially in the last five to six years of her life, she surfaced as a force to be reckoned with. She was involved with getting the pope back to Rome from Avignon and trying to reform a church that was unbelievably dysfunctional.³²

³⁰Brazal, "Ministry in a New Ecclesiology: Toward a More Expansive Participation of Lay Women" (Unpublished paper).

³¹Elizabeth Dryer in an Interview with "U.S. Catholic," "A Medieval Woman for Modern Times," published online by US Catholic http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201607/medieval-woman-modern-times-30707?utm_source=Long+read+7%2F20%2F16&utm_campaign=Long+read+7%2F21%2F16&utm_medium=email accessed on 22nd July, 2016.

³²"A Medieval Woman for Modern Times," A US Catholic Interview, <http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201607/medieval-woman-modern-times-30707> accessed on 20.05.2016

Another role model for women, most recently recognized by Pope Francis by raising the status of her commemoration to the dignity of feast, is Mary Magdalene. "As she was an eye witness to the risen Christ, she was also the first one to bear witness to him before the male Apostles. She fulfils the command of the Risen Lord: "'Go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples 'I have seen the Lord' and she told them that he had said these things to her" (Jn 20:17-18). Thus, as already indicated she becomes an evangelist, that is a messenger who announces the Good News of the Lord's resurrection."³³ Thomas Aquinas called her the 'apostle of the apostles'.

Women in the Church in India have to be made aware that they have been complicit in perpetuating clericalism by their continued subservience to the clergy. They need to grow out of this infantile subservience and take their place among the People of God as an equal in the mission of the Church. Women's present role and participation at the grassroots especially in the SCCs, needs to be seen as a relevant ministry, with more scope given to women to be trained and exercise greater freedom in executing their ministry in creative ways. Since the SCC is modelled on the early Christian community that struggled to live in community according to the values of the Gospel, it can develop into a discipleship community of equals that "witnesses to a counter-culture wherein power and domination are replaced by humble and loving service."³⁴

Women have to trust each other and work together to create a Church that is collaborative, participatory, and inclusive without distinctions of caste, class and gender; a Church that is truly the sign and sacrament of God's reign among us.

³³Archbishop Arthur Roche, Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/apostle-apostles>.

³⁴Margaret Beirne RSC in "Women Leadership in the New Testament," (Unpublished paper).