

2012 St Mary of Magdala Prayer Service

This service was developed with FutureChurch's new Spring 2012 resource, "Women Deacons: Why Not Now?" at its core. As we work to End the Silencing of Catholic Women and restore women deacons we reflect on both the historical roles of women deacons and the tasks of the permanent diaconate today. Faithful men and women experience God's call to serve their communities, yet in the Latin rite women are currently excluded from ordination. Though not called "deacon" we recognize and affirm women who already perform diaconal ministry. These women are servant leaders and are an example of what work can be done in our community and in the cause of church renewal.

Our discussion of women deacons aims to promote not only the capacity for service but also the preaching gifts of women. There are many women whose voices, though long silenced, could contribute meaningful messages for the faithful in liturgy. Please consider inviting a woman, or women, with preaching background and experience to share a Gospel of her choosing and offer a homily. As Mary of Magdala announced the resurrection so should women today proclaim the Good News.

As you plan your celebration, please use this service, or any of its elements to create a prayer experience that fits your community.

****Also included are community service and church renewal ideas that can be distributed to participants to encourage further servant leadership****

End the Silencing of Catholic Women: Restore Women Deacons

Note: If possible, please celebrate around a central table with two bowls of water and a Bible. A second table with the servant-leader idea sheets should be placed to the side (alternatively, two tables on opposite sides for larger groups).

Leader: Welcome all to our celebration of the feast of St. Mary of Magdala. Please take a moment to introduce yourselves to one another. *(Allow time for introductions)*

Leader: Let us join our voices together in song.

Opening Song: Suggestions: We are Called (David Hass, 1988 GIA Publications, Inc.)
We are Many Parts (Marty Haugen, 1980 GIA Publications, Inc.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: We are called here together by God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit Guide. Let us remember St. Mary of Magdala, our sister in faith, disciple of unwavering belief, and Apostle to the Apostles. Mary was called to work beside Jesus, to accompany him in his passion and death, and to proclaim his resurrection. Today we take time to remember not only Mary of Magdala, but also women leaders who served as deacons in the early church, that their example might show us the way: The way of courage, The way of generosity; The way of strength; The way of perseverance; The way of love; The way of hope; The way of passion; The way of desire; The way of equality; The way of service. The way to the Diaconate.

All: Amen

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading: Acts 6:1-7 or Quilt of Women Voices

Litany of Women Deacons:

All: Loving God, the call of the Spirit seen in early women deacons is alive in our world today. Guide us as we remember and continue their work.

Leader We recall our sister, Phoebe: benefactor and sister in faith to Paul; called by God to lead her community as a *diakonos*, the same title Paul used to describe his own ministry of proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles

All: Help us Phoebe, grant us your zeal, generosity and perseverance that we might follow our own call to serve our community through leadership and proclamation of the Word.

Leader: We recall our sister Olympias: widowed at a young age; who resisted patriarchal orders to remarry so a man could manage her wealth. Instead, she became an ordained deacon and leader of deacons, a friend and benefactor to St. John Chrysostom, and followed God's call to live a simple life. She dedicated her great wealth in service to the Church, and in service to the poor.

All: Help us Olympias, teach us by your strength, endurance and generosity to resist attempts by others to control our destinies. Show us how we too might live simply, become benefactors of church ministers, male and female, and serve the needs of all God's people, especially the poor.

Leader: We recall our sister Macrina: ascetic and teacher; She devoted herself to spiritual development and established a monastery. Those in her community admired her work with the poor and sick and her talent in philosophical argument was hailed as "sublime."

All: Help us Macrina, show us by your dedication how to recognize those who are in need of assistance that we might serve them. Lead us to contribute our thoughts and voices to the education and development of our communities.

Leader: We recall our sister Dionysia: wife and mother; Who struggled through years of infertility. Her prayers were answered when she experienced a divine vision informing her that she was to be blessed with a child, a son, who would bring encouragement to the church. Soon after the birth of her son, she suffered the tragic suicide of her husband, Paul. Even then she did not lose hope but was ordained a deacon and served the church of Melitene.

All: Help us Dionysia, offer us your determination and resolve that we might overcome our own hardships. Let us be aware of the love and strength of God in our lives that we too might find hope and courage to continue on through adversity.

Leader: We recall our sister Radegunda: Queen and deacon; A woman whose passion led her to a new life. As a young woman she was taken prisoner and forced to marry the King, though her heart belonged to the poor. Due to her devotion to God and her desire to serve, she finally left the King and demanded the bishop consecrate her a deacon. In spite of her husband's threats, the bishop was moved by her desire, and consented. She traded her gowns for monastic garb, and opened a monastery in Poitiers to serve the poor and sick.

All: Help us Radegunda, ignite within us a passion that cannot be denied. As your desire led you into the sacristy, let us not be hindered by those who do not understand our call. Instead, help us to recognize our talents and use them to serve others that they might know God's love.

All: God, your Spirit who called women deacons in the early Church, is alive in our world today. Fill us with the Spirit's fiery love that we might continue their work, and Yours.

Gospel Acclamation:

Gospel and Homily: *One focus of this service is women proclaiming the Word. You may choose to have several women preach, which can add to the experience of hearing women's voices from the pulpit. If one person gives the homily, it should last no more than 20 minutes. If you choose to have more than one preacher, allow no more than 8-10 minutes for each homily. Homilist may choose scripture passage related to biblical service, women's leadership, servant leadership, St. Mary of Magdala etc.*

Suggested Scriptural passages: John 20:1-2, 11-18; John 13:1-20; Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-11; Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 22:27-30

Reflection: *Please allow a few moments for private reflection after the homily (each homily), Depending on your group, it may also be appropriate to have a shared or communal reflection. For some this can be the first time they are hearing a woman's point of view in a homily.*

Reflection on Diaconal Service

Voice One: Historically, deacons were tasked with certain duties as part of their ministry to the Church. As found in Acts, these duties involved service in the community. They were endowed with the Spirit, which called them to care for the poor, the widowed, and the sick. They took on these tasks with strength and vigor even risking their lives as they did so. Through time the definition and responsibilities of the diaconate changed but the call of the Holy Spirit to serve the community continues in every time and place.

Voice Two: Permanent deacons today are called to serve at the Eucharistic table, in the service of the Word, and in service to the community. In the Latin rite only men may be deacons but in other eastern rites such as the Armenian, women also serve as deacons. We believe women are called to serve as permanent deacons in the Latin rite today since several have come forward in at least three US dioceses. In scripture such leaders were called *diakonoi*, servants, of the Church and of Christ.

Voice One: Today we reflect on early women leaders who were called by the Spirit to serve the Church as deacons. We remember Phoebe, Olympias, Macrina, Dionysia, Radegunda and their sisters. We also reflect on those unfamiliar women who served without recognition, like Maria, Paula, and Eugenia whose ministry is known only through inscriptions that identify them as deacons. Those who like Perpetua and Felicity suffered torture for their faith; Those that were exiled from the community like Olympias; Those that lost their families, lovers, and friends in order to follow the call like Thecla; Those who, like the sisters at Hotel Dieu, stayed with the sick and dying through epidemic and plague, even after the priests had fled; Those who ministered with the poor in famine; Those who gave their lives for Christ and for the Church.

Voice Two: Just as we acknowledge that those women existed, so too we recognize the women who perform diaconal service among us today but are not recognized. In our world there are still poor, sick, dying, lonely, unloved, uneducated persons in need of aid. Who cares for them? Who ministers to them?

Please name aloud or silently a woman you know who performs this type of ministry.

Voice One: In our churches: who unlocks the buildings? Who decorates and lights the candles? Who cleans the worship spaces? Who educates our children in the faith? Who organizes Bible study?

Please name aloud or silently a woman you know who performs this type of ministry.

Voice Two: In our community: Who distributes food and goods at shelters? Who volunteers at the hospitals? Who organizes charity drives and fun runs?

Please name aloud or silently a woman you know who performs this type of ministry.

Leader: Let us take a moment now to reflect on women who, without fanfare or recognition, have answered the Spirit's call to diaconal service in our day even as did women deacons in the early church. Who are the woman or women who take on these roles in your community? Who do you believe could be called to the permanent diaconate ?

In this time of silence, I ask each person here to consider one woman or several women, in whom you already see the qualities of diaconal ministry at work. Then, consider if these women leaders may be called to or would consider diaconal ordination today. When you have finished, please consider committing to have a conversation with the woman or women about your perceptions.

Note: Please allow 3-5 minutes of silent contemplation before continuing.

All: We give you thanks O God for the generosity with which so many women and men already serve our Church and our world. We pray that the institution of the Church will soon recognize and affirm the abundance of ministerial calls already being poured out among us.

Ritual of Service

Leader: The Gospel of John offers us an example of what it is to be servant modeled on Christ Jesus. Before Passover, Jesus donned the apparel of a servant and with a washbasin and towel in hand, washed and dried the feet of his disciples. Jesus, though teacher and master, was also servant to his disciples. He humbled himself so that we would then serve each other, saying "I have given a model for you, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." (Jn 13:15) This is his call to us, to serve our neighbor as he has served.

Today we wash one another's hands in memory of Jesus' servant leadership. As we do this, let us celebrate all the diaconal calls already at work among us and recommit ourselves to humbly and courageously serve one another and those most in need of Christ's liberating love.

Hymn: The Servant Song (Richard Gillard, 1994, GIA Publications, Inc.)

Leader: Please come forward.

(Two people model the hand washing ritual. The leader approaches the bowl, dips her hands in the water and turns to the person behind her who dries the leader's hands with the towel. The second person then dips her hands in the bowl and her hands are dried by the leader who gives the towel to the second person to dry the hands of the next person in line...and so on. After each person completes the hand washing ritual, he or she moves to the second table to receive the servant leadership ideas sheet and returns to their seat)

Closing Prayer:

Leader: We thank you God, that throughout history and still today, women are answering your call to service and to leadership. We remember the words of Pope John Paul II: "I make an appeal to the women of the church today to assume new forms of leadership in service and I appeal to all the institutions of the church to welcome this contribution of women."

All: Christ, you came as a servant to show us the way. Thank you for filling us with your Spirit and help us respond to your call with courage, strength, and resolve.

Leader: We have been given examples of leadership in the persons of Mary of Magdala who delivered the message of new life to the apostles, the early women deacons who led so courageously, and women

and men who serve our communities today. Let us remember that serving our neighbor and working for expanded roles for women in the Church, does not end at the edge of our gathering, but continues in every person we encounter, in every letter or postcard we write and in every justice cause that we embrace.

Let us go forth now to love and serve our God

All: Thanks be to God!

Closing Song: Suggestions: Companions on the Journey (Carey Landry, 1985, NALR)
City of God (Daniel Schutte, 1981, New Dawn Music)
The Spirit is A-Movin' (Carey Landry, 1969, NALR)

Quilt of Voices of Women Leaders

(If you choose to use this you may want to have several readers)

Mary of Nazareth

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

(Luke 1:46-55)

Mary of Magdala

But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb and saw two angels sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus has been. And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and said to him, "Sir if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni," which means Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and what he told her. *(John 20:11-18)*

Phoebe of Cenchreae

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a *diakonos* of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been benefactor to many and to me as well. *(Romans 16:1-2)*

Macrina the Younger

"You have in your hands everything [Macrina] put away. Look at her cloak, look at the veil on her head, the worn sandals on her feet; this is her wealth, this her fortune! Apart from what you see there is nothing laid by in hidden chests or chambers in reserve. She knew only on repository for her own wealth, the treasury of heaven. There she stored everything, and left nothing behind on earth." *(Women in Early Christianity. edited by Patricia Cox Miller. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005)*

Dionysia of Melitene

Dionysia and her husband were discouraged by years of being unable to conceive a child. One night a divine vision appeared to them announcing that their prayers would be answered; Dionysia was blessed with a son. Her husband, Paul, took his own life three years later. "But blessed Dionysia, since she was so devoted to God and the things of God, he ordained deacon of the holy church." (*Life of Saint Euthymius by Cyril of Scythopolis from Ordained Women in the Early Church. edited by Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2005, 33.*)

Olympias of Constantinople

"And the blessed Olympias herself burst the supreme limit in her almsgiving and her humility. For no place, no country, no desert, no island, no distant setting, remained without a share in the benevolence of this famous woman; rather, she furnished the churches with liturgical offerings and helped the monasteries and convents, the beggars, the prisoners and those in exile; quite simply, she distributed her alms over the entire inhabited world . . . She had a life without vanity, an appearance without pretence, character without affectation, intelligence without conceit, an untroubled heart and undying hope in God." (*The Life of Olympias as found in Jerome, Chrysostom and Friends by Elizabeth A, Clark, Edwin Mellen Press, 1979*)

Radegunda of Gaul

"If Divinity fosters it, misfortune often leads to salvation. Thus her innocent brother was killed so that she might come to live in religion. She left the king and went straight to holy Médard at Noyon. She earnestly begged that she might change her garments and be consecrated to God. But mind- fill of the words of the Apostle: "Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed," he hesitated to garb the Queen in the robe of a *monacha*. For even then, nobles were harassing the holy man and attempting to drag him brutally through the basilica from the altar to keep him from veiling the king's spouse lest the priest imagine he could take away the king's official queen as though she were only a prostitute. That holiest of women knew this and, sizing up the situation, entered the sacristy put on a monastic garb and proceeded straight to the altar, saying to the blessed Médard: "If you shrink from consecrating me, and fear man more than God, Pastor, He will require His sheep's soul from your hand." He was thunderstruck by that argument and, laying his hand on her, he consecrated her as a deaconess."

(*Fortunatus, Venantius. The Life of the Holy Radegunda (12). <http://mw.mcmaster.ca/scriptorium/radegund.html> accessed 3/22/2012*)