Appendix C

Data and Interview Questions for RCWP Communities

Although womenpriests are the central focus of this book, RCWP’s ordained women do not exist in isolation. The following offers some basic information about the people who regularly attend Mass and are active in RCWP-led communities. Most of the following information comes from three studies: a 2014 electronic survey I conducted through the RCWP and ARCWP listservs; a 2011 MA thesis for Drew University’s Theological School (“Waiting for Wisdom: Sophia’s Response to the Roman Catholic Church’s Position on Priesthood”), written by Allison Delcalzo; and an undergraduate thesis in women and gender studies from Washington University in St. Louis (“All Are Welcome: The Roman Catholic Women’s Ordination Movement and the Motivations of Participants”), written by Caitlyn Gaskell. I have also developed a strong sense of RCWP congregants through news stories, documentary interviews, and participant observation. Data combined with ethnographic research revealed distinctive patterns within North American RCWP communities (no parishioners outside of the US and Canada opted to take my survey), especially when compared to recent trends in American Catholic demographics (as reported primarily by the Pew Research Center).

Demographics of RCWP Congregants

RCWP congregants (or community members, i.e., people who regularly attend RCWP liturgies) are as diverse as the womenpriests themselves yet are united—also like the womenpriests—by shared beliefs about the need for Roman Catholic Church reform, spiritual growth, and the role modeling of Jesus. I have culled some preliminary data about RCWP parishioners in order to place womenpriests in a wider though still immediate context.

First and foremost, RCWP’s worshippers are women, by a strong majority: Delcalzo’s respondents were 85 percent women, Gaskell’s were 67 percent women, and women in my survey were 82 percent. While women are indeed better represented in the general American Catholic population, Pew’s findings of 54 percent average women membership (to men’s 46 percent) shows that RCWP’s appeal to women is dramatic. One can reasonably assume that many women join RCWP because of the powerful allure of a
Appendix C

womanpriest, something for which countless Catholic women have long waited. This is even more the case for women of older generations, who grew up during Vatican II and its aftermath, seeing the rise of Catholic feminism and being part of a transforming Catholicism. And indeed, RCWP’s worshippers are older: 100 percent of the parishioners Delcalzo surveyed were over the age of fifty. All but two people I surveyed were over the age of fifty, and twenty-five of my twenty-eight respondents were born before the start of Vatican II. The two oldest members from my survey were born in 1914 (and thus turned eighty the year they took the survey in 2014), and the youngest, born in 1983, was the only one of the twenty-eight born after 1966. When Gaskill interviewed Therese members in 2008 and 2009, she found a much younger average population (ranging in age from twenty-two to “late sixties”) than I have seen in my recent visits to Therese, where members appear to be in their fifties, sixties, and older.4 To be sure, the American Catholic population is an older group as a whole, with an average age of forty-nine (in 2015), which is higher than the American average of forty-six and significantly higher than the average age of not-religiously-affiliated Americans, thirty-six.5 In spite of this trend, nearly 50 percent of American Catholics fall between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine.6 Clearly, RCWP skews much older.

Openness to the idea of womenpriests may also stem from RCWP community members’ significant educational achievements. Whereas 46 percent of American Catholics are likely to have a high school degree or less, 27 percent are likely to have some college, 16 percent have a bachelor’s degree, and 10 percent have a postgraduate degree, RCWP’s parishioners have devoted remarkably more time to education and degree seeking. Of Delcalzo’s respondents, 30 percent had bachelor degrees alone, 50 percent had a master’s degree, and 19 percent had multiple master’s degrees. All of Gaskell’s respondents had college degrees, and 53 percent had graduate degrees. Of my respondents, 64 percent had one or more graduate degrees.

Race is another factor that significantly distinguishes RCWP communities from American Catholics at large: all of Delcalzo’s respondents in New Jersey and 93 percent of Gaskell’s in St. Louis identified as white.7 Compare this to the 2014 Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study, which found that 59 percent of American Catholics are likely to be white, with 34 percent Hispanic, 3 percent black, 3 percent Asian, and 2 percent “other.” And yet, although the RCWP data tips wildly toward white, the regional demographics where Delcalzo’s and Gaskell’s communities were located should not be ignored: nearly-all-white parishes in Sussex County, New Jersey, and St. Louis, Missouri, are not unusual. More telling would be RCWP communities in California or the American Southwest reporting 90 percent–plus white parishioners. As yet, that data is unavailable. Moreover, there are very few womenpriests in the Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona corridor, where huge swaths of the Hispanic Catholic population reside.8 More significant, I believe, is a fact I mentioned earlier in the book: the majority of RCWP’s community members tend to resemble the womenpriests themselves—older, well educated, and white. Womenpriests seem to attract communities that demographically resemble them.
My survey found 50 percent of parishioners were married, 33 percent were single, and 18 percent were divorced, which is fairly consistent with the American Catholic averages of 52 percent married, 8 percent living with a partner, 12 percent divorced, 7 percent widowed, and 21 percent never married. Delcalzo’s study found more divorced and divorced-and-remarried members. Fifteen percent of Delcalzo’s respondents identified as homosexual, compared with 20 percent in Gaskell’s study and 14 percent (identified lesbian, gay, or bisexual) in my survey; unfortunately, there is no Pew data on practicing gay and lesbian Catholics for comparison. Because of the church’s rigidity about same-sex relationships and divorce, one might presume RCWP communities would have more individuals longing for Catholicism in a judgment-free environment. Then again, many such individuals may have given up altogether on finding nurture within Catholic spirituality.

2014 Survey

In the summer of 2014, I conducted an electronic survey of members of RCWP communities. With the help of administrators, I sent the survey through the RCWP and ARCWP listservs, and willing womenpriests could forward the link onto their congregants. The main purpose of the survey was to get a greater sense of how RCWP parishioners understand and interpret the womenpriests’ presence as a Catholic community leader.

In quoting the respondents, I retain their choices in capitalization.

Basic Demographic Questions

1. What year were you born?
2. Where do you live (city, state, country)?
3. What educational degrees have you received (and in what years)?
4. What is your occupation?
5. Which of the best describes you? (cradle Catholic, convert, other)
6. What do you think are the most pressing issues confronting the Roman Catholic Church today?
7. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?
8. Which best describes you? (heterosexual, gay/lesbian, bisexual, other)
9. How many children do you have (including biological, adopted, and from blended families)?
10. How many grandchildren do you have (including biological, adopted, and from blended families)?
Experience within the Worship Community

11. In which womanpriest community do you attend Mass?
12. Who is/are your womanpriest(s) and/or deacon(s)?
13. How many years have you been a part of this community?
14. How did you first learn about RCWP and this worship community?
15. Was this your first experience with a female priest? If so, can you describe what that was like, initially?
16. In addition to this community, do you participate in any other religious communities?

Experience with Ordained Catholic Women

17. Does having a womanpriest change your experience of the priesthood? If so, explain.
18. Does having a womanpriest change your experience or understanding of Roman Catholicism? If so, explain.
19. Does having a womanpriest change your experience of the sacraments? If so, explain.
20. Does having a womanpriest change your experience or understanding of Jesus? If so, explain.

Lay Involvement

21. In what ways have you been involved in your worship community?
22. In what ways would you like to be involved in your worship community?

Envisioning the Future

23. What do you envision as the future of the RCWP movement?
24. What do you envision as the future of the Roman Catholic Church?

Various

25. My research focuses on topics like ordination ceremonies, sacraments, ministries, families, bodies, and sexuality. If you have any examples or stories about these or other topics that you are willing to share, please do so here.
26. What should I be asking you? What have I missed?