



ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS-USA, INC.
(RCWP-USA)

CONSTITUTION

Ratified on April 2, 2012

**For RCWP-USA members, this Constitution replaces
the Roman Catholic Womenpriests-North America Structures Document
ratified on February 3, 2007**

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1. Vision

“A new model of ordained ministry in a renewed Roman Catholic Church”

2. Mission

Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc. (RCWP-USA) is a prophetic organization within an international progressive movement in the Roman Catholic Church. Its mission is to prepare, ordain in apostolic succession, and support primarily women who are called by the Holy Spirit and their communities to a renewed priestly ministry rooted in justice and faithfulness to the Gospel.

3. Principles

We believe that women and men are created equal by God and can equally represent Christ in ministry.

We believe that women are called to a model of ministerial priesthood that is grounded in our common Baptism.

We believe that there is no intrinsic connection between priesthood and mandatory celibacy.

We believe that we are called to operate on the principles of subsidiarity and democratic process.

We believe that we are continually called to support and encourage the next generation of women in their pursuit of priesthood.

We believe that we are called to practice a renewed theology, liturgy, and pastoral presence to better reflect the spirit and teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

We believe that we are called by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus as our model of empowerment, inclusivity and generous service.

4. Membership

Membership in RCWP-USA is comprised of candidates, deacons, priests, and bishops.

4.1. Candidates

Candidates are those who have met the initial requirements of RCWP-USA and have been accepted into the Program of Discernment and Preparation for Priesthood (Preparation Program). Candidates become voting members after six months in the Preparation Program.

During their period of candidacy, usually a minimum of one year, they complete the required units of study and their discernment for the diaconate. The discernment/preparation process is a mutual one between the candidate and the Program Preparation Team. Completion of the program does not guarantee ordination.

4.2. Deacons

Deacons are those who have completed the required units in the Preparation Program and have been ordained to the diaconate according to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church.

They are transitional deacons, meaning that they are preparing for priestly ordination.

During this period, usually for a minimum of one year, they complete the units of study and

their discernment for the priesthood. Completion of the program does not guarantee ordination.

Deacons may officiate at baptisms and funerals. They may also officiate at weddings, with the proper registration from the state and local authorities in which the wedding will take place.

4.3. Priests

Priests are those deacons who have successfully completed the Preparation Program and have been ordained to the priesthood according to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church. The primary role of the priest is to provide for the sacramental, pastoral and liturgical needs of the people they serve. Priests are called to lead a prayer-filled life, model spiritual leadership, and provide caring pastoral support. They preside at Eucharist and administer the sacraments.

Priests are financially self-supporting and their ministries are independent of RCWP-USA.

4.4. Bishops

Bishops are those priests who have been elected by the voting members of their region after a period of prayer, discernment and discussion. They are ordained according to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church in apostolic succession. They provide prophetic, spiritual, sacramental, and liturgical leadership, as well as caring, pastoral support to all RCWP-USA members. Bishops ordain deacons, priests and other bishops, as well as preside at Eucharist and administer the sacraments.

Bishops are ordained for life although circumstances may call for a less active period of service. If those circumstances include the necessity to retire, the membership will be duly notified.

4.5. Catacomb members

Some candidates, deacons and priests, for a number of reasons, choose not to be openly identified as members of RCWP-USA. Known as catacomb members, their identity and personal information are kept confidential. Catacomb members participate in regional discussions, meetings and activities and may choose to share personal information with their regional members. They are not recognized publicly and their ordinations are private. It is up to the catacomb members as to how much information is to be shared and when or if their identity can be disclosed.

4.6. Member accountability

Members are accountable to God, the people of God, and the membership of RCWP-USA. They are expected to adhere to the RCWP-USA Code of Ethics (see Section 12). If a member exhibits some form of behavior that is in direct conflict with the Code of Ethics, the Regional Leadership Team (see Section 5.1) and/or the Board of Directors Circle (see Section 6.1) is responsible to investigate, intervene, and attempt to solve the problem. Any allegation of criminal behavior will immediately be turned over to the appropriate civil authorities. Corrective action by the Regional Leadership Team and/or the Board of Directors Circle may take various forms depending on the seriousness of the Code of Ethics violation, from verbal and/or written counsel, up to and including the revocation of membership in RCWP-USA.

5. Regions

RCWP-USA is composed of members who belong to regions. A region is defined by geographic boundaries and demographic parameters (size, location, population, and culture). Regional boundaries will be subject to periodic re-evaluation and possible change as RCWP-USA continues to grow. RCWP-USA is currently comprised of five regions: Eastern, Southern, Great Waters, Midwest, and Western:

Eastern Region: Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania (eastern half), Rhode Island, Vermont

Southern Region: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

Great Waters Region: Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan (Lower Peninsula), Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania (western half), West Virginia

Midwest Region: Iowa, Michigan (Upper Peninsula), Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Wyoming

Western Region: Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington

Members usually belong to a region in their geographic area. There may be instances when a person who relocates from one region to another may choose to remain affiliated with the first region. There may also be instances when a person may live in one region but choose to belong to another.

Members of a region may form smaller Support Circles within their immediate geographical area. Support Circles may discuss and make recommendations regarding regional business to their Regional Leadership Team.

Regional meetings are usually held once a month. Members are expected to attend their region's meetings as often as possible. Generally, decisions are made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, a vote is held with a simple majority prevailing. If a region forms Support Circles, a member from the Support Circle may be elected to represent the Circle's members at the regional meeting.

5.1. Regional Leadership Team

The Regional Leadership Team consists of the Administrator(s), the Program Coordinator(s), and the Bishop(s). The Team is responsible to carry out the administration and day-to-day operations of each region. It meets on a regular basis, usually once a month.

The Regional Leadership Team works in consultation with the members of their region, always practicing collegiality and inclusivity in decision-making. Generally, decisions are made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be held with a simple majority prevailing.

5.1.1. Administrator

Administrators are elected by the voting members of their region. Eligibility requirements may vary from region to region because of the specific make-up of an area. Administrators are elected for a term of three (3) years, renewable once. If an

Administrator is not an RCWP-USA member, s/he needs to be familiar with the RCWP Vision, Mission, Principles, Code of Ethics, and the Preparation Program.

Administrators are expected to have managerial skills and to collaborate collegially with others. Their responsibilities include participating in the Regional Leadership Team, the Preparation Program Team (see Section 5.2), signing contracts, and overseeing the region's finances. They represent their region on the Board of Directors Circle (see Section 6.1). A region may choose to divide the Administrator's duties among two or more people, but only one person from the administrative team can be on the Board of Directors Circle. They also perform other functions as designated by the region.

5.1.2. Program Coordinator

Program Coordinators are elected by the voting members of their region. Persons eligible for this position are ordained priests. Program Coordinators are elected for a term of three (3) years, renewable once.

Program Coordinators are responsible for assessing the qualifications of applicants, accepting candidates into the Preparation Program, and for guiding candidates and deacons as they progress toward ordination. A region may choose to divide the Program Coordinator's duties among two or more people. Program Coordinators represent their region on the Program Coordinators' Circle (see Section 6.2.1). Other responsibilities include participating in the Regional Leadership Team and the Preparation Program Team (see Section 5.2).

Program Coordinators may appoint Program Assistants to support or directly mentor candidates and deacons; persons eligible to be appointed as Program Assistants are ordained priests. Program Assistants are responsible for the day-to-day guidance of candidates and deacons.

5.1.3. Bishop

Bishops work as a member of the Regional Leadership Team to assure that the goals and mission of the region are carried out. They are also called to provide pastoral and prayerful support of the candidates, deacons and priests of their region. They represent their region on the Bishops' Circle (see Section 6.2.3). Other responsibilities include participating in the Preparation Program Team (see Section 5.2), determining the readiness of a candidate or deacon for ordination, and finalizing the ordination liturgy.

Because they have a leadership position in the region, they are not eligible for other elected offices on the Regional Leadership Team and are required to resign from any leadership position they may hold upon becoming bishop.

5.2. Preparation Program Team

The Preparation Program Team consists of the Program Coordinator, the Program Assistant(s) working with candidates and deacons, the Bishop and the Administrator. The members of the Team remain in regular contact concerning the progress of those seeking ordination. Generally, decisions are made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be held with a simple majority prevailing. However, there must be consensus among Team members on a candidate's or deacon's readiness for ordination.

5.3. Removal of Regional Leadership Team Members

In the event of a serious problem or impasse within a Regional Leadership Team that directly affects the operations of the region or the national organization as a whole, a majority of the voting members of a region may request, in writing, that the Board of Directors Circle (see Section 6.1) supervise a vote of “no confidence” for a Team member or the Team as a whole. The vote is to take place within seven days of the receipt of the request. If two-thirds of the voting members of a region vote “no confidence,” an Administrator, Program Coordinator and/or Bishop will be removed from active leadership.

6. National Governance

6.1. Board of Directors Circle

The administration and operations of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc. are carried out by the Board of Directors of RCWP-USA, Inc., (Board of Directors Circle), consisting of the elected Regional Administrators and Directors-at-large. The number of Regional Administrators on the Board must be greater than the number of Directors-at-large. They perform their duties in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc.

The Board of Directors Circle meets on a regular basis, usually once a month. Representatives from the Program Coordinators’ Circle (see Section 6.2.1), Vision Keepers’ Circle (see Section 6.2.2), and Bishops’ Circle (see Section 6.2.3) participate in these meetings as advisors.

The Board of Directors Circle works in consultation with the National Circles (see Section 6.2), the Advisory Circles (see Section 7), and the members of RCWP-USA, always practicing collegiality and inclusivity in decision-making. Generally, decisions will be made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be held with a simple majority prevailing.

6.2. National Circles

6.2.1. Program Coordinators’ Circle

The Program Coordinators’ Circle is composed of the elected Program Coordinators from each region. The Circle may allow regions that have two or more elected Co-Program Coordinators to all participate on the Circle, but each region has only one vote when a vote is taken. The main responsibility of this Circle is the oversight and revision of the Preparation Program. Each Program Coordinator is accountable to her region and to the Program Coordinators’ Circle for the Preparation Program in her region. The Circle is also responsible for selecting a member to represent them at the monthly Board of Directors Circle’s meetings.

The Program Coordinators’ Circle meets on a regular basis, usually once a month, always practicing collegiality and inclusivity in decision-making. Generally, decisions will be made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be held with a simple majority prevailing.

6.2.2. Vision Keepers’ Circle

The Vision Keepers’ Circle is composed of one member from each region, elected for a term of three (3) years, renewable once. It is responsible for maintaining accountability

of the RCWP-USA membership to the Vision Statement and our mission through various forums. It initiates the writing of an annual report, which is a collaborative effort by all members as to how RCWP-USA is living out its stated mission. The reports are intended to inspire and challenge the RCWP-USA community to deepen their ministry in faithful service to the people of God. The Circle is also responsible for selecting a member to represent them at the monthly Board of Directors Circle's meetings.

The Vision Keepers' Circle meets on a regular basis, usually once a month, always practicing collegiality and inclusivity in decision-making. Generally, decisions will be made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be held with a simple majority prevailing.

6.2.3. Bishops' Circle

The Bishops' Circle is composed of the bishops from each region. The Circle may allow regions that have two or more bishops to all participate on the Circle, but each region has only one vote when a vote is taken. Its tasks include collaborating with the Program Coordinators' Circle in reviewing and revising the Preparation Program, and the oversight and revision of a canonically-correct ordination liturgy that is common throughout the RCWP-USA regions. The Circle is also responsible for selecting a bishop to represent them at the monthly Board of Directors Circle's meetings.

The Bishops' Circle meets on a regular basis, usually once a month, always practicing collegiality and inclusivity in decision-making. Generally, decisions will be made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, a vote will be held with a simple majority prevailing.

7. Advisory Circles

The Advisory Circles support the vision, mission, and operations of RCWP-USA. It is desirable, but not necessary, for a region to have a representative in every advisory circle. An advisory circle may also invite non-members who have specific gifts, talents and an interest in the purpose and work of the circle to participate.

Advisory Circles work in consultation with the Board of Directors Circle and the members of RCWP-USA, always practicing collegiality and inclusivity in decision-making. Generally, decisions will be made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached a vote will be held with a simple majority prevailing.

These Advisory Circles include, but are not limited to:

- **Compassion Circle:** persons with expertise in mediation and conflict management.
- **Fund Development Circle:** persons with expertise in fund-raising and grant-writing.
- **Media Circle:** persons versed in writing press releases, public speaking and other media relations.
- **National Gathering Circle:** persons willing to plan and execute national retreats, meetings, and gatherings.
- **Publicity and Website Communications Circle:** persons with expertise in website management, advertising, promotion and publicity.

8. Amendments

A region may file a proposed amendment to this Constitution with the Board of Directors Circle to be voted on by the membership of RCWP-USA. Individual members may also file a proposed amendment with the Board of Directors Circle if it has the signatures of at least seven (7) members. The Board of Directors Circle will conduct the election to amend. A two-thirds majority vote from the membership will pass the amendment.

9. Ratification

This Constitution of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc. shall be considered ratified when a two-thirds majority of the voting members of RCWP-USA as of March 1, 2012 will have voted to ratify.

10. Disclaimer

Every ministry convened by a Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA member operates separately and independently from Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc. RCWP-USA, Inc. disclaims any liability for the operation of an individual member's ministry(ies).

11. Resolution

**We are resolved as members of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc.
to dedicate our lives to God and to the service of the people of God.
We unite ourselves closely to Jesus Christ and the Gospel values
through the grace of the Holy Spirit.**

12. Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc. Code of Ethics

- I will seek to relate to all people with respect, sensitivity and reverence. I will treat all people with integrity, courtesy, patience and dignity.
- I will respect, recognize and support the variety of calls to ministry within the RCWP-USA membership and support the members and people I minister to by building constructive relationships with them.
- I will personally and publicly support my colleagues who experience discrimination on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, physical impairment or disability.
- I will not use my ministerial status, position or authority to knowingly abuse, misguide, negatively influence, manipulate, or take advantage of anyone.
- I will not step beyond my competence in any ministerial situation.
- I will report all instances of abuse and/or criminal behavior to the proper civil authorities. In any case involving RCWP-USA members, I will also report the circumstances to the appropriate RCWP-USA regional and national leadership.
- I will hold in confidence and treat as confidential communication of any information provided to me with the expectation of privacy, including sacramental records. I will not disclose such information in private or public, except when I am convinced that the sanctity of confidentiality is outweighed by my well-founded belief that life-threatening or substantial harm may be caused.
- I will avoid any action that might present a conflict of interest, since the existence, or even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call into question the integrity and professional conduct of the individual and the organization.
- I will maintain meticulous and honest records of all financial transactions within my ministry and within the RCWP-USA organization.
- I will use information and technology resources positively and as a means of supportive, educational, instructional and administrative endeavors in my ministry and within RCWP-USA.
- I will be in communication with the members of my region on a regular basis.
- I will maintain a disciplined ministry through prayer and worship. I will endeavor to maintain wholesome family relationships, sexual integrity, and financial responsibility. I will regularly engage in educational and recreational activities for ministerial and personal development. I will not abuse alcohol or use illegal drugs.
- I will demonstrate my personal love of God, as revealed in Jesus the Christ, in my life and ministry, as I strive to preserve and promote the integrity of the vocation to which I have been called in service to the people of God.

RATIFICATION

Constitution of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc.

On this day, _____ ,
(date)

I, _____ ,
(print name)

**a voting member of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc.,
indicate, by affixing my signature hereto,
my vote to ratify and to abide by
the Constitution of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc.**

I understand that this document replaces the previous document entitled *Roman Catholic Womenpriests-North America—Vision Statement—“A new model of ordained ministry in a renewed Roman Catholic Church”* which was ratified on February 3, 2007.

I understand that I am responsible to follow the Code of Ethics in Section 12 of this Constitution and that my membership in Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc. is subject to my adherence to the principles in this Code.

Corrective action by my Regional Leadership Team and/or the Board of Directors Circle may be taken in various forms, from verbal and/or written counsel up to and including removal from membership in RCWP-USA.

(Signature)

NONRATIFICATION

On this day, _____ ,
(date)

I, _____ ,
(print name)

**a voting member of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc.,
indicate, by affixing my signature hereto, that I vote not to ratify
the Constitution of Roman Catholic Womenpriests-USA, Inc.**

(Signature)