

First nine women ordained as Lutheran pastors in Poland

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Beata Janota, Wiktoria Matloch, Katarzyna Rudkowska, Halina Radacz, Malgorzata Gas, Katarzyna Kowalska, Karina Chwastek-Kamieniorz, Izabela Sikora, and Marta Zachraj-Mikolajczyk, the nine Polish women who were ordained as pastors on May 7. (Photo by Agnieszka Godfrejow-Tarnogorska/Lutheran World Federation)

The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland took a historic step on May 7, as Presiding Bishop Jerzy Samiec ordained nine women to the priesthood at a service in Warsaw's Holy Trinity Church. The event marked a concluding milestone in the discussion about women's ordination which has been ongoing in Poland's largest Protestant church for decades.

Last October, the synod of the Polish church voted to allow women's ordination, opening the way for them to run parishes and stand for the ministry of bishop. Women have been serving as deacons, leading services, and administering baptism

since 1999. They have been administering communion since 2016.

Addressing the newly ordained pastors, Estonian archbishop Urmas Viilma, the Lutheran World Federation's vice president for Europe, thanked them "for not giving up your calling over the years in the midst of many challenges." He also acknowledged the "many other women in Poland who have served the Lutheran Church throughout their lives as theologians, deacons, catechists, Sunday school teachers, youth workers, and in many other capacities."

In her sermon, one of the newly ordained pastors, Halina Radacz, reflected on the true marks of Christian discipleship.

"We want to speak about love and bear witness to it; we want to speak about equality for all and show that it is possible; we want to teach mutual respect and show how to do it," she said. "So perhaps we are getting closer to the idea of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote: 'The Church is the Church only when it exists for others.'"

Izabela Sikora, another of the newly ordained women from Szczecin in north-western Poland, said the event marked a transformative occasion for her but was also a "symbolic moment for those who walk after us." Her ordination, she said, "is about listening to God's word, to the story of our beginnings, when God created man and woman in his image."

Karina Chwastek-Kamieniorz, who works in the largest country parish of Goleiszów in southern Poland, noted that from a practical perspective, she will continue doing the same pastoral work she has done for many years: leading worship; conducting weddings, baptisms, and funerals; teaching; and visiting parishioners at home. But she said she hoped the decision to ordain women would bring equal pay and an end to discrimination against women in the church.

Marcia Blasi, Lutheran World Federation's program executive for gender justice and women's empowerment, said, "We rejoice as a communion with these women who have prepared, worked, and waited hopefully for this day, as well as with the church leadership that took this step forward. Moving towards gender justice in the church and in society is our shared commitment and witness to the love of God in the world." —Lutheran World Federation