

Flashes of Insight: Ministry clarity or crumbs from the table?



Anything that authenticates, makes visible and validates women's ministry will help women take their rightful place in the Church says Kate Bell, a theologian and catechist. She made the comment on Flashes of Insight, a conversation between herself, and fellow theologians, Fiona Dyball, Elizabeth Young and Jo Ayers. The women discussed the newly approved ministries for women of Lector, Acolyte and Catechist." I think it is helpful that Canon Law has been changed and women are formally allowed into ministry. "It's got to be helpful that women because of the 'womenness' are no longer excluded

from ministry. However, her view is not all 'clear water', Bell telling the conversation she has a slight concern that formal recognition of these ministries might alienate the baptised who have been performing them for a long time." The people of God, the baptised, might become further disenfranchised from ministry by yet another layer and another process." While keen to see the introduction of formal ministries Bell does not want ministry to happen only when it is recognised." It's the job of all of us to be involved," she said. Host, Joe Grayland politely suggested Bell was 'sitting on the fence'. Pushing her, he made the choice concrete, asking would she support the introduction of these ministries at the Palmerston North Cathedral. (Where Bell works). Bell 'weighed up the balance' telling Flashes of Insight that while in the past the parish there was less formality involved with those ministering as Catechist she will support the introduction of the ministry. "The ministry of Catechist would be perfect for those ministering in the area of marriage preparation", she said. It is a point echoed by Fiona Dyball, adding that Pope Francis' statement makes the changes very clear. "It is obviously something very dear to his heart", she said. Dyball said that women have been performing these ministries for a long time, but in some places, it was said that women do not fit these roles and so were prevented from doing them. She describes the changes as "a welcome clarity; because these things matter". The Church has known for a long time that women have these gifts Dyball says. She sees this as an important step for the church to legitimately use the gifts to help it accomplish its mission, in its service of the community. Jo Ayers an Auckland theologian and lecturer however took a different perspective. Responding to Dyball, Ayers said, "I was going to say one thing but Fiona's nearly persuaded that the institute of Acolyte and Reader is a good thing. "The persuasion was a near thing as Ayers went on to describe the institution of these ministries for women as, "crumbs from the table" and "another layer of clericalism. Ayers says she is looking for real power-sharing. However, Elizabeth Young RSM, a theologian and pastoral worker in Forbes echoes Dyball, but with a difference, saying it is important for people taking part and for those receiving the benefits of the service to know the minister is authorized. "Signs make a real difference", she said and so she welcomes that these ministries are now officially open to women.

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