

Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE)
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Toronto, ON M4W 3T9

President Jimmy Carter
The Carter Center
One Copenhill
453 Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30307

Dear President Carter,

As members of the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE), we are writing to thank you for your prophetic voice for justice and equality for women. Your difficult decision to sever ties with the Southern Baptist Convention, due to their claims of biblical justification for the discrimination of women, serves as a catalyst for all people of faith to examine their religious denomination's ideas and practices regarding women. Reading your statement gave us all great hope for the future! We also fully endorse The Elders declaration that "The justification of discrimination against women and girls on grounds of religion or tradition, as if it were prescribed by a Higher Authority, is unacceptable." We are hopeful that the growing number of voices speaking out for women's equality at all levels of society will contribute to human flourishing. In offering our solidarity, we wanted to share some of our story with you.

CNWE is a Canadian organization that was founded by four women theology students in 1981. After attending the Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit, they enthusiastically believed that equality for women in the Catholic church was 'just around the corner'. Some 32 years later, this longing for justice and equality for women in the Catholic Church has not only *not* materialized, but has been deliberately set back under the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Knowing that the work for justice is a long-term project, we continue to 'stand on the shoulders' of our visionary elders. We are not permitting ourselves to be complicit in discrimination against women through silence, intimidation or the daunting nature of the task.

Our desire to work for change comes from our varied experiences as Catholic women. For some of us, we are impelled by painful experiences of exclusion from ministry or dismissive attitudes from clergy, despite a great need for ministers in the Catholic church and our comprehensive pastoral and academic qualifications. Some of our members, whose life work has been to 'walk with' the poor and marginalized, know first hand that societies flourish only to the extent that girls and women have equal opportunities in all sectors of society. For many of us, Catholic theological training and experience as Catholic women religious has taught us that the equal dignity of each human person and recognition of their gifts is central to all Christianity. All of us long for

a more inclusive, accountable, collegial and relevant Catholic church for ourselves, our families and our world.

CNWE members gather in local groups across Canada to work for this change via letter writing, speaking out in the media, dialogue with willing Catholic clergy, non-violent action for equality, ongoing learning among our members and outreach to invite others to join with us. Rooted in a liberative vision of the Gospel and the contributions of feminist and eco-theology to our understanding, we ensure that prayer, ritual and nurturing community are part of each of our gatherings. We gather annually for a national conference and we network with several international organizations for change in the Catholic church. In short, as members of CNWE, we strive to 'be the change we seek in the world'.

We are encouraged by the growing global calls for reform in the Catholic church. We are also cautiously hopeful that Pope Francis' personal commitment to the poor will translate into his advocacy for structural change for the equality of women in the Catholic Church.

Know that as we continue this work here in Canada, we are heartened by your personal commitment and the commitment of The Elders to work for the equality of women in the world. May our chorus of voices continue to ring out across the world to make more fully manifest the just 'reign of God' in our times!

With every best wish for your important work in so many areas and for health and joy for yourself, Rosalyn and your family.

In Christian solidarity and friendship,

Mary Ellen Chown, Cathy Holtmann, Shirley Kindred, Denise Wiggins
National Work Group, Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE), Canada
www.cnwe.org