

*Biographical note from Jane Coll:*

Let me tell you a bit about myself. I am a very ordinary wife, mother and grandmother. I live in a remote, rural community in the North of Scotland. I am an active member of my local church and have been a catechist for twenty years. In my role as catechist, I was asked by my parish priest to do a divinity degree. While I thought that this was a particularly strange request, my other role as a Benedictine oblate meant that I could not refuse (the *Rule of St Benedict* is very clear on the need for obedience!). While doing the degree, the same priest regularly reminded me that the degree was to be the foundation stone for writing. "Writing what?" I would ask, to be told that that would become clear later. Sure enough, my very last essay included looking at the Vatican II document "*Lumen Gentium*." A phrase practically jumped out at me, screaming "Here I am, study me in more detail and write up your findings."

The fateful phrase was that only the bishop has the fullness of the sacrament of ordination (see *Lumen Gentium* nos. 21 and 26). I found this an odd statement - where does it leave priests and deacons? So I settled down to investigate the topic. I very quickly realized that I could not study the sacrament of ordination without also considering the place of women in the Church.

There are many books on the subject of women in the Church, and I did sometimes wonder why I felt the need to add to the list. What did I have to offer that others did not? I am still not entirely sure of the answer to that but suggest two things. First, I do have a great loyalty to the Church and a sense that change can only come from within. Any suggestions for change must be totally compatible with Church teaching. Secondly, my lack of an academic background meant that I could approach the subject with fewer preconceived ideas.

I hope my contributions are helpful to the discussion. May the Spirit guide our conversations.