

Statement on the Sacrament of Ordination here at the Community of St. Hildegard

Written and submitted by Rev. Dr. Shanon Sterringer, Founding Pastor

There has been much confusion over the last several years within our community regarding the topic of the sacrament of ordination and why it is important here at CSH. In the spirit of St. Paul, who often wrote pastoral letters to the communities he had founded when they were faced with dilemmas, disagreements, and unclear policies, I am writing this to the Community of St. Hildegard to offer some clarity on the role of ordained ministry here at CSH. It is not expected that every member will agree with this statement, but for as long as I serve here as the pastor (God-willing, until I reach retirement age), it is the model of ordination that will govern our community. When the time comes for CSH to hire a successor pastor, this statement will likely need to be revisited and updated based on the circumstances and community dynamics at that time.

Based on the results of the survey conducted in May 2025, together with several years of town hall discussions and educational presentations, it is the position of CSH that an ordained priest or bishop is necessary for our Eucharistic celebrations both in-person and on zoom. This policy does not take away from the dignity of the laity, or our commitment to continuing to find creative ways to empowering the wider community within the context of the liturgy, but it preserves the sanctity and necessity of ordination here in our context.

We are an independent Catholic community which means we must continue to strive to function as best that we can within the Catholic sacramental framework, even if we have chosen to break canon 1024 of the Code of Canon Law by recognizing the validity of women's ordination.

One of the core tenants of our Catholic faith is our belief in the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. While we are open regarding what constitutes acceptable elements to be used for "bread and wine" in the Eucharistic meal, we have always approached the Eucharistic table with the greatest respect and reverence, in the church as well as in our homes. We are "pushing the envelope" a bit in the way we celebrate Eucharist, however, Catholic Eucharistic theology reminds us that there is an intimate relationship between the priest and the consecration of the Eucharist.

Therefore, on the occasion when a substitute priest is needed for a weekend liturgy, the substitute will be someone whose ordination and beliefs align with our faith here at the Community of St. Hildegard.

Emergencies and unexpected situations happen...

If I am unable to preside at a scheduled in-person liturgy, it is my responsibility to arrange a suitable substitute. In the event a suitable substitute cannot be arranged, the in-person liturgy will be canceled, and all will be encouraged to attend the online zoom liturgy.

If I am not available for the online zoom liturgy, it is my responsibility to arrange a suitable substitute. In the event I am unable to do so due to an emergency, the Church Council Chair will either arrange for a substitute based on our list of preapproved substitutes or will implement a contingency plan based on the circumstances.

I deeply appreciate the various ways that this community engages in “full, active, conscious participation” within the Eucharistic liturgy here at the Community of St. Hildegard. We are a model of an open, inclusive, and vibrant table. I thank you all for your commitment to embracing our Catholic faith in new and creative ways. At the same time, I am grateful for your commitment to preserving the Catholic traditions that we all so deeply love. It has given me the opportunity to live out my vocation as a Catholic priest here in space.

If you have questions regarding this statement or would like some general information on the survey results, please send me an email at
worship@hildegardhaus.com

In prayer,
Rev. Shanon