

# origins

CNS documentary service

## Decree Allowing Women in Foot-Washing Ritual

### Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments

Following a request by Pope Francis, the Vatican issued a decree specifying that the Holy Thursday foot-washing ritual can include “all members of the people of God,” including women — a practice already observed by the pope and many priests around the world. In a letter dated December 2014 and addressed to Cardinal Robert Sarah, the head of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, the pope said the rubric of the Roman Missal, which mentions only men as participants in the foot-washing rite, should be changed so that priests can choose

*“In performing this rite bishops and priests are invited to intimately conform themselves to Christ.”*

from all members of the church. The pope said the change would help express the full meaning of Jesus’ gesture at the Last Supper, his “giving himself ‘to the end’ for the salvation of the world” and his endless charity. However, the pope insisted those chosen be given “an adequate explanation of the meaning of the rite itself.” The pope’s letter, the congregation’s decree and a commentary on the decree were released by the Vatican Jan. 21. The pope’s letter was released only in Italian. The decree, “In Missa in Cena Domini,” issued by Cardinal Sarah and dated Jan. 6, states that pastors can choose “a small group of the faithful to represent the variety and the unity of each part of the people of God. Such small groups can be made up of men and women, and it is appropriate that they consist of people young and old, healthy and sick, clerics, consecrated men and women, and laity.” The decree follows, copyright © 2016 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

**t**he restoration of Holy Week with the decree *Maxima Redemptionis Nostrae Mysteria* (Nov. 30, 1955), granted the faculty for the washing of feet of 12 men during the Mass of the Lord’s Supper after the reading of the Gospel according to John, where a pastoral reason recommended it, in order to demonstrate in an almost representative way the humility and charity of Christ toward his disciples.

In the Roman liturgy this rite was handed down with the name of the *mandatum* of the Lord concerning fraternal charity from the

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