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something other than they are. It's not going to work," Raab says.

One nun who declined to have her name used, said the work done on an individual basis with people in need will continue, and nothing is said or explicit that would give the church reason to come down on them.

"Because we're careful. By design, we're very, very careful," she said. "What happens in my counseling office, nobody's ever going to know, and I ain't going to tell."

But, she says, it's work to keep it under the radar. "That's the piece that's just horrible to have to do. To mind, who am I talking to? Who is this going to get back to? There isn't that freedom."

One area that firmly divides the views of many women religious and the Vatican is the ordination of women to the priesthood. In 2010, the Vatican — ostensibly to update a decree on the handling of priests involved in sex abuse scandals — added the attempted ordination of women among the most serious crimes against the church, alongside pedophilia and heresy. It was already condemned by the church, but punishable by automatic excommunication by the women attempting to be ordained and by the bishop conducting the ceremony. No notice from the Vatican is necessary.

Yet beyond Rome, the Catholic Church is in motion on this issue. In May, hundreds of priests meeting in Dublin, Ireland, called for an end to compulsory celibacy for priests and for the ordination of women. The Church of England recently moved closer to approving ordained women priests in establishing options to accommodate traditionalists who want to exempt themselves from women in the pulpit.

And women priests are at work throughout the Pacific Northwest. From the first legal ordination in 2002 in Europe, women priests have been ordained around the world. The international movement, Roman Catholic Womenpriests, counts 130 women priests worldwide, 96 in the United States. Several have gone on to become bishops, ordaining more women into the priesthood.

Portland's Suzanne Thiel is an ordained priest and the president of the West Region of Roman Catholic Womanpriests, an international movement within the Catholic Church. She says the people are the church, and the male clergy are, for the most part, out of touch.

"The Vatican hierarchy especially, but also our U.S. bishops as well, must continue to grow and change with the signs of the times," Thiel says. "That means there must be room for dialogue and input from the non-clergy and especially from the voice of women on all matters of Church teachings. Women will no longer tolerate taking a second-class position in the Church's leadership."

Pastor Rev. Toni Tortorilla of Portland was ordained in 2007 and leads services for the Sophia Christi Alternative Catholic Community in Portland and Eugene. Like other women around the world who have been ordained, she has been automatically excommunicated, but the term doesn't have the same impact today as it might have had 100 years ago. When she heard about the bishops' criticism of LCWR's support for women priests, she saw it as a deflection from the sex abuse scandal within the church hierarchy.

"I thought, oh, my God. Here we are in the middle of the worst scandal in history, the sexual abuse crisis, the bishops have absolutely no moral authority anymore, and now they're going after the nuns? That is the group that does have moral authority in the church. There are lot of things said about nuns over the years, but one thing people know is that where social justice issues meet the road in the Catholic Church, the nuns are right there."

Tortorilla, who has identified as a lesbian

from an early age, says social justice has a very narrow identity within the church hierarchy — one focused on sex — that is abusive to the women and gay and lesbian members of church. Tortorilla doesn't look at the consequences of this showdown between the nuns and the bishops in individual terms as much in the larger impact on the women's movement within the church.

"Any advocacy for reproductive health for women or gay and lesbian issues is definitely in the crosshairs. Anything that works for women's rights, and any issue that addresses women's health, whether it's psychological or physical, is going to be in the crosshairs," she says. "It's crazy. Making contraception into a political football that everybody has to deal with is, I think, abusive. ... Trying to insist that the Catholic population get behind the bishops on the contraceptive issue, when there are women sitting in the pews who are using contraception, and their husbands, their families need to be using contraception and they know it, that's abuse. They're not dialoging with anyone. They're not asking what your story is. There's no pastoral care involved. It's top down and it's abuse. That's what I see."

Tortorilla also used the example of Archbishop Sartain's letter to priests instructing them to petition congregations against Washington's gay-marriage proposal. "Then you abuse the gay and lesbian population within your congregation as well as within the whole state of Washington, and you use the pulpit to do it," she said.

According to other media reports, at least seven priests have refused to circulate the petition in their parishes.

A request for an interview with Archbishop Sartain was not answered.

Several nuns were contacted for this story, and most declined to speak on the record, deferring instead to the statements from the LCWR, which is still in discussions with the bishops. One wrote that they had been asked by LCWR not to comment publicly on the situation. The LCWR has also declined interviews, with the significant exception of a July 17 interview on NPR's Fresh Air with the LCWR's president, Sister Pat Farrell.

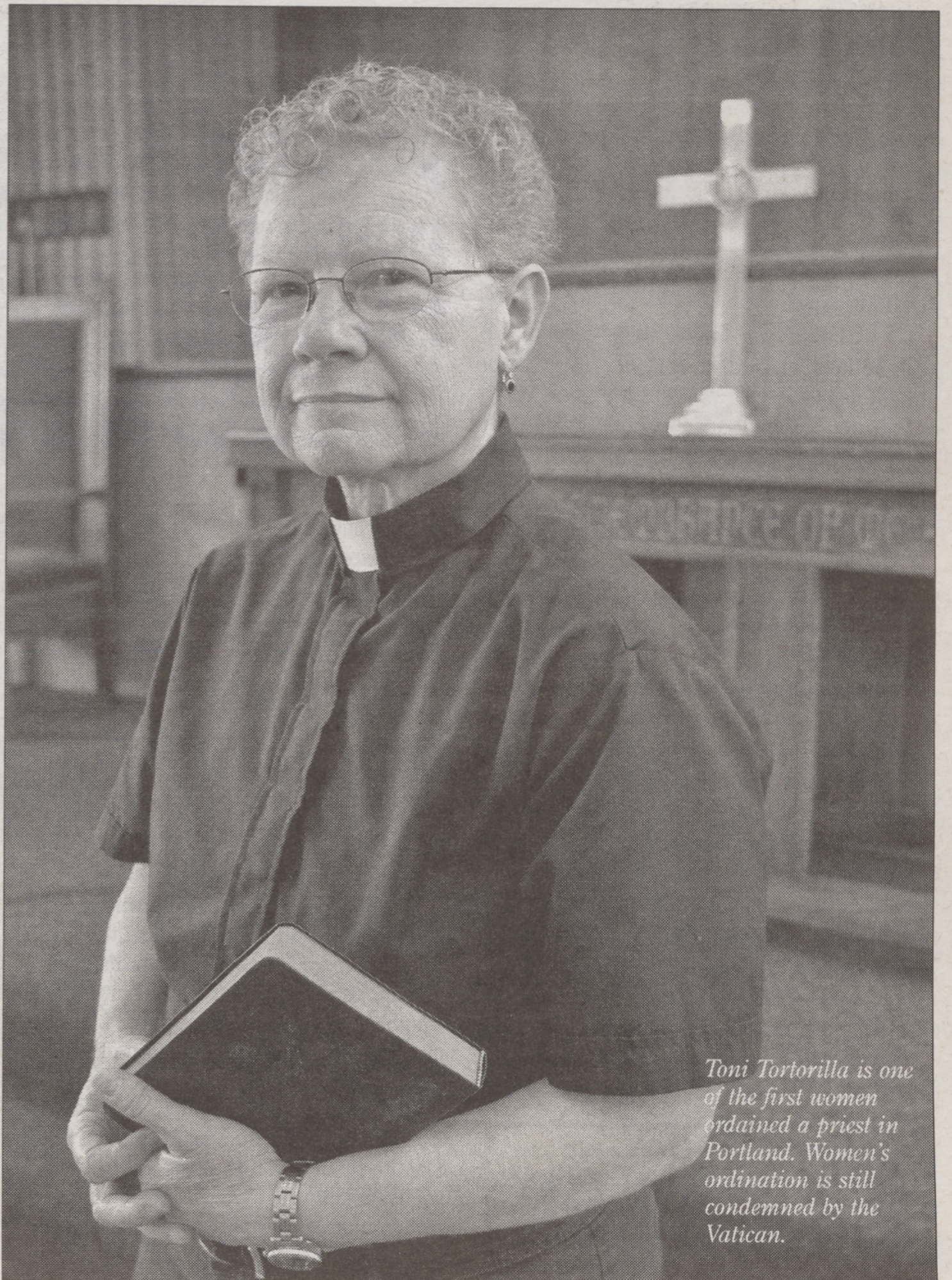
In her keynote address to the conference, Farrell said this: "This is not the first time that a form of religious life has collided with the institutional Church. Nor will it be the last. ... The historical impact of this moment is clear to all of us. It is reflected in the care with which LCWR members have both responded and not responded, in an effort to speak with one voice. We have heard it in more private conversations with concerned priests and bishops. It is evident in the immense groundswell of support from our brother religious and from the laity. Clearly they share our concern at the intolerance of dissent even from those with informed consciences, the continued curtailing of the role of women."

And while big picture politics are definitely in play, most in Portland agree that on the ground, the work of women religious will continue on course.

"I don't think they will in any way be able to stop women religious work in the field. Their commitment to the poor, to those who are underprivileged those who are not honored — that's their commitment to social justice," Galluzzo said.

"We're known for making lemonade out of lemons," said one nun, who didn't want her name used. "Just what the LCWR is doing now, we're going to be doing on an individual level. Most of us have said it's nothing new. They're just coming down a little harder."

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Toni Tortorilla is one of the first women ordained a priest in Portland. Women's ordination is still condemned by the Vatican.

PHOTO BY KRISTINA WRIGHT

A lifelong calling realized in one woman's ordination

BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

Toni Tortorilla remembers being five years old, standing in the back of her church, and feeling a compelling magnetic force drawing her to the altar and to priesthood.

"That's the only way I can describe it — pulling me to the altar, and in that instance I knew that that's what I was to do. That's my life. I knew that," she says.

Now in her 60s, Tortorilla says that that calling never left her — throughout disappointments, depression, and the turmoil of an evolving church.

Throughout her life, her education and vocation was structured toward the priesthood in a church that didn't allow it. Through the Second Vatican Council, as the church opened itself up to changes of the 1960s, women had newfound freedoms within the church — except ordination. But following the calling, she says, was in a way, part of the calling.

With the turn of the century, however, even that began to change. Seven women in Germany were ordained on the Danube River, and the future for Tortorilla and others who felt a similar calling would never be the same. Tortorilla was ordained in 2007. Today she leads services in the Sophia Christi Alternative Catholic Community in Portland and Eugene.

Still, the ordination of women is one of the core disputes between the Vatican and women religious, who have tacitly approved of the practice. For Tortorilla, who also identifies as a lesbian, it is an age-old battle of the sexes still in play.

J.Z.: At what point did it occur to you that you actually could be a priest?

T.T.: That didn't become a reality until 2002. I always pursued being a

priest in whatever way I could. I knew that I wasn't called to be a minister in another denomination. Inside I never stopped being called to priesthood. Many times I was depressed. I would get my hopes up and sort of pursue this line, thinking this will take me closer to doing what I'm called to do.

J.Z.: During this whole time, were you thinking that the church was empirically wrong, or was there an internal struggle that the church is empirically right and you just don't get it.

T.T.: The hierarchical church was telling me I couldn't do what I was called to do. I felt that God was telling me to be a priest. The men were standing in the way. In fact, in the 70s, many of us believed that women were going to be ordained soon.

J.Z.: They were in other churches...

T.T.: Exactly, and we felt like that was going to happen in our church, too. It was just the conflict between feeling that call so strongly, and knowing that the barriers were not coming down, and in fact were becoming more and more firm.

J.Z.: Did you ever hear any argument that you considered valid as to why a woman could not be a priest?

T.T.: Never. In fact, there was a commission of biblical scholars that were pulled together to study whether or not it was biblically possible for women to be priests, and that commission came out with their findings that there was absolutely no reason in scripture to deny ordination to women. None. And it was

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