

## Dr. Iris Muller, RCWP, a "Grandmother" of the Women Priests Movement Died on Jan. 30, 2011

<http://bridgetmarys.blogspot.com/2011/01/dr-iris-muller-rcwp-grandmother-of.html>

Iris Müller, A Roman Catholic Woman Priest , and Theologian, known as one of the "Grandmothers" of the Women Priests Movement died on January 30, 2011.

Long time advocate of women's equality and women's ordination in the Roman Catholic Church, Iris Müller died peacefully on January 30, 2011 in Stuttgart, Germany after suffering from a long illness related to a previous stroke. Her lifetime friend, Bishop Dr. Ida Raming was at her side. Both women were part of the original seven women ordained in 2002 on the Danube River and were the foremothers of the womens ordination movement in the Catholic Church. In 1963, they were the first to write a petition to the Vatican Council II calling for the ordination of women.

Iris was the first woman to speak out openly in favour of women's ordination in the Roman Catholic Church, despite the fact that she had no existential security whatever at the time. The consequences of her courageous stance on this issue were serious: she was threatened that even the small stipend she received and so desperately needed because she was a refugee would be withdrawn and there was, of course, no possibility of any official appointment within the official church. On the other hand, she was able to influence other Catholic women who, because of their upbringing, were conformed in their thinking and also timid. Through Iris' guidance, some of them 'woke up' to the reality of discrimination against women in the R.C. church and in this way, Iris Müller fulfilled a real prophetic role and became known as one of the "grandmothers" of the Roman Catholic Women Priest Movement.

### Iris Müller: Her Story

Iris Müller was born in 1930 in Magdeburg (mid-eastern part of Germany). After her final high school examination in 1950 she studied Protestant theology in Naumburg/Halle. In 1955 she continued her theological studies at the Martin Luther-University in Halle/Saale and received a diploma in theology from this university in 1958. After this examination which qualified her to serve as a pastor in the Protestant church, she converted to the Roman Catholic Church – a church, which she found, expressed its "following of Christ not just in words but in full sacramental reality." The consequences of this religious decision were extremely hard for Iris and as a woman she now came under the restrictions of Catholic Canon law.

Iris said, "I had become a creature incapable of receiving Holy Orders (cf. c. 1024 CIC). As a Catholic woman I was expected to accept the status of women in the Catholic Church. A further consequence of my conversion to this Church was that there was no prospect of any employment for me as a Catholic theologian in the communist regime of the DDR (East German Republic), since I refused to become a member of the communist party SED. My situation became so critical that I had to leave the DDR illegally and found refuge in the Western part of Germany (BRD) in 1959.

After many problems I succeeded in continuing my theological studies at the faculty of Catholic theology in Münster. As in the DDR my Catholic surroundings, the professors and most of the students, expected of me that I should accept the position of women in the Catholic Church without further question. But I decided to be faithful to my conviction and to my call to priesthood. So (as a former Protestant theologian) I was the first woman in the Catholic faculty to give witness that women are discriminated against in the Catholic Church and that their inferior status had to be reformed. On my

path as a pioneer for women's equality and women's ordination at the Catholic faculty in Münster, I found solidarity and support from Ida Raming. In 1963, during Vatican Council II, we together wrote a petition to the Council, calling for women's ordination. In 1970 I completed my doctorate in theology. During the following years I remained a member of the faculty in Münster, as a scientific assistant. I was involved in building up a special library on the status of women in the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), entitled "Women in Religion". After a lifelong struggle for women's equality and women's ordination in the Catholic Church I decided to follow my call to priesthood.. Together with my friend and colleague, Ida Raming, I was ordained a priest in 2002 as one of the original seven women on the Danube River." Iris resided in Stuttgart since her ordination."

#### Second Obituary:

DR IRIS MÜLLER (born 11 September 1930), „God chose those who by human standards count for nothing, to reduce to nothing all those that do count for something, so that no human being may be boastful before God” (1 Cor. 1, 28). Iris Müller has now “fought the good fight to the end, run the race to the finish ...” (cf. 2 Tim 4,7) She had great ideals from an early age, which she strove to fulfil with great commitment. All her life, Iris knew struggle and effort in achieving the goals she set herself and often had to contend with setbacks, humiliation and illness. When she left school, Iris decided to study theology with the aim of becoming a Protestant minister. She began her religious studies at the Catechetical Institute in Naumburg/Saale. This was a Centre of Studies for those who were in opposition to the oppressive communist regime in the German Democratic Republic (Eastern Germany). Even as a student at school, Iris Müller dared to speak out against injustice and oppression. She completed a degree in theology in Halle/Saale in 1958.

Iris then converted to Catholicism. Her reasons included the search for a deeper, more spiritual path. But this step had serious consequences for her: there was, of course, no possibility of being ordained as a woman in the Catholic church. Even before her conversion she said clearly that she did not agree with this rule but she nevertheless hoped that it would be possible to convince those in authority in the R.C. church that the exclusion of women from Orders was based on unacceptable and unjust theological arguments. This hope was, as we know with hindsight, very much in vain. Nevertheless, Iris continued to follow her calling with great determination. On existential grounds, Iris was then forced to flee from the GDR because there was no possibility of any kind of job for a dissident Catholic theologian in that part of Germany at the time.. The year was 1959, two years before the Berlin Wall was built. Having got to West-Germany - after a risky and troublesome flight, Iris was eventually able, despite the many difficulties and setbacks, she encountered as refugee, to continue her studies as a doctoral student in the theology department at the University of Münster. She completed her doctorate there.

During her doctoral studies at the university, Iris was the first woman to speak out openly in favour of women's ordination in the R.C. church, despite the fact that she had no existential security whatever at the time. The consequences of her courageous stance on this issue were serious: she was threatened that even the small stipend she received and so desperately needed because she was a refugee would be withdrawn and there was, of course, no possibility of any official appointment within the official church.

On the other hand, she was able to influence other Catholic women who, because of their upbringing, were conformed in their thinking and also timid. Through Iris' guidance, some of them 'woke up' to the reality of discrimination against women in the R.C. church and in this way, Iris Müller fulfilled a real prophetic role.

After her doctoral examination she continued the struggle for the freedom of Catholic women from unjust discrimination by means of publications, talks and correspondence and above all by building up a library on the theme of "Women in Religion, especially Judaism, Christianity and Islam" in the theological faculty of the University of Münster. The overcoming of discrimination against women in all the major religions was always close to Iris' heart.

As the years went by and the Vatican "NO" to women's ordination became ever stronger and louder, and as it became clear that there was no hope of achieving any change within the ecclesial system itself, Iris Müller, together with six other women, decided to take public action against the official law of the church, which excludes women from ordination (CIC can. 1024).

On June 29th 2002, Iris Müller was ordained a Catholic priest. Thus she had finally achieved her goal - though not recognized and acknowledged by the official church, but as a woman who opened up for her sisters a way of liberation. In this way, Iris Müller "fought the good fight", so that Catholic women would, in the future, be able to rejoice in their freedom as 'daughters of God'.

Meditation and spirituality were very necessary to Iris. It was from these that she drew the strength to overcome the challenges and difficulties that she faced in her life. Her confirmation bible text was: When Yahweh is pleased with someone's way of life, He makes that person's very enemies into friends". (Prov. 16,7) She often reflected on this text: it was both mysterious and deep for her and at the same time frightening, because there is the mention of 'enemies'.

In Iris' prayer journal, I found the following words which she herself wrote: "So in death, what happens is the miracle of transformation. Over death, there lies the invincible promise of salvation and resurrection. This means that I surrender to God everything that I am and have - and God gives it back to me, transformed. Life triumphs over death." This is also our faith and our hope for the deceased. A truly noble, generous person has gone before us, having been called into the peace of God. Let us keep Iris Müller in faithful remembrance! (Ida Raming, Winter 2011 – English translation: Dr. Patricia Fresen)

Bridget Mary's Reflection:

We give thanks for Dr. Iris Muller's prophetic witness for women's equality and for women priests as an issue of gender justice in the Roman Catholic Church. She is one of the beloved "grandmothers" of our Roman Catholic Women Priests Movement whom we will miss, and whose memory will continue to inspire us in our labor for justice for women in church and society. May Iris' vision of the full equality of women in the Roman Catholic Church become a reality in our time. Let us pray for comfort for all who will miss Iris especially her dear friend, and care-giver during the last years of her life, Dr. Ida Raming, who like Iris, is a brilliant theologian and "grandmother" of the RCWP Movement.. We owe these women, visionary theologians, a debt of gratitude.