

Female priests? It's time for a change, says C.V. filmmaker

By CHRIS COUNTS

WHILE IT is unlikely the Roman Catholic Church will ever endorse Carmel Valley filmmaker Jules Hart's new film, "Pink Smoke Over the Vatican," an international film festival is giving it two big thumbs up.

The documentary — which chronicles the struggles of women seeking to become ordained priests — was honored last week at the Action On Film Festival in Pasadena, where Hart took home prizes for Best Female Filmmaker and Best Faith-Based Film.

As Hart's documentary illustrates, the stakes are high for women attempting to join the priesthood. In May 2008, the Vatican declared that any woman who tries to become a priest or any bishop who attempts to ordain a woman as a priest will be excommunicated from the church.

The fear of excommunication, though, had no effect on Hart.

"I'm not Catholic," explained Hart, who has also produced films about storefront churches, Latina healers, art as a vehicle for healing, and drumming as a spiritual practice. "And I'm not even that interested in organized religion."

But after Hart met a woman who urged her to make a movie about the obstacles facing women seeking to become priests, she began to examine the subject. "I started reading about the church and its stance against these women, and I said, 'This is for me.'"

Hart quickly discovered that there were many people — including even some Catholic priests — who believed in her

In a scene from the documentary, "Pink Smoke Over the Vatican," three German women who believe they are Catholic bishops meet the press. The women were secretly ordained in 2002. Later, they traveled to Canada, where they ordained nine women as priests.



cause.

"I received a \$5,000 check from a priest in Germany," Hart recalled. "He had a cousin who was a woman, and she wanted to be a priest."

In 2002, German bishops secretly ordained seven women as priests and another three women as bishops. Three years later, the three female bishops traveled to Ottawa, Canada, where they ordained nine women.

Joined by a cameraman, Chris Angelos, and a sound technician, Rick Chelew, Hart traveled to Canada for the ceremony. Upon arrival in Ottawa, Hart and her crew were confronted with a surprisingly chaotic scene.

"I was expecting it to be a very quiet and spiritual ceremony," she said. "But it was an absolute zoo. There weren't many protesters, but there were dozens of news crews."

Because no Catholic diocese would allow the ceremony to happen in its jurisdiction, the priests were ordained on a ship as it navigated the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Surrounded by competing reporters and their camera crews, Hart struggled to capture the day's events. "It was like being in a mosh pit," she observed.

A year later, Hart and her crew traveled to Pittsburgh to film the ordination of eight female priests — a first in the United States.

Prior to the ceremony in Pittsburgh, Hart had been unable to find even one Catholic Church official who was willing to be interviewed on camera. But the Pittsburgh event attracted so much media attention that the church — which Hart said has avoided the subject of female priests whenever possible — finally decided to publicly comment on the topic. Hart

was now able to add the voices of church officials to her story — with or without their cooperation. "They had to respond in Pittsburgh," she said.

Off to a promising start

About five years after starting the project, "Pink Smoke Over the Vatican" was completed. The entire production cost about \$100,000, which by industry standards definitely qualifies as a shoestring budget.

With limited financial backing and controversial subject matter, the documentary faces an uphill battle in its search for an audience. But its success in Pasadena has given Hart confidence that "Pink Smoke" will make an impact in the film world.

In Pasadena, Hart also discovered there are more female priests than she originally thought. "After the screening of the film, two women came forward and said they are ordained priests," recalled Hart, who now estimates there are about 50 female priests active throughout the world.

Once ambivalent about the subject of organized religion, Hart has become an advocate for change within the Catholic Church.

"I believe religion should empower all people," added Hart, who is hoping the documentary will be screened at this year's Carmel Art and Film Festival, which is scheduled for Oct. 6-10. "People should all be considered equal in the eyes of God. The Catholic Church has been guided by a patriarchal system. It's time for that to change. Whether things will change, well, that's another question."

For more information, visit www.eyegoddess.com.



It took Carmel Valley filmmaker Jules Hart five years and about \$100,000 to produce her prize-winning film.

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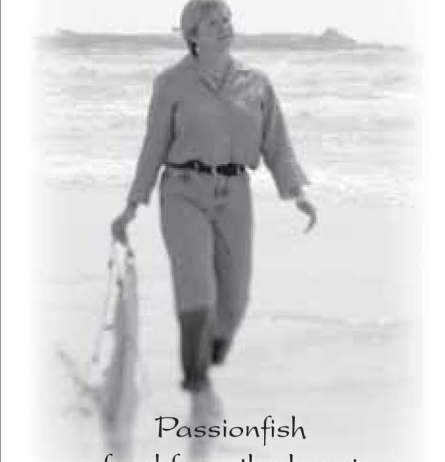
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