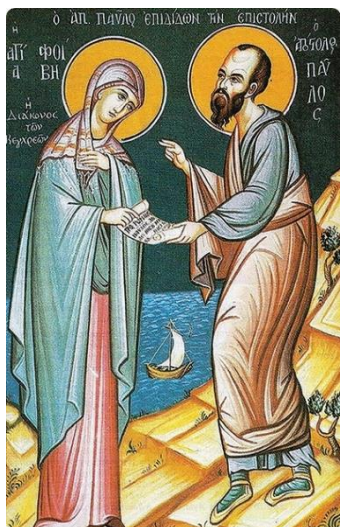


# Pastoral Responses and Resources for Replying to Women Who Feel Called to Ministries that Exist and Ministries that Do Not Yet Exist

*Created by the AUSCP Women in the Church Working Group*



Catholic women face numerous challenges in discerning their vocational calls to ministry. They can discern religious life or a lay vocation. Even though history shows that the Church included women as permanent deacons for many centuries, women today cannot discern with their Church a call to the diaconate. However, the [Final Document of the Synod on Synodality](#), which was approved by Pope Francis as magisterial teaching, affirms that the discernment about women's access to the diaconal ministry needs to continue (Final document, paragraph 60). During this time of implementing the Synod's recommendations, this report was written to assist clergy to meaningfully participate in the Church's ongoing discernment about women and the permanent diaconate. The following suggestions encourage pastors to listen to women's vocational call stories with "the ears of the heart."

**Pastoral responses to a woman who wants to talk with her pastor about her vocational call might vary according to context.**

- How well do you know the person?
- Is she asking on the way out of Mass or has she made an appointment?
- Is she serving in ministry in your parish?
- Are women leaders actively engaged in all your parish activities?
- Does your parish have a permanent deacon?
- Is your parish receptive to the Catholic Church allowing women to participate more robustly?
- Has your parish been involved in Synodal Conversations of the Spirit?
- How well do you understand all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law regarding the role of women?
- Are there areas in the life of your parish where women's roles remain underutilized?
- How well do you understand the current discernment about women's access to diaconal ministry? Would you like to learn more?

**If appropriate, reflect on your own vocational discernment.**

- How did you know you were being called to the priesthood?
- Who did you first tell?
- How might this woman be feeling as she shares what is in her heart?

## Here is a list of suggested **DOs** and **DON'Ts** for that initial response:

**DO** listen and acknowledge her desire and willingness to share her story. “Can we schedule a time for you to tell me more?”

**DON'T** dismiss her without an opportunity to hear more.

**DO** recognize and commend the ministries she is engaged in at the parish.

**DON'T** say “You are already doing those things so well, why do you need ordination?”

**DO** be open to why she would like to discern a call to ordained ministry like the diaconate and what she understands about the vocation. “What do you know about it?”

**DON'T** say “Be patient. It will happen in God’s good time.”

**DO** affirm that although ministerial priesthood is not possible for women today, the possibility for women as permanent deacons is under discussion and is an ongoing discernment in the Catholic Church.

**DON'T** say categorically “No, it’s not possible.”

**DO** empathize with her desire to better serve the pastoral needs of the community.

**DON'T** say, “Find another church,” nor “Maybe you should look for a different Christian denomination.”

**DO** mention that the question of women’s access to diaconal ministry remains open. The discernment needs to continue and there is need for further study and discernment.

**DON'T** say, “You are dissenting from Church teaching.”

**DO** offer to pray with her for her discernment during this time when the Church is also discerning what is God’s call to women in this third millennium.

**DON'T** take a side for or against women’s diaconal ordination. The Church is in a period of listening, study, and discernment.

**DO** provide resources for further faith formation, education, and spiritual direction and share information about which roles are already open to lay women.

**DON'T** say, “there is a lot you can do, just keep doing what you are doing.”

## A word for women:

**DO** know that you are not alone as a faithful Catholic calling for the Church to increase the participation of women. You can walk away from a parish, but you cannot walk away from the Holy Spirit.

**DON'T** be discouraged by hasty or negative responses. Do not give up on finding a deacon, priest or bishop who is willing to listen to your vocational call story. Many clergy do want to be supportive of their Catholic sisters.

# Resources

Together let us pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be a synodal church of communion, participation, and mission.

## Websites

**Women in the Church Working Group of AUSCP** <https://auscp.org/initiatives/women/>

We create safe spaces for priests and women to become thought-partners in mutual accompaniment beginning with the reception of one another's stories, their hopes, and laments.

**Discerning Deacons** [www.discerningdeacons.org](http://www.discerningdeacons.org)

The mission of Discerning Deacons is to engage Catholics in the active discernment of our Church about women and the diaconate and to contribute to the renewal of the diaconate. Discerning Deacons helped to prepare this [formation tool](#) to guide parishes in a Conversation in the Spirit about the diaconate using texts from the Final Synod Document.

**Catholic Women Preach** [www.catholicwomenpreach.org](http://www.catholicwomenpreach.org)

CWP promotes the call for more active engagement of the baptized in the preaching mission of the Church. Specifically, they offer the reflections of theologically informed women on Sunday scripture readings using web-based resources.

## Videos

**Vatican consultant, Dr Myriam Wijlens inspires with lecture on the importance of the laity in the Church** <https://catholicoutlook.org/vatican-consultor-dr-myriam-wijlens-inspires-with-lecture-on-the-importance-of-the-laity-in-the-church/?utm> (Fast forward to 1.03.48 and beyond)

**"Female Diaconate: If not now....when?" with Sr. Maureen Sullivan, OP, PhD**

<https://youtu.be/9CiWmHyCyWg?si=YctHiy9rpiAJHGio>

## Documents

**Final Document of the XVI Assembly of the Synod of Bishops** [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va) *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. Paragraphs #60 is about Women in Church life and #73 is about the ministry of deacons.

**What do US Catholics think about women deacons**, by Eric Berrelloza and Phyllis Zagano. Published online by the Review of Religious Research Association 7 March 2019. Surveys attitudes of Catholics concerning women in the diaconate.

**Reframing the Understanding of Participation in Mission and Leadership in a Synodal Church** An introduction to a research project of the Peter and Paul Seminar by Myriam Wijlens, Rafael Luciani, Co-Moderators. *Studia canonica* 58 2024 15-25 [https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=issue&journal\\_code=STC&issue=1&vol=58](https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=issue&journal_code=STC&issue=1&vol=58)

**Lay Persons in Leadership and Governance in a Synodal Church** Canonical developments calling for theological reflections and a paradigm shift by Myriam Wijlens, *Studia canonica* 58 2024 53-77

[https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=issue&journal\\_code=STC&issue=1&vol=58](https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=issue&journal_code=STC&issue=1&vol=58)

## Books

- O'Donnell, T. (2020). *The Deacon (Icon of Christ the Servant, Minister of the Threshold)*. Paulist Press.
- Macy, G., Ditewig, Wm. T., Zagano, P. (2011). *Women Deacons (Past, Present, Future)*. Paulist Press.

**“What comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped!”**

**Paragraph 60:** *This paragraph of the [Final Document of the Synod on Synodality](#) addresses women's participation in a synodal church.*

**60. By virtue of Baptism, women and men have equal dignity as members of the People of God. However, women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation, and place in all the various areas of the Church's life.** This is to the detriment of serving the Church's shared mission. Scripture attests to the prominent role of many women in the history of salvation. One woman, Mary Magdalene, was entrusted with the first proclamation of the Resurrection. On the day of Pentecost, Mary, the Mother of God, was present, accompanied by many other women who had followed the Lord. It is important that the Scripture passages that relate these stories find adequate space inside liturgical lectionaries. Crucial turning points in Church history confirm the essential contribution of women moved by the Spirit. **Women make up the majority of churchgoers and are often the first witnesses to the faith in families.** They are active in the life of small Christian communities and parishes. They run schools, hospitals, and shelters. They lead initiatives for reconciliation and promoting human dignity and social justice. Women contribute to theological research and are present in positions of responsibility in Church institutions, in diocesan curia and the Roman Curia. There are women who hold positions of authority and are leaders of their communities. **This Assembly asks for full implementation of all the opportunities already provided for in Canon Law with regard to the role of women, particularly in those places where they remain underutilised. There is no reason or impediment that should prevent women from carrying out leadership roles in the Church: what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped. Additionally, the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue.** The Assembly also asks that more attention be given to the language and images used in preaching, teaching, catechesis, and the drafting of official Church documents, giving more space to the contributions of female saints, theologians, and mystics.