

Synodal Encounter on Women's Leadership in the Church

Small Group Discussion Summary

The bullet points were summarized from the scribe notes from the six small groups, an individual summary submitted from one of the groups, and comments added to the Witness Surveys. You may request to view these documents by contacting the Good Shepherd office.

➤ ***How can men and women better cooperate in pastoral ministry and exercising related responsibilities?***

- General feeling that men and women DO cooperate at Good Shepherd. Most people have not experienced difficulty working with anyone in the parish, and never felt they couldn't or shouldn't do something because of their gender.
- Most women serving in "unseen ministries," still feel validated and spiritually fulfilled with their service role.
- Women already lead and participate in several ministries; need more men to do the same.
- Perhaps men feel the women have things covered and there's no real need for them to step up. Maybe the message is that men need to work together with the women.
- Need better "recruitment campaigns" for both men and women to serve in ministries.
- All should live their faith: men, women, children.
- Need to partner with pastor; be willing to adapt to pastor and other staff.
- We'd have better cooperation by including women in leadership positions.
- Perhaps there could be a greater role for women in the Church, but not as deacons.

- ***What are the most significant benefits you see for the Church ordaining women as deacons? What are your concerns? What challenges do you see?***

Benefits

- Provide assistance to priests who have parishes without sufficient deacons, particularly those serving in sparsely populated areas, or serving small parishes. The numbers of servants to God must increase.
- Pastoral care of the sick is a “big deal.” More deacons would be helpful.
- Women are already serving in so many capacities. The permanent diaconate is the next logical step in providing opportunities to those who feel the call to serve in a more meaningful way.
- For many years, women have taught religious education, theology, and liturgy. There would be no reason to say they could not preach a meaningful homily, preside at a wedding, or provide comfort and support to those grieving at a funeral.
- Recognize and utilize the unique gifts of women. Women are generally the spiritual leaders and nurturers of their families.
- The gifts of both men and women are complementary and vitally important.
- Women are sometimes more comfortable being totally honest with another woman than with a priest or male deacon. It’s easier for a woman to minister to other women in hospitals, hospice-care, and prisons.
- Women need to have a more active role in the Church; role model for young girls; would increase participation; women would bring balance.
- Women can be just as responsible and competent as men. Protestant women do an excellent job as ministers.
- If a female diaconate is approved, many nuns are already qualified and called to serve.

Challenges

- There would be a delicate balance of time management for a mother with small children. There might not be many women willing to accept the calling because of family commitments.
- There may be a degree of resistance by some priests, especially the “old guard.” There may be some reluctance to accept the assistance the women deacons could provide.
- Just as the changes brought by Vatican II, which upset so many Catholics but in time were accepted, there will be many Catholics who will be disgruntled and resistant. However, those responsible for discerning whether this is a viable and feasible decision must be firm, patient and sensitive to the feelings of those who object and make their decision with the welfare and future of the Church as the utmost consideration.
- People’s negativity and opposition to change; those who “fear” the thought of female deacons.
- View that this is a feminist rights issue, rather than about the universal spiritual gifts received by both men and women at baptism.
- Most Americans tend to look at things only from their perspective, often forgetting about the needs of the rest of the world, especially those areas less fortunate than us.
- Close mindedness: negative comments tear down the objective.
- It may take a lot of “getting used to” before women deacons would likely be accepted.
- Change in the Church takes a long time.

Concerns

- Opens the door for women to be priests. Women should not be deacons, much less priests.
- Just because a woman can hold up a chalice, doesn’t mean they should become a deacon.
- Women should be subservient to men and stay in their place.

- Would the priest still be the head of local churches, or would women become equals? What would the rules and policies be for women deacons?
- Jesus never made women feel marginalized. Jesus built the Church with women as servers of the ministry. We shouldn't change that.
- If women become deacons, men will not feel the need to serve; might be perceived as the ascent of women and the descent of men.
- Proponents deliberately give the false impression that women are widely dissatisfied with the male-only diaconate; fear Church leaders will be misled by unproven assertions.
- Favorable attention goes principally to those opposing change. Those who love the current Church are portrayed as old-fashioned, out of touch, backward, etc.
- So much attention is given by Church authorities and others to the dissidents, and so much effort given to appease them, that those who live and love Church teaching and practice feel ignored and betrayed.
- Those who desire change should accommodate themselves to the Church rather than requiring the Church to accommodate them.
- We are conforming to "pop-culture." The Holy Spirit is telling us to be guarded and stand our ground. We don't need change for the sake of change; feeling of "forced equality." Our progression should be spiritual and not just to be "seen."
- Women tend to over-commit.
- Afraid it could split the Church.
- The Catholic Church discriminates against women.