



An Intercontinental Synodal Encounter

**PILGRIMAGE TO OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE,
PATRON OF THE AMERICAS
FOR THE FEAST OF ST. PHOEBE,
PATRON OF A SYNODAL DIACONATE**

Mexico City
August 31–September 5, 2022

Synthesis of proceedings, insights, and points of discernment

*Respectfully submitted as a contribution
for a Synodal Church in the Continental Stage*

*Presented by the Women and Ministeriality Thematic Core Group of the
Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon-CEAMA + Discerning Deacons*

*On December 12th, 2022
The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*



**Discerning
Deacons**



ceama

Conferencia Eclesial de la Amazonia

Feast of the Visitation, May 31, 2023

As we conclude this Marian month of May, we are grateful for Pope Francis' invitation to seek Mary's wisdom and intercession to guide the synodal path of the Church. Our recent intercontinental pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City is a testament to the transformative role of women in the Church and the unity we found under Mary's mantle.

Coming together across the Americas, this sacred journey, rooted in dialogue, has cultivated a deep sense of mutual respect, solidarity, and strengthening our commitment to collective action for the holistic flourishing of all communities within the embrace of Christ's love.

We find great encouragement in the leadership of the Holy Father who trusts the Holy Spirit to guide the Church's discernment. Pope Francis' recent decision to involve women directly as voting members in the Synod of Bishops is a monumental step and reflects the Church's commitment to greater inclusivity.

On pilgrimage we encountered Mary, Mother of the Poor, who recognized the dignity of Juan Diego and heard the cries of Indigenous peoples. Pope Francis' recent rejection of the Doctrine of Discovery is a profound shift in the Church's relationship with Indigenous peoples. It recognizes historical injustices and represents a commitment to rectifying past wrongs.

The Church is called to engage in sincere and open dialogue with Indigenous communities, listening to their spiritual insights and incorporating their perspectives into theological discourse. Indigenous women's voices and experiences are vital for caring for our common home, growing an inculturated practice of the faith, and renewing the Church's social mission.

In the Synod on the Pan-Amazonian Region, participants expressed their commitment to listen to the experiences of women in ministry. This must also include hearing the desires of women to be received as permanent deacons, ordained to serve their communities, as missionary disciples in this church that goes out to the peripheries, which so desperately need the service of women committed to the care of life.

Inspired by Our Lady of Guadalupe, our pilgrimage has ignited a flame within us to create a world that cherishes the unique contributions of women and their ministry from every corner of the globe. This recognition of diaconal women within the Church signifies the birth of a renewed diaconate: synodal, rooted in the peripheries, and accompanying the people of God in the defense and dignity of life, their struggles for human rights and the rights of nature.

We offer this synthesis and we pray for all those carrying the responsibility to shepherd the synod process - that together we might discover renewed paths of communion, participation and mission.

Presented by Discerning Deacons and the Women and Ministeriality Thematic Core Group of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon-CEAMA:

Casey Stanton, Ellie Hidalgo, Maureen O'Connell

Doris Almeida de Vasconcelos, Aura Patricia Orozco, Sr. Laura Vicuña Pereira Manso

* Discerning Deacons, Saint Thomas More Catholic Community, 1079 Summit Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55015 *

www.DiscerningDeacons.org

Contents

2	Letter from Archbishop Roque Paloschi
5	Synthesizing the Fruits of a Historic Pilgrimage
8	An Encounter that Continues to Reveal: Our Lady, Juan Diego, and the Church in the Americas
8	Juan Diego, an Unlikely Protagonist
12	Forsaken, Rejected, but Not Alone
15	The Mother of Removing Obstacles
16	The Miracle of Recognition: Making Visible What was Invisible
20	Called to Build a New Church Out on Mission
24	Making the Road by Walking: New Structures for Greater Participation
27	The Spirit is Stirring for an Enlarged Understanding of the Diaconate
28	Conclusion
30	Appendix



**Discerning
Deacons**



ceama

Conferencia Eclesial de la Amazonía



ARQUIDIOCESE DE PORTO VELHO

Av. Carlos Gomes, 964 – Centro.
Fone: (69) 3224-1590 / 3221-2270
CEP 76801-147 - Porto Velho-RO
coordenacaopastoralpvh@hotmail.com



Peace and goodwill!

During the time we spent on the sacred grounds of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Juan Diego in Mexico City, we lived days of intense ecclesial, synodal, and ministerial communion. Women and men, servants of the Good News, shared life and mission, with the strength of prophecy, which is incarnate in the here and now of history; building paths, which lead to a recognition of the gift, the strength, and the diaconal service of women in the Church, because "everything that the Church has to offer must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world... Preaching must become incarnate, spirituality must become incarnate, ecclesial structures must become incarnate" (Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonía*, no. 6).

The gratitude to God is immense for such a significant experience. Women and men of faith, walked to the hill of Tepeyac to drink from the sacred source, to make a commitment to the life of the original peoples, here to represent the countless poor and marginalized – who cry out for life, for justice, and for a place in society and in the Church. We have all come to Mother of Guadalupe to learn from her, to serve the little ones, allowing ourselves to be enveloped by her sacred mantle of service and by the Good News of God for all peoples.

The presence of women in the Church is fundamental for the animation of the life of countless communities, and without their generous service, the faith would have already collapsed in many parts of the Americas, and I would risk saying, in many parts of the world. This tender and maternal presence makes people draw near and seek encouragement, but it is also a firm and vigorous presence, which vivifies and strengthens life where it is most threatened.

In the Magnificat, Mary exalts the wonders of God in her life: "The Almighty has done great things for me"; she recognizes His liberating power; she announces and denounces: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." She places herself at the service of all humanity, carrying in her womb the very force of life, the Liberating God. In her womb she carries the Son of God, Jesus Christ in all his humanity and divinity.

Mary, mother invoked by so many names, Mother of the Amazon, Mother of the Pilgrims, Mother of the Refugees, Mother of Sorrows, Mother of the Original peoples and Mother of the Americas. Mary, brown-skinned Mother of Heaven, Our Lady of Guadalupe, prophet of hope and of a new dawn, helps us to recognize the strength, the gift, and the *diakonia* of women in the Church.

Women are in frontier services in the Church. They serve among the most vulnerable, be they children, refugees, youth, abused women, migrants, native peoples, peasants and so many others. Women are also in the service of animation of basic ecclesial communities, ministers of the Word and the Eucharist, in various pastoral ministries, energizing the life of the communities, in the service of an integral pastoral care, for faith and life. These women are similar to the women at the foot of the cross, who stand in solidarity with the historical crucified and those who, at dawn, carry the perfumes to anoint the body of Jesus and of the many brothers and sisters who yearn for a dignified and full life. They, "the women" have the strength and do not accept that death has the last word. "The Lord lives and is in our midst," this life force places women as deacons of hope and life.



ARQUIDIOCESE DE PORTO VELHO

Av. Carlos Gomes, 964 – Centro.
Fone: (69) 3224-1590 / 3221-2270
CEP 76801-147 - Porto Velho-RO
coordenacaopastoralpvh@hotmail.com



Patriarchal and colonialist attitudes still persist among us, and in the face of this "sin" we are invited to enter into a dynamic of conversion of mind, heart, and will, in order to recognize the service that women render to the Church, without making distinctions among men and women, but with dignity and equity in ministry. In this way, the diaconate of women will be understood and practiced fully as a service of integral and inculturated evangelization, and at the service of the innumerable communities that clamor for a permanent evangelizing presence, with the charisms given through baptism for the building up of the Church.

The times we live in today ask us for steadfastness and audacity in the Spirit in order to live the ecclesiality, synodality, and ministeriality in the communities where we come from, and thereby make visible the protagonism of women in the Church. I bring to memory the extraordinary Amazon Synod, "Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology," when it emphasizes that, "In the many consultations carried out in the Amazon, the fundamental role of religious and lay women in the Church of the Amazon and its communities was recognized and emphasized, given the wealth of services they provide" (no. 103).

In the Synod of Amazonia, Pope Francis invites us all, not to "put new patches on old clothes", nor to "put new wine into old wineskins". Pope Francis urges us to witness, to "overflow," to have creativity for an integral and inculturated evangelization, in the commitment to the poor and to the common home, that cry out for the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

We gathered from various parts of the American continent, "like a river that welcomes many rivers, all wanting to drink from the same source." We are 'bridge people' who join Pope Francis for an inculturated evangelization in its diverse contexts and for living out an integral ecology, being Church on the way, Servant, Samaritan, Marian, and Magdalene, at the service of the countless ecclesial communities in this immense America.

The meeting of women and men, which took place from August 31st to September 5th, was marked by the experience of synodality, attentive listening to the Spirit of God, and discernment of the pathways towards an integral and inculturated evangelization in communion with Pope Francis and all his magisterium. The attentive listening and the sharing of life and mission give us elements to integrate the contributions to the continental stage of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality – For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe help us to listen and live the Word of God as a generous service to the people of God, preferably as life given to the poorest.

† Roque Paloschi
Roque Paloschi

Brother on the journey and Bishop of the Church in Porto Velho, Brazil





Synthesizing the Fruits of a Historic Pilgrimage

The in-breaking of God's healing and transformative presence in the Americas through the story of Juan Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the local bishop provides people in ministry with a source of inspiration, perseverance and protagonism on the journey of forming a synodal Church. Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patron of the Americas, helps to inspire the call to encounter, listen, dialogue and discern. And in the aftermath of years of clergy and ecclesial abuse from which the Church and the People of God are still healing, the encounter with Guadalupe becomes the ground for building a new vision and practice of ministeriality for the healthy exercise of authority in our Church.

Discerning Deacons¹ and members of the Women and Ministeriality Thematic Core Group of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA)² joined together to organize an intercontinental pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City August 31– September 5, 2022.

The pilgrimage was inspired by the Latin American Ecclesial Assembly (November 2021) and the global synod process of walking together in faith across continents, cultures, languages, and histories. This is not a new path for the Church in the Americas, but is in continuity with the dreams shared by St. John Paul II, who exhorted the Church across the Americas to actively foster bonds of solidarity and communion, to incarnate the Gospel in our intertwined realities.³

Fifty-six pilgrims journeyed to Mexico City for five days, moved by a shared devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and a living commitment to foster a synodal, missionary Church. Pilgrims arrived from across the Amazon — Brazil, Bolivia, and Colombia — together with participants from 14 states in the US, including delegations from Los Angeles, Minnesota, Chicago, San Francisco, Ohio, South Bend, Washington, D.C. and Miami.

1. **Discerning Deacons** was launched in the United States in April 2021, inspired by the witness of the Amazonian Synod and nurtured in virtual spaces of communal discernment during the height of the pandemic. Through prayer, education, relationship building, and formation, Discerning Deacons strives to foster a synodal Church. It is a growing community of witnesses who testify to the movement of the Holy Spirit and the call women receive from their communities to serve and lead as synodal deacons.
2. One of the thematic core groups of CEAMA is **Women and Ministeriality** which emerged from the Amazon Synod of 2019: "[Women's] leadership must be more fully assumed in the heart of the Church, recognized and promoted by strengthening their participation in the pastoral councils of parishes and dioceses, and also in positions of governance" (FD 101). In its plan of action, this core group has set itself the task of animating, recognizing, supporting, and deepening the understanding of the ministerial roles of women who contribute to the pastoral mission of the Church in the Amazon; studying the theology of the diaconate and the ordination of women to the diaconate; discerning paths towards new ministerial roles instituted for women; and advocating for the presence of women at decision-making tables and in ecclesial spaces.
3. "I asked that the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops reflect on America as a single entity, by reason of all that is common to the peoples of the continent, including their shared Christian identity and their genuine attempt to strengthen the bonds of solidarity and communion between the different forms of the continent's rich cultural heritage. The decision to speak of "America" in the singular was an attempt to express not only the unity which in some way already exists, but also to point to that closer bond which the peoples of the continent seek and which the Church wishes to foster as part of her own mission, as she works to promote the communion of all in the Lord." ([Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Ecclesia In America](#); Given at Mexico City, January 22, in the year 1999, by Pope John Paul II).



Father Eleazar López Hernández of Mexico, an expert on indigenous theology and consultant to the Amazon Synod in 2019, joined pilgrims to help inform our journey to Tepeyac as we sought to learn from the history, cultures, and faith of the peoples of Mexico. His presentation revealed the story of Juan Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the bishop as a powerful series of encounters that can guide the vision for a synodal Church. He helped root pilgrims in the perspectives of indigenous peoples, and he introduced the Nican Mopohua,⁴ the translated, indigenous Náhuatl text recounting Our Lady of Guadalupe’s apparitions to Juan Diego.

Through lively celebrations of the Eucharist, synodal dialogue, communal discernment sessions, and day-long journeys to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and other sacred sites, pilgrims sought to live these core questions together:

- **What do the encounters between Our Lady of Guadalupe, Juan Diego, and the bishop reveal for how we are to walk on a synodal path together in the third millennium?**
- **What is being revealed about women’s roles, leadership, and gifts for ministry for the Church today?**

We present this synthesis as an offering for discernment in the Continental Stage of the global synod — For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. In light of the fact that the synod’s *Working Document for the Continental Stage* names the “critical and urgent” task to “rethink women’s participation,” we want to present the fruits of our dynamic encounter and the meaning and significance of Our Lady of Guadalupe as an offering to deepen the Church’s discernment on the ministerial roles of women, as well as the possibility for women to preach in parish settings and to be ordained as deacons.⁵

4. “Guadalupe: Luz y Cambio de Nuestra Realidad” by Rev. Clodomiro L. Siller Acuña is a translation into Spanish of the Nican Mopohua, the oldest surviving Náhuatl text recounting Our Lady of Guadalupe’s apparitions. The Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Mexico City authorized the printing of the Nican Mopohua in 1649.
5. “Almost all reports raise the issue of full and equal participation of women: ‘The growing recognition of the importance of women in the life of the Church opens up possibilities for greater, albeit limited, participation in Church structures and decision-making spheres’ (EC Brazil). However, the reports do not agree on a single or complete response to the question of the vocation, inclusion and flourishing of women in Church and society. After careful listening, many reports ask that the Church continue its discernment in relation to a range of specific questions: the active role of women in the governing structures of Church bodies, the possibility for women with adequate training to preach in parish settings, and a female diaconate.” ([Document for the Continental Phase #64](#)).



An encounter that continues to reveal: Our Lady, Juan Diego, and the Church in the Americas

Juan Diego, an Unlikely Protagonist

Juan Diego encounters the Mother of God during a time of profound grief and destruction of indigenous culture and society by colonizing powers. Our merciful Mother of the Poor hears the cries of the conquered and wants to heal all their miseries, pains and sorrows. Mary's first words to Juan Diego are for all who live at the peripheries, including those who are turned away from the embrace offered through Jesus' Church.

Oye, hijo mío el más desamparado, digno Juan: a donde vas?

Listen, my son, the most forsaken, worthy Juan: where are you going?

She acknowledges Juan Diego's forsakenness and suffering, yet also affirms his worthiness. She draws near, and commits to walking with him on a path to become a protagonist in his liberation and the healing and liberation of his people. Mary asks Juan Diego to talk with the Catholic bishop about her request for a temple on top of the hill at Tepeyac so that all nations will know that she is the Merciful Mother who hears the people's laments and seeks to heal all their miseries, sorrows and pains. She calls him to a mission that invigorates him and invites him to step into his protagonism!

Mira, hijo mío el más desamparado, ya has oído mi dicho y mi palabra; haz todo lo que esté de tu parte.

Look, my son, the most forsaken, you have heard my word; do all that is in your power.





A LA MEMORIA DEL SR.
ANTONIO DEL VALLE TALAVERA
GUADALUPANO E IEMPLAR
CREADOR Y CONSTRUCTOR DE ESTE PARQUE
24 DE FEBRERO DE 1992 SU HERMANO

While Santa María de Guadalupe offers divine accompaniment to liberate those who are forsaken, this does not mean that it will be easy for the peripheries to be heard by the center. The first two times Juan Diego seeks to encounter ecclesial authority, the bishop rejects both message and messenger. Juan Diego will need to persist and overcome disbelief, trivialization and rejection for his message to be received.

When María instructed Juan Diego to go witness to the bishop – not once, but three times – Juan Diego resisted, knowing too well his own lowliness in his society, in the Church. Who was he to share his divine experience with the bishop? Surely this would be a waste of divine time. These are the same feelings we as Catholic women experience when we are seen but not heard, received but not heeded in our encounters with the hierarchical Church. When we are dismissed and turned out of the Church – the very Church we have been called to serve – in much the same way that Juan Diego was in 1531. Doubted, discredited and denied. By the Church, perhaps – but not by God!

This conviction of vocation and worthiness, of legitimacy and urgency, was especially present in the witness of our sisters from the Amazon. Their commitment, their joy, their truth-telling and leadership vanished all pretension, doubt or temptation to abstraction. It is one thing to tell someone that women cannot preach or proclaim the Gospel. But when you SEE a woman proclaim the Gospel, when you HEAR a woman preach, in the context of Mass, then you can no longer say that it cannot be done; it IS being done. By these very women! These women of tremendous faithfulness, valor, and holiness. Our US counterparts were equally humble and bold in proclaiming the Word and blessing us with their reflections. These mutual exchanges of vocational gifts, and even of obstacles to the call, bonded us with a Spirit-strength glue. A deep knowing that we are not alone. We are not delusional or unorthodox or unworthy. We are called. We are juntas, juntos, en el camino hacia Roma, hacia Cristo. To bring our roses into the inner rooms, to offer a way for the people of God into the Church, and a way for the Church to connect to the people of God.

— ALLISON BEYER, music minister, visual artist,
wife and mother of three; South Bend, Indiana, USA





Similar to Juan Diego, women are often called to serve from the peripheries. Many women who experience their call also experience rejection in the Church, which tempts them towards despair and feelings of unworthiness. This is not the shame born of sin; this is the pain and lament of not being seen and received with equal dignity in communion with the clergy and all of the baptized.

In our church where the spirit calls me daily...where I hear calls to vocation like many of you, I say "yes," but sort of like dear Juan Diego, I am not sure if my voice is being heard.

— LYDIA TINAJERO-DECK, pediatrician, preacher, Oakland, California, USA; reflection delivered at Pocito Chapel on the campus of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe

As pilgrims reflected and shared their devotion to Mary, there was a resonance: so many are nurtured by the faith of their mothers and grandmothers, who themselves experienced the nearness of the Mother of God, encouraging women to trust in their call and creatively respond to the needs of others, despite constraints they face.

Empowered by their shared common baptism to speak as protagonists — and not only as victims of history — women pilgrims named the way power is abused and also named alternate ways of sharing and exercising power that are rooted in the Gospel and in a synodal Church.

For example, during Mass at the Church of Los Remedios, Ellie Hidalgo and the delegation from Dolores Mission Church in Los Angeles, invited pilgrims to enter into the experience of migrants and refugees — and to discern, with open hearts, how to embrace others with welcome — even when we feel we do not have much to give.

When Amada tells me the story of how the parish became a shelter for migrants she talks about rice and beans. Amada was a poor, immigrant mother of six children, and after she measured the rice and beans needed to feed her children, she would also set aside a cup of rice and a cup of beans and walk over to the church to donate her cups of rice and beans to those preparing food for the migrants. And she did this each day. And it wasn't just Amada... Each mother or grandmother giving a cup of rice and a cup of beans — that is how we will construct the reign of God.

— ELLIE HIDALGO, Co-Director of Discerning Deacons, former Pastoral Associate at Dolores Mission Church, Los Angeles, California, USA



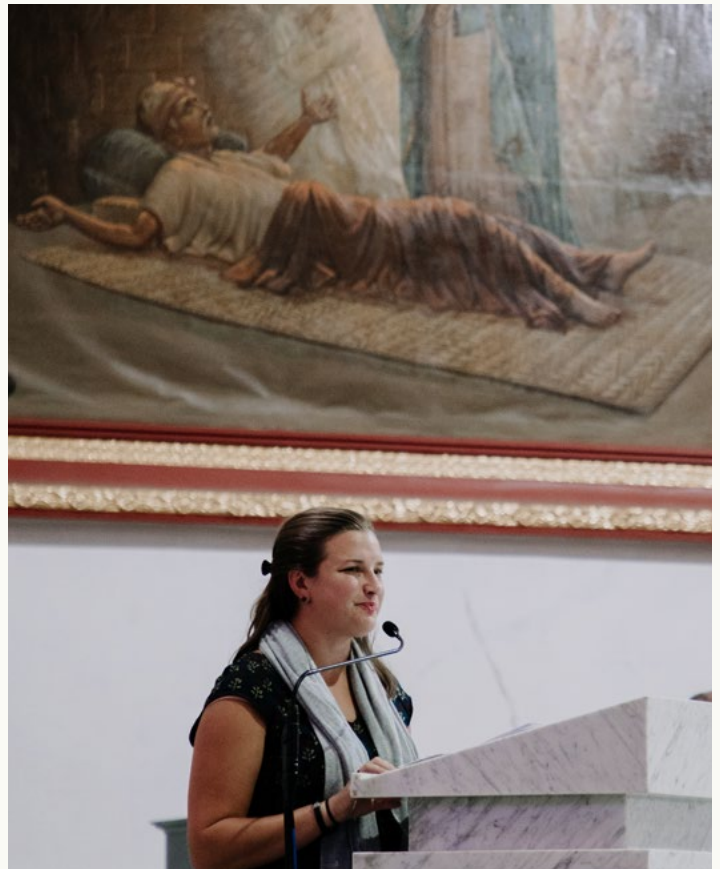
Forsaken, Rejected, but Not Alone

A forsaken and rejected Juan Diego asks Our Lady of Guadalupe to send a well-respected, well-connected person because he feels that he has no place in colonial society; nobody takes him seriously. Mary responds that it is precisely her plan that he be her mediator with the bishop for her will and her desire to be fulfilled. Juan Diego becomes a little more convinced of his call and mission and is willing to visit the bishop a second time. The bishop tells him that his word will not be enough; Juan Diego must bring a sign that Our Lady of Heaven sent him. However, during this time, Juan Diego's uncle has become very sick and he decides to avoid another encounter with Mary and take a different route in order to seek help for his uncle. A persistent Mary encounters him on this alternate route and shares with Juan Diego the words that have resonated throughout the centuries, revealing that the Mother of God is mother to us all:

***¿No estoy yo aquí que soy tu madre?
Am I not here, I who am your mother?***

Mother Mary urges Juan Diego to believe that she cares about him and is healing his uncle; she is his source of life; she is protecting him with her mantle; she walks with him in all things. Juan Diego's heart is deeply consoled, and he is willing to climb the hill of Tepeyac once again to gather Mary's sign for the bishop — beautiful blooming flowers in wintertime.

As we pray with Mary's words and experience her accompaniment, we discover our inner resilience and willingness to climb the hill again, to find and collect the roses, to bring them back down the mountain, and encounter once more the bishop and his companions. She teaches us to journey together.



As Allison put it: "To bring our life into the inner sanctuary of the Church to be seen by all. To bring our offering, our proof of encounter with the divine, before the earthly authority of the Church. Because we know we are not alone. Because we know we have been called and sent."

In the most difficult moments, on painful days filled with suffering, it is our communities who carry us. Who carry our hearts. Jesus teaches us in today's Gospel (Lk 14:25–33) that there is no discipleship without taking up, carrying our cross. Discipleship is not a solitary path. We bear the Good News in community.

— LISA CATHELYN, Minister of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation for the Federation of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (CSSJ)

While Lisa did not grow up with a devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, she first was introduced to her when she joined a deacon as together they met with women in prison. The deacon always brought an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on their visits — a visible reminder to all that the Mother of the Incarcerated Jesus was near.



ESTA IMAGEN LE COPIA DEL
SU SACRAMENTO ASISTIR
DAN DON ESTE QUANTO DAZZINI
Y CERTIFICADO AUTENTICIDAD
1977
ROBERTO CARLOS E. VERA CASZIRA
AZORIO FERRARI DE JALISCO



The Mother of Removing Obstacles

To receive Santa Maria de Guadalupe's message through the witness of one forsaken and rejected, the bishop would need to listen with his heart and not just with his ears. For his part, Juan Diego would need to persist, and to trust that Our Lady had wisely chosen her ambassador to encounter the bishop.

Our Lady of Guadalupe helped Juan Diego remove significant obstacles so that he could fulfill his call to encounter the bishop. She healed his sick uncle. She provided the signs that converted the bishop's heart. Most importantly, she assisted Juan Diego to navigate the conversion of his own heart so that he, a poor indigenous man, could believe that he had been called to a great mission.

Women also pray to Santa Maria del Camino to make a way where there is no way; to persevere through constraints on our call; to give us the words to share our ministry experiences so that our call, constraints, adaptations and contributions can be heard and understood by others.

There are barriers that unordained ministers like myself hit that result in unmet pastoral needs especially to those in vulnerable situations where ministry is most needed. Ordained ministers often have unrestricted access to the incarcerated in prisons and immigration detention centers in the US. I could have walked with people that I was accompanying in my parish ministry into detention centers more effectively had I been a deacon. Ordained ministers often have unrestricted access to patients in some hospitals. Only ordained ministers can be military chaplains thereby denying all Catholics in the military access to a [Catholic] woman chaplain. In my experience, there are simply not enough priests in general, and especially not enough bilingual, bicultural priests to serve the diversity of the Catholic Church (not just Spanish, but all other languages and cultures).

— ANNE ATTEA, Pastoral Associate at Ascension Parish,
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA



OPPOSITE

Santa María del Camino by Rev. Fernando Aritzti, SJ in which Mary clears the path of rocks to make a way for migrants seeking refuge

The Miracle of Recognition: Making Visible What was Invisible

When Juan Diego gifts the bishop with Mary's flowers and reveals the extraordinary image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on his tilma, the bishop experiences an immediate conversion of heart that allows him to receive the message and the messengers — Juan Diego and Mary Queen of Heaven in the image of an indigenous Mary.

The miracle of Juan Diego's tilma is not only the prophetic image of an indigenous Mary it reveals — but the movement this image generated within the Church to begin to see and receive the humanity of indigenous peoples, to receive their wisdom, and to believe in their testimony. Nearly 500 years after her apparition in 1531, we are still in the process of fully receiving the miracle of recognition of all peoples on the peripheries, of inviting diverse races, cultures and faiths to be in dialogue with one another. It continues to be made possible by the overflow of grace which comes from God, through human encounters.

Helped by Mary's intervention and Juan Diego's persistence, **the bishop recognized what was already true: that indigenous peoples can bear witness to their own experience of the sacred and invite others into dialogue about the truths which the divine reveals.**



Juan Diego's journey from invisibility to visibility continues to illuminate the Church's path in history. As the listening phase in the global synod revealed, women are asking to move from invisibility to visibility so as to further the Church's mission in the world. These are interconnected movements, as Laura Vicuña Pereira Manso elucidated when she preached in the opening liturgy — an inculturated Amazonian rite:

*A diaconate of women will be fully understood and practiced in the service of an integral and inculturated evangelization. As presented to us in today's Gospel (Lk 4:38–44) with the service of Peter's mother-in-law, **she was freed from invisibility and became a protagonist in the service of women.** [...] In the new church and in the new society it is necessary to make visible and recognize the service that we women already provide.*

— SR. LAURA VICUÑA PEREIRA MANSO, C.F., missionary with indigenous peoples in Brazil, member of the Women and Ministeriality Thematic Core Group (CEAMA), Auditor for the Amazon Synod





Rosa Bonilla shared her testimony of growing up in rural El Salvador where she experienced as the norm diaconal women presiding at liturgies of the Word and breaking open scripture – experiences that have rooted her confidence that God also calls her to accompany her immigrant faith community in Los Angeles.

At the age of 13 I had the opportunity to give my first reflection on the Gospel in a celebration of the Word of God.

And this continues to be part of my ministry today, accompanying and being present with the community, with those who suffer, and with those who are alone. Trying to help my sisters and brothers not only in their spiritual needs, but also in their material needs. On days when there is no priest in my parish, I am given the opportunity to celebrate services of the Word with Communion and offer reflections on the scriptures.

Although there are still people in my community who are reluctant to see women's leadership in liturgical celebrations, there are others who come up to me and ask, "Can you bless water for me?" and sometimes they also ask me to bless medals,



images and rosaries. At the beginning I was in doubt, should I do it or not? But immediately I remember that we are all priests, prophets and kings, and the blessing is not in my name, but in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

For me to be able to serve as a deacon, above all things, would be a dream come true. Not because I have a title, but because it gives me the possibility to do my work and ministry with more freedom.

— ROSA BONILLA, wife and mother of three children, Pastoral Assistant at Dolores Mission Church in Los Angeles, California, USA



Women throughout the world are serving, leading, and ministering — but often outside of view of the formal structures in the Church. While this grants a measure of freedom to serve at the margins and bring the Gospel to those in need, it can be dangerous to remain invisible or feel you must shrink in order to survive.

For many women, the result of stepping out of the blind spot is part of a journey to greater freedom and deepening faith. In naming aloud the *diakonia* they feel called to, women's steps are strengthened and their vision is clarified: a desire to become synodal deacons. Not obsessed with titles, but committed to the ministry which God & God's people have called them into.

For men — including priests on this pilgrimage — the encounter with women's testimonies was a source of conversion, an invitation to see, to recognize, and to embrace what is already true. Together women and men can walk as St. Paul and St. Phoebe did in the early Church, and as Juan Diego and his bishop did — as collaborators in ministry for the sake of the gospel. Recognition becomes the ground from which to grow and strengthen a shared commitment to serve a synodal Church.

*I'm reminded that our faith is not a fantasy. Our faith is about fidelity to the experience which is real. In this week, that's been obvious. This is obviously true. It is obviously true that these women here, present, are serving as deacons in our church. But our faith as fidelity is about recognition. **All stories and all apparitions are about recognizing something that we already know to be true.** "Recognizing" doesn't have the same taste in English as it does in Spanish — "**reconocer**" — to know again what we already know to be true. As a Jesuit, as a priest, as a brother to all of you, I pray I will always work to recognize what is already and obviously true — in the women I work with and the women I am privileged to serve.*

— FR. BRENDAN BUSSE, SJ, Pastor of Dolores Mission Church, Los Angeles, California, USA

Called to Build a New Church Out on Mission

The temple which Santa Maria de Guadalupe proposes is not just a building, but a new reality, where God's dream and our ancestors' dreams are realized. Her temple is that of the cosmos and the human's place in it on this planet. Our future depends on our ability to recognize that we live, move and have our being on holy ground — what today we refer to as our Common Home. **The renewal of the Church is connected to a renewal of ministry: one not rooted in titles, but in ministeriality for a synodal Church.** It is grounded in the people of God: animated by our common baptism — who all are seen as worthy to contribute, whose cries are heard, whose witness is received.

Reflecting on Mary's encounter with Juan Diego reveals something fresh about ministeriality in a synodal church.

The pilgrimage helped me to reflect on my own mission to advance synodality, participation, mission. Mary opens the way to the ministeriality of synodality. Mary is generous. Mary walks a camino from the moment she conceives Jesus, all through the moments of his life and beyond. The pilgrimage reveals all the gifts Mary brings as a woman to this Church — service, sacrifice, generosity. Mary points to all the women of early Christianity and throughout our history and what they bring — Veronica, Priscila, St. Teresa de Avila, all the anonymous women who bring their gifts to building up a church on mission.

— DORIS ALMEIDA DE VASCONCELOS, lay woman of the Secular Franciscan Order; socio-environmental activist in the Diocese of Xingu-Altamira; Territorial Coordinator for REPAM Brasil; member of the Women and Ministeriality Thematic Core Group (CEAMA); Auditor for the Amazon Synod

RIGHT

Pilgrims receive the gift of tucuma rings from the Amazon delegation which symbolize solidarity with the poor





MADE IN MEXICO
Carmencita
Vestidos

MADE IN MEXICO
Vestidos



In light of their crossroads experiences, women are hearing the call to step into the chasms that divide their communities and to build bridges using the synodal arts of listening, discernment and forward movement together. In the contexts of their ministries, they are building bridges of listening, of connection and dialogue, of discernment and consensus-building, bridges of healing and community building. This is the work of greater co-responsibility with our brothers for the Church in the third millennium. This is ministry in a synodal key.

I have always assumed the position of a baptized woman, therefore, co-responsible, as much as the hierarchy, for the teachings of Jesus to the faithful and to the entire local society.

— MARIA DE FATIMA DA FONSECA; Since 1983 Fatima has been teaching at the Presbyteral Formation Institute of the Archdiocese of Belém and of lay men and women in the dioceses of the North Region II in Pará and Amapá, Brazil. She is a member of the Women and Ministeriality Thematic Core Group of CEAMA.

In my role as Pastoral Associate in the Archdiocese of Boston, I used to help refugees and immigrants in their needs of housing, food, health and legal services etc. I organized people in small groups. I encouraged them to call each other on a weekly basis. The elderly group brought communion to the sick. The men's group provided transportation to families. And the youth group served in food pantries and cleaned the church. As a woman, I could relate to women, men, children or adults in our multicultural parish. This community was one of the most vibrant.

— PHILOMÈNE PÉAN, DMin., A native of Haiti, Philomène has lived for many years in Boston where she has grown a space of refuge and ministry for the Hattian community as they navigate a new context and culture. She also serves as a board certified hospice chaplain, retreat leader and spiritual director.

Part of what it means to be a bridge person is to be a bridge between the present, with all of its limitations, and a vision of the future where the gifts of all are celebrated. We do this by daring to embody that future in the present.

— ANNA ROBERSTON, parishioner at St. Joseph Church, Seattle, WA, USA and Associate Director of Distributed Organizing for Discerning Deacons

It is with this synodal sensibility that women assert that they do not want to be "clericalized" but rather responsible protagonists in shepherding a new understanding and practice of *ministeriality* in the context of synodality. Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Phoebe, a deacon in our early Church, together offer a witness and inspiration for this approach to ministry for the lay and for the ordained.

Making the Road by Walking: New Structures for Greater Participation

The members of CEAMA's core group on Women and Ministry shared about the new forms of ecclesial life that are emerging and taking root as direct fruits of the Amazon Synod. They bore witness that the synodal way is about listening *and* incarnating the dreams of the People of God. Practically, this has meant creating an ecclesial conference that includes clergy, consecrated life, and lay women and men working together to build the reign of God for our times. The gradual but significant changes that have been taking root following the Amazon Synod offer insight for those of us in the United States. This generative exchange challenged US participants to consider: **How might we move towards a more ecclesial assembly model of listening, dialoguing, discerning, and acting together?**





AMAZÔNIA



REPAM
REDE ECLESIAL PANAMAZÔNICA
BRASIL

NA AMÉRICA DO SUL

O DOS MÁRTIRES DA FLORESTA

Gathering the Fruit

Discerning Deacons
Gathering the Fruits

Círio de Nazaré
130ª CÍRIO DE NÁZARE SENHORA DE NÁZARE
MARIA, MÃE E MESTRA 2022



During this pilgrimage of exchange and encounter, we recognized points of deep communion, and that there is much to learn from the Amazon Church about how to trust in God's dreams for humanity, even in the face of immense struggle.

I come from a humble family that has hidden its indigenous identity all its life, because of prejudice and discrimination. It was the direct work with the indigenous people and the devastation of the Amazon that made me self-affirm my Kariri identity. From the experience of life mission, with the Karipuna people, I bring the effort, the struggle, and the work in defense of the Karipuna Indigenous Land, which is demarcated and approved, and even so, suffers countless invasions. Defending the Karipuna territory is today the defense of the rights guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of Brazil. Thirty years ago, the Karipuna people suffered a near extermination,

*leaving only eight people behind: five adults and three children. Today the people live the eminence of a genocide, by the illegal action of economic groups and politicians who want to take possession of their land. In 2017, together with the Karipuna people, we conducted a walk through the territory, locating and registering with geographic coordinates and images, the points of invasion of the territory. In the following years, more than 150 kilometers were walked, in order to continue with the same work and thus have the necessary elements and evidence to make political incidences at the national and international level, demanding steps to remove the invaders and punish them civilly and criminally. There was no lack of persecution and death threats for the Karipuna people, missionaries, and allies. **Today my service to the church is in defense of life, land, and rights.***

— SR. LAURA VICUÑA PEREIRA MANSO, C.F.

The Spirit is Stirring for an Enlarged Understanding of the Diaconate

This feels like a big, impossible call: who are we to enlarge the Church's understanding of the diaconate?⁶ And yet we feel compelled to share what it is we see and hear and hope for our Church.⁷

The diaconate is a ministry for the poor and for the earth.

The diaconate is a ministry of bridge building through listening and creative response.

The diaconate can address the problem of clericalism, if women are invited to bring alternate perspectives and ways of approaching the exercise of ministry, leadership, and the sharing of power.

A desire for enlarging the ordained diaconate to include women arises from a desire that is being heard on every continent to share the good news of Jesus' own affirmation that our common baptism initiates all of us into His *diakonia*. Through their lived witness and ministry, women can offer theological, sacramental, and ecclesial reflection to the discernment about the restoration and renewal of the permanent diaconate.

In light of the fact that there already are women ministering as *de facto* deacons, reflection on their lived experience gives us new insights into a diaconate for the Church at the change of an epoch.

An expanded diaconate that includes women could assist the Church with its vision of returning to a synodal style of governing — one that goes out to the peripheries; that seeks to include all people; and that prioritizes formation for listening, dialogue, discerning the will of the Holy Spirit, and consensus building so that we can respond to the needs of our times. Leadership in a synodal key harkens back to St. Paul, when, having recognized St. Phoebe's *diakonia* as a leader of the church in Cenchræ, he entrusted her to deliver and proclaim his letter to the Romans, whom he in turn asked to help Phoebe with whatever she needed. St. Paul goes on to thank the faith leaders in Rome and names more than 20 men and women who live the promise and the joy of the Gospel in prophetic ways.⁸



6. We note the words of Pope Paul VI and find key echoes for today's discussion about the significance of an ordained permanent diaconate, as distinct from the priesthood, particularly commissioned to animate the service of the Church and the mysteries of Christ:

Although some functions of the deacons, especially in missionary countries, are in fact accustomed to be entrusted to lay men it is nevertheless "beneficial that those who perform a truly diaconal ministry be strengthened by the imposition of hands, a tradition going back to the Apostles, and be more closely joined to the altar so that they may more effectively carry out their ministry through the sacramental grace of the diaconate."⁽⁴⁾ Certainly in this way the special nature of this order will be shown most clearly. It is not to be considered as a mere step towards the priesthood, but it is so adorned with its own indelible character and its own special grace so that those who are called to it "can permanently serve the mysteries of Christ and the Church."⁽⁵⁾ (Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter [Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem](#), General Norms For Restoring The Permanent Diaconate In The Latin Church; June 18, 1967).
7. "What if deacons are particularly commissioned (and formed) as listeners helping to flex the synodal muscle, serving the hierarchy to know what is in the hearts and minds of the People of God, especially drawing near to those who are at risk of being left out as key decisions or directions are made, while also calling forth and inviting the gifts of the community forward? In other words, a synodal diaconate." From the [Discerning Deacon's Synthesis Report](#) (Conclusion, p 28).
8. St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 16:1–16.

Conclusion

Mary of Many Names: Inspiration for a Synodal Church

In the Guadalupe story Mary calls herself by many names — Holy Mary of Guadalupe, Mother of God, Merciful Mother, Mother of the Poor, Queen of Heaven, Mother of Our Savior and Our Lord Jesus Christ. The names help us to understand her call and her mission to support us throughout our lives, to accompany our journey, to help us make a way and remove obstacles in all the circumstances of our lives. Mary has many names, in part, because she has many calls, just as women receive many calls to assist the Church and to be on mission.

One of the most striking insights from Fr. Eleazar’s presentation on the image of the tilma was to notice that she is not a static figure. Her bent knee indicates that she is in movement — walking, dancing, on a journey — and she sets us in movement. Her movement is one of integration — of peoples across roles of power in the Church, of peoples from different cultures, and of people with the earth. She also moves us toward inculturation by incarnating the promises of the Magnificat in the lived realities of distinct peoples. Mary witnesses the overflow of God’s grace.

Rather than confining women into a generic or flat understanding of “the role of woman,” Mary, through the multiplicity of her roles and names and the dynamism of her encounter with Juan Diego, inspires Catholic women to continue walking in an alive faith, trusting in the word of the angel who proclaims that nothing will be impossible for God (Luke 1:37).

For women holding a vocational desire to be named deacon — that is, to exercise the role of ordained minister for the sake of their communities — Mary is an inspiration and a way maker. Women continue to trust in the call to serve the Church as deacons, to preach the Gospel and to share good news with the poor that calls them into their own protagonism for the transformation of our world.

It is our hope that the witness of this pilgrimage can be received as a sign in the Church’s discernment journey to open up new horizons of hope: St. Juan Diego, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the bishop, help us imagine *nuevos caminos* / new pathways that form the synodal, listening, walking-together Church we are called to be.

Humbly and with gratitude,

Casey Stanton
Ellie Hidalgo
Maureen O’Connell
Carolina Manson,
translator

Doris Almeida de Vasconcelos
Aura Patricia Orozco
Sr. Laura Vicuña Pareira Manso

OPPOSITE

Annie Knight sketched this drawing on the bus to Teotihuacan. This indigenous/mestiza Mary is adorned with the symbolism of Quetzalcoatl corn and roses. Her earrings are based on an Aztec symbol for flower. Fr. Eleazar López Hernández mentioned he had seen a depiction of her with two snakes, and so the artist plays with this symbol in the design. The traditional cinta, a protective belt meant to shield the baby from external harm, serves as a reminder that this is a Mary full of life, close to all who stand on the threshold and seek to bring life into the world.



*
APle '22

Appendix

Full Text of the Reflections on the Word

[Sr. Laura Vicuña Pereira Manso](#) – To be entrusted with the proclamation of Good News

[Ellie Hidalgo](#) – Gente Puente: Building synodal discipleship across continents

[Lydia Tinajero Deck](#) – Our Lady of Guadalupe helps us to say ‘yes’ to our call

[Lisa Cathelyn](#) – Receiving the gift of ‘deacon-ing’

Conference Day Remarks

[Archbishop Miguel Cabrejos](#) – Welcome video from the president of the Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM)

[Fr. Eleazar López Hernández](#) – His conference day remarks were based on his article about how Our Lady of Guadalupe summons indigenous theology and Christianity to be in dialogue and to build a new reality

[Doris Almeida de Vasconcelos and Laura Vicuña Pereira Manso](#) – Prophetic, synodal, ecclesial paths of the Amazonian Church and integral ecology

Panel Remarks

[Rosa Bonilla](#) – The roots of my diaconal ministry in LA are in El Salvador

[Sr. Laura Vicuña Pereira Manso](#) – My service to the Church is in defense of life, land, and rights

[Philomène Péan](#) – Haitian-American minister: “Here I am Lord, send me”

[Anne Attea](#) – The diaconate for women is a path for Church renewal

[Maria de Fatima da Fonseca](#) – Co-responsible for the teachings of Jesus in Brazil

[Sr. Ciria Mees](#) – Sharing sacramental life with Bolivian faith communities

St. Phoebe Prayer Service

[Anna Robertson](#) – You are invited to go on a journey in the Year of St. Phoebe

Final Document of the Amazon Synod

[The pilgrimage and this synthesis aim to develop the themes raised in sections 101 through 104 from the Final Document of the Amazon Synod](#)



Credits

For full remarks from speaker, panelists, and pilgrimage participants please visit: <https://discerningdeacons.org/pilgrimage-2022/>

Photos by Luisa Arumi Ortiz and Pilar Timpane
Cover photo by Aida Batres

Designed by Larry Issa





**Discerning
Deacons**

discerningdeacons.org



ceama

Conferencia Eclesial de la Amazonía