

# Discerning Deacons Synod Report Loyola Marymount University Latinx Theology and Ministry Initiative

## Logistics and Demographic Information

Date of Synod Consultation: March 23-May 2, 2022 – through online survey.

Primary zip code: 90045. Participants represented many zip codes -- most from Southern California and Southern Nevada, a few from Northern and Central California, and one from Miami, Florida. This was an online survey that could be filled out in English and Spanish; the survey was sent in snowball fashion to students (undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education), faculty, staff, and alumni of Loyola Marymount University. Both those identifying as Latinas and those identifying as allies of Latinas were invited to fill out the survey.

Location: The survey went out in the name of the LMU Latinx Theology and Ministry Initiative in collaboration with Discerning Deacons. Participants filled out an online survey.  
Participants: 149 persons participated.

Participation of women: 85 participants identified as Latinas; however, we did not ask for more identifying information than that. The survey was slightly different for Latinas and for those who identified as allies of Latinas (men or women).

Age groups represented: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75 +.

Cultural heritages represented: The survey only requested information if participants identified as Latinas, 85 identified as such. So a large percentage were Hispanic/Latina/o/x. Others would have been from multiple ethnicities, but we did not request this information.

Primary languages spoken: 42 participants chose to respond in Spanish, the rest in English.

Faith traditions: We did not ask participants to identify their faith traditions, but the survey assumed affiliation with the Catholic Church.

Focus on a group on the peripheries: The intentional focus was on Latinas both in respondents but also on the questions asked.

## Reflections, Themes, Insights

Focus questions for consultation.

Introductory Section for the LMU Latino/a/x Theology and Ministry Synod Process Latinas and the Church Today. This survey contains six questions, in addition to a few multiple-choice questions at the beginning. Here is what this survey is about:

What: Pope Francis wants to consult with all the people of God. He is encouraging us to gather globally to share hopes and dreams as a world that journeys together. We hope to let the Spirit lead the way as we are called to make a preferential option for the most vulnerable. No topic is off limits, and a critical engagement is welcome. The Pope wants to hear what is good and what is not so good.

The History: As far back as the First Encuentro in 1972, Latina/o/x Catholics in the U.S. raised the issue of women's fuller participation in Church and society. The questions of Latinas have been particularly missing from conversations in the U.S. in the larger public discourse. This particular state of invisibility prompts us to make a preferential option for Latinas.

Why: "A church that teaches must be firstly a church that listens . . ." (Francis 2020) A wounded church must listen to those whom they hurt and repair trust that may have been lost. There are three ways we can look at the church and we want you to feel free to include any and all of these ways: All the people of God; The Church leadership; and/or your particular community of faith.

Who: Because this global process wants to include everyone, our particular survey is intentionally reaching out to a community that deserves a special focus so we may hear their concerns: Latinas in the United States who are connected to Loyola Marymount University as well as others connected to LMU that identify as allies of Latinas. The project is a collaboration of the LMU Latin/a/o/x Theology and Ministry Initiative and Discerning Deacons.

Outcome: To ensure perspectives of all views are captured and compiled fairly from our community level, and contribute to our archdiocesan consultation as well as to the national organization Discerning Deacons who will share a synthesis with the U.S. Bishops Conference.

The questions that follow have a chronological theme:

First you will be asked about your past experience. Then about your present experience. And finally, about what you would like to see in the future

- For Latinas: We invite you to tap into your memory and imagination...When you hear the word "Church", what comes to mind? What is the truest image, memory, or feeling you have that defines what the Catholic Church means to you? Is there a time when you have felt a sense of belonging to your church community as a Latina? If so, where did that sense of belonging come from?
- How does the church connect you with God? Or how does it get in the way? How does the church connect you with your sense of self as a Latina? Or how does it get in the way? How does the church connect you with the community? Or how does it get in the way?
- As Pope Francis has asked, we want to make room and hear from those who may have been wounded by the church or feel alienated from the Catholic Church. So we may listen to your experiences, have you ever felt alienated from the church? If so, what does the Catholic Church need to do in order to repair its relationship with you? With other women?
- How would you describe the Catholic Church IF it were more of what you would hope it would be? If you can, offer a metaphor for what you would like the Catholic Church to be.
- Finally, think now about those men and other non-Latina persons in the church -- people who might be thought of as allies of Latinas in the Church. What do you hope allies will understand or do?

- For allies of Latinas: We invite you to tap into your memory and imagination...When you hear the word "Church", what comes to mind? What is the truest image, memory, or feeling you have that defines what the Catholic Church means to you?
- In your past experience, can you recall times when doors seemed more open or more closed for women in the Church? For Latinas? What makes it possible for doors to be more open? Are there differences in treatment of US-born vs. immigrant Latinas?
- What has made you an ally of Latinas in the Church and in society?
- Now, think of your current experience of the Catholic Church. What does Church look like for you? How do you interact with the church now? Or how do you choose NOT to interact with the church?
- As Pope Francis has asked, we want to make room and hear from those who may have been wounded by the church or feel alienated from the Catholic Church. What do you think has contributed to their sense of alienation from the Church? In such cases, what does the Catholic Church need to do in order to repair its relationship with Latinas? With other women?
- How would you describe the Catholic Church IF it were more of what you would hope it would be? If you can, offer a metaphor for what you would like the Catholic Church to be.

#### Images for the church offered by participants:

- A circle where everyone is inside, no one is left out. A voice and advocate for the marginalized sectors of society; the poor, sexual minorities, women, children, the elderly.
- If I can offer a metaphor of what I would like the Catholic Church to be, with all of its different institutions, like a lively garden. La del hijo prodigo. [That of the prodigal son.] Opened doors so people from other creeds can come and see how great the love God has for his people. Just like the prodigal son parable.
- Una comunidad de fieles, donde todos nos sentimos verdaderos hijos de Dios, (Medicos del Alma), sin titulos ni gerarquia, amándonos y respetados como una verdadera Familia. [. . . a community of faithful, where we all feel true children of God, (Doctors of the Soul), without titles or hierarchy, loving and respecting each other as a true Family.]
- La Iglesia es madre y maestra [The Church is mother and teacher]
- Ser cómo niños. Pero a la vez ser mansos como palomas y astutos como serpientes, para siempre obrar para el bien. [Be like children. But at the same time be meek as doves and astute as serpents, to always work for the good.]
- La imagino como una gallina con sus polluelos caminado juntos, descubrieron el camino de realización del plan de Dios en sus vidas, felices de no separarse aunque haya obstáculos, felices porque van al abrigo y cuidado de mama gallina (Dios). [I imagine her as a hen with her chicks walking together, discovering the path of carrying out God's plan in their lives, happy not to be separated even if there are obstacles, happy because they go to the shelter and care of mother hen (God).]
- Mother Utopia, everyone is welcomed regardless of who they are or who they love.
- La Iglesia caminando codo a codo, sus sacerdotes de la mano de su pueblo [The Church walking side by side, her priests hand in hand with her people]
- The Catholic Church would be like one of Jesus's many meals shared with friends, where everyone would be welcome, especially those who others don't want to welcome, everyone would be equal, and everyone would be called to both serve and to be served. First the washing of the feet - with all of us included and then the meal, beginning with the least.

- I would describe the Catholic Church as the Family of God, in which all are recognized for who they are, even with differences and in the midst of difficulties. The church is like Jesus collecting all that followed him and filling it with his teachings, love, and respect.
- The Church is the bride of Christ, she should therefore be spotless and have love for her spouse only.
- The metaphor would be the "Dance" (1910) by Henri Matisse.
- My image would be of a Grandma/Grandpa loving the children, allowing them to grow and be valued as the wonders that they are all the way along the way.
- A healing, strengthening and transformative banquet -- welcome to all and drawing on everyone's gifts -- where we meet God again and again in one another and attune our minds and hearts into hearing God's clear commands about how to keep ushering in the Kin-dom of God's compassion and mercy.
- Big tent. As Father Greg Boyle says a big circle of compassion with no one on the outside.
- Leadership would reflect in race and gender the people in the pews. White Catholics would be more interested in justice for their brothers and sisters in the pews alongside them and less worried about matters of sexuality.
- Gathered around the dinner table at Thanksgiving, where even non-believers do find something to be grateful for. And there is joy at seeing family and friends we have not seen in a year, where we don't judge the one who came out as trans, or the sister who divorced and remarried - again. Where we rejoice in the gift of life and love.
- The Shepherd, yet let's go after the one harder than the 99.
- Lilies of the fields, let them grow and bloom
- More like a mission in a third world country than an office in a first world country.
- Lo ideal sería como el regazo de una madre [ideally it would be like a mother's breast]

Specific steps or recommendations made to take towards becoming a more synodal church at the universal / wider Catholic Church level.

1) Communicating and passing along experiences with the Church can cut two ways. On the one hand, if families have had positive experiences these will continue into future generations. However, negative experiences are also passed along and often stand as insurmountable obstacles to healing and to encouraging involvement. This is especially true when the experiences have been of being seen, heard and taken seriously or the opposite of this in invisibility, marginality or exploitation.

2) The role of youth ministries was often highlighted as the place where the Church as community of faith was met early on creating a sense of belonging and encouragement.

3) Communities on the peripheries (immigrants, the poor) expressed their need for their own spaces to create community with each other. These safe spaces encourage trust, opening up to questions and also creativity. It is important to create experiences where the immigrant's language is spoken, where open communication is encouraged and welcomed and where the cultural differences and roots of community members are valued.

4) A theme throughout was the perception that the Church as institution needs to do much more to encourage and prepare women for leadership of women. This was especially important to the young women who need to witness well-prepared and committed women treated with dignity and being given a prominent role in the life of the community.

5) Participants highlighted the need to invest in education and formation of lay leaders, especially first-generation immigrants who have particular challenges in accessing education and who are often relegated to unpaid jobs because of this.

6) Participants of different backgrounds all highlighted the need to practice intercultural hospitality and the value of knowing each other.

7) One area brought up that is often overlooked is the needs of single persons. Those who are unmarried and have no children need to feel seen, respected and invited into involvement. It is worth highlighting that since our survey was focused on Latinas, the marginality of single women and of being women of color in the Church is doubled.

What new questions or further issues need to be reflected upon especially with regard to the theme of communion, participation, and mission?

1) The issue of racism against Latinas and Latinos was brought up repeatedly. The Church must be much clearer on the sinfulness of racism. Be clear that this is not just a Black/White problem but that it profoundly affects Hispanic persons and provide the necessary formation for clergy and ministers on identifying and combating racism. White privilege was brought up often as a real problem in the US Catholic Church.

2) Clericalism was often presented as a stumbling block to the kind of community the Church must foster. Priests as gatekeepers can be welcoming or can seriously hurt community members.

3) The issue of the exploitation of women workers in parish, school or diocesan structures, the expectation of being volunteers and submissive was brought up as an urgent problem by several participants. The abusive culture within some Church structures was understood as detrimental both for those being exploited and “humiliated” and for attracting prospective parishioners.

4) There was emphasis around the question of holding parishes and religious communities accountable for the well-being of their members, including strengthening legal protections and supporting women more explicitly (childcare, parental leave).

5) The question of remarried Catholics, or those in interracial marriages being denied full participation needs to be addressed.

6) The problem of the marginality of Latino persons in the US Church was brought up as a feature of an out of step paternalistic system, which fails to treat them as “subjects,” and to provide them with the necessary education and formation for fuller participation.

7) The alienating preaching against LGBTQ persons and other oppressive attitudes having to do with sexuality were seen as alienating young persons and their supporters.

8) The problem of poorly prepared liturgies was seen as an obstacle.

9) There was a caution raised about the lack of a solid theological and ministerial formation for lay leaders, which can cascade into hurting many in the parish community.

10) The issue of the clergy sex abuse scandals continues to reverberate and is understood as responsible for much disaffiliation. This underlines the need for loving outreach to those who have been hurt by the Church.

11) The need for a listening church at the local level.

12) The issue of economics was brought up as playing a part in the “guilt” some poor women may feel for being unable to marry in the church, etc. and feeling excluded from the sacraments and from the full participation in their communities.

## Women's Leadership

1) Participants for the most part were fully invested and passionate about women’s leadership in the Church, however, among a few of the first-generation immigrant women there was marked resistance to women’s leadership in the Church. The Church needs to reckon seriously with the lasting effects of the way it has marginalized women for centuries, especially painful to witness women who even in a space dedicated to women prefer to present themselves as submissive and justify their marginality.

2) The need for women’s full participation in the Church, as deacons and priests was brought up very often. As one participant put it “I feel alienated [from the Church] when women are not allowed to discern, or even imagine, priesthood.”

3) The restoration of the diaconate was often highlighted and understood by several participants as an efficient way to break down hierarchical structures that are not representative of the “Body of Christ” and to combat clericalism. The diaconate of women is also understood as a return to the roots of the Church, and not to be dismissed as a modern idea.

4) The role of the Holy Spirit in calling women to active ministries was highlighted, especially the importance of preaching and embracing the insights and experiences of women as they “break open the Word” and “how half of us live the gospel message.”

5) The need to fundamentally shift the theological symbols of the Church to embody the complexity of women’s lives is important.

6) Formation of both clergy and laity on the full dignity of women is needed.

7) The theme of equality between men and women was brought up very often as necessary for a functioning society and for the Church to fulfill its mission.

Submitted by the LMU Latinx Theology and Ministry Initiative, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, California, 90045. United States.