



Number 10

*The Perceptions of U.S. Bishops and Deacon Directors Regarding  
the Work of the Papal Commission of Study on the Diaconate of  
Women*



Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate  
Georgetown University  
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CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States.

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## Introduction

In 2016, at the request of representatives of the International Union of Superiors General (the Vatican sanctioned representatives of Religious Institutes), Pope Francis established a Papal Commission of Study on the Diaconate of Women. The Commission was tasked *to review the theology and history of the office of deacon in the Roman Catholic Church and the question of whether women might be allowed to become deacons*. The Commission has been meeting during the past two years.

This past year, 2018, marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of the permanent diaconate in the United States. In recognition of this milestone, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate released a book examining both the history of the permanent diaconate and the current state of diaconal ministry in the United States. Having gathered a wealth of information on the experience of the diaconate, CARA approached the Raskob Foundation for financial support to conduct a survey of bishops and diocesan diaconate directors on their attitudes about the possibility of women deacons should the Holy See authorize the sacramental ordination of women as deacons.

In spring 2018 CARA completed a survey of the major superiors of women and men's religious institutes in the United States asking questions about the demographics and composition of religious institutes as well as attitudes about the sacramental ordination of women as deacons. A report on that research was released in June 2018 and is available on the CARA website (<http://cara.georgetown.edu>).

In fall 2018 CARA completed a survey of the bishops leading each of the 197 dioceses and eparchies in the United States and a near identical survey of the deacon directors in each diocese and eparchy. This report focuses on the attitudes of bishops and diocesan directors of the permanent diaconate about the possibility of women as permanent deacons should the Holy See authorize the sacramental ordination of women as deacons.

The purpose of this study is to explore attitudes of two groups about the possibility of ordaining women to the permanent diaconate should the Holy See authorize it:

- ordinaries of dioceses and eparchies belonging to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (referred to as **bishops** in this report), and
- directors of the offices of permanent diaconate in U.S. dioceses (referred to as **deacon directors** in this report).

This study does not take a position on the question of women as permanent deacons but strives to fulfill CARA's mission to increase the Church's self-understanding, to serve the applied research needs of Church decision-makers, and to advance scholarly research on religion, particularly Catholicism.

## Summary Findings

Among the responding bishops and deacon directors nearly three-fourths do not believe that the Holy See will authorize the sacramental ordination of women to the diaconate. Two-thirds or more do not believe that the Holy See should do so, and three in five of the bishops and one-half of the deacon directors do not believe it is theoretically possible. But, if the Holy See does authorize the ordination of women as deacons the majority of bishops would implement it in their diocese.

The majority of bishops and deacon directors responded that if there were women deacons, then they would find it helpful to have women deacons serving in a wide variety of ministries. Notably, a number of the bishops and directors commented that lay women are already effectively serving in most of these ministries, particularly in the ministries of Charity and Word.

Among the greatest identified challenges would be the opposition to having women deacons by others in the Church (priests, deacons, and laity) and the impact on the Church's teaching on priesthood.

The greatest possible benefits are seen as three-fold: improving the amount and quality of ministries by the inclusion of women deacons; women sharing in the sacramental grace of the diaconate; and giving more prominence to women's experience and voice in the Church.

### **Awareness of the Papal Commission of Study on the Diaconate of Women**

The permanent diaconate was restored in the United States in 1968 and the first group of permanent deacons were ordained in 1971. From 58 U.S. permanent deacons in 1971 the diaconate has grown to 18,045 deacons in 2016. Deacons are serving in every archdiocese, diocese, and eparchy in the United States. Some dioceses have just a handful of deacons, others have several hundred. Most of the bishops responding to the survey report 61 or more deacons serving in their dioceses and 90% say their diocese has an active program for deacon formation at this time.

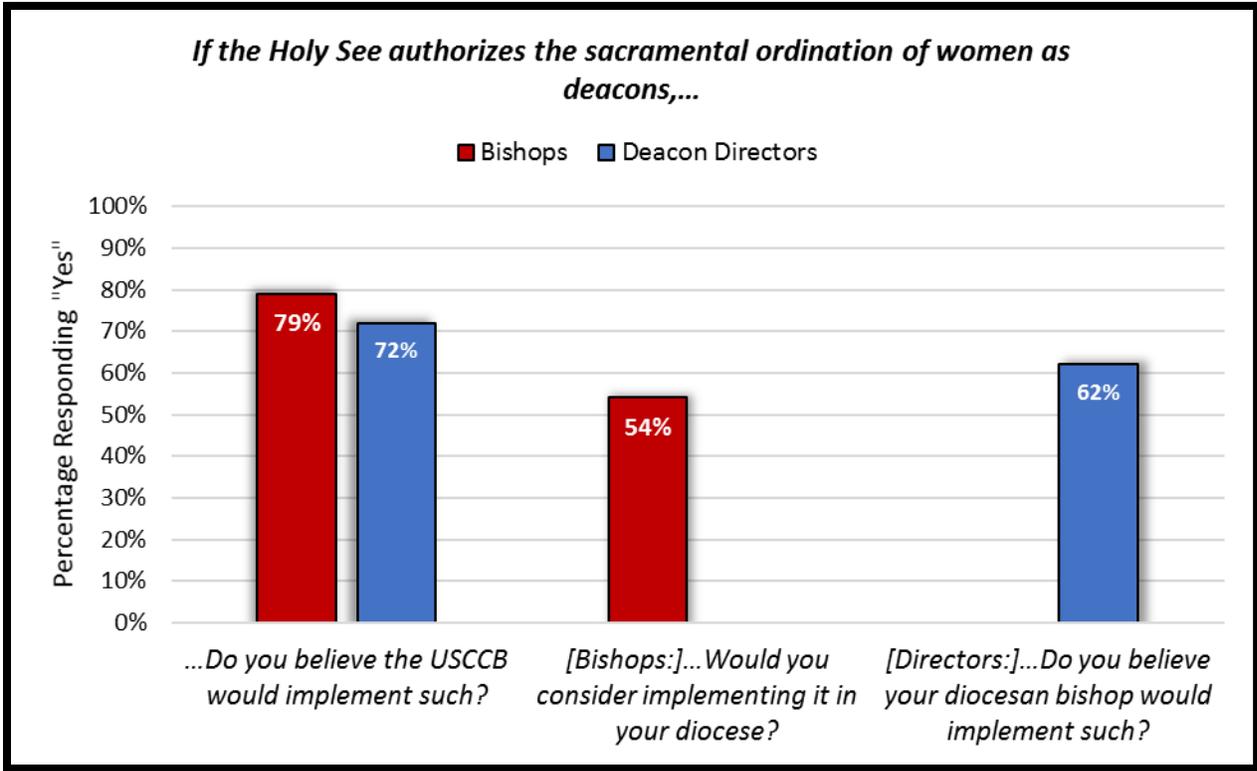
In 2016, at the request of representatives of the International Union of Superiors General (the Vatican sanctioned representatives of Religious Institutes), Pope Francis established a Papal Commission of Study on the Diaconate of Women. The Commission has been meeting during the past two years.

The bishops and the deacon directors were asked, "Were you previously aware that the International Union of Superiors General had requested that Pope Francis establish the Papal Commission of Study on the Diaconate of Women?" About nine in ten of both the bishops (86%) and deacon directors (91%) were aware of the request from the International Union of Superiors General for such a Papal Commission. Slightly fewer were aware that the Papal Commission had been formed and had met (bishops 84% and deacon directors 87%).

No report or statement from the Papal Commission had been released as of December 2018 when this survey was concluded, so there is no public knowledge of the deliberations or findings of the Papal Commission.

### **Attitudes towards the possibility of Women Deacons**

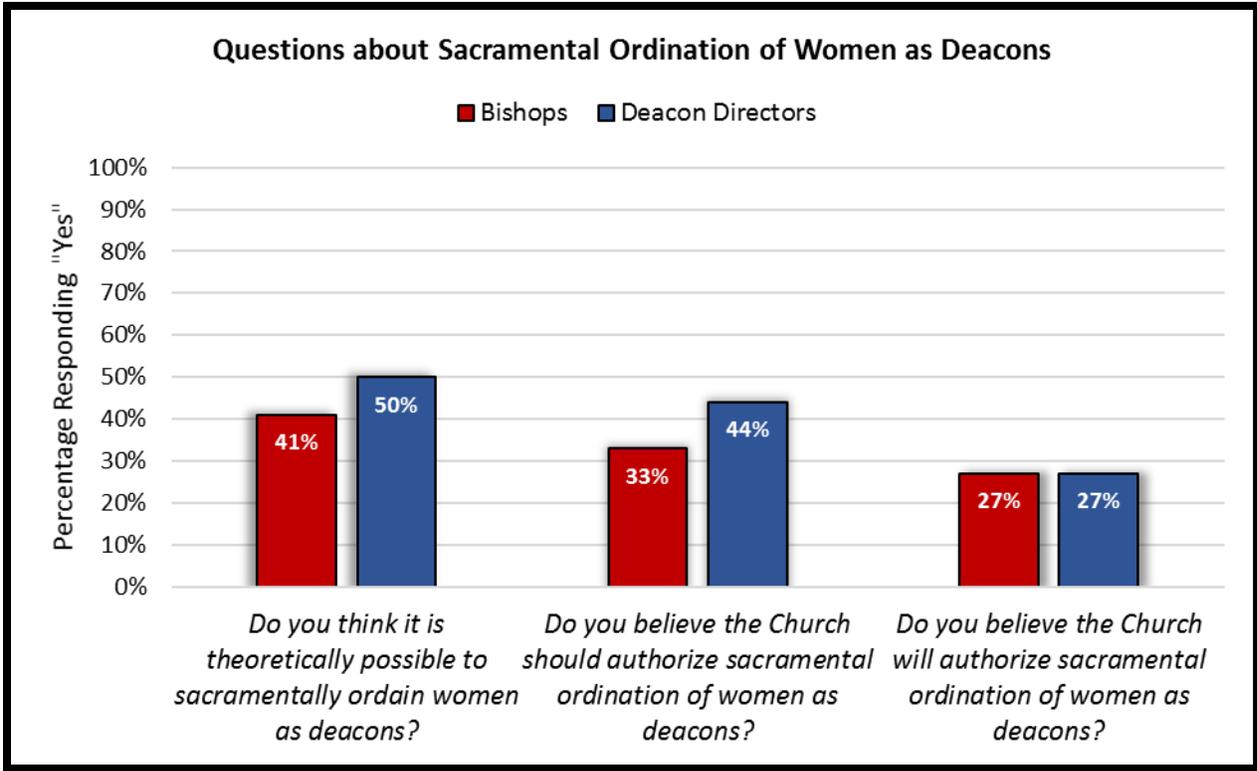
A hypothetical question was asked of the bishops and deacon directors: "If the Holy See authorizes the sacramental ordination of women as deacons, do you believe the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops would implement such?" Since no report from the Papal Commission had been released at the time of the survey the respondents were offering their speculation.



Almost four in five bishops (79%) and three in four deacon directors (72%) responded positively to the question.

When the question was further refined to ask: “If the Holy See authorizes the sacramental ordination of women as deacons, would you consider implementing it in your diocese?” just over one-half of the bishops said yes, and more than six in ten of the deacon directors (62%) said that their bishop would implement this.

Interestingly, when the bishops and deacon directors were asked for their individual understanding of the possibility of sacramentally ordaining women as deacons, a smaller proportion thought it was theoretically possible. Two in five bishops (41%) and one-half (50%) of the deacon directors think it is theoretically possible.



When asked “Do you believe the Church should authorize sacramental ordination of women as deacons?” the proportion grows smaller as only one-third of the bishops (33%) and two in five of the deacon directors (44%) believe the Church should do so. Only one-quarter of the bishops and deacon directors (27% for each) believe that the Church will authorize the sacramental ordination of women as deacons.

In responding, it appears that the bishops and deacon directors would positively respond to the sacramental ordination of women as deacons if the Holy See authorizes it, but they themselves do not believe the Holy See will do so; nor do most of them believe the Holy See should do so.

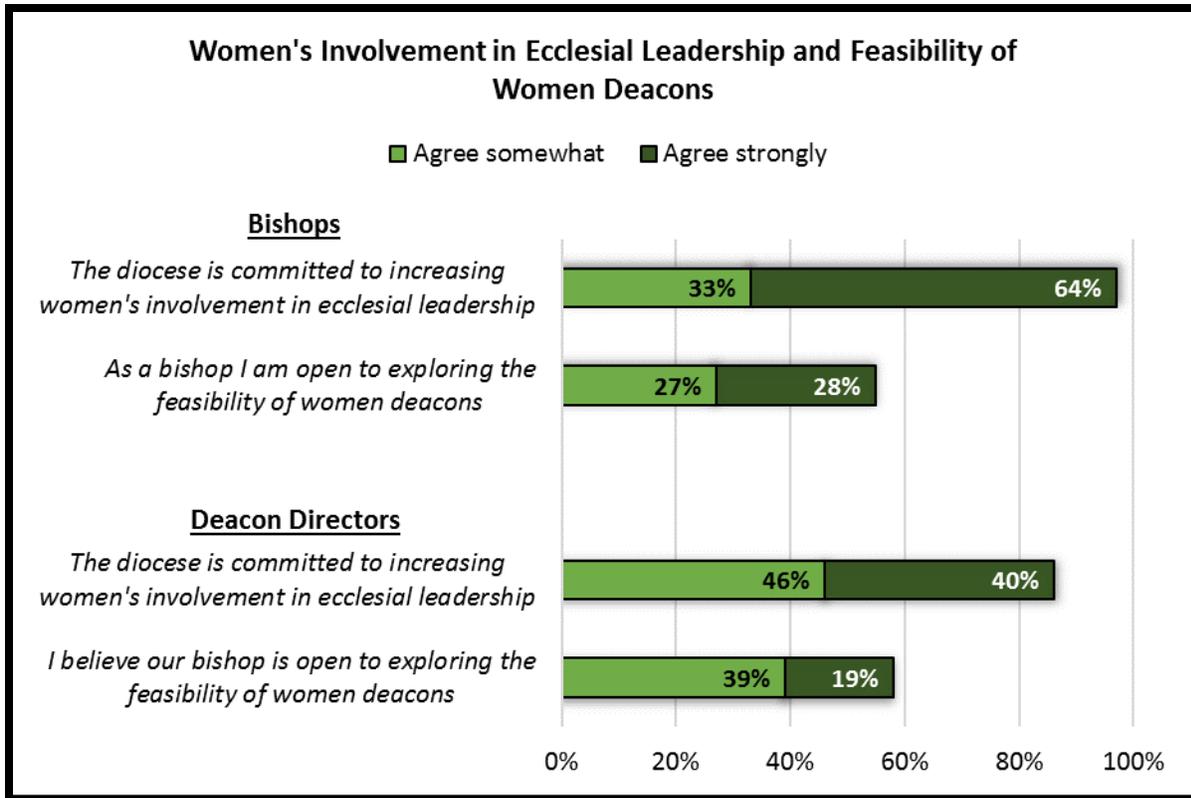
**The Diaconate in their Dioceses**

The bishops and deacon directors were asked about the current number of permanent deacons serving in their diocese and the need for additional deacons. More than four in five bishops “agree somewhat” or “strongly agree” that the permanent diaconate is needed now more than when it was first restored (44% agree somewhat and 39% agree strongly). The deacon directors agree even more so, with 25% “agree somewhat” and 65% “strongly agree.”

One-half of the bishops agree that their diocese has a sufficient number of permanent deacons for its current need (34% “agree somewhat” and 20% “strongly agree”). In contrast, only three in ten deacon directors agree that the diocese has a sufficient number of deacons (22 % “agree somewhat” and 7 % “strongly agree”).

The commitment of their diocese to increasing women’s involvement in ecclesial leadership is strongly supported by both the bishops and deacon directors. Among the bishops 64% “strongly

agree” and 33% “agree somewhat” that their diocese is committed to increasing women’s involvement in ecclesial leadership. The deacon directors agree a little less so as 40% “strongly agree” and 46% “somewhat agree.”



Should the Holy See authorize the sacramental ordination of women as deacons, one-half of the bishops agree that they are “open to exploring the feasibility of women deacons” (28% “strongly agree” and 27% “agree somewhat”). A similar proportion of deacon directors believe that their bishop is open to this (19% “strongly agree” and 39% “agree somewhat”).

**Perceived Openness to Women as Deacons in their Diocese**

Bishops and deacon directors were asked for their perception of the openness of the priests, deacons, and parishioners of their diocese to having women deacons should the Holy See authorize the sacramental ordination of women as deacons.

About one-half of both the Bishops and deacon directors believe that the parishioners of the diocese are open to having women deacons should this be authorized by the Holy See (38% of the bishops “somewhat agree” and 10% “strongly agree” while 35% of the deacon directors “somewhat agree” and 20% “strongly agree”). Similar proportions agree that the diaconate community is open to having women deacons.

Both the bishops and the deacon directors believe that proportionately fewer priests of the diocese are open to exploring the feasibility of women deacons. Only about one-third of the

bishops agree that the priests are open, while two-thirds disagree (35% agree and 65% disagree). Even fewer Directors concur with 29 % agreeing and 71% disagreeing.

The responses of both bishops and deacon directors suggest that the priests of the diocese are perceived to be less open than either the deacon community or parishioners to exploring the feasibility of women deacons should the Holy See authorize it.

The question was also asked if the sacramental ordination of women as deacons would strengthen the Catholic Church and their diocese. Three in five bishops disagreed that it would strengthen the Catholic Church and their individual diocese and one-half of the deacon directors also disagreed.

### **Women as Deacons, Women as Priests**

In the discussions and writings about the possibility of women as deacons a question arises as to whether the sacramental ordination of women as deacons is related to the question of ordaining women as priests. While the Papal Commission is charged with studying women in the diaconate, it is not investigating the question of the ordination of women as priests.

The survey though, asks the bishops and deacon directors for their perception of whether or not the ordination of women as deacons would create a greater call for women to be ordained as priests. Over three-quarters of the bishops either “agreed somewhat” (30%) or “strongly agreed” (47%) that it would create a greater call for women to be ordained as priests. About two-thirds of the deacon directors concurred (30% “agree somewhat” and 35% “strongly agree”).

Given that the Holy See has repeatedly affirmed that it is not possible for women to be ordained as priests, the bishops and deacon directors believe that the ordination of women as deacons would create a challenge to that teaching.

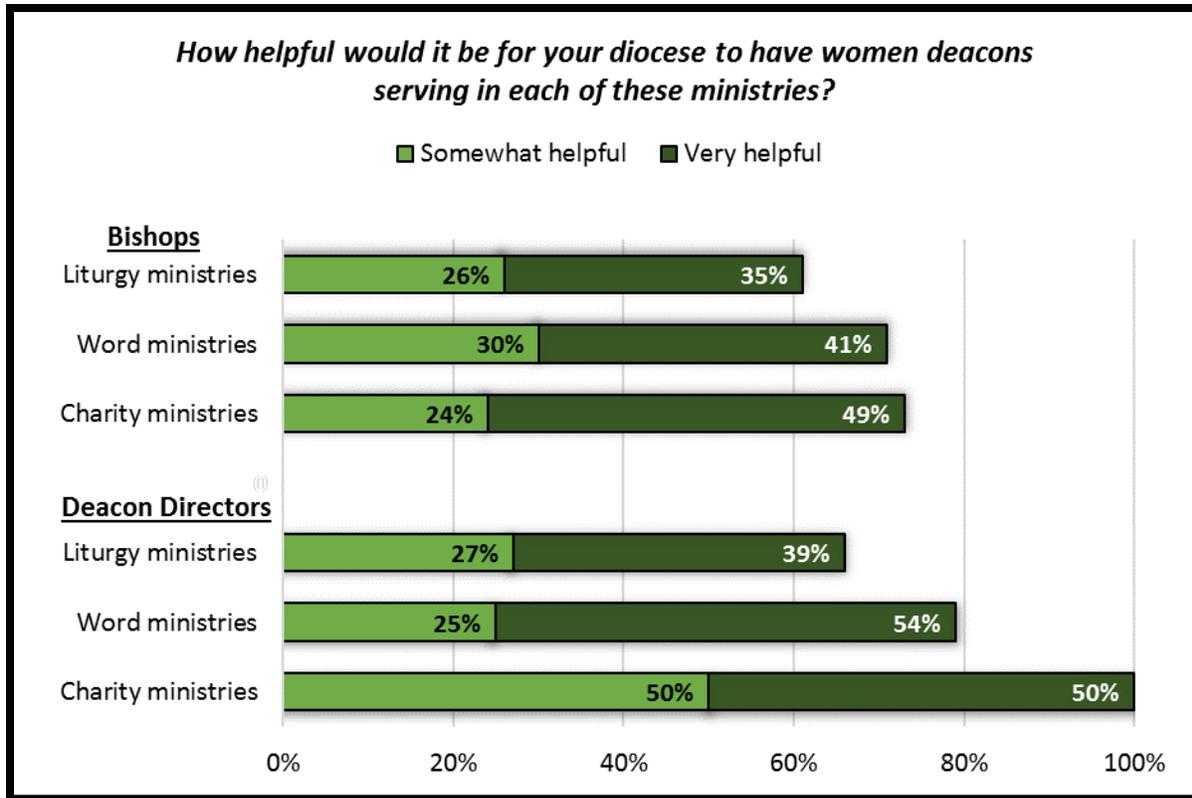
### **If Women were Deacons in Your Diocese, How Helpful would Their Ministry Be?**

The bishops and deacon directors were asked to speculate on how helpful it would be for their diocese to have women deacons serving in the three-fold diaconal ministries of Charity, Word, and Liturgy if the Holy See authorizes the sacramental ordination of women as deacons. These diaconal ministries are described in CARA’s recent book:

Deacons perform a wide range of functions, balanced between the three ministerial areas of word, sacrament, and pastoral service....

The ministry of the word focuses on proclaiming and illustrating the word of God, proclaiming the Scriptures as well as instructing and exhorting the people. The ministry of liturgy or sacrament focuses on administering the selected sacraments and the sacraments, as well as assisting in various liturgical functions. Finally, the ministry of charity or service can be understood as “the ministry of love and justice” that focuses on carrying out works of charity and assistance by serving as a community animator, by serving in ecclesial life, as well as by serving in those areas relating to the exercise of charity and the administration of goods. (CARA, *Word, Liturgy, Charity: The Diaconate in the U.S. Catholic Church, 1968-2018*, p 86)

Overall the majority of bishops and deacon directors thought that women deacons would be “somewhat” or “very helpful” in these ministries, with the deacon directors a little more positive than the bishops.



Both perceived that women deacons would be more helpful in the ministries of Charity and Word and less so in the ministry of Liturgy.

The three-fold diaconal ministries of Charity, Word, and Liturgy were further specified by asking about 20 distinct ministerial activities that deacons may be involved in and how helpful bishops and deacon directors thought women deacons would be in serving in each ministry. In all of the activities except prison ministry the deacon directors believed women deacons would be more helpful than the responding bishops.

In the eight distinct ministerial activities of Charity, seven in ten or more of the bishops (and slightly more of the deacon directors) believed it would be helpful to have women deacons serving in prison ministry (75 v. 69%), ministry to married couples (75 v. 81%), ministry to the bereaved (74 v. 80%), hospital/nursing home ministry (74 v. 80%), and ministry to the poor (70 v. 79%).

Six in ten or more of the bishops (and seven in ten or more of the deacon directors) believed it would be helpful to have women deacons serving in campus/young adult ministry (69 v. 76%), youth ministry (65 v. 78%), and community organizing/advocacy (64 v. 78%).

Among the six distinct ministerial activities of the Word there were two in which seven in ten bishops or more believed it would be helpful to have women deacons serving: outreach to alienated Catholics (72 v. 79%) and evangelization (71 v. 77%).

Six in ten bishops believed the other four distinct ministerial activities of the Word (Bible study/prayer ministry (69 v. 80%), catechetical instruction (68 v. 80%), sacramental preparation (67 v. 77%), and leading retreats (65 v. 73%)) would be aided by having women deacons serving in them.

The helpfulness of having women deacons serving in the six distinct ministerial activities of the Liturgy had less support than the other diaconal ministries, yet six in ten bishops believed it would be helpful to have women deacons for presiding at Word and Communion services in the absence of a priest (61 v. 70%), conducting public rites of blessing/prayer service (60 v. 71%), preaching homilies (59 v. 65%), proclaiming the Gospel at Mass (58 v. 62%), celebrating Rites (58 v. 67%), and officiating at Liturgy of the Hours/Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament (58 v. 68%).

### **Perceptions of the Greatest Benefit or Challenge**

The survey concluded with two open-ended questions: “If the diaconate were opened to women as an ordained ministry, what would be the greatest benefit of women deacons for your diocese?” and “If the diaconate were opened to women as an ordained ministry, what would be the greatest obstacle or challenge of women deacons for your diocese?” This provided an opportunity for the responding bishops and deacon directors to express their views on the possibility of women deacons in their own words. Overall about 60% of the bishops and 75% of the deacon directors responded to these open-ended questions.

In general, bishops had fewer words to say about potential benefits of women diaconate (averaging 18 words per response) than related to its challenges (averaging 27 words per response).

### **The Benefits – Bishops’ Perspective**

The most frequently mentioned benefit of women deacons to their dioceses (identified by 17 bishops) is in increasing the amount and/or quality of various **ministries**. The ministries where women deacons would be particularly beneficial include (in no particular order):

- preaching (homilies) and evangelization, administering sacraments, parish administration, and works of charity,
- teaching and formation (formation in general, religious education, family formation, young family formation, and catechetical formation),
- pastoral ministries (family ministry, pastoral care in parishes and among the marginalized, ministry to other women, sick women, dying women, and women in prison).

Notably, some respondents who saw no benefit to having women deacons argued that women already work in those ministries and provide their skillset without being ordained.

Six bishops believe that the **sacramental grace** bestowed on women deacons would be one of the greatest benefits to their diocese. It might be worth mentioning that, from the theological perspective, the purpose of the diaconate is to exercise sacramental grace rather than to perform specific functions. While the functions that a deacon performs do not make that person a deacon, the functions that a deacon performs make the functions diaconal. According to the Congregation

for Bishops, while functions assigned to deacons “may also be performed by the lay faithful, they are always diaconal when performed by a deacon in the name of the Church, and sustained by the grace of the sacrament” (2004: §92).<sup>1</sup>

A number of responses indicated that the greatest benefit of women deacons to dioceses would be in treating women as **equal members** of the Church. Five bishops expressed it in terms of increasing diversity, giving voice to women, reducing discrimination, empowering, affirming and validating women, among other things. Separately, six bishops focused on how the benefit would lie in granting women a prominent status or providing them with a sense of belonging.

Three bishops indicated that the greatest benefit of women deacons to dioceses would be in including women in the **hierarchy**, in positions of leadership, and/or in the ranks of clergy. Separately, three bishops alluded to the differences in gender specific skillsets and how they could complement each other. Three bishops noted that having women deacons would have a benefit of making clergy more representative of the congregations. Finally, one bishop stated that women deacons would help alleviate clericalism. Notably, the survey were completed by the bishops in 2018, during the heightened media attention on how bishops have handled the sex abuse scandal. However, none of the bishops mentioned a potential role women deacons could play in navigating past and future challenges related to sexual abuse and in changing the clerical culture in the Church. In fact, just the opposite- one bishop expressed the concern that women as deacons would have an effect of “clericalizing the laity.”

Three bishops noted **other** benefits not listed above. Those benefits include extending the notion of ministry, emergence of theology and spirituality from a woman's perspective, and strengthening of marriage.

Finally, the responses focusing on Eastern Catholics deserve special consideration:

*I would love to see women deacons, not as ordained male deacons but in a more traditional role as the Eastern Churches had them- more like consecrated widows; or virgins; or women who served other women, the poor, the orphans and children, the needy of the Church.*

A few respondents used this question to express their concern that the survey is “not good,” that it is skewed, and/or questioned the underlying assumptions about what was the purpose of the Papal Commission, and about whether women as deacons is a proper focus for the survey.

### **The Benefits – Deacon Directors’ Perspective**

In general, deacon directors had fewer words to say about the potential benefits of women as deacons (averaging 34 words per response) than related to it challenges (averaging 42 words per response).

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Bishops. 2004. *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum Successores*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc\\_con\\_cbishops\\_doc\\_20040222\\_apostolorum-successores\\_en.html#Chapter\\_IV](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20040222_apostolorum-successores_en.html#Chapter_IV).

The most frequently mentioned benefit of women deacons in deacon directors' dioceses (identified by 43 respondents) is in increasing the amount and/or quality of various **ministries**. The ministries where women deacons would be particularly beneficial include (in no particular order):

- pastoral ministry, pastoral care, pastoral leadership, serving as spiritual directors, pastoral outreach of our Church,
- presiding at sacramental celebrations at which deacons preside: infant baptisms, marriages, funeral vigils, committals, funerals outside of Mass, Communion Services,
- ministry to the poor, marginalized, and victimized, to women in prison (and imprisoned in general), to other women, to married couples, to children, to youth, to young women, to parishioners, to the bereaved, and those in need in general, works of mercy and compassion in women's shelters, hospitals and hospices,
- ministries of Word, proclaiming the Gospel and preaching a homily
- evangelization and ecumenical outreach
- teaching and formation (Catechesis formation, family ministry formation, married couples, children, formation in general, premarital and marriage counseling),
- administrative roles,
- leadership for young women, families and childcare.

Six deacon directors believe that a women diaconate would **attract more women** to be involved in ministry. On the other side, some respondents who saw no benefit to having women deacons argued that women already work in those ministries and provide their skillset without being ordained.

Five deacon directors believe that the **sacramental grace** bestowed on women deacons would be one of the greatest benefits to their diocese.

Overall, 16 responses indicated that the greatest benefit of women deacons to dioceses would be in treating women as **equal members** of the Church. This would, among other things, elevate women's role, giving them a sense of belonging, reduce discrimination, and increase diversity.

Eight deacon directors indicated that the greatest benefit of women deacons to dioceses would be in including women in the **hierarchy**, in positions of leadership, and/or in the ranks of clergy. Separately, 21 directors alluded to the differences in gender specific skillsets and how they could complement each other. Two respondents noted that having women deacons would have a benefit of making clergy more representative of the congregations. Notably, one deacon director saw the greatest benefit being "[l]ess sexual abuse by the clergy."

Few respondents noted **other** benefits not listed above. For example:

*It would encourage all the males to become more involved.*

*Women clergy would give young women role models and examples to aspire to within the church- and demonstrate the complimentary between service in the church, marriage and family life.*

*It would challenge the men now serving as deacons to realize that ordination is not a right.*

## The Challenges – Bishops’ Perspective

The most frequently mentioned group of challenges the permanent diaconate of women would pose to bishops’ dioceses (identified by 44 bishops) is related to **opposition from constituents** in the form of active opposition, resistance to change, and lack of acceptance:

- Opposition from the laity/parishioners/body of the faithful was mentioned by 22 bishops, who responded, for example, that:

*The increasing divide in the Church would be sealed; it would certainly lead to a schism.*

*The greatest would be their acceptance by the laity. I already have people who don't want permanent deacons preaching, baptizing, etc. This would be very divisive for many.*

- Opposition from priests (or clergy in general) was mentioned by 11 bishops.
- Opposition from men permanent deacons was mentioned by four bishops.
- Additionally, 13 bishops indicated that opposition of the Church in general (without pointing to any specific group) would be a challenge.

Eleven bishops stated that **theological ramifications** would be the greatest challenge of women deacons in their diocese. This includes reconciling the teaching and tradition with the institution of permanent diaconate of women and educating the faithful / overcoming confusion. For example, bishops stated that:

*It would be necessary to state that the diaconate does not pertain to holy orders and deacons are not clerics*

*The ordination of women is not supported historically or theologically. This is the greatest challenge.*

*I think setting up the expectation that the deaconess would be just like the deacon. This was never the case in history. Deaconess is a great role for women; but it should be experienced as a service to the poor, needy, and to women, not like female deacon at Divine Liturgy or other liturgical roles.*

*It would sow confusion in the minds of the Catholic faithful, undermine the sacramental understanding of Holy Orders*

Ten bishops focused on the **“political” consequences** of women deacons in their diocese. Seven of them stated that a women diaconate would lead to a push for women priests and/or bishops. As one of the bishops put it:

*It will most definitely lead (...) to ordaining women as priests, and eventually bishops. It will be incomprehensible to our people that the Church would draw a "glass ceiling" at priesthood, after ordaining them deacons. And this despite the definitive teaching, clarified by Pope John Paul II, that the Church has no authority to do this, This puts the Church in an irresolvable dilemma: it's against defined Church teaching to ordain women as priests, and yet it makes no sense NOT to if they are already admitted to Holy Orders.*

Four bishops described other “political” agendas. For example:

*There are some who would view it as an aberration and a liberal agenda forced upon the faithful.*

*It will signal the Church's affirmation of gender ideology. This gets to the root of the problem: people think the Church sees women as inferior because it does not ordain them, i.e., give them access to positions of power. This is based on a completely flawed anthropology. The root of the problem lies at the level of anthropology, not Church policy. If people understood this correctly, they would be offended by the idea that, for a woman to be equal to man, she has to do what a man does and deny within herself that which makes her uniquely feminine.*

Nine bishops noted that the **issues related to the implementation** of a permanent diaconate for women in their dioceses pose the greatest challenge. Those issues include, for example, finding suitable ministries/assignments and ensuring safety.

Finally, eight bishops mentioned **other side effects** a permanent diaconate of women would have in their dioceses. This includes detrimental effect on other women in ministry (mentioned by three bishops), clericalization of laity (mentioned by two bishops), making the family obligations more difficult to meet (mentioned by two bishops), decreasing involvement in lay ministry, and decreasing men's involvement (mentioned by one bishop).

### **The Challenges – Deacon Director's Perspective**

The written comments by deacon directors regarding the greatest challenge of a permanent diaconate for women would pose to the dioceses are similar to the concerns of the bishops. Some 73 deacon directors noted the challenge of **opposition from constituents** in the form of active opposition, resistance to change, and lack of acceptance:

- Opposition from priests (or clergy in general) was mentioned by 32 directors, who responded, for example, that:

*[M]any priests tolerate married men who are deacons, having married women who are deacons would be difficult for them to manage.*

*As it is, male deacons still struggle with acceptance by priests. Many priests feel threatened by deacons. They feel that they lose if a deacon takes a greater leadership role. Many don't see that everyone gains when there is solid leadership in a parish. There is presently a very clericalist attitude on the part of many priests, and they would see women deacons as competition.... The presence of a competent woman in such a visible leadership role would be intimidating for many priests.*

- Opposition from the laity/parishioners/body of the faithful was mentioned by 23 directors, who responded, for example, that:

*Parishioners would not be open. They would be accepted in a few parishes but not in a majority. Parishes that would have a women deacon would have to deal with a conflict within the parish community - those in favor and those opposed.*

*I feel that it would be a challenge to many of the women faithful as well. I am not sure how women in the pews would react to women in FORMAL prayer leadership. It might be a bit challenge. Some women in the pews would be furious, others would be joyful.*

- Opposition from men permanent deacons was mentioned by five directors.
- Additionally, 31 directors indicated that opposition of the Church in general (without pointing to any specific group) would be a challenge.

Overall, 19 Directors alluded that **theological ramifications** would be the greatest challenge of women deacons in their diocese. This includes reconciling the teaching and tradition with the institution of a permanent diaconate of women and educating the faithful / overcoming confusion. For example, deacon directors stated that:

*The diaconate itself is only 50 years old in its current instantiation, and the theology of diaconate is still "thinner" rather than "thicker," however much a maturation is now occurring. I think the greatest obstacle [that] "women deacons" (whether ordained in the way we understand the ordination of male deacons or whether ordained in the manner analogous to the "order of widows" or some other ecclesial reality) would face is the immaturity of the diaconate itself. And the diaconate needs to be better understood vis-a-vis priesthood and holy orders in general AND vis-a-vis the universal baptismal call of holiness. AND vis-a-vis the New Evangelization. It would be pastorally imprudent to introduce a new reality in holy orders before a more mature understanding and experience of diaconate itself emerges.*

*The theological difficulty inherent in breaking over 2,000 years of tradition and opening holy orders to women. That's not to say that women shouldn't or can't or don't perform tasks that are "diaconal" or service-oriented, and that's not to deny that at different times in the early centuries women who performed certain tasks were called "deaconesses," but it's another matter entirely to confer holy orders on women. I think this would cause schism and discouragement and disorientation in the Church.*

*Place women deacons in a larger historical context - Its. Phoebe, Olympias, Theosaria, etc. would be important to, otherwise women deacons could be seen as a 21st century innovation rather than a restoration of the diaconate of women, along the lines of the restoration of the permanent diaconate.*

*Given that Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have officially precluded the ordination of women to the Priesthood and that the Sacrament of Holy Orders is on three levels, diaconate, presbyterate and episcopate, the ordination of women to the diaconate would fragment this sacrament since one of its tiers would be functioning in a significantly different manner than the other two.*

Overall, 17 directors focused on the **“political” consequences** of women deacons in their diocese. Eight of them stated that a women diaconate would lead to a push for women priests and/or bishops. As one of the deacon directors put it:

*There would be some who would feel it would lead to women priests. I don't believe so. Women priests is a different subject. Those who think that [they] are the same [are] people who do not understand what a deacon is called to do. Those are the same people who do not recognize deacons as ordained ministers.*

Eleven directors described other “political” agendas. For example:

*As with so many roles within the church and the society the greatest obstacle would be to acceptance as an 'equal'. In addition there is a tendency noted in the social/economic world of some women feeling a need to act in the same manner as the men in the same position - not exercising their uniqueness, rather trying to*

*mimic what has become the accepted role model - which would also create a challenge to women being able minister fully their own unique diaconal charism.*

*It would help support the belief on the part of the presbyterate that deacons aren't "really" ordained.*

*[I]t would further perpetuate the myth (& dysfunction) of clericalism: that you have to be ordained in order to be active & influential as a leader.*

Overall, 15 directors noted that the **issues related to the implementation** of a women permanent diaconate in their dioceses pose the greatest challenge. Those issues include adjustments in institutional culture (mentioned by nine directors). For example,

*[M]arried clergy is difficult to 'manage' and we are just now learning about married men, it will be a long learning curve again if we had married women as deacons.*

*The important thing to remember is that in countries like the US where women are educated, vocal, and active in the Catholic Church and other faiths, then, yes, the US would be willing to embrace ordination slowly. However, this could frustrate women just as it frustrated married men in the early 1970s when the diaconate was restored as a permanent order. Even though the diaconate has been restored for 50 years, the universal church has not fully embraced it. Many countries outside the US and Europe do not view women or even married men equally like we do. It would be disastrous to ordain women unless the whole global church is on board with the diaconate like they are with the presbyterate and episcopacy.*

*Sacramental and ecclesial identity vs. lay professional ministry. This question needs to be first addressed in the order as it now appears in most dioceses.*

Seven directors mentioned other issues related to the implementation of a women permanent diaconate. For example:

*From a formation perspective, while our diocese would be able to relatively quickly incorporate women into formation, the challenge of accepting both spouses into formation (or wives of current deacons) would add some dynamics that must be explored.*

*It would be problematic if we did not have a proper training and formation in this change just as we have had in changes with the Missal and in the numerous changes of the 2nd Vatican Council.*

*The selection process would need some minor tweaking and adjusting. The entire diaconate would need to be prepared on how to handle a record number of applicants.*

Finally, eight directors mentioned **other side effects** that a permanent diaconate of women would have in their dioceses. This includes:

- Problems with sexual misconduct.
- Problems with balancing family obligations.
- Decrease the number of men deacons.
- Decrease in men's involvement. This item was argued in the following way:

*We have enough trouble with getting men involved in a parish, I am fearful that this could make it worse.*

## Data Collection Methodology

The bishops and deacon directors were surveyed using two separate survey instruments (they are included at the end of this report). The surveys were distributed in September 2018. Each participant was sent an electronic invitation, electronic reminder, paper survey, and final electronic reminder. Each survey instrument was available both in paper and electronic forms. The collection was conducted anonymously. The final response rates were as follows:

- Out of 192 bishops invited to participate (several dioceses were awaiting the appointment of a new bishop), 108 responded to the survey (a final response rate of 56%).
- Out of 186 directors invited to participate in the survey, 133 responded to the survey (a final response rate of 72%).

## Validity Assessment

The issue of research accuracy in social science includes, among other things, the question of whether reported results can be generalized to the entire studied population and the question of whether the queries were asked in a valid and reliable manner.

In regard to **generalizing the findings** from the report to the entire studied population (i.e., external validity), the study is accurate to the extent that the responses of survey participants are representative of the answers all members of the population would have given if they all participated in the same survey.

The accuracy of the two surveys included in this report can be summarized as follows:

- The accuracy of the survey of bishops is such that in 19 out of 20 cases (i.e., 95% confidence level), the margin of error is 6.6%.
- The accuracy of the survey of deacon directors is such that in 19 out of 20 cases (i.e., 95% confidence level), the margin of error is 4.6%.

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### *Where is your diocese located?*

USCCB Region		Survey of Bishops		Survey of Directors		In existence	
Name	Number	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Northeast	1-3	16	15	21	16	41	21
Midwest	6-7	13	12	17	13	35	18
South	4-5, 14	12	11	23	17	37	19
Central	8-10	25	23	33	25	44	22
West	11-13	20	19	30	23	39	20
Not disclosed		22	20	9	7	0	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>108</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>

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The preceding table provides more nuanced insight into the accuracy of the findings. It shows the distribution of surveys' participants from dioceses located in different regions of the country. Those distributions are compared to the distribution of all dioceses (including those, which did and did not participate in the surveys).

Concerning the issue of **whether the queries were asked in a valid and reliable manner**, a number of bishops and directors expressed concerns about the design of the two surveys underlying this report. The criticism they offered included the following:

- The surveys misrepresent the purpose of the Papal Commission of Study on the Diaconate of Women:

*Pope Francis asked the Papal Commission to consider what role women served in the first centuries of Christianity. Cardinal Ledaria has stated that "The Holy Father did not ask us to say if women could be deacons."*

*This study called for by Pope Francis was just that...a study...not a definitive way to move on the ordination of women. Ordination of women must come with "the weight" or the authority of an ecumenical council (Vatican III?) to make it happen like Vatican II did for the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent order.*

- The surveys frame the problem incorrectly:

*[Several questions] are inappropriate. They call for a great amount of speculation.*

*With all due respect, I do not think a survey of this type is appropriate inasmuch as this is a doctrinal matter. It is the Holy See's responsibility to consult the world's bishops on a matter of doctrine, rather than as a question of "feasibility and impact."*

*I wish to add some (...) comments here about the inadequacy of a survey such as this on such a complex issue, and perhaps even the harm it could do. For example, I answered "strongly disagree" on all of the questions under n. 19 NOT because I do not value the ministry of women in these areas. Most of these areas of ministry are already being carried out quite effectively by women in my diocese. The problem is not women doing these ministries, but the confusion it would cause if they were to do so as deacons. Likewise on question n. 6 under number 18: I am committed to SUSTAINING the great work that women are already doing in positions of leadership in my diocese, but I do not see any need to INCREASE it. In fact, if anything, there is a need to increase the participation of lay men in Church leadership roles. Also, many of the questions did not admit of simple "yes" or "no" answers: some of my deacons, priests and parishioners would favor women deacons, others would not. I do not know if I believe the Church has the authority to ordain women as deacons. In ancient times the Church had the order of deaconess, but never women deacons per se. I personally am still undecided on this question. I fear false conclusions will be reached from answers given in this survey. I do not believe a matter such as this can be subject to a survey and, personally, I would be hesitant to give it much credence.*

As any research institution, CARA could be a source of bias in its own research. For example, CARA's research team inevitably bring their own identities as Catholics, professionals and academics in the social sciences to the research they conduct. CARA tries to be self-aware of the

coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanisms and the bias they may introduce. The reader can make their own assessment of potential biases by reviewing the survey instruments, which follow.

## Complete Quantitative Results

<i>What is the total number of deacons in active ministry in your diocese?</i>							
Survey of Bishops (question #1)				Survey of Directors (question #1)			
Mean	Median	Range	n	Mean	Median	Range	n
#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
83	61	3 - 541	91	89	65	3 - 541	132

<i>In what year were the first men accepted for diaconate formation in your diocese?</i>							
Survey of Bishops (question #2)				Survey of Directors (question #2)			
Mean	Median	Range	n	Mean	Median	Range	n
#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
1980	1977	1968 - 2010	80	1981	1977	1969 - 2012	126

<i>Does your diocese have an active program for deacon formation at this time?</i>							
Percentage of valid responses							
Survey of Bishops (question #3)				Survey of Directors (question #3)			
Yes	No	n		Yes	No	n	
%	%	#		%	%	#	
91	9	94		95	5	132	

<i>If your diocese has an active program for deacon formation at this time, how often does your diocese begin a new cohort for its deacon formation program?</i>				
Percentage of valid responses				
	Survey of Bishops (question #4)		Survey of Directors (n/a)	
	Selected	n	Selected	n
	%	#	%	#
Yearly	15	13	-	-
Every other year	26	22	-	-
Periodically, when there are enough aspirants to form a cohort	59	50	-	-

<i>If your diocese has an active program for deacon formation at this time, what year was the previous cohort ordained?</i>							
Survey of Bishops (n/a)				Survey of Directors (question #4)			
Mean	Median	Range	n	Mean	Median	Range	n
#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
-	-	-	-	2016	2017	2009 - 2018	112

***If your diocese has an active program for deacon formation at this time, what year is the next cohort scheduled for ordination?***

Survey of Bishops (n/a)				Survey of Directors (question #5)			
Mean	Median	Range	n	Mean	Median	Range	n
#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
-	-	-	-	2020	2020	2018 - 2027	114

***If your diocese has an active program for deacon formation at this time, please select the category below that best describes the academic formation program for your deacons.***

	Percentage of valid responses			
	Survey of Bishops (n/a)		Survey of Directors (question #6)	
	Selected	n	Selected	n
	%	#	%	#
Graduate-level program associated with a Catholic institution – degree awarded	-	-	20	25
Graduate-level program associated with a Catholic institution – no degree awarded	-	-	19	24
Undergraduate-level program associated with a Catholic institution	-	-	13	16
Freestanding program only – no degree or certificate awarded	-	-	48	59

***If your diocese does not have an active program for deacon formation at this time, is your diocese planning to implement a program for deacon formation in the next few years?***

	Percentage of valid responses			
	Survey of Bishops (question #5)		Survey of Directors (question #7)	
	Selected	n	Selected	n
	%	#	%	#
Yes	25	2	38	3
Under consideration	50	4	25	2
No planning for deacon formation at this time	25	2	38	3

<b>How are wives of deacons incorporated into the...*</b>										
Percentage of valid responses										
	<b>Survey of Bishops (question #6,7,9)</b>					<b>Survey of Directors (question #8,9,11)</b>				
	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>n</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>
human formation for your deacons?	6	18	46	30	89	2	10	59	28	127
spiritual formation for your deacons?	6	14	49	31	90	2	14	58	26	127
pastoral formation for your deacons?	14	32	41	12	90	13	30	46	10	126

\* The categories are as follows:  
 A = No participation by wives expected or encouraged  
 B = Optional, but not required  
 C = Wives are strongly encouraged to participate  
 D = Participation by wives is mandatory

<b>How are wives of deacons incorporated into the intellectual formation for your deacons?</b>						
Percentage of all respondents						
	<b>Survey of Bishops (question #8)</b>			<b>Survey of Directors (question #10)</b>		
	<b>Selected</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>Selected</b>		<b>n</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>		<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	
No participation by wives expected or encouraged	8	11		5	6	
Optional, but not required	34	45		57	76	
Audit only, not for academic credit	20	27		33	44	
Academic credit for those who enroll	12	16		21	28	

<b>Are wives invited to deacon retreats or other post-ordination diaconate gatherings sponsored by the diocese?</b>						
Percentage of valid responses						
<b>Survey of Bishops (question #10)</b>			<b>Survey of Directors (question #12)</b>			
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>n</b>	
<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	
99	1	91	98	2	126	

**Please select yes or no for each of the following questions.**

Percentage of valid responses

	<b>Survey of Bishops (question #11-17)</b>			<b>Survey of Directors (question #13-19)</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>n</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>
Were you previously aware that the International Union of Superiors General had requested that Pope Francis establish the Papal Commission of Study on the Diaconate of Women?	86	14	91	91	9	129
Are you aware that the Papal Commission has been formed and has met?	84	16	91	87	13	130
Do you think it is theoretically possible to sacramentally ordain women as deacons?	41	59	86	50	50	125
Do you believe the Church should authorize sacramental ordination of women as deacons?	33	67	81	44	56	121
Do you believe the Church will authorize sacramental ordination of women as deacons?	27	73	75	27	73	126
Do you believe the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops would implement such?*	79	21	84	72	28	123
Would implement such / do you believe your diocesan bishop (or the bishops in the dioceses where you minister) would implement such?*	54	46	80	62	38	119

\*if the Holy See authorizes the sacramental ordination of women as deacons

**Use the categories below\*\* to respond to each of the following statements.**

Percentage of valid responses

	Survey of Bishops (question #18)					Survey of Directors (question #20)				
	A	B	C	D	n	A	B	C	D	n
	%	%	%	%	#	%	%	%	%	#
This diocese has a sufficient number of permanent deacons for its current needs.	13	33	34	20	91	37	33	22	7	129
The permanent diaconate is needed now more than when it was first restored.	2	14	44	39	90	2	5	25	67	128
The diaconate formation program in this diocese adequately prepares men for this ministry.	2	9	45	43	86	4	2	30	63	128
The diaconate formation program is so demanding that it might be turning good candidates away.	44	35	19	2	89	30	39	26	5	128
This diocese is committed to calling, forming, supervising, and supporting its deacons.	1	3	22	73	90	2	5	25	68	129
This diocese is committed to increasing women's involvement in ecclesial leadership.	0	3	33	64	91	3	10	46	40	125
I believe that the diaconate community in our diocese is open to exploring the feasibility of women deacons*	26	32	26	16	81	23	20	37	20	122
As bishop I am open / our bishop is open to exploring the feasibility of women deacons*	31	14	27	28	86	23	19	39	19	119
I believe that the priests in our diocese are open to exploring the feasibility of women deacons*	24	41	30	5	87	32	39	26	3	124
I believe that the parishioners of the diocese are open to having women deacons, should the Holy See authorize it / and our bishop implement it.	14	37	38	10	86	17	27	35	20	124
The sacramental ordination of women as deacons would strengthen the Catholic Church.	34	25	16	25	83	27	19	20	34	126
The sacramental ordination of women as deacons would strengthen my diocese.	35	24	15	26	82	29	18	20	33	125
The ordination of women as deacons would create a greater call for women to be ordained as priests.	10	13	30	47	86	15	20	30	35	124

\* should the Holy See authorize the sacramental ordination of women as deacons.

\*\* The categories are as follows:

- A = Disagree strongly
- B = Somewhat disagree
- C = Agree somewhat
- D = Strongly agree

**If the Holy See authorizes the sacramental ordination of women as deacons, how helpful would it be for your diocese to have women deacons serving in each below.\***

Percentage of valid responses

	Survey of Bishops (question #19)					Survey of Directors (question #21)				
	A	B	C	D	n	A	B	C	D	n
	%	%	%	%	#	%	%	%	%	#
Sacramental preparation	22	11	30	37	73	14	9	25	52	114
Catechetical instruction	22	11	27	41	74	13	7	24	56	114
Bible study/prayer ministry	22	9	27	42	74	13	7	26	54	114
Leading retreats	22	14	27	38	74	14	13	24	49	114
Outreach to alienated Catholics	20	8	30	42	74	13	8	23	56	114
Evangelization	20	8	28	43	74	13	10	23	54	114
Proclaiming the Gospel at Mass	29	14	25	33	73	23	15	27	35	114
Preaching homilies	27	14	25	34	73	19	15	27	38	113
Celebrating Rites (e.g., baptisms)	33	10	26	32	73	18	15	28	39	114
Presiding at Word and Communion services in the absence of a priest	26	14	30	31	74	19	12	28	42	113
Officiating at Liturgy of the Hours/Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament	26	15	22	36	72	17	15	25	43	114
Conducting public rites of blessing/ prayer services	25	15	26	34	73	18	12	26	45	113
Ministry to the poor (e.g., St. Vincent de Paul)	21	10	18	52	73	12	10	26	53	113
Ministry to the bereaved	20	5	20	54	74	12	8	21	59	112
Hospital/nursing home ministry	19	7	20	54	74	12	8	24	56	111
Prison ministry	18	7	29	46	72	16	15	23	46	112
Youth ministry (i.e., under 18 yrs.)	22	14	23	42	74	12	9	27	51	113
Campus/young adult ministry	20	11	31	38	74	13	11	27	49	112
Community organizing/advocacy	22	14	22	42	73	13	10	27	51	112
Ministry to married couples	20	4	24	51	74	14	4	25	56	114

\* The categories are as follows:

- A = Not at all helpful
- B = Only a little
- C = Somewhat
- D = Very helpful

***In your opinion, how would the ordination of women as deacons affect the number of vocations to women's religious institutes?***

Percentage of valid responses

	Survey of Bishops (n/a)		Survey of Directors (question #22)	
	Selected	n	Selected	n
	%	#	%	#
The number of women religious vocations would decrease	-	-	33	40
The number of women religious vocations would not be affected	-	-	59	72
The number of women religious vocations would increase	-	-	8	10

***What do you think would be the most beneficial course of action for the Catholic Church in regard to women's involvement in ecclesial leadership?***

Percentage of valid responses

	Survey of Bishops (n/a)		Survey of Directors (question #23)	
	Selected	n	Selected	n
	%	#	%	#
To increase the role of women	-	-	72	88
To keep current norms and engagement of women as they are	-	-	28	34
To reduce the role of women	-	-	0	0

***Where is your diocese located?\****

Percentage of valid responses

	Survey of Bishops (question #20)		Survey of Directors (question #24)	
	Selected	n	Selected	n
	%	#	%	#
Northeast (USCCB Region 1-3)	19	16	17	21
Midwest (USCCB Region 6-7)	15	13	14	17
South (USCCB Region 4-5, and 14)	14	12	19	23
Central (USCCB Region 8-10)	29	25	27	33
West (USCCB Region 11-13)	23	20	24	30

\* The USCCB regions are defined as follows:

- Northeast (USCCB Region 1-3): Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont.
- Midwest (USCCB Region 6-7): Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan.
- South (USCCB Region 4-5, and 14): Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia.
- Central (USCCB Region 8-10): Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas.

- West (USCCB Region 11-13): Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

<b><i>What is the size of Catholic population of your diocese?</i></b>					
Percentage of valid responses					
	<b>Survey of Bishops (question #21)</b>		<b>Survey of Directors (question #25)</b>		
	<b>Selected</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Selected</b>	<b>n</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	
Fewer than 100,000	34	30	30	37	
100,000 to 249,999	33	29	25	31	
250,000 to 599,999	14	12	22	27	
600,000 or more	18	16	22	27	