

**Diocese of Monterey**  
**Synod Listening Sessions of Religious Men and Women**

***Question 1. “Journeying Companions.” What has been my personal experience of journeying together in my local church?***

Our deepest personal experience of journeying together has been the Incarnational Love and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist and in our lives. Our monastic and ministerial communities in the Diocese witness to community in a world that so emphasizes and idolizes the individual above all. As monastic and as ministerial religious we strive to live united with our Church and with God’s People, especially the poor, through the evangelical councils in contemplation through ministry. What we value and appreciate as religious, especially in relation to the local Church, is the mutual care and concern for one another and in acceptance and responsibility for our planet earth. Many of us have seen first-hand the leadership and generosity of the lay people in the service of the Church, especially in parish life. Many religious experience an inclusivity that is felt in a whole variety of areas in our ministry and our work with the People of God. Oftentimes, the People of God edify us and challenge us to live our faith more fervently; working alongside them gives us great joy.

Important qualities and characteristics that we believe are necessary in our Church, in our parishes, and in our religious communities include a spirit of hospitality and welcome, mutual recognition and appreciation of the gifts of all, and an acknowledgement of the great diversity of God’s people in our area: in language, culture, marital history, sexual orientation, etc.

We recognize several challenges for moving forward. Clericalism can still be a great obstacle to involving the laity and providing better leadership in our parishes and in our ministries; continuity in parishes suffers when priests do not include laity in leadership and in decision- making roles. Not all feel welcome in the Church. There are many who are marginalized in our local Church: migrants, the poor and LGBTQ+ people. We as a Church must be ready to meet people where they are in a spirit of encounter

Some religious have felt disconnected, too, from the local Church. How do we as religious share our charism and spirituality when consecrated life is so little understood in today’s age? Many ask, “What about women in the Church?” They share their gifts but at such a cost. Women religious have been the leaders of following the Spirit into the future and they have led the way in ministry and prayer. Some religious wonder: how long do they have to wait to be welcomed as Deacons and as Priests?

***Question 2. “Co-Responsibility in Mission. What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in our journey together, especially to grow in our appreciation and response to the immigrant and poor communities in our area?”***

We see co-responsibility happening at the parish level with generous lay ministers with whom we are in contact. The religious make “space for encounters” by bringing trust among the poor and youth. The focus on encounter rather than on conversion leads to networks of relationships that can be mobilized to meet needs of the immigrant and poor. This is seen in the efforts made with C.O.P.A. to empower Latino immigrants to discover their own agency and gifts. Other examples of co-responsibility are expressed in promoting systemic change through peace and justice efforts against racism in our area and against discrimination towards women and the LGBTQ+ communities.

Some of us have been witnesses to the very difficult experiences of migrants, especially women migrants. Despite their resilience in the face of prejudice and poverty, we have seen them living in fear, in the shadows, on the margins. This fear causes them to not seek out public social services or health services and so they hide. The diocese has not reached out to connect our efforts in the parishes with theirs. How can we, as religious, be in better communication with the diocese regarding opportunities to serve, while also remaining true to our particular charisms and ministries?

The Spirit challenges us to co-responsibility for all through collaboration and respect for the personal dignity and agency of all. Through individual and communal discernment at the local parish, we can commit to personal attitudes and judgments that generate inclusivity and welcome that reaches the poor and the immigrants by meeting them in their homes and workplaces. We can create pastoral teams that recognize the immigrants and the poor as equal partners. While we cannot avoid the tensions running through the immigrant communities within US culture, we can enrich our parish communities by finding space for their culture, their faith and their experience. We have a special concern to reach out to all youth, but especially the young of the immigrant and low-income communities. As religious we can communicate to the needy and poor the dignity they have. We as religious cannot always solve problems, but we can often lead others to good resources.

Some of our Generation X and Millennials do not feel welcome in our parishes. Many of our younger religious express how difficult it is for them because of the lack of peers in their spiritual journey and call. They often lament and express concern regarding some clergy that seldom care when our youth need inspiration and leadership to follow Jesus Christ.

While many of us religious are no longer able to work and minister directly in our institutions and a significant number of us in the diocese are called to the monastic life, we have strong commitments to our immigrant and poor communities. Through our hospitality, our contemplative community life and our charitable giving, retired and monastic religious are very much aware of the real needs of the poor. The Carmelite Sisters' response to the poor and immigrants, in particular, comes primarily through their prayer and contemplation. Retired and monastic religious also support those who are directly involved in ministry.

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