



Saint Catherine's Vision

Building Up the Body of Christ

Report of Results: Survey of Orthodox Christian Faithful *International Consultation on Women, Mangano, Italy; October 3-7, 2017*

Background and Rationale:

In cooperation with the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission, Saint Catherine's Vision (SCV) recently developed and inaugurated a *Survey for Orthodox Christian Faithful*. The survey sought participants' input regarding "Challenges and Opportunities of the Role of Women in the Church" for the Consultation on "Ecumenical Perspectives on the Role of Women in the Churches," held at the Monastery of Bose in Mangano, Italy on October 3-7, 2017.

It has been over thirty-five years since representatives from the various Christian churches around the world came together to communicate and discuss the participation of women in their church families. The Saint Catherine's Vision (SCV) Survey was designed to solicit responses from a wide range of Orthodox faithful to better inform the Orthodox delegates and enrich their presentations. As Co-founder and Executive Director of SCV and Adjunct Professor of Theology at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, I was invited to offer the featured Orthodox presentation on: "Challenges and Opportunities of the Role of Women in the Orthodox Church from a Theological Perspective." The lecture was well-received, largely propelled by the breadth and clarity of your responses.

This survey was a qualitative, open-ended tool, collaboratively designed to gather input from Orthodox Christians regarding the challenges and opportunities affecting women's participation in the life of the Church. Due to the time-limited nature of this opportunity, a forty-day participation period was established to distribute the survey to as many Orthodox Christians as we were able to reach through SCV's email list-serve and Facebook presence, church and personal contact lists.

Summary of Survey Questions:

The respondents were asked to begin by answering specific questions about their own personal experience of serving the Church either as clergy or laypeople, whether salaried workers or volunteers, and what they saw as their particular gifts, opportunities, and challenges. Then they were asked to comment additionally in a short essay on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges regarding the participation of women in the life of the Church today.

Summary of the Results:

We are grateful that a relatively large number of respondents generously offered their perspectives. Collectively, these in turn offered the Bose Consultation Orthodox delegation, (and ultimately, the other participants as well,) clear and responsible information. We understand that many survey respondents may be interested in the responses themselves. The highlights are offered anonymously below.

I. Of the almost **191 participants**, **18.5%** of the responses were submitted by Orthodox clergy. Approximately **40%** of the survey participants were between 21-50 years old, and **60%** were over 50. **28.7%** of the respondents were men, **71.3%** were women. Although the majority of respondents were citizens of the U.S.A., a sizable number (**24%**) claimed different ethnic origins or citizenship abroad and were from every major canonical Orthodox Christian jurisdiction.

II. In regard to survey questions concerning **opportunities for women to serve in the Church: 141 (74%)** stated or intimated that they would like to see more opportunities for women to serve in the Church. **35 (18%)** said that they felt women in general (or they personally) had enough opportunities – with some of these adding that these opportunities were very rich. **15 (8%)** did not address the question.

The most frequent challenge recorded by parish staff and volunteers (priests, deacons, choir directors, Sunday school teachers, church administrators, parish board members etc.) was that women and men are not stepping up to fill the opportunities for service that are already available and badly needed at the parish level.

III. Although, there were no questions regarding the **rejuvenation of the ministry deaconesses**; still, some respondents did address this in their short essays.

Out of the 191 respondents, **58 (30%)** mentioned deaconesses, **34 (18%) of these 58** stated that they would like to see “deaconesses,” although **26 of these 34** did not stipulate if the deaconesses should be ordained or simply blessed by a bishop, or if they should have liturgical functions. Therefore, no conclusions as to their specific opinion on the ordination or role of deaconesses can be drawn from these 26 respondents. The remaining **8 of the 34 (4% of 191)** stated that they would support the ordination of women in a liturgical as well as in social roles.

Of the **remaining 24 responses**, **8 (4% of 191)** stated that the ministry of deaconesses should be restricted to social non-liturgical functions and should not be in the altar. **4** would like to see the question of deaconesses considered. **1** feels that the vocation and role of deaconess needs to be defined. **2** gave a strong negative to deaconesses, or to women even reading in church. **3** want women to be both deacons and priests (1 of these also desires women bishops). **1** (a woman) said that the question of deaconesses and women’s participation in general was a red herring, distracting us from the real problems of the Church. **5** others mentioned deaconesses, but their remarks were too vague to classify.

IV. **33 (17%)** of both men and women related a personal negative challenge, experience, or grievance in response to the “Your challenges” question, or in the final comment/essay section.

Many of the remarks under challenges were about the respondent’s personal failure, lack of time and/or volunteers, or the need for a salaried position, rather than pointing to an injustice or outward obstruction.

Of those who recorded a specific outward challenge, the majority were from men and women who felt that they were unable to use their theological or other academic degrees, or their natural gifts, in service to the Church. Other individual comments ranged from not wanting to be advised on how to dress or keep one's children quiet in church, to dissatisfaction with choir directors/lead chanters, clergy or hierarchs, and one who specifically felt she was not heard in Orthodox meetings because she is a woman.

Response of St. Catherine's Vision:

The Survey garnered a wide range of responses. While there were clear differences of opinion, on closer inspection, we were interested to see that the majority of responses were within relative proximity of each other indicating a largely shared perspective among respondents regarding the challenges and opportunities affecting women in the church. Only a few comments reflecting thoughts outside of this range were submitted.

The most noteworthy and gratifying finding was that the great majority of submissions expressed a deep fidelity to the Church. This was typically demonstrated as an articulate, rich and profound love to Christ and His Church. Many respondents expressed a strong concern for the general witness, integrity, and well-being of the Orthodox Church. A concern for Orthodox unity was also expressed across the continuum of perspectives. We are prayerfully secure in the fact that however the Church may discern to move forward regarding more fully implementing the ministries through which women may serve for our time and context, this foundation of Orthodox unity will serve as the basis from which this will take place.

The devotion, depth and eloquence with which many stated their perspectives was inspiring. Collectively, the submissions offered a powerful witness to our essential unity with Christ and His Church, and this was a source of joy for us. We pray that the unity revealed through your responses is fully realized for all Orthodox Christians throughout the world.

Once again, we thank our respondents! Your submissions have greatly blessed us, and it is through your witness and prayers that we can declare with St. Nicholas Cabasilas:

Christ gives life and growth, nourishment and light and breath.... He strengthens the traveler and He is the way. He is at once both the inn along the road and the destination of the journey. When we struggle, He struggles at our side. When we argue, He is the reconciler. And when we win the victory, He is the prize.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Feast-day of the Presentation of Our Lord and Savior in the Temple
February 2, 2018