

'She has a story' – contribution of the Dutch Network of Catholic Women to the synodal process, 2021 - 2023

Summary

To the delight and surprise of the board of the Network of Catholic Women in the Netherlands (NKV), 2238 women have shared their stories through a survey administered by the NKV as part of the synodal process. We are impressed by this rich harvest, both by the large number of respondents and by the content. We see this as a sign and a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church of Christ. We are very grateful to all those who completed the survey.

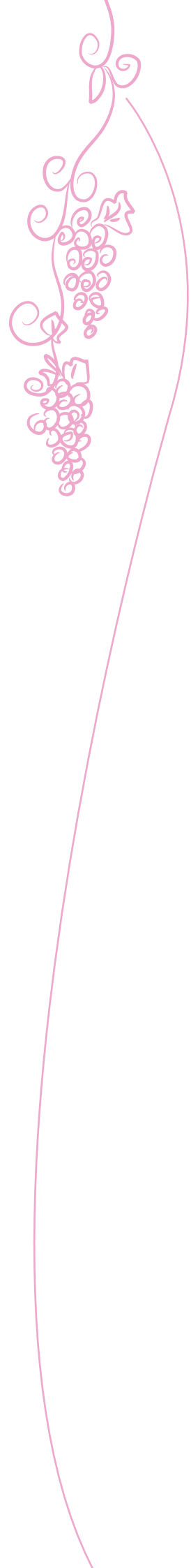
Most respondents are very committed believers and also faithful churchgoers. They regularly attend Eucharistic celebrations and/or prayer meetings in a Catholic (parish) church, in all dioceses of the Netherlands. A large part of them is active within the (parish) church as a volunteer, and many of them even take on multiple tasks in the parish. In addition to their church involvement, many are committed to and active in society. For this work they find their motivation in the Catholic faith. 'Looking out for one another' and 'being carried by the Holy Spirit' are the main motivations in the responses. A small minority indicated that they had distanced themselves from church life.

Most survey participants are positive about being a woman in the Netherlands. When asked how they experience their womanhood within the Catholic Church, a less positive picture emerges. According to the survey results, there is room for improvement within the Church of Christ and it is (high) time for change.

In general, the respondents experience joy in the Catholic Church in the Netherlands. They experience this joy most in praying and celebrating the liturgy, the Eucharist and singing together. They also experience contact with God in the silence and the possibility of adoration and praise. Meeting Jesus in the Holy Eucharist brings joy to many. But also experiencing the mutual love and connectedness, knowing that we as church, are a worldwide community that is carried and nourished by the Holy Spirit, gives inspiration and joy. Pope Francis as leader of the world church is mentioned by many as a source of inspiration and joy.

The vast majority (96%) of our respondents indicate that they have ideas and wishes for the future of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands. From the many responses we received, we would like to share with you the seven most frequently mentioned wishes for the future of the Church:

1. Further growing equality and balance between men and women.
2. To increase the visibility of women in the Church in many ways, starting with the daily practice in the parishes. This includes participation by women in administrative bodies, in the mission of the church and also at the altar.
3. To promote the connectedness of the Church with society: to become a church that works more on its diaconal task in the world.



4. Parishes that are a home for all. Respondents speak of a church community that is not exclusionary; they hope for parish communities that are more open, diverse and inclusive in many ways than they are today.
5. Learning to better understand the signs of the times through catechesis, Bible study and celebrating together.
6. More personal and pastoral attention and empathy for parishioners.
7. More attention to community building, spirituality and faith deepening.

Listening to one another is seen by respondents as the basis for this much needed renewal. The synodal process speaks of a change of mind-set in the Church. We hope for a state of mind that will make women more visible. We hope that this process of listening will continue and bear fruit in many ways and in many places.

Advices

In addition to these wishes for the future of the Church, the respondents offer some advice:

1. Listen to the blowing of the Holy Spirit: take women more seriously, treat them with respect and as equal interlocutors. Listen and value them. Utilize their talents, creativity and qualities in all areas of the Catholic Church.
2. The Spirit of God is also blowing today. Don't be afraid, and dare to listen with creativity to this Spirit and to women who are giving words to Spirit power today. They are women both inside and outside the Church. Have the courage to encourage and support a movement of renewal in the Church.
3. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is central to all your work. The survey shows that this is not always perceived and seen that way. Make every effort, especially for and with women, to make this more visible.
4. Invite women to apply for church appointments as acolytes and lectors.
5. Initiate the formation of pastoral councils at the parish, diocesan and national levels in which lay people together with priests, deacons and pastoral workers listen to the Spirit of God and to each other, with an open eye and ear to the needs of the times, of the Church and of society.
6. Encourage faith education, faith deepening and faith maturation. See this as a task of the whole church, giving particular attention to the contribution of women catechists, theologians and other competent women.
7. Involve women and other lay people in all selection procedures in the Church and make these procedures transparent.
8. Encourage the search for new language in words, images and music that can be used in the liturgy; language that connects to the lives and God experiences of people today.

Dear Bishops,

There are two more points we would like to present to you. We do this in all humility and in the awareness that these points are controversial within the Church today. However, this does not stop us - the Network of Catholic Women in the Netherlands - from submitting them to you. We do this because a large number of respondents emphatically requested it:

- Encourage theological research and conversation in the Catholic Church about the admission of women to deacon training and the deacon ministry.
- Explore the possibilities of renewing the priesthood to serve the Church of tomorrow. Be open to dialogue with women who ask to be admitted to this.

In conclusion, we invite you, as the Dutch Bishops' Conference as a whole and as individual bishops, to stay in touch with us and inform us about how you listen to our advice and take it with you into the life of the local church, to your Ad-limina visit at the end of 2022, and to the General Synod of Bishops in 2023.

On behalf of all the participants who have entrusted their stories to us, we greet you all, united in Christ,

The project group 'She has a story' of the Network of Catholic Women:

Maria van Schaijik, chairperson Network Catholic Women

Carin Hereijgers, secretary

Sister Holkje van der Veer OP

Marie-Louise van Wijk - van de Ven

Laetitia van der Lans

Prof. Dr. Monique van Dijk - Groeneboer, research leader

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