

Rev Diana Iris Cabello, Director of the Centro de Estudios Teologicos San Andres, Diocese of Western Mexico

Greetings to everyone. I am Reverend Diana Iris Cabello from the Diocese of Western Mexico and I am here to share with you the experience that we, as women, have had in the field of theological education.

At this moment, in my diocese out 35 clergy, we are six ordained women, 3 Mexican and 3 from the United States, and only I dedicate myself to theological education. In the seminary in the area of theology, we have 24 students, 11 of which are women and three of them have the aptitude to become educators in the seminary. Out of 27 participants, two of us are women in the Clergy Refresher Diploma, and there are 9 women attending the School of Lay Ministries. We have 8 faculty members in the seminary, two of which are women, one is the head psychologist in the area of human development in the seminary and the other is a retired professor responsible for the area of psycho-pedagogy in the school for teachers of Christian education. There are 23 women among 60 students in the whole seminary. A year and eight months ago, when I took over the rectorship of the seminary, there were only 4 female students, and it seems to me that my presence motivated more women to join

My path to reach the rectorship of the seminary has not been easy, first of all because I was commissioned in an indigenous community in the Sierra de San Luís Potosí, and I had been there for 4 years. In this community we had an extension of the seminary with three students, of which one was already a presbyter and remained in charge in the region and another one will be ordained as a permanent deacon this year. So, to take up my duties in the seminary, I had to leave my first congregation, which, as you know, our first love is very difficult to leave, much less forget. The second difficulty was that I had very little time as an ordained minister, only two years and four months, and with my time as a lay minister, I completed a total of 6 years of active service in the diocese. Of course, all my life, from the age of 16 I have dedicated myself to teaching and on two occasions I have been the principal of educational institutions and received the gift of being able to transmit theoretical and practical knowledge.

It was difficult for my clergy colleagues to accept my presence in the seminary and in the beginning it was difficult to have the support to make the necessary changes to cover distance education, because the territory of our diocese is very extensive and for many of those interested, it is difficult to move to live with their families to study in Guadalajara and I was the only one who took care of the students by extension, which was the name we gave them a year and eight months ago. And among them were my three Sierra students. There were five students at the beginning of the extension program.

When the pandemic forced us to move all the students to virtuality, all the teaching staff had to face great challenges, but we managed to organise both the program and the classes so that we could work effectively and we could ensure that the pandemic turned into a great blessing, because the number of students multiplied prodigiously, since at the beginning of the pandemic we had 11 students and now we have 60.

One aspect that concerns us deeply is the development of spirituality and community life, which has always been an important objective in the seminaries in person and which, due to the limitations of electronic means, is difficult to achieve and what we have done so far in this regard is to hold a spiritual retreat for liturgical time, also at a distance, as well as hold small weekly prayer communities with seminarians where the objective is to learn free prayer and fraternal coexistence and participation in Eucharistic services dedicated especially to the theological community. We also have a conversation with the Bishop every four months, which we call "Manuel Aguas Lecture", in which the relationship between the Bishop and the seminarians is developed and a feeling of belonging to the diocese is created. This, together with liturgical prayer, through the opening of a Facebook page called "Diocese of the West in prayer and in which seminary students lead the four periods of the Divine Office, has become the backbone of daily prayer in our diocese; each prayer should have a short sermon, which favors the liturgical and homiletic practice of the students, with excellent results, because many people join the prayer and the congregations know the seminarians.

There is still a lot to be shared and I remain at your disposal

Thank you.