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Dialogue, not Demands: Engagement Suggestions

In response to participants at our December, 2014, New York City Conference, “Women & Diaconal Ministry in the Orthodox Church: Past, Present and Future” who asked what they could do to help, St. Phoebe Center offers the following engagement suggestions--asking all to remember that restoring the ordination of women deacons will require education, patience, dialogue, discernment, and respect for the Orthodox Church’s tradition and process. Above all, it will require listening for God’s will for this ministry of service by women and men. Below are humble suggestions for engagement:

1) Always remember that progress on the ordination of women deacons will come through dialogue, not demands. The dialogue will help identify needs in the church, define how could women deacons serve today, what would the qualifications be, and the process for ordination. Stress that this is not an effort to ordain women priests or bishops.

2) Join the regional chapter of St. Phoebe.

3) Attend our next meeting on Thursday, July 16, 7:00 pm at the home of Marilyn Rouvelas, 1200 N. Nash Street, #1126, Arlington, VA. (Rosslyn Metro)

4) Educate yourself about the diaconate for women and men.

Recommended readings at: www.orthodoxdeaconess.org and www.orthodoxdeacons.org

5) Sign the prayer at www.orthodoxdeacons.org

6) Ask your priest about starting a book discussion group to help deepen appreciation for this ministry. Recommended books: *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church* by Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald and *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia* by John Chryssavgis.

7) Begin a dialogue with your priest and church, discussing respectfully the needs of your community and whether deacons (female and male) could help meet those needs. Examples include the ministries of speakers at the New York City conference:

- * Spiritual director (Sister Rebecca Cown, New Skete Monastery)
- * Ministry of the word (Professor Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Brown University)
- * Parish administration and outreach (Ann Marie Mecera, Diocesan Council for the Midwest Diocese of the OCA)
- * Chaplaincy (Clio Pavlantos, MA, CMA, MDiv, BCC –Provisional)

Encourage and support women in other ministries such as prison work, outreach to the homeless and hospitalized, and missions.

8) Begin a dialogue with your bishop. A woman can only be ordained a deacon by a bishop, but such a major step would require the approval of his synod of bishops. Form a small group of people who meet periodically to study and become well versed in the diaconate for periodic meetings with your bishop to discuss respectfully the interest in the community, ask questions, seek his advice about the role of women deacons, including who would qualify and how they could be trained. In your initial meeting with your bishop, let him know about the two recent conferences on women deacons and the interest in this issue.

9) Begin a dialogue with the deacon training program established by your jurisdiction. (See “Becoming a Deacon” at www.orthodoxdeacons.org) Could a woman be admitted to the program? Could the school develop courses in pastoral care, chaplaincy, spiritual direct, philanthropy, and administration?

10) Pray for guidance from our Lord and the women deacon saints.

Please join us at our next meeting on Thursday, July 16, 7:00 pm, at the home of Marilyn Rouvelas, Arlington, VA (Rosslyn metro) rsvp: mrouvelas@verizon.net

Troparion (Tone 3) for St. Phoebe

Enlightened by grace and taught the Faith by the chosen vessel of Christ, you were found worthy of the diaconate; and you carried Paul’s words to Rome, O Deaconess Phoebe, pray to Christ God that his Spirit may enlighten our souls!