



**Saint Catherine's Vision**  
Building Up the Body of Christ

***Introductory Parameters for the Ministry of Ordained  
Deaconesses in the Orthodox Church***  
*With Initial Questions to Consider*

**A Proposal Submitted by:**

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**Introduction**

This Proposal offers for consideration some “Introductory Parameters for the Ministry of Ordained Deaconesses in the Orthodox Church” in the USA. Initiated by His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios of Boston and Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh,<sup>1</sup> this effort began in December 2006. By early January 2007, the original version of this document was submitted for consideration by His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios to His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The original Proposal was written by His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos, His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios and Presvytera Dr. Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For over thirty years (March 1979-August 2011), Metropolitan Maximos faithfully served as the presiding hierarch of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh. Failing health forced him to retire. Until his retirement, he also actively served as Spiritual Father of Saint Catherine's Vision. To this day, we continue to humbly seek his prayers and blessing.

<sup>2</sup> Presvytera FitzGerald is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Saint Catherine's Vision and serves as Adjunct Professor of Theology at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

The Proposal received a very strong request for further clarification and elaboration and was suspended for further study. Almost two years ago, however, we were encouraged to complete this effort due to recent developments from the Holy Synod of the Holy Patriarchate of Alexandria. Under the direction of His Beatitude, Patriarch and Pope Theodore, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria unanimously committed to the discernment process of rejuvenating this ministry for the Orthodox Church in Africa. And for the writing of this Proposal, we appreciate the informational and pastoral assistance offered to us by hierarchs from the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Here, we wish to thank especially, His Eminence Metropolitan Serafim of Zimbabwe and Angola who kindly consented to represent the Holy Patriarchate of Alexandria by assisting in the writing of this revised Proposal.

In addition to the historic development for the Orthodox Church in Africa regarding this ministry, we were also greatly inspired by the results of an exploratory and groundbreaking 2017 Pan-Orthodox survey conducted by Saint Catherine's Vision. The study was titled, *Survey for Orthodox Christian Faithful*. The structured, yet open-ended Survey invited participants' personal perspective regarding "Challenges and Opportunities of the Role of Women in the Church". As a prerequisite for participation, respondents needed to attest they identified themselves as "faithful Orthodox Christians". One lesson we gleaned from this study, was that three-quarters of participants (74%) expressed the desire for *more* opportunities for women's participation in the life in the Church. A third (30%) of respondents also voluntarily brought up concerns engaging the issue of deaconesses. These results, as well as other insights revealed from this study, indicated to us that more education, reflection and discernment were needed to clarify mixed opinions regarding Holy Tradition and the possibility of receiving women into the diaconate.<sup>3</sup> With the above in mind, we came to appreciate with an exquisite acuity, the importance of submitting a Proposal of "Introductory Parameters" such as those contained in this document. Our intention for this Proposal is to respectfully offer our beloved bishops essential information for their consideration which may benefit the discerning process of the Orthodox Church in the United States regarding moving forward with this ministry.

Furthermore, we have greatly benefitted from the spiritual wisdom, vast scholarly insight, guidance and encouragement of His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos of

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<sup>3</sup> See: *Report of Results: Survey of Orthodox Christian Faithful*, <http://saintcatherinesvision.com/assets/files/Feb.%20,%202018%20SCV%20Survey%20Report.pdf>.

Diokleia who generously agreed to serve as a co-author of this document.<sup>4</sup> We were also joined by *Emeritus* Professor of Canon Law, Dr. Lewis J. Patsavos, whose depth of theological knowledge and facility with the canonical and legislative inner workings of the Church throughout history and today, have greatly facilitated our efforts. Because of these important developments, we invited theologian and *Emeritus* Professor of Liturgical Theology, Professor Evangelos Theodorou, the “father” of the contemporary movement in the Orthodox Church for the rejuvenation of the ministry of the ordained deaconess, to join us in writing this revised Proposal. He generously accepted to assist us, freely offering his academic scholarship and unparalleled personal experience on this issue. We are forever grateful to God for the professor’s assistance; we completed the initial draft of this Proposal only a few months before he departed to be with the Lord.

### **A Very Brief Overview**

As with every age throughout the life of the Church, the ‘signs of the times’ (Matthew 16:3) of our present age demand rigorous discernment, preparation and response. Hierarchs, who through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit have perceived the need for the ordained pastoral ministry of female deacons (or “deaconesses”) to serve alongside male deacons, would naturally begin this effort by inaugurating a set of *Introductory Parameters*, such as these submitted for consideration from which to begin.<sup>5</sup>

This Proposal seeks to address the “first phase” toward a more complete restoration of the diaconate (both male and female) within the life of the Church. This endeavor as a whole, represents “. . . a positive response to many of the needs and demands of the contemporary world in many spheres. This would be all the more true if the diaconate in general (male as well as female) were restored in all places in its original, manifold services (*diakoniai*), with extension into the social sphere, in the spirit of ancient tradition and in response to the increasing specific needs of our time.

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<sup>4</sup> Together with His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios of Boston, His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos also serves as Spiritual Father of Saint Catherine’s Vision.

<sup>5</sup> For a synopsis of the ministry of the ordained deaconess in the Orthodox Church, see: *A Call for the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Deaconess: Addressed to His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and the Secretariat of the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church*, Saint Catherine’s Vision, November 2014, <http://saintcatherinesvision.com/assets/files/December%20SCV%20Call.pdf>.

It should not be solely restricted to a purely liturgical role or considered to be a mere step on the way to higher “ranks” of clergy.”<sup>6</sup>

With this in mind, it is important to begin this Proposal by emphasizing our deep respect for the fact, that until relatively recently, there have been two prevailing views concerning the status of deaconesses. One perspective understands deaconesses to be received into service through an appointment or blessing. The deaconess is thus seen as a minor order. Her ordination is a straight-forward *cheirothesia*. She is ordained outside the Liturgy, at the Bishop's throne in the main body of the church. In effect, she is regarded as a kind of blessed social worker.

We appreciate deeply how today some still hold to this view regarding the *cheirothesia* of the deaconess. Historically speaking, by the early middle ages the deaconess enjoyed a vibrant ministry only in specific places in the Christian East. There were numerous areas of the Christian East where the ministry of the deaconess did not exist. In the Christian West, deaconesses, by and large, were regarded simply as a minor order. These two factors especially, offer us ample insight to appreciate persons who have maintained the *cheirothesia* perspective.<sup>7</sup>

That being said, for over seventy years, these two perspectives have been vigorously examined within the life of the Orthodox Church by numerous faithful theologians and scholars. We are particularly indebted to the ground-breaking studies of Professor Evangelos Theodorou. After a thorough investigation of early Christian and patristic texts, as well as liturgical, canonical and archeological evidence, he inspired many Orthodox of this generation to come to the same conclusion: that the deaconess is on the same footing as the deacon, that is, that she was ordained by *cheirotomia*.

His work witnesses to the ecclesial principle of “*Lex Orandi est Lex Credendi*” (“the Word of Prayer is the Word of Faith”). Theodorou’s efforts invite us to study the

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<sup>6</sup> Gennadios Limouris, (ed.), *Place of Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*, (“Tertios” Publications: Katerini, Greece) 1992, p. 31-32. This text is from the 1988 Pan-Orthodox Consultation held on the Greek island of Rhodes convened by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrios I. Hierarchical representatives from the Autocephalous and Autonomous churches, as well as numerous other theologians, were invited to deliberate “*The Place of Women in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*”. Furthermore, thirty percent (30%) of the invited participants of this historic event were female.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the early development and decline of the ministry of the deaconess, see: *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church: Called to Holiness and Ministry*, Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999, pp. 1-58, 134-148, respectively.

ordination text for the deaconess which is to be found in Goar's *Euchologion*.<sup>8</sup> The ceremony itself originates in the eighth century with foundational elements of the specific prayers reaching back to the early Church. The ordination rite clearly expresses all the essential features of ordinations to "major orders" as understood by Orthodox theology:

- The ordination takes place within the context of the celebration of the Eucharist, at the same point in the liturgy as the male deacon is ordained.
- The ordination takes place before the altar and follows the same rubrics. The only exception is that the deaconess is ordained while standing throughout the service and does not kneel as does the deacon; at this time, women kneeling in a public manner was deemed improper.
- The ordination begins with the proclamation "Divine Grace" (*E Theia Haris*) and requires two prayers of *epiclesis* (solemn prayers invoking the action of the Holy Spirit), just as the ordination rites for the deacon, presbyter and bishop require.
- The deaconess receives the diaconal stole at the conclusion of the ordination rite. The diaconal stole is the traditional symbol of the order of deacon.
- The female deacon receives Holy Communion at the Altar as is the case with other members of the clergy.

Furthermore, the deliberate Eucharistic context of this and every ordination affirms a vital ancient Christian conviction still firmly asserted by the Orthodox. This conviction is grounded in the belief that all ordinations are events of joy for the Christian community as they are a gift to the Church, by the Holy Spirit who sustains the Church. Like the mysteries of Baptism and Chrismation (Confirmation), which mark the process of Christian initiation, ordinations are "Pentecostal" events.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See pages 19-23 for the Greek and English texts of the Byzantine ordination rite.

<sup>9</sup> See the pioneering work of Emeritus Professor Evangelos Theodorou, *Heroines of Love: Deaconesses through the Ages*, (Athens: 1947), in Greek, available at <http://saintcatherinesvision.com/collaborative-work/document-archives> and *The "Ordination" or "Appointment" of the Deaconess*, (Athens: 1954), in Greek, available at <http://saintcatherinesvision.com/collaborative-work/document-archives>. See also: FitzGerald, *Women Deacons*, pp. 78-110.

## **Considerations for the Orthodox in the United States**

By providing an opportunity for shared prayer and study, this Proposal suggests that the Church in the USA begins by ordaining to the diaconate a small number of highly qualified female candidates whom the hierarchs know very well and who are deemed to be eminently qualified. Either through a local community or metropolis setting, these duly ordained ministers of the Church will be assigned to placements which require specialized experience, training and/or education that cannot be easily found. During this initial phase, they would submit to regularly scheduled on-going assessment through personal and group evaluation under the direction of the presiding bishop. As God blesses, through this on-going collaborative process, the proper insights and discernment necessary for further cultivation of this ministry will present themselves “in the fullness of time”.

It is of the utmost necessity that the first women received into the ordained diaconate in this country be of the highest spiritual and moral character, persons whom the ordaining bishops would trust unequivocally. Ordaining male and female deacons for specialized ministries avoids deploying already over-extended clergy who work tirelessly to be all things to all people.

***The following examples of specialized ministries outside liturgical worship are typically expressive of ordained servant-leadership and are consistent with the Tradition in a manner that is responsive to contemporary needs:***

- Pastoral counseling (including pre-marital, marital, family and life-transitions) and spiritual direction
- Pastoral care to survivors of trauma and abuse (*including the psychological, physical and sexual expressions of abuse*)
- Theological education, teaching and catechesis
- Spiritual formation and education outreach
- Supervision and advanced training in pastoral care for clergy, seminarians and others engaged in ministry
- Hospital, hospice and prison chaplaincies
- Philanthropy, social witness, community relations and outreach
- Visitations to the homebound and shut-ins
- College and university campus pastoral ministry
- Ecumenical dialogue and inter-faith witness
- Pastoral administration

*In addition to the above examples, the ordained diaconate presents ministry-specific expressions of servant-leadership directly conveyed within the liturgical assembly. For reasons of brevity, the celebration of the Divine Liturgy will be the only example to be considered for this discussion. The following general categories of diaconal liturgical service include, but are not limited to:*

- Assisting in the preparation of the Holy Gifts
- Censing
- Participation in solemn processions (e.g. the Small and Great Entrance)
- Reading the Gospel at the Liturgy
- Preaching during the Liturgy
- Offering petitions on behalf of the faithful
- Assisting in the administration of Communion at the Liturgy
- Assisting with the consumption of communion and other post-communion duties.
- Taking the sacrament of Communion for sick persons in their homes, in the hospital, etc.

*As far as we know from extant evidence, only the final listed expression of liturgical ministry (i.e., taking Holy Communion to those who for valid reasons, are unable to attend the Divine Liturgy), can be stated with certainty, to have been entrusted to the deaconess, particularly during the Middle ages.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, some significant evidence remains that indicates prior to the Church's emancipation under St. Constantine, that the deaconess served alongside the deacon (paraplesios, "likewise"), sharing in a fuller range of liturgical responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>*

## I. Why ordain women to the diaconate?

### *Can't this work be done by 'non-ordained' women or nuns?*

Yes, as every baptized believer is called to a vocation of holiness within the life of the Church, many specific tasks among the people of God may be expressed by various members. Through their humble obedience to the will of God, it is not uncommon for laypersons, monks, nuns, deacons, presbyters and/or bishops to offer spiritual guidance, to teach at every level of need (including the highest expressions

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<sup>10</sup> For a brief overview of the liturgical, pastoral and other tasks of the deaconess, see, *Women Deacons*, especially pp. 18-27, 115-120 and 190-193.

<sup>11</sup> See footnote #14.

of theological formation), to preach, to conduct and lead acts of public service and philanthropy, to speak on behalf of the Church, to organize and facilitate meetings, conferences and dialogues on behalf of the Church, to offer administrative service, to publish on behalf of the Church, etc. This indicates that the Holy Spirit attends to every need within the life of the Church in a personal and not merely a utilitarian manner.

***Authentic Relationship, Not Reductionism (a symptom of Secularism)***

In addition to the opportunity for offering a practical sacrificial task, there lies a deeper, relational component to every expression of ministry or service. Perhaps this is even more important—as every act of good that we do on behalf of Christ, occurs as a response to our relationship with Him and in Him, as we seek to “love our neighbor as ourselves”. The charism of ordained ministry (including the “priesthood of the laity”) in a mysterious manner offers within each expression (i.e. “level” or “rank”) of ministry, a unique and complete/full manifestation of Christ, Himself, within the life of the community. Perhaps to some degree due to secularism, we witness how easy it is to fall into unintentional reductionism, ultimately minimizing expressions of ministry, service and philanthropy to mere utilitarian actions alone. Consequently, this further deprives us of being touched by Christ Himself, through the power of the Holy Spirit. As is proclaimed at every Divine Liturgy, “Christ is in our midst”; we would benefit to remember more frequently that He abides within the entire body of the faithful in the life of the Church.

At more serious levels of spiritual dysfunction, this reductionism may display a particularly gross hardness of heart, or at the very least, ignorance to the depth and breadth of the living Tradition of the Church. This common, mistaken utilitarian perspective regarding service and ministry “de-sacramentalizes”, even “secularizes”, humble human sacrificial actions offered to others in grateful response to the mercy (*eleos*) of God. We would do well to remember how each domain of “royal priesthood” (episcopacy, presbyterate, diaconate and laity), reflects a charismatic dimension through their service by which the faithful believer—and ultimately the whole Church, benefits in the “building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

Life is a Mystery, as the Church herself is a Mystery. These mysteries have been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, who always points to Christ. How we are each called to follow, to be bound to Christ and one another by the power of the Holy Spirit, is to be discerned, tested and received by the Church. It is well known that through the history of the Church, persons called to ordained ministry are at some

point “revealed” to those who are called to discern these vocations; many times, even if those called to ordained service do not wish this to be so!

That some people cynically may ask “why ordain deaconesses?”, serves a dynamic that risks casting doubt on the entire ministry of the Church. Too many times, these questions reveal a hardness of heart- or at least gross ignorance regarding how the Holy Spirit lives and moves within the life of the Church and calls whom He wishes to call (cf. John 3:8).

We are blessed to have the lives of the saints and the writings of the Fathers and many other holy ones in Christ to heighten and widen our perspective and prod us to more actively seek His will.<sup>12</sup>

## **II. In what area/s of ministry would they serve?**

*As with all ministry, the ultimate local authority is the presiding hierarch.*

Pastoral, spiritual, liturgical/musical, administrative, educational, philanthropic, witness and humble attention to the practical needs of the Church vary from one context to another. In whatever manner they may be serving, deacons would submit to regularly scheduled on-going assessment through personal and group evaluation under the direction of the presiding hierarch. Through this on-going collaborative process, the proper insights and discernment necessary for implementing future modifications will unfold. We envision three general, yet inter-related ‘pathways’ of diaconal service, particularly for female deacons. The local Church may sometimes discern to implement each of these directions simultaneously.

- A. *Specialized ministries on behalf of the bishop directly.*** These duly ordained ministers of the Church (while attached to a local parish community), will be assigned to placements which require specialized experience, training and/or education that cannot be easily obtained and will be ready to respond to the directives of the bishop.
- B. *More general, local community-based ministries.*** While still responsible to the bishop, through direct accountability to a supervising

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<sup>12</sup> NB: The charism of each expression (i.e. “rank”) of priesthood, be it the priesthood of the laity, the priesthood of the diaconate, the presbyterate, or the episcopacy each bear witness to both the functional and the charismatic. These are highly inter-related/inter-dependent domains; in truth, they are dimensions of one reality. These concepts are separated only for the sake of discussion and more importantly, contemplative study.

colleague, the deaconess may serve in parish, hospital/hospice chaplaincies, educational, theological, liturgical/musical, philanthropic, social, pastoral, outreach witness and administrative ministries.

***C. Discerning from the monastic witness how the diaconate may be even more available in monasteries, as necessary per community.***

### **III. Practically Speaking, what would the liturgical parameters be?**

***As with all liturgical ministry, as agreed upon by the Holy Synod, the ultimate local authority is the presiding hierarch.***

With the above in mind, we offer these suggestions for consideration:

- A. Deaconesses may be called to assist liturgically in every way an appropriately prepared layperson may serve.** This includes preaching, liturgical music, participation in processions, serving as and/or directing the acolytes, offering readings, including the epistle, offering sub-diaconal assistance to the presider.<sup>13</sup>
- B. The female deacon is entrusted with the mysteries.** Just as the deaconess is entrusted with the communion cup by the ordaining hierarch during her ordination, so also the bishop has the prerogative to set the parameters how she is to serve in this manner. At the very least, we recommend that she may be entrusted with bringing holy communion to persons unable to attend the divine liturgy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> NB: In the GOA and other jurisdictions, the sub-deacon does not lead the congregation in the petitions. We have this in mind while submitting this document.

<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, should the need arise in very large parishes where more clergy are needed during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, we suggest the female deacon may assist with offering communion to families, especially women and children. We offer this suggestion bearing in mind the liturgical evidence that in certain places in the ancient Christian East, deaconesses offered when necessary, communion to women and children. We also know that St. Melania the Younger communed her uncle, the presbyter Gerontius, whom she also brought to Christ. The groundbreaking scholarship of Professor Theodorou and others highlight that deaconesses in some parts of the ancient Church helped the bishop/presbyter with the preparation of the gifts, e.g., pouring the *zeon* (the liturgical exchange between the presiding celebrant and the deacon, where hot water is blessed and added to the communion chalice) and other similar activities. This is still part of the Armenian liturgical tradition, which does not differentiate between male and female deacons in their ordination or liturgical service, e.g. Armenian female deacons may read the gospel during the divine liturgy. Professor Theodorou, unyieldingly stresses that this custom points more correctly to ancient practice, as the deacon and deaconess in the ancient Church were seen as “*paraplesios*” standing side-by-side. He notes ancient evidence indicating that the deaconess stood beside the deacon, “side-by-side” during worship. See: <http://www.saintcatherinesvision.org/assets/files/Ordination%20or%20Appointmentof%20Deaconesses%20by%20Professor%20Theodorou%20Volume%202.pdf>. With the above in mind, we humbly suggest that wherever the needs and the local culture allow, it is within the charism of the diaconate for the female deacon to be available to offer

**C. Deacons are ordained to “sacred” or “priestly” servant-ministry (*iera diakonia*). Liturgically speaking, it is central to remember that deacons, male and female, do not preside in the eucharistic assembly as do presbyters and bishops.<sup>15</sup>**

#### **IV. What would their formation and training be?**

***In the beginning, especially—female deacons would need to be “over-qualified” both in spiritual preparedness and in theological formation.***

The very core of this preparation assumes “priestly” formation and verified pastoral identity under the direction of the spiritual father. Firstly, deaconesses would be accountable to their hierarch. Secondly, they are also accountable to their ordained and lay pastoral partners in ministry—one who can also love her neighbor as herself.

**A. Initial Standards for Theological and Spiritual Formation:** As God blesses, we envision the most desirable candidates for ordination to be experienced, senior female monastics. These nuns would be theologically, pastorally and personally predisposed for this ministry. Nevertheless, there may also be additional spiritually mature lay candidates who are “exceptions who prove the rule”. This may include experienced women who have attended Orthodox theological seminaries receiving the M.Div. degree or its equivalent. Additional studies and/or certifications may also be required depending upon the specialized form of ministry to be conducted. Furthermore, by God’s grace, there may be other candidates called to this holy ministry whose life experience, theological and spiritual formation originate outside the above more easily recognized pathways of formation. Mysteriously, here too, divine grace enabled them to receive the requisite formation. In all of the above cases, the great Tradition of the Church bears a strong testimony regarding the discerning process for appropriate persons

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communion in the parish setting. We are reminded of a contemporary custom from the holy mountain of Mount Athos, to refer to the Holy Theotokos as the “chalice” from which Christ is offered to every person through the Eucharist. As the Mother of God is our mother as well, female deacons, in particular, would humbly rest on her mantle during these sacred moments.

<sup>15</sup> It is well known today that during the early middle ages, the servant-ministry of deacons became very influential in the life of the Church. This grew to the point of threatening the ministry of presbyters. Through canonical legislation and other means, the liturgical and philanthropic activities of deacons were curtailed. It would benefit the Church today to study these changes in the light of the needs of the Church today. Some ministries may need to be returned to the diaconate, other additional practices may need to be adapted for contemporary use, and some may need to remain peacefully dormant. See: *Remembering and Reclaiming Diakonia: The Diaconate, Yesterday and Today*, by John Chryssavgis, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2009.

called to serve through this holy ministry: as “*much testing*” will be required.<sup>16</sup>

**B. Spiritual Verification.** The *symmartyria* of the candidate’s Father-Confessor (i.e., the affidavit of the spiritual father attesting the candidate’s readiness for ordination)<sup>17</sup> will testify that the candidate is a person of the Church, having amply demonstrated “the mind of the Church”, i.e., an ecclesial “*syneidesis*”.<sup>18</sup> This indicates “*phronema*” (the deep mind or worldview which leads to sanctification)<sup>19</sup> witnessing that the candidate has been growing spiritually for many years through the liturgical and spiritual life of the Church. The candidate must have been a regular and active participant within the life of a canonical Orthodox Christian community (monastery, seminary and/or parish community) for at least ten years. This participation would reflect a full liturgical life (i.e. not merely Sundays and Feast Days), a life that also deeply engages the rich “mundane” aspects of Orthodox Christian spiritual, liturgical and philanthropic life expressed within the home, through the life of the worshipping community and with one’s neighbors in society. In addition to their Spiritual Father, the ordaining bishop must know the candidate personally and very well, also being able to testify to the above.

**C. Future Discernment.** Through the progression of time, as is true for the presbyterate and male deacons, different paths of preparation will reveal themselves for the ordination of female deacons.<sup>20</sup> At the heart of the candidate’s formation is the *urgency* that all ordained ministers function within the parameters of their limitations. For example, ordination never instantly and magically turns a person into a spiritual father/spiritual mother, canonist or dogmatic theologian. For spiritual (as well as legal) reasons, all ordained servants must be hierarchically sanctioned, functioning within the tested limitations of their personal formation and training.

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<sup>16</sup> See a discussion on the witness of the Holy Canons and Byzantine legislation regarding the significance of this discipline. *Women Deacons*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> The *Symmartyria* is the spiritual father’s letter of canonical confirmation verifying the “worthiness” of his spiritual child for ordination. The affidavit requires a “thorough inquiry and careful examination” of the person being considered for ordination to Holy Orders.

<sup>18</sup> While the word *syneidesis* refers to “conscience”, it assumes more than contemporary notions related to personal conscience. From an Orthodox Christian perspective, this term refers to the *conscience of the Church* and is a fruit of the Holy Spirit growing in the life of the person, which binds him or her more deeply to the inner life and deeper conscience of the whole Church, both Church militant (living) and Church triumphant (departed).

<sup>19</sup> Often referred to as the Orthodox Christian world-view, *phronema* refers to a growing spiritually founded embodied, experiential-knowledge or wisdom within the life of the person that ultimately leads to Christ, Himself (i.e. theosis).

<sup>20</sup> At some future point, as with male candidates for the diaconate, female candidates may also be considered for inclusion in regional diaconal formation programs.

**V. What would be the essential personal qualities of the first deaconesses serving the Orthodox community?**

*Candidates are to be “tested”, spiritually mature, living a sober and chaste life.*

Throughout the course of their lives, candidates are committed to living a pure and chaste life. We anticipate that most candidates for ordination will be experienced, “well tested” senior nuns. The monastic candidate must be living a spiritually, psychologically and sexually chaste life. If she is not living in an established monastic community, it is the responsibility of the candidate to satisfactorily demonstrate from where she experiences supportive community and spiritual direction.

If circumstances present themselves where married women are considered for ordination, these candidates must be living in a strong, spiritually and psychologically healthy marriage and in monogamous chastity. The candidate is obliged to satisfactorily demonstrate from where she experiences supportive community and spiritual direction. She must have fulfilled family responsibilities of raising younger children and attending to other dependent family members. She must be able otherwise, as well, to be generally available for this ministry. The spouse of a candidate for deaconess, must be Orthodox and in good canonical standing with the Church. Spouses must submit a letter supporting the candidate’s application. The Church reserves the right to also investigate *to the same degree* the spouses of candidates. They also will be obliged to sign the appropriate release documentation to expedite this process.

While the canons state the minimum age for ordination of the female deacon is forty, at this initial juncture of rejuvenating this order of ministry in the United States, we recommend that female monastic candidates be at least 40 years of age and married candidates to be at least 50.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For younger candidates who may be pursuing a call to ordained ministry, as the local hierarch discerns, we propose a formal *cheirothesia* appointment, where their spiritual formation and chaplaincy ministries would be further developed. These women would necessarily have committed to life-long vocational service. Not unrelated to the sub-diaconate, their efforts would be considered a lay-extension of the diaconal ministry. Furthermore, as the sub-diaconate is seen in some parts of the Church as the “culmination of the gifts of the laity”, could not male sub-deacons and/or officially blessed chaplains, likewise, benefit from being considered a lay extension of the diaconal ministry, especially if they too, are committed to life-long vocational service?

**VI. What essential practical, spiritual discipline will be guiding the ministry of the deaconess?**

*All members of the ordained clergy are strictly bound to a discipline of humility, obedience and transparency.*

Once accepted as a candidate for ordained ministry, the postulant for diaconal orders will sign a letter affirming that she will observe faithfully the teachings and canons of the Holy Orthodox Church. She will be humbly obedient to her bishop's guidance that will direct her liturgical, spiritual and pastoral responsibilities. As to avoid misunderstanding and facilitate awareness, the presiding bishop will convey the appropriate expectations throughout His Metropolis, and as is fitting for good communications, with the Archdiocese and Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding these parameters. Likewise, she will be accountable to the designated supervisor who will be acting on behalf of the presiding hierarch on a day-to-day basis.

Candidates must respond to the inquiries of the Church with complete transparency. They will sign an informed consent form, including one's personal social security number which the Chancellor's office will also authorize. They will submit to a criminal background investigation. Withholding information, falsehoods and other methods used intentionally to deceive the Church regarding the candidate's readiness for ministry, *before or after* ordination, will lead to disciplinary measures, which may include: immediate suspension, demotion, defrocking, ex-communication and/or reporting to civil authorities.

When visiting other Orthodox contexts where there are no ordained deaconesses, comportment must humbly *and cheerfully* be rendered adjusting to the parameters expected of the host context.

**VII. What are the requirements regarding mental and physical health?**

**A.** Psychological/psychiatric "*transparency*" (as described in section #VI above) is *required* of every applicant. Candidates are to complete a full psychiatric personal history, including hospitalizations and out-patient care. Through self-report, they must identify diagnoses and conditions presently in remission and those that are not. For all these conditions, especially for those not in remission, the candidates must explain fully how these will be managed, especially when

considering the new unexpected challenges ordained ministry naturally brings. They are expected to participate in appropriate therapies. Applicants will also agree to psychological testing and a series of psychological interviews to be determined by their metropolis. They will sign an informed consent form allowing the testing psychologist, on behalf of the metropolis, to investigate the psychiatric and psychological history of the applicant to the degree of satisfaction required by law and by the metropolis. Spouses of candidates may also be required to provide the same information in this regard.

- B.** Complete medical disclosure (i.e. “transparency”, as described in section #VI above) is also *required* of every applicant. They must report any and all previous medical conditions as well as submit to a full personal medical check-up. A physician’s certificate verifying the person is in good enough health for ministry is required.

### **VIII. Practically speaking, what will the screening process look like?**

*For the first eight to ten years in particular,  
hierarchs will determine amongst themselves these parameters.*

*We offer two models for consideration:*

- A.** *One approach presently being considered by the Holy Patriarchate of Alexandria is this:*

The presiding bishop discerns that a particular place (e.g., a parish community) requires the need for at least one ordained deaconess. The hierarch asks local parish leaders<sup>22</sup> to submit three names of women they deem most trust-worthy for this ministry from within their parish. They need to be sure to include the reasons why each possible candidate is being recommended and offer a report of their personal background. The nominated women will most likely not know that they are being considered. The bishop, himself, will decide in the end.

After personally assessing the candidate, the hierarch will then build on the strengths of the candidate immediately- so she has the ability to start serving

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<sup>22</sup> i.e., the pastor with a few senior members of the parish council.

promptly after ordination. He will also help her obtain the training she needs where she is deficient. Appropriate senior clergy will be assigned by the bishop to guide and support her development.

**B. *With Orthodox Christian “syneidisis” as the lens through which to interpret the following, screening procedures from The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) and The American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC)<sup>23</sup> may be adapted for Orthodox usage. In brief, this may take place in two stages:***

**Firstly, a potential candidate’s name is brought forth to the attention of the hierarchy either through:**

1. A local pastor and/or spiritual father, *or*
2. An inquiry or petition is made by the person herself, *or*
3. A presiding hierarch wishes to promote someone from within his metropolis.

**Secondly, the hierarch’s appointed Standing Committee of two-to-three experienced persons, will screen for:**

1. Maturity of *phronema*: spiritual and theological formation demonstrated through personal character
2. Pastoral competencies
3. “Specialization” abilities
4. Pastoral identity
5. Personal psychological integration (including mental health and interpersonal discipline (i.e. conduct self-awareness, while demonstrating a mature capacity to engage and collaborate with others **AND**
6. Present and on-going personal spiritual discipline.

After an evaluation of the applicant’s file and if there are no objections, as directed by the bishop, the applicant will be invited for a series of interviews which will engage the above concerns. Respecting the sacred importance of this task, we envision this may be a protracted process.

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<sup>23</sup> NB: As of July 1, 2019, the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) will be re-joining the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE).

## **IX. What about Remuneration?**

*On a case-by-case basis, this will be determined by the ordaining Metropolitan in conversation with the candidate and possibly with those who may be in direct reception of the potential ministry which may be offered.*

In principle, *all* persons called to ordained ministry must be able to live a financially independent life, as remuneration must not be the primary motivating factor for seeking to offer life-long, vocational service within the life of the Church. Regarding this specific ministry, however, the services of these highly qualified and dedicated persons, must be considered for remuneration on a parity with all other ordained clergy. Even when the assignment is not a full-time or half-time paid position, an appropriate honorarium, travel allowance and other considerations must be offered to the deacon as an expression of respect for the ministry provided. Whenever positions are salaried, the candidate will sign a letter promising to become a part of the Clergy Pension Program of the Archdiocese and will remain a participant while under contract.

## **X. What are the Guidelines for Comportment and Dress?**

*As is true with every expression of ministry, but perhaps even more so for the diaconate, the perceptive deacon appreciates how dress and demeanor are two very important elements when discerning how to engage various pastoral contexts, challenges and opportunities.*

- A. *Some of these ordained ministers will have secular positions*** and, like male clergy living and working in the world, they will also continue to dress in accordance with the standards of appropriateness and modesty while working in the “secular” world.
- B. *During liturgical services. Generally speaking, female deacons will be dressed as deacons with no difference to male deacons.*** For pastoral reasons, there may be certain modifications necessary to this general directive. Final determination will be made by the local hierarch, in collaboration with the regional Holy Synod.
- C. *While conducting official ministry on Orthodox grounds or in public. The specific options will depend on the ecclesial, pastoral and/or social context***

*and the directive of the bishop.* Final determination will be made by the local hierarchy, in collaboration with the regional Holy Synod.

**D. *Decorum and Ministry.*** While female deacons would need to be able to minister autonomously while in obedience to their bishops, they are nevertheless deeply mindful they are called to be accountable to serve the unity of the Church. As directed by their bishop, deaconesses, like all clergy, will publicly and semi-publicly engage controversial issues respecting the directives established by their holy synods. This may include carefully managing questions related to the ordination of women to the presbyterate/episcopacy. We recommend this approach because we strongly believe that it is important for the first several years to give the diaconate ample time to develop organically and with less distraction in the life of the Church.

**E. *How will ordained female deacons be addressed?*** *Formally:* “Reverend” or “Reverend Sister”, *Informally:* “Sister.” If, at some point, the local hierarchy discerns to raise the honor of a faithful, experienced deaconess to serve as “Archdeaconess” (or some other similar title of distinction) we recommend that she be recognized as a “Gerontissa” and be referred to as “Reverend Mother” formally, and “Mother” informally.

## **XI. Are we setting a somewhat “higher standard” for female deacons?**

***“Yes, especially as we begin this ministry in our contemporary context.”***

Deacons, male and female, will have more constant, direct access to the issues of the people and of society. They are to be trusted with the entire Tradition of the Church on a living, day-to-day basis. They are called to be deeply grounded in this knowledge not only intellectually, but in an embodied manner, as people of the Church, while collaborating closely and obediently with their bishops and other clergy.

The Church enjoys the prerogative to establish the parameters of her ministries as She sees fit. Women received into the diaconate would need to be deeply embedded in the Church’s living Tradition (*phronema*) through their spiritual and theological formation, manifested through personal integrity of character and relationships, while always seeking Christ. On deeper contemplation, this deliberate methodology of search, formation and selection may not be unlike some of the essential elements for discerning a candidate for the holy office of abbot/abbess. Because of the

diaconate's ancient and deep foundation in both the public and private spheres in the life of the Church, it is not unwise to reflect on the lessons learned through Orthodox monasticism regarding the spiritual formation of abbots/abbesses here. There would be much to be gained from this exercise.

*Established in the "Compassion of God" (Theion Eleos),  
from the God Who loves us first,  
may this Apostolic ministry become a witness  
in those many places that thirst for the outreach of Christ,  
the One Who serves  
(Luke 22:27).<sup>24</sup>*

***Together, the authors of this Proposal invite everyone to join us in prayer that  
God may continue to reveal His holy will on this important issue  
not only for the Church in the United States,  
but throughout the world, as well.***

Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Boston  
Brookline, Massachusetts

*Submitted, March 25, 2019  
Feast of the Annunciation of the Holy Theotokos*

*Since 2007, Saint Catherine's Vision is blessed  
as an officially endorsed Orthodox Christian organization by  
The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.*

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<sup>24</sup> Slightly adapted from: *A Call for the Rejuvenation of the Ministry of the Ordained Deaconess*, "Summary Paragraph," p. 5.

## APPENDIX I:

### The Byzantine Ordination Rite of the Deaconess

Because of the significance of the service of ordination of the deaconess, we present a translation of the Greek text included in Professor Theodorou's research. This service dates from the eighth to tenth centuries and is found in the Barberini codex and the Bessarianos codex. The following rite is from Codices B and K of Goar's *Euchologion*.<sup>25</sup>

*After the holy oblation is made, before the opening of the royal gates and before the deacon says "Having commemorated all the saints . . ." she who is to be ordained is brought before the hierarch, and he recites:*

Divine grace (which always heals that which is infirm and completes that which is lacking, ordains N., beloved of God, as deacon. Let us pray for her, that the grace of the Holy Spirit may come upon her).<sup>26</sup>

*Meanwhile, she bows her head and the bishop places his hand on her head. He makes the sign of the cross three times and prays the following:*

O God, the Holy and Almighty, who sanctified woman through the birth in the flesh of your only-begotten son and our God from the Virgin; and bestowed the grace and advent of your Holy Spirit not to men alone, but also to women; look now, Lord, upon this your servant and call her to the work of your diaconate, send down upon her the abundant gift of your Holy Spirit. Preserve her in your Orthodox faith, in blameless conduct, always fulfilling her ministry according to your pleasure; because to You (is due all honor, glory and worship, to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit . . .)

*After the "Amen" one of the deacons prays the following:*

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

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<sup>25</sup> Theodorou, *The Ordination*, pp. 55-6. See also: Jacobi Goar, *Euchologion sive rituale Graecorum, complectens ritus et ordines*, editio secunda (Venetiis, 1730), 218ff; FitzGerald, pp. 202-04, Limouris, pp.229-230.

<sup>26</sup> Following an ancient practice, it is also believed that the people responded three times with "Lord have mercy" immediately after this bidding.

For the peace from above and for the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord.

For the peace of the whole world, let us pray to the Lord.

For our archbishop N. and for his priesthood, assistance, maintenance, peace, health, salvation and the work of his hands, let us pray to the Lord.

For she who is now being ordained deaconess and for her salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

That God, who loves humankind, will bestow upon her the grace for a spotless and irreproachable diaconate, let us pray to the Lord.

For our pious and God-favored emperor, (let us pray to the Lord).

For our deliverance (from all tribulation wrath, danger and necessity, let us pray to the Lord).

Help us, save us, (have mercy upon us and keep us, O God, by Your grace).

*And while this prayer is being said by the deacon the bishop, still keeping his hand in the same position upon the head of the woman being ordained, prays as follows:*

Sovereign Lord, You who do not reject women offering themselves and desiring to minister in your holy houses, in accordance with what is fitting, but rather receive them into an order of ministers; bestow the grace of your Holy Spirit also upon this your servant who desires to offer herself to You, and fill her with the grace of the diaconate, just as You gave the grace of your diaconate to Phoebe, whom You called to the work of ministry. O God, grant that she may persevere blamelessly in your holy temples, to cultivate appropriate conduct, especially, prudence (*sophrosyne*); and make your servant perfect so that she, standing at the judgment seat of your Christ, may receive the worthy reward of her good conduct. Through the mercy and love for humanity of your

only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed (together with your All-holy, Good and Life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.).

*After the “Amen,” he places the diaconal orarion around her neck under the maphorion, bringing the two ends forward. The deacon then stands on the ambon and says:*

Having commemorated all the saints, etc. . . .

*After she has communed of the Holy Body and Holy Blood, the archbishop gives her the holy chalice, which she accepts and replaces on the holy altar.*

**«Εὐχή ἐπί χειροτονία διακονίσης»**  
**(Κώδικες Β και Κ – Ευχολόγιον Goar)**

«Μετά τό γενέσθαι τήν ἁγίαν ἀναφοράν καί ἀνοιγῆναι τάς θύρας· πρίν ἤ εἰπεῖν τόν διάκονον· Πάντων τῶν ἁγίων, προσφέρεται ἡ μέλλουσα χειροτονεῖσθαι τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ καί ἐκφωνῶν τό, Ἡ θεία Χάρις, κλινούσης αὐτῆς τήν κεφαλῆν, ἐπιτίθησι τήν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἐπί τήν κεφαλῆν αὐτῆς, καί ποιῶν σταυρούς τρεῖς ἐπεύχεται ταῦτα.

Ὁ Θεός ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ Παντοδύναμος, ὁ διά τῆς ἐκ Παρθένου κατά σάρκα γεννήσεως τοῦ μονογενοῦς Σου υἱοῦ καί Θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἀγιάσας τό θῆλυ· καί οὐκ ἀνδράσι μόνον ἀλλά καί ταῖς γυναιξί δωρησάμενος τήν χάριν καί τήν ἐπιφοίτησιν τοῦ ἁγίου Σου Πνεύματος· Αὐτός καί νῦν, Δέσποτα, ἔπιδε ἐπί τήν δούλην Σου ταύτην· καί προσκάλεσον αὐτήν εἰς τό ἔργον τῆς διακονίας Σου, καίκατάπεμψον αὐτῇ τήν πλουσίαν δωρεάν τοῦ ἁγίου Σου Πνεύματος· διαφύλαξον αὐτήν ἐν τῇ ὀρθοδόξῳ Σου πίστει, ἐν ἀμέμπτῳ πολιτείᾳ κατά τό Σοί εὐάρεστον τήν ἑαυτῆς λειτουργίαν διά παντός ἐκπληροῦσαν. Ὅτι πρέπει Σοι .... ἀμήν.

Καί μετά τό ἀμήν ποιεῖ εἰς τῶν διακόνων εὐχὴν οὕτως·

Ἐν εἰρήνῃ τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.

Ἐπὲρ τῆς ἄνωθεν εἰρήνης, καί εὐσταθείας τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου· τοῦ κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.

Ἐπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου· τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.

Ἐπὲρ τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου ἡμῶν (τοῦ δεῖνος), ἱερωσύνης, ἀντιλήψεως, διαμονῆς, εἰρήνης, ὑγιείας, σωτηρίας αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἔργου τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ· τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.

Ἐπὲρ τῆς νῦν προχειριζομένης διακονίσης (τῆσδε) καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας αὐτῆς· τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.

Ὅπως ὁ φιλόανθρωπος Θεός ἄσπιλον καὶ ἀμώμητον αὐτῇ τὴν διακονίαν χαρίσῃται· τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν.

Ἐπὲρ τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου καὶ θεοφιλεστάτου βασιλέως ἡμῶν.

Ἐπὲρ τοῦ ῥυσθῆναι ἡμᾶς.

Ἀντιλαβοῦ σῶσον.

Καὶ ἐν τῷ γενέσθαι ταύτην τὴν εὐχὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ διακόνου, ἔχων ὁμοίως τὴν χεῖρα ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς χειροτονουμένης ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ἐπεύχεται οὕτως.

Δέσποτα Κύριε, ὁ μηδέ γυναῖκας ἀναθεμένας ἑαυτάς καὶ βουληθείσας καθ' ὃ προσῆκε λειτουργεῖν τοῖς ἁγίοις οἴκοις Σου ἀποβαλλόμενος, ἀλλὰ ταύτας ἐν τάξει λειτουργῶν προσδεξάμενος· δώρησαι τὴν χάριν τοῦ Ἁγίου Σου Πνεύματος καὶ τῇ δούλῃ Σου ταύτῃ, βουληθείσῃ ἀναθεῖναι Σοι ἑαυτήν, καὶ τὴν διακονίαν ἀποπληρῶσαι χάριν, ὡς ἔδωκας χάριν τῆς διακονίας Σου Φοίβῃ, ἣν ἐκάλεσας εἰς ἔργον τῆς λειτουργίας· παράχου δέ αὐτῇ ὁ Θεός, ἀκατακρίτως προσκαρτερεῖν τοῖς ἁγίοις ναοῖς Σου, ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τῆς οἰκείας πολιτείας, σωφροσύνης δέ μάλιστα, καὶ τελείαν ἀπόδειξον δούλην Σου· ἵνα καὶ αὐτῇ, παραστῶσα τῷ βήματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἄξιον τῆς ἀγαθῆς πολιτείας ἀπολήψῃται τὸν μισθόν. Ἐλέει καὶ φιλοανθρωπία τοῦ μονογενοῦς Σου Υἱοῦ, μεθ' οὗ εὐλογητός εἶ· καὶ τὰ ἕξῃς.

Καὶ μετὰ τὸ ἀμὴν, περιτίθησι τῷ τραχήλῳ αὐτῆς ὑποκάτωθεν τοῦ μαφωρίου τὸ διακονικὸν ὠράριον, φέρων ἔμπροσθεν τὰς δύο ἀρχάς· καὶ τότε ὁ ἐν τῷ ἄμβωνι διάκονος λέγει· Πάντων τῶν ἁγίων μνημονεύσαντες καὶ τὰ λοιπά.

Μετὰ (δέ) τὸ μεταλαβεῖν αὐτὴν τοῦ ἁγίου σώματος καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου αἵματος, ἐπιδίδων αὐτῇ ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος τὸ ἅγιον ποτήριον· ὅπερ δεχομένη ἀποτίθεται τῇ ἁγίᾳ τραπέζῃ».

APPENDIX II:<sup>27</sup>

ΑΝΟΙΚΤΗ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ  
Τοῦ  
ΣΕΒ. ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΥ ΒΟΡΕΙΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΝΟΤΙΟΥ ΑΜΕΡΙΚΗΣ  
ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΚΥΡΙΟΥ ΜΙΧΑΗΛ  
Πρὸς  
ΤΑΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΟΑΜΕΡΙΚΑΝΙΔΑΣ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΕΟΥΣ  
Ν Ε Α Ν Ι Δ Α Σ

✠---✠

AN OPEN LETTER  
of  
H I S E M I N E N C E M I C H A E L  
Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in  
North and South America  
to  
Y O U N G W O M E N  
of the Greek Orthodox Faith

January 1953

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<sup>27</sup> We wish to thank Presvytera Emily Harakas for providing original copies of these documents. Pres. Harakas was one of the twelve young women who responded in the affirmative to Archbishop Michael's *Open Letter*. See: FitzGerald, *Women Deacons*, pp. 153-158, 175 n. 13.

Τέκνα μου ἐν Κυρίῳ ἀγαπητά, εὐσερεῖς Ἑλληνοαμερικανοὶ Ὀρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί. Χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη παρὰ Θεοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι,

Ἀφ' οὗτου ἰδρῦθη ἡ Ἐκκλησία κάμνει ἔργον ἱεραποστολικόν. Τὰ λόγια τοῦ Σωτῆρος μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πορευθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη καὶ πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον... ἀπηυθύνοντο πρὸς ὅλους ὅσοι συνεχίζομεν τὸ ἔργον τῶν Ἀποστόλων. Ὁ ἱεραποστολικὸς δὲ χαρακτήρ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι καὶ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἐντονώτερος καὶ ἐμφανεστερος εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν μεγάλην χώραν εἰς τὴν ὁποίαν ζῶμεν. Καὶ διότι ἐκτός τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας ὑπάρχουν καὶ πλεῖστοι ἄλλοι· καὶ διότι τὰ τέκνα τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, εἶναι διασκορπισμένα ἀνά τὴν ἀχανῆ αὐτὴν χώραν· καί, ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον, εἶναι μεμονωμένα μέσα εἰς τὰς μυριάδας τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ μακρὰν, ἄλλοτε πᾶρα πολὺ καὶ ἄλλοτε ὀλίγον, πάντοτε ὅμως μακρὰν, ἀπὸ τὸ θρησκευτικὸν τοὺς κέντρον, τὸν κοινοτικὸν Ναόν.

Διὰ νὰ ἐδρίσκηται ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ὀρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία εἰς παντοεινὴν καὶ πλήρη ἐπαφήν μετὰ τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς τέκνα ἔχει ἀνάγκην βοηθῶν πολλῶν. Ἐχει βεβαίως τοὺς ἱερεῖς τῆς. Ὑπάρχει, ὅμως, τόση ἐργασία εἰς κάθε κοινότητα, ὥστε νὰ ἀδυνατῆ νὰ ἐπαρκέσῃ μόνος τοῦ ἱερέως. Ἄν θέλῃ μάλιστα, ὅπως ἄλλωστε καὶ πρέπει, νὰ γνωρίζῃ κατ' ὄνομα τὰ πνευματικὰ τοῦ τέκνα, καὶ τοῦ καθενὸς τὰ προβλήματα καὶ τὰς πνευματικὰς καὶ ἠθικὰς ἀνάγκας, εἶναι καθ' ὀλοκλήριαν ἀδύνατον νὰ ἐπαρκέσῃ μόνος· ὁσονδήποτε καὶ ἂν θελήσῃ νὰ ἐντείνῃ τὰς σαματικὰς καὶ τὰς ψυχικὰς δυνάμεις τοῦ.

Αἱ μεγάλοι, αἱ τεράστιαι αὐταὶ ἀνάγκαι τῆς ἐν Ἀμερικῇ Ἑλληνικῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, μᾶς ἔκαμαν νὰ σκεφθῶμεν ὅτι θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ζητήσωμεν καὶ τὴν βοήθειαν τῶν πνευματικῶν μας θυγατέρων, τῶν Ἑλληνίδων τῆς Ἀμερικῆς. Ἐσκέφθημεν ὅτι θὰ ἔπρεπε χάριτι τοῦ μέλλοντος καὶ τοῦ καλοῦ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῆς Ὀμογενείας νὰ ἰδρύσωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς τὰ γμα δ ι α κ ο ν ι σ σ ῶ ν. Χάριτι Θεοῦ χάριτος κατὰ ἄλληλος καὶ ἀφθονος ὑπάρχει. Εἶναι ἡ Ἀκαδημία τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου. Κτιριακαὶ ἐγκαταστάσεις διὰ τὸν σκοπὸν αὐτὸν ἐπίσης ὑπάρχουν. Μὲ ὀλίγας ἐπιδιορθώσεις, πού θὰ ἀπαιτήσουν ὄχι μεγάλας δαπάνας θὰ ἐγκατασταθοῦν ἐκεῖ ἕως 25 πρόσωπα τοὐλάχιστον ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος.

Χρειαζόμεθα ὅμως ὄλικόν ἀνθρώπινον. Αὐτὸ δὲ εἶναι καὶ τὸ σπουδαιότερον. Ἄν δὲ δὲν ἔχομεν ἐπιτυχίαν εἰς αὐτὸ ἢ προσπάθεια ἐν τῇ γενέσει τῆς θά ναυαγήσῃ. Πιστεύομεν ὅμως εἰς τὴν ἱερότητα τοῦ σκοποῦ τούτου· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πιστεύομεν, ἐπίσης, ὅτι ὁ μεταξὺ μας διαμένων Σωτῆρ μας Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, θὰ φωτίσῃ ὀφισμένας Ἑλληνοαμερικανίδας Ὀρθοδόξους νὰ ἀκολουθήσουν συστηματικώτερα τὸν δρόμον τοῦ, νὰ ἀρνηθοῦν τὸν κόσμον διὰ νὰ βοηθήσουν τὸν κόσμον, πού ἔχει πρό πάντων σήμερον τὴν μεγαλειτέραν ἀνάγκην βοήθειας. Ἡ πραγματικὴ ζωὴ δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἀπόλαυσις, ἀλλ' ἡ θυσία. Ἀπόδειξις τούτου τρανωτάτη εἶναι ὅτι ἡ ἱστορία ἔδωσε τὸ μεγαλιτέρον καὶ σημαντικώτερον τόπον εἰς τὰς σελίδας τῆς, εἰς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους πού προσέφεραν τὰς περισσοτέρας θυσίας εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον. Δεσπόζει δὲ καὶ κυριαρχεῖ εἰς ὀλοκλήρον τὴν ἱστορίαν Ἐκεῖνος πού ὑπῆρξεν Ὀλοκλήρος θυσία, παρ' ὅλον τὸ θεῖκόν τοῦ μεγαλιτεῖον, ὁ Θεᾶνθρωπος Σωτῆρ μας, ὁ Χριστός.

Συνεχίζει ὁ Χριστός τὸ ἔργον Του. Συνεχίζει τὴν θυσίαν Του. Καὶ θὰ τὴν συνεχίσῃ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων ἐφόσον ἔστω καὶ εἰς ἄνθρωπος θὰ μένη ἀλύτρωτος ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. Ζητεῖ δὲ τὴν συνεργασίαν μας. Ζητεῖ τὴν συνεργασίαν ἀνδρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν. Ζητεῖ καὶ σήμερον τὴν συνεργασίαν ὄχι μόνον ἱεραποστολικῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἱεραποστολικῶν γυναικῶν. Αἱ ἑτερόδοξοι Ἐκκλησίαι πρό πολλοῦ ἔχουν τὰ γυναικεῖα τάγματά των. Ὅπως ὅλοι ὁμολογοῦν αὐτὰ αποτελοῦν τὴν ἀφανῆ τους δυνάμειν. Εἶναι καιρὸς νὰ ἀποκτήσωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς τὰ ἰδικὰ μας.

Προσκαλοῦμεν, ὅθεν, τὰς Ἑλληνοαμερικανίδας Ὀρθοδόξους, πού θὰ ἤθελον νὰ ἀπιερῶσσαν ἑαυτάς εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ τὴν σωτηρίαν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ μᾶς γράψουν.

Μὲ τὴν βοήθειαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀποκλειστικῶς καὶ μόνον διὰ τὸ μέλλον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὸ καλὸν τῆς Ὀμογενείας μας, ἀνοίγομεν τὸ νέον αὐτὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ Ἀμερικῆς.

Μετὰ βαθείας πατρικῆς ἀγάπης καὶ διαπύρων εὐχῶν

Ἰ. Ἀμερικῆς Μαχαίλ

To my beloved spiritual children,  
the devout Greek-American Orthodox Christians.

May the Grace and Peace of the Father  
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit  
be upon you!

From the very days when the Church was founded, it has pursued a missionary task. And our Savior Jesus Christ addressed these words to all of those who have continued the sacred work of the Apostles:

"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." and "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

The missionary character of our Church should be even stronger and more obvious in this great land in which we live, because here besides the Orthodox Church there are many others; because the members of the Greek Orthodox Church are widely scattered throughout this vast country; because in most instances our brethren are rather isolated in the sea of America's millions, frequently living far from their religious centers, their local churches.

In order, therefore, that the Greek Orthodox Church be always in complete communion with its members it needs substantial assistance. While it has, of course, its priests, there is so much to be done in each community that the endeavors of these priests alone do not suffice. For should the priest wish to know, as he must, his spiritual children by name, their problems and their spiritual and moral needs, this would certainly be beyond his physical and spiritual resources.

These tremendous needs of our Greek Orthodox Church in America have urged us to make a fervent appeal such as this to our daughters-in Christ, the young women of Greek descent in America. With the future welfare of our Church and its membership at heart, we are considering the establishment in this country of an order of deaconesses. By the grace of God, there are available adequate and plentiful facilities for such a project on the grounds of St. Basil's Academy at Garrison, N.Y. When certain minor inexpensive alterations have been made at Garrison, we would for the present be able to accommodate there up to 25 young ladies.

However, what we do need urgently are human resources, people to dedicate themselves fully and earnestly to the sacred mission. If in this all-important human aspect we fail, our project will founder in its very infancy. Yet we believe firmly in the holiness of the cause at hand, and for this reason we also believe that Christ the Savior Who remains in our very midst will inspire a number of our young women to dedicate themselves more formally to His way, that they would thus wish to renounce the world so as to help the world which today more than ever needs to be helped.

The real life, the life in Christ, is not the life of pleasure but the life of sacrifice. Formidable proof of this is that history's brightest, most splendid pages are those which tell of people who sacrificed their all for the world. And He Who reigns majestically through every page in history, He Who Himself is the epitome of sacrifice, is the Savior Jesus Christ.

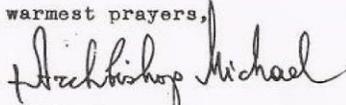
Christ continues His work. Christ continues His sacrifice, as He will in the ages to come, so long as there remains even one soul to be saved from sin. He seeks our help. He seeks the cooperation not only of men as missionaries, but of women also.

Other religious denominations in this country have many religious orders for women, which are admittedly an invaluable treasure of strength.

It is high time, indeed, for our Church to act. We therefore earnestly appeal to our young women of the Greek Orthodox faith who would wish to dedicate their selves to Christ and to the salvation of mankind through Him. Please write to us if you are interested.

With the help of Christ and especially for the sake of the future of our wondrous Orthodox Church and of our incomparable Greek heritage, we open this new and vital chapter in the history of Hellenism in America.

With my deep and fatherly love and warmest prayers,



Michael,  
Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church  
in North and South America

GREEK ARCHDIOCESE OF N. & S. AMERICA  
Office of Public Relations  
10 E. 79th Street, N.Y. 21, N.Y.

### Appendix III

#### **1986 Third Pre-Conciliar Conference, Chambesy, Switzerland 1988 Symposium on Women in the Orthodox Church, Rhodes, Greece,**

The Inter-Orthodox Theological Consultation held in Rhodes, Greece from October 30 to November 7, 1988, convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. This symposium brought together official representatives from all the Orthodox Churches to study the topic: “*The Place of Woman in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women*”. This Consultation was organized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate under the leadership of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I, of blessed memory, in response to a request coming from the Third Pre-Conciliar Conference held October 28 to November 6, 1986 at Chambesy, Switzerland. The Conference proposed a study of “the issue of the ordination of women in order to promote the relevant Orthodox doctrine in all her dialogues with Christian Churches and confessions proceeding with the ordination of women”. The Autocephalous Churches were invited to send official delegates to this important Consultation. In addition to these, there were nearly fifty other theologians invited to participate in the Consultation. This historic conference is the most authoritative Orthodox gathering to date engaging this issue.

The ultimate purpose of the 1988 Consultation was to reflect upon a number of issues and to provide the Church with a statement which would reflect in a theological and pastoral manner the consensus of Orthodox theologians with regard to the place of women in the Church and questions associated with the ordination of women. The published report was meant to be a document which could serve the regional Orthodox Churches and their theologians. At the same time, the report could provide some guidance for those Orthodox who were involved in multilateral and bilateral dialogues with other Christians. Among its numerous conclusions, the 1988 Consultation also formally and unanimously advocated for the restoration of the order of the women deacons (deaconesses). The participants stressed unequivocally that women have not been ordained as presbyters or bishops in the Orthodox Church in the past; they did affirm, however, that women had been ordained to the diaconate. The official statement says:

*The apostolic order of the deaconess should be revived. It was never altogether abandoned in the Orthodox Church though it has tended to fall into disuse. There is ample evidence from apostolic times, from the patristic, canonical and liturgical tradition, well into the Byzantine period (and even in our own day) that this order was held in high honour. The deaconess was ordained within the sanctuary during the Divine Liturgy with two prayers, she received the Orarion (the deacon's stole) and received Holy Communion at the Altar . . . The revival of this ancient order should be envisaged on the basis of the ancient prototypes testified to in many sources (cf. the reference quoted in the works on the subject of modern Orthodox scholars) and*

*with the prayers found in the Apostolic Constitutions and the ancient Byzantine liturgical books.*

The Consultation continues to strengthen its recommendations by stating that the recovery of the order of women deacons:

*. . . would represent a positive response to many of the needs and demands of the contemporary world. This would be all the more true if the diaconate in general (male as well as female) were restored in all places in its original, manifold services (diakoniai) with extension into the social sphere, in the spirit of the ancient tradition and in response to the increasing specific needs of our time.*<sup>28</sup>

#### **ABSTRACT:**

##### ***Introductory Parameters for the Ministry of Ordained Deaconesses in the Orthodox Church***

*Saint Catherine's Vision (SCV) is pleased to announce the collaboratively written Proposal for Introductory Parameters for the Ministry of Ordained Deaconesses in the Orthodox Church in the USA. An initiative begun in 2006, by His Eminence, Metropolitan Methodios of Boston, this process was energized in recent years by the example set by the Holy Patriarchate of Alexandria, taking deliberate steps to establish the ministry of deaconesses for the Orthodox Church in Africa. Metropolitan Methodios invited a select group of Orthodox hierarchs and theologians from the USA and around the world, as well as Saint Catherine's Vision, to collaborate with him on this initiative.*

*This Proposal seeks to offer "first phase" considerations toward a more complete restoration of the ordained diaconate (both male and female) within the life of the Church. This is respectfully submitted so that Orthodox Christian faithful, but especially our beloved bishops, may more easily obtain essential information to help them in their efforts to discern (cf. Matthew 16:3) some of the initial theological, spiritual, pastoral and practical parameters that may be associated with the ordination of deaconesses. For a copy of the Proposal, please visit:*

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<sup>28</sup> See: Limouris, p. 10; See also: FitzGerald, "The Inter-Orthodox Theological Consultation . . . , pp. 33-34; and Idem., *Women Deacons*, pp. 160-167.