



Excerpts from
Insights into the Orthodox Faith
by Protopresbyter Lawrence R. Barriger
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“The office of deaconess, like that of the deacon, is certainly of Apostolic origin. The Greek noun *diakonos* from which our word “deacon” is taken, is a gender inclusive noun that includes men and women.”

“The origin of the deaconess, like the deacon, was undoubtedly connected with the idea of *service* in the everyday affairs of the Church. The word *diakonos* originally meant a servant who worked out of love and not out of compulsion. It is often rendered into English as ‘minister.’ Jesus Himself used the term to describe His work: ‘*I am among you as one that serves*’ (St. Luke 22:27), literally, ‘*I am among you as a deacon.*’

“We must remember that in antiquity, especially in those places influenced by Hellenistic culture, women of a respectable sort did not move freely about in society.” (This means that culture DID influence religion)

“We know from Gospel accounts that the Lord Himself and the disciples were ministered to by women...”

“It is perhaps tragic that such calls [to restore the office of deaconess] are often greeted with fear and misunderstanding. This is most likely because the office of deacon itself has come to be seen as a step to the priesthood and the deacon as some sort of inferior priest. Unfortunately, its original purpose as an office of ministry to others has been forgotten. Because of this, the mere mention of the word ‘deaconess’ often fills people with visions of women in Byzantine diaconal garb intoning the Great Litany, swinging censers and clamoring for ordination to the priesthood.”

“Often the greatest concern of those studying for the diaconate in the Church is the correct manner of serving liturgical services, rather than understanding the Gospel and sharing it with the members of the Church.”

“In the early Church, the liturgical ministry was the least important task of the deacon. The deacons were the servants of the bishop’s ministry as it pertained to society and those in need in the Church.

They were often referred to as the bishop's 'eyes and ears' because they were the ones who saw the needs to be filled and listen with compassion to those who were troubled. "

"It was the deacons of the Church who were especially charged with administering charity to the poor and comforting those under persecution or in any suffering. They did this through the distribution of money collected by the Church and of the Eucharist."

"During the times of persecution the authorities often targeted deacons since they knew them to be the ministers of the funds of the Church to those in need. St. Lawrence of Rome, martyred on August 10, 256 A.D., was brought before the magistrates and ordered to turn over the treasure of the Roman Church. He requested three days to gather it together. On the third day he brought with him a large crowd of poor people and informed the magistrate: 'Here is the treasure of the Roman Church.' ...Imagine how the magistrates would have reacted if St. Lawrence would have answered the question, 'Show us the treasure of the Roman Church,' by putting on a demonstration of the proper way to swing a censer, the correct intonation of petitions and gave an explanation of how the oration is to be arranged at different points of the Liturgy..."