

THE ORTHODOX FELLOWSHIP OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST

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To:

His Eminence Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain

The Rt Revd Bishop Andriy of Western Europe

The Rt Revd Bishop Basil of Amphipolis

His Eminence Metropolitan Gabriel of Western and Central Europe

The Rt Revd Bishop Elisey of Bogorodsk

The Rt Revd Dosithey of Great Britain and Scandinavia

His Eminence Metropolitan Iosif of Western and Southern Europe

His Eminence Metropolitan Simeon of Western Europe

At the end of its Annual Summer conference at Aylesford, Kent, on 28-30 July 2006, on the theme 'Women and Men in the Church', the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist resolved to write to the different Orthodox Bishops with pastoral responsibilities in the British Isles, urging them to work actively for the restoration of the diaconate for women within the Orthodox Church.

As is well known, the order of deaconesses that existed in the Church during early centuries was never formally abolished, but it fell gradually into disuse. Thirty years ago, in September 1976, the members of the inter-Orthodox Consultation on the Role and Participation of Women in the Orthodox Church, held at Agapia monastery in Romania, expressed the strong hope that the office of deaconess might be reactivated. Since then the same call for the restoration of the diaconate for women has been issued by many other Orthodox assemblies, most notably by the Theological Consultation held in Rhodes, Greece, in 1988, which was concerned by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and was attended by official representative from all the Orthodox Churches.

An appeal to revive the female diaconate was likewise made at the two international conferences entitled 'Discerning the signs of the times: women in the life of the Orthodox Church' held at Damascus in October 1996 and at Constantinople in May 1997.

We the members of the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist, which seeks to promote inter-Orthodox co-operation in the British Isles, wish also to add our voice to these many appeals for the renewal of the diaconate for women.

Women are already active within the Church in many forms of service, through teaching and witness, through pastoral guidance and social work. The reactivation of the female diaconate would significantly strengthen and enlarge this existing ministry. While the liturgical role of deaconesses needs to be further studied, their service is by no means narrowly limited to this sphere, but extends also to the 'liturgy after the liturgy', through service to all in need and through the proclamation of the faith.

Any restoration of the order of deaconesses requires to be discussed within more general context of the meaning of the diaconate, as a whole, whether for women or men, in the contemporary Church. While in the case of men the diaconate is often stepping-stone to the priesthood, it needs to be seen also, and more fundamentally, as a life-long vocation. In the case of women, the question of receiving the female diaconate is, of course, altogether distinct from the issue of the ordination of women priests.

On behalf of the members of the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist, respectfully yet urgently I ask you, my beloved Brothers in Christ, to consider seriously the re-establishment of the diaconate in its fullness, as an order for women as well as men, and to promote a discussion of this possibility both among yourselves and among the members of your flocks.

Asking for your prayers, and assuring you of my own,

**Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia**

Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain

Chairman, the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist