

### **Invisible Leaders in the Orthodox Church**

One of the better kept secrets in the Orthodox Church today is how many of our leaders are or have been female. They tend not to stand out, as we are trained to expect our leaders to wear cassocks, beards, and pectoral crosses or otherwise be male. But knowing about the specific roles women are playing in the Church today is important, all the more if you desire to fulfill your own calling. As the historian Eva C. Topping said in a 1998 interview in *St. Nina Quarterly*, “Women need to know their own history in the Church. ... We cannot make the contributions women are called to make, unless we are first informed of our history and enlivened by the true vision of Orthodoxy that all are equal in Christ.” She is right: we women must know our history, but I would add that we have an even greater need to understand our present reality.

Where are these women leaders? It’s not hard to find them. Below is a preliminary list of just some women in vital roles within the Church today. It was surprisingly easy to compile it (my own experience, a scroll through LinkedIn contacts, a question to Facebook friends, websites of Orthodox organizations). This list therefore reflects my own location within North America, with feet in academic, Greek, and OCA worlds. Given my informal gathering process, I have undoubtedly omitted many women who should be included, including entire categories such as priest’s wives and youth camp directors. Possessing little direct knowledge of their leadership and pursuits, I have also omitted important organizations such as Philoptochos and ladies’ guilds. Some information comes from websites that are not time-stamped and so may be out of date. In short, this list is just a beginning. I hope someday to create a more complete accounting.

Finally, I have organized the list in terms of activities and positions, rather than people or jurisdictions, and you’ll see that many women contribute in more than one area. But read through it and see if your perspective on the Church, and its men and women, changes a little—and for the better.

#### **1. Pastoral Care, Chaplaincy, and Spiritual Direction**

Pastoral care consists of emotional and spiritual support for people in their pain, grief, and anxiety, as well as their celebrations, joys and victories. St. John Chrysostom tells us that pastoral caregivers, especially, must possess clear and unshakable wisdom, patience, and prudence.

*Not surprisingly, the one example of a North American woman under consideration for canonization as a saint falls into this category. Venerated Matushka Olga Michael (1916-1979) was a Yup’ik priest’s wife who lived in the village of Kwethluk on the Kuskokwim River in Alaska, raised eight children, trained as a midwife, and kept busy doing things for other people, constantly sewing, knitting socks, or crafting traditional fur garments. Most friends and neighbors had something she had made for them. Parishes hundreds of miles away received unsolicited gifts, such as traditional mukluks, to sell in fundraising. Since her death, people have reported visions of her, a sense of her healing presence, and miracles. She holds a special place*

*in the lives of certain native people and a growing number of other Orthodox women. As she may herself have known from personal experience the trauma of abuse earlier in her life, she acts as a heavenly intercessor for those who have been abused, particularly sexually.*

## **Chaplains**

*Hospital chaplains possess a master's degree in divinity or a related field. They are generally required to obtain Clinical Pastoral Education training at an accredited institution and compete a rigorous two-year residency program under the supervision of a senior chaplain. It is not surprising to find a number of women serving in this category.*

- Tania Bouteneff (Hartford Hospital)
- Sarah Byrne-Martelli (Beacon Hospice)
- Atsede Elegba (Compassionate Care Hospice, Brooklyn NY; The Haven Visiting Nurse Service, Manhattan NY)
- Clio Pavlantos (Oncology Chaplain, New York NY)
- Miho Ochiai Ealy (Allina Health)
- Demetra Velisarios Jacquet (retired, Association of Pastoral Counselors)
- Beryl Knudsen (Danbury Hospital)

## **Pastoral Counseling**

*Pastoral counseling involves assistance in coping with life's struggles. It involves a religiously affiliated counselor who works with individuals, couples, and families. Pastoral counselors can be licensed in the field of counseling or therapy, and are sensitive to spiritual perspectives, believing that one's spiritual life can be invoked to help heal emotional damage, resolve conflict, pave the way for life transitions, and illuminate values.*

- Merri Wentworth (Antiochian House of Studies)

## **College ministry**

*Women serve in the Orthodox Christian Fellowship's mission to connect college students with worship and fellowship opportunities.*

- Ann Campbell (former Director, St. Nectarios House, Eugene OR)
- Jennifer Nahas (Executive Director, Orthodox Christian Fellowship)

## **Family ministry**

*Professionals in this field care for the well-being of marriages and families based on Orthodox teaching and resources.*

- Kerry Kaloudis Pappas (Coordinator for Seminarian and Clergy Couple Care, GOA)
- Pauline Pavlakos (President, National Sisterhood of Presvyteres)
- LeeAnn Vandervort (Executive Director, The Treehouse, Wichita KS)

## **Spiritual Direction**

*“The spiritual father or mother is a fellow-traveler, not a tour guide. The bond that forms can be very intense, the relationship very intimate. This is made possible, in part, by the spiritual mentor’s own purified condition and intense, intimate connection with the Holy Trinity. Though perhaps not yet fully glorified by God, ideally he or she possesses a purified heart in which the passions have been set aright and illumination has begun. With such a person we will be able to surrender safely and most easily to the process of spiritual direction,” as Dn John Chryssavgis writes. Although there are monastics and elders (such as Russian babushkas and Greek yiayiades who have gained their wisdom in the “school of life,” there are also teachers and monastics who are working to create training and standards for such callings.*

- Sister Rebecca Cown (New Skete)
- Demetra Velisarios Jaquet (retired, Pastoral Counseling for Denver)

## **2. Church Diplomats**

*A number of women fill this role today. To work in the intra-Orthodox and ecumenical spheres a person needs a solid church affiliation, a strong understanding of Orthodox theology and life, an openness to learning from others, skills in diplomacy, and (usually) a willingness to travel.*

- Kyriaki KaridoyanesFitzgerald (World Council of Churches)
- Tamara Grdzeldze (World Council of Churches, Georgian Ambassador to the Vatican)
- Anne Glynn Mackoul (World Council of Churches)
- Despina Prassas (World Council of Churches)
- Elizabeth H. Prodromou (Special Delegate, Ecumenical Patriarchate, Pan-Orthodox Council)
- Connie Tarasar (late, World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches)
- Valerie Zahirsky (National Council of Churches)

## **3. Administrative Heads and Advisors**

### **Abbesses**

*The work of nuns in general and abbesses in particular involves a great deal of physical, mental, and spiritual labor. Many abbesses in the US are the founders of their monasteries, and frequently serve the church as translators, iconographers, and so on. It is not uncommon for them to have physically worked alongside their nuns to build their monastery’s buildings, and they run the businesses that support themselves and their communities, often through farming. No one in a US monastery gets to be simply an executive; everybody has to pitch in and bake industry-sized batches of cheesecakes or shear sheep, gather eggs, or milk cows. In addition to that, abbesses shape the direction of the monastery, taking into account the kind of monastery they want to be and how to make that happen. In other words, the abbess in a small monastery is essentially the chief executive officer, development officer, and chief of operations combined, and also spiritual director. In addition to living lives of prayer and providing hospitality to guests—meals and clean rooms—acting as intercessors in prayer, and visiting the sick, nuns must support themselves, earning and raising money while making sure their bookkeeping is transparent and accountable.*

- Abbess Agapia (Holy Annunciation Monastery, Reddick FL)

- Mother Ambrozia (Protection of the Mother of God Monastery, Ellenville NY)
- Mother Anna (Monastery Marcha, Richfield OH)
- Mother Barbara (Our Lady of Kazan Skete, Santa Rosa CA)
- Mother Barbara (Nativity of Our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ Monastery, Kemp TX)
- Mother Cassiana (Protection of the Holy Virgin Monastery, Lake George CO)
- Sister Cecilia (Our Lady of the Sign Monastery, Nuns of New Skete, Cambridge NY)
- Mother Christophora (Monastery of the Transfiguration (Ellwood City PA)
- Mother Dorothea (St. Xenia Skete, Wildwood CA)
- Abbess Efpraxia (St. John the Forerunner Monastery, Goldendale WA)
- Abbess Elisabeth (St. Elizabeth the New Martyr Convent, Mohawk NY)
- Igumenija Evpraksija (Nativity of the Mother of God Monastery)
- Abbess Foteini (All Saints Monastery, Calverton NY)
- Mother Gabriella (Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery, Rives Junction MI)
- Abbess Irina (Holy Dormition Convent, Nanuet NY)
- Mother Justina (St. Thekla Convent, Glenville PA)
- Nun Katherine (St. Xenia Metochion, Indianapolis IN)
- Mother Michaila (St. Paisius Monastery, Safford AZ)
- Mother Nektaria (St. Paul Skete, Grand Junction TN)
- Mother Raphaela (Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery, Otego NY)
- Mother Sergia (Presentation of the Virgin Mary Monastery, Marshfield MO)
- Abbess Theadelphi (Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple Skete, Hayesville OH)
- Mother Thekla (Ss. Mary and Martha Monastery, Wagener SC)
- Nun Theodora (Convent of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Wayne WV)

## **Trustees and Directors**

*The governing boards of seminaries, like those of other educational institutions, have a general obligation to be caretakers of the organization and look after the interests of all its stakeholders. Still, the role is layered with complexity as they are shaping the minds of future generations. There is a host of competing pressures that seminaries face, including the economic factors that impact the institution, the financial hardship of seminarians, increasing the need for aid, combined with a high level of idealism. They must strive to provide a sound environment, with appropriate facilities and an engaged staff to turn out the next generation of clergy and theologians. They must make sure the books are balanced and raise money for capital investment, student experience, research, and continued growth, among many other duties.*

- Loula C. Anaston (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Anne van den Berg (St. Vladimir's Seminary)
- Helen Boyko-Greenleaf (St. Sophia Seminary)
- Helen A. Carlos (Hellenic College Holy Cross Seminary)
- Olga Stepowj Coffey (St. Sophia Seminary)
- Roula Demertzis (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Stephanie Duncan (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Joan Farha (St. Vladimir's Seminary)
- Patricia Georgiou (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Nancy Gilbert (St. Tikhon's Seminary)
- Rosalind Halikis (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Tatiana Lapchuk Hoff (St. Vladimir's Seminary)

- Lila Kalinich (International Orthodox Christian Charities)
- Christine Karavites (Hellenic College Holy Cross Seminary)
- Hariklia Karis (Hellenic College Holy Cross Seminary),
- Carol Kassouf (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Nancy Kohudic (St. Tikhon's Seminary)
- Helen Lambros (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Anne Glynn Mackoul (St. Vladimir's Seminary)
- Elsie Skvir Nierle (late, St. Vladimir's Seminary)
- Melanie O'Regan (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Bessie Papailias (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Teresa A. Polychronis (retired, Orthodox Christian Mission Center)
- Kassandra Loucas Romas (Hellenic College Holy Cross Seminary),
- Nina Stroyen (St. Tikhon's Seminary)
- Melody (Monica) Thompson (St. Vladimir's Seminary)
- Alexandra Turkington (Patriarch Athenagoras Institute)
- Gayle Woloschak (Orthodox Christian Mission Center; Center for Advanced Studies in Religion and Science)

### **Council, Commission, and Committee Members**

*In sharing their expertise in these venues, women can have an effect internationally, nation-wide, jurisdictionally, and across a given diocese.*

#### Archdiocesan Center for Family Care, Greek Archdiocese

- Marilyn Rouvelas (Advisor)

#### Archdiocesan Council, Greek Archdiocese

- Marilyn Rouvelas (Member, Advisor to the Interfaith Marriage Project)

#### Commission for Science and Technology, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese

- Gayle Woloschak (Chair, Organizing Committee for Conference on Stem Cell Research)

#### Commission on Canon Law, Inter-Council Presence of the Russian Orthodox Church

- Sister Vassa Larin

#### Commission on Liturgy and Church Art, Inter-Council Presence of the Russian Orthodox Church

- Sister Vassa Larin

#### Committee on AIDS, Greek Orthodox Diocese of Chicago

- Gayle Woloschak (Member)

Ganister Orthodox Foundation Committee, First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania

- Elsie Skvir Nierle (late, Member)

Governing Council, Antiochian Archdiocese of North America

- Mary Winstanley O'Connor (Chair)

Leadership Council, Churches for Middle East Peace

- Marilyn Rouvelas (Member)

Metropolitan Council, Orthodox Church in America

- Eleana Silk (Member, Strategic Planning Committee)
- Faith Skordinski (former Delegate-at-Large; Special Investigative Committees)

Metropolitan Council, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

- Gayle Woloschak (Member)

Order of St Ignatius, Antiochian Archdiocese of North America

- Mary Winstanley O'Connor (Chair)

Social and Moral Issues Committee, Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in the Americas

- Lila Kalinich (Member)
- Gayle Woloschak (Member)

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

- Elizabeth Prodromou (Vice Chair and Commissioner)

U.S. Secretary of State's Religion & Foreign Policy Working Group

- Elizabeth Prodromou (Member, Subgroup on Religious Freedom, Democracy, and Security in the Middle East and North Africa)

## **Parish Council Presidents**

*When I asked friends on Facebook for the names of women parish presidents, I received some resistance. Although they obliged, they also desired acknowledgement for the many other women doing significant work on their councils, and rightly so. The majority of members on many councils are female. That's the case in my own parish, where five of the seven positions are held by women. As one friend wrote of St. Anthony's in Rock Hill SC, "We have three women on our parish council but none of them are President or Treasurer. They are all hard workers and give*

*important insight and direction for our parish.” Then there are communities that do not have a typical parish council structure, such as at Christ the Savior in Southbury CT, where they have stewards of Education, Outreach, Maintenance, Finance, Secretary, Community Relations, Bookstore, and Martha Fund (which gives away their top 10%); six of the nine stewards are women. I honor the hard-working members of parish administrative structures; sitting on a parish council puts them squarely in the leadership category: sadly, there simply is not enough space in an article of this scope to include them all. This list, therefore, is of current and recent presidents only. It is worth noting that some parishes have had women presidents since at least the 1970s, as at St. Basil in Stockton CA.*

- Patricia Fann Bouteneff (Holy Trinity, Yonkers NY)
- Stacy Christensen (Holy Martyr Peter the Aleut, Calgary AB Canada)
- Marianna Colyer (St. Nicholas, Oxford UK)
- Taisia Fedorov (Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God, Albany NY)
- Veronica Gatrousis (St. Basil, Stockton CA)
- Almaz Kebede (Beata LeMarium, Harlem, NY)
- Rebecca Magaziner Matovich (St Mary Magdalen, New York, NY)
- Ann Marie Mecera (St. Gregory of Nyssa, Columbus OH)
- Mary Winstanley O’Connor (St Mary, Cambridge, MA)
- Victoria Wilcox Statkevicius (Holy Trinity, Yonkers NY)

#### **4. Finance**

*The chief financial officer of an institution is responsible for managing its financial risk, financial planning, record-keeping, and financial reporting. The CFO typically reports to the head of the organization and its board. The treasurer of an organization, on the other hand, oversees how its money is spent, either directly dictating expenditure or authorizing it; she also ensures that it has enough money to carry out its mission and that it neither over- or under-spends. She reports the financial status to the board and/or general membership to ensure transparency.*

#### **Chief Financial Officers and Treasurers**

*Women serve as treasurers on both the diocesan and the jurisdictional level.*

- Melanie Ringa (Treasurer, Orthodox Church in America; Chief Financial Officer, St. Vladimir’s Seminary)
- Mary Breton (Treasurer, Diocese of New York & New Jersey Treasurer)

#### **Parish Council Treasurers**

*With many women accredited in the fields of bookkeeping and accounting, it is not surprising to find that a number of parishes are tapping this valuable resource. Some also take on the demanding task of learning a tough and time-consuming job as they go.*

- Val Brown (Holy Trinity, Goshen IN)
- Azmera Mamo (Holy Martyr Peter the Aleut, Calgary AB Canada)
- Rebecca Magaziner Matovich (St Mary Magdalen, New York, NY)

- Elizabeth Rzyk (Holy Trinity, Yonkers NY)

## **5. Musicians**

### **Academic Practitioners**

*Qualifications include at least a master's degree in musical performance and/or conducting. Jessica Suchy Pilalis has been credited as one of the thought-leaders in moving Greek churches away from Western-style choral singing back to Eastern chant.*

- Robin Freeman (St. Vladimir's Seminary)
- Christine Holet (Antiochian House of Studies)
- Nataika Pavlovsky (St. Sophia Seminary)
- Jessica Suchy Pilalis (Crane School of Music – State University of New York at Potsdam)
- Valerie Yova (PSALM)

### **Parish Choir Directors**

*The choir director plays a key role in the liturgy and other church services. Choir directors have to have a “sense” of the Liturgy, deep experience with church music, musicality, and leadership skills. Many of them have had formal training as conductors; although it is best to have some concerted training in music and liturgy, many have gained their knowledge over the course of years of singing.*

- Susan Anderson (St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Livermore CA)
- Grainne Archer (St. Nicholas, Oxford UK)
- Joanna Bartlett (Holy Martyr Peter the Aleut, Calgary AB Canada)
- Tamara Cowan (Holy Trinity, Yonkers),
- Jennifer Cross (Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection, New York NY)
- Barbara Eriksson (Holy Martyr Peter the Aleut, Calgary AB Canada)
- Simona Fatuca (Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection, New York NY)
- Karen Kinnick (St. Nicholas AOC, Western Rite, Spokane WA)
- Yvonne Lysack (Christ the Saviour, Ottawa ON Canada)
- Michelle Mabardy (St. Mary, Cambridge MA)
- Danielle Terpening Miller (Antiochian Archdiocese)
- Vicky Papachristos (St. Basil, Stockton CA)
- Leanne Parrott (Holy Martyr Peter the Aleut, Calgary AB Canada)
- Anna Platt (St Nicholas, Oxford UK)
- Elaine Rentel (St. Gregory of Nyssa, Columbus OH)
- Madeline Sarantidis (Holy Trinity, Portland ME)
- Natasha Schuler (Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God, Albany NY)
- Judith Scott (St Gregory the Theologian, NYC),
- Anastasia Serdsev (St Mary Magdalen, New York, NY)
- Lisa Shortes (St. Anthony Parish, Rock Hill SC)
- Irene Tomaras Supica (xxx, Spokane WA)
- Sue Talley (St. Gregory the Theologian, NYC)
- Pat Tsagalakis (Holy Apostles, Shoreline WA)



- Demetria Veziris (St. Basil, Stockton CA)
- Cindy Voytovich (Three Saints, Ansonia CT)
- Manna Ohno Whitfield (St. Nicholas, Salem MA)
- Anne K. Wilkinson (Christ the Savior, Southbury CT)
- Valerie Yova (St. Athanasius, Santa Barbara/Goleta CA)

## **6. Academics**

*Academics hold terminal degrees, normally doctorates, in their subjects; many women have earned master's degrees from Orthodox seminaries as well as the necessary doctorates in the following fields. They hold positions in secular universities as well as in virtually every Orthodox Seminary. Roles include theologians (liturgists, dogmaticians, and patristics scholars), church historians, music scholars, art historians, biblical and liturgical language scholars, religious educators, and church-specific management and leadership professors. Faculty with master's degrees in their fields include librarians and archivists.*

### **Theologians**

- Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (late, St Serge)
- Beth Dunlop (St. Herman's Seminary)
- Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald (Holy Cross Seminary)
- Mary S. Ford (St Tikhon's Seminary)
- Carrie Frederick Frost (St. Sophia Seminary)
- Christina Gschwandtner (University of Scranton)
- Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Brown University)
- Edith M. Humphrey (Pittsburg Theological Seminary)
- Demetra Velisarios Jaquet (retired, Regis University)
- Valerie Karras (Lindenwood University)
- Sister Vassa Larin (University of Vienna),
- Despina Prassas (Providence College)
- Ashley Marie Purpura (Fordham University)
- Teva Regule (Boston College)
- Vera Shevzov (Smith College)
- Helen Creticos Theodoropoulos (St. Sava Serbian Orthodox School of Theology)
- Gayle Woloschak (Northwestern University and Lutheran School of Theology)
- Stefanie Yazge (St. Vincent College)

### **Church Historians**

- Stamenka Antonova (Montclair State University)
- Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Brown University)
- Nadieszda Kizenko (University at Albany, State University of New York)
- Vera Shevzov (Smith College).
- Caren Stayer (Strayer University)

### **Music**

*See Musicians section.*

## **Art History**

- Bissera Pentcheva (Stanford University)

## **Biblical & Liturgical Languages**

- Eirini Artemi (Institute of Pastoral Education, Archdiocese of Athens)
- Elena Nelson (Holy Trinity Seminary)
- Evie Zachariades-Holmberg (Holy Cross Seminary)

## **Religious Education**

- Ann Mitsakos Beszzerides (Holy Cross Seminary)
- Sonia Kouloumzin (late, St. Vladimir's Seminary)
- Jenny Haddad Mosher (Union Theological Seminary)
- Phyllis Meshel Onest (Diocesan Director of Religious Education, Greek Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh)
- Fevronia Soumakis (Teachers College, Columbia University)
- Constance Tarasar (late, St. Vladimir's Seminary)

## **Bioethics**

- Gayle Woloschak (St. Vladimir's Seminary)

## **Management & Leadership**

- Maria Georgiopoulos Mackavey (retired, Hellenic College and Holy Cross Seminary)

## **Librarians and Archivists**

- Laryssa Bulyha (St. Sophia Seminary)
- Daria Safronova-Simeonoff (St. Herman's Seminary)
- Eleana Silk (St. Vladimir's Seminary)

## **7. Artists**

*Orthodox aesthetics reside as much in the art and architecture which surrounds us and expresses our beliefs as it does in our music and poetic traditions. That is, liturgy consists as much in action as in materials which have taken a holy form. Women do significant work in iconography, graphic design and illustration, ecclesiastical tailoring, and textile design.*

## **Iconographers**

- Bess Chakravarty
- Anna Dumoulin
- Mother Efpraxia
- Sr Cecilia Harvey (New Skete)

- Erin Kimmett
- Eileen McGuckin
- Heather McKean
- Maria Pente
- Masha Struve

## **Graphic Design and Illustration**

- Chryssanth Greene-Gross (Katonah Art Center, Chryssanthemum Studios)
- Amber Schley Iragui (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press)

## **Ecclesiastical Tailors**

*Vestments are “integral to Orthodox Christian praxis in the same way that an altar faces east or the Pantocrator icon is depicted in the main dome of the church, and integral to Orthodox Christian theological expression in the same way that the veneration of icons manifests our belief in the Incarnation.” –Krista West*

- Christine Kerxhalli (Philothei)
- Krista West (Krista West Vestments)

## **Textile Designers**

- Abbess Efraxia (St. John the Forerunner Monastery, Goldendale WA),
- Krista West (Krista West Vestments)

## **8. Authors, Speakers, and Translators**

### **Writers**

*Below is a selection of book authors, some academic, some popular. The list is limited to monographs, as there is not enough space for editors of collected scholarship or writers of journal and magazine articles.*

- Mother Alexandra (late, *The Holy Angels*)
- Ann Mitsakos Bezzerides (*Christ at Work: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Vocation*)
- Deborah Malachy Belonick (*Feminism in Christianity*)
- Angela Doll Carlson (*Nearly Orthodox: On Being a Modern Woman in an Ancient Tradition, DoxaSoma: The Daily Practice of Praise*)
- Marjorie Corbman (*A Tiny Step Away from Deepest Faith*)
- Gillian Crow (*This Holy Man: Impressions of Metropolitan Anthony*)
- Mary Cunningham (*Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God; Gate of Heaven: Orthodox Thinking on the Mother of God*)
- Sister Gabriela (*Seeking Perfection in the World of Art: The Artistic Path of Father Sophrony*)
- Kyriaki KaridoyanesFitzgerald (*Women Deacons in the Church, Living the Beatitudes*)
- Mary S. Ford (*The Soul’s Longing: An Orthodox Christian Perspective on Biblical Interpretation*)

- Mary P Hallick (*The Book of Saints*)
- Sister Nonna Verna Harrison (*God's Many-Splendoured Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation, Suffering and Evil in Early Christian Thought*)
- Edith Humphrey (*Scripture and Tradition: What the Bible Really Says; Grand Entrance: Worship on Earth as in Heaven; And I Turned to See the Voice: The Rhetoric of Vision in the New Testament; Ecstasy and Intimacy: When the Holy Spirit Meets the Human Spirit; The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and The Shepherd of Hermas*)
- Valerie A. Karras (*Women in the Byzantine Liturgy*)
- Nadiezsda Kizenko (*Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People*)
- Myrna Kotash (*Prodigal Daughter: A Journey to Byzantium*)
- Sr Vassa Larin (*The Byzantine Hierarchal Divine Liturgy in Arsenij Suzanov's Proskinitarij*)
- Sister Magdalen (*Children in the Church Today: An Orthodox Perspective*)
- Joanna Manley (*The Lament of Eve, The Bible and the Holy Father for Orthodox, Grace for Grace: The Psalter and the Holy Fathers, Isaiah Through the Ages, Prelude to Light, Wisdom Let Us Attend: Job, the Fathers, and the Old Testament among others*)
- Frederica Matthews-Greene (*Welcome to the Orthodox Church, The Jesus Prayer, Mary as the Early Christians Knew Her, First Fruits of Prayer, Facing East, among others*)
- Irina Paert (*Spiritual Elders: Charisma and Tradition in Russian Orthodoxy*)
- Bissera Pentcheva (*Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium; The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*)
- Julianna Schmemmann (*The Joy to Serve*)
- Vera Shevzov (*Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*)
- Abbess Thaisia (*Abbess Thaisia of Leushino: The Autobiography of a Spiritual Daughter of St. John of Kronstadt*)
- Elizabeth Theokritoff (*Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology*)
- Eva Catafygiotou Topping (late, *Saints and Sisterhood: The Lives of Forty-Eight Holy Women; Sacred Stories from Byzantium; Sacred Songs: Studies in Byzantine Hymnography; Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy*)
- Krista West (*The Garments of Salvation: Orthodox Christian Liturgical Vesture*)
- Mother Raphaela Wilkinson (*Growing in Christ, Living in Christ, Becoming Icons of Christ*)

## Children's Books

- Dorrie Papademetriou (*North Star: St. Herman of Alaska*)
- Marilyn Rouvelas and Jeannette Aydlette (*The Silent Way: A Series about Passions and Stillness*)

## Bloggers/Podcasters

*In many ways blogs perform for their online readership a similar function to the opinion pages of newspapers, while podcasts demand a level of technical sophistication not unlike that of a radio show. Some have a large following. Sister Vassa Larin's highly engaging "Coffee with Sister Vassa" has a wide international audience and has been translated into many languages.*

- Elissa Bjeletich ("Raising Saints: Educating Our Youth in the Orthodox Church, Both at Home and in the Parish")
- Annalisa Boyd ("The Ascetic Lives of Mothers")
- Marcia Harris Brim ("The Bible's Grand Narrative")
- Martha Condra ("Wheat, Wine, and Oil")
- Jeannie Constantinou ("Searching the Scriptures")
- Anna Dumoulin ("Leo Clement")
- Chrissi Hart ("Readings from Under the Grapevine")
- Edith M. Humphrey ("A Lamp for Today: Understanding the Old Testament with Jesus and the Apostles")
- Sr Vassa Larin ("Coffee with Sister Vassa")
- Rita Madden ("Food, Faith, and Fasting")
- Frederica Mathewes-Green ("Frederica Here and Now")
- Jennifer Nahas ("Sowing Seeds: Building Orthodox Campus Ministry")
- Nicole Roccas ("Time Eternal: Faith at the Intersection of Time and Eternity")
- Molly Sabourin ("Grace Here and Now" and "Close to Home")
- Krista West ("The Opinionated Tailor")
- Mariam Youssef ("On Social Justice")

## Translators

These women have translated liturgical texts as well as theological and spiritual works.

- Vera Bouteneff (*Father Arseny: Prisoner, Priest, and Spiritual Father; Cloud of Witnesses*)
- Mother Maria (late, with Bp Kallistos Ware, *The Festal Menaion*)
- Despina Prassas ( *Maximus the Confessor's Questions and Doubts*)
- Mother Raphaela Wilkinson (*The Kathisma Psalter and Old Testament Canticles, Revised according to the Septuagint*)
- Elizabeth Theokritoff (among many others, *Hymn of Entry: Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church* by Archimandrite Vasileios; *The Divine Liturgy: A Commentary in the Light of the Fathers* by Hieromonk Gregorios; *Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles, Experiences, Teachings* by Elder Joseph; *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* by Nikolaos Loudovikos; *Hymn of Dismissal: Now All Things Are Filled with Light* by Archimandrite Vasileios)

## Homilists

They have received a formal blessing to deliver sermons during church services.

- Sister Rebecca Cown (New Skete)
- Mother Raphaela Wilkinson (Holy Myrrhbearers)

## 9. Catalysts and Founders

In truth, many of the women above fall in this category. They are, in effect, what the corporate world would call "change agents." If they weren't the first in the Orthodox world, they may have

been the first in their jurisdiction or community, and so faced the same hurdles as any breaker of new ground.

Some have created new organizations to support causes. These include the founders of St. Phoebe Center for the Diaconess, which is devoted to the reinvigoration of the diaconate for both women and men—Carrie Frederick Frost, AnnMarie Gidus-Mecera, Demetra Velisarios Jaquet, and Helen Creticos Theodoropoulos, and Catherine Gregovits Vrugitz. It also includes Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald and Clara Nickolson, of blessed memory, who are the founders of St. Catherine’s Vision, an international fellowship of Orthodox Christians whose purpose is developing and implementing initiatives to support women’s church ministries. St. Nina Quarterly, an important resource, had an editorial board which included Nancy Holloway, Demetra Velisarios Jaquet, Valerie Karras, Bonnie Michal, Despina Prassas, Teva Regule, Christina Shaheen Reimann, and Helen Creticos Theodoropoulos.

At least one founded a magazine. Inga Leonova started *The Wheel*, an online and print journal of Orthodox Christian thought, which aims—refreshingly and successfully—to move beyond the polarizations of much current debate in the Orthodox Church.

Elsie Skvir Nierle, founded not only a church (Holy Cross, Williamsport PA), but also a seminary professorship (St. Vladimir’s) and numerous scholarships (St. Vladimir’s and St. Tikhon’s).

Others are the first in their jurisdictions to perform a given role. Clio Pavlantos was the first woman chaplain in the Greek archdiocese in the New York metropolitan area. Lila Kalinich was the first woman on the board of directors of the International Orthodox Christian Charities. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis, a specialist in Byzantine music, in 1984 became the first officially titled and salaried female chanter (*psaltis*) of the Greek archdiocese.

Anyone who stands up against corruption, abuse, or malfeasance within the church also falls into the category of leader (and the people who do this vital service need to be accorded the same protections within our jurisdictions that they are in corporations and government). We cannot thank them enough for standing up to immense pressure to remain silent. In the days before the churches put processes in place for responsibly dealing with clergy sexual misconduct, whistleblowers such as Valerie Karras and Faith Skordinski came under severe pressure for holding the hierarchy to account in their respective jurisdictions. Someone breaking new ground as the coordinator of the Office of Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations for the Orthodox Church in America is Cindy Heise.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned above, this is my own idiosyncratic catalog of women who are active in the church, and omits many great people. I like to think of it as the tip of the iceberg: it’s heartening to think that there are so many more out there than I have named. But even within its limitations, this list shows clearly that women leaders in the church are anything but rare, they’re not tokens, and they act in the here and now. Compiling it inspired me to act when I saw that the recent Pan-Orthodox Council, as originally structured, would include almost no women delegates. The resulting petition attracted more than 1,200 signatures from women and men, clergy and laity, around the world and across many jurisdictions. Although it did not increase the number of

women at the Council, it had an important effect. His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch responded to me personally, writing, “Nonetheless, your ongoing effort and encouragement within your respective Churches for greater openness to women, within the canonical boundaries of tradition, will greatly enrich the life of our Church.”

If you want to know how to begin identifying or acting on your calling, I can do no better than to quote some thoughts sent to me by Clio Pavlantos, the first woman chaplain of the Greek Archdiocese:

We have to start from where we are, and taking our cue from Mother Gavrilia and Mother Maria of Paris, we do what we can with what we’ve got. With no recognition. Without help. (Mother Gavrilia didn’t have a bank account or insurance.) Assistance will come in God’s own time. Monastic theology says that everything comes from God: the good and the bad are permitted. It is said that God saves us through our failures and Satan pulls us down through our strengths and accomplishments. If we can’t do what we’d like to do, it’s not time yet. In the meantime, there is usually plenty of work to do, and it is probably preparation for the work we want to do. At a certain point, agitating for a change in role takes one away from the work that is there to be done. Perhaps we forget our value in the eyes of God and the work we have to do within ourselves.

She continues:

In the meantime, the most radical and subversive thing women can do right now is to go to seminary and earn an MDiv, a DMin or a PhD. Those experiences open you up to so many possibilities for work within the Church. When I started, there weren’t any women board-certified Greek Orthodox chaplains in the New York metropolitan area. So many people said I wouldn’t make it. Yet here I am. An archimandrite, the Very Reverend Vasilios Bassakyros, appeared to shepherd me through when the time came. I think this is how God works. I’m now in an outpatient chaplaincy that’s never existed before at my oncology hospital. If I’d listened to the naysayers, I’d never have gotten anywhere.

This essay, comprised mostly of lists, is a step on the way towards knowing Orthodox women’s present reality and bringing some of our invisible leaders into the light. We have been fulfilling many of these roles for centuries, some for decades, others more recently. But a broader awareness of the evident potential for women’s service in and for the Church is surely a real revelation. It is a response to the numerous nay-sayers. It is evidence of possibilities. And it may even awaken in you a course of action you didn’t know existed. My hope is that you continue to be inspired by the women you see around you, by those I have listed above, and by your sense of your own calling within the Church.

<http://www.aphairesources.com/2016/09/05/invisible-leaders-in-the-orthodox-church/>