

Rejuvenating the Diaconate: Opportunities, Challenges, and Steps

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Introduction

- Women have always participated in the diaconal ministry of the Church.
- Modern Era calls for restoring the ordained female diaconate
 - e.g. Russian Church, Church of Greece, International Orthodox Consultations, French theologians, Fellowship of St. John the Baptist (UK)

The Meaning of “Ordination” and how the Church structures participation in the one priesthood of Christ

- Ordination as a relational and communal paradigm versus conferring an objectively ontological state and/or merely reflecting functional activity
- The ministry of the bishop, presbyter and deacon and their relationship with one another

The Need for a fully developed Diaconate for the Church today

- The particular need for a female diaconate today

What an ordained ministry could offer the Church

- Liturgy as the source and summit of all ministry
- Connecting pastoral care to the Sacramental life of the Church
 - Chaplaincy
 - Spiritual Director
 - Personal experience – Ministry at the Hellenic Nursing Home
- Recapturing the philanthropic dimension of the liturgy
- Focusing on the Word of God; sharing with the community
 - Homilists
- Connecting the pastoral, social, and liturgical ministries of the diaconate

Steps towards a full diaconal ministry

- General Case
 - More (sponsored) seminary education for women
 - Encouraging the current diaconal programs (e.g. OCA, GOA) to explore diaconal ministry more fully and prepare candidates accordingly.
- Chaplaincy
 - Expand seminary education to include professional chaplaincy training
 - Expand endorsement process (e.g. Antiochian Archdiocese, Assembly of Bishops)
- Spiritual Direction
 - Training program for ministry (e.g. possible certificate program through the seminaries paired with Orthodox mentors)
 - Develop an endorsement process to recognize and encourage participation of directors and those seeking direction
- Parish Administration – Episcopal blessing in the absence of a priest
- Ministry of the Word
 - Chanters and Readers – Bless/tonsure women for this ministry
 - Homilists – Train and bless seminary educated persons to minister in this capacity on a more regular basis; perhaps, expand to an official endorsement
- Liturgical Ministry
 - Open Altar *Service* to girls/women (important liturgical educational opportunity, cultivating the desire to serve, restoring the integrity of the church, dispelling the false sense of entitlement given to those who only serve because of their biological sex)
 - e.g. St. Mary Liturgical ministry program