

TROPARION to St. Phoebe
Commemorated September 3

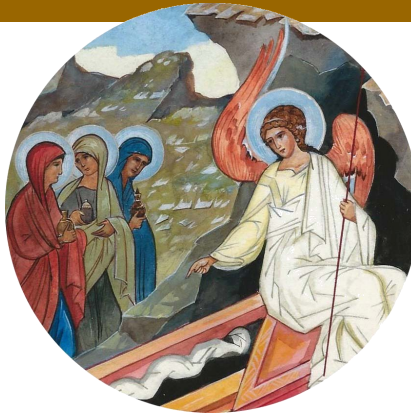
*Enlightened by grace and
taught the Faith by the
Chosen vessel of Christ,
You were found worthy of the diaconate;
And you carried Paul's words to Rome.
O Deaconess Phoebe, pray to Christ God
That his Spirit may enlighten our souls!*



In 1988 a high-level Pan-Orthodox Consultation concluded that **“the apostolic order of deaconesses should be revived.”** Convened in Rhodes by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, this body of bishops, theologians and academics found that “the deaconess was ordained within the sanctuary during the Divine Liturgy.” Ordination today should be done with “the prayers found in the Apostolic Constitution and the ancient Byzantine liturgical books.” Given these significant findings, the time is right for a dialogue among the laity, deacons, priests and bishops about ordaining women deacons for the building up the body of Christ and the glory of God.

Christ's Example

In a time & culture in which women were limited to performing familial duties, and held a marginal position within society, Christ acted in a most radical manner: He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, He healed the woman with the flow of blood, and revealed His Resurrection first to the Myrrh-Bearing Women who are called ‘Apostles to the Apostles.’



PURPOSE and GOALS

- Sharing the history of the female diaconate in the early church
- Serving as a repository of historical documents, sacred texts, articles, and contemporary scholarship that explores the purpose of the female diaconate
- Discerning how restoration of the female diaconate in the Orthodox Christian Church can help build up the body of Christ
- Aiding and supporting the re-establishment of the female diaconate
- Conducting conferences and seminars to educate others on the history and re-establishment of the female diaconate

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Deaconesses

IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH



The Early Church ordained women in the altar as female deacons, and entrusted them with numerous duties. *How could restoration of this ordained role help build up Christ's Church & His people?*

St. Phoebe Center

FOR THE DEACONESS
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Why Restore the Female Diaconate?

Female deacons did more than help with female baptisms. Thirteen different historical duties of the deaconess are listed in *The Study of Liturgy*, Oxford, 1978 and *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West*, 1990. Her duties included: administration, supervision at Liturgy, taking charge of properties, reporting to the bishop, providing pastoral care to women, sheltering guests, education, and more. The majority of those needs most definitely exist today.



While the priest is the shepherd of his parish, it is unrealistic and unhealthy to think that he can meet all of the needs of his parish. Ordained members of his parish (male & female deacons) can help him carry out his pastoral and ministerial roles, which can result in a more spiritually healthy parish. We have unfortunately seen the responsibilities of the male deacon fall away, leaving a distorted view of the deacon as a liturgical assistant and merely a required first step to the priesthood, rather than a calling of service (*diaconia*). Restoring the rightful role of the deacon is critical to the health and well-being of the Orthodox faithful.

Benefits to the Church

Limiting the diaconate to men ignores the gifts and talents of half of our faithful, and assumes that the priest can successfully address all of the unique needs and challenges of women. This is not realistic. Woman-to-woman counseling is beneficial and necessary for the well-being, health, and salvation of the entire Church. Counseling and support can include marital relations, motherhood, abortion, miscarriage, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, care-giving, and other issues.



The female diaconate could strengthen the pastoral care of the faithful and connect them to the sacramental life of the Church; recapture the philanthropic dimension of the Liturgy; focus on the Word of God; and more fully integrate the pastoral, social, and liturgical dimensions of the diaconate. Assuming that women can minister outside of ordination misses the point of ordination. Ordination is a setting apart of a person for ministry in a particular community, which changes that person's relationship with the community. Furthermore, when ordained by the bishop, her ministry is recognized by the entire Church.

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Please pray for our work!

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