

## On Administration and Governance

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Good morning everyone. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak about what is -- other than my wife, children and family -- the great love of my life, namely the holy diaconate in Christ, in which I have been privileged to serve for the past 42 years. For the deacon, to live is to serve and to serve is to live. This living and serving is, however, not for oneself -- it is for the Church, the Body of Christ.

I envy my fellow panelists, who are speaking about very intimate person-to-person service to the Body: pastoral counseling, chaplaincy, hospice and homebound. And here I am, discussing the dry and dreary subjects of administration and governance. Or are they so dry and dreary? Can they be full of passion and love? The answer is yes. But only through service to others and sacrifice of oneself.

I have served on multiple governing boards, overseas and domestic: parish councils, diocesan councils, metropolitan councils, St Vladimir's Seminary, the Secretariat of the Assembly of Bishops, a European international school, as well as a manager for over three decades with Exxon Corporation. In all these roles, my *persona* as a corporate executive and an Orthodox deacon were intertwined.

My knowledge of business development, negotiations, leadership and management were continually permeated by the absolute requirement to serve others in sacrificial love, every day, in every place, without exception. However, none of that would have been even remotely possible without the steadfast and self-sacrificing example of my wife of 49 years, Diaconessa Tanya, who is a far better deacon and servant of God than I will ever be.

## GOVERNANCE

Let me speak first about governance. When we think about governance, we might imagine a board, like a parish or diocesan council, meeting in a conference room, making “big decisions.” Well, governance, properly understood, especially in the context of the Orthodox Church, is far more intimate and grass-roots than that.

The icon of governance in the Church is the episcopate. In the New Testament, St Paul uses the word *episkopous* to refer to the overseers of the flock, who also serve as guardians and stewards. The image of the Good Shepherd immediately springs to mind, the one whose sheep know his name and the one who seeks after the lost and lonely ones. Further, the oversight role of the bishop includes looking after others and visiting them to see how everyone is doing.

Are the bishops the only ones who govern? No, many of us govern and oversee others in some way. Parents oversee children, supervisors their subordinates, teachers their students. But how do we govern? Do we do so by fiat, or by example? Do we reject others’ ideas out of hand if they do not agree with ours? Or, do we listen carefully to not only the words but also to the thoughts and feelings behind them? Do we view ourselves as servants or as authorities?

What about deacons? How do they fit into the governance structure?

Firstly, they are neither bishops, priests nor laity. They serve as a bridge between all of these roles in the Church. Many deacons are employed in “secular” work areas which can be of benefit in parish and church administration. They can be of significant assistance to the bishops, especially in bringing their specialist expertise to bear upon his problems. In addition, since they are normally not compensated for their work, they are capable of speaking truth to power, in love, and not be afraid, as some priests might be, of losing their paying pastoral positions. They work in a spirit of true sacrifice and service, in any church or charitable activity, showing others the joy of serving.

I would emphasize, that a servant of Christ, a true deacon in Christ, does not have to be a Deacon with a capital “D”. We are all deacons by virtue of our baptism and chrismation, just as we are all members of the royal priesthood, if we serve others in the spirit of Christ, following the example of the One who is THE bishop, THE priest and THE deacon, our Lord Jesus Christ.

St Ignatius of Antioch had a special affection for deacons. He called them “my favorites – entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ.” One of them, he called “my fellow slave, the deacon Zotion” and said of him “I am delighted with him, because he submits to the bishop as to God’s grace.” Sometimes, modern-day Christians recoil at the very mention of submission, but the Martyr’s words simply echo St Paul’s when the Apostle said “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Practically, what does this submission mean? St Ignatius goes on to say quite explicitly: “the Lord Jesus did nothing without the Father, because he was one with him, so you must not do anything without the bishop and presbyters. Do not, moreover, try to convince yourself that anything done on your own is commendable. Only what you do together is right.”

Proper governance in the Church requires both responsible hierarchical authority and collaboration among all. St Cyprian of Carthage said: “The Church is a people united with its sacred bishop and a flock which stands behind its own shepherd. The bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop; if anyone is not with the bishop, he is not in the Church.”

Everyone needs a supervisor. We need the blessing of the bishop.

The bishop's blessing is sometimes implicit, in cases such as teaching Sunday school, taking care of the church building or other charitable activities. Even here, we receive the explicit blessing of the priest who is the delegate of the bishop in the local parish.

However, when we are contemplating changes in the structure of the church or considering issues which bear upon the theology of the Church, we need to have the explicit involvement of the bishop. In the specific question of re-institution of the order of female deacons, the bishop needs to be there for proper governance.

At present my understanding is that the St Phoebe Center is not under the omophorion of any Orthodox Bishop.

Fr Tom Hopko said, in one of his 55 maxims, "give advice only when asked or when it is your duty." I'll claim the latter as a guest and a friend.. My unsolicited recommendation to the board of St Phoebe Center is this: seek the proper Church governance structure for your organization. Place yourself under the hierarchical authority of a Bishop, or, better yet, a Synod of Bishops. You do have an advisory board, one of whose members is Metropolitan Kallistos. However, an advisory board has no role in governance.

You might think, well, the topic of female deacons is too controversial and our discussions may be limited if we place ourselves under a bishop. That could certainly be. However, the controversial aspects and the theological issues are precisely why you must be under the omophorion of a governing bishop. You also owe it to the bishop who is responsible before God for you. Are we helping him? Do we proactively invite the bishops "inside" our own plans and dreams, hopes and fears? Or do we effectively exclude them, keeping them "outside" and isolated from us?

## ADMINISTRATION

Now, let me turn to administration: the parallel Greek word *oikonomia* means the building of a house, specifically the building of the house of the Lord. Construction must be done in a disciplined and careful way, built upon the proper foundation, with skillful workmanship.

In the Church, administration needs additionally to be done in a conciliar and collaborative manner, taking into consideration where everyone in the Church is

at. What does this mean? We in the Orthodox Church in this country can be quite different. We come from various backgrounds; some are cradle-Orthodox for sixty years, some for twenty. Some are recent converts, others for decades. Some are highly traditional, some are not. And so on.

The walls of the house must go up at the same time or else the building will collapse. The foundation must remain inviolate or else tremors will cause disaster. The problem is compounded when different architects emerge with different plans for that building. When they meet with their separate blueprints, egos may flare and the end may be worse than the beginning. What to do?

Enter the deacon and the example that he sets. The deacon serves others, whoever they are. I was once asked by a priest how I would simply explain to others the difference between a priest and a deacon. I said: "A deacon washes feet; a priest suffers and dies on the cross for his people." He liked the deacon reference; I don't think he cared for the priestly one. But it's true: the deacon serves in whatever situation the church calls him to. He images Christ as servant: the one of no reputation, emptying himself for others. He thus offers the example of humility in administration. In a corporate environment, the most effective leader is the one who serves others without regard to title or position, laying aside his own presuppositions in search for a common solution, shared values, and a unified vision.

In the question of the female diaconate, it is critical that the administrative process, in simpler words, your next steps, be constructed very carefully. Our church theology of community is that we are all one in Jesus Christ. This is critical. Any steps regarding controversial subjects such as the female diaconate, especially

in approaching the episcopate, need to be taken very carefully and in complete humility.

And you need to consider what it is you want, **really** want, is it to be ordained, or is it purely to serve?

In closing, I offer a personal story. Many years ago, I was asked by a group of young Orthodox adults, aged 25-35, to help them make a decision: to stay inside the Orthodox Church or to leave it. Their Orthodox parish had no adult bible studies. They asked the parish council if they could have them in the church. The answer was “no, we don’t do bible studies. We’re Orthodox.” Well, the young people didn’t like that answer but didn’t know what to do. So they invited me to lead a weekend retreat with them to help them decide. We spent the entire weekend talking openly and earnestly about the fundamentals of the faith, as revealed in Scripture and the liturgical services.

At the end of the weekend, they asked: “Deacon, what do you think we should do? Go back and re-emphasize our request for bible studies?” I said: “No. Go back to the parish council and say: we will do anything you want us to do – wash floors, clean the sanctuary, make spanakopita, drive shut-ins to church, whatever. But one thing above all – do NOT, do NOT mention bible studies.”

Well, I returned home and did not hear anything from them for months. Then at our weekly parish Youth Fellowship, a young man who had a theology degree from Greece, said: “This is my last week. I’m moving across the country. A parish council has asked me to become their first-ever full-time paid youth minister.” This was

the parish that these young people came from who were at the retreat. I was very happy to hear that.

But I was even happier when I heard later, years later, that these same young people became, in the words of a highly reliable witness, “pillars of the church and members of the parish council.”

My recommendation: Offer to serve, in any way that you can, without expecting any consideration of your own desires regarding church organization and roles. Another of Fr Tom Hopko's maxims is: "Don't try to convince anyone of anything."

Seek blessings for everything. Pray that the Lord's will be done in **you** -- to be a true servant of God, by virtue of **your** baptism and chrismation.

Thank you.