



St Phoebe Center
FOR THE DEACONESS

Girls' Participation in the Liturgy

St. Phoebe Center Zoom Event, January 28, 2024

Dr. Teva Regule's Opening Remarks

One of the most pressing pastoral issues of our day is how to connect our young people to the life of the Church, in particular to our liturgical celebration. Our liturgy can be quite powerful, but it can also be quite inaccessible for young people, especially our girls as their participation tends to be more circumscribed. This event focused on the participation of girls in our liturgical celebration more particularly.

So, why focus on liturgy? For the Orthodox, the liturgical life of the Church is one of the primary ways that the faith is experienced, understood, expressed and transmitted. It forms the identity of the person—made in the image of God and called to grow into His likeness, nurtures us along the way, and ultimately gives us the opportunity to be transformed into, as Cyril of Jerusalem says in his baptismal catecheses, “little Christs.”

One of the prominent voices of the Russian religious renaissance in the early 20th c, Bishop Nazarius of Nizhni-Novgorod explains further,

“The Orthodox faith is acquired, strengthened, and maintained chiefly by means of liturgical worship. Liturgical worship is properly considered to be the best school for teaching faith and morals, for it acts abundantly and salutarly on all the powers and capacities of the soul. But if worship is to accomplish all this, then all the faithful must participate in it **directly, consciously, and actively.**”

How can we involve our women and girls in worship so that they experience liturgy directly, consciously, and actively? This event is the third in a series organized and hosted by Axia Women and the St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess that explores this question.

In the first installment, we discussed the roles of (tonsured) reader and altar or congregational servers and advocated for women and girls in their exercise. We outlined many benefits to including girls in the liturgy as altar or congregational servers, including:

- 1) Its catechetical value – by participating in the liturgy, they could learn about the structure, flow and theology of our celebration by writing it onto their bodies and thereby be able to draw closer to God from their experience.

2) It encourages spiritual growth. Alternatively, by disallowing girls (just because they are in a female body), it can have a negative effect on their spiritual lives and their connection to God in the liturgical celebration.

3) It adds to the integrity of the Church. Eligibility is not just gender determined, but to serve includes moral considerations as well as a respect for the distinctions in the minor orders.

4) It doesn't give any server a false sense of entitlement that is antithetical to the Gospel message of humility in service to Christ and His Church.

Of course, there are also benefits for the assembly as well including their own education, joy of seeing their daughters participate along side their sons and modeling for others.

At our second event, women who have been tonsured as readers and/or chanters as well as liturgical servers shared their experience of serving in this ministry. We also highlighted the different ways that parishes were integrating their young girls (and boys) into our liturgical celebration. In addition, we saw scans that show how neuroscience confirms that the spiritual pain of exclusion correlates with physical pain as they both operate on the same parts of the brain.

In this event, we continued to highlight how various parishes integrate their young people into the liturgical celebration, especially their girls. We heard from the perspectives of those who coordinate this ministry and a parent and parish priest about how doing so has benefitted their daughter and parish community respectively.

[Watch the event recording on YouTube.](#)