



*St Phoebe Center*  
FOR THE DEACONESS

Dear Supporters of the St Phoebe Center,

This report is an update following the Orthodox Church in America's (OCA) 21<sup>st</sup> All American Council (AAC) held in Phoenix AZ in July of 2025. We offer this update in love for the Church and with our prayers for its flourishing in America and everywhere.

Earlier this year, many of you who are members of the OCA provided the St. Phoebe Center with [your responses](#) to the Metropolitan's solicitation for reflections on the life of the Church in advance of the AAC. Thank you again for your efforts. The St. Phoebe Center compiled your responses into categories, posted them on our website, and sent them to the Metropolitan with the following three recommendations:

- **The St. Phoebe Center recommends that the AAC pass a resolution to establish a working group composed of clergy and laity and men and women to examine trends among men and women in conversion (those new to the church) and in retention (those who are not new to the church).**
- **The St. Phoebe Center recommends that the AAC pass a resolution that asks the Holy Synod to release a statement regarding the dignity of women, their equality with men, and dispelling misconceptions about ritual impurity.**
- **The St. Phoebe Center recommends that the AAC pass a resolution appointing a working committee to study women's roles—past, present, and future—in the Orthodox Church, and make recommendations at the 22nd AAC on how to best honor women's unique experiences, perspectives, and skills within the Orthodox Church. This working group could be composed of clergy and laity, both male and female, with diverse expertise in areas including but not limited to early Church history, Byzantine Church history, liturgics, and pastoral counseling and spiritual direction.**

Meanwhile, during the same time period that the St. Phoebe Center was collecting feedback from OCA supporters, the Center applied for a table in the exhibit hall at the AAC. At the previous AAC, the Center applied for and was granted permission to have a table at the AAC at which we shared flyers and other informational material about our organization, the history of the deaconess, and the need for deaconesses today. To our surprise, our application for this AAC was rejected. When we inquired to the Preconciliar Commission why this was the case and what had changed between the last AAC and the one held this summer, we received this message from the OCA Metropolitan: "There is no official forum of the Orthodox Church in America suitable for the St. Phoebe Center's education and advocacy for the restoration of the female diaconate, as the Holy Synod has not initiated and blessed such a conversation touching on the Church's doctrine and practice."

This left us perplexed and disappointed, as we were granted permission to have a table at the previous AAC, and our mission has not changed in the interim. Furthermore, the possibility of ordaining women as deaconesses today is not a “doctrinal” question, considering that our tradition included deaconesses as part of its practice for centuries and the order has never been banned. The question of ordaining women to the diaconate today is an exclusively pastoral question.

We responded, asking if not the AAC, then what is the proper forum for discussion about deaconesses today—a discussion that is pastoral and not doctrinal? We received a message from the Metropolitan’s office saying that the proper forum for such a conversation would be a Holy Synod-appointed synodal commission or ad hoc committee.

Therefore, one of our board members, Gust Mecera, as a delegate to the AAC (not in his capacity as a St. Phoebe Board member), submitted the following resolution to the Resolutions Committee:

**Whereas over the last fifty years, scholars, theologians, academics, faithful men and women, and organizations have been discussing women’s roles in the Orthodox Christian Church; women comprise at least half of the Church and possess unique gifts, talents, and experiences that could be used for the upbuilding of the body of Christ; these unique gifts, talents, and experiences are often overlooked; misconceptions persist about ritual impurity that perpetuate an erroneous view of girls and women that impedes their full participation in the Church; and many of the OCA faithful—clergy and laity and men and women—wish to continue to explore women’s roles in the Church that are aligned with the Orthodox Church’s teachings; and that it is time to begin discussions with courage and faith,**

**Therefore be it resolved that the Holy Synod appoints a synodal commission or ad hoc committee/group synodally appointed and composed of a diverse group of clergy and laity including both men and women to 1) compose and release a statement regarding the dignity of women, their equality with men, and dispelling misconceptions about ritual impurity, 2) study women’s roles in the Orthodox Church—past, present, and future—and, 3) make recommendations on how to best acknowledge the dignity of women, their equality with men, and embrace women’s unique experiences, perspectives, and skills for the building up of the Orthodox Church.**

**This synodal commission or ad hoc committee/group would work over a two year period to complete these goals described here, and make a report to the Orthodox Church in America Holy Synod and the Orthodox faithful containing action-oriented recommendations.**

The Resolutions Committee approved the resolution, meaning that it could be submitted on the floor of one of the AAC plenary sessions, but it needed to go through final review by the Holy Synod first. The Holy Synod rejected the resolution.

During the Q&A session that followed the opening remarks of the AAC by the Metropolitan, a delegate asked a question about the revival of the ancient order of the deaconess. His Eminence responded to this question by first saying he had “prepared a statement.” He went on to say that the

ancient order was “not handed down to us.” Furthermore, he said there is no need to have a committee study the dignity of women in the church, when he sees how many women are involved in the Church. The audience acknowledged his comments with a round of applause.

The St. Phoebe Center is greatly disappointed by this sequence of events regarding the OCA AAC and afterwards. While there are some (both men and women) in the Orthodox Church who believe that everything is fine in terms of women in the Church today, there are many (both men and women) who perceive otherwise. While it is true that women are involved in many roles in the OCA today, there are still many women whose talents and skills go unappreciated by the Church and many women who feel pastorally neglected. And yet, His Eminence dismissed those concerns during the plenary session of the AAC, the St. Phoebe Center’s application to have a table at the AAC was denied, and the resolution proposed by Gust Mecera was not allowed by the Holy Synod to go to the floor of the All-American Council.

Subsequent to the AAC, an OCA priest who was scheduled to appear as part of the panel for the St. Phoebe Center’s “Overworked Priests: How Deaconesses Can Help” event on August 19 was requested by his bishop to withdraw from the event and to not participate in St. Phoebe Center events going forward.

The St. Phoebe Center interprets all these actions as an attempt to suppress the ongoing conversation about the possibility of ordaining deaconesses here in the twenty-first century and even more generally to suppress any conversation about women’s roles in the Orthodox Church in America today. We are alarmed by this attempt at suppression because not only do we see that ordained deaconesses would build up the body of Christ today, we furthermore think it is essential that the Church be able to more generally discuss women’s dignity and women’s roles. A healthy community is capable of having difficult and complicated discussions.

The St. Phoebe Center has written to His Eminence Metropolitan Tikhon, expressing our disappointment and confusion over this sequence of events. We have not yet heard back, but we remain hopeful that there will be an opportunity for conversation with Metropolitan Tikhon as well as other hierarchs of the OCA.

Our board is actively considering how to respond to these efforts of suppression and censorship. We feel the need to name it for what it is, while respecting the privacy of individuals. We are working on ways to directly address these concerns. We hope this chain of events will deeply concern all of the hierarchs in the OCA and all jurisdictions, and compel them to open their hearts and minds to discussions about women in the Orthodox Church today.