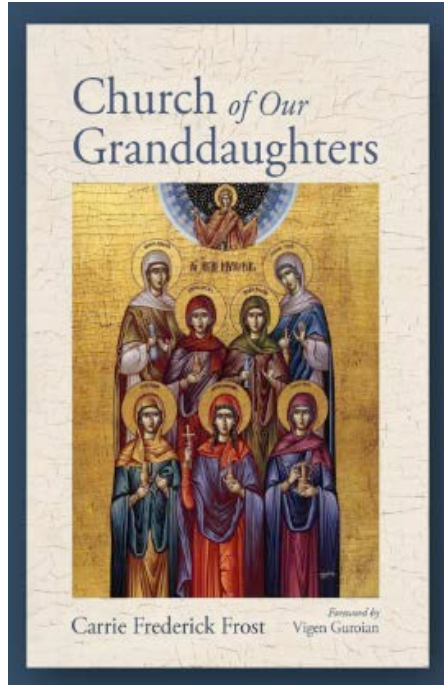
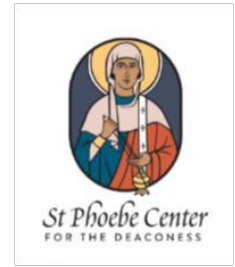




Church of Our Granddaughters...

Ordination

Church of Our Granddaughters

► Speaker – Dr. Helen Creticos Theodoropoulos

- Life-long member of the Orthodox Church (GOA)
- MTS (HCHC), PhD (Univ. of Chicago)
- Professor – St. Sava Serbian Ortho. School of Theology
 - Patristics, Christianity in America
- Board – St. Phoebe Center
- Secretary – OCAMPR, OTSA (former)
- Parish Teaching – High School, Bible Study group, adult religious education



Church of Our Granddaughters Ordination

► What can we envision?

- *“I envision women as ordained deaconesses in the Orthodox Church of our granddaughters; deaconesses who serve women, men, and the mission of the Church. I also envision the Church as capable of considering the possibility of other ordained ministries for women.”*

◦ *Carrie Frederick Frost
Church of Our Granddaughters (82)*

Church of Our Granddaughters

Ordination – Past

From Apostolic Times:



Phoebe: The first witness of the order of women deacons is in Romans 16:1-2: “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a deaconess (*diakonos/διάκονος, servant*) of the church in Cenchrea.”

****Origen and Chrysostom both interpret the term as “deacon.”**

****Phoebe is commemorated on Sept 3 and referred to as a “model deaconess” in Orthodox liturgical texts. In her icon she is often identified as “deaconess,” and is also often shown wearing the diaconal stole**

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Ordination – Past

Evidence from the life of the early Church

- ▶ Inscriptions on churches and tombstones.
- ▶ Liturgical rubrics and architectural descriptions.
- ▶ Canons of local and Ecumenical Councils
- ▶ Writings of the Church Fathers, historians and chronographers; seals, letters.
- ▶ Saint's lives.
- ▶ Church manuals and service order books (*euchologia*), and monastic rules (*typika*)
- ▶ Early church orders – Didascalia Apostolorum (3rd), Apostolic Constitutions (4th), Testamentum Domini (4th–5th) that give directions for both “deacon” and “deaconess”

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Ordination – Past

- ▶ “The Holy Mother Sophronia. Theodosia the deaconess. Gregoria the deaconess. These are some of the women lovingly memorialized at a magnificent Byzantine basilica from the 4th or early 5th century C.E. that Israeli archaeologists have uncovered in the southern city of Ashdod. ...The oldest text was an inscription in one of the side naves that was paved “in memory of the priest Gaianos and Severa the deaconess,” and carries a date that translates to the year 416 C.E.”

(From “Byzantine Basilica With Graves of Female Ministers and Baffling Mass Burials Found in Israel” by Ariel David, *Archeology*, Nov. 15, 2021)

Byzantine–
500s

Church of Our Granddaughters Ordination – Past



Fig. 2.8 **a** Two women with censers flank the Anastasis altar. **b** Women in procession to the altar. Ivory pyx, 500s. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, CCO



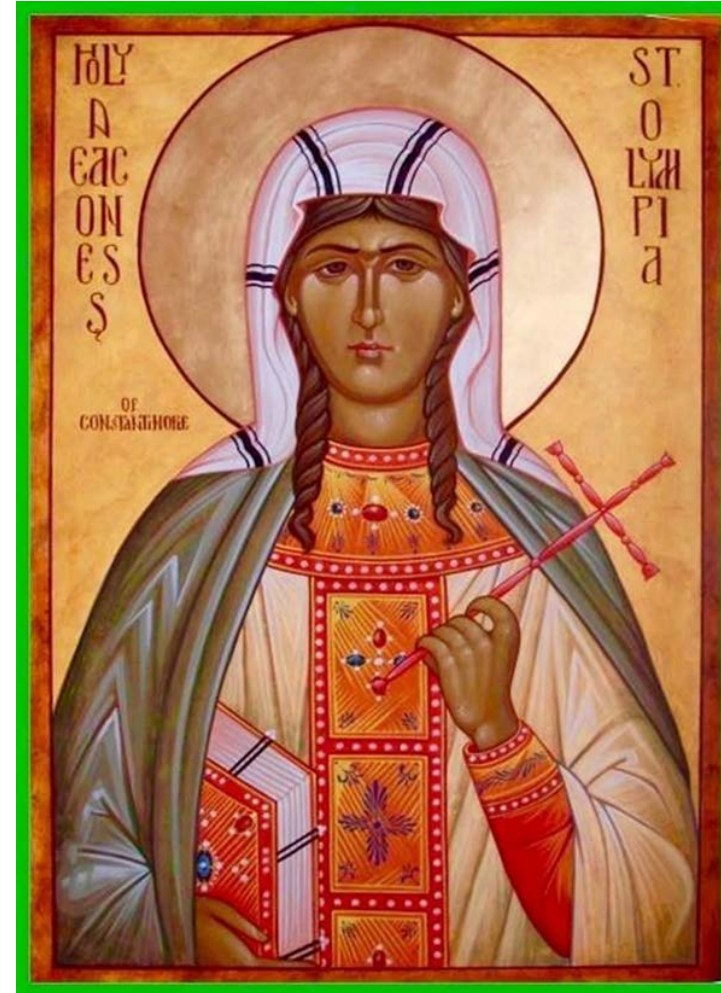
Dedicatory inscription in Greek to the Gaianos the priest and Severa the Deaconess

Deaconess Saints



St Tatiana of Rome

- Scholars have found over 40 literary references and 61 inscriptions giving us information on named deaconesses in the Christian East
- There are many saints who were ordained deaconesses remembered in the Orthodox church calendar



St Olympia of Constantinople

2nd Byzantine Ordination Prayer for the Female Deacon

Sovereign Lord, **You who do not reject women offering themselves** and wishing to minister in your holy houses in accordance with what is fitting, **but receive them into an order of ministers; bestow the grace of your Holy Spirit** also upon this your servant who desires to offer herself to you, and **fill her with the grace of the diaconate, as you gave the grace of your diaconate to Phoebe**, whom you called to the work of ministry...
(*Barberini 336* codex, 164.10 (8th c.))

Ordained into the higher orders

- Her ordination occurred during the Eucharistic liturgy, at the same point as the male deacon's (i.e., immediately following the *anaphora*)
- Occurred at the altar, with the bishop's laying on of hands and his reading of two prayers
- The prayers include God's call to the ordinand and an *epiklesis* (i.e. calling down of Holy Spirit)
- She was vested with the *orarion* crossed in the same way as the subdeacon's, which is how the deacon wears it at Holy Communion
- After receiving the Eucharist from the bishop at the altar, she was given the chalice and she herself replaced it on the altar

Ordination Past: Functions of the Female Deacons

- ▶ Assisted with the baptism of adult women, including performing the actual anointing
- ▶ Took the Eucharist to homebound women
- ▶ Catechized women, and then instructed newly baptized women in the faith
- ▶ Chaperoned women's meetings with male clergy
- ▶ Kept order in the women's section of the church
- ▶ Chanted at services and participated in processions
- ▶ Served as abbesses and liturgical leaders in women's monasteries
- ▶ Served as the Bishop's agent in tasks of hospitality and philanthropy.

Decline of the Female Diaconate

- ▶ No specific reasons for the decline are evident from historical records. The order has never been officially discontinued or banned.
 - ▶ Contributing factors include:
 - Monastic influence on liturgical life
 - Geopolitical pressure on the Byzantine empire
 - Development of putative connection between women's bodies and impurity
 - Decline of the entire [e.g. male] diaconate
 - Shifting of diaconal duties from the parish to the monastery
- 

Church of Our Granddaughters

Ordination – Present

- ▶ Ordination of female deacons in the Armenian Orthodox (Apostolic) Church.
- ▶ The historic consecration of deaconesses blessed to the diaconate February 17, 2017 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, part of the Synod of Alexandria.
- ▶ May 2, 2024, Angelic Molen of Harare, Zimbabwe, was ordained Deaconess Angelic in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa. She was elevated to Archdeaconess two days later, with the full title: Archdeaconess Angelic–Phoebe Molen



Ordination Today: Why is it needed?

- ▶ Each person has **unique gifts** to uplift the Church – gifts that are *needed*
- ▶ **Women have specific, *needed* gifts** because their incarnational reality as *women*
- ▶ The continued need for **women to women ministry**– there are spaces and traumatic events where the ministry of a woman is *needed* and that of a man is limited or unwelcome.
- ▶ Fresh possibilities of men and women working together in ordained ministry– sacramental synergy

Why Ordination?

- ▶ Ordination is the **transformative work of the Spirit**
- ▶ Ordination gives **authorization**, enabling her to speak, act and serve on behalf of the Church. It is the **authorization to diaconal service**.
- ▶ Ordination **connects the sacramental life** of the Church, centered in the Eucharist, to the work of the deaconess, and to the life of the faithful.
- ▶ With ordination, the deaconess is incorporated into the life of the Church, the life of the Church is sealed into the life of the deaconess, and the service she gives to the Church **becomes the presence of the Church** to those in need
- ▶ Ordination provides **oversight and accountability**

Addressing the sceptics/detractors

(esp. the “slippery slope”)

- ▶ The diaconate is its own distinct and complete ministry, and does not automatically lead to another higher order.
- ▶ Women were ordained deacons for over a thousand years, and there was never a move to the other higher orders
- ▶ Fear of schism or discord: this ignores the present reality and is a failure to address current needs and truths; it fails those most vulnerable, marginalized, and silent.

Ordination: Possibilities

With the proper training and education, some ways deaconesses can serve are in:

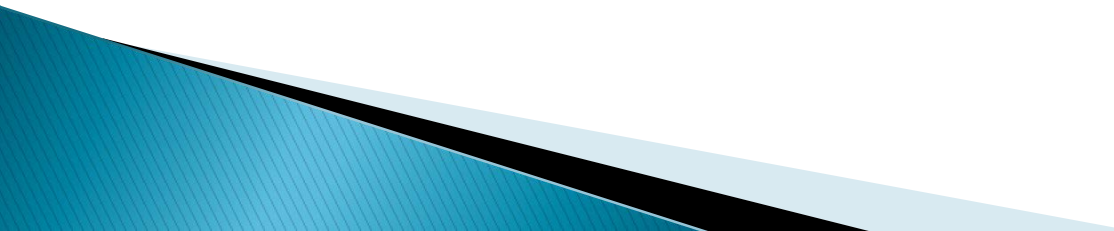
- ❖ Philanthropy
 - ❖ Administration
 - ❖ Catechesis
 - ❖ Chaplaincy
 - ❖ Social work
 - ❖ Pastoral care
 - ❖ Elder care/ and for those in long-term care
 - ❖ Liturgical assistance/Assisting in sacraments
- 

Ordination:

To uplift the whole Church

- ▶ The diaconate—male or female—is not about recognition or status or power. It's about the Church going into the world to meet the needs of a suffering humanity, both those within the body of Christ and those still seeking Him. The needs are many, the workers, few.
 - ▶ We need the ministries of BOTH ordained men and women AND devoted laypeople, and the work of one does not diminish— but rather supports— the work of the other.
- 

A Final Thought

- ▶ “Reinstitution of the ordained order of deaconess would involve a creative re-imagination of how the order would best serve the Orthodox Church today.” (*Church of Our Granddaughters*, p. 96)
 - ▶ Let us not be a Church of scarcity and lack, tolerant of or blind to what is missing. We are a Church of abundance and love. Through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, conferred in the mystery of ordination to the diaconate of women and men, this infinite abundance can reach further into the lives of all. May it be blessed.
- 

Church of Our Granddaughters

► Discussion Questions

- How did you feel when you learned about women deacons in the life of the Church?
- What would you tell someone about it?

Church of Our Granddaughters

► Discussion Questions

- Why do you think we need (or do not need) women deacons?
- What do you envision women deacons doing today?

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► Discussion Questions

- What do you see are the biggest concerns in ordaining deaconesses today?
- How would you address those concerns?

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Conclusion

► Concerns

- Resistance to all change
 - “Just as change is not good for its own sake, stasis is not good for its own sake.”
- Reaction to Culture wars
 - “The Orthodox Church ought not to alter its ways just because of changes in the wider culture... but the wider culture may on occasion justifiably prompt the Church to revisit its own priorities and practices.”
 - “...fuller inclusion of women in the life of the Church would be a fulfillment of our history and theology, not a departure [vs. a response to secular cultural change]
- Culture of fear/division
 - “...women’s realities in the Orthodox Church are already *divisive*, driving women (and men) away... in a *silent schism*.”
 - “Change that I propose...is not a capitulation instead it is a courageous response to the real needs of the Orthodox Church that will *promote flourishing and fulfillment*.”