

# Mission and Outreach

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Summary

## **Mission**

We live in a time of the decline of the Christian consciousness in our country, the world, and within the walls of our own Churches. We have a great task to renew that consciousness. What is our Mission? Go baptize and teach! Clergy, laity, and hierarchy are called upon to spread the good news.

How are we to fulfill our mission?

We must know what it is to be an Orthodox Christian. We have to prepare ourselves to be able to have others experience Christ. This can be accomplished by:

- Restoring the order of the Catechumens
- Developing a nationwide program of catechism/evangelism
- Developing a nationwide program of continuing education
- Speaking in "truth and love"
- Using contemporary American English as the norm in Church life, and
- Emphasizing philanthropy

## **Outreach**

It is not enough to bring souls into the church through our mission, we must nurture and care for them by constantly reaching out to all of the members of the Body. Outreach seeks to draw Christians into the fourfold life of the church:

- Apostles Doctrine - Education
- Fellowship - Community Involvement
- Breaking of the Bread - Divine Liturgy
- Prayer - Spiritual Life

The ten outreach concerns:

- The Unchurched
- Converts
- Immigrants
- Youth
- Senior Citizens
- Modern Day "Captives" (homebound, prison, nursing home)
- Marriage and Divorce

- Those Married Outside the Church
- Orthodox and Heterodox Spouses
- Orthodox and non-Christian Spouses
- Children of These Marriages
- Homosexuals and the Church
- Women and the Church
- Liturgical Roles for Women
- Purity Issues
- Ordination

\*\*This list is not inclusive. It is a beginning. The world and our faithful await the Orthodox Christian mission and outreach for the Glory of God.

It is in the hope that we will all be inspired to walk in that newness of life, that we present these thoughts and recommendations on Mission and Outreach for our Church and our world today.

## **MISSION**

### **Make Disciples Of All Nations**

We know the commandment of Christ, to GO, BAPTIZE, and TEACH; how are we to fulfill it?

There must be a new commitment by our whole Church, Hierarchs, Priests and the Laity, to the evangelizing of our own country, as well as missionary projects overseas.

It is not only the clergy who must preach the Gospel.

Our Church has been sorely lacking in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ, as if we were going to offend other Christian communities by our preaching. Evangelism is not proselytizing, emotional pressure, or threats of eternal damnation. It is the invitation to a life in the Body of Christ, incorporation in the Church that Jesus Christ founded, and against which the gates of hell will not prevail.

But we should make no mistake. There are individual and corporate implications for this new life in Christ. If we are serious about preaching the Good News and calling people into the fellowship of the Orthodox Church, we must consider what kind of life we are offering. The life of a Christian Disciple begins with self-denial. The Lord's call is a call to sacrifice and self-denial.

*If any one will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever would save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it (St. Luke 9:23, 24)*

In an age when society at large expects Christians to indiscriminately authenticate nearly every lifestyle, the ascetic message may be difficult (if not delicate) to communicate. But Orthodoxy is called to transform the world, not be conformed to it.

Our daily cross is the cross of self-crucifixion, the cross of self-sacrifice. Through it, we are able to extend beyond ourselves and live for others.

We must remember that the "Sin of the Progenitor," (usually referred to as "original sin") was self-love. The Cross of Christ has taught us "a more excellent way," as St. Paul has admirably described in I Corinthians, chapter 13. The call to be a Christian is a call to this kind of love.

*This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (St. John 15:12, 13).*

It is only when we have denied ourselves, and taken up our cross, that we can truly be followers of Christ.

The invitation of the Gospel is an invitation to discover our true self, a painful and often difficult process. There are many who would gladly accept the Gospel, if it would not interfere with their personal agendas, which often have no point of reference in the faith and teaching of the Church.

In calling others to Christ, we owe it to them to be honest about the Christian vocation. To become new, to become what and who God has created us to be is not an easy task. Even the Lord admonished us to "count the cost" (see St. Luke 14:27,28).

The fact is, we live in a time of the decline of the Christian consciousness in our country, the world, and within the walls of our own churches. We have a great task to renew that consciousness. Our responsibility is great. Our opportunity is even greater.

We have many places to GO; many people to BAPTIZE; many more to TEACH. We have the challenge of inviting the human family to become the "NEA KTISIS" - the New Creation. The invitation is Christ's own.

*Wisdom has built Her House, She has hewn out Her seven pillars; She has killed her beasts; She has mingled Her Wine; She has also furnished Her Table. She has sent forth Her maidens; She cries out upon the highest places of the city, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here;' to the one that lacks understanding, She says, 'Come, eat of My Bread, and drink of the Wine Which I have mingled' (Proverbs 9:1-5).*

## **Recommendations**

### **RESTORATION OF THE ORDER OF THE CATECHUMENATE**

*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).*

As people respond to our preaching, we need to prepare them for their New Life in the Christ. In the case of families who are Orthodox already, we need to spend time preparing the sponsors and parents of infants who are to be baptized. The restoration of the Order of the Catechumens will meet these needs.

We all require an introduction to Christ, someone to lead us to Him. As it is written of St. Andrew the First-called, "first he found his own brother . . . and brought him to Jesus" (St. John 1:41,42).

As a Catechumen, adult converts have a role and responsibility in the Community. Sponsors and parents have an opportunity to reacquaint and recommit themselves to their Faith.

The Service of Chrismation, as part of Christian Baptism, must be given its rightful context and meaning. As we prepare converts from heterodox Christian communities, we must affirm that our Church accepts only a complete Orthodox Baptism, and that if Chrismation alone is used, this is only by *oikonomia*.

In all things, our goal is to receive souls into the Faith, and that they may have an appreciation and initial understanding of the great commitment and joy of the Christian calling. Let our response be that of the Deacon and Apostle Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch (see Acts 8:26-39).

This is a great challenge for the Church today. As the Lord said:

*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, to the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest (St. Matthew 9:37, 38).*

### **Support Parish Catechists**

*How, then, shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him in Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent (Romans 10:14,15)?*

The Apostles once complained that they did not have enough time to commit to the "word of God" (Acts 6:2). Many of our Hierarchs and Priests are in the same circumstance today, and yet, this is their principle function in the Church.

It is time for our Clergy to commit a greater part of their ministry to Catechesis/Evangelism and to form a corps of lay co-workers to assist them in spreading the Gospel and teaching the Faith. This is nothing more than the restoration of the order of Catechists who, in the first centuries of our Church, prepared individuals for Baptism.

Parishes should support these Catechists, full-time or part-time ministers of the Gospel and see this as part of the integral life of the Parish.

The UNIFORM PARISH REGULATIONS, which govern our Communities, speak to this issue: "The diakonia (work and ministry) of the Parish consists of proclaiming the Gospel in accordance with the Orthodox Faith. . . ." (Chapter 1, Article 2, Section 2).

The Priest has the responsibility of "proclaiming the Kerygma of the Apostles and Dogma of the Fathers, preaching the Word, teaching the commandments of the New Life, . . ." etc. (Chapter 4, Section 1). And not only on Sunday morning!

Preach the word; be diligent in season, out of season, exhort with all patience and teaching (II Timothy

4:2)

We need LITURGICAL PREACHING, at every Mysterion and Service of our Church. Call it MISSION, or call it OUTREACH - the fact is that we must evangelize our own people, many of them for the first time.

Our Faithful must first hear the Gospel themselves; then they will "cooperate in every way towards the welfare and prosperity of the Parish and the success of its sacred mission" (Article 6, Section 6).

There are tremendous resources in our community-at-large, mass media, radio, television, as well as the printed word. We must harness these resources for the spreading of our own faith and fit these methods to our own message. That message can only be defined by the Faith of the Apostles, the Faith of the Fathers, the Faith of the Martyrs, the Faith that sustains the Universe.

A catechism/evangelism program in the local parish can spark new and invigorated enthusiasm. Our people are hungry. They are thirsty. Let us set aright our goals.

*Labor not for the food which perishes, but for that food which endures to life everlasting . . . . (St. John 6:27).*

### **Continuing Catechetical Education**

*And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ (Acts 5:42).*

What a description of the first clergymen of our Church! So it should be today. At Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, we have more than a center for the academic and theological training of our priests. It must become the source for a nationwide school of faith. We cannot afford to leave the preaching, catechizing, educating and living of Christ's Gospel to the self-appointed and self-ordained.

Within the present structure of the Archdiocese, with Cathedrals and major parishes in every state, the means to establishing such a "school without walls" is already in place. Consider the impression this ministry would have on the Faithful.

A national program would not only facilitate the training of Parish Catechists, it would also help prepare seminarians to become Preachers, as well as provide ongoing education for Priests. It would encourage our clergy, Bishops and Priests alike, to hone their skills at preaching; both in substance as well as style. Our message is too important. Without vision and conviction our people will perish.

*The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophecy (Amos 3:8)?*

### **SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE**

*And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd (St. John 10:16).*

It is time for our Church to incorporate Evangelizing as part of Her ecumenical dialogue with heterodox Christians. His All-Holiness, Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople expressed, as early as 1902, the following viewpoint to his fellow Orthodox Patriarchs, "on the subject of our present and future relations with the two great growths of Christianity, viz. the Western Church and the Church of the Protestants:"

Of course, the union of them and of all who believe in Christ with us in the Orthodox Faith is the pious and heartfelt desire of our Church and of all genuine Christians, who stand firm in the evangelical doctrine of unity, and it is the subject of constant prayer and supplication . . . . It is a truism that the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is founded upon the Apostles and preserved by the divine and inspired Fathers in the Oecumenical Councils, and that Her Head is Christ, the Great Shepherd, Who bought Her with His own Blood, and that according to the inspired and heaven-bound Apostle [Paul] She is the pillar and ground of truth and the Body of Christ: this Holy Church is indeed, one in identity of faith with the decisions of the Seven Oecumenical Councils, and She must be one and not many, differing from each other in dogmas and fundamental institutions of ecclesiastical government. (Letter in The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement).

We need to return to the spirit of these early ecumenical pioneers, who saw their responsibility to their fellow Christians as a responsibility of love and truthfulness.

We have a prophetic role to fulfill, as a watchman to the house of Israel (see Ezekiel 33:7-9). This requires purity of heart and sincerity of intention.

*How will you say to your brother, "Let me pull the speck out of your eye;" and, look, there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first cast the log out of your own eye, and then you shall see clearly to pull the speck out of your brother's (St. Matthew 7:4,5).*

### **Speak and Listen with Understanding**

*We hear them speak in our own language of the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11).*

The miracle of the Day of Pentecost was not that the Apostles spoke in marvelous languages; it was that the Good News they preached was understood by everyone who heard them.

For too long, our Church has fought and argued about which language to use. The historical languages of the Liturgy, Greek, Slavonic, Arabic and others, have a place in the Church today, but not at the expense of the understanding and nurturing of the Faithful, much less of the Catechumens.

Contemporary American English is the language of the Orthodox peoples of America. It should be the language of their Services as well.

Where there is need, by all means, let there be divergence. We seek unity, not uniformity. What is appropriate for one situation may not be for another. But at all times, the moving force behind our decisions should be the edification of the Church. As St. Paul has written:

There are, it seems, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

*But if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be like a barbarian speaking. . . . But you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in gifts that edify the Church (**I Corinthians 14:10-12**).*

### **PHILANTHROPY – AGAIN!**

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven (**St. Matthew 5:16**).*

Our Lord said that a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven would be that the poor would have the Gospel preached to them (St. Matthew 11:5). He also said that we would always have the poor. Why? Not because He isn't merciful, but because He wants us to participate in His mercy.

We hear many today say that the Church has not proven to be a good steward of these gifts of God; that money is wasted on excess and vainglory.

And so we have the poor with us, so that we may learn again to be merciful, as God is merciful with us.

Who are these poor? Just look around. The homeless, the hungry, the illiterate, people with AIDS, the helpless, the hopeless, the prisoners, the sick. They wait for us in every generation to bring the Gospel to them, not with high-sounding words, but with humble and patient acts of compassion and love. This is the Everlasting Gospel, "that God so loved the world, that He gave His Only-begotten Son."

We have the potential for great social and human improvement right in our own backyard. Each Parish can take on projects in their own community, as a witness to their love for Christ. It is a message delivered in silence that speaks louder than any words.

*My little children, let us love not in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth (**I John 3:18**).*

These are our recommendations. Not just words that may or may not sound good to the hearer, but what we feel our Church is called to today.

- A Restoration of the Order of the Catechumens
- A Nationwide Program of Catechism/Evangelism
- A Nationwide Education Program for Catechists
- A New Ecumenical Approach of "Truth in Love"
- Contemporary American English as the Norm in Church Life
- A New Emphasis on Philanthropy

It's time. It is later than we think.

*Do you not say, There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are already white, way past the time of harvest. And he that reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit unto life eternal: that both he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together (**St. John 4:35,36**).*

## OUTREACH

*And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine, and in Fellowship, and in The Breaking of The Bread, and in Prayer (Acts 2:43).*

What do we mean by Outreach? It is the continual incorporation of the Body of Christ, the creative and multiform diakonia which makes the new life in Christ available to every Orthodox Christian, in accordance with their measure of faith.

Becoming New Creations in Christ is a process, which requires our cooperation, with God and with each other. It is the nurturing process of maturation which St. Paul speaks of in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

*[F]or the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ: until we all grow, in the unity of the Faith, and in the knowledge of the Son of God, into a complete person, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians. 4:12,13).*

This is the DOGMATIC aspect of the Church, the continuous teaching of the Gospel of Christ in word and deed.

### **The Fourfold Nature of Outreach**

As Christ reached out on His Holy Cross to the four corners of the world, so does our OUTREACH seek to draw all Christians into the fourfold life of the Church.

- The Apostles' Doctrine
- Fellowship
- The Breaking of The Bread (Divine Liturgy)
- Prayer

It is not enough to bring souls into the Church through our Mission, we must nurture and care for them by constantly reaching out to all of the members of the Body. St. Paul makes this clear in his teaching:

*God has set each member in the Body as it has pleased Him. If everyone were the same, what would the Body be? Now there are many members, but one Body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you;" neither can the head say to the feet, "I don't need you." . . . God has fit the Body together, giving a greater abundance of honor to those members that seem lacking, in order that there should be no divisions in the Body; and that the members should all care for one another. If someone is suffering, the other members should empathize, and if someone is honored, let all the others rejoice (I Corinthians 12:18-21, 24-26).*

Our task is to examine how we may relate every member of the Body to the whole, bringing them into the fullness of the Church, with real participation and inclusion. Based on the Apostolic model, we can see the four essential areas are:

- Education (Apostles' Doctrine)



- Community Involvement (Fellowship)
- Liturgical Participation (The Breaking of the Bread)
- Spiritual Life (Prayer)

What follows is a list of ten concerns. It is by no means exhaustive and we hope that others may follow as a result of this paper. (A special insert on human sexuality, "Male And Female Created He Them," will preface the last four).

- The Unchurched
- Converts
- Immigrants
- Youth
- Senior Citizens
- Modern Day "Captives" (homebound, prison, nursing home)
- Marriage and Divorce
- Those Married Outside the Church
- Orthodox and Heterodox spouses
- Orthodox and non-Christian spouses
- Children of these marriages
- Homosexuals and the Church
- Women and the Church
- Liturgical roles for women (chanter, reader, choir)
- Purity issues (presence and/or service in the Altar)
- Ordination

Our recommendations will be based on the Apostolic model for Church life. Some will call for renewal according to the mind of Christ, others for the restoration of ancient practice; but in either case, the dominant principle will be that of Christ:

*Every scribe, who is learned in the Kingdom of Heaven, is like a man who is a householder, who brings forth both new and old things out of his treasure (St. Matthew 13:52).*

### **The Unchurched**

*Even so, it is not the will of your Father, Who is in Heaven, that one of these little ones should perish (St. Matthew 18:14).*

So concludes the parable of the ninety-nine sheep and the one who went astray. Today, it would be fair to say that the ratio has increased in favor of the latter. There are literally tens of thousands of Unchurched Orthodox, with as many reasons why they no longer practice their faith.

### Recommendations

1. In every local parish, let there be a campaign to seek out and search for those who have dropped out or have not been seen for a long period of time. Follow up with a reintroduction to the Faith

and a welcome back.

2. Fellowship events, which often attract rarely seen members (Sacraments, memorials, festivals, etc.), should be occasions of encouragement and warm welcome. Special committees must be formed to follow up on attraction and instruction of Unchurched members.
3. At Great Feast Days (e.g. Palm Sunday, Holy Friday) clergy should make it a point not to preach sermons castigating those who have "shown up." Rather, let us give them something to come back to!
4. Let there be prayer in the Church at every Liturgy, public and pronounced, for those who are absent.
5. Although we cannot force anyone to live their Faith, we can lift up Christ in our own lives. Do our brothers and sisters see the love of the Christ in us? If we are bearing our cross, they will. It is love that draws us to God.

*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to Myself (St. John 12:32).*

### **Converts**

*I will bring them to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Isaiah 56:7).*

The first great issue of the Orthodox Church was whether the Faith was meant for Greeks (Gentiles), as well as Jews. Even some of the Apostles were not certain at first! The tables have certainly turned since then, but have we changed?

From clergy who discourage mass conversions to parishioners who tell seekers that their ancestry is wrong, we still struggle as a Church with being Catholic (kath olous) - for all people. We still make it difficult for others to join our Church. If we are serious about preaching the Gospel, we should be ready for people to respond to it.

### Recommendations

1 Catechism is essential. It is an understanding of our Faith that we seek to impart. There must be classes, lectures and homilies. Too often, converts are received without proper instruction, preparation and understanding.

1. As often as possible, the reception of converts should be at well attended Services, with some community event following.
2. To put to rest a misconception - not all converts prefer the Divine Liturgy in English, but most are in the same boat as the rest of our members; they do not understand any of the historical languages of the Liturgy. English or the vernacular, is the only path to a worshipping Church that fulfills the Apostolic model, to pray and sing with understanding (see I Corinthians 14:15).
3. Far from the popular notion, the monastic tradition is a LAY tradition and the source of much spiritual food. Converts and "Cradle" Orthodox alike should work for their establishment and increase, to bring emphasis again to the wealth of our spiritual tradition.

Whether we were born into an Orthodox family, or we have created our own through a conscious decision, the fact is, we all must make a beginning in our faith; we are all converts to Christ.

Our Church calls all mankind to the knowledge of the love of God. We must learn to embrace all those who embrace the Faith, regardless of their ethnic origin, color, or cultural tradition. The Lord Himself observed that it is not only those born with the privilege of faith, but those that choose, who shall find a place in His Kingdom.

*And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God (St. Luke 13:29).*

### **Immigrants**

*The stranger who dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself (Leviticus 19:34).*

Immigrants, simple men and women, brought the Orthodox Faith to the Americas. It would be a great shame if our Church were to forget those origins. How especially grateful should converts be to this memory, and how supportive should all of us be to those who are still arriving in this land of opportunity. What are we offering these fellow Orthodox when they arrive on our shores?

### **Recommendations**

1. Where appropriate, let us have English Schools, as well as Greek (or whatever) Schools to perpetuate native tongues. Let there also be religious instruction in Greek, Russian, Arabic and any other language that is spoken by the Faithful.
2. The ethnic language schools have often become isolated fellowships within the larger community. Many Parishes have enough diversity to warrant "cultural exchange" programs within their own walls. More homogeneous Parishes may want to have exchanges with nearby communities of different ethnic origins.
3. In affirming that contemporary American English should be the liturgical standard of our Church, let us not forget the needs of the newly arrived, as well as the beauty and integrity of the historical liturgical tongues. A selection of hymns, such as the Trisagion and the Cherubikon, sung in these historical languages, can give the feeling of "home" to many immigrants, without compromising the comprehension of the Liturgy.
4. Those who come from native Orthodox countries often bring many local/traditional customs. These should be encouraged and not ignored.

Differences of culture, language, race and ethnic origin are not obliterated by Christ; they are sanctified. Hospitality to strangers is a good beginning towards this holiness.

*Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to be hospitable to strangers, for in this way, some have entertained Angels unawares (Hebrews 13:1,2).*

## **Youth**

*Permit the little children to come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God (St. Mark 10:14).*

Again and again, we hear the cry in our Parishes, "What are we doing for our youth?" If statistics tell us anything, they tell us our programs are not doing enough. We are raising generations of young Orthodox, who neither know, nor care to know their Faith. Is it that they are not drawn to Christ, or has something been blocking their path?

Sunday School, has it worked? How many of our children know who the Saints are on their Parish Iconostasion? Religious instruction begins in the home; there is no getting around it.

### **Recommendations**

1. The Sunday Catechetical School must be conducted either before or after the Divine Liturgy, thereby enabling the youth to participate in the worship of the Church. The educational program of the local Parish must have a unified effort towards educating and involving the parents. Everything we do and say in Sunday School is only an affirmation of what occurs in the home.
2. Dedicated Youth Ministries with emphasis on Christian faith and action are a must for each Parish, meaning both dedication of time and money. In addition, our youth must be integrated with the rest of the Parish; an evening of GOYA with the Golden Age Club, for example.
3. Nowhere is the need for English so pronounced as in our Youth. And not only on this level of understanding; there needs to be a concentrated effort to explain the meaning of the Liturgy in its many facets.

Spiritual retreats, local pilgrimages (to a monastery or wonder-working icon) and special programs must be organized to meet their spiritual needs.

Our children are full members of the Body of Christ. They may not pay on a pledge, fill the coffers of the building funds, or make donations to adorn the sanctuary. Rather, it is they who adorn the Church, in the beauty of their simplicity and trust. In these, we would do well to follow their example.

*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (St. Matthew 18:3).*

## **Senior Citizens**

*You shall stand up in the presence of the elderly, and honor them, and reverence your God (Leviticus 19:32).*

In a day when men and women are living longer and comprise the largest segment of active Church members, the needs of our elderly community need to be addressed. These people, who have devoted an entire lifetime of faith and service in the Church, are too often forgotten in their waning years.

## Recommendations

1. As much as our Senior Citizens participate in the ongoing educational programs of the Church, they also have much to offer. Their memory of the recent history of the Church is invaluable. Oral history sessions should be encouraged, lest their wisdom be wasted on our own ignorance.
2. Many Parishes have succeeded at providing fellowship opportunities for the elderly, but we must be careful not to isolate the elderly from the rest of the Community.
3. Although many of our Senior Citizens enjoy the Services in the traditional tongues, they also enjoy having their grandchildren in Church! They, more than any other group, seem willing to make language sacrifices in favor of understanding and keeping their descendants Orthodox.
4. A long life is considered a blessing from God, but it also means a long history of spiritual struggle. Our Church must honor this struggle, especially as many prepare to face the end of this life. We must establish special ministries to serve them, particularly when one has been bereaved by the death of a spouse or a child. Many of the auxiliary groups (e.g. Philoptochos) can serve to this end.

The Youth and our Senior Citizens have many of the same needs. The way we treat the latter, may have a great deal to do with whether we shall retain the former.

*Honor your father and mother; (which is the first commandment with a promise) that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth (Ephesians 6:2,3).*

## Modern Day "Captives"

*Whoever has this world's material benefits, and sees his brother in need, and shuts off his own compassion from him, how does the love of God dwell in him (St. John 3:17)?*

Christ came to set the "captives" free, and we must continue that ministry in our own Communities. There are many modern day "captives," those in hospitals, nursing centers, institutions, prison, and those living at great distances from a parish. It is most certainly not only the clergy who have the responsibility of this ministry.

There are many opportunities for the laity to serve, not only those in their own Parish, but in the community at large. This is the witness to our love, the proof of our preaching.

## Recommendations

1. We cannot meet the needs if we do not know what they are. Social Service committees should be formed to heighten the awareness of the Parish and assist the clergy. Monthly updates, seminars, and Parish programs should be organized to expand the involvement of as many people as possible.
2. Visitation is essential. For those who cannot participate in the local fellowship of the Church, it

must be brought to them.

3. Our Church needs a complete restoration of the Diaconate to serve the crying need for liturgical participation with those unable, for whatever reason, to attend. These Deacons could be prepared through study courses which would be (1) sanctioned by the Hierarchs, (2) formulated by the faculty of the Theological School and (3) administered by the local parish priest. These Deacons would serve at the Sunday Liturgy; particularly invaluable would be their assistance in the administration of Communion and other liturgical and pastoral functions. They would continue to function "in the world," but must be understood to be full clergymen. The Diaconate is not a step to the Priesthood; rather it is part of it, with a full ministry of its own.
4. Those who work with the special needs of this often forgotten segment of our Communities need to have special sensitivities to their needs. There should be training and spiritual instruction in this regard.

If we are truly the Body of Christ, then we cannot afford to cut off our own limbs. How we respond to those of greatest need, yet least prominence, will one day come back to us all. Will we hear our Lord say this on the Day of Judgment?

*I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me (St. Matthew 25:35,36).*

### **"Male And Female Created He Them"**

Before we move on to the recommendations on marriage and divorce, homosexuals, and the role of women, let us pause and reflect on the meaning and purpose of sexuality.

In the Book of Genesis we read:

*So God created man in His own Image, in the Image of God He created him; male and female created He them (Genesis 1:27).*

We may understand this passage in two ways. One, that men and women share in the same image of God, and, that our human nature is compound, both male and female. We were created by God to bear within ourselves the totality of sexuality. This does not imply a physical or biological notion of gender; rather that the fullness of sexuality was part of the original state of humankind, before the "Fall" (it should be noted that both the word and concept "Fall" are a convention of speech - they do not appear in Holy Scripture).

If we examine the nature of this "Fall," we see that the "Sin of the Progenitor," (the "original sin") was not mere disobedience, much less the desire for the physical sexual act (as many have wrongly interpreted the eating of the forbidden fruit).

In disobeying the command of God, our spiritual ancestors failed to choose for love, love for God, love for one another. God gave them, and has given us, the ultimate freedom, the freedom to choose (Genesis 2:16,17).

Adam and Eve, who were created to be together (Genesis 2:18-25), are reported as being apart when the temptation to disobey came (Genesis 3:1-6). This was the beginning of the opposition and fragmentation in the human spirit that has plagued the world ever since (Genesis 3:16). This was the beginning of the dissolution of love. Its first offspring was murder (Genesis 4:1-8).

The consequences of this choice for self-love have been devastating to the human family. The Creator was abandoned by His creation. Communion with Heaven was lost. Paradise was removed from earth. Our human nature, created to be immortal, became subject to death and divided against itself. Our sexuality, created to be a power and force of unifying love, became misdirected and misunderstood.

Then came Christ, born of the Virgin, to heal and restore our nature. The significance of Christ's sexuality cannot be underestimated.

In the story of Genesis, we read that from the virgin body of a man (Adam) came forth woman, who was called Eve, or Zoe, because, by giving birth (by blood and water in the natural sense), she would become the source of the human race.

In the "Book of Genesis of Jesus Christ" (St. Matthew 1:1 - literal translation), we read that from the virgin body of a woman, the new Eve - the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, comes forth the New Adam, Who, through the Holy Blood (Eucharist) and the Holy Water (Baptism) that flowed from His Side (St. John 19:34,35), has become the source of the New Creation, the new human race.

Consider the similarity of both creations. Adam was put to sleep, then his side was opened to bring forth Eve. Christ was put to sleep on the Cross, then His Side was opened, to bring forth the New Creation. As if to memorialize the creation of humanity, women, to this very day, give first nourishment to children at their own breast. And where else does the Christian seek spiritual nourishment, if not at the Breast of Christ, from which flow His Most Precious Blood and the cleansing waters of Regeneration?

The process of dissolution and disintegration of our human nature and the division of our sexuality is corrected by the New Adam and the New Eve. They have turned the process upside down, reversing the sexual roles, in order to bring them together again. Instead of a perfect woman from a perfect man, we have a perfect man from a perfect woman. Nowhere is the consequence of this reunification so poignantly depicted, as in the Icon of the Resurrection, which shows our Lord bringing Adam and Eve up together from out of the depths of hell.

And what of this new sexuality, this new human nature? Although Our Lord lived as a virgin, we surely cannot consider Him to have been asexual. Rather, He embodied the totality of male and female and redeemed their purpose. By His Incarnation, He has re-created our sexuality. By giving up His life for the world on the Precious Cross, He has restored its purpose. And in virtue of His Holy Resurrection, He has granted us His Holy Spirit, to empower us to partake of our sexuality as New Creations in Him.

Our nature, our sexuality is restored through sacrificial love. It finds its true purpose and fulfillment only in this love.

We know the commandment. It is the same yesterday, today and forever.

*As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you: continue in My love. If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in My love . . . This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you (St. John 15:10,12).*

The Martyrs have showed their love in every age, giving their very life, not for fanatical convictions, but out of deep love for a person, the Divine Person, God Himself. Their love is a passionate love which testifies to their redeemed sexuality. What is the sign of a Martyr? It is not without significance that the First Martyr of our Church was St. Stephen the Archdeacon, whose name means "crown."

But we also call Marriage a crowning, a "stepsis." Is it not because those who are married are also called to that same sacrificial love which inspires the Martyrs? It is also a union with God, and our sexuality find physical expression in this context, as both a means of forging and expressing our new nature.

In the Mystery of Marriage, we return to the Garden of Eden, where they were exposed and vulnerable to each other, and not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). In this context, a physical sexual life becomes a willful commitment to another person, in whom one's nature finds fulfillment. This is the true meaning of the Epistle read at all Orthodox Marriages (Ephesians 6: 20-33).

The imagery of St. Paul, "being subject" and "above" and below" has nothing to do with the subjugation of women. He is speaking of the relationship of the heart and the head in the human body. Whereas a man brings the aspect of his sexuality as logos (reason - the head) to the conjugal relationship, a woman brings sophia (wisdom - the heart).

When a man and woman are joined in Marriage, they become "one flesh." They are one nature (male and female) and yet, two distinct persons. In this way, they glorify Christ, who, as both the Logos/Word and Sophia/Wisdom of God, was two natures (human and divine), yet One Divine Person. Sexual relations are a means of expressing this deep mystery, but they by no means comprehend its totality.

It should be pointed out that physical relations, like children, are not necessary to an Orthodox marriage. Both can be the cause of great joy and personal enrichment, but the foundational love of marriage goes deeper than either (note that the Orthodox Church is the only Christian community which considers the couple married at the altar, without the need for physical consummation - this is why there is no annulment in our Church).

Obviously, everyone cannot be married, much less, Martyrs. This is why God has given us a third way, the way of virginity, the way of celibacy - and it is no less sexual than the prior two.

We tend, in our modern world, to think of celibate persons as being strange and asexual. Rather, they are called to give full expression to their sexuality by a virginal love for all people. Monastic life is a perfect example.

In contrast to marriage, where we choose our partners, the monk does not choose the brethren of his, or her, community. But they are still called to love them, all of them, as intensely as God loves us. This is the fullness of sexuality without physical action. And it is more common than we think.



Consider our children or parents. We do not choose them (except in the case of adoption, which is considered a divine and grace-filled state, because it imitates God's choosing of us), but do we love them less strongly for that? We all know that physical sexual expressions are against nature in these relationships, but the love is passionate. Like the celibate, whether monk or in the world, these relationships call for self-denial and self-sacrifice.

It is only through this sacrifice that we find our true selves, united in the complete image of God, male and female. The Lord said: "Whoever would save his life must lose it." Part of carrying a cross is the willingness to hang on it, not as punishment, but in redemptive and sacrificial love for others.

Orthodoxy is not a religion; it is a way of living, a way of loving. Whether we are called to Martyrdom, or the intimacy of marriage, or a life of celibacy, we are all called to give up ourselves, and find our true selves in the Other, the other man, the other woman, the other person, the Image of God Himself.

### **Marriage and Divorce**

*Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven (St. Matthew 18:18).*

Marriage has been given, like other Sacraments of the Church, as a provision for this world. Our Lord Himself called it an indissoluble bond (see St. Mark 10:2-12). This is the Christian ideal and any variance from it is by oikonomia, dispensation, out of love and compassion.

Although we conform to the civil laws of our land, we must recognize that it is the Church which has the authority from God to bind couples together through Marriage, as well as loose them from each other, through divorce.

The increasing divorce rate in our Church should give us pause as to whether we are preparing the Faithful for the challenge of Marriage, and ministering to them through the pain of divorce.

#### Recommendations - Marriage

1. Let there be pan-Orthodox cooperation in developing ministries that can prepare our people for marriage. Many do not understand the purposes of Christian Marriage, and why we try to marry within our Faith, at least someone who is Christian. If it happens to be the case, the non-Orthodox or non-Christian bride or groom-to-be should be invited to become an Orthodox Christian.
2. We need to provide the means of fellowship for couples preparing for marriage, as well as the newly married.
3. If not the entire Liturgy, let us at least restore Holy Communion for two Orthodox partners at a Marriage. Where there is one non-Orthodox partner, let the Common Cup remain. There are other liturgical practices that can be employed as well: the tradition of the Bride and Groom walking down the aisle together, traditional Orthodox Hymns, and the Betrothal taking place in the narthex. These lend a certain degree of variety to the service, and can involve the couple in a more active way in the planning of the ceremony.

4. Let us enhance the spiritual appreciation of Marriage, with the teaching of the unity of human nature that is so much a part of Orthodox Theology.

#### Recommendations - Divorce

1. The process of Ecclesiastical Divorce needs to be opened up to the understanding of the Faithful. Our Spiritual Courts often resemble either the inquisition or paper formalities. The Church should seem more interested in the souls of the Faithful, rather than the fees for the proceedings. There is also a difference of approach between jurisdictions in this country. Conferences to deal with these issues should be encouraged. The clergy and especially the Bishops should lead this effort.
2. In the local community, groups should be available for persons going through separation and divorce.
3. Very often, people do not receive their Ecclesiastical Divorces until they need to, for the sake of a new marriage or a desire to participate in one of the Mysteries of the Church as a sponsor. Receiving Holy Communion is not even discussed with the individual. We need to make our people aware of the spiritual implications of divorce, the necessity of Ecclesiastical Divorce, and not excommunicate 'en masse' those who may have not yet obtained it. Each circumstance will be different and needs to be treated as such; not that we should disregard the standards of the Church, but that we should apply oikonomia liberally, when it is for the salvation of a soul.
4. The spiritual needs of people going through divorce are delicate. We need to train the clergy of our Church in the demands of this particularly painful situation.

Our Lord said that divorce was given because of our "hardness of heart." But He has also promised that He would give us a "heart of flesh" for our "heart of stone." If we can deal with the pain and challenge of divorce in our Church today, then perhaps we will have a better chance of living in marriage as the Apostle calls us:

*For the man is not without the woman, neither is the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, so also is the man by the woman; and all things are of God (I Corinthians 11:11,12).*

#### **Those Married Outside The Church**

*For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by her husband. If this were not so, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy (I Corinthians 7:14).*

There are two different problems here, but many similar solutions. Those who are married outside the Church to Heterodox Christians need only to have their marriages blessed in the Church in order to reincorporate themselves in the sacramental life of the Church.

Those married to non-Christians cannot do this, for the Church does not (and should not) marry

Christians and non-Christians (II Corinthians 6:14). But it does happen that decisions about whom to marry are made at one stage of life and faith, while the recognition of and need for the truth of the Gospel may happen at another.

#### Recommendations

1. There should be an active effort to inform and instruct the Orthodox and Heterodox couples as to why the Orthodox blessing is so important (as well as the invitation to become Orthodox). This should be seen as a complement to whatever marital relationship exists, even if there were only a civil ceremony. It is time to recognize the social validity of these marriages. This goes as well for Orthodox married to non-Christians. We should encourage participation in the full sacramental life of the Church as an enhancement to the existing marriage, not as a denouncement of "living in sin."
2. If it is possible, let the children be baptized and raised in the Church. Here we should stress the role of sponsor and the Orthodox parent as being responsible for raising the child in the Faith.
3. The witness of friendship and fellowship can be instrumental in bringing both parties into the Faith. Let there also be a mutual appreciation of the heterodox partner's devotion to their own Christian community, and a warm welcome for the non-Christian. Children must always be welcome at fellowship events, even if they have not been baptized.
4. If it is not possible for an Orthodox blessing to occur (either due to family pressure or the refusal of a spouse of a heterodox, or because of marriage to a non-Christian) let us admit to Communion those who have sought an entry to the Sacrament through Confession. It is senseless to deprive our own people of the Eucharist for an indefinite period of time. There is no sin that excommunicates a person from the Church forever, except that it not be repented.

If we cannot bless the Marriage, then we must pray with the couple for mutual understanding and growth. We must remember that the children of such families are special, even if they are not baptized.

This is a difficult and delicate issue, but we must always be guided by the same principles that guided the Apostles.

*For how do you know, O woman, whether you shall save your husband? Or how do you know, O man, whether you shall save your wife (I Corinthians 7:16).*

#### **Homosexuals And The Church**

*Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ (I Corinthians 11:1).*

One of the most controversial issues in modern religious life is the status of an emerging homosexual community. Although many may think so, this is not a new situation in world history. Homosexuals have been part of the world scene and culture from earliest recorded time (see Romans 1:26,27).

It is not our intention to speculate on the theories of homosexuality, whether there is a biological basis

or predisposition, or it is a condition of environment and choice. The fact is that our Church has numerous homosexual members, and She must reach out to them in love.

While the Church should support the full civil rights of homosexuals in our free and democratic society, She is under no obligation to endorse a lifestyle inconsistent with Her own teachings. Unions of male with male, or female with female, are contrary to the meaning and purposes of human sexuality.

While it is certainly possible for monogamous homosexual relationships to manifest some of the character of marital relationships, we must emphasize that even these fail in their understanding of the nature and purpose of marriage.

Marriage is given as a sacred context for the renewal of the image of God within us, through sacrificial love, and it can be expressed in physical love.

The incompleteness of the homosexual relationship is found in this: rather than reuniting the human image (male and female), it becomes fixated in the affection of an incomplete nature (either male or female). In this way, it "misses the mark" (amartia) and so can be described as sin.

This incompleteness is symbolized by the necessary barrenness of such relationships, where physical sexual expression not only does not produce offspring, but cannot.

In describing homosexual relationships as sin, let us not forget that heterosexual relationships, even faithful ones, are also sinful, if they are not bound within the context and meaning of marriage. Outside of Marriage, both heterosexuals and homosexuals are called to a life of celibacy. Their response to this call is a matter of free will, even if their sexual preference is not.

#### Recommendations

1. There needs to be much education, counseling and teaching in this area, bringing a new understanding of self to the Christian community, based on the image of God within us, not sexual preference.
2. We need to see celibacy as a "normal" lifestyle in the Church. The fellowship in our Church must make room for the single, unmarried, celibate and often homosexual members in the Parish, and not expect them to socialize with each other in order to get married.
3. Let us remember that the only thing that blocks our access to the Liturgy is our own sinfulness, and Christ is always willing to forgive.
4. In many ways, our homosexual members have a more difficult path, and very often not of their own choosing. They need spiritual support and encouragement from clergy and laity alike.

The Lord never promised us an easy spiritual life, but He stands by those with the fortitude and courage to take on the task.

*Everyone cannot receive this saying, except for those to whom it is given. There are some eunuchs, who*

*were born that way; and there are some eunuchs, who were made into eunuchs by others; and there are some eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. If you can receive this saying, then receive it (St. Matthew 19:11,12).*

## **WOMEN AND THE CHURCH**

For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-28

It would be unreasonable to assume that our Church has given women the recognition they so richly deserve, especially when one considers the inestimable importance of the Ever-Virgin Mary. Women have ministered in countless ways, in opposition to Judaic custom, which still has many vestiges in our Church.

The consideration of our three concerns should be tempered with a sensitivity to the present needs of women. Recommendations will follow in each section, based on the content of that section.

### **Liturgical Roles for Women**

Participation in the Divine Liturgy (or any other service) should not be judged on whether one has an active role in that Service. Remember the story of Sts. Mary and Martha (St. Luke 10:38-42). Mary received the "good part," "the one thing necessary . . . which cannot be taken away," by attentively sitting at the feet of our Lord.

Our people need to learn again the meaning of the exhortation, "Wisdom, let us be attentive!" The greatest role in the Divine Liturgy is that of Communicant, to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Here, our gender is not an issue, only the purity and readiness of our intention and our souls.

We would consider the Apostolic injunction against women speaking during the Liturgy (I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:11) to be a holdover out of respect for Judaism, where women had no religious function at all.

Recommendation

Women may participate in choirs, as chanters, and as readers. They should be tonsured for these roles as men (should be - there are other implications for this tonsure, as will be seen below).

### **Purity Issues:**

Here again we find Judaizing elements in the tradition of the Church. These elements need to be seen in the complete light of the transfiguring Christian message, and if they are to be maintained, let it be for a holistic symbolic value, rather than any even implied denigration of women. Entry of Women into Church after Childbirth (40 days) - This tradition, found in Leviticus 12:1-6, is kept in our Church, but not for the same reasons that ancient Judaism practiced it. It is also part of a wider context of

thanksgiving and blessing for both mother and child after childbirth. For ancient Judaism, it was an issue of ritual purity (an extensive treatment and rejection of ritual purity can be found throughout the writings of St. Paul).

For the Christian woman, it is part of the great and mystical honor of becoming a mother. In this context, we must renew the traditional blessing that precedes the 40 Day blessing. First there is the blessing after the delivery of the child. On the Eighth Day, instead of a Jewish ritual circumcision, we are to give the child its Christian name. The mother then continues to remain outside the worshipping community for 40 days as a commemoration of the 40 days spent by the Ever-Virgin Mary (St. Luke 2:22), which culminated in the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple (feast - February 2nd). The Christian woman has this time, not only for the recovery of her body, but for the consideration of the new life she has brought into the world. Far from a negative connotation, this time should be of utmost importance in the spiritual life of the family.

#### Recommendation

Let the 40 days be a time of joy and reflection, not exclusion, which is consummated in the woman's presentation of her offspring in the Temple, and her reception of Holy Communion. If there is a good reason why the woman should be in the community before the 40 days, let the blessing be done early.

### **Churching of Female Infants**

Along with the blessing of the mother (father and sponsors as well!), there is also the blessing of the child. It should be noted here that the official Service Books of the Church do not indicate that there should be a difference between the ways male and female children should be Churched.

The common practice today, that boys are brought into the Altar, while girls are blessed in front of the Iconostasion, is not substantiated in the "Euchologia." The argument that only male children should be carried around the Altar because only they may become Priests is a non-sequitur; as we will see later, not all males may become Priests.

#### Recommendation

Both male and female infants should be Churched in the same way, within the Altar. Service within the Altar (liturgical and otherwise) - There is a false notion in our Church that only males may go inside the Altar. This is patently false. Only those appointed to serve the Altar may enter it, and it is time that the clergy enforced this pious tradition.

### **May women serve within the Altar?**

So then we must ask: May women serve within the Altar? Of course, as they are apportioned such ministries. This service may consist of cleaning (which is not dishonorable - even a Priest must "clean" the Holy Vessels), or direct assistance to the clergy during services.

As to the question of "Altar Girls," this relates to the wider issue of tonsuring women. "Cheirothesia," the placing of hands, accompanied by tonsure, is the traditional means of the appointment to liturgical ministry for men and women. In the early Church, there were even deaconesses who assisted at the

Baptisms of women (it should be noted that adults were baptized as children are today, naked and fully immersed - the deaconesses were used for the sake of propriety).

#### Recommendation

If a woman is tonsured as a reader, then she must be welcome in service to the Altar. It is time for our Church to recognize that these gifts are a normative part of Church life. Perhaps, we may see an increase in the monastic vocations of women (almost unheard of in the Americas) if more liturgical encouragement were to be given in the local parish.

#### **Receiving Holy Communion and Menstruation**

The practice of a woman not receiving Holy Communion during the time of her menstrual cycle is rooted in the ritual purity laws of Judaism. The woman who touched the hem of our Lord's garment (St. Mark 5:24-34) was also conscious of these purity laws, and so sought her healing in secret. But the Lord brought her faith to the light of day and accepted her.

#### Recommendation

We must affirm that natural bodily functions in no way bar anyone from participation in the Sacraments, but we should not condemn those who observe ancient traditions out of personal piety.

#### **Ordination**

Unity of the Priesthood - Although there is much that could be said on this subject, we must affirm that the Priesthood, as understood in the Orthodox Church, is a unified reality, which finds its only fullness in the High Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Priesthood belongs to Christ, not to any one person. Whether one is a Deacon, Presbyter, or Bishop, it is the same Priesthood, only a different degree of responsibility.

(It should be noted that in the New Testament, the offices of Bishop and Presbyter were so similar, that the terms are often used interchangeably.)

Even if one accepts that only males may become Priests, it should be pointed out that not all men have this opportunity. For example, a man must have all of his external bodily parts, he cannot be blind or deaf; if he is married, he must be married to his first and only wife (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). Thus we see the importance of the Priest as the living icon of Christ in the Divine Liturgy, for it is the celebration of the Liturgy, more than any thing else, that makes a Priest (Deacon, Presbyter, or Bishop) a Priest.

Why are there no women clergy? - This is a legitimate question, even in the light of a two thousand year old tradition, and deserves an adequate explanation.

Given the total human nature of our Lord, it does not seem possible, but we must consider the full historical implications of such a decision (as well as the reason it has not been decided so to this day).

Our Faith has its foundations in the historical reality of Jesus Christ, His Birth, Ministry, Passion,

Death, Resurrection, and Ascension - all of which our Church takes to be historical fact.

The reason why the clergy of our Church are male is because He came as a male (see the insert on human sexuality). This is part of the integral historic evidence that any icon of the Church manifests, that Our Lord was a real person (see I John).

In the Liturgy, the Priest, like the Icons, directly and mystically represent Christ Himself. The Priest is no more, but no less, Christ than any of the Icons are. This sacred, iconographic function is as necessary to the integrity of the Orthodox Faith as the Icons themselves. In this way, the historico-iconographic role of the clergy support and confirm the decisions of the Holy Seven Oecumenical Councils. It is not without reason that the Holy Spirit has guided the Church in this way for nearly two thousand years.

The Priestly Ministry of the clergy must be understood as a provision for this world, not the world to come, where there will be no more need for Mysteries and Promise, but Christ will be all in all. Moreover, we have all been called, in virtue of our Baptism and response to it, into the Royal Priesthood of Christ. Here there is neither male nor female, and we all have the same access to the Same Spirit of God.

Deaconesses (is there a liturgical/pastoral need?) - Since there were deaconesses in the early years of our Church (until the 4th century), it is reasonable to examine whether and under what circumstances this old treasure might bring forth new gifts.

Although the liturgical needs do not seem apparent, there may yet be pastoral needs (the affirmation of women's varied roles) which necessitate its reinstatement.

#### Recommendations

1. Care must be taken to teach the Faithful in the meaning of the Holy Priesthood, that there not be any misunderstandings about why the Priesthood is reserved for males.
2. Consistent with Orthodox tradition and theology, the office of deaconess must be restored.

There is much that can be done to involve women in creative and new ministries in the Church. There is also much to be done to educate our Faithful to the true meaning of our purposes as redeemed women and men, who are called into the fullness of communion with God.

Whatever our gender, Christ has called us into relationship with Himself, and as He Himself says, there will be new roles for all of us.

For whoever shall do the will of My Father, Who is in Heaven, the same is my brother and my sister and my mother.

St. Matthew 12:50

We hope and pray that these thoughts and recommendations will serve to inspire reflection and



dialogue on the needs of our Church today, as well as encourage thoughtful exchange of the clergy and the faithful on other issues. There is so much work of the Gospel to do; the world is waiting and so are our own Faithful.

The quest to become New Creations in Christ Jesus is a difficult and arduous one, but one that He has promised to be with us in. That promise is sure; He is the Same yesterday, today and forever. With boldness let us go forward to work the "works of God," confident in a more certain hope, that the One that is in us, is greater than anything that is in the world.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38,39

+ To God be the Glory +

+ Amen +