



St Phoebe Center
FOR THE DEACONESS

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St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess

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St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess to Hold Symposium
Deaconesses for the Orthodox Church Today
November 10-12, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLUMBUS, OHIO—In honor of its tenth anniversary, the St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess is holding an in-person symposium November 10-12 at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology/Hellenic College in Brookline, MA.

The order of deaconess is a part of the history of the Orthodox Church. In antiquity, she ministered to women much as the male deacon ministered to men. This included providing pastoral care to women, assisting with the baptism of women, visiting and taking communion to the sick, catechesis, supervision at Liturgy, church administration, acting as an agent from/to the bishop, and more, depending on need and location. Throughout the modern period, there have been numerous calls from hierarchs, international consultations, study groups, and others in the Orthodox Church for the revival of this ministry. The St. Phoebe Center was born in response to these calls.

The mission of the St. Phoebe Center is to educate and prayerfully advocate for the revival of the ordained female diaconate to help serve the ministerial needs of the Orthodox Church and the world today. In the last decade the Center has lifted up the history of deaconesses, shining light on the presence and function of deaconesses in

the first millennium of the Church. The Center has also elucidated the real need for the revival of this ordained order—to help overworked priests, to offer woman-to-woman ministry for many issues, and to generally build up the Body of Christ for men and women. In its second decade, the St. Phoebe Center intends to build on this foundation and turn its attention to *how* the Orthodox Church might welcome women as deaconesses.

The symposium, *Deaconesses for the Orthodox Church Today*, will acknowledge the history of the deaconess in the Christian East and the need for women in diaconal ministry today, and will primarily consider the pragmatics of how the Orthodox Church might welcome women into the diaconate once again. Attention will be given to ways all Orthodox Christians might constructively help the Church to move forward on ordaining deaconesses to build up the Body of Christ.

All who are curious in learning more about the history and possibilities for deaconesses in the Orthodox Church today are welcome to attend the symposium.

Symposium Schedule

Friday, November 10, 2023

Deaconesses for the Orthodox Church Today will begin on Friday, November 10 at 7pm with opening remarks and prayers by His Eminence Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago (GOA), followed by a joint keynote address by Dr. Helen Creticos Theodoropoulos and Dr. Carrie Frederick Frost on the topic of “Deaconesses for the Orthodox Church Today: The History, the Need, and the Future,” moderated by Archdeacon John Chryssavgis. The evening will conclude with a reception. This event will be free and open to the public, although registration is required. The keynote will briefly review the history of deaconesses in the Orthodox Church and the need for them today, the St. Phoebe Center’s history, and the legacy of the Rhodes Consultation of 1988 and its call to revive the female diaconate as well as other contemporary calls for deaconesses. It will then largely focus on how the Orthodox Church might go about restoring this vital order that is so essential for its health and future. All present will be invited to attend the events of the next day, when possible processes for ordaining deaconesses once again will be discussed in more depth.

Saturday, November 11, 2023

On Saturday, November 11, 8:30am-6:30pm, the symposium will continue with multiple sessions featuring Orthodox women and men, laity and clergy. Registration for Saturday is required and includes a fee. The day will begin in prayer, and esteemed panelists will speak on topics including:

- Calls for Deaconesses and Women’s Ministry in the Church

The call to revive the female diaconate is not new in the life of the Orthodox Church. This session will present the numerous calls to do so from the modern period. It will also highlight the many ways that lay women are currently serving in diaconal-type capacities. While acknowledging that these ministries are important in and of themselves, this session will further explain why ordination is valuable and necessary to participate more fully in the diaconal ministry of the Orthodox Church.

Panelists: Dr. Teva Regule

Ms. Sophia Kyrou

Dr. Ioana Popa

- Can Women go in the Altar? Addressing the Myths around Ordaining Deaconesses

This session will directly engage with concerns and and incorrect teachings about the revival of the ordained order of deaconesses in the Orthodox Church, addressing such issues as: the unfounded but wide-spread belief that women are not allowed in the altar, lingering and theologically indefensible connections between women’s bodies and impurity, and “slippery slope” concerns about deaconesses leading to women priests.

Dr. Valerie Karras

Rev. Dr. Philip Zymaris

Dr. Paul Ladouceur

- How to Restore the Ordained Order of Deaconesses Today

A process will be proposed and discussed by which the Orthodox Church might restore the ordained order of deaconesses today to minister to needs in the church and the world, acknowledging the importance for the renewal of the entire diaconate. Small groups moderated by St. Phoebe Center board members will workshop this issue, culminating in a full-group discussion.

Speakers: Dr. Carrie Frederick Frost and Rev. Dr. Perry Hamalis

Respondents: Dr. James Skedros

His Eminence Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago

- Ways to Advocate for Deaconesses

This session will offer practical ways that attendees can help the St. Phoebe Center advocate for deaconesses in the Orthodox Church today.

The day will end with a joyful celebration of women’s ministry in the Orthodox Church.

Sunday, November 12, 2023

On Sunday, November 12, St. Phoebe will be commemorated at a local liturgy, followed by a no-host lunch and debrief of the symposium.

Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/deaconesses-for-the-orthodox-church-today-symposium-tickets-642311419747>

Get more information on our website at: <https://orthodoxdeaconess.org/>

Send questions to: stphoebecenter@gmail.com

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