

## CHURCH SERVICE AND THE DIACONATE WORKSHOP

### SUMMARY REPORT

This workshop continues the discussion concerning women in Church Service which took place in Agapia, Romania. The group concentrated in two areas: 1.) The responsibility of the laity for Church Service, "Diakonia"; 2.) Examining the role of the Diaconate.

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As Christians, we belong to the one Body of Christ. Baptism and Chrismation consecrate us into full, responsible membership of our Lord's Church. As we know, the primary call for all Christians is to constantly strive to live in the presence of God. We are encouraged to continually struggle to meet Christ, always trying to build our relationship with Him. We have a personal God, a God whom we can come to know through experience.

An important aspect of our relationship with Christ involves our relationship with our neighbor. "Diakonia", Christian service, begins here! We each are called to serve according to our own gifts and abilities.

The first aspect of Christian Diakonia that our group discussed concerned the Diakonia of the Laity. This is a great responsibility entrusted to all baptized members of the Church. The Diakonia of the Laity can be manifested in a variety of ways; in our prayer for others, our home-life, our parish and diocesan activities, our jobs and our civil and social responsibilities. All Christians are encouraged to serve the Lord and make Him present wherever their particular life situations take them. We are all called to service, carrying out the mission of the Church in the world.

Each person's call to Christian Diakonia is expressed uniquely. The varied services that each of us give, benefit the whole Body of the Church as well. Every Christian within the laity and the clergy is held responsible for his or her own particular service to the Lord and His People. St. Paul recognized this and encouraged his flock to use their gifts accordingly. He states this specifically in Romans 12:3-9 when he says,

"I want to urge each one among you not to exaggerate his real importance... each part has a separate function, so all of us, in union

with Christ form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other. Our gifts differ according to the grace given to us. If your gift is prophesy, then use it as your faith suggests; if it is administration, then use it for administration; if teaching, then use it for teaching. Let the preacher deliver sermons; the almsgiver give freely; the officials be diligent, and those who do works of mercy, do them cheerfully. "

Every member of the Church's Lay Diakonia is called to give of his or her own time, talent and resources for the fulfillment of God's work.

The second aspect of Diakonia that was discussed by our group concerned the possibilities of rejuvenating the ordained Diaconate in places where such an office would serve the needs of the Church. The workshop leaders shared some aspects of their particular studies regarding the male and female Diaconate of the early Church. In agreement, the group concluded that the Deacons and Deaconesses of the early Church, as ordained members of the clergy, were ordained to a life of service, Diakonia. It was emphasized that this was not an ordination to Priesthood. ( The male Diaconate, however, by extension, partially did participate in the Priesthood in practice. )

Their responsibilities differed at various times and places. Their service encompassed every phase of assisting Church life. For more information regarding the ministry of the Deaconess, we recommend the background paper offered by Dr. E. Theodorou on "The Ministry of the Deaconess in the Greek Orthodox Church". If the Church were to decide to rejuvenate the Diaconate, she would encourage the persons called to such an office to be completely dedicated to a life of service to the Church.

#### CONCLUDING SUGGESTIONS:

1) It is of primary importance that the Laity be made aware of its responsibility to Christ and His Church. Every baptized man and woman has to recognize that each of them has his or her own specific service to give. This general diakonia

can be expressed in home, parish and social settings. Every Christian is held responsible for bringing Christ to others, to the best of their talents and abilities.

2) Once the process of heightening the laity's awareness of its responsibilities to the Church has begun, we suggest that our jurisdictional hierarchies, SCOBA, and Seminaries undertake serious study concerning the rejuvenation of the Diaconate. This would be a Diaconate consistent with the spirit of our living Church Tradition, tailored to the specific pastoral needs of today.

3) After adequate study of the Diaconate is made and the present needs of the Church determined, we suggest that our hierarchies and seminaries establish qualifications and training programs for these ordained ministries.

4) Finally, we suggest that an active program be established educating the faithful on the Diaconate's true mission and purpose.