

On the Ministry of the Diaconate, Part Three

By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

His Eminence presents a three-part series about revitalizing the diaconate in our Archdiocese.

Specialized Diaconate Ministry Project for Better Pastoral Ministry

"The deacon assists the hierarch and the priest in conducting prayers and services, and completing pastoral, educational and social work" (Article 95, Chapter VII of the Internal Regulations of the See of Antioch issued by the Holy Synod on April 7, 1983).

Introduction

Whereas urban areas are expanding, and parishioners' residences continue to scatter over wide areas, making the direct presence of the priest in the local community more challenging;

And whereas, the current era is marked by specialization in all fields – scientific, educational, pastoral, and social work, making it more difficult for a single individual to master them all;

And whereas, there is a pressing need for the activation of knowledgeable ecclesiastical pastoral service, with competency in specialized fields;

Whereas traditional pastoral care that once characterized small agricultural communities, predominantly Orthodox in the past, no longer meets the diverse needs of the current society;

Whereas the complexity of contemporary life, on one hand, and the economic situation in general, on the other, no longer allows the Church to establish full-time ministers for all the required pastoral services;

Whereas diverse talents might additionally contribute to various ecclesiastical pastoral services, it is becoming imperative for the Archdiocese to expand the field of volunteer diaconal ministry, especially since many of our young people show willingness and desire to serve their Church in specific areas commensurate with the talent and potential of each of them.

Therefore, we encourage our children to engage in specialized volunteer diaconal service, in accordance with the laws of the Holy Orthodox Christian Church of Antioch and the requirements of our Archdiocese in North America.

Admission Requirements:

- The applicant must be over twenty-five years old.
- The applicant must be a faithful attendee of church services.
- Must have completed (the online) St. Stephen's Certificate Program from the Antiochian House of Studies, or The Word (Al-Kalima) Program in Balamand, or be willing to pursue studies in either program.
- Must have a good reputation, being known for moral and ethical purity.
- Must be married to one woman, not divorced or remarried.
- Must obtain a letter of recommendation from the parish priest attesting to his active ministry, apostolic zeal, and talent in diaconal service (pastoral, educational, and social fields).
- Must obtain a letter recommendation from the Antiochian bishop in his area.
- Must commit to volunteering for six hours of specific service weekly, excluding liturgical services.
- Will commit in writing to not seek ordination to the priesthood in the future.

Duties of the Deacon:

- Assisting the parish priest in conducting weekly services in the parish, the Divine Liturgy on Sundays, feasts and all other church services as needed.
- Performing a specific service or "diakonia," according to his talent and ability, in full coordination with the parish priest, working under his obedience and complying with his instructions.
- The deacon can serve in any of the following areas: educational, pastoral, and all acts of charity as highlighted below:
 - Teaching the parishioners by word and example, and guiding them to the fountains of salvation, in full coordination with the parish priest.
 - Caring for the poor, the orphan, the widow, the disabled, the bereaved, the sick, the imprisoned, and the distressed, in full

coordination with the parish priest and the Archdiocese's charitable societies.

- Caring for children and youth, organizing their meetings, helping to educate them in the faith, securing their readings, and their spiritual and sports activities, in full coordination with the parish priest.
- The deacon shall seek the blessing from his parish priest to be absent from the parish, and from the bishop of the area to be absent from the country.
- The deacon remains in the parish where he was ordained and is not transferred elsewhere except under extraordinary conditions.