



**An Active Discernment:
The Restoration of Women
to the Ordained Diaconate
in the Catholic Churches**

History of the Diaconate



1st Century – 12th Century

- In the letter to the Romans (56 A.D.), St. Paul commends Phoebe and introduces her as “our sister,” a benefactor and a deacon (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae, Corinth.
- Until the 12th century, women deacons were involved in word, liturgy and acts of charity.

12th Century – 20th Century

- By the 12th century, the diaconate became solely a transitional step towards the priesthood.
- Since women and married men could not become priests, they could no longer be ordained as deacons.

20th Century

- Vatican II (1962-1965) decreed the diaconate should be restored as a permanent state of life to married and single men as it was “only right to strengthen them by...the sacramental grace of the diaconate.”
-Ad Gentes, On the Mission Activity of the Church

21st Century

- 2016 - Pope Francis established a commission to study whether women could be ordained as deacons. (Their report was never published.)
- 2019 - in response to a formal request by the Amazon Synod, the Pope established a New Commission to study the topic.
- The Commission may be meeting in the fall of 2021.



Women and the Diaconate: Our Church's Discernment

Luke Hansen
Co-Founder, Discerning Deacons

[Watch Video \(6 min\)](#)

What is Active Discernment and Why is the Holy Father Calling for it?

- The Holy Spirit is always reforming and renewing the Church (*Ecclesia semper reformanda*).
- The faithful are called to listen and to be responsive to the Holy Spirit and to pray and reflect on the needs of the Church.
- Women already performing diaconal ministry could be strengthened through the charism of holy orders.
- In 2016, Pope Francis established a Commission for the study of the diaconate of women.
- In 2019, in response to a formal request made by the Amazon Synod, Pope Francis established a second commission:

I will take on the request to reconvene the commission, perhaps with new members...I pick up the challenge. There's a glove somewhere that's been thrown down. The women have put up a sign and said, 'Please listen to us. May we be heard.' And I pick up that gauntlet.

(Pope Francis, Amazon Synod, 2019)

- In 2021, Pope Francis amended canon law, making it possible for women to be installed formally as lectors and acolytes.



Women and the Diaconate: The Church in the Amazon

Ellie Hidalgo

Co-Director, Discerning Deacons

[Watch Video \(5 mins\)](#)

What do Deacons do?

- Minister in the areas of Liturgy, Word and Charity
- Serve as bridges between the altar and the faithful
- Proclaim the Gospel and preach the homily during Mass
- Preside at baptisms, weddings, funerals and burial services
- Care for those on the margins of society
- Advance the social justice mission of the Church
- Teach the Catechism
- Evangelize

Why Ordain Women to the Diaconate?

- To meet the pastoral needs of the Church
- To strengthen women's ministries with the sacramental grace of the diaconate
- To honor the history of the early Christian Church
- To inspire young Catholic women to recognize their home in the Church
- To help Catholics see the image of Christ in women
- To collaborate with other ordained ministers
- To be attentive to the call of the Holy Spirit

“Ordaining women as deacons who have the necessary personal, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral qualities would give their indispensable role in the life of the church a new degree of official recognition, both of their ministry and of their direct connection to their diocesan bishop for assignments and faculties.”

(Bishop Emil Aloisius Wcela, Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Rockville Centre, NY. “Why Not Women?” *America*, October 2012.)

Learn More



“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a minister [*diakonos*] of the Church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well” (Romans 16:1-2).

Survey Data on Ordaining Women to the Diaconate

Who believes the church should ordain women as deacons?*

- 72 % of leaders of religious orders
- 60% of Catholic Women
- 44% of directors of deacon formation
- 33% of bishops

*Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Georgetown University 2018/2019)

For more information on ordaining women to the diaconate, click below.

discerningdeacons.org

Virtual Prayer Service for the Feast of St. Phoebe

Friday, September 3, 2021 @7pm EDT

- We invite you to gather with us virtually to pray to St. Phoebe for her help in our discernment, to listen to powerful testimonies from Catholic women already engaged in diaconal ministry, and to express our hope that the Church will “receive [these women] in the Lord,” just as St. Paul asked the Church in Rome to receive Phoebe, the *diakonos*. (Romans 16:1-2)
- The **fruits of our conversation** will be brought to **Pope Francis** and members of the Papal Commission
- **To participate, please register using the link below**
Date: Friday, September 3, 2021
Time: 7:00 to 8:30pm EDT

[Registration](#)



Artwork by Laura James

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