

## Maphorion



The office of the Deaconesses constitutes an ancient tradition of the Church deriving from the Apostolic Period. From the book of *Acts* (6:17) we learn about the choosing and the ordination of the first seven male deacons of the Church.

As the surviving sources testify from this period this priestly office was given equally both to men and women. St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans presents Phoebe (Φοίβη) as an exemplary Deaconess of the Church.

In the third century AD, as Origen and Clement of Alexandria wrote, Deaconesses ministered to the churches throughout Palestine, Asia Minor and Balkan Peninsula. This office kept thriving in the Church in the Byzantine era, according to the information we get from Emperor Constantine's VII writings (10<sup>th</sup> century), Emperor Alexios Comnenos biography (11<sup>th</sup> century) and

Theodore Balsamon's commentary on the Holy Canons (12<sup>th</sup> century). Over the centuries of the decline of the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman oppression the ministry of Deaconesses fell into disuse, while male Deacons were demoted to serving the Bishop.

In modern times, striving to unite ourselves with the hearty and unadorned piety of the Early Church we acknowledge the need for women in the ministries of the Church. That's why, with our Cathedral's ministry, St. Kyriaki Handmaidens, we welcome the young girls, distinctive for their devotion and we have appointed them to assist in various ways in the divine services. Their vestments, which appears as a white cape is called a "Maphorion" and it was the garment of the Deaconesses in the ancient Church. Similarly, the Altar Boy vestments resemble those of the deacon. Many women saints of the Church are depicted wearing it.



Therefore let us always wear the Maphorion with honor, distinction, and piety as we serve Christ and his Holy Church.

