

Office of Communications

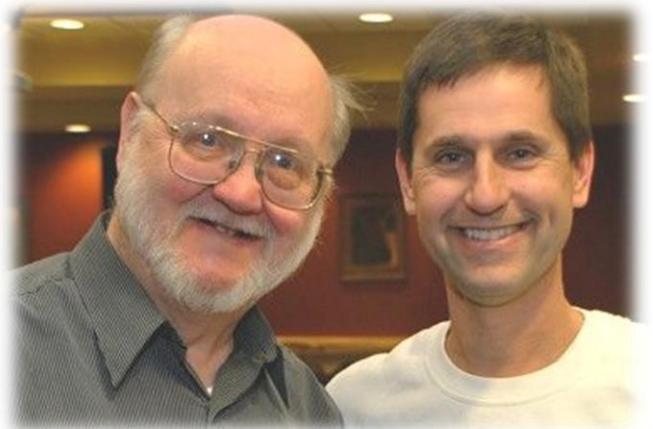
Orthodox Church in America Diocese of New York and New Jersey

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The **Diocesan Diaconal Formation Program** was inaugurated on September 11, 2010. As the program's twelve enrolled students now progress diligently and rapidly through a second semester, it is apparent that God's blessings are upon the endeavor. Reflecting upon the formulation and inauguration of this program in our diocese, Bishop +Michael states: "What is essential about this Diocesan Diaconate Program, established by Saint Tikhon's Seminary, is personal formation. A deacon or a priest, for that matter, cannot be formed personally, spiritually, or even liturgically from only textbooks or on-line coursework. Formation in the tradition of our spiritual fathers, the saints, can only be done in person."

Revitalization of the diaconate in terms of *diaconia* (service) and *martyria* (witness) is the chief goal and raison d'être for His Grace in establishing the program. The diaconate as we see it today in this country is a far cry from its traditional expression throughout the history of the church. Presently the diaconate, except for small instances in this country, has been reduced to liturgical service and no more. The traditional role of deacons serving those in need has virtually disappeared and it is Bishop +Michael's intention to restore the fullness of the diaconate to its



historical service and witness, both in and beyond the altar. Of course, there is emphasis on liturgical practice and serving. "Liturgical practicum is so important in diaconal formation," said Bishop +Michael, "men need to know, by experience, the divine services before they can love them ... and to be a good deacon means you have to love the Liturgy, you have to love Vespers and Matins or Vigil. You can't love something you don't know ... and, again, you can't learn to love from a textbook or on-line." So too, the formation of men to be truly functioning deacons of the Church implies a ministry of service and witness beyond serving at liturgical services. As His Grace puts it, "The need for personal formation in ordained ministry is articulated for us beautifully by Saint Gregory the Theologian: *'A man himself must be cleansed, before cleansing others; himself be knowledgeable, that he may teach others; become light, and then give light; draw near to God, and so bring others near; be hallowed, in order to be able to make them holy; be possessed of leadership in order to lead others by the hand; possess wisdom in order to give advice.'* (Oration 2, 71). His words form the inspiration for this program."

Of the three major orders of clergy -- diaconate/deacons, presbyterate/priests, episcopate/bishops -- the diaconate was established first. In the Acts of the Holy Apostles (Chapter 6) we read that seven men were selected to assist with the charitable work of the Christian community. Ideally, every parish should have at least one deacon. It is the restoration of this particular aspect of the diaconate that Bishop +Michael wishes to effect.

This Program, an adjunct off-campus extension of Saint Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, is headquartered at the campus of Saints Peter and Paul Church, Endicott NY. Students come from all over New York State, some driving considerable distances with travel times of 3+ hours one-way.

The 12 students are:

John Hawranick, Ilion NY
Sean McNulty, Rochester NY
Ilya Arnopodesky, Brooklyn NY
Gregory Aidinov, Brooklyn NY
David Chow, New York City
Joseph Kosinski, Auburn NY
Subdeacon Mark Bohush, Binghamton/Endicott NY
Subdeacon Monk Stavros (Lever), Binghamton/Endicott NY
Michael Pylypciw, Binghamton/Endicott NY
Reader Gregory Sagan, Binghamton/Endicott NY
Subdeacon Simeon (Terry) C. Peet, Binghamton/Endicott NY
Gregory White, Gillett PA



Three classes are offered each Saturday following the Divine Liturgy and breakfast: scripture, church order and liturgics. Students earn a total of six credit hours each semester. Father Michael Meerson teaches scripture and Father Alexey Karlgut instructs in both church order and liturgics. Occasionally Bishop +Michael teaches the scripture class. The scripture class includes instruction on some controversial and heterodox viewpoints in order to prepare a prospective deacon for questions about them, such as evolution versus creationism (or intelligent design) when interpreting Genesis and the historical Jesus movement when trying to understand the Gospels.

