

Dear Holy Trinity Parent,

Over the past several months there has been some discussion on establishing a ministry in which girls and young teens from Holy Trinity might be involved in. Too often we have heard that our young girls and ladies are relegated to singing in the choir, but with little else to be involved in during the Divine Liturgy. What follows suggests an alternative.

Several Greek Orthodox parishes have started a Handmaiden Ministry, and recently the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Protection (OCA) on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in NYC established their own (St Lydia), thanks largely to the efforts of Kristina Baktis and Juliana Federoff. The Handmaidens are a sisterhood of young girls and women, modeled after the ministry of the Theotokos, Holy Myrrhbearers, and other female saints, and is intended to allow girls to grow together in service, prayer and purity. Holy Virgin Protection used as their template the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation in Atlanta, GA. Kristina was kind enough to provide detailed information what their parish model looks like. It has been adapted to fit our needs.

The first step is establishing a level of interest. The three girls who this would mostly immediately impact would be Brittney V (16), Zoe K (14), and Anna Rose F (age 6 1/2). The ages for handmaidens will be from six years old through senior year of high school.

Naming the handmaiden ministry is important. A bit of research is necessary. Zoe and Brittney would be asked to read brief biographies (one-page) of six female saints. That would give them the honor of naming the handmaiden ministry. They would know that for as long as their ministry functioned in a liturgical capacity at Holy Trinity, they were responsible for naming it. Anna, meanwhile, would be told or be read to about the six choices, then she will also have that special feeling that she also helped name the ministry. The hope is that all current and future handmaidens model their life after the female saint the Handmaiden Ministry is named after. It will be their Patron Saint.

Following are six female saints for consideration. Their dedication to church, God, and in some cases, parenthood, stands out. They provide a good cross-section.

- **St Juliana of Lazarevo** (*January 2*); 17<sup>th</sup> century saint and mother of six sons and one daughter.
- **St Emelia of Constantinople** (*May 30*); Mother of 10 children, five are commemorated as saints.
- **St Nina of Georgia** (*January 14*); 5<sup>th</sup> century deaconess; Brought Orthodoxy to people of Georgia.
- **St Maria Skobtsvoa** (*July 20*); 20<sup>th</sup> c. saint. Gave her life in place of Jewish woman during WWII.
- **St Olympias** (*July 25*); Early 5<sup>th</sup> century deaconess; Admired greatly by St John Chrysostom. Well educated, and very influential. Built hospital and orphanage, and cared for the poor and needy.
- **St Priscilla** (*June 7*); 1<sup>st</sup> c. missionary who traveled w/ St Paul. Converted house to a church. Mentioned four times by Paul in New Testament.

### **How will the girls be designated as Handmaidens?**

The girls in the Greek Cathedral in Atlanta wear white capes called a "*maphorion*" which was the traditional garment of deaconess in the early church wore. Our girls will wear be a small cape which falls to just above the waist; it would not entirely cover the girls skirts or dresses. The 2<sup>nd</sup> St Cathedral opted for the same. A full length vestment, a sash, or pin are other choices to designate the Handmaiden Ministers.

### **Who will make the maphorions?**

It would be good if a parishioner or two with sewing skills could lead the effort. Barbara Lacey would be willing to travel to the 2<sup>nd</sup> St Cathedral to get a better idea of the pattern and material, and has already volunteered to sew.

## **What will our new handmaidens do? What will it look like?**

The girls will be present for The Little Entrance, the Gospel Reading, and the Great Entrance.

## **Tell me more?**

The girls should sit together in the front pew on the side away from the choir. It would be helpful if another female (does not have to be same person each week) sat with them in order to give a prompt when necessary. The idea would be that the girls would follow along in Divine Liturgy books, so that they will better understand the Liturgy, and then also own their ministry. At the designated Entrances, the girls will go to the kliros, light their candles, and take their position outside the South Deacons' Door. As their male servers exit, the girls will either lead or follow during each of the three processions. Once the entrance is completed, the girls will return their candles and return to their seat.

## **Will we need additional candles for the girls?**

Yes. Would someone like to make a donation?

## **Any other responsibilities the girls will have?**

Pretty much what they do now. Take the collection, and then also begin setting up the bread and wine for Holy Communion. The male altar servers pretty much take care of this detail now, but in order to distribute these responsibilities evenly, the girls could eventually take this duty over, or at the very least share it. The girls could also help out with tidying up after Liturgy, restore books and pick up any other items from the pews and return them to their proper places, and assist with readings in liturgical services.

## **Would there be some training?**

Yes, of course. Fr Marc will do some training, so that things go smoothly when the handmaidens begin their duties. The learning could be set up as a small retreat one Sunday after Divine Liturgy. The girls would each be given their own Divine Liturgy book, and then make markings in it as necessary.

## **When will the girls remove their maphorions?**

After the prayer Before the Ambo, the girls will receive a blessing from Fr Marc and then return to the left kliros, remove, then hang up their vestment. They should also receive a blessing when putting on the maphorion prior to Liturgy, in the same way the male altar servers do when putting on their vestment.

## **Final Thoughts?**

If the handmaiden ministry is going to be successful, then being in church, say no later 9:25, is critical. This falls on the parents; it becomes their responsibility to arrive to church on time.

## **When will the Holy Trinity Handmaiden Ministry begin?**

If everyone is in agreement, most especially Brittney, Zoe, and Anna, then it will be submitted to Archbishop Nikon for his review, editing, and final blessing. If blessed, we would need to purchase material, identify a parish seamstress or two, and also purchase additional candles. It would also be good to have an icon of the Handmaiden Ministry's Patron Saint to place in the church for weekly veneration.

## **Visually speaking, it would be helpful to see what the handmaidens look like.**

### **Anything I can put my eyes on?**

This is a link to the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Atlanta and the pictures of the handmaidens <http://www.atlgoc.org/index.html>; Also: <http://www.nycathedral.org/> -- Fr Marc V.