01/10/2021

Holy Cross Diaconate Program 2021



Online and in Person

By Rev. Dn. Salvatore Michael Fazio

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, the Program for the Diaconate was able to hold its annual summer session in 2021, completing its fifteenth consecutive year of service to the Church in training future deacons for the building up of the body of Christ. Normally, the Program for the Diaconate holds a nine-day summer session on the campus of Holy Cross, where first-, second-, and third-year candidates for the diaconate participate in educational and formational courses as they prepare for possible future ordination. Upon completing the summer session, the candidates then return to their parishes and continue to be mentored by their priests and Hierarchs through the program structure and various diaconate fellowship and regional workshops. Following last year's struggles, we implemented a more robust program experience for the theological and spiritual formation of the candidates in 2021.

The Program for the Diaconate got its start in 2005, when the Holy Eparchial Synod of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America requested that the faculty of Holy Cross create a program to train deacons to assist clergy with their parish duties

and help out with the needs of the Metropolises. In 2007, Holy Cross enrolled its first candidates. Since then, approximately150 candidates have enrolled in the program. Of those, 83 have completed the program, 45 have been ordained to the diaconate, and 27 are currently eligible candidates for ordination at various stages in the process of receiving the Church's blessing to be ordained to the diaconate. The majority of candidates who are enrolled in or have gone through the program are men from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, although candidates from the Orthodox Church in America and the Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America have also completed the program and been ordained by their respective Hierarchs.

In 2021, a total of 34 candidates were enrolled at various stages of the program and participated in the summer's online session. All of the 34 candidates demonstrated their dedication towards realizing their calling to serve Christ and His Church through the holy diaconate. They also have taken advantage of the opportunity to join in the fellowship events and Metropolis Regional Group events and workshops held throughout the year both in person and online.

The Holy Cross Diaconate Program has now adapted to offering three online classes and several Metropolis Fellowship and Regional Group online and in-person opportunities for retreats, workshops, and continued education for all candidates as well as DP alumni.

The following are the 2021 online and in-person events of the Diaconate Program (those that have occurred and those that are planned):

Feb 13: Diaconate Program Valentine's Day–an opportunity for fellowship, along with a review of the role of a deacon in a reader service offered by guest speaker Rev. Dn. William Leogas.

May 26: HCHC Clergy Mentor Zoom call. All current candidate Mentors were invited to hear updates on the program for 2021 and to share feedback on the Program.

May 29: Diaconate Program Regional Leader Zoom call. All current DP Metropolis Regional Group leaders, blessed by their respective Hierarchs, agreed to have summer, fall, winter, and spring regional in-person and/or online events.

June 5: The 2021 summer session kicked off with a virtual lamb BBQ video conference call. The evening program welcomed back DP alumni and all new and returning candidates. The BBQ was a great success, with over 60 attendees.

June 7-11: The first DP academic course offered (online): Vespers, Matins, and

Liturgy taught by Fr. Philip Zymaris.

June 21-25: The second DP academic course offered (online): Pastoral Care taught by Dr. Philip Mamalakis.

July 12-16: The third and final DP academic course (online): Orthodox Spirituality taught by His Eminence Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh. Having His Eminence spend a week with the candidates, as he did in 2009, was greatly appreciated by all.

July 20: San Francisco/Chicago Regional Summer Group Zoom call with guest speaker Archdeacon Vasilios Smith of Chicago on the topic of Hierarchical Liturgies.

July 27: San Francisco open Regional Summer Group Zoom call with guest speaker Dr. Eugenia Constantinou on “Thinking Orthodox.” His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco joined the call and offered words of encouragement to the attendees.

July 28: Zoom call for third-year candidates, which allowed them to share their reflections and feedback on being able to meet in person their first year at HCHC and then have to go through pandemic-related adaptations of the program over the last two years.

July 31: Zoom call for first-year candidates, which gave them an opportunity to get to know their classmates better and give feedback on the classes.

July 31: Zoom call for second-year candidates to reflect on two years of online courses and give feedback on their second-year diaconal formation journey and on the classes.

Aug 19-22: HCHC/ Boston Regional Group Retreat. Hosted by the HCHC DP staff, Dr. James Skedros, Rev. Dn. Salvatore Fazio, and Boston Regional Leaders Rev. Dn. Gary Kent and Rev. Dn. John Vaporis. Fr. Peter Chamberas and Fr. Chris Foustoukos gave encouraging talks to the participants and celebrated Vespers, Matins, and Divine Liturgy. The retreat welcomed several DP Regional Leaders, including Rev. Dn. Anastaci Hallas (Direct Archdiocesan District), Rev. Dn. Daniel Cunningham (San Francisco), and Rev. Dn. Vasili Yacalis (Detroit). The retreat was a great success giving DP Professors, guest speakers, alumni deacons, alumni candidates, and current candidates and their spouses an opportunity for continued education and to share a lamb roast and diaconate fellowship. Completion certificates for the graduating third-year candidates in attendance were presented at the conclusion of Divine Liturgy. The retreat guest speakers included Fr. Peter Chamberas, who spoke on the life of Bishop Gerasimos of Abydos, Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou, who

offered a focused lecture and reflections on the topic of the Jesus Prayer, Dr. Philip Mamalakis and Fr. Chris Foustoukos, who led a joint presentation on pastoral ministry, and Fr. Andrew Giouralis, who spoke on diaconate chaplaincy and pastoral care today in a pandemic world.

Diaconate Regional Groups continue to be planned and are posted on the HCHC Diaconate website. These are the upcoming events in the calendar to date:

Sept 28-30: Metropolis of Atlanta Fellowship Group with His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios

Oct 12-15: The APC National Clergy Retreat, open to ordained deacons

Nov 5-7: Metropolis of San Francisco Fellowship Retreat with His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos

The Diaconate Program is under the direction of the Holy Eparchial Synod and the Faculty of Holy Cross and is intended to provide parishes with trained deacons who can assist with the liturgical and pastoral needs of a community. Ordained graduates of the program are under the omophorion of their local Metropolitan. The Program gives those called to service in the Church as deacons the opportunity to be trained and tested as they discern their calling. The program is for the holy diaconate; individuals with a calling to the priesthood are encouraged to enroll in the Master of Divinity degree program at Holy Cross.

By the grace of God, the Program continues to grow and by His will continues to nurture those who sense a calling to the holy diaconate in the Orthodox Church. For more information about the Diaconate Program, please visit the program's website at https://www.hchc.edu/certificate-programs/diaconate-program/, or email Dn. Sal Fazio, Director of Outreach for the Diaconate Program, at .

PHOTO: Metropolis of Boston Retreat, August 19-22, 2021, at the St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center, Contoocook, NH

goarch.org