

## Bringing Healing and Restoring Unity

Finally, studying and celebrating past women of faith will help bring wholeness and completeness within the church. Women who have felt the pain of exclusion will begin to experience the healing process of full acceptance once they are included as equal members of the Body of Christ. For the first time, other women will be freed to use their gifts in ministry when they discover how former daughters of God were mightily used to proclaim the Good News in word and deed. Men will rejoice that God raised up partners in mission in other centuries, and will themselves now be free to join hands with their Christian sisters today. In a fragmented world, the visible unity of believers as they serve together will be both a compelling testimony to the reality of new life in Christ and a powerful force in spreading the Gospel.

So the ultimate answer to the question "Why remember our foremothers — does that truly matter?" is "Yes, it does, because truth always matters." Knowing truth sets us all free to serve (John 8:31,32). Grounding our actions on truth makes us all strong to serve (Galatians 5:1).

Over the centuries, the true record of women of faith has become obscured. Isn't it time to set that record straight?

### Women's Voices

They came from all over —  
Bahrain, Turkey, Rome:  
A little band of women  
with hope all their own  
To learn and to study,  
To become stronger in their faith,  
To encourage one another  
In the footsteps of the saints.  
Priscilla, Praxidis, Paula  
And of course, our Theodora;  
How many of the others  
Have been thoroughly ignored?  
But more important is how  
Do we know  
How many of these women's voices  
Were lost in Long Ago?

—Deboran Everist

## OUR SISTER, PHOEBE

Linda Montgomery

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper (prostatis) of many and of myself as well (Romans 16:1,2 RSV).*

I was having a discussion the other evening with a family in our church about the subject of women deacons. I said, "Well, Phoebe, of course, was a deacon."

Someone said, "Really? Are you sure? Not everyone believes that she was."

"She was a deacon," I said. It's in Romans 16."

*Diakonos* means "servant." Phoebe was a prominent woman who distinguished herself by the services she rendered to her church and to Paul himself.

The word *prostatis* is usually translated "helper" or "patroness" for Phoebe. Yet in the literature of the time it had the connotation of "leading officer," "president," "governor," or "superintendent."

In Romans 16:1, the Greek word *diakonos* is translated, "deaconess" in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, "servant" in the New International Version, "servant" in the King James Version, and "dear Christian woman" in the Living Bible Paraphrased.

The very same word, *diakonos* is translated "deacon" in Philippians 1:1, I Timothy 3:8, and I Timothy 3:12, in each reference, in all four versions of the Bible cited above. These verses refer to church leadership. Note that I Timothy 3:12 could have been a warning against polygamy. In I Timothy 3:11, "the women likewise" may mean either "wives of deacons" or "women deacons."

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (*diakonos*)."  
(Phil. 1:1 RSV)

"Deacons (*diakonos*) likewise must be serious, not double-tongued..." (I Tim. 3:8 RSV)

"Let deacons (*diakonos*) be the husband of one wife..." (I Tim. 3:12 RSV)

To be consistent, should not the word *diakonos* be consistently translated "servant" or translated "deacon"? Why a change in translation for Phoebe, but not elsewhere?

Phoebe's story begins with her name, which means, "moon." She was probably named in honor of the goddess Artemis, who was widely worshiped in the Greek world, including in Corinth and the nearby seaport of Cenchreae where she lived. Probably, Phoebe had grown up as a devotee of this moon-goddess of fertility, the patroness of maidens, the helper of women in childbirth, and the giver of a gentle death to women.

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