SUMMER · 2021

## **AWESOME NEWS!**

Presented by the Antiochian Women of the East



## **Summer of Living Faith**

As we approach mid summer, we reflect on the "seasons" of our faith experiences in the Orthodox Church. Looking over our shoulder at the past year-and-a-half of illness, separation, and many other obstacles to maintaining a "Living Faith", we are looking forward to the horizon of a NEW season -- a time of coming back together, of healing, and continued LIVING FAITH among women of the parishes in the Eastern Dioceses. Having moved through what could be compared to a harsh "winter" of Covid-19 restrictions, we have felt the icy blast of separation from family, friends, and at times felt detached even from our Creator God - unable to worship and partake of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

Now, feeling the thaw of "Springtime" with the slow but steady lifting of restrictions, we see the once-frozen river of our feeble faith trickling and flowing once more, leading to the sure growth and beauty of the coming summer. May our LIVING FAITH emerge more devout and sweeter than before. May we share our stories of "summer" and be encouraged to LIVE.

## This issue:

Letter from Metropolitan JOSEPH PAGE 02

Article from Bishop THOMAS PAGE 03

Message from Fr. Donald Shadid AWE Spiritual Advisor PAGE 06

Update from AWE President Rula Osama Khoury PAGE 08

AWE Chapter Updates
BEGIN ON PAGE 14



# HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN JOSEPH

His Eminence The Most Reverend Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America

## ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

July 1, 2021

Beloved sisters in Christ,

Blessings and much love to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

I greet you during this joyful time of reopening, as our country emerges from a season of danger, fear, and isolation. We pray that this pandemic is behind us for good, so that we can reinvigorate all our ministries in this archdiocese.

As we have discovered through this dark year, the world needs the grace of God. Our human race is so spiritually weak that one little virus can profoundly shake our social fabric. Brother turned against brother, sister against sister, parent against child. Depression and anxiety skyrocketed. Many lost hope. Coronavirus thus revealed not just the weakness of our bodies but (more importantly) our lack of spiritual resilience. We Christians know that such resilience only comes through faith in the God who is love (1 John 4:8), who "meets all [our] needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Let us, then, rediscover our faith, by increasing our prayer life, reading the wisdom of our Orthodox tradition, and immersing ourselves in the worship of the Church. And let us share this faith with our friends and families, encouraging one another to seek that foundation in Christ which cannot be shaken. It has outlasted persecutions, heresies, famine, plague, and war, and it can carry us through whatever lies ahead.

Assuring you of my prayers, and asking your prayers for our archdiocese, I remain,

Yours in the service of Christ,

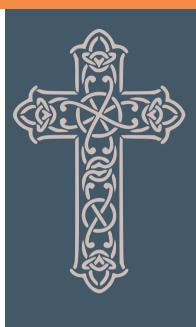
Metropolitan Loseph\_

+IOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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# Living the Faith: Christian Marriage and the Role of Sexuality in the Life of the Orthodox Christian

## BY HIS GRACE BISHOP THOMAS

When we hear the term "sexual revolution" many think of the 1960s during which time there was a cultural liberalization of societal sexual norms. The monogamous marriage between one man and one woman was challenged by the increasing acceptance of pre-marital and extramarital sexual activity. "Free Love" became the mantra through the 1960s, 70s and 80s until the rise of HIV AIDS provided a pause in the cultural imagination of what was a beneficial expression of one's sexual new found freedom.

In addition to the liberalization of societal sexual norms, the advent of widespread use of birth control, and the legalization of abortion with the U.S. Supreme Court decision on January 22, 1973, of the Roe v. Wade case, brought about a newly expanded detachment between sexual activity and childbirth. No longer was it to be expected that sexual relations between a man and a woman might very well bear the fruit of a child, further separating the means from the end. Now, the 'end' of sexual activity could simply be the temporary enjoyment of physical pleasure without the previous constraints of marriage and the expectation of pregnancy.

As the effectiveness of birth control increased and sexual activity outside of marriage became increasingly permissible within society, the hope for free love without consequences came face to face with a growing number of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including the deadly human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) that causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Rather than rethinking our newly embraced sexual freedom as a society, we turned to a new public health campaign encouraging 'Safe Sex.' According to the Planned Parenthood document titled, *History of Sex Education in the U.S.* <sup>1</sup>, "In 1975, the World Health Organization (WHO) offered this definition of sexual health:

Sexual health is the integration of the somatic, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual being, in ways that are positively enriching and that enhance personality, communication, and love. Fundamental to this concept are the right to sexual information and the right to pleasure."

The document further explains, "The concept of sexual health includes three basic elements:

- a capacity to enjoy and control sexual and reproductive behavior in accordance with a social and personal ethic;
- 2. freedom from fear, shame, guilt, false beliefs, and other psychological factors inhibiting sexual response and impairing sexual relationship; and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> History of Sex Education in the U.S. (Planned Parenthood, Nov 2016) https://www.plannedparenthood.org/uploads/filer\_public/da/67/da67fd5d-631d-438a-85e8-a446d90fd1e3/20170209\_sexed\_d04\_1.pdf

3. freedom from organic disorders, diseases, and deficiencies that interfere with sexual and reproductive functions.

WHO's early definition is at the core of our understanding of sexual health today and is a departure from prevailing notions about sexual health — and sex education — that predominated in the 19th and 20th centuries. Until the 1960s and 1970s, the goals of social hygiene and moral purity activists eclipsed broader sexual health concerns in the public health arena. Their narrow goals were to prevent sexually transmitted infections, stamp out masturbation and prostitution, and limit sexual expression to marriage (Elia, 2009)."

Indeed, this description articulates well the desired change in societal sexual norms that activists began working for — "a departure from prevailing notions about sexual health" (i.e., sexual activity is good and fruitful only within a marriage of one man and one woman), and towards the "right to pleasure." Through efforts made in public education, public information campaigns, and the marketing of products offering 'safe sex', much of the Western world has adopted this view of the purpose and role of human sexuality. This, however, is not the understanding of the Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Church has always held together the sanctity and dignity of both the married and celibate life. Rather than seeking to liberate sexual activity from the relationship of a monogamous marriage for the purpose of maximizing the pursuit of physical pleasure, sexual relations are understood to be pure and fruitful only in the context of the sacramental marriage of one man and one woman for life. Outside of this sacramental relationship, sexual activity of all kinds is to be refrained from. To modern readers, this sounds like madness because they have accepted the notion that as physical animals, we all have the right to gratify our sexual desires in a consensual manner. Gratifying the flesh, however, is not the highest aim of the Christian, but rightly ordered, the flesh will serve the soul in its ascent to God – this includes the sexual dynamics of male and female. St. Paul writes to the Romans, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Romans 8:5-6)

This, however, is not to imply that the sexual relations between a husband and wife are to be viewed as inherently sinful. St. John Chrysostom writes, "Impurity does not originate in the union of their bodies, but in their thoughts and motives." The Patristic understanding is that while earthly marriage and sexual relations for procreation were not a part of life in the Garden of Paradise, they are a merciful concession that God made to fallen mankind. Through this relationship the procreation of humanity is furthered, "Be fruitful and multiply"; aid and support is rendered for both husband and wife for the furtherance of their loving union and edification to avoid sexual immorality, "let each man have his own wife, and let each woman

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*, Homily 19 (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 33.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:28

have her own husband";<sup>4</sup> and a living example of the mystical union of Christ and His Church is put on display for the world, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."<sup>5</sup> Marriage, and consequently all sexual relations between a husband and wife, should adhere to and keep as its aim a loving union with Christ which will surpass the veil of death and remain for eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Because earthly marriage and sexual relations were not a part of the life of Adam and Eve in the Garden, the celibate life should be understood to be a blessing and not a curse. In fact, St. Paul writes that it is to be preferred if one has the gift for it. "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am..." And, "I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife." The celibate life, however, is not to be devoid of relationship, but instead is free from the responsibilities of spouse and children. The monastic life is a particularly poignant expression of the celibate life—living as it were the life of the angels as well as the future life of the Kingdom where "...they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven." The celibate life, whether monastic or lay, is an opportunity to more fully devote one's life to the pursuit of a loving union with God, and, like marriage, requires self-discipline, prayer and fasting, and the ascetic struggle to put off the works of the flesh and be clothed in righteousness.

This sobering and yet joyful boundary for human sexuality should be appropriately modeled and taught in our parishes, Orthodox schools and colleges, and in our homes. We must not give way to the cultural forces which seek to dilute our faith, deceive our minds, and ignite our passions. St. John the Evangelist and Theologian warns us against allowing our affections to become enflamed for the ways of the world. He writes, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world."

Brothers and Sisters, let us heed the instruction of our father among the saints, St. John Chrysostom who writes, "We must strive for self-control...St. Paul tells us to seek peace and the sanctification without which it is impossible to see the Lord. So whether we presently live in virginity, in our first marriage, or in our second, let us pursue holiness, that we may be counted worthy to see Him and to attain the Kingdom of Heaven, through the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, dominion, and honor, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen." 10

<sup>4 1</sup> Corinthians 7:2

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ephesians 5:32

<sup>6 1</sup> Corinthians 7:8

<sup>7 1</sup> Corinthians 7:32-33

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 22:30

<sup>9 1</sup> John 2:15-16

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> On Marriage and Family Life, 42.

#### ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

THE MOST REVEREND METROPOLITAN PHILIP - FOUNDER
A SISTERHOOD SERVING CHRIST THROUGH SERVING OTHERS



 ❖ DIOCESE OF NEW YORK ℰ WASHINGTON, D.C. ❖

 ❖ DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON, OAKLAND ℰ THE MID-ATLANTIC ❖



July 15, 2021

AWE Spiritual Advisor Summer Message

My Dear Sisters in Christ,

Christ is in Our Midst! He is and Always Shall Be! As we enjoy the always welcome season of Summer, as well as the relaxation of some of the Pandemic restrictions, let us rejoice and offer thanksgiving & glory to our great God Who is always with us, from our creation unto our eternity (Psalm 49:15 & 138:13 & 16; Jeremiah 1:5 and Revelation 21:1-5).

As Orthodox Christians we preserve, practice and pass on the Tradition of Apostolic Christianity through our liturgical & communal life. Indeed, this is precisely how we offer thanks & glory to our God, through our worship of Him and our love of neighbor. As we well know, our Church offers us a wonderful cycle of fasting, prayer & almsgiving throughout our Fall, Winter & Spring seasons. Then we come to this sunny, fun & active season of Summer and everything in the church seems to slow down; or does it? Did you know that there are some amazing special minor feasts in the Summer?

Please allow me to take a few moments to remind you of what yet remains for us before we begin the new liturgical year on September 1. These feasts are: (1) Sunday between July 13 & 19 - Holy Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council ... we affirm & honor the collective witness of these Holy Bishops to Orthodox belief, in particular the proclamation of the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ ... i.e. Christ's humanity & divinity in one individual existence (Jesus Christ is 100% God & 100% Man; (2) July 20 - The Prophet Elijah ... his life of austerity in the mountains & the desert is an ascetic protest against the corruption of the world ... his example of prayer as an act of stretching oneself over another in spirit (3 Kingdoms [1 Kings] 17:17-24] reminds us that we must implore God for those whom we are praying for, with our whole being, and not just with a quick mention of their name; (3) July 22 - St. Mary Magdala, Myrrhbearer & Equal to the Apostles ... through this celebration, we are reminded that we must bring to Christ the costly & invaluable fragrance of a life made holy by grace; (4) August 1 - The Procession of the Honorable and Life-Giving Cross ... whereas the Greater Feasts of the Cross, the Elevation on Sept. 14 is our discovery of the Cross, its encounter with the soul and the Adoration on the Third Sunday of Lent is recognition of our Lord's Cross, as well as our own, as the supreme authority over ourselves, this minor feast reminds us, through a procession, to follow the Cross wherever it leads us; (5) June 24 - The Nativity of John the Baptist, the Precursor ... in this celebration, one might say that we are in the atmosphere of Advent as we are reminded of Zacharias' vision in the temple and his choosing not to believe that his wife would bear a son ... he was thus struck temporarily dumb, unable to speak ... if we cannot

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receive God's promises without any reservations, then we cannot 'speak' (in the deep sense of the word) to others of our faith, of God's Love for us, etc. ... and ... (6) August 29 - The Beheading of John the Baptist, the Precursor ... it is John, the champion of moral law, that is killed because the law is hated so ... this is the celebration at this feast ... as the vespers for the feast proclaims: 'O John, thou wast beheaded for the sake of the law of the Lord' ... John had confronted Herod about his sin of stealing his brother's wife ... John's conscientious protest in the name of eternal law reminds us that our own conscience must lead us to protest our own friends, family and institutions that mock the law and use it for self-gain ... their attempts to abolish the law are in direct opposition to our Lord's exhortation that He fulfills the Law ... knowing that the memory of the Forerunner sometimes mingles with the cycle of our Lord's life, let us remember these words from the kathisma for this feast's matins: 'Let us, the faithful, unite in praise of him who was the mediator between the Law and Grace.' Though these latter two are minor feasts, please keep in mind that the Church places John the Baptist, the Forerunner / Precursor of our Lord above the apostles themselves.

Some of the material in the paragraph above is taken from *The Year of Grace of the Lord* by A Monk of The Eastern Church (SVS Press, Crestwood, New York 10707, 1980).

I pray that you might be able to offer special reverence to God through your celebration of these minor feasts!

If your parish does not offer the Divine Services for these minor feasts, talk to your priest and ask if he is able to put it on the parish's schedule. If you are able, offer to help him with whatever is needed for the service. It could be that he has tried in the past, and no one responded. In the Orthodox Church the priest is not allowed to celebrate the Divine Services alone.

The worship of God & love of neighbor are at the foundation of AWE's Ministry! I pray that God will continue to guide you all as you minister within the Holy Vineyard of our Lord's Church. Please remember that God desires a relationship with all His Creation .... that means you too! Please keep me in your Holy Prayers!

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Don

Very Rev. Fr. Donald Shadid, Spiritual Advisor – Antiochian Women of The East



#### ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

THE MOST REVEREND METROPOLITAN PHILIP - FOUNDER
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THE MOST REVEREND METROPOLITAN JOSEPH 358 MOUNTAIN ROAD ENGLEWOOD, NEW JERSEY 07631

DIOCESAN PRESIDENT



Historic Virtual PLC Meeting – President's Report to The AWE – June 12, 2021 Via Zoom

Your Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Your Grace Bishop THOMAS, Reverend Fathers, and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is in our Midst! He is and ever shall be!

Greetings in the Name of Our Lord, God, and Savior Iesus Christ, I pray that you and your loved ones are well.

"She girdeth her loins with strength and strengthened her arms." (Proverbs 31:17) Without a doubt, God gives Christian women strength. As with everything God gives us, we then become the stewards of that gift. We also become responsible to use it well and to be accountable for how we use it.

I am honored to serve you all for a third term as the president of the Antiochian Women of the East (AWE). I am thankful for the ladies who have inspired and encouraged me to embark on this role. The previous presidents that served our region carved the path for the good work that we have been conducting. I thank them because without them we would not be here today. We are also blessed to have Very Rev. Fr. Don Shadid continue as our Spiritual Advisor along with the support of our AWE Executive Board. I am sad to announce Rachel Szewczyk resigned from her role in December for personal work reasons. Also, due to the arrival of Colleen McAfee's new baby, Simon, she will be stepping down too. Both always offered wisdom during our discussions and were helpful. We love you both and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your hard work, commitment, and devotion to the AWE. May God grant you both many years!

On the other hand, I am thrilled to announce that Cynthia Brandenburg is the new AWE Book Club Coordinator who joined us in December 2020. In February we appointed Kh. BethAnn as Social Media Coordinator! AWE admires their gifts and knowledge they have-to share with us.

The AWE Executive Board members for the 2021-2023 term include: \*Rula Osama Khoury (President), Angela Saliby (Vice President), Nancy Tentzeras (Recording Secretary), Khouria Kelly Purdie (Treasurer), Anna Veniamin (Religious Coordinator), Leslie Deeb-Carter (Humanitarian Coordinator), Barbara Fanik (Membership Coordinator), Cynthia Brandenburg (newly appointed Book Club Coordinator) and Kh. BethAnn Hyatt (newly appointed Social Media Coordinator). As mentioned above, our outgoing Coordinators from the 2018-2021 term are Colleen McAfee (Public Relations Director) and Rachel Szewczyk (Social Media Coordinator).

AWE consists of two Dioceses: (1) the Diocese of New York and Washington, D.C., under the direction of his Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, which includes 14 churches and missions and (2) The Diocese of Charleston, Oakland, and the Mid-Atlantic, led by His Grace Bishop THOMAS, which includes 31 churches and missions. We strive to keep our contact list up to date for all the 45 churches and missions by providing a Google form that is easy to fill out with any updated parish contact information.

#### Included below are updates since PLC 2020:

• Last year On June 27th, we held a very successful historic Virtual PLC with close to 60 ladies in attendance representing 29 churches as well as representatives from the NAB (North American Board). We were blessed to have His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and His Grace, Bishop THOMAS in

RULA OSAMA KHOURY \* PRESIDENT OF THE DIOCESE OF NY & WASHINGTON, D.C. & THE DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON, OAKLAND & MID-ATLANTIC

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\* ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF NORTH AMERICA \*

attendance spending time with the ladies and gave a brief talk and answered the many questions that the ladies had for him.

- Last year was very successful, for we had a lot of events and we kept connected with all the parish presidents and/or their representatives. For example, in July 2020 we created a Virtual Retreat Series entitled "Living Faith." These spiritual talks are recorded and always feature questions & discussion. They can be found on our You Tube Channel. Please subscribe to it. <a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6LuWieZn5n6og-e03iyWk0">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6LuWieZn5n6og-e03iyWk0</a>.
- AWE is thankful for all the speakers who shared their knowledge and experience with us: Dr. Maria Khoury, Khouria Janet Shadid, Mother Magdalena & Mother Paula, Elaine Piniat, Mother Gabriella, Mother Elizabeth, Khouria Laila Ellias, Kh. Krista West, Khouria Erin Kimmett and Dr. Chrissi Hart.
- In July, the Antiochian Women of the East, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, partnered with FOCUS
  North America in sponsoring the Back to School Backpack program. AWE donated \$1000.00 to FOCUS.
  The Backpacks were distributed at the end of August as shown in the pictures of our "AWEsome Newsletter."
- In September, we launched our "AWEsome Newsletter" as an additional method of fellowship. We had 12 churches provide submissions. We understand all of the difficulties our Antiochian Women are currently facing, but we are hopeful more churches will participate in our next Issue. The ladies shared with everyone what they have been doing to keep in touch with one another during the quarantine. Many have been attending services virtually, utilizing technology to have Bible studies, and attend book clubs via Zoom meetings, while still doing humanitarian acts of mercy like making masks, preparing food for essential workers, collecting food for food pantries, donating clothes for those less fortunate, and Angel Fund Gift Cards.
- In October, AWE donated \$200 to the Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), which has been at the forefront of virtual ministry accommodating the needs of college students. The ministry is making a difference in the lives of thousands of our students both on-campus and virtually. College students need us now. They want to live faithfully. They want to be engaged in their faith and they want their faith to engage them. Our AWE is requesting that all of our parishes please send their college students' contact information to the national OCF Ministry ... <a href="https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/weblink.aspx?name=E355495&id=7">https://interland3.donorperfect.net/weblink/weblink.aspx?name=E355495&id=7</a>. If you have questions or comments, please contact them at <a href="mailto:firstfortydays@ocf.net">firstfortydays@ocf.net</a>.
- In November, we held a very successful Virtual Fall Retreat and Meeting with close to 90 ladies in
  attendance. We had Mother Gabriella of the Holy Dormition Monastery, which is in Rives Junction (south
  central Michigan). She gave an inspiring presentation on the significance of the Lord's Incarnation for our
  salvation and the ways that our Church guides us during Advent to prepare our hearts to receive Christ.
- In the past four years, we have been sending AWE customized Christmas cards, each with a \$50 gift card, to nine widowed priests' wives in our two dioceses. We also sent customized Christmas cards to the Bishops of our dioceses, the NAB president, all the past retreat keynote speakers, four monasteries, all the past and recent AWE officers, coordinators, and AWE's previous presidents.
- On February 7, 2021, the new AWE Book Club met for the first time to discuss the 2020-2021 NAB recommended book, The Holy Angels by Mother Alexandra. Over 40 attendees joined the Book Club discussion. Cynthia Brandenburg has led fascinating and stimulating discussions on the various chapters (e.g. "What are Angels?" [Chapter One], "Angels in Genesis" [Chapter Two], etc.). She put a lot of time into this book and was very informative. God has sent her to the AWE. She is an amazing lady, gifted and knowledgeable. We cannot thank her enough for her hard work and time she put in this work. God grant her many years. We are looking forward to discussing more books in the future.

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"A woman's strength should be spent on her God. The scriptures say in Proverbs 31:25 "Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in the time to come." Our Board is a true representation

• In March, to celebrate Antiochian Women Month, we planned activities & talks for each weekend. On March 14, AWE's "Ask Abouna" session was uplifting and amazing! Attended by almost 50 women and lasting over two hours, this was our most loved session yet! A big "Thank You!" to Father John Nosal, Father Charles Baz, and Father Don Shadid. These wonderful priests lovingly and wisely answered a range of questions from the ladies, but our main topic centered on forgiveness. In light of Forgiveness Sunday, our hearts had many questions regarding the process of forgiveness, how to practice forgiveness, pray for those who have sinned against us, and ongoing healing from traumatic past hurts. All three priests also reminded us that forgiveness is also for the sake of our own soul - not just the others.

On March 28, AWE was delighted to host over 40 Khourias and Shamassehs at our Clergy Wives Recognition event. We started our event with a funny skit by our beloved Kh. Janet https://voutu.be/vto\_oxHZGTM. We enjoyed a touching summarized reading of a tribute to our Khourias adapted from Father Stephen Freeman's blogpost "The Priest's Wife," published October 8, 2015 in Father Stephen's blog "Glory to God for All Things" at blogs.ancientfaith.com. This was presented by Leslie Carter and Anna Veniamin, along with a slideshow of beautiful photos taken by Leslie Carter https://youtu.be/cEEPdKWV2Pc. After introducing our current AWE Board members, we also introduced several past AWE Presidents who were able to be in attendance! What a privilege to host these women who so generously and bravely led our AWE boards in the past, setting the groundwork for generations of AWE women to come! Kh. Nancy Long and Kh. Rima Zafaran chanted hymns for us all in both English and Arabic. What beauty they created as we closed our eyes and listened. The majority of our time together was spent introducing ourselves, sharing funny or touching stories, and how they really felt when their husbands were ordained! It was so encouraging to share together with women we have been unable to fellowship with for so long, and to create some new friendships! We closed the meeting with a quote by Kh. Janet Shadid, "They don't make Khourias like they used to - it's all about the fun!"

- The AWE Treasury Books will be closing at the end of this month, so dues would need to be received by June 20th for them to be turned in "on time." Our dues serve multiple purposes. A portion is sent to the Antiochian Women North American Board (NAB), and a portion remains in our Dioceses. In both cases these funds cover our expenses and the good works of the Antiochian Women (e.g., donations for ministries, for mission priests, gifts for priests' widows, and honorariums for our Living Faith series). Parishes are asked to still participate even if their group is inactive, for every woman in our parishes is an "Antiochian Woman!" Please find attached the current Treasurer's Report; if you have any questions, please reach out to Khouria Kelly Purdie for more information.
- In March 2018, Antiochian Women of The East initiated a Music Project to honor the beloved memory of Khouria Stefanie Yova Yazge. Since December 2019 this liturgical music project had been put on hold at the request of Metropolitan JOSEPH due to the changes that are impending regarding the Translations in our Service Books. But last week on Jun 9, 2021 we got the blessing from His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH to proceed at this time. AWE has contacted Mareena Boosamra Ball, (Chairwoman for the Department of Sacred Music) to start implementing the project, we will keep you posted. The donations that we have received towards the Music Project have been set aside in our treasury specifically for this project.

#### AWE upcoming events:

- > On June 15, 2021 we will meet with the Deans from our deaneries to see how we can help them and keep connecting with other churches.
- > The next edition of the "AWEsome Newsletter," another way to get to know each other, will be going out soon. We understand not all the churches were active during the Pandemic therefore we made it easier for you to keep in touch with us by sending an AWE chapter Report Form with a couple questions. Simply respond to the questions even if there is nothing to report. The Newsletter conveys a variety of topics, including describing special ministry teams in the parishes, submitting personal reflections, or sharing the activities of the women of the parishes through Zoom, or include

3

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- special scriptures or quotes that have been meaningful to you during this time of separation. We are in the process of creating the summer issue, if you didn't submit your report, please do so your parish can be represented.
- > SAVE THE DATE JULY 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH will be presiding over the 2021 Virtual Archdiocese Convention on Friday evening July 23 and Saturday July 24, 2021, more details coming soon. The NAB Summer meeting will be on July 23rd at 5 pm.
- November 12-13, 2021 The Eastern Dioceses' Fall Retreat & Meetings will be held this year at St. John Chrysostom Church in York, Pennsylvania. Additional schedule and hotel options will be forthcoming. For those unable to attend in person, the main sessions will be livestreamed. AWE is in the process of planning for their portion of the Fall Retreat. We need to ask your opinion: are you ready to meet in person?
- ➤ Lenten Retreat 2022 the retreat will take place on March 25-27, 2021, at the Antiochian Village Heritage & Learning Center, Bolivar, PA. Our speaker will be Mother Gabriella from Dormition Monastery in MI. the topic will be the Life of the Theotokos. This year we will be adding new activities to our retreat. Friday evening, we will watch a documentary about the Theotokos, and we will do a book discussion. On Saturday morning we will do the Paraklesis Prayers of Supplication to the Theotokos. On Saturday afternoon we are going to do a procession and service of supplications to the shrine of Saint Thekla at the village.
- Parish Life Conference 2022 June 30 July 3 this will be at the Antiochian Village and will be "in person!" It will be co-hosted by the parishes of St. Mary in Johnstown, PA, and St. Michael in Greensburg, PA.

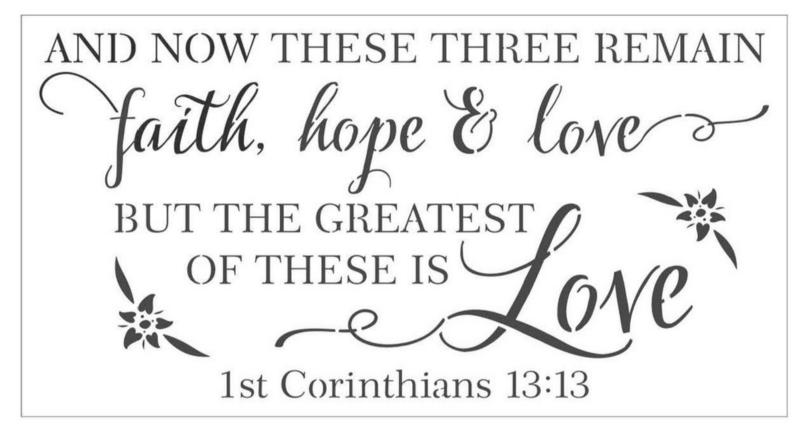
I thank our officers and coordinators for their commitment to their positions and their ability to work so closely together, even with the hundreds of miles that separate us throughout the year (as well as answering my endless emails, text messages, and phone calls!). A woman's strength should be spent on her God. The scriptures say in *Proverbs 31:25, "strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in the time to come."* Our board is a true representation of this.

Respectfully submitted,

Rula Osama Khoury Mrs. Rula Osama Khoury AWE President

4





"The eternal trinity": faith, hope, and love. We continuously need these three factors in our lives, which is what "remain" implies. Our need for them never ends; we need them throughout life, every day without end. We live by faith, and the other two are directly connected to faith. They are, in fact, the three building blocks of a successful, abundant life. They are inextricably bound, tied to our relationship with God, and they are the qualities that make us run or work correctly.

These three facets of life are what get me through each day, relying heavily on living faith. especially with what we all have endured these past many months. We run—move—on *faith*, *hope*, *and love*. These qualities nourish us, giving us strength to function as God intends. Every living human being, or who has ever lived, was intended to function by these qualities, but only the faith, hope, and love that comes from God will work to produce true success.

#### FIRST KHOURIA APPRECIATION DAY 2021!

On Sunday, March 28, 2021, the Second Sunday of Great Lent and the conclusion of Antiochian Women's Month, the AWE held a historic meeting of Clergy Wives from across the dioceses of Oakland, Charleston and the Mid-Atlantic and of New York and Washington D.C. Many Khourias and Shamassehs various parishes met with the Board of the AWE via Zoom for an evening of entertainment and fellowship. Fr. Don Shadid, AWE Spiritual Advisor, opened the evening with the Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian.

President Rula Khoury gave a warm welcome to all the ladies in attendance and Kh. Janet Shadid entertained everyone with a song especially written for the occasion. Anna Veniamin and Leslie Deeb Carter, AWE board members, delivered a tribute entitled "The Priest's Wife", accompanied by slides of Leslie's nature photography.

Introductions of AWE board members and past presidents, including founding president Evelyn Khouri, were followed by Lenten hymns chanted by Kh. Nancy Long and Kh. Rima Zafaran, to the delight of all present.

Ice breaker questions prompted an engaging discussion as our Clergy Wives shared some of the highlights, challenges, and funny moments of their parish lives.

This first event of its kind was a great success which honored dedicated Khourias and Shamassehs from our two dioceses during these very trying times, offering fellowship, encouragement and support. The AWE looks forward to holding more Khouria Appreciation Days in future years!!





## St. George Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church Washington, D.C. Submitted by Nicolette B. Aftimos

The Saint George Ladies Myrrh Bearing Society meets weekly via Zoom for a lighthearted discussion. The discussions are focused on a spiritual growth topic or book; we've maintained an average of 16 – 20 participants of all ages throughout the pandemic; These meetings offer the Ladies a venue to discuss stress points, concerns, and opportunities to maintain the loving comradery that the Antiochian Women of St. George are accustomed to.

- o The Ladies regularly reach out to parishioners, as needed.
- o The Ladies actively participate in the Parish wide weekly Thursday discussions focused on the Orthodox faith.
- o We Participate(d) in Online/virtual Church Services.
- o We hold monthly LMBS Business meetings.
- o The Fundraisers are also an opportunity to connect with fellow parishioners.





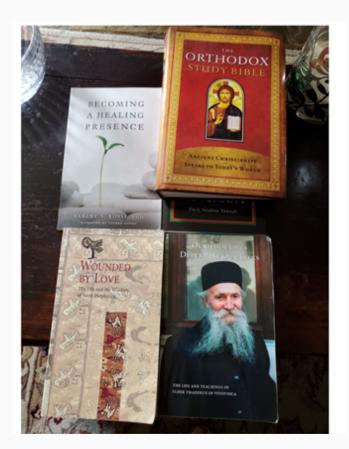
#### **Spiritual Education:**

During our weekly Tuesday night zoom gatherings, the LMBS members researched, led discussions on, and participated in the following sampling of religious learning opportunities:

**§ Women of the Old Testament.** In addition to the discussions led by the members of the Ladies Society, The Very Reverend Dr. Paul Tarazi, a guest speaker and expert on the Old Testament, shared his deep knowledge, and participated in a few of our discussions.



One of the OT discussions with the Very Reverend Dr. Tarazi





#### § Read and thoroughly discussed the following books:

- -Becoming a Healing Presence by Dr. Albert S. Rossi. The women heightened their understanding of the healing impact that they can have on others as they live their daily life.
- -Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives, The Life and Teachings of Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica. This book complemented the lessons learned by the earlier read book. It enhanced our understanding of how we can enhance our commitment to God.
- -Wounded by Love, The Life and the Wisdom of Saint Porphyrios. Of the three most recently read books, this book seems to have most directly connected us with the Saints and offered us daily lessons that can be applied to every aspect of living a Christian Life.

§ Icons, Symbolism, and Meaning; Special presentation by Iconographer Khouria Erin Kimmett. The Ladies of Saint George virtually hosted our local sister Orthodox Churches for an enlightening presentation on Icons and their use in our prayer life.

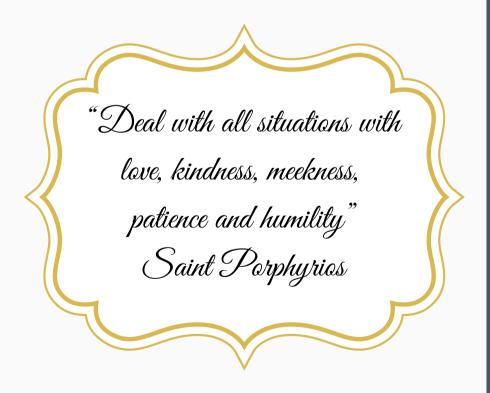
The LMBS **maintained its activities and support of the Church** around the Feast days and outreach to the Parish.

- o We beautifully decorated the Church for the Nativity season.
- o Supported the Teen SOYO fundraisers.
- o Maintained the tradition of "March" Ladies Month service activities.



o Participated in the Lenten Services and conducted all needed tasks in preparation for Pascha; i.e. Deep Cleaned the Church and facilities; fundraised and decorated the Naash and Church; colored eggs, etc.

The below quotes define the focus of the Saint George LMBS as we grow in the faith and support each other and the blessed Saint George Community during this period of physical separation:



"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, selfcontrol."

GALATIANS 5:22



#### Submitted by Khouria Rebecca Alford

We are a very small parish and do everything as a family, children and adults, men and women, working together. Therefore, we don't have officers or meetings.

The members of St. Gregory the Great parish are grateful to be able to come together again to worship and have some social interaction. The covid pandemic of 2020 and the first half of 2021 brought some very extreme restrictions and we are glad to see many of those now being lifted.

Although all coffee hours and dinners, in-person classes and meetings, and some liturgical celebrations were curtailed, we have remained connected via live-streamed services, zoom coffee hours, Sunday School classes, catechism classes, and parish council meetings. We also have had a lock-box at the church so that parishioners could come anytime to pray, and that also allowed people to bring their contributions for the Food for Hungry People program when they were unable to be in church with others.

This has been a time more of looking inward to find ways we can help each other. When schools were closed, several mothers decided to begin home-schooling their children and received assistance from those already engaged in that form of education; meals are being prepared for a family whose youngest child has leukemia; baby showers had to be curtailed in favor of on-line gifts. During this time, our women have appreciated the zoom offerings of the Antiochian Women of the diocese.

We thank God that no one from our church became sick with the virus and now rejoice that we can begin to return to normal parish life.



"Have confidence in the compassion of our Creator. Reflect well on what you are now doing. and keep before you the things you have done. Lift up your eyes to the overflowing compassion of heaven. and while He waits for you. Draw near in tears to our merciful Judge. Having before your mind that He is a Just Judge. do not take your sins lightly: and having also in mind that He is compassionate. Do not despair. The God- Man gives man confidence before God."

~ ST. GREGORY THE GREAT



## Holy Trinity Orthodox Church

Lynchburg, Virginia

Submitted by Jessica Buckmaster

During this last year, AWE of Holy Trinity Lynchburg, VA has been blessed with a renewed vigor in our membership and participation. We organized a Harvest Party and All Saints Celebration in the Fall for the children of the parish, went on a parish-wide Pumpkin Patch day, celebrated St. Nicholas day with a wonderful St. Nicholas party, hosted baby showers for the several women of the parish who welcomed new children to their families, hosted two bridal showers and assisted with the Mercy Meal and funeral preparations for the repose of our dear friend and Shamasseh Angela Weaver. We also were able to encourage our ladies to read the recommended book and held a book club meeting for an afternoon.

This year we built upon our new tradition of holding a St. Nicholas Day Party at our Parish. The event included activities, crafts, and the story of St. Nicholas. It was also an opportunity for our parish to raise funds and supplies for Miriam's house, a shelter for women and children.





"Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arragant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own will, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

- The Apostle St. Paul

## St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church

Allentown, Pennsylvania

Submitted by Ebtisam Moussa

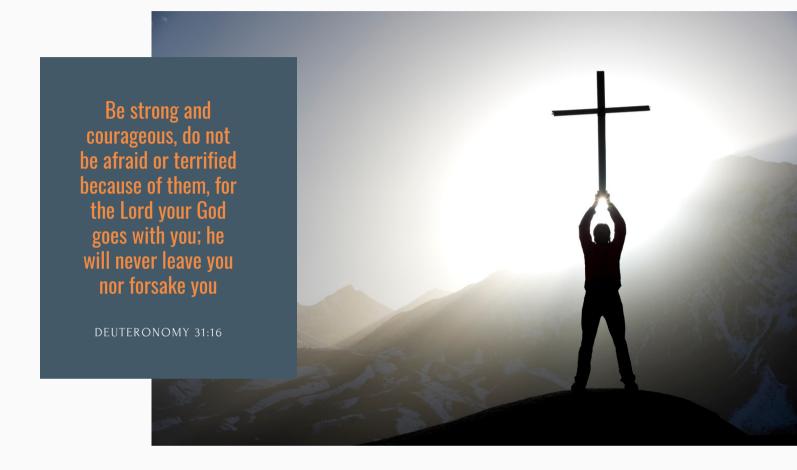
Our chapter stayed connected through monthly zoom meetings and phone calls. We also had several fundraisers:

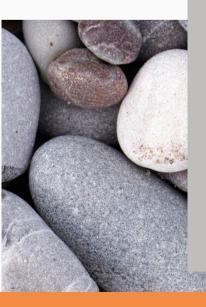
- September 2020, we had a "Grilled Kibbee Fundraiser"
- December 2020, we did a bake sale
- March 2021, we had an event called "Ask Abouna" and we had a stuffed grape leaves and cabbage fundraiser alongside with rice and beans.
- April 2021, we had a falafel fundraiser
- Aside from these fundraisers we had the election for new ladies' officers this past May.
- Back in December we sent money to the children we adopted through Children Fund.
- Aside from the money that was sent to the children, the rest of the money went to the general account because this year at St. George's we do not have a ladies account.

The verse above has been meaningful to our chapter.

# Virgin Mary Orthodox Church yourkers, New York

Submitted by Jumana Sayegh



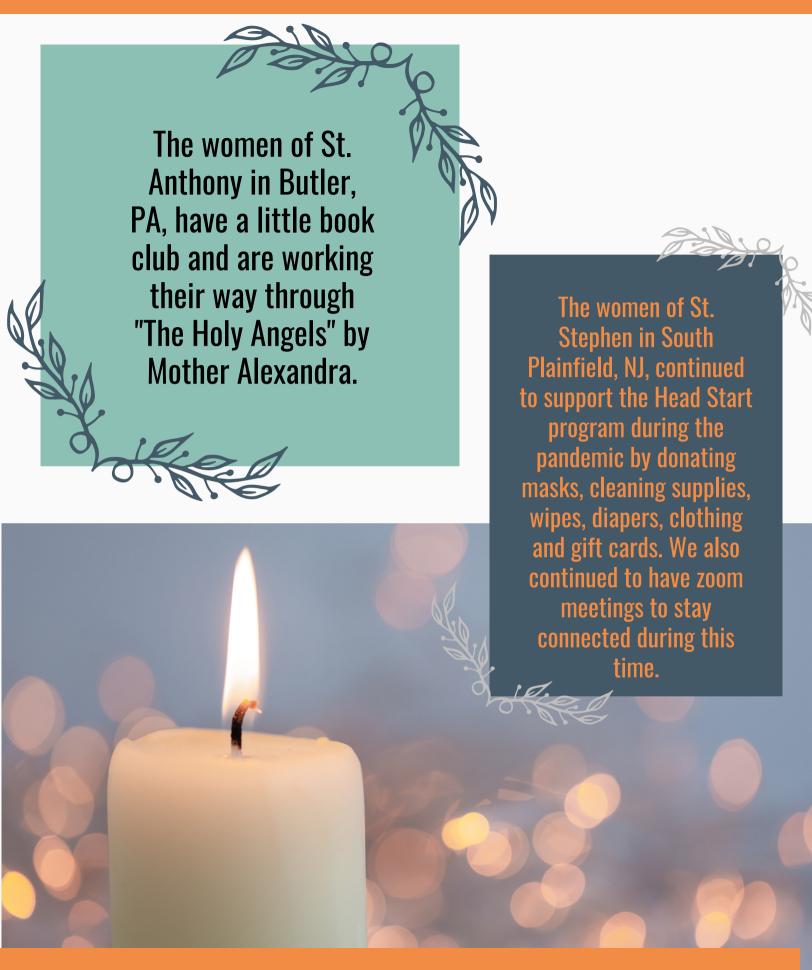


In March we sponsored a falafel luncheon immediately following liturgy. All food items were donated. There was no fee for this luncheon but we made over \$800 in donations.

We all came together to prepare the Bier for the Good Friday services.

We hosted a breakfast after the Rush Service/Feast of Pascha Saturday.





### St. Michael's Orthodox Church

Greensburg, Pennsylvania Submitted by Valerie Flizanes

We are truly grateful to be attending services pretty much as "normal". The ladies are trying to get motivated to get back on schedule with cooking and attending meetings in person.

Many have been asking about it,

so we will start out slowly and see how it goes.

Not much to report at this time, although the ladies did give Father gift cards to distribute to our parishioners that were and still are affected by the pandemic.

We did keep the tradition of reading the Epistle during March.

Getting back to "normal' will take a little time,

with the grace of God we'll do our best.

Please stay safe and well and hope to see all

in person very soon

How wonderful to finally see everyone's face, thank God.



BLESSED ART THOU, LORD, ALMIGHTY MASTER, WHO ILLUMINEST THE DAY WITH THE LIGHT OF THE SUN AND THE NIGHT WITH THE GLOW OF THE MOON, WHO HAST MADE US WORTHY TO PASS THE COURSE OF THE DAY AND DRAW NEAR TO THE ONSET OF THE NIGHT; HEAR OUR PETITIONS AND THOSE OF ALL THY PEOPLE. FORGIVE US ALL OUR SINS, BOTH VOLUNTARY AND INVOLUNTARY, AND ACCEPT OUR EVENING SUPPLICATIONS AND SEND DOWN THE MULTITUDE OF THY MERCIES AND COMPASSIONS UPON THY PEOPLE.

EXCERPTED FROM THE KNEELING VESPERS OF PENTECOST

## St. Andrew Church Lewes, Delaware

### Submitted by Sh. Vera Acker

AS I AM SURE IS TRUE AT EVERY CHURCH, ST. ANDREW CHURCH IN LEWES, DELAWARE, HAS A BUSY AND DEDICATED CORE OF WOMEN WHO SERVE THE CHURCH EVEN WHEN IT IS DIFFICULT. WHEN WE COULD NOT HAVE PARISHIONERS AT THE SERVICES, THE PROSFORA KEPT COMING EACH WEEK, THE NEWSLETTER KEPT GOING OUT EACH MONTH, AND THE WEBSITE WAS KEPT UP TO DATE, THANKS TO OUR LADIES. MINISTRY TO SHUT-INS WAS EXPANDED TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE WAS OKAY AND NOT FEELING ISOLATED. NEW SKILLS WERE DEVELOPED, SUCH AS OUR STREAMING OF SERVICES, SET UP AND MAINTAINED BY ONE OF OUR LADIES.

WHEN THE CHURCH WAS OPEN AGAIN, MANY MINISTRIES PICKED UP AGAIN: KOLLYVA FOR MEMORIALS, A LARGER SPACE FOR THE BOOK AND GIFT SHOP WITH GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING, ADDED CHANTERS/SINGERS FOR THE SERVICES. SEVERAL OF OUR WOMEN PARTICIPATED IN SOME OF THE EXCELLENT PRESENTATIONS OFFERED ONLINE BY AWE. WE HAD A SUCCESSFUL BASKET RAFFLE, THE PROCEEDS OF WHICH SUPPORTED THE ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN'S PROJECT. WHILE SOME ACTIVITIES TOOK A MODIFIED FORM, AT TIMES WE FELT ALMOST NORMAL!

FOR GREAT LENT, ONE OF OUR LADIES ORGANIZED A LENTEN PSALM READING GROUP. TWENTY LADIES EACH READ A DIFFERENT ONE OF THE TWENTY KATHISMATA OF THE PSALMS EACH DAY, AT HOME, ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN SCHEDULE. IN THIS WAY, THE ENTIRE PSALTER WAS READ EACH DAY BY OUR GROUP, AND EACH LADY READ THE ENTIRE PSALTER THROUGH TWICE DURING THE FAST, ALSO PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER. WHAT A BLESSING IT WAS TO PRAY WITH GOD'S OWN WORDS EACH DAY!

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM OUR METROPOLITAN JOSEPH, WE HAVE BEGUN SERVING COFFEE HOURS. SOON, WE WILL GET BACK TO MEETINGS, EXPANDED ACTIVITIES, AND IN-PERSON EVENTS. IT WILL BE GOOD TO BE ALL TOGETHER IN ONE SPACE AGAIN!

#### Greetings from the Antiochian Women of St. Mary in Wilkes Barre PA!

Submitted by Anna Veniamin

We pray that all our beloved sisters in Christ and their families are well and in good health.

Here at St. Mary, Wilkes Barre we are looking forward to a pleasant and relaxed summer season with more opportunities to enjoy each other's company.

As restrictions due to the COVID pandemic have been gradually eased we have welcomed more parishioners back to church services and we were also able to resume our spaghetti dinners on a takeout basis. We are also planning for our fall food festival to take place with safety measures to be implemented as needed.

We are looking forward to meeting you all in person at future PLCs and AWE retreats. What a special blessing that will be!

We wish you all a blessed summer, with opportunities to enjoy fellowship and make happy memories with friends and family near and far.



The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust. (Psalm 18)



Sts. Peter & Paul Women in Potomac, Maryland, started a virtual book club discussing FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD.

We connect by mass emails and phone calls.

#### The women continued most of their projects:

Collecting and delivering Christmas and Pascha shut in gifts
Christmas homeless shelter

Collecting and decorating for Christmas and the Naash
AWE Project collection through Bakeless Bake Sale
Angel Fund project for parishioners in need

Actively donating to monthly local Food Banks and charitable organizations
Submitted by Donna Gavin

# St. George

Bridgeville, Pennsylvania

Submitted by Kh. Anna DelVitto

"Through God all things are possible..."

We at St. George are grateful to God that He has brought us through the pandemic and continues to pour out His Love upon us. Returning to full capacity for our church services and being able to gather after church in coffee hour are blessings we are so thankful for. Our faithful community were so blessed to have services for Pascha in person this year, followed by a Paschal meal together (For 2020, the Divine Liturgy and services for Feasts were online via Facebook. Pascha 2020 was served by our beloved clergy, and the beautiful voices of one faithful family filled the church with Christ is Risen!).

In 2020, the women of our church created St. Catherine's Fellowship which meets weekly for adult education. The members of the Fellowship read books on the Orthodox faith, discuss various topics of interest and offer an open forum of education for our parishioners.

Our women serve on the Parish Council, read the Epistle during the Divine Liturgy, teach Church School, sing in the Choir, participate in the landscaping of our new church property, make Holy Bread throughout the year for the Divine Liturgies, and cook and prepare food for our yearly Food Festival this year scheduled for October. 2021. The Food Fair is a major fundraiser which helps support the mortgage payments of our new church.

The women of our parish continue to serve as a powerful witness and inspiration to our parishioners of all ages serving Our Lord and His Holy Orthodox Church with unwavering love and commitment.

## St. Mary's Church

Brooklyn, New York Submitted by Sandra Arida

The Ladies of St. Mary's Church in Brooklyn, New York, send warm greetings to all of our sisters in Christ! We hope our little letter finds you all well and safe. It is hard to believe we have been wearing masks and keeping our distance for over a year now.

We at St. Mary's give thanks for our beloved Very Rev. Fr. Michael Ellias, Kh. Laila, Deacon Farid Farkouh, and Parish Council President Christopher Athineos who served every Liturgy and Lenten service during the lockdown and live-streamed them to our parishioners via Twitch. No one with Internet had to miss any services last year!

Happily now, we are open but still following pandemic precautions. Holy Week and Pascha this year were so different with many attending the services in person. Of course events were limited in 2020. Our last formal Ladies events were the magnificent Christmas Boutique in December 2019 and Epiphany Luncheon in January 2020. Funds raised then enabled us to make our usual donations to IOCC, FOCUS, The Treehouse, and our own St. Mary's Church.

This past Christmas 2020 we sponsored our 2nd annual wreath drive which has become very popular and profitable! Parishioners are able to donate a wreath which is decorated and hung by our "wreath dream team" on fencing all around the Church. A card noting the donor is hung right next to each wreath. It is a beautiful sight indeed!



During Ladies Month this year our ladies read the Epistle both in English and Arabic. A wonderful group of ladies sponsored a Syrian sweets sale during Lent. The homemade sweets were delicious and sold with all profits forwarded to IOCC.

We raised funds for the Bishop's Project this year by sponsoring a "Lunchless Luncheon"! No one had to attend (!) but we requested donations for the continuation of "Fulfilling the Vision" of a Cathedral at the Antiochian Village. We were able to raise \$2125.00 for the project! Again we give thanks for the health and safety of our parishioners and all our sisters across the Archdiocese. Greetings and best wishes to all!



In everything, give thanks.



Follow us on Facebook at <u>Antiochian Women of</u> <u>the East</u>

