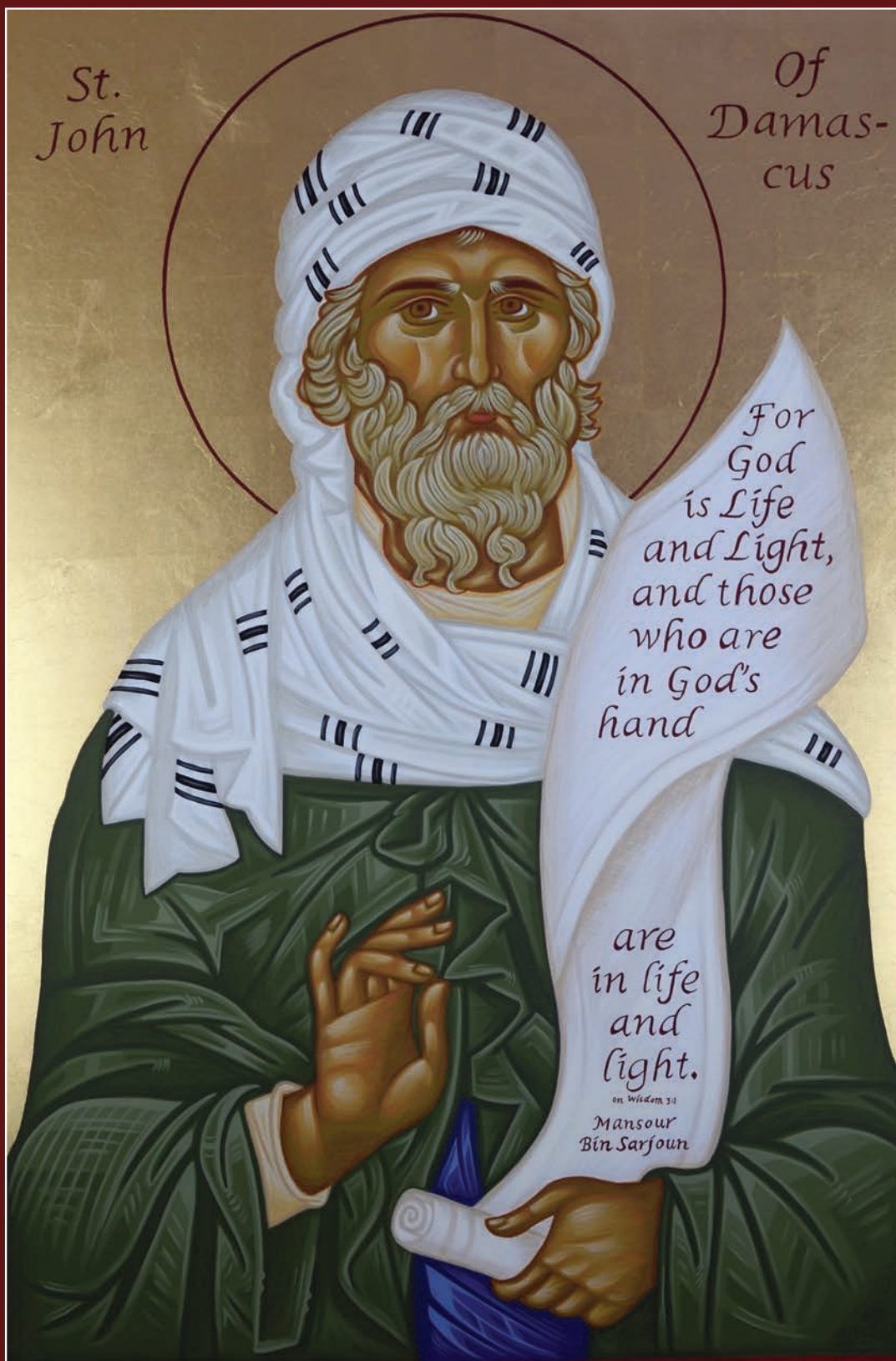


THE WORD

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THE WORD

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Letters to the editor are welcome and should include the author's full name and parish. Submissions for "Communities in Action" must be approved by the local pastor. Both may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All submissions e-mailed and provided as a Microsoft Word text or editable PDF. Please do not embed artwork into the word documents. All art work must be high resolution: at least 300dpi.

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CHRISTMAS, AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE GOD'S GREAT NEWS



How do we proclaim the birth of the Savior to people who may think that they can save themselves, or that they don't need or want salvation, or who simply aren't interested?

Not caring and *not interested* is indeed the culture and climate of our time. This is the mission field of our graduating seminarians and the Orthodox faithful throughout the world. This is the state of affairs inside and outside the hedge of our Church. A new hedonism – all about individual pleasure – is everywhere and permeates everything.

The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
Bishop NICHOLAS

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Nevertheless, we are sent forth from the liturgy to bring the good news to all nations. We are to baptize all in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even when we are all “charged up,” however, our audience is too busy with their own self-centered universe to even notice our presence. How can you engage someone so preoccupied with his personal device, or his own self-constructed and self-limiting world, that he can’t hear you call his name?

Christmas time may offer us an infrequent opportunity. Perhaps in all the noise and images of the holiday season that bombard us we can find a little common ground, a common memory, of the infant Jesus with a glow from his stable. Perhaps in the eggnog or the mulled cider is a positive remembrance of gifts, loved ones, and church. Perhaps in this whisper of a nostalgic thought is a recollection of Christ in the life of our loved ones, or an encounter of God from our youth. Let’s build on that memory to initiate an encounter that may call someone home to Christ, His Church and life itself.

Let us seize the moment to share and connect with those both inside and outside the Church, to see how our common bond is God Himself. Let us take the moment to invite each other to reexamine worship or prayer. Let us recognize the embers of God’s Spirit warming our hearts. These embers need to be fanned into flame. With a little help, perhaps our friends, colleagues and family can be reminded of the God who has been calling them from their youth.

Let this Christmas time be one of hope. God is working as hard as ever to call us home. Let us invite each other and encourage each other as we worship the Savior born in a cave, buried in a cave, and who, out of the cave, is able to save.

Christ Is Born!

Bishop JOHN

The Birth of Christ and the Embracing of Death

Reader Daniel Manzuk

IT MIGHT SEEM ODD TO TALK ABOUT DEATH WHILE WE ARE PREPARING TO CELEBRATE CHRIST’S BIRTH; BUT NOT IF WE REMEMBER THAT CHRIST – ALONE AMONG ALL PEOPLE – WAS BORN TO DIE. THIS WASN’T A DECISION THE FATHER MADE DURING CHRIST’S EARTHLY MINISTRY. THIS WAS THE PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING.



“And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour” (John 12:27; cf. Mark10:45 and Luke 18:31–33). God created us to be body and soul together; thus their separation through death is a travesty and tragedy. We were not intended for death but for life; we die because we habitually sin – any violation of the “Golden Rule” (Luke 6:31) and the “first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37–39) – “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Christ, on the other hand, was born specifically to die. The very Epistle read on His Nativity says so: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4–5). This is reiterated in the Epistle read on the Second Day of the Nativity (Synaxis of the Theotokos): “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of Death, that is, the Devil, and release those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Hebrews 2:14–15).

The Church bears this out in the hymnography – lyrics and melodies – and imagery of the Feast; the Compline Canons for the Forefeast of the Nativity are intentionally almost identical to those of the Matins/Orthros services of Holy Week. The Paschal and Nativity Canons (both written by St. John of Damascus) closely parallel each other: Christ is

born in a cave and buried in a cave; Herod tries to kill Him, Pilate does it; and the Wise Men bring gold, frankincense and myrrh “as though He had been dead three days” (Nativity *Aposticha*), prefiguring the Myrrh-bearers. Even the image of Christ in swaddling clothes evokes the image of Him in grave clothes; compare Christ in swaddling clothes to Lazarus in his grave clothes. (I have never seen an *epitaphios/plaschinitsa* depicting Him thoroughly wrapped.)

Before His Incarnation, God the Son knew when, where and how He would die; and the “how” was one of the most gruesome ways imaginable: slow asphyxiation hanging from the cross, with the nails scraping His bare nerves and a stab wound in His side. Many of those who suffered this would have considered His three to six hours on the Cross

to be a gift. (Mark has the crucifixion beginning at the third hour, while Matthew and Luke put it at the sixth hour; the Synoptic Gospels all agree that He died at the ninth hour, or three p.m., the time the Passover Lambs were slain in the temple.) Many, including the two thieves, had to endure far longer ... even days. From the moment of His conception, the clock began to tick down to this seminal event. Christ embraced this fact, though, like any human, He did agonize over it before accepting that it was why He came and freely decided to go through with it. Like Christ, we are called to embrace death; not in a fatalistic, doomsday, “there’s-no-hope-we’re-doomed-let’s-get-it-over-with” way. This is exactly what St. Paul rejects when he writes, “But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). For by His death, Christ has permanently broken the power of Death; death is no longer The End; there is life beyond it in Him.

Then what do we mean by “embracing death”? We mean accepting that it will happen, and there is no avoiding it. This goes against our culture, which tries to convince us to fight against the inevitability of death, to put the idea of death and dying out of our minds. True funerals, with the loved ones around the open casket, are being supplanted by memorial celebrations, with just a portrait of the deceased. The fact and face of death are kept at arm’s length. One commercial for cremation services has a person saying she doesn’t want a function where people are standing around crying over her body; she wants nothing but joy (and somehow cremation is supposed to enable this). Even where the fact of death is accepted in our culture, it is often coupled with the hedonistic mantra, “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die!” (In the Bible, it is not “tomorrow” but *“tonight”*; Luke 12:19–20). So even here, there is an attempt to put off death.

What true embracing of death means is, as the Tim McGraw song goes, to “live like you were dying.” (There are some very Christian lyrics in that song.) Specifically, you are to live as though, at any moment, your soul could be face to face with God. The warnings about preparedness for the Second Coming which we hear at the Presanctified Liturgy on Great and Holy Tuesday (Matthew 24:44–25:46) also apply to preparation for each person’s individual passing to the next life and the judgment

which will accompany it. One of the prayers before sleep says, “If my bed should be my coffin” Even the popular children’s prayer says, “If I die before I wake” Thus the Church has always tried to keep us mindful of a sudden end, and how well or poorly we’re prepared for it.

Christ knew that every day of His earthly life brought Him one step closer to the Cross. And throughout that life He freely complied with His (and our) Father’s will, genuinely resisting temptations at the beginning of His ministry and making the agonizing decision to go through with His death at the end. Though He knew He would be raised from the dead, the natural instinct for self-preservation in the face of death (especially through an inhumane execution) was genuinely there. Christ’s death was a pre-planned self-sacrifice; ours will come – most often – when we least expect it or want it ... but it will come. The question is, How prepared or unprepared will we be? Will we be like the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21) or the goats in the parable (Matthew 25:31–46), and act like death and judgment will never come? Or will we be like the wise virgins (Matthew 25:1–13) or the watchful and dutiful servant (Matthew 24:45–51), and be as ready for it as possible?

As it celebrates His birth, the Church simultaneously looks forward to His death. She views His birth through the prism of His death ... the reason for His First Coming. Therefore, as we celebrate the beginning of Christ’s saving condescension, let us live as He did, knowing that death will come. Let us live a life that shows that we’ve internalized the incomprehensible sacrifices He made for our sake – becoming one of us and being unjustly executed for us – and all He has taught us, by carrying our crosses, lovingly fulfilling His commandments and “complet[ing] the remaining time of our lives in peace and repentance” (Evening/Morning Litany), that by His grace, when our end comes, we may eternally revel in the presence of Him, our God incarnate.

Reader Daniel Manzuk
St. Mary’s Cathedral, Minneapolis (OCA)

“FROM THESE STONES”

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

SALVATION IS NOT COMFORTABLE

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt
Vice-Chairman, Department of Missions and Evangelism

IS THERE SALVATION FOR THE COMFORTABLE? THE SHORT ANSWER IS *NO*. THIS HAS NOT BEEN REVEALED TO US. IF THAT MAKES YAOU UNCOMFORTABLE, BEAR WITH ME.

I am writing this on my laptop from a comfy chair. I am looking forward to a vacation with the Missus, who just returned from the grocer with the week’s provisions in a recently acquired, used, but comfortable car. Thanks God, the bills are paid. I should add, I like air-conditioning. Call me a hypocrite, and I’ll say, “My friend, you don’t know the half of it!”

Try as I may, I cannot find in the Scriptures or the lives of the Saints where it is stated that the comfortable shall be saved. God saves whom He wills, but the salvation of the comfortable has not been revealed. Don’t take my word for it; here are a few snips from the voluminous writings of St Isaac the Syrian:

The spirit of the devil, not the spirit of God, dwells in those who pass their life in ease.¹

Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul and they can injure her more than the demons.²

The path to God is a daily cross. No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease, for we know where the way of ease leads and how it ends.³

I have been blessed by the struggles of parishioners who bear various physical ailments: blind, lame, or deaf. While many among the hale and hearty might view these ailments as a hindrance, it has been my experience that oftentimes they are understood by those who bear them as a blessing.

Take Cecilia, for instance. Though not born blind, Cecilia was without her sight by the time I met her. On more than one occasion she told me how losing her sight was the greatest gift. Until she was blind, she never knew how kind people can be.

Then there’s Christopher, who has the challenge of muscular sclerosis. This progressive condition is

one that he bears with a strength that is unknown to most in the world. Once, back before he was confined to a wheelchair, I was hearing his confession when he dropped his prayer rope. Seeing him struggle unsteadily to bend down to retrieve it, without thinking, I bent to fetch it. “Father!” he said. “Please let me rejoice in my sufferings.” He later explained that his sufferings united him to Christ and His sufferings.

Regardless of the condition our bodies, our soul needs spiritual exercise: asceticism. Asceticism is the practice of self-denial, self-discipline, and avoidance of excess. Our Lord says, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Thus, it seems clear that when it concerns our salvation, asceticism is not optional. We are all called to prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and acts of continual repentance. This denial of self is the way of the cross. Comfortable Christianity is not wanting to take up your cross.

In the early stages of repentance, the believer carries the small cross that God’s Providence, in His discernment and love for mankind, has foreseen in the life of each one of us. Our personal cross is shaped according to our specific need to be liberated from every form of passionate attachment, and unless we carry it we will never be able to love God our Creator and Benefactor with a free heart and run His course faithfully and steadily. In other words, we take up our cross in response to the commandment to repent, and it becomes the key to our entry into the great and eternal inheritance, which Christ gained for us through His Cross and Resurrection.⁴

Anyone involved in training, conditioning, or even dieting, knows: the struggle is good. It’s when we don’t

“Without the cross, there is no resurrection”

Where
there
is no
struggle,
the
people
perish

struggle that we become fat, lazy, and complacent. In like manner, without spiritual conditioning (asceticism), we become desperate. We become depressed. We become despondent. We lose hope. Given our comfortable American society, appreciating the truth that the struggle is good is difficult. We can become blinded by our own negligence. I once had a man ask me if suffering was necessary once he converted to Orthodoxy. Mind you, this was a man who'd been twice divorced, lost a child, and whose life was in a general malaise. Still, he wanted to know if suffering would come with Orthodoxy! What he didn't, perhaps couldn't, realize was that he'd been suffering all along without the grace of God imparted within the Church.

If you've read this far, you might be thinking, "This is basic Orthodoxy 101 stuff – you know, like they teach in catechism." Generally, only adults converting to the Faith attend catechism class. Thus it's possible that many Orthodox Christians live their whole lives never having to study the history, theology, and piety of the Orthodox Church. Granted, the academic study of such is not necessary for salvation, but the deposit of faith imparted explains, encourages, and unites.

Even more ironic is the fact that some converts, tempted by the example of their newfound family, may follow up the strenuous struggle of catechism by then trying to imitate the cradle faithful. For an example of this, one need only look at the attendance for Great Vespers or Orthros. On a typical Saturday evening, or early Sunday morning, one often finds inquirers and catechumens in attendance. Over time, however, the newcomers to the Faith realize that, whatever the excuse, most lifelong Orthodox don't attend. Unfortunately, for some, the same can often be said about fasting, prayer, and repentance.

Then there is the comfortable parish. Here, you may substitute the word *dying* for *comfortable*. If, as we read in Proverbs (29:19), "Where there is no vision, the people perish ...," it can also be said, "Where there is no struggle, the people perish." The unified labors of a fledgling church community are fraught with hills, bumps, warts, storms, struggle, and pain, but this communal work is salvific and brings much joy. Without the Cross there is no Resurrection! Whereas the essence of a dying parish is comfort.

True, many a dying parish may look perfectly fine – with buildings, programs, people, and polish. It functions as a successful enterprise: bills are paid; festivals and fundraisers are successful; proud are its parishioners. In other words, physically the parish may look

fine and healthy – but like the rich man planning a bigger barn (Luke 12:16–21), spiritually it may be ailing. For the remedy, we need look no further than ourselves and our Lord. Each of us must continually work on putting off the Old Man and being renewed by the God-Man. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

Once, after hearing a long line of confessions, Reader Lucien (C. L.) Kennedy told me: "It warms my heart to see all those people coming to confession. It just shows how healthy the parish is." Knowing that he was a pharmacist, I cocked my head questioningly. "That's right," he said. "Unlike my profession where long lines indicate sickness, in the church it just shows the health of the Body."

We tend to believe the lies of the Enemy. We believe, so easily, that another drink will "heal" us; another lustful glance will "fulfill" us; one more gossiping judgment against our neighbor will "elevate" us – one more gripe against our condition will "justify" us.

We become addicted to the "pleasures" of this life and make no movement toward storing up treasures in heaven. We doubt God is always good, nor do we believe in heaven. Thus, we languish in hell. God may allow our languishing for a time, for our benefit, for He gives us free will. Yet His desire is for us to return to health in Him. We are not called to be perfected in the world. We are called to be perfected in Him, the Physician and Healer of our souls.

In Him we are satisfied, filled, judged, elevated, healed. In Him we see ourselves no more; others we see more clearly. In Him there is no darkness at all. In Him there is light. In Him is our salvation. Like the man who found the "pearl of great price" (Matthew 13:45–46), this work – the ascetic labors of prayer, fasting, alms-giving, and perpetual repentance – is our task. This is the way of the Cross. It is the way of Salvation.

There is much to be done, dear friends, on our Old Man, and in our beloved parishes. Let us be faithful; let us drink deeply from the well of true worship. Let us attend! After all, as the celebration of the hierarchical liturgy, the deacon says:

O Lord, save the faithful.
Then: *O Lord, save those of true worship.*
Never: *O Lord save the Comfortable!*



دورة المجمع الأنطاكي المقدس
تشرين الأول ٢٠١٩ - البلمند

Statement Issued by the Holy Synod of Antioch

BALAMAND, OCTOBER 10, 2019

The Holy Synod of Antioch, chaired by His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, held its eleventh ordinary session on October 3-10, 2019 in Balamand and was attended by the Metropolitans and Bishops from the homeland and countries abroad. The participants were Their Eminences, the Most Reverend Metropolitans: Elias (Archdiocese of Beirut and dependencies), Elias (Archdiocese of Tyre, Sidon and dependencies), Sergio (Archdiocese of Santiago and all Chile), Damaskinos (Archdiocese of Sao Paulo and all Brazil), Saba (Archdiocese of Bosra Horan and Jebel al-Arab), George (Archdiocese of Homs and dependencies), Silouan (Archdiocese of Byblos, Batroun and dependencies), Basilios (Archdiocese of Akkar and dependencies), Ephrem (Archdiocese of Tripoli, Koura, and dependencies), Ignatius (Archdiocese of France, Western and Southern Europe), Isaac (Archdiocese of Germany and Central Europe), Joseph (Archdiocese of New York and all North America), Ghattas (Archdiocese of Baghdad, Kuwait, the Arab Peninsula and dependencies), Silwan (Archdiocese of British Isles and Ireland),

Antonios (Archdiocese of Zahleh, Baalbek, and dependencies), Nicolas (Archdiocese of Hama and dependencies), Basilios (Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines), Ignatius (Archdiocese of Mexico, Venezuela, Central America and the Islands of the Caribbean Sea), Athanasios (Archdiocese of Lattakia and dependencies), Jacques (Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and All Argentine). The following bishops were also present: Metropolitan Niphon Saykali, Moussa El-Khoury, Luka El-Khoury, Thomas Joseph, Demetri Charback, Elia Toumeh, Constantine Kayyal, Johannes Haykal, John Abdullah, Anthony Michael, Nicholas Ozone, Gregorios Khoury-Abdullah, Qais Sadiq, Youhanna Batash, and Theodore El-Ghandour. The Secretary of the Holy Synod, Bishop Efraim Maalouli was also in attendance. Excused were both Bishops Basil Essey and Alexandre Mufarij. His Eminence, Metropolitan Boulos (Archdiocese of Aleppo, Alexandretta and dependencies) was present in the prayers of the Synod fathers, despite his absence due to his abduction. After the opening prayer and the invocation of the

Endnotes
1. St. Isaac, *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, p. 293.
2. St. Isaac, p. 236.
3. St. Isaac, p. 290.
4. Archimandrite Zacharias (Zacharou), *The Hidden Man of the Heart*, p. 9.

Holy Spirit, the fathers lifted their prayers for the repose of the Thrice Blessed Metropolitan Spyridon Khoury, the previous Metropolitan of Zahleh, Baalbek and dependencies, that the Lord God may grant his soul Divine mercies. Then, the agenda was reviewed. First, the fathers discussed the abduction of the Metropolitans of Aleppo, Paul Yazigi and Youhanna Ibrahim, decrying the international silence on the case that has reached its sixth year. They called for releasing the bishops and closing this case, which only sheds a glance on the sufferings in the East. The state of the “family” was a main topic on the agenda of the Synod. The Fathers invited a number of clergy and lay specialists to attend the Synod sessions concerning this matter. Leading these specialists was His Eminence Nikolaos, Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki of the Holy Church of Greece. The fathers considered the huge and multifaceted challenges that face the family, in the homeland and overseas. They were well aware that the economic difficulties are the first and most pressing of these challenges, which leave direct repercussions on the life and stability of the family. Therefore, they decided to call on parish priests and councils in all dioceses to intensify their efforts and initiatives towards alleviating the impact of these crises on the faithful in their parishes. Moreover, in addition to offering their prayers, they also tend to cooperate with concerned persons to find feasible solutions. The fathers were concerned about the proliferating challenges that face the family nowadays, due to patching so many connotations to human freedom, to the consequent defilement of the values related to faith and human dignity, especially that these challenges are more seriously affecting the family and the salvation of its members. They pondered on the manifest deviation from the sound foundations of human life and social controls, the growing spirit of individuality and consumption that threatens the family to disintegrate and lose the living communion among its members in the light of the Gospel. They accorded time for research, reflection and attention to these matters, and to questions that concern the moral implication of families in some bioethics fields. The fathers discussed these issues in several sessions, that hosted priests, specialists, and active members in the life of the Church. They listened



to deep perspectives on the subject, in view of formulating a Church discourse concerning the family related problems. The fathers examined pastoral ways to protect the family, help it remain steadfast in Christ, and immunize it with the spirit of the Gospel. The fathers listened to reports on facts about the family and the surrounding

milieu in various dioceses. They discussed topics on marriage, education, bioethics, homosexuality, cohabitation, media and related issues. Hoping that the faithful in the Church will cling to their freedom in Christ, as salvation is our most precious goal, the fathers decided to send a pastoral, educational, and instructional encyclical to the faithful in the coming weeks, entitled “Family: the Joy of Life.” This encyclical outlines the theological foundations of marriage and the Church’s approach to all these contemporary challenges, the questions on bioethics, the role of the family in the life of the Church and the Church’s recommendations to the faithful. They considered launching pastoral support measures towards the “family” in the Archdioceses that would promote this message among the faithful. As for the pastoral frameworks of these measures in the parishes, they would be determined by each diocese. The Synod fathers discussed the challenges facing the various Orthodox Churches, and the dangers facing the unique Orthodox testimony in today’s world in case these challenges are not overcome. They called for multiplying the efforts to heal the wounds inflicted on the Church’s body through conciliar and common consultative work. The fathers heard reports about the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology in Balamand, the Patriarchal Department of Humanitarian Relief, and the Antiochian Orthodox Media Center. They praised the efforts of these institutes’ directors, stressing the role of the Church in consolidating the voice of truth, justice and peace in the world. The fathers also discussed the issue of immigration and displacement in the homeland and overseas and stressed the pivotal role of the Church, that constantly offers service to humankind in any place. They expressed the importance of the Antiochian presence in the dioceses overseas. Upon hearing the related reports, they commended the efforts of the all bishops and priests, who personally contribute to embrace all the faithful of the Church of

Antioch overseas, and call these faithful to preserve the Antiochian uniqueness, to be always rooted in the Gospel values, and to empower and strengthen their presence in the community life. The fathers decided to form a new Disciplinary Council for Clerical Appeal, after the resignation of its previous body, and approved the new body.

Within the framework of the Holy Synod of Antioch, His Beatitude Patriarch John X and the hierarchs of the Holy Synod participated in a Divine Liturgy on the morning of Sunday, October 6, and attended the Byzantine Music Concert entitled “Crown them With Glory and Honor,” presented by a joint Antiochian Choir that included chanters from all the Lebanese and Syrian Archdioceses. The event was held on the main campus of Balamand University.

Regarding the Syrian crisis, the Synod fathers welcomed the initiatives aimed at finding a political solution to the years-long conflict. This solution ought to respect the unity of the state and the frights and aspirations of the Syrian people. The fathers called upon the world to look at the scale of the human tragedy, and the expanse of human suffering caused by the war and the economic blockade. They call for serious action to lift the sanctions imposed on Syria, whose citizens bear the burden on their livelihood and health, and to provide the conditions for the return of displaced, migrants, and refugees. They also urged all people to work for national reconciliation and to contribute courageously to solutions that provide security, peace, cohesion and stability and cause growth, progress and prosperity. They also expressed their condemnation of any aggression targeting Syrian sovereignty and exposing its people to death, displacement and refuge. Regarding Lebanon, the fathers of the Holy Synod requested that the government take whatever measures that would settle the difficult economic situation, alleviate the burdens on citizens and avoid imposing more taxes on low-income people. They also call on all Lebanese officials to work for terminating the rampant corruption in the state administrations, for this situation affects all areas of life and threatens the collapse of the government. While calling to prefer political over personal interests and considerations, and to cleanse public administrations from corruption, the Synod fathers welcome the initiative of the Council of Ministers to fill public vacancies. They emphasize the need for

transparency in recruitment as a must. Candidates should meet competence and expertise, and their selection needs to confirm with the confessional system’s distribution, not preferring one denomination over another. In this regard, the fathers assert that the existing of a clear mechanism allowing the most efficient candidates to be appointed to the positions remains the best option that takes the appointments away from the logic of quotas and cronyism.

The fathers pondered upon the so-called “Deal of the Century” that is being marketed in the region. They stressed that the Palestinian cause is the strife of a people whose most basic rights are violated on a daily basis, and who are subject to the worst forms of racial discrimination by an occupying power. Calling on all countries of the world to work towards the establishment of a Palestinian state and the implementation of international resolutions on the right of return, they affirm that any solution to the Palestinian issue outside the framework of justice and guaranteeing the rights of the Palestinian people remains unjust and unacceptable.

The Synod fathers prayed for Iraq and for other peoples and countries of the region, and ask God to enlighten the minds of the authorities responsible for the destinies of the peoples of the world and the region. May they realize the oppression and suffering inflicted to the human being, and may they take the initiative to make the world more peaceful and just without conflicts, violence, greed, polarization and divisions.

The fathers discussed the deteriorating environmental crisis due to the continued pollution with its various causes and the indiscriminate exploitation of the earth resources. Noting that this crisis is a threat to nature and life, including human life, they called for courageous living options that respect the environment, and reduce the greed of consumption that dominate nature for quick and easy profit. They also called for enforcing policies that guarantee the prospects for future life and contribute to protecting the access by future generations to the goods of the earth. The fathers offered their prayers for the peace of the whole world and pray that the Almighty Lord may send His Spirit of peace to the world and preserve the faithful of the Holy Church of Antioch everywhere, in the homeland and overseas through the intercessions of the Holy Virgin, Our Lady of Balamand, Saints Peter and Paul, the founders of the Holy See of Antioch and all the saints.

Reflections on the Holy Synod on Family: Facing “Huge and Multifaceted Challenges”

Fr. Theodore Pulcini

Early in 2019 His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X issued a call to hierarchs and other clergy, as well as lay specialists, to prepare papers for presentation at an upcoming Holy Synod meeting. These papers were to address the “huge and multifaceted challenges” facing the Christian family in all the regions of the Patriarchate. Like many other metropolitans, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH responded to that call and assembled a delegation to represent the North American Archdiocese at the meeting, which took place October 3 through 10 in Lebanon at the St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology at Balamand.

Metropolitan JOSEPH led our delegation, which also included Bishop THOMAS, Bishop JOHN, Bishop ANTHONY, Bishop NICHOLAS, Archpriest Isaiah Gillette, Priest Theodore Pulcini, and Deacon John El Massih. Also in attendance from the Archdiocese were Dr. Daniel Hinshaw and Dr. Adnan Trabulsi, as well as members of the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees, Fawaz El Khoury (Vice-Chairman) and Salim Abboud (Treasurer).

His Beatitude opened the Synod the afternoon of Thursday, October 3, by meeting with the thirty-six metropolitans and bishops who had gathered from throughout the Patriarchate. The agenda for the Synod was finalized, and initial discussions on administrative matters were conducted.

The next morning, paper presentations began with reports on the situation of the family in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf Countries. Later that morning Metropolitan JOSEPH presented his paper on the family situation in North America, followed by presentations from other hierarchs on the situations in South America, Australia, and Europe. After lunch and an afternoon break, participants reassembled for papers on the sacrament of marriage in Scripture and the Church Fathers. Even though Archpriest Michel Najim of our Archdiocese was

not able to attend the Synod, his paper, “Secularization and Globalization: Impact on the Members of the Church, the Family, and Marriage,” was included among the others presented by members of this panel. The evening concluded with Bishop JOHN’s presentation of his paper “Sociopolitical Economy: Effects on Family and Church.”

The morning session on Saturday, October 5, began with Bishop ANTHONY’s presentation on “The Roles of Men and Women: Gender Issues in Modern Culture.” This was followed by several other papers, including that of Dr. Adnan Trabulsi on “Homosexuality” and that of Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotki (from the Church of Greece) on “Ethics of the End-of-Life.” There were no evening presentations that day so that participants could attend Vespers at the Balamand Monastery.

Of course, the central event of Sunday, October 6, was the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy at which a host of hierarchs from outside of Lebanon and Syria (including Metropolitan JOSEPH, Bishop JOHN, Bishop ANTHONY, and Bishop NICHOLAS), priests (including Fr. Isaiah and Fr. Theodore), and deacons (including Deacon John) concelebrated with His Beatitude. The overflow crowd that converged on the Monastery church included a number of pilgrims from the United States, most notably from West Virginia (accompanied by Fr. Joseph Hazar) and California (accompanied by Fr. Samer Youssef). The Liturgy was broadcast on Lebanese television.

Later that day the Patriarch hosted the North American delegation at his residence near the Monastery. Accompanied by Fawaz El Khoury and Salim Abboud, members of the delegation were presented to His Beatitude by Metropolitan JOSEPH. His Beatitude spent more than an hour with us, anxious to hear our impressions of the Synod and our perceptions of the state of Orthodoxy in the United States. The discussion was honest, lively, and energizing.

Especially noteworthy was the Patriarch’s description of how Balamand University, since its inception just thirty years ago, has risen quickly to great prominence in rankings of Middle Eastern institutions of higher learning. Directing our attention to a large aerial photograph in his salon, he showed us how the University grew from the nucleus of the Monastery to a large surrounding area. The University is also home to two preparatory schools, one stressing French in its curriculum, and the other English. The evening reception drew to a close as all made their way to the University campus for a concert of Byzantine music performed by a joint choir of chanters from all the Lebanese and Syrian Archdioceses. Its theme was “Crown Them with Glory and Honor,” celebrating the Orthodox theology of marriage.

Presentations resumed the next morning, during the course of which Fr. Isaiah Gillette presented a paper, “Pastoral Therapeutic Interventions for Marriage and Family Conflicts,” submitted by Fr. David Alexander. (Because Fr. Isaiah had collaborated with Fr. David in producing the final version of this paper, he was asked to present it in the absence of Fr. David, who was not able to attend.) Later that same morning, Fr. Theodore Pulcini presented his paper on “The Lasting Effects of Divorce: Implications for Pastoral Work with Children of Fractured Families.” Other presentations in the morning session addressed issues of education, mixed marriage, cohabitation, and addiction. The effect of media – especially social media – on families was the focus of lively presentations made that evening.

The final day of presentations was Tuesday, October 8. In the morning session, Bishop THOMAS presented his paper on “Pastoral Care for People with Special Needs,” and Dr. Daniel Hinshaw, a specialist in palliative medicine in the University of Michigan Health System, presented his paper on “Orthodox Christian Accompaniment at the End of Life.” (In addition to attending the Synod meetings, Dr. Hinshaw met with the Balamand seminarians, providing instruction on end-of-life issues.) That morning’s work was rounded out by a number of pastoral proposals regarding marriage preparation and enrichment, as well as care for the elderly. That evening participants reassembled to discuss what should be included in the Synod’s final statement on the Christian family.

Later that evening those representing our Archdiocese at the Synod were invited to Mhanna, one

of the finest restaurants in Lebanon, where they were welcomed by Sayidna Basilios, Metropolitan of Akkar and Dependencies, to a dinner offered through the generosity of Fadi Mitri. The superb food and warm hospitality made this an evening to remember, a perfect way for us non-episcopal delegates to conclude our participation in the Synod.

For the bishops, however, their work continued for another day. There were still administrative matters for the metropolitans and bishops to consider. Cultural, political, economic, and ecological challenges facing the faithful of the Patriarchate, both in the homeland and abroad, were duly examined. Finishing touches were proposed for the forthcoming encyclical “Family: The Joy of Life,” which will convey the insights and aspirations of the Synod. It was also announced that the Patriarchate will publish a book including all the papers submitted for the event.

By Friday, October 11, most of us were making our way to Beirut’s Hariri Airport to begin our journey home, a bit tired, but much exhilarated by our experiences at the Synod.

In closing, I would like to take the liberty of making a few personal remarks. What impressed me most about the Synod was the spirit of collaboration and openness that permeated its sessions. The Patriarch made it clear from the very start that he wanted everyone to be attentive to the content of the presentations (no less than thirty-two of them!) and to be actively engaged in the discussions that would follow each of the panels. At several points His Beatitude expressed his satisfaction with the energetic exchange of ideas that took place. Of course, most of the synodal participants were hierarchs, but they did not minimize the voices of the other clergy and the laypeople in attendance. I remarked to one of the bishops, “You are our fathers, and we respect you as such, but you have treated us as brothers in this assembly.” “Of course,” he responded, “if we are going to solve some of these problems, we are going to have to listen to one another and work together.”

The Patriarch reflected the same sentiment in his concluding remarks, in which he charged all of us “to implement all the beautiful things we have discussed.” One of my American colleagues remarked that this emphasis on the practicalities of pastoral care is typical of our Antiochian approach to Church life: “We honestly admit to the problems we have, without sugar-coating them, and then we find ways of confronting them.” One of the “homeland” hierarchs made

a point of telling us how much he appreciated our bringing this American perspective to the synodal deliberations. We were, of course, grateful for his remark and moved by it.

It was the exemplary organization of this Synod that made such openness and collaboration possible. We adhered to a well-crafted schedule from the beginning to the end of the event. Three booklets were distributed to all participants, two of which provided the papers presented in Arabic as well as Arabic translations of the papers presented in English, and a third booklet which provided the original versions of the English contributions. (In this regard the work of Fr. Bassam Nassif must be recognized.) Moreover, we English-speakers were able to engage fully in the Synod by virtue of the efforts of professional translators present for all the proceedings.

In fact, in the tradition of Middle Eastern hospitality, no effort was spared in making our delegation feel at home. Especially noteworthy in this regard were the seminarians of the Balamand. They were present at every turn, interacting with us, providing information, and serving the tables at our lunches and dinners. Two of them, Gaby El Murr and Ibrahim Klaimy, attended to our various needs with patience and solicitude. I was inspired by the caliber of the students of the Institute of Theology. They manifested genuine love for the Church and zeal for furthering its mission. Many of them had trained for secular careers before opting to relinquish their prospects for success in the world by enrolling in the Institute to devote themselves to service to Christ and the Gospel. Their devotion seemed genuinely joyful, not cold or grudging. With such men as its future leaders, our Patriarchate, despite all the challenges it faces, will be greatly strengthened.

What drew together all the strands of the synodal experience was the brief impromptu speech given by His Beatitude at one of the concluding sessions. He emphasized the two themes that ran through the event: unity and universality. By coming together at the Balamand, we affirmed our unity in the Patriarchate. And at the Divine Liturgy we affirmed our diversity through the various vernacular languages used in worship and everyday life throughout the Patriarchate: Arabic, Greek, English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Swedish.... “We are one, and we are universal,” he concluded. “That’s who we are as Antiochians – and we are proud of it!”

Indeed we are.

The Fall Meeting of the Board of Trustees

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

1 Corinthians 12:4–6

During the weekend of October 18–20, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH presided over a historic weekend celebrating many joyous milestones: the beginning of the ministry of St. Raphael in North America in 1895, the consecration of the current St. Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn in 1920, the 25th anniversary of the priestly ordination of Fr. Thomas Zain, and the elevation of Fr. Adrian Budica to the rank of Archpriest. The weekend was also the occasion of the fall meeting of the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees. Given the weekend’s daunting schedule, His Eminence and the Board could have considered shrinking down the scope and length of the meetings, but they seized the opportunity to engage in a series of full and fruitful deliberations.

His Eminence began the meeting by highlighting the indispensable contribution made by the hierarchs, clergy, and laity who had attended the recent “Antiochian Conference on the Family” that took place in Lebanon at the Balamand Monastery. His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X convened this expanded meeting of the Holy Synod earlier in the month that included all of the hierarchs of the patriarchal throne. They gathered to study the challenges faced by our families in the contemporary world. To address this critical and timely topic, His Beatitude included not just hierarchs but esteemed clergy and laity with expertise in a wide array of relevant areas. His Eminence reported that the presentations of our Archdiocesan delegation were a key to the success of this “Antiochian Conference on the Family,” and he expressed great

paternal pride in our Archdiocese as a whole.

His Eminence began the Board meetings with this account of the synod not merely to express his pride over how our delegation presented itself in Lebanon. He stressed the point that our Archdiocese is a true model of cooperation of clergy and laity for the entire Patriarchate. Oftentimes in the Orthodox Church, we live with an untraditional traditionalism. In other words, the clericalism of recent centuries has become the tradition, while attempts to renew the ancient synergy of the clergy and the laity is viewed as a modern innovation. His Eminence wanted to illuminate this very point at the outset of the Board of Trustees meeting to set the proper tone for the work to come, work that would require this synergy of clergy and laity.

During the course of the Board’s deliberations, many important topics were discussed. A lively and informative discussion took place after the report from the committee on legal issues, presented by Mr. Richard Ayoub.

This committee is charged with identifying potential legal liabilities, and a proposal to send a letter to the parishes with helpful advice on certain issues of concern was approved. The financial report from Mr. Salim Abboud was noted for its comprehensiveness. Ancient Faith Ministries was invited for the first time to present a full overview of all of its varied programming. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh announced the completion of the initial draft of the new model parish constitution which was shared with a committee of senior clergy from each of the dioceses. The next phase of review will be sharing the draft with the members of the Board so that members can discuss it fully at the spring Board meeting.

Towards the end of the full agenda, His Eminence discussed plans for enriching the Antiochian Village. He anticipated some of the questions that



may be asked, and he reiterated the importance of a larger church to meet the spiritual needs of the Holy Mountain of our Archdiocese. He spoke of the importance of planning for the retirement home for the hierarchs and a new monastic community. His Eminence also shared initial sketches of the new buildings for the Board to see how this vision can be realized.

His Eminence thanked the Board members for the care and diligence with which all made their presentations, deliberated, and worked during the meetings. He spoke about how important it is for all of members of the Body of Christ to offer their gifts and talents to the work of the Church. All are necessary for the Body to function. The passage from 1 Corinthians, above, was used in the benediction to close the fruitful meetings that had exemplified this Pauline teaching.

LIVING THE LITURGY – A PRACTICAL REFLECTION

PART 4 OF 10

From decorations, to the part given to the youngest kids in the Sunday School Christmas Pageant, angels play a huge role in our celebrations of our Lord’s Nativity, and rightly so. It was an angel that announced her bearing of Christ to the Theotokos. An angel visited Joseph in a dream. An angel called the shepherds to come and worship Christ. After the sermon, we sing what we call the Cherubic Hymn. That word, *cherubic*, comes from the word *cherubim*, which is a rank of angel. If you remember, in the book of Isaiah he talked about another rank of angel, the *seraphim*, surrounding the throne of God. In other places, the Bible mentions *cherubim* as well.

the place of preparation and brought through the midst of the people to the altar for the consecration. We take the gifts which God has given us; from wheat (which we have made flour), yeast, water, and grapes, we have formed bread and wine. Now we prepare them and offer them back to God. When the bishop serves, he will often prepare the gifts at this time, though most priests will do that before Divine Liturgy has started. This preparation is called the *proskomedia*.

During this preparation, the celebrant cuts open the bread, that people baked and offered for prayers, in a very specific way. He places the different parts onto an elevated plate called the *diskos*. Water and wine are poured into the chalice during this time as well. The first cut of bread is the center, marked with the letters IC XC NI KA. This abbreviation is Greek for “Jesus Christ Conquers.” The center piece is called the “lamb.” This is what will be put into the chalice for communion. Following this, other pieces are cut: the next for the Theotokos, then those for

the nine ranks of commemorations: the angels, John the Baptist and all the prophets, the Apostles, saints who were bishops, the martyrs, monastic saints, the unmercenary healers, the parents of the Theotokos and those saints commemorated that day, and then the author of the Divine Liturgy celebrated that morning. Next, a piece is taken to commemorate the bishop of the church, and all the bishops and clergy, and all the members of the parish, then another for the founders of the parish and the departed bishops and clergy of the parish, then one for each of the names being commemorated that day – living and departed. Finally, the priest or bishop prays “Remember, O Lord, my unworthiness, and

forgive all my offences, both voluntary and involuntary.” During the Great Entrance, the priest or bishop prays for all present, all Orthodox Christians, the bishop, the leader of the country, and all those names who were commemorated that day. Following the entrance, we conclude the Cherubic Hymn with the words, “that we may receive the King of all, escorted invisibly by the angelic orders. Alleluia.”

According to this hymn, we must first lay aside “our earthly cares” in order to receive the King of All. During the beginning of the hymn, the priest prays silently: “No one who is bound with the desires and pleasures of the flesh is worthy to approach or to draw nigh or to serve thee, O King of glory, for to serve thee is a great and fearful thing even to the heavenly powers. Nevertheless” We are being reminded that we cannot receive God without first putting those things aside that distract us. And what are our distractions?

In the survey mentioned last month, when asked to share up to four things they think about during liturgy, the surveyed youth shared the following as their top five answers: life (56%), God/Jesus (33%), school/homework (28%), family (27%), and food (27%). When asked to share up to four things that distract them, the top five answers were other people (92%), “thoughts” (39%), family/friends (31%), cell phones (26%), and school/homework (21%). We often think of distractions as “bad,” but none of these things are inherently bad. Nonetheless, they still distract us from God and must be set aside if

we are going to receive the King of All.

Christ shows us what is expected when, in Chapter 8 of the Gospel of Matthew, He is told that His mother and brothers want to talk to Him. Rather than stopping His teaching, He asks: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Later, in Matthew 10, he says, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” These teachings are tough to hear, but Christ is teaching us what it means to lay aside our earthly cares.

The martyrs give us this example time and again. Take the life of St. Julita and her son, St. Cyricus, from the year 305, for example. Trying to persuade St. Julita to abandon her Christian faith, the governor took her son in his lap. Refusing to leave his mother, St. Cyricus broke free from the governor and ran to his mother declaring, “I am a Christian.” His mother watched as he was martyred, before being martyred herself. Our earthly cares, even this life itself, are not to be compared with what we have been promised. We have a foretaste of what is promised in the Eucharist. When influenced by the right community, we find the support we need to lay aside our earthly cares in worship, and to make difficult decisions in the world.

Gregory Abdalah, D. Min.



“...now lay aside all earthly cares”

The Cherubic Hymn refers once again to the reading from Isaiah and the hymn of the angels: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Having sung the thrice-holy hymn, in which we joined the angels singing before the throne of God, we continue: “Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim, and who sing to the Life-Giving Trinity the thrice-holy hymn, now lay aside all earthly cares” This first part of the hymn reminds us to lay aside all the cares of this world, now that we have entered into the choir of the angels and are praising God, while standing at his throne. Then we have the Great Entrance. The gifts are taken from

HOW TO COPE WITH GRIEF WHILE CAREGIVING

Q&A with Bishop JOHN Abdalah

Grief is a normal, healthy response to any loss or perceived change. Sometimes, when there are multiple losses, untimely losses (in the case of younger people), losses that include income or involve children, grief can be complicated. As caregivers, we mourn the losses of our loved one as he or she loses various physical functions, or anticipates losses to come. We may become physically exhausted and in need of relief from the pain in our hearts – and this in turn may produce conflicting feelings within us. I wondered what my own church (the Antiochian Orthodox jurisdiction) might have to say about all these feelings, so I called Bishop JOHN Abdalah of the Antiochian Orthodox Diocese of Worcester and New England and asked if he would share some insight and advice about grieving, from his pastoral experience. Bishop JOHN is a pastoral therapist and facilitated a grief support group in Pennsylvania for twenty years. In his current role as Bishop, he continues to minister to those who struggle with grief, among other things.



Rachelle – Your Grace, as a caregiver, I find that feelings of grief are never far from my heart. Is this common among caregivers that you have met?

Bp. John – When caregivers take care of people that they love, they share the losses experienced with the person for whom they care. They may experience all the grief-responses, and if they do, their feelings are as real as anyone experiencing grief directly due

to loss. To complicate things, caregivers and those they care for are sometimes experiencing the stages of grief on a different schedule, because they are separate persons. By this I mean that even though, say, in marriage, two become one, each may still get hungry at a different time than the other, feel hopeful at a different time, and be depressed at a different time. This should be expected, but when one is hopeful and the other is depressed, the two will feel disconnected. This complicates our relationship with our loved one. As a condition worsens, each loss of an ability to care for oneself complicates the grief. When the one we are caring for is sick for a long time, we naturally become tired. When we anticipate the loss of life, we may even begin to grieve the loss in anticipation – “anticipatory grief.” This type of grief is tricky, in that it comes and goes, can distract us from the time we still have together, and leave us wondering how we are supposed to feel.

Caregivers rarely get a reprieve from their duties, and for some, when that reprieve happens it may

be filled with grieving and regret as we mourn a life we never envisioned for ourselves or our family. Is how I am feeling – and I presume others who are caregiving – normal? There is a profound sense of guilt that is associated with “anticipatory grief.” For many, this guilt is especially intensified because, after being a caregiver for so long, you would think that you would be used to changes in your darling’s health.

It is perfectly normal for caregivers to experience grief and to mourn the loss of what could have been. I expect every caregiver who reads this knows that it is typical to feel blame, guilt, anger, depression, sadness, and frustration. If you love the person you are caring for, it would be abnormal to feel otherwise. Not grieving would imply you didn’t really lose much.

The guilt associated with a caregiver’s feelings of grief and sadness may be related to the fact that we’ve been conditioned to believe that the experience of grief and grieving is only appropriate when someone passes. This is simply not true. Caregivers – and the people they care for – experience a significant loss, and may continue to experience loss after loss as the ill loved one loses each function or ability. And while the person they care for may still be present, lucid, and stable – for the caregiver loss comes in many other complicating ways: loss of em-

ployment, loss of freedom, loss of “normalcy,” loss of sleep ... the list goes on.

R – What are some of the coping mechanisms you recommend to caregivers, and how do they differ from the strategies of those who are grieving loss of life?

Bp. John – Strategies for caregivers include the following:

Connect with Others in Similar Situations

The benefits of engaging in a support group outweigh much of the potential pitfalls. When caregivers connect with others who are living a similar life, there is usually an implicit understanding of the emotional, physical, and spiritual toll of caregiving. Not only can other caregivers understand because they are going through similar loss at the same time, but many have found ways to cope. In addition, hearing the stories of others validates our experiences; we can see that they’re normal.

There are many formats for support groups these days – some may be conference-calls, others are online groups and forums – even social media offers a plethora of options when it comes to support groups. Caregivers may not have the ability to get out of their houses at a set time every week – or even every month – so, these alternatives may prove helpful.



Share Your Truth

In my experience, many caregivers are good at dealing with complicated situations efficiently and rarely ask for help – even when they are trying to work through feelings of grief. Maybe they’ve asked for help in the past and been burned, or maybe they’ve shared some of their struggles with friends and family, and have not been heard or felt supported. Males often feel that needing help is a weakness. That idea is not helpful.

If as a caregiver you can engage in a support group, or work with a therapist or clergyperson, you may be able to get a different perspective on your feelings of grief, loss, and guilt. From there, you may expand your circle of trust and let in others who have shown a genuine interest in your life – and your struggles. Talking about grief is uncomfortable, but letting people in may help alleviate some of that burden. And when people genuinely care, they will be there for you even in those uncomfortable moments.

Seek Professional Advice

Sometimes the stress, sadness, and grief a caregiver feels are too much – and this may impact our overall health and well-being. If depression caused by grief lingers too long and impedes your ability to care for yourself or others – or if you have thoughts of harming others or yourself – seek out advice from a trained professional, like a doctor or a therapist, immediately. If you are unable to make an appointment quickly, go to your nearest emergency room.



Similarly, if the grief is overwhelming, it may cause physiological issues – heart palpitations, migraines, high blood pressure – and if you have any health conditions of your own, this high stress environment may cause your own symptoms to be exacerbated. Talk to your doctor about your feelings of grief – and how you are feeling generally. Caregivers need to take care of themselves – your life matters.

Respite Is Essential

Caregivers are constantly being swallowed up by the needs of others – and that constant need to be fully present for someone else can trigger a sense of loss of self. Selflessness is a noble endeavor – but eventually, it renders the selfless person incapable of even caring for themselves. Getting away is very difficult for caregivers, but it’s essential to their well-being.

Do you have family or friends who can cover for you for a few hours each week? Bi-weekly? Even monthly? If you don’t have a reliable family member or friend, do you know a responsible high school student, or a local caregiver service in your area, that could come and sit with your person so that you might take a few minutes to yourself? Maybe there is a local house of worship that offers volunteers to visit with the sick or the elderly? When family or helpers come, get out of the house and do something – anything – for yourself.

Making time for yourself as a caregiver is essential to withstanding the grueling hours and physical demands that caregiving places on the individual. Use this time to do something that gives you pleasure, helps rest your body, or alleviates some of the pressure you are constantly under. It doesn’t have to be complicated – it just must be for you.

R – I’d like to close with a question that seems cheesy, but what is one piece of advice that you feel is helpful to caregivers who may not see an end to their grief?

Bp. John – Take one day at a time. You can’t change what happened or what will happen. We can only live in the moment we are in. Christ meets us here where we are, loves us, and loves those we love. We may not understand why things happen, but God is with us.

Rachelle Khalaf
More articles by Rachelle can be found at
<https://jugglehustlerepeat.com/>

SHARING THE FAITH

BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS,



“This then, is our task: to educate ourselves and our children in godliness”

– St. John Chrysostom

Among the articles and notes on the following pages, you’ll read about the retirement of Betty Randolph, Vasiliki Oldziey, and our Administrative Assistant and Departmental Administrator for the Creative Festivals, Rosemary Shumski. There is a time for everything, according to the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, and we ask God’s blessings for these wonderful and dedicated women for the next chapter of their lives.

We shine the Volunteer Staff Spotlight on our two new Coordinators, Khouria Gigi Shadid and Deacon Elisha Long, who will share responsibility for the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America.

One of the Two Holiest Days of The Year Has Been Compromised. With every December I am reminded of how Christmas has been commercialized. This year it was the announcement of 14 new Christmas movies coming to the Hallmark Channel. The holiday is big business for them – the channel airs Christmas movies starting in July!

Can we truly say that “Jesus is the reason for the season?” Maybe once that was the case. When did this change, and how? Look for my essay on our website as “What Did We Trade for Christmas?”

Programs. We have recently posted two new programs as free downloads, “My Orthodox Church, for Middle School,” and “The Great Feasts: The Life of Our Lord.” We need your comments, suggestions or corrections. Please e-mail us at aodce@aol.com.

Finally, please look at the Training Updates to see if any events are occurring in your vicinity.

Wishing you a blessed and holy Feast of the Nativity,

Carole A. Buleya, Director



With gratitude, we acknowledge the contribution of the Order of St. Ignatius that partially funds the work of our Department.

AODCE SOCIAL NETWORKING MINISTRY

To nurture the children God has placed in our care!

On our **Orthodox Christian Parenting** sites, we will continue our fall series on the book, “Blueprints for the Little Church: Creating an Orthodox Home,” For **Orthodox Church School Teachers**, we will be concluding our series on Classroom Success by suggesting resources helpful to teachers working with students of varying abilities. We will also offer, on both sites, a handful of suggestions of new resources for children of different ages. These would make great Christmas gifts!

Kristina Wenger, Staff Assistant for Social Network Ministry



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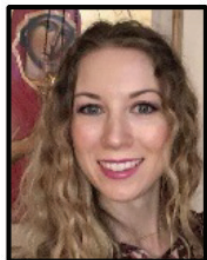
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ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH SCHOOL DIRECTORS

In our Church Schools, December is usually filled with Nativity play practices and performances. May your programs bring joy to all as students proclaim, “Christ is Born! Glorify Him!” January provides a chance for directors to exhale and focus on planning Creative Arts workshops, before the focus shifts to Great Lent.

On the Orthodox Christian Church School Director’s Facebook page this month, we will discuss the 2020 Creative Arts theme and materials, as well as ways to organize workshops for PK-12th-grade students. In January, we will review *Of Such Is the Kingdom: A Practical Theology of Disability* by Summer Kinard, as we educate our selves on making Sunday Church Schools welcoming for all students.

Anna-Sarah Farha, aodce.csdirectors@gmail.com



CREATIVE FESTIVALS 2020

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

(John 3:17)



This year's theme is “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). The deadline for submitting all entries is April 1st. If you haven't begun using the theme and encouraging the students to work on their entries, January is a perfect time to start! Begin the New Year by introducing the theme, using the explanation and lesson plans we've provided. Another great resource we offer is the cross-reference of OCEC texts that relate to the theme in some way. Decorate your classroom with the Creative Festival posters we provide and teach students the theme song. By using both audio and visual teaching materials, you can appeal to the various ways students learn. Encourage every student to enter something in at least one of the categories!

On a personal note, after having had the honor and privilege of working at the Department of Christian Education for twenty years, I'm retiring to spend more time with my family. I'd like to thank Carole Buleza for giving me this incredible opportunity, Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory for approving my employment, and Metropolitan JOSEPH for his continued spiritual guidance and support of the Department of Christian Education. In my role as the Administrative Assistant and the Departmental Administrator for the Creative Festivals, I've been continually surrounded by Orthodox Christian resources which have enabled me to learn exponentially and grow in my faith. In addition, it's been such a great blessing to have met so many wonderful people over the years (even if only via e-mail or phone) and I will miss you all! May God bless you!

With love in Christ,

Rosemary Skumski, Administrative Assistant and Departmental Administrator for the Creative Festivals

Rosemary's position with the Department began with my tenure. Among her several duties were the accounting tasks, and they were quite involved after our events. I could always rely on her to manage the finances and to submit complete and accurate monthly financial reports. Rosemary was present at all the Orthodox Institutes and was responsible for all the course registrations over the years. She did a fine job as Administrator of the Creative Festivals, compiling all the materials and posting them on the website. She also took part in the Committee to draft our soon-to-be-published “Guidelines for Child Protection.” I have come to admire her in many respects and am

so grateful to her – the Department would not be what it is today without her. Diligent and professional, courteous, kind, and patient, Rosemary will be missed by all of us. Carole Buleza

If you would care to send Rosemary a note, please address it to the Department, 105 Leader Heights Road, York, PA 17403.

TRANSITIONS

KH. BETTY RANDOLPH

Coordinator for the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast*

By Carole Buleza



Betty began serving the Department under Dr. John Boojamra. With her background as an educator and principal, she offered a wealth of experience to our Church School Directors through trainings, both in her own as well as other dioceses, and at The Orthodox Institute. She was an intrepid traveler, attending almost every staff meeting and contributing ideas and always on a positive note. I am personally grateful for the encouraging words she offered me as I began my tenure.

Her dedication to our Directors was manifest in the many hours required to create and co-edit the Church School Directors Handbook – a vital resource for years now. You willingly gave your time and effort over so many years to Orthodox Christian education, and we are grateful to you!

*Note: Betty retired three years ago. We were able to give Betty her retirement award recently.

VASILIKI OLDZIEY

Coordinator for the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America

By Leslie Atherholt



After 15 years of volunteer service with the Department of Christian Education, Vasiliki Oldziey, has announced her retirement. She has served the entire Diocese by providing trainings, answering questions, facilitating the Creative Arts Festival, including writing lesson plans, and being the face and

voice of the Department in her area. In order to facilitate the traveling to parishes, Vas has named two people to share the territory.

Vas encourages the church school directors and teachers of DOWAMA to “call on Dn. Elisha and Kh. Gigi for help

with curriculum, brainstorming and ideas. They are excellent, enthusiastic educators, ready and willing to serve you!” Thank you, Vas, for your dedication to DOWAMA!

VOLUNTEER STAFF SPOTLIGHT

KH. GIGI SHADID

Christian Education Coordinator, Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America (*Deaneries: Southwest, and North, Central, and East Texas*)



Khouria Gigi Shadid is no stranger to the Department. She has been an associate for five years, has traveled to various parishes for teacher development workshops, and has written Creative Festivals lesson plans and theme songs. Most recently, she conducted a teacher training in the Southeast Texas deanery, with a follow-up scheduled in January. The best way to reach her is at gishadid@gmail.com.

Kh. Gigi also served her home parish as a full-time youth director for three years, teaching children ages Pre-K to college. She has produced four Orthodox children's music CDs, “to teach and help children grow in their faith in Christ and their love for His holy church.” She has also produced Vacation Church School programs and plans to continue to do so. She currently teaches at The St. Constantine School, an Orthodox Classical school in Houston, Texas, after years of teaching in the public schools. She writes, “I can now heed God's call to focus my energy on Christian Education, including for the Department.”

VOLUNTEER STAFF SPOTLIGHT

DEACON ELISHA LONG



Christian Education Coordinator, Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America (*Deaneries: Great Plains, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Rocky Mountain*)

By Leslie Atherholt

Dn. Elisha Long has assisted the Department with trainings and workshops over the past several years. His heart for Christian Education and the education of our children made it a natural transition when Vas asked him to take on a larger role. His first official training took place at St. Elijah, Oklahoma City, on November 9. He was able to meet and get to know better some of the teachers, Church School Directors and priests in his area of responsibility, in order to serve their needs. He can be

reached at rlongsummer@gmail.com.

Dn. Elisha has worked at a private, classical Christian school for 19 years, and currently serves as Principal. He has also taught Sunday Church School for almost 11 years and been the Church School Director for ten years. He has assisted Vas with various presentations at local parishes and the Parish Life Conference over the past 4 years.

Dn. Elisha adds, “St. Theophan the Recluse said that education was the holiest of works and I consider it a privilege to be a part of Christian Education in our Diocese and Archdiocese.”

DIOCESAN TRAINING UPDATE



The Department of Christian Education plans and facilitates teacher and Church School Director workshops across the country. Training can cover classroom management, teaching techniques, adolescent needs, moral issues, creative resources and more. Fall 2019 has been a busy training season.

Wichita and Mid-America

Vasiliki Oldziey conducted her final training for the Department at **St. Elijah, Oklahoma City**, in August, just before her retirement. Teachers from St. Elijah and Holy Ascension in Norman worked on topics related to the theme of this year's Creative Festivals. The 15 participants discussed judgement, salvation, the Symbol of Faith and the Lord's Prayer as guides to the meaning of the theme.

Dn. Elisha Long, one of the new Coordinators, was introduced to teachers in the Diocese during his first official training on November 9 at St. George Orthodox Cathedral, Wichita. Dn. Elisha was invited to present workshops on Finding Christ in the Old Testament, and Teaching Techniques. Orthodox churches in the area were invited to participate.

Toledo and the Midwest

Director Carole Buleza traveled to **St. George Orthodox Church, West St. Paul**, to present Overview of Orthodoxy, New Methods in Teaching, and Moral Issues to 19 teachers from four parishes in the area. Churches represented included OCA, Greek, and Antiochian. Teachers learned icebreaker ideas for class, as well as lesson-plan templates, which were put to use the next day, including ways to measure our effectiveness! Learning that it's okay to incorporate breaks into lessons, especially for the little ones, and allow multiple weeks to introduce and discuss challenging subjects with the older students, was really helpful!

Ottawa and Upstate New York

Coordinator Fr. Christopher Rigden-Briscall facilitated workshops during **St. Elias Orthodox Cathedral's** recent Pan-Orthodox Education Series. On Friday night, Fr. Christopher addressed the 39 attendees and St. Elias' Teen SOYO with the presentation "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth." On Saturday, participants learned about "The Liturgy of Life: Understanding the Divine Liturgy So as to Live our Orthodox Faith Always and Everywhere" and "Engaging the Unengaged: Teaching Challenging Children/Youth and Children/Youth with Challenges."

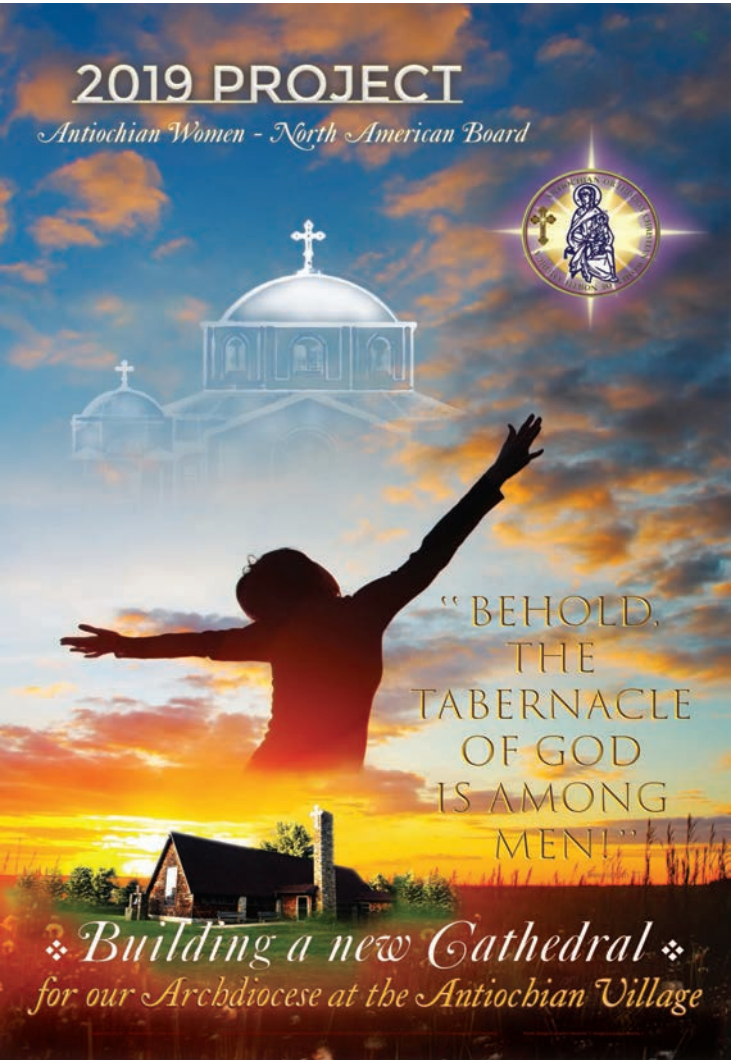
Fr. Christopher also visited **St. Michael Orthodox Church**, Geneva, New York, for a teacher development workshop. On Saturday, November 16, Fr. Christopher presented "Overview of Orthodox Christian Education," "Enhancing the Classroom Experience," and "Engaging the Unengaged." Many churches in the upstate New York region participated.

Miami and the Southeast

On Friday, September 6, Coordinator Anna-Sarah Farha presented an interactive cyber workshop with the focus on Middle School curriculum for the DOSME Fall Retreat. She introduced the group, which was meeting at **St. Ignatius Orthodox Church in Franklin, Tennessee**, to the Department's newest resource for middle school students – "My Orthodox Church."

Check our website (ww1.antiochian.org/christianeducation), or Facebook to stay current on upcoming events. Please contact Leslie Atherholt at aodce.events@gmail.com if your parish is interested in hosting a workshop.

Leslie Atherholt, Staff Assistant for Special Projects



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ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

BARKER, Deacon Nicholas (Colin), to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on August 25, 2019, at St. Ignatius Orthodox Church, Florida, New York. Fr. Nicholas is completing his studies at St. Tikhon's Seminary in Pennsylvania.

BARKLEY, Deacon Timothy, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on July 19, 2019, at Holy Cross Church, Linthicum, Maryland. Fr. Timothy is assigned to St. James the Apostle Church, Westminster, Maryland.

JUAREZ-LUNA, Damian, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on September 22, 2019, at Holy Apostles Mission, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

VLAS, Sergiu Cristian, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on August 25, 2019, at St. Ananias Church, Evansville, Indiana, where he is attached.

ELEVATED

WAGGENER, Fr. Alban, to the dignity of Archpriest by Bishop JOHN on November 10, 2019, at Holy Trinity Mission, Lynchburg, Virginia.

ASSIGNED

MOSELENER, Fr. Seraphim, is attached to All Saints Church, Bloomington, Indiana.

DEPARTED

Archpriest Basil McMURRY of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, reposed September 20, 2019, at the age of 85. May God grant him Paradise. Father Basil was preceded in death by Khouria Bertha in 2010, and is survived by their two sons, a brother and a sister, and their families.

+His Eminence Metropolitan SPIRIDON (Khoury) of Zahle and Baalbek reposed on September 14, 2019. Memory eternal!

Khouria Anastasia FARHA of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Church, Hillsboro, Kansas, reposed on October 31, 2019, at the age of 36. She is the wife of Fr. Isaac Farha and leaves four children: Peter, Melania, Barbara, and Biana.

APPOINTMENTS

Mrs. Mareena Boosamra BALL, as the Chair of the Department of Sacred Music

DEPOSED

MEFRIGE, John (former priest)

The WORD appreciates donations to help defray the cost of this ministry. We send *The WORD* to all of the homes of our Archdiocese, as well as to libraries and seminaries all over the world. *The WORD* is a record of the living history of the our Archdiocese, and we work to offer news and theology of interest to all of our readers.

Please make your checks out to the **Antiochian Archdiocese** and in the memo line write, "For The WORD." Thank you.

Correction: The photo on page 4 of the November 2019 WORD was of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of Bishops.

Save the Date!

The Eastern Dioceses of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America invites all to our

2ND ANNUAL SPRING RETREAT & PILGRIMAGE

APRIL 3-5, 2020

**ANTIOCHIAN VILLAGE
CONFERENCE CENTER**

Special sessions for members of Parish Council, YAM, SOYO, & DMC





Icon courtesy of Linda Fowler of St. Luke Antiochian Church in Abilene, TX.

Salvation in the Incarnate Christ through Faith and Works

Christopher Holwey, M.Div.

As we near the end of December, once again, we are called upon to celebrate and remember the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, this Jesus of Nazareth, who came to us in our world as the pre-eternal, uncreated, incarnate Son of God to save us from our sins. It is right, then, to contemplate this mystery of our salvation in Christ, the Messiah, who was given the name *Jesus*, meaning “Savior,” to understand that it is “in him” (Ephesians 1) that we are saved, and to heed the call to “**work out our own salvation with fear and trembling**” (Philippians 2:12).

When St. Paul wrote to Timothy, he encouraged him to continue in the things which he learned, saying to him, “that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14–15). St. Peter wrote in his First Epistle that we are “kept by the power of God

through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time,” and that after the testing of our faith, we receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls (1:3–9).

Some (in the Protestant world) say that we are saved by faith in Jesus alone, while others (in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox world) say it is by faith and works. Those who believe the former quote from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Chapter 4, which says that Abraham was not justified by his works, but rather by his faith, which cites in turn Genesis 15:6: “**Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.**” It was his faith that made him right with God, before he was circumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe. This is true.

Yet, on the other hand, we see from the Letter of James (2:14–26) how faith and works go together, again using Abraham as the argument: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that

faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God” (21–23). So, do Romans 4 and James 2 contradict each other? Certainly not!

In fact, there are two different understandings and meanings to the word *works* used in the New Testament, and the Orthodox and Protestant views only appear to be contradictory. Both meanings are found in Ephesians 2:8–10: “For by grace **you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God** – *not because of works*, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

The first understanding deals with what St. Paul talks about in Romans 4, where “works” refers to the works of the Law. He shows that Abraham was justified with God by his faith, before he was circumcised, before there even was the law of circumcision. Abraham “received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised” (v. 11). His point was that for Jew and Gentile, “**the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe**” (Romans 3:21–22). **Likewise, in our Christian understanding, we would compare it to baptism, and say that we are not saved, or justified with God, simply because we are baptized in the Orthodox Church.** Baptism is not the end of our salvation. It is the beginning of a new life in Christ, which needs to grow and manifest itself in who we are and what we do.

This brings us to the second understanding of “works,” as the fruit of our faith. Our faith is shown through the good works we do, “for we are **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). This is what St. James means when he says, “If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So **faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead**” (15–17). We see the same thing in Matthew 25:31 and following, where the Son of man separates the sheep from the goats. It was the

sheep who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and so forth, who were justified with God and inherited the kingdom. Those who did not do these works to the least of His brethren were sent away into eternal punishment. “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). These works are also mentioned throughout the Book of Revelation, where Jesus knows our works, and says, “I will give to each one of you according to your works” (2:23), and where St. John hears the voice from heaven, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that **they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them**” (14:13). So then, Abraham was made right with God because of his faith, but his faith was shown to us in action when he offered up his son Isaac and trusted God’s word.

Therefore, it is correct to say that we are saved by faith, not by works (of the law), since our salvation is given to us by the grace of God as a gift, the Gift of His only begotten Son, “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Yet it cannot be by “faith alone,” since nowhere in the Bible does it say this, and as St. James says, “Even the demons believe — and shudder” (2:17). Because we are saved by grace through faith, our faith must be a living and dynamic thing. Since we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, it is our faith working through love, manifest in that which we do for the least of God’s brethren, that brings us salvation and allows us to inherit the kingdom. Therefore, “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17), for as St. Paul says, God “will render to every man according to his works” (Romans 2:6). It is not according to whether we are simply circumcised or baptized, or eating the right foods or not, but according to the fruits of the Holy Spirit we manifest in our lives, the love we share and show to one another, for the glory of God.

May the Incarnation of the Son of God in the flesh **inspire us to do what we do through faith in Him**, that we may hear Him say to us: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Christopher Holwey, M.Div.



The Doctrine of the Church Through the Lens of the Epistles of St. Ignatius

ANTIOCHIAN
HOUSE of STUDIES

Nicholas A. Pappas

ECCLESIOLOGY: A VERY BRIEF OVERVIEW

Ecclesiology (εκκλησιολογία) is the study (λόγια) of the church (εκκλησία – the community of individuals “called out”). It is multi-faceted; it may be understood best by the metaphor of icon-writing. (I am indebted to Monica Διακόνισσα, an accomplished iconographer, for the following description of icon-drawing.) In the “writing” or painting of Byzantine icons, the first application of pigment provides a flat foundation for subsequent, multilayered applications. The second application outlines the volume of the shapes of the figures (that is, the body, face, and clothing with folds). The third layer of pigment highlights the image’s shape, when applied within the parameters of the second layer, by using geometric shapes. Said shapes reflect the light within the icon’s image; the underlying symmetry of the facets reflect the soul of the icon’s image.

Ecclesiology, too, is layered, but with several interdisciplinary studies: Church history, Scripture, eschatology, Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, and the Mysteries (Μυστήρια). When carefully applied, the underlying symmetry of these multifaceted studies reflects an inner light, similar to icons. This inner light magnifies the heart of Ignatius’ ecclesiology. This slave of Christ provides the reader, in painstaking detail, his understanding of the Church. It is supported with a firm foundation of church leadership, which exposes and expunges heresy while severing bonds linking Judaism and Christianity. Its center, however, is the Eucharist.

SETTING THE STAGE

Let’s witness Ignatius’s arrest and detention by a legion of Roman soldiers in Antioch. We accompany

him, shackled, to Rome for certain martyrdom. We make stops along the way in multiple Christian enclaves: Smyrna, Troas, Neapolis, and Philippi. Ignatius did not sit idle nor bemoan his fate. We see him rejuvenated when mobs of Christian well-wishers turn out to greet him. Ignatius seems to know everyone: Polycarp and Polybius, bishops of Smyrna and Tralles, respectively; Apollonius and Bassus, presbyters of Magnesia; and, Burrhus and Philo, deacons of Ephesus and Cilicia, respectively. He had time to think, to pray and to write. It was, by all reckoning, a long trip. Ignatius authored, while in transit, letters to Christian communities in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna.

Ignatius articulates a vision of the Church in his epistles from a unique perspective: that of the Bishop of Antioch. He repeatedly reminds us and his followers throughout his journey to “regard the Bishop as the Lord Himself” (*Letter to the Ephesians*) and that the Bishop presides “in the place of God and the presbyters in place of the council of the Apostles and the deacons having been entrusted in the service of Jesus Christ.” They are to “do nothing without the Bishop and Presbyters” (*Letter to the Magnesians*). When considering the bishop, Ignatius “sees the entire congregation.” Here, “bishops and presbyters and deacons make up the church” (*Letter to the Trallians*), “all those to whom God and Jesus Christ are with the Bishop” (*Letter to the Philadelphians*). “One who honors the Bishop is honored by God” (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans*). It would not be surprising to learn that Ignatius coined the Latin phrase: *maxim ubi episcopus, ibi ecclesia* (“where the Bishop is, there the Church is”). The stature of a bishop catapulted him to a position of unchallenged authority, where nothing should be done without the bishop. The bishop was to be regarded

as the Lord Himself, an embodiment of the congregation, a beneficiary of honor, and entrusted in the service of Christ. Ignatius declared that Man’s salvation is dependent on the bishop. Despite many exhortations in support of the role of the bishop, Ignatius remains silent regarding their selection and appointment, and on apostolic succession.

Ignatius then reveals: “βεβαια ευχαριστια ηγεισθω η υπό των επισκοπων ούσα, η ω αν αυτος επιτρέψη” (“Only that Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop is to be considered valid”). This revelation seemingly binds the bishop to the Eucharist. He melodiously applies musical language to this nexus, writing, “Presbyters are attuned to the Bishop as strings to a lyre,” and “unity with the Bishop is akin to having a share in God” (*Letter to the Ephesians*). We come to learn, as we accompany him, how this revelation supports his ecclesiology centered on the Eucharist.

GUIDELINES

Ignatius required concise and unambiguous guidelines to contest and defeat those who believed false teaching. He was certain that Christ was human, a physical descendant of David, born of a woman, Mary, His Mother. Christ consumed necessities (food and drink) like all humans, as He was the Son of Man. Nails were driven through Christ to affix Him to a cross; He was pulled upright by the Holy Spirit, where He hung to die in the presence of all – including those waiting beneath the earth and those up above. He was the same sinless Christ, now raised from the dead by His Father, God, as He was the Son of God. Except for these actions, there could be no “renewal of eternal life” for Man (*Letter to the Ephesians*). Ignatius concluded that Christ’s birth, death and resurrection rescued Man from his Expulsion and Fall, and restored Man’s ability to live in perpetual harmony with God through Christ. Sin’s relentless onslaught would continue to seduce Man into conduct contrary to the goodness of God and grace of love. Man, however, was now equipped to engage the enemy through the Eucharist. Ignatius longed for the celestial food of life, the flesh and blood of the Son of God, convinced of its life-giving elements. He says it best: “I desire the drink of God, namely His Blood” (*Letter to the Romans*). He enunciated stern caveats for those who strayed from the faith: “If they believe not in the blood of Christ, then to them there is judgment” (*Letter to Smyrna*).

MIMIC CHRIST THROUGH MARTYRDOM

Ignatius’s desire for martyrdom reflects another facet of his understanding of the Church centered on the Eucharist. This desire for martyrdom never waned while he was being hauled to Rome. Indeed, it strengthened him. He sought to mimic Christ, by voluntarily submitting not to death by crucifixion, but to death by wild animals; he became so emboldened that he rejected any attempt to bar him from martyrdom. Ignatius was determined to be mauled in the hope of being ground down – like wheat – as the pure bread of Christ.

ECCLESIOLOGY CENTERED ON THE EUCHARIST

Ignatius believed that the Church is one, undivided Eucharist: one Flesh, broken for humanity, with His Blood. It is distributed to the many from one altar, for the whole Church, in one vessel, just as there is one bishop to Christ, as Christ is to His Father. He rejects any premise that Man is inherently immortal; rather, the sole source of Man’s life is the Eucharist. Ignatius was convinced that the unity of all men, concrete and spiritual, could only be realized through an undivided Eucharist, by submission to the bishop. Failing to maintain this unity with the bishop, he opined, leads to division and is detested by God.

CONCLUSION

Imagine for a moment Ignatius standing before an easel, a pallet of pigments in one hand, a brush in the other, seeking to draw an icon of ecclesiology. He dips the brush into one pigment and applies it to the blank board in preparation for subsequent, multilayered applications of pigments. One is known as Christology, the other soteriology, yet another referred to as pneumatology. Each application contributes to the image’s shape, when the perfect symmetry of the facets begin to glow. Suddenly a bright light within the icon’s image appears, reflecting the soul of the icon’s image. Look again and you’ll be blinded by an ecclesiology centered on the undivided Eucharist.

Nicholas A. Pappas
Antiochian House of Studies

ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

Judges' Choice, the Oratorical Festival
for the Diocese of Ottawa

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Philippians 4:13

Growing up as an Orthodox child, I was constantly taught to trust in God and let His will be done. This applied to everything in my life, whether it was school, family or church: my faith and trust were always in God.

From a very young age, my parents took me to church for every service, and I mean *every* service. Thankfully, in my parish we are blessed to have Sunday school classes for all ages, as well as wonderful teachers that know our faith so well that they are able to pass it on to the following generations. This is where I learned the following text, one that makes me feel protected and lead by God's grace: "You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:9-10).

As servants of God, we are called to let go and let God take control of our lives. Once our focus is on letting Christ take control of our lives, everything else will progress at the pace that He knows each of us can handle. None of this is possible, however, without a close relationship with God, a *synergy*. What does this mean? What is a relationship with God? How do we have a relationship with Christ? I'm sure that these questions trigger the obvious answers from all of us, such as prayer, fasting and attending church services, and while these are all very good answers, we must think more deeply about this. Let us ask ourselves what



synergy really means and how it applies to our everyday lives.

To begin, let me explain what synergy is for those who may not know. As Christians, God gives us a free will, right? We must not forget, however, that God also has His own will for us. We acknowledge this fact and even ask for this every time we pray the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done." Saint Cyprian of Carthage says, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven; we pray not that

God should do His will, but that we may carry out His will." The collaboration, as well as the cooperation, of our free human will with God's to achieve certain goals allow God to do His works through us. For as Saint Seraphim says: "True faith cannot be without works; one who truly believes will unfailingly have works as well." Our actions here on earth are a response to what God wants for us. He fills us with the compassion to follow His desire. While responding to this will, He is giving us the strength to make the decisions we need to make in order to accomplish various necessary actions and to develop the virtues that will eventually help us attain our salvation. In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians 3:9, the following is written: "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." We on earth are not able to work alone. God in heaven does not work alone either. We humans need to work in union with God, and in this way we are strengthened by Him to do all things.

Now how does all this apply to our daily lives?

As a teenager myself, I can tell you that God has been with me on my journey of life, strengthening me when I know I need it, and when He knows I will need it and I am not aware of it yet. In this past year of high school, I had chosen the classes I needed to take, one of them being physics. A little secret: math and I, we're not such good friends, if you know what I mean. Anyways, as a student should, I still went to every class, was assigned my first test, and studied what I thought was a decent amount of time to succeed. So I wrote the test, got the results and definitely was not satisfied with my mark. The first thought that came to mind was that I would drop the class, but when I told my parents that that's what I was thinking, their answer was, "Where is your faith in God? If you try hard enough and put your mind to it, God will help you pass the class if He wills so."

So I continued the semester with those words in my mind, and I prayed a lot about the whole situation. I asked God to help me succeed, especially after reading the following quotation by St. Moses the Ethiopian: "Throw your weakness before God, and the Lords will become your strength." And let me tell you... *wow!* I finished that class with one of my highest averages this past year. Throughout the entire semester, it felt like the harder I worked, the more God saw how much effort I was putting into something I wanted so badly, that He helped me reach my objective. I constantly remind myself, however, that if I only had the faith, and didn't study for any tests or work hard on any projects and relied only on God, I would not have succeeded. If I had only studied for tests and worked

hard on projects without having faith in God, I also would not have succeeded. As St. James says: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

This being said, our faith is the root of our eternal salvation and our goal on earth is to attain this salvation. The Trinity provides us with the ability to receive and gain God's grace, for as we say in prayer, "The Father is my hope, the Son is my refuge, the Holy Spirit is my protection." Through God's grace, we are given the strength, help, and courage, as well as leadership, to fulfill our tasks. We must also keep in mind that He will not allow, nor strengthen us, in things that will not bring us closer to Him. Everything that is given to us, we must accept with an open heart, because Christ knows what each of us can handle. Therefore He will not put us in situations that we can't manage. In order to accomplish all and everything, we must accept what Christ has given us, considering that He knows what we need and why we need it. It is through Him and His grace that we, by aligning our will with the will of God, are strengthened and thus are fulfilling synergy!

Maria Abou Nehme

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Awards will be presented at ADC's 40th National Convention in Washington, D.C., in 2020.

Fulfilling the Vision of Metropolitan JOSEPH

Antiochian Women Project

Sheryl VanderWagen, Vice President
North American Board of the Antiochian Women

“We must build on the past and build the present and the future.”

Metropolitan JOSEPH gave this charge to the Antiochian Women at their luncheon at the 2019 Archdiocese Convention as he outlined the 2020 North American Board (NAB) Project. This charge is in addition to foster vocations in the Church to assure the future of the Church, but is a part of it as well. As we grow, the Archdiocese needs space to pray and meet together to discern God’s will and develop the character of our leadership and membership.

Since giving the charge to raise funds for a new cathedral at the Antiochian Village in the 2019 NAB Project, His Eminence has developed further his vision for the Antiochian Village. In this he has been building on the foundation laid by Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory, and others.

The Cathedral is the first phase of the project. His Eminence has chosen the location and will have plans to unveil soon. The Cathedral will hold a thou-

sand people in worship and the same number of people in the adjoining conference room. There will be enough space to hold large gatherings of the faithful, including those attending Parish Life conferences and clergy symposia. As we enter the Cathedral, to the left we will see a crypt where our hierarchs will repose, including

Metropolitan PHILIP, Metropolitan ANTHONY Bashir, and Archbishop MICHAEL Shaheen. To the right of the entry we will see a large baptistry for infants and for adults. There will also be a very special place for the sacred body of St. RAPHAEL of Brooklyn, which will allow the faithful to properly venerate our great Father-among-the-Saints.

The second phase of the project will include a residence for our bishops, so they will have a place to stay when they come to the Village for conferences, and so forth, and a place to live after they retire. Our bishops are men of prayer and ministry. Once they retire from their diocesan duties, they have a vocation of prayer and spiritual guidance. Visiting hierarchs will also have quarters in this structure, so their spiritual discipline will not be hindered as they journey to the Village for conferences and symposia.

The third phase will be a women’s monastery. A monastic presence is necessary for the growth of the Church in North America. It is by the holy prayers of a monastic community that we will grow the church and increase the number of bishops and priests to serve the faithful.

We often refer to the Antiochian Village as being our “holy mountain.” A mountain is high and visible to all who look up to it. The expansion of the Antiochian Village, its cathedral with all the other facilities, will announce the presence of the Orthodox in this community. It will be a beacon to draw us closer to our spiritual roots, a place of pilgrimage, and a witness to our holy Orthodox faith.

So let’s immediately start our fundraising for this inspirational building project, fulfilling the vision of Metropolitan PHILIP, Fr. John Namie, and others who have gone before us. Let us “build the present and the future.” On behalf of the entire North American Board of the Antiochian Women, I thank you in advance for your tireless labor for this worthy cause.



First Annual Pacific Northwest Deanery Retreat

Brotherhood in Conciliarity

Deacon James Hefner

“BEHOLD, HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS FOR BRETHREN
TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY!”

The clergy of the Pacific Northwest Deanery of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese held their first annual deanery retreat at St. John the Forerunner Monastery in Goldendale, Washington, during the week of September 24–26, 2019. Twenty five members of the clergy came together for this retreat, which began with dinner, followed by Vespers and Compline at the monastery. The first session began on Tuesday evening, entitled “The Deanery as a Brotherhood,” led by Fr. Michael Habib, Dean of the Pacific Northwest and Pastor of St. Ignatius Church in Twin Falls, Idaho. It was instructional, but also informal, in that Fr. Michael encouraged questions, and basically dealt with some of the practices of the clergy, emphasizing the importance of the unity of the brotherhood.

Wednesday started early at 4:45 a.m. for the Paraklesis service. After breakfast, the second session began, led by Fr. Gregory Horton, from Bonner’s Ferry, Idaho. His teaching was on moral issues and how to deal with them in a Christian world. The discussion involved many of the current issues in the world today and how we as clergy deal with them in the parishes. All the clergy agreed that these emerging issues in the world are also creeping into our Church life. It was agreed that they are difficult to deal with, but they have to be dealt with. They are not going away; actually they are becoming ingrained in society, and we must take a position.

On Thursday morning, September 26, our clergy joined with the monastic community to celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. John the Theologian. Fr. Michael Habib celebrated the Liturgy with Fr. Joseph Copeland, Fr. Gregory Horton, and Protodeacon Nathanel Haglar. It was indeed a joyous celebration and the perfect way to being our final day together.

In our third session, on Thursday morning, we heard Fr. Jeremiah Vollman, from Brier, Washington, on the subject, “The Priest as Preacher and Teacher.” His presentation centered on taking the gospel message and delivering it to the faithful. Fr. Jeremiah explained that we need to be centered in Christ, and to be vocal, and to be heard in our message. The people of our parishes need to hear a clear and Christ-centered message that deals with the gospel and epistle readings, and also applies to the current issues of our time.

The atmosphere of the Monastery was perfect for fellowship and dialogue among the clergy. There were common meals, along with the services that allowed much discussion time. The clergy also stayed together in the large guest house, which also served as a meeting room for the sessions and the discussion that followed each of the teachings.

The sisters of St John the Forerunner Monastery were wonderful hosts to our clergy. The food was fresh, delicious and plentiful. They also brought refreshments for our sessions that allowed us to break and enjoy home-made cakes, fruit and other light food. All of the clergy benefited from our first retreat. All agreed that this was something that should be done each year. The date for the next retreat has already been set, and it will be held again at the Monastery.

Geographically, the Pacific Northwest Deanery is the largest deanery. It extends from Alaska all the way down to Utah. It also includes the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. It was truly a blessing to have such a gathering, and with the effort of our Dean, Fr. Michael Habib, and the work of Fr. Gregory Horton, in making the arrangements with the Monastery, this first annual retreat was a huge success!



The Hand of God



Our life as a parish changed dramatically on the morning of November 11, 2017. St. Matthew the Evangelist of North Royalton, Ohio, suffered a devastating fire that destroyed our beloved church building. Many of us stood there, heartbroken, as we watched the firemen break through the roof to let the smoke escape. We watched the stained glass windows being smashed, the icons melting right before our eyes, the iconostasis, which had been built by hand by one of our parishioners, go up in flames. We wept as, minute by minute, more of our house of worship was disappearing.

In addition to the loss of our church building, our hall was severely smoke damaged, and we lost much of our furniture, our classrooms, educational supplies, office equipment, kitchen items, and books. Though the outer structure of the fellowship hall was still standing, the interior damage required extensive renovation.

Shortly following the fire, many people asked, "How could God allow such a holy place to be destroyed? What will happen to our parish? Where will we worship? Are we going to be separated from our church family until we rebuild? Are we going to lose our members to other parishes?"

Two weeks following our devastating fire, the epistle that was read during the Divine Liturgy was from

Ephesians 2:19–22, which was fitting for our parish at that time: "Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Fr. Andrew encouraged us to remain steadfast and faithful, knowing that all of us working together is our true Temple in the Lord.

Personally, I have never witnessed more evidence of the hand of God in a time of crisis as I saw in our church since that fateful day. It began with our Priest, Fr. Andrew Harmon, who spoke with unshakeable faith in a television interview that day, "We will be OK. God will help us." We have been more than OK. We are thriving, and continue to remain a strong family through the struggles.

The title, "Hand of God," strikes me as appropriate, because, as I was watching the firemen standing on the altar with their arms outstretched, spraying the icons, I wanted to scream, "Stop!" It didn't seem right somehow. The hand of God, however, was evident in the fact that not one person was taken from us on that day. Fr. Andrew was the only person in the building at the time, and he was able to escape without injury. Though we lost everything, we still had our Priest and our entire church family intact. In addition, the relics of

St. Raphael and St. Mary of Egypt were not destroyed!

Since that day, God's mighty hand has been at work within each of us as we have striven to fulfill our vision of building our new temple. Fr. Andrew has continued to lead his flock without missing a step, even after he was injured in a car accident two months following the fire. He was not able to serve for several months, and when he returned to us, he served from his wheelchair, always with joy. Still, his faith never wavered. He lost his church home, and the use of his leg temporarily, but never his faith in God or in us.

While worshipping in several different locations, not only did our parishioners remain steadfast, we grew in numbers! If we had any concerns about losing people, they quickly evaporated with each new member. In one instance, a nearby parish closed and its remaining members joined us on our journey, worshipping with us today.

The parish of St. Matthew is well known for our service to the surrounding community. Every one of our ministries has remained in place, despite not having a permanent home to meet and worship. Those include our Christian education programs, Bible studies, feeding the homeless, serving the poor, sending our children to camp, and meeting on parish family night, just to name a few.

God stepped in, took control of every one of our concerns, and has turned them into blessings. He provided places for us to worship while keeping us bonded

to one another. In the past two years, we have met in three different church buildings, two funeral homes, an American Legion Hall, and a monastery. Not only have we gained several new families throughout our journey, we currently have four catechumens. People and churches have prayed for us and provided us with items so that we can continue to worship. God has continued to guide our Priest and Parish Council through some very tough decisions.

We have come a long way! Our most recent accomplishment has been the renovation and completion of our fellowship hall, education classrooms, kitchen, and offices. After almost two years, we are finally home and worshipping in our new hall. Our next and final step in our journey is to see our new church constructed. We are working hard and have much to do to make that a reality. God's hand is still very much apparent, because we are blessed with a very dedicated and faithful parish Priest, Parish Council, building committee and generous, dedicated parishioners who are working together to help us reach our goal.

May God bless each of you who have joined us on our journey in some way, either through prayer, physical help, or financial contributions. Please keep the parish of St. Matthew in your prayers. We look forward to the day that, as a family of believers, we can realize God's vision. We want everyone in the Archdiocese to hear our story, and to see and experience the glory of God at work.

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