

THE الكلمة WORD

THE LEGACY OF THE
ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

THIS MOMENT:
A REFLECTION ON
OUR GROWTH

CAMP CATANESE

METAPHORS OF
ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
CHURCH POLITY AND
STRUCTURE

THE WORD

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COVER: Metropolitan Saba Celebrates Paschal Vigil at St. Elias Cathedral of Ottawa, ON, on Sunday, April 20, 2025 - Photos by Boula Moussa

Metaphors of Orthodox Christian Church Polity and Structure

BISHOP JOHN

Introduction

What do we mean when we say Church? The organizational structure and governance of the church, often referred to as church polity, can be complex and multifaceted. We gather as parish councils with our pastors, but we often come with different images of who we are and how leadership in the Church works. Metropolitan Saba emphasizes that we all work together in symphony, each playing essential roles. God has given us different talents and we bring all of who we are to the table. To better understand and explain this intricate system, metaphors are frequently employed. These metaphors offer vivid and relatable illustrations, enabling both leaders and congregants to grasp the essence of church polity and structure. But every metaphor limps. Let's explore various metaphors used to depict the church's governance and organizational framework. Seemingly opposite principles are often held in tension or balance, so we need to read and use these metaphors with open minds and patience.

The Body of Christ

One of the most enduring and powerful metaphors for church polity is the "Body of Christ." This metaphor, rooted in the New Testament, suggests

that the church functions as a living organism, with Christ as the head (source) and individual members acting as different parts of the body. Each member has a unique role and function, contributing to the overall health and mission of the church.

"For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." – Romans 12:4–5

In this metaphor, the emphasis is on unity and interdependence. The various gifts and talents of church members are seen as essential to the church's mission. Leadership within this framework is often viewed as servanthood, with leaders acting as caretakers and facilitators, ensuring that each member can fulfill their role effectively. The purpose of the body is salvation and fulfillment, our salvation and the salvation of the world. Fulfillment comes from our mission to care for the world. The Church is best described as being in the body of Christ. The Orthodox Church is in the body of Christ, who else is in the body of Christ is up to God.

The Household of God

Another common metaphor for church polity is the "Household of God." This illustration portrays the church as a family or household, with God as the head. In this familial structure,

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relationships are paramount, and the church operates as a close-knit community with everyone being subject to and responsible to and for each other.

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household.” – Ephesians 2:19

This metaphor highlights the importance of mutual care, support, and accountability within the church. Leadership is often seen as parental, with leaders providing guidance, nurturing, and discipline. Appropriate leadership recognizes that most of the children of the family are adult members with free will. Free will allows the members to make poor choices and later repent and return. Wise parents of adults respect their adult children and are open to learning from them. The household metaphor underscores the value of belonging and participation, encouraging members to engage actively in the life of the church.

Home is said to always be a safe place to return when we need healing and support. It needs to be a respectful and peaceful place where people heal from the battering of the world.

The Church is also called our mother. Without the Church as our mother, we cannot call God our Father. We are reborn through the Church into Christ and His household.

The Spiritual Army

The metaphor of the church as a “Spiritual Army” emphasizes the militant and disciplined aspects of church polity as well as unity for order. This illustration depicts the church as an organized force engaged in spiritual warfare, with Christ as the supreme commander.

“Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” – Ephesians 6:11

In this framework, leaders are often likened to officers, tasked with training, equipping, and mobilizing the congregation for spiritual battle. The metaphor emphasizes unity, obedience, and readiness. It

also underscores the church's mission to advance the kingdom of God and combat spiritual adversaries.

The Vine and the Branches

The “Vine and the Branches” metaphor, derived from the teachings of Jesus, illustrates the church's organic and relational aspects. In this metaphor, Christ is the vine, and the members are the branches. The health and fruitfulness of the branches depend on their connection to the vine.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” – John 15:5

This metaphor emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ and maintaining a close relationship with Him. Leadership within this framework focuses on spiritual nurturing and growth, ensuring that members remain connected to Christ and flourish in their faith. It highlights the significance of spiritual vitality and dependence on Christ for sustenance and effectiveness.

The bishop calls God to visit and perfect His vine which God planted firmly in Christ. The bishop then offers this perfected vine back to God who offers it to us.

The Temple of the Holy Spirit

The “Temple of the Holy Spirit” metaphor portrays the church as a sacred space indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This illustration emphasizes the church's holiness, unity, and purpose as a dwelling place for God's presence.

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?” – 1 Corinthians 3:16

In this metaphor, the church is seen as a collective entity, with each member serving as a living stone in the construction of the temple. Leadership is often viewed as priestly, with leaders facilitating worship, teaching, and the sacramental life of the church. The metaphor underscores the importance of purity, reverence, and the active presence of the Holy Spirit within the church.

The temple is also a refuge or sanctuary for displaced people wandering in a modern spiritual desert. Like a hospital, the temple needs to be a place of healing. The Holy Spirit is always associated with the healing of soul and body.

The Flock of Sheep

The “Flock of Sheep” metaphor depicts the church as a community of believers under the care of Christ, the Good Shepherd. This illustration highlights the pastoral and protective aspects of church leadership.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” – John 10:14



In this framework, leaders are likened to shepherds, responsible for guiding, feeding, and protecting the flock. The metaphor emphasizes the shepherd's care, compassion, and vigilance in ensuring the well-being of the congregation. It also underscores the importance of trust and the intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

Christ as shepherd of intellectually endowed sheep is also counterintuitive. Why would a shepherd die for His sheep? The sheep are raised for market. Our God surprised us by showing us to be of great value, and His life for us is for us to resurrect and share eternity with Him.

Church as Business

It is true that the Church has receipts, disbursements, electric bills, workers, and many financial considerations to conduct its business. But the purpose of Church business is not financial profit, rather the purpose is fulfilling Christ's command to baptize the world and love one another. Our love is from God and returns through those we serve to God. The Church has no consumers. Christians are God's own people, set aside to worship, serve and support each other. The Church appoints bishops who delegate presbyters to perform sacraments and services, and to reside among the congregation as role models and mentors.

So our budget and balance sheet must reflect how we are serving God in accordance with our mandate. Our business plan is an action plan of ministry, not dollars.

Church as Club

A dictionary defines a club as a private social organization that offers its members,

who often share common interests or have similar occupations, a place to meet, dine, and occasionally stay. It can also refer to the building where such an organization is based. The Church is a mystical organization that is both God's and man's. Christ is the source or head and the Holy Spirit dwells within and guides her.

While clubs vote to find the collective will of its members, the people of God work to discern God's will for His Church and to do His work.

I once quipped to a parish council that the Theotokos, angels, and saints were members of our parish and that they vote with me. Not understanding my humor (even after 16 years) some took offense. Nevertheless, we don't vote for our will but seek God who sends us. Our buildings are not our own but have been dedicated or given to God. The priest presides at the altar and is elected to preside at the sacraments. The common work (liturgy) of the club is worship and sharing the Eucharist. It is what makes us Christian through baptism and regular confession.

Conclusion

Metaphors play a crucial role in elucidating the multifaceted nature of church polity and structure. Each metaphor offers unique insights into the roles, relationships, and functions within the church, helping to convey complex theological and organizational principles in a relatable and understandable manner. By exploring these metaphors, one can gain a deeper appreciation for the diverse and dynamic ways in which the church operates and fulfills its mission to be the body of Christ.

Why Doesn't God Answer Our Prayers as Asked?

Daniel Manzuk

“

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers.

Remember when you're talkin' to the Man Upstairs.

That just because He doesn't answer, doesn't mean He don't care.

Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.

- Garth Brooks, "Unanswered Prayers"
(see 1/3 Kings 8:38-39, 1 John 5:14-15)

You can't always get what you want.

But if you try sometimes, you just might find,

You just might find, you get what you need.

- The Rolling Stones, "You Can't Always Get
What You Want"

”

It is amazing that a spiritual truth can be found – like a diamond in the rough – in popular culture. It is an all-too-common thing for people to pray for something, and then get upset when the prayer is not answered as they expected. This is especially the case when it comes to presents, or hopes for the coming year during the Christmas/New Year season. They can sometimes harp on Jesus' words, "Ask, and it will be given to you" (Luke 11:9) without taking the rest of the passage, much less the Bible, into consideration – another all-too-common mistake. The Apostle James has the perfect answer: "You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3).

God is treated like a genie Who is supposed to grant what the person wants, regardless of whether it is to his or her spiritual benefit. Perhaps He is considered to be like a vending machine: insert your

prayer, pick what you want, and get it. God doesn't act that way. When James and John asked Him to grant whatever they asked, He refused their request, because it was beyond His authority and it was hubris/spiritually dangerous on their part to ask. He makes this clear by going on to mandate that His disciples are to serve, rather than be served – in imitation of Him – and not to aspire to the grandeur and power of the Gentile rulers (Mark 10:35–45).

More to the point, when St. Paul asked Christ three times to remove the thorn in his flesh – what St. Paul called, “the messenger from Satan” – Christ refused, because it was in Paul's best interests to endure the thorn and rely on God (1 Corinthians 12:7–10). Christ spends a lot of time making clear that God's idea of “good things” is often not humankind's idea of them. Just as no parent would give his or her child something that would be harmful or useless, in the same way our heavenly Father would never give us anything that is harmful or useless to us spiritually – even if we asked for it.

St. Cyril of Alexandria observes, “We sometimes come near to our bounteous God offering Him petitions for various objects according to each one's pleasure. Sometimes we pray without discernment or any careful examination of what truly is to our advantage, and if granted by God would not prove a blessing or would be to our injury if we received it. Rather, by the inconsiderate impulse of our fancy, we fall into desires full of ruin that thrust the souls of those that entertain them into the snare of death and the meshes of hell. When we ask of God anything of this kind, we will by no means receive it. On the contrary, we offer a petition suitable only for ridicule.”¹

¹ Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 79, 11:11–13.

That is the reason that God doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we want or expect; He will always do what is in our best interest – our salvation – and not simply our desires. Christ, through St. John the Theologian, states, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (15:7; see 14:12–14; 16:23–27). The crux is that one abides in Christ, for if one truly abides in Christ, one will ask for those things which are for one's spiritual benefit.

Solomon – at the beginning of his reign – is the exemplar in prayer. He was offered anything and everything, but prayed for wisdom in order to benefit his people. That request, of course, was granted. St. John reiterates the point in his first general Epistle: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (3:22). That is the part people forget, though it is everywhere in the Bible. In the Lord's Prayer we ask that the *Father's* will, not ours, be done, and that He give us what we need – “our daily bread” – not necessarily what we *want*. I know that the ever-memorable Father Thomas Hopko, for example, prayed to get better – as did hundreds of those who loved him, on his behalf – but he accepted God's will and gave us a holy example of “a Christian ending to our life,” even remarking, in true Fr. Tom fashion, “This process of dying is really fascinating” (see 2 Corinthians 6:9).

As the song by Garth Brooks quoted above suggests, how often, sometimes years down the road, do we look back at something we prayed very hard for, but didn't get, and say, “Thank God that didn't happen”? God knows what we need and gives it to us, whether we know we need it or not. The Hebrews of His time wanted and prayed

for a military messiah to deliver Israel from the tyranny of Rome; instead, the Father sent them the divine Messiah Who restored spiritual Israel from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. Christ gave the people the “sign of Jonah” instead of the flashy miracle they asked for (Luke 11:29–32). Thank God the first-century Hebrews didn’t get what they prayed for, but got what they needed – and what we need.

Just by way of counterpoint, in one instance God acceded to the Hebrews’ desires and gave them the temporal king they wanted, so they could be just like everyone else. What was the result? They became just like those around them: a corrupted, worldly-minded, self-serving, God-marginalizing nation, just like any other. They lost sight of their role as the holy nation and people of God (Exodus 19:5–6) and became a state focused on self-preservation and worldly status, leading to a complete misapprehension of who or what the Messiah would be. This led many to turn away from Christ for not being what they expected. Thus they were replaced in their sacred position by the combination of the faithful Jewish remnant (who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah) and the converted Gentiles – together, the (Orthodox) Christians (Matthew 21:43; 1 Peter 2:9–10).

Finally, as Garth states, “Just because He doesn’t answer, doesn’t mean He don’t care.” He probably has answered, just not in the way one would like or expect. Instead of losing faith, pray, ask, examine, and try to see if He has something else for you. Keep in mind that the big, showy sign is not often His way. Instead, His signs often seem almost imperceptible, requiring our full attention: “And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks

in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; *and after the fire a still small voice*. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave” (1/3 Kings 19:11–13).

Let us keep all this in mind, especially as we begin the civil new year with resolutions and wish-lists; and pray, as we do regularly in our litanies, for “all things good and profitable for our souls and peace for the world.”



This Moment

A Reflection on Our Growth

Fr. John Fenton

By God's grace the Holy Spirit is giving an increase to many parishes in our archdiocese. This is not because we have talented priests or well-chosen locations or a clever evangelism approach. This increase is from God. Over the years, others planted, still others watered, but God gives the increase. Now those who planted

and those who watered did so by God's mercy; but it is God who gives the increase (cf. 1 Cor 3:6–7).

Because of this God-given increase, we are in this moment – God's moment. The key question, in my mind, is how do we respond to God's moment? Do we say, "Isn't that nice?" Do we say, "Be careful what you pray for"? Or do we receive this Lord's gift, this moment, by doing all we can to welcome it, build



on it, and take wisely these talents that the Lord has entrusted to us? Clearly, the Spirit of the Lord has entrusted us with this moment.

For if “the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them; if to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability” – then it appears that this moment is our moment to receive the Lord’s goods, His talents, according to our ability.

But how do we respond? Do we invest, or do we hide the talents in fear that worse days might come?

Let me be more plain. There can be three possible reactions in God’s moment.

First, we can be overly cautious. This reaction is often built on past experiences that have scared us and scarred us. For that reason, we may see this moment as only a moment; a blip that will pass just as other moments have passed (perhaps because we didn’t see their potential). Overly cautious means we need to hang on hard to our talent because who knows what the future will bring. Caution rather than faith, fear rather than hope, will lead us not to engage this moment fully; instead, we’ll let the moment pass thinking the timing isn’t right, other priorities are necessary, or resources won’t be there. But that’s like the couple who won’t marry or have children until everything’s just right.

There are tough questions that we might face in this moment. Who can we send? Should we invest in new parishes, or collapse into few but larger parishes? Do we wait until the parishes grow to afford full-time priests? Do we trust that a little leaven can leaven the whole lump?

Who will help finance, build, lead? How will we finance small parishes so that they can welcome the steady stream in this moment? These are legitimate questions, but if that’s all we focus on – or if we wait until everything is in place – we might be paralyzed or at least too slow-footed to receive these talents and increase that the Lord has given us.

The answer to the overly cautious is this: God has given us this moment, and so He will raise up – in fact, He probably has already raised up – those who will answer these very necessary, very real questions. And we can trust the Spirit to do great things. Looking back, trusting the Spirit is the foundation of the “spirit of Antioch.” Not molding situations, demographics, or other factors, but trusting that the Spirit has already shown us the way. But do we see it? Do we see those whom He has raised up? Do we see the answers in ourselves? Am I or are you one or more of the answers to these questions?

Second, we can be overly optimistic. That is another reaction to God’s moment. This reaction leads us to simply go, without much thought, almost recklessly, without a plan. God will provide for this moment, the thinking goes, and so let’s just jump, and leap, and hope that the others will catch up. The overly optimistic approach, however, confuses moving with wisdom; it tries to force God’s hand, acts without a vision, and is unable to look ahead to see where God is leading. The overly optimistic approach assumes that we must take this moment out of God’s hands and run with it.

Both the overly optimistic and the overly cautious set aside one key aspect of this moment. It’s God’s moment. He has made it happen. True, He has set us in this moment and entrusted it to us – but it’s still His moment. When we lose sight of this, then we think it all relies on us. We think we have

got to find the right mix to use the Lord's talents. Or that we have the Lord's talents because we are deserving, rather than because the Lord gives.

When we forget that this is the Lord's moment, we take too much on our shoulders – too much anxiety, too much independence, too much work, and too much pride. We – I or you or us – we think that everything relies on us getting it right, and so in fear we stall, or in fear we throw caution to the wind.

More importantly, both the overly cautious and the overly optimistic approaches lead us to squander the moment. And when we squander God's moment, we are effectively telling our merciful Lord that He has badly chosen us for this moment, and that our fears or comforts or plodding (or plotting) is more important than grasping in faith and hope the talents, the persons, and this moment that the Lord has given us now.

Yet, there is a third way. Between overly cautious and overly optimistic is a way that is faithful yet deliberate, relentless yet unafraid, hopeful yet not grasping at straws. This third way is to see what God has given us, to see where He is leading us, and to make use of His gifts. That, I think, is the best way to respond to this moment that the Lord has given us, this season of increase granted by Our Lord in His Spirit. So permit me to focus on these three questions as a way of living within God's moment:

What has God given us?

Where is he leading us?

How can we make use of his gifts?

Regardless of our ethnic or cultural background, we are all discovering – or rediscovering – the ancient faith of our ancestors: from the Middle East, Africa, Asia or Asia Minor, Latin America, and even North

and South Europe. And all of us, in one way or another, have sacrificed and stretched beyond our upbringing to grow into spiritually mature, disciplined Christians. We're not all the way there yet, but we also know that we won't get there if we wait for the right moment. Because that moment – God's moment – is now.

Regardless of our background, language, or upbringing, we all enter with skills, talents, gifts, and means to help in humility, in obedience, and yet with fervor to invest and take advantage of God's moment in this archdiocese. Some of these skills and gifts are obvious, some will be discovered, and some will surprise us and our bishops as we move away from fear and anxiety.

In either case, we are not just part of this moment, or even in this moment. We are God's moment. Because God's moment is not about grand themes or movements. God's moment is always about bringing persons into greater relationship and union with Him in the Body of Christ. Or, more simply, God's moment is always about our salvation.

So that's what God has given us: the opportunity to have a larger share in aiding and supporting the salvation of others and thereby helping our own salvation. And since that's the gift and the talent placed in our hand, and since there is nothing richer or more necessary than this moment of God's saving work, we should set aside our own anxieties and do whatever it takes, whatever it costs, whatever is needed, to be engaged in God's moment. That work takes care, deliberation, and diligence, but we shouldn't let foot-dragging or incautious exuberance stand in the way.

Where is the Lord leading us in this moment? Well, the obvious answer is "into His heavenly kingdom." That is, into the Divine Liturgy both

now and in the world to come. Does this mean an expansion of our present facilities? Perhaps. Or the birthing of another parish? May it be so. Or supporting small parishes with working priests so that visitors and guests come through an open, welcoming door? Please God, yes!

But for now, let us not forget what all this looks like. It looks like us. The Lord is leading us. Not them, or us later – but us, now. And He is leading, guiding, directing. And we, the faithful, are faithfully following. Following His lead, His direction. Do we know exactly how this will work out? Not necessarily. More needs to be made clear. But we do know the goal, and we can understand what stands in the way of that goal: fear, pride, greed, isolation, selfishness, in-fighting, trying to control outcomes, and putting our agendas and prejudice of others in the lead.

The lead is Christ Himself. And He's not wrapped up in everything that we think matters. So as we make decisions on how we follow Christ now and

into the future, let us always ask, "How does this benefit Christ, and the moment He's delivered to us, and the folks He's determined to bring us?"

That should lead us, then, to a sense of the next question: How can we make use of the gifts He has given us for this moment: gifts that are persons, gifts that are personal, and gifts that we can leverage together. How can we make use of His gifts? Again, the answer seems obvious: get out of the way. Get out of our own way, and get out of each other's way.

For Christ is the Way, yet too often we go our own way, using whatever skills and abilities we have in order to advance what we think is best. What we think is best should not be ignored since God has given us each other for this moment. But collectively we can do more than when we force or manipulate our own ideas. The gifts God has given us are each other. Pulling together. Sacrificing together. Working together. Praying, worshipping, and loving together. And, above all else, together embracing this moment that the Lord has given us.



The Legacy of the Antiochian Women

BISHOP JOHN

Antiochian Women define themselves as all women who are Antiochian. By this definition, the first Antiochian Women stood at the cross of our Lord. They were loyal to our Lord and were blessed to be the first to see the empty tomb. With the Theotokos, some of the early leaders of the Church who continued the legacy of Antiochian Women include Tabatha/Dorkas (Acts 9:36) who exemplified the Antiochian Women's serving the poor and outreach to the wider community, Lydia (Acts 16:13) who taught the faith and administered the needs of her parish community, and Priscila (Acts 18:18) who, with her husband, led in missionary activities. Throughout history, Antiochian Women have organized parishes, done missionary activity, and taken care



of the poor and the sick. This ministry continued when Antiochian Women came to the shores of North America.

Early in our history in America, Metropolitan Antony saw opportunities to build up the parishes of the archdiocese by organizing local church leaders to share best practices and develop resources. He established SOYO which provided for the social needs following World War II, and provided choir music, church school materials, and parish educational material. Many of its leaders were women.

Metropolitan Philip developed these ministries of SOYO into several archdiocese organizations and departments as well as established the Order of St. Ignatius and the North American Board and

regional organizations of Antiochian Women. All these ministries have served the archdiocese well.

With archdiocese-wide ministries as well as parish-level ministries, there sometimes has been some confusion around the lines of authority and responsibility. In the case of the Antiochian Women, it is noteworthy that most of the local chapters predate the establishment of the parishes, and a few predate the establishment of the archdiocese. A quick look at the Model Constitution for parishes of the archdiocese shows that all parishes receive their authority from the Metropolitan (archdiocese) who charges the pastor and parish council with the responsibility of administration. Local organizations are authorized by the pastor, and their constitutions, charters, or bylaws are granted and approved by the pastor and parish council of the parish. The representatives of the organizations are then members of the parish council, which coordinates events within the guidelines of the parish constitution. This protects all the ministries of the church and ensures that they are supported and protected from being outside the scope of our Church. It also ensures that there are no conflicting events or dates. This is for the building up of the local ministries of Christ.

To use the language of organizational science, the local parish and ministries are “line” whose authority and accountability is traced from the organization or ministry to the pastor and parish council to the bishops and metropolitan. Line actions are those that deal with the major product or activity of the organization. In our case, ministering on the local level. The ministries of the North American Board, like all of the archdiocese departments and organizations, fill the “staff” function. Staff ministries take care of archdiocese functions: think tanks or

research and development, accounting, human resources, vocations and communication. Staff, like line, are also responsible to the metropolitan.

The organizational scientists say that accountability and responsibility is best handled by line to line and staff to staff. That way everyone knows who they are in direct accountability and responsibility with.

As Christians, by love and respect and for the purpose of the salvation of each other, we are all accountable to and for each other (Ephesians 5). The Church is not about power, and church leaders should not be seeking to lord over the faithful. Rather we need to let Christ, who is Truth, reveal His will or enlighten us as we seek to serve as His stewards.

I understand that many of our forefathers came to America seeking freedom and that sometimes that freedom was understood as power, sometimes even power against the Church, or clergy, other times from other clans. I understand this has caused sin and scandal, which led to a worldwide reaction against Christianity all together. This is true of those of Eastern and Western origin. I may write about that further in the future. Enough for this writing to remind myself and readers that God is love and we are His. Our goal is to serve God and take care of all people that God created and creation.

The Antiochian Women have continued their proud heritage with acts of mercy, teaching and leading God’s people from the earliest days of the Church. I have been blessed to be by their side as North American Board Spiritual Advisor for the last 28 years. I have seen so much good from the women who serve God through our parishes and archdiocese.

The Keepers of Tradition

Rudaina Swais
President, Antiochian Women, Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest

Throughout history, women have played an indispensable role in preserving and nurturing the Orthodox Christian traditions. From the earliest days of the Church to modern times, women have been the silent yet steadfast guardians of our traditions, ensuring that faith and practice endure across generations.

During the North American Board (NAB) summer meeting last year at Antiochian Village, Metropolitan Saba shared a statement that deeply resonated with me: “The Russian grandmothers were the ones who saved Orthodox traditions and religion.” This powerful truth reflects a recurring theme in Orthodox history. During times of persecution, particularly under Soviet rule, Russian women – especially grandmothers – became the silent yet steadfast guardians of the faith.

This is not just a Russian story. Across the Orthodox world, from the Middle East to Eastern Europe, from North America to Africa to Asia, women have been the bedrock of faith, quietly but

powerfully transmitting Orthodox traditions within their families and communities. As St. Paisios the Athonite reminds us, “Tradition is like an anchor that keeps the ship from drifting away.” Orthodox women have been an anchor, ensuring that our faith remains firmly rooted despite the changing tides of history.

Women have long been at the heart of the “domestic church,” ensuring that faith is lived out daily in the home and passed on to the next generation. One of the most tangible ways they do this is through the preservation of Orthodox traditions, particularly in the preparation of special foods for prominent days, some of many examples:

Feast day foods: In the Antiochian Church, specific meals and foods are prepared for most feast days, differing from culture to culture but all rooted in the Orthodox faith. Women passed down these recipes teaching younger generations the significance of each dish and the story behind it.

Holy bread (prosphora): Baking the holy bread used in the Divine Liturgy is a deeply spiritual act,

connecting generations of women to the very life of the Church.

Boiled wheat (koliva) for memorials: Used to honor the departed, this same wheat different recipe is also prepared as burbarah for St. Barbara's feast day.

Paschal traditions: From dyeing red eggs at Pascha to preparing traditional Easter feasts and beautifying the church with flowers, women ensure that these customs endure, reinforcing the faith through tangible, lived expressions of Orthodoxy.

Fasting and meals: Women plan and prepare meals that follow fasting guidelines, ensuring their families observe the Church's liturgical calendar with devotion and understanding.

While some traditions differ across cultures, they

remain unified in our Orthodox faith. As St. John Chrysostom wisely stated, "What greater work is there than training the mind and forming the habits of the young?" Women, through their tireless efforts in teaching and guiding, ensure that our faith and tradition remain alive and thriving.

The role of women preserving traditions in the Church extends back to its very foundation. In the New Testament, we see women among Christ's disciples and as key witnesses to His resurrection. The Myrrh-Bearing Women, including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, carried on the Jewish burial tradition of anointing the dead by bringing spices and oils to Jesus' tomb early on the third day. Their devotion to tradition led them to witness the empty tomb and become the first to hear of His resurrection. Their commitment to preserving sacred traditions continues to serve as

ICON by Annunciation Press



an inspiration for Orthodox women today.

Women today also continue to serve as guardians of tradition in many ways:

Monastic leadership: Female monastics are instrumental in founding and overseeing monasteries that serve as spiritual and educational centers.

Education and scholarship: Women lead Sunday schools, conduct Bible studies, and author theological works, ensuring that Orthodox teachings remain accessible and relevant.

Philanthropy and service: The Antiochian Women's organizations within parishes and dioceses provide aid to those in need, continuing the traditional motto: "Serving Christ through serving others."

Orthodox women, past and present, are the keepers of Orthodox tradition. At the Midwest Diocese fall gathering last year, Archimandrite Jeremy Davis stated that the women are "one of the pillars of our church. Their unwavering commitment to Christ

and His Church ensures that our faith is not merely preserved but flourishes. Though their contributions may sometimes be understated, they are foundational to the Church's vitality. It is through their love, sacrifice, and dedication that the light of Orthodoxy continues to shine for future generations."

Therefore, we call upon all Antiochian Women in every part of the world and in every culture, to take on the responsibility of teaching our Orthodox traditions to the next generation. It is our sacred duty to be inspired by the Russian grandmothers and ensure that we do not lose the traditions entrusted to us by our own grandmothers. These traditions, be they in food, prayer, or service, are part of our Orthodox identity, binding us together in faith.

As St. Basil the Great exhorted, "We must not abandon the traditions we have received. Let us cling to the traditions we have been taught, whether by word or by deed." May we take this to heart, standing as both keepers and guardians of Orthodox heritage, ensuring that our faith remains strong and vibrant for those who follow us.



2024 DEACONS' RETREAT

“WHERE ANGER GOES, GOD DOES NOT GO” — COUNSELS FOR LIFE: FROM THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF FR. EPIPHANIOS THEODORAPOULOS

Abraham Cavalier

An the weekend of September 20–22, the deacons of the Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic gathered together with His Grace Bishop THOMAS in prayer, worship, spiritual growth, and fellowship for the annual deacons’ retreat, graciously hosted by Fr. David Jacobs and the community of St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church in Chambersburg, PA.

We were blessed to have Fr. Ted Pulcini as our speaker this year. Fr. Ted led our discussion on a very relevant topic: anger, not only as a personal issue, but as something we find around us in the world to an increasing degree.

A 2023 report in the United States is telling: “According to a poll taken just before the pandemic, 84% of people think Americans are angrier than a generation before and 42% admitted that they themselves were angrier.”¹ Globally, according to the 2024 Gallup Emotions report, all negative emotions, including anger, although showing a recent downward trend, remain higher than a decade ago.²

From the very beginning, scripture hints of anger as a destructive force: “but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his

countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?’” (Genesis 4:5-6). And indeed, the New Testament provides a very clear rejection of anger: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19–20).

When annoyances give way to anger, which manifests as harmful thoughts and actions, it becomes sin that separates us from God and our neighbor. It’s important, not only for deacons, but for all Orthodox Christians to recognize anger and its effects within ourselves, as well as in our parishes, our communities, our workplaces, and even our families.

How do we combat anger? Fr. Ted offered several approaches that are both practical and rooted in the theology of the church.

First, be silent rather than reactive. As St. John Climacus writes in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, “The beginning of freedom from anger is silence of the lips when the heart is agitated”, and St. Paisios in *Passions and Virtues*, “We give way to wrath with humility and silence.”

Second, we can use anticipatory or imaginative approaches. Sts. Nikodemus and Theophan offer in *Unseen Warfare*: “Review in your mind all the occasions you may meet with in the course of the

1 David Wade, <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/question-everything-why-is-everyone-so-angry/>

2 <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/349280/gallup-global-emotions-report.aspx>

day, both favorable and unfavorable, and visualize the passionate impulses, lusts, and irritations they may provoke; then prepare in yourself beforehand how to stifle them at the very inception, without allowing them to develop.”

Third, we can use the psalms. St. Basil the Great in his Commentary on Psalm One, points out the power of the psalms to heal the wounds caused by anger. In particular, he says that the imprecatory psalms lead the soul from anger to acceptance of God’s will, from desire for vengeance to compliance with God’s righteousness.

Fourth, we must recognize that our own rational control is not enough. Our intellect is insufficient unless empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. According to St. Diadochos in *One Hundred Texts*, “Only the Holy Spirit can purify the intellect, for unless a greater power comes and overthrows the despoiler, what he has taken captive will never be set free. In every way, therefore, and especially through the peace of the soul, we must make ourselves a dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit.”

And finally, we may need to reassess “our gospel”. We may need to make changes in how we are living our lives. According to St. Paisios, “Oftentimes a person is vexed by various external factors and has an angry outburst because he is not at ease with what he is doing and actually wants something else. But these reactions are simply external dust that goes away once a person finds that which brings him solace.”

We are grateful to Fr. Ted for his spiritual and practical guidance, and for facilitating an open and spiritually profitable discussion on this very difficult and relevant topic.

It is truly a blessing to gather together as brothers each year to strengthen our commitment of service. Thank you to His Grace Bishop THOMAS for being with us and leading us in prayer and worship throughout the weekend. We are also very thankful for the hospitality of our hosts Fr. David, Dn. Evangelos, Dn. George, and the entire community of St. Mary Orthodox Church, Chambersburg, PA.





Camp Catanese

Jason Catanese

In 2016, countless friends from Antiochian Village, Camp St. Raphael, Camp St. Nicholas, Camp Transfiguration, and other Orthodox camps came together with a vision – to create a one-week college-access summer camp for underserved and low-income high school students in inner-city Phoenix. This vision was rooted in the ideals, love, and encouragement that we all received when we were campers at our respective Orthodox camps.

The spark for Camp Catanese came from a troubling realization. Two former students of Jason Catanese, a math teacher in Phoenix and an Antiochian Village alumnus, nervously approached him and Erika Parr, another Antiochian Village alumnus. They shared that they were supposed to take a test called the ACT in just two days but had never even heard of it. They were going into the test blind, and it was clear that their school had not provided the necessary resources to prepare them for college entrance exams.

This moment was a turning point. Inspired by their own transformative Orthodox camp

experiences and motivated by the desire to ensure that every student has the chance to succeed, a group of friends, community leaders, and donors from around the Archdiocese came together to create Camp Catanese, a summer camp where the students attending were not Orthodox but the staff was almost entirely young Orthodox Christians, giving back what they had received at their own camping experiences. The goal was simple but profound: to offer a summer camp experience that would equip underserved students with the knowledge and inspiration needed to pursue higher education, regardless of the school they attended or the resources available to them.

In 2016, the dream became a reality as 120 students attended the first Camp Catanese at Arizona State University’s West Campus. The week proved to be transformational, with students calling it the most inspirational week of their year. Camp inspired them to strive for better grades, engage more in extracurricular activities, complete college applications, and envision careers that they had never before imagined.

But the vision didn't stop at a single summer camp. Since then, Camp Catanese has grown into a year-round program, supporting students through weekend retreats, college application workshops, mentorship check-ins, tutoring sessions, and more. The mission remains the same: to ensure that students' circumstances do not define their destiny. In inner-city Phoenix, only 37% of students are going to college. In contrast, 100% of Camp Catanese students graduate from high school, and 93% go on to college, with 70% currently enrolled.

Today, Camp Catanese serves 500 students year-round, from 7th grade to senior year of college, and continues to grow each year to serve even more. Our program emphasizes the belief that students not only can graduate from high school but also graduate from college and build successful futures.

One of the core values at Camp Catanese is holistic care. Many of our students come from challenging backgrounds where even basic needs, like consistent meals, are not guaranteed. To address this, we ensure that every camper receives three nutritious meals a day during camp, thanks to the generous support of the Food For Hungry People program of our Archdiocese. But our commitment to nourishing both body and mind goes beyond just the week of camp. We offer weekly tutoring sessions, monthly programs, weekend retreats, and more, where students can also receive meals, thanks to the generous support of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese and other anonymous donors. For some of our students, these meals are a vital resource that they may not always have when school is not in session. This comprehensive support system ensures that students not only fill their minds with knowledge but also their bodies with sustenance, feeling

cared for and loved throughout every aspect of their Camp Catanese journey.

The growth of Camp Catanese is a testament to the unwavering support of our Archdiocese and the dedication of our young church members. Together, we are making sure that every student, regardless of their zip code or socioeconomic status, has access to the resources and encouragement needed to pursue their dreams. Camp Catanese is more than just a camp; it's a movement toward equity, opportunity, and a brighter future for every young person we serve.



Reports from the Mission Field: Chesapeake, VA

Fr. James Purdie

A small Orthodox community began surfacing in Chesapeake, VA, starting back in 2022. At that time, a group of grad students, a professor, and some other professionals met to learn about the Orthodox faith. There was also a developing OCF at nearby Regent University. There were already a handful of Orthodox Christians in that area and I received additional support and suggestions encouraging growth. Many had been traveling half an hour or more to attend St. Basil the Great in Hampton, VA, where I pastor.

The community of St. Basil and I responded to this possibility. In the spring and summer of 2023, we pulled together a hand-picked group of 15 people from our parish to act as the mission team (another 10–15 volunteers later joined to support). We spent the next year meeting on a monthly basis to train and develop our plans for

the creation of a mission in Chesapeake. Goals were identified, roles were assigned, methods of communication were put into place, and guiding operational principles were established. This year-long process culminated in a series of “Intro to Orthodoxy” events in Chesapeake designed to help get the mission off the ground.

These “Intro to Orthodoxy” events were held on three consecutive Sundays in June of 2024 at a rented space that could accommodate a large number of people, break-out rooms, and space for childcare. The events were designed so that each Sunday we would delve deeper into presenting the Orthodox faith. At each event we gave an overview of the evening’s theme, three to four brief talks related to the theme, which were presented by our clergy and others who were theologically trained. The time concluded with fellowship and a meal.

Initially, our hope was that the events could possibly be attended by up to 200 people. This

was based on the fact that we sent out a flyer to 20,000 households in the Chesapeake area, as well as advertisements on Facebook, social media, and a website that we developed for the mission. We weren't even close! Each event only brought in five to 10 new inquirers of Orthodoxy. From a numbers standpoint, the events could be viewed as a failure.

Archbishop Anastasios, who recently reposed, but who is perhaps the modern standard of Orthodox mission work, wrote to the effect that perceived failures in the mission field are often simply the seed dying in the Earth that will later come up to bear fruit. That seems to be exactly what has happened. Although the "Intro to Orthodoxy" events fell flat on the surface, they created and galvanized a missionary mindset and structure in our parish. Newcomers to St. Basil were impressed and attracted by the fact that we were being mission-minded. Furthermore, the "Intro to Orthodoxy" events did attract enough people that we could carry out our second phase.

The second phase began in the fall of 2024 when we began celebrating a liturgy one Saturday a month in Chesapeake. After each liturgy we have a Q&A session or presentation with a full meal. Twice a month I also meet with anyone from the group who is available to join me at a local coffee shop. Additionally, each Thursday I continue to meet with the students at the Regent OCF.

At the writing of this report we are preparing for our sixth liturgy. All of the liturgies have been well attended by 20–35 people. There are currently seven tithing units that are committed to the mission, with an additional nine who are

inquiring. This equates to 24 totally committed people with an additional 15 inquiring. Those who were part of the original mission team also attend the Saturday liturgies. They offer support for the mission, give presentations, develop relationships, and act as sponsors and godparents. The next phase will include adding an additional Lenten service, assigning leadership roles, developing finances, and starting a formal catechism.

This effort seems to be bearing fruit. God willing, it will continue. We continue to get inquirers and find people who, although they did not attend the introductory events, nevertheless received the flyer. This has put Orthodoxy on their radar! We are by no means the only community engaged in such work, but I believe this is a model for Orthodox missionary work in America: healthy parishes giving birth to daughter communities by creating a trained missionary team to work with the priest in developing a new community. Doing so has organized and excited our own people, has attracted new members to our parish, and of course the effort has helped to create a new community that hopefully will grow and become a full parish. Please pray for us and for the success of all Orthodox missionary efforts.



ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

DECEASED

Sabry Joseph Mackoul, 84, on February 25, 2025, in Palm Beach Gardens, FL. A 40-year resident of Princeton, Sabry leaves bereft his wife of 42 years, Anne Glynn Mackoul, and his two daughters, Candice Marie Mackoul (Ryan Flanagan) and Stephanie Anne Mackoul, as well as his sister, Kathleen Mackoul Haselmann (Ralph Haselmann) and his brother, Theodore Ramsey Mackoul.

Sabry leaves behind a legacy of kindness, wisdom, and generosity, and many circles of people who loved him, admired him, and will miss him deeply. Sabry's deep attachment to the Christian Orthodox faith was the foundation of his character, inspirational to the generations that follow him. He was raised by his parents, Theodore and Nellie Mackoul, in an Orthodox home in Hillsdale, NJ, visited by many bishops and patriarchs over the years. His father, Ted Mackoul, served for decades as treasurer of the Antiochian Archdiocese, and his mother, Nellie, was a founding member of the Antiochian Women. Sabry served in many church advisory and leadership roles, and at the time of his passing was a parishioner at St.

Mary's Antiochian Orthodox parish in Bay Ridge, NY.

Archpriest George Manneh, 79, who fell asleep in the Lord Jesus Christ on Tuesday, March 11, 2025, after a long illness. Fr. George was born in Jaffa, Palestine, in 1945 and attended school in both Jerusalem and Jordan. He moved to Massachusetts in 1972 to attend Hellenic College Holy Cross Orthodox School of Theology. In 1977, Fr. George married the love of his life, Elaine Maykel, who was a faithful, selfless, and worthy partner in his 40-year ministry, along with their children, Demetri, Christopher, and Alexis.



That same year, Fr. George was ordained a deacon by Metropolitan Philip of thrice-blessed memory in November and a priest in December. He was assigned to St. George Church of Troy, MI, St. George Church in Terre Haute, IN, St. Ignatius

Church in Windsor, ON, and most recently, St. George Church in Upland, CA, until his retirement from pastoral ministry in 2017. He also ministered in the Greek Archdiocese at St. Sophia Cathedral in Los Angeles and St. Spyridon Church in Upland. Fr. George was a tireless servant of the church. His hands baptized generations, his voice united couples in matrimony, and his heart comforted grieving families. His legacy lives on in the countless lives he touched.

Archpriest Wayne (Nicholas) Wilson, 76, on Feb. 28, 2025, due to cardiac arrest after several years of health issues. Fr. Wayne was born Edward Wayne Wilson Jr. on Aug. 23, 1948, in Sewickley, PA. In 1964, he moved with his family to Southern California. From 1966–1970, he worked for Campus Crusade for Christ while attending California State University, Fullerton. In 1971, Fr. Wayne married the love of his life, Kh. Lynn Diane Stoltenburg. In 1979, they joined the Evangelical Orthodox Church (EOC) and worked with Fr. Peter Gillquist, Fr. John Braun, Fr. Jack Sparks, and other members of the EOC to pursue the “church of the apostles.” This journey of faith culminated in the EOC’s

conversion to Holy Orthodoxy through the Antiochian Archdiocese in 1987.

Fr. Wayne, who held a pastoral position in the EOC, was ordained to the holy priesthood that same year, founding St. Barnabas Church in Costa Mesa, CA, which he pastored for 30 years.



With a passion for service, Fr. Wayne became a chaplain for the Fountain Valley Police Dept. in 1993. Being a police chaplain and parish priest were two labors of love that Fr. Wayne cherished. In 2017, Fr. Wayne retired from pastoral ministry due to Kh. Lynn's cancer diagnosis. Sadly, Fr. Wayne's official retirement date was the day after Kh. Lynn's repose in the Lord. Fr. Wayne continued to serve St. Barnabas Church as pastor emeritus.

Fr. Wayne is survived by his younger sister, Mary; his son, Peter; daughter-in-law Alexandra; and the joy of his

heart, his granddaughter, Zenia (Xenia); as well as his nieces, Katrina and Natasha; and nephew, Micah.

Fr. David Gene Ogan, 71, reposed in the Lord Jesus Christ on Feb. 19, 2025, in Nashville, TN.

Fr. David was born on July 12, 1953, in Bakersfield, CA, to the late Ray and Jo Ogan. He was the founding pastor of St. Timothy Church in Lompoc, CA, upon his conversion to Holy Orthodoxy via the Archdiocese's reception of the Antiochian Evangelical Orthodox Mission. Fr. David also directed the Fellowship of St. Silas, one of the precursor outreaches of Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry. His family and friends recall that he loved the ocean, loved to fish, and was a kindhearted man. They add he was talented in songwriting, playing guitar, and singing.



In addition to his parents, Fr. David was predeceased by

his brother, Darrell Ogan, and his nephew, Elton Ogan. He is survived by his wife of 52 years, Concetta Ogan; his children, Dan Ogan and Nina Calvert (Patrick); his siblings, Don Ogan (Katia) and Lori West (Jeff); and his grandchildren, Isabella, Lily, Luke Calvert, Zoey Lopez, and Briana Ogan.

Archpriest Michael Massouh, 85, on Feb. 18, 2025, after a brief illness. He was preceded in death by his wife, Kh. Virginia Massouh, less than a year ago, and his parents, Carl and Elizabeth Massouh.



Born in Canton, OH, on Nov. 21, 1939, Fr. Michael attended McKinley High School and Hiram College. He earned a master's degree in science and a Ph.D. in science and technology from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. He married Virginia Jacox in 1965, and they started their family in upstate New York before moving to Brookline, MA,

where he was the associate vice president of academic affairs at Boston University. From 1984–1999, he worked as the dean of graduate studies and research at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and later in a similar capacity at Worcester State College. In 1999, Fr. Michael heeded a calling to the holy priesthood, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Archpriest Spyridon Massouh, after co-teaching a course at Holy Cross Seminary in Science and Religion. He attended St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, NY, taking advanced courses in scripture and patristics, as well as pastoral and practical theology courses. The next year, Fr. Michael graduated with a master’s degree in arts and was ordained at the age of 60. Metropolitan PHILIP appointed Fr. Michael and Kh. Ginny executive director and the events coordinator, respectively, of the Antiochian Village Conference and Retreat Center.

In 2005, the Massouhs were moved to Pinellas Park, FL, where Fr. Michael served as pastor of St. Nicholas Church for 15 years. He played a pivotal role in building up and adorning the church, remaining a faithful member of the community during his retirement, even helping to complete the

new hall and plans for a new and improved parish library. He was also a regular contributor to antiochian.org and the WORD magazine, including his most recent article, “Five Heavenly Gifts: What I Have Witnessed in My Life as an Educator, Administrator, and Pastor.”

Fr. Michael is survived by his children, Benjamin, Andrew (Amy), Theodora, and Luke (Sarah); his grandchildren, Zachary, Solomon, Asa, Vivian, and Leelo; his brother, Carl, Jr. (Cheryl), and his sister, Linda Bell (Greg).

Archdeacon George Shishim, 79, on March 30, 2025. Archdn. George was born on January 5, 1946, to George and Jessie Bell Shishim in Santa Monica, CA. For many years, he worked as a procurer for Lear Astronics before his retirement in 2005.

His greatest love, of course, was serving at the holy altar for 45 years at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles, CA. He was nicknamed by those privileged to know and learn from him as “the Archdeacon,” “the Field Marshal,” or simply “Arch,” but his spiritual sons knew him as “Father.”

On Palm Sunday in 2016, upon his 40th anniversary in

the holy diaconate, Archdn. George received an icon of St. Nicholas, a special orarion with icons of two prominent archdeacon saints – Stephen the Proto-Martyr and Laurence of Rome – and the Medal of St. Raphael of Brooklyn for his dedicated and silent service to his parish, the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West, and the Antiochian Archdiocese. In his humility, he said afterward, “It’s more than I deserve.”



In 2021, he retired from active ministry to Prescott Valley, AZ, where he reposed at home on March 31, 2025. Archdn. George is survived by his sister, Edie (Steve); his nieces, Anna (Ande) and Katherine; his grandnephew, A.J.; and dozens of spiritual sons that he raised at the holy altar who will miss him dearly. They could always count on him for his spiritual wisdom and fatherly love.

Ordination of Dn. Simon at Our Lady of Balamand

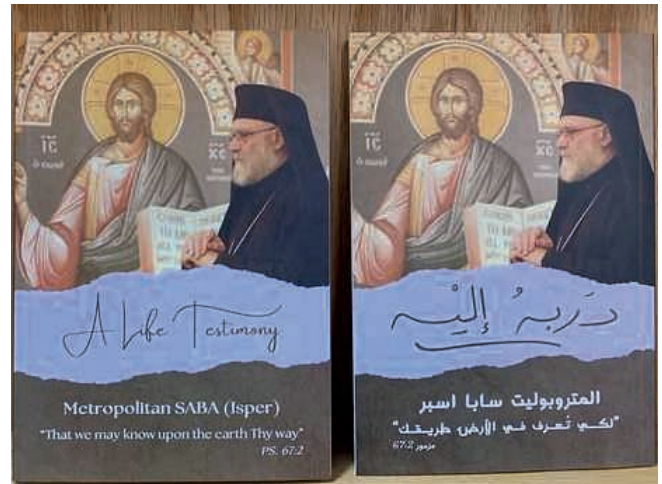
His Eminence Metropolitan Saba celebrated the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy at Dormition Church at Our Lady of Balamand Monastery in Lebanon on Sunday, Feb. 16, 2025. Joining him were His Grace Bishop Moussa, Patriarchal Vicar; a group of priests and deacons; and a number of faithful.

In the liturgy, His Eminence ordained Simon Najm, Ph.D., to the holy diaconate. He has held the position of adjunct professor at the University of Balamand in Lebanon, Florida State University, and the Antiochian House of Studies in the USA. He has also been a Fulbright Scholar. Dn. Simon's areas of teaching range from courses in general church history, the history of the Church of Antioch, and Arab culture. In July of 2024, at the invitation of Metropolitan Saba, Dn. Simon delivered a three-part series of lectures on "Reflections on the Uniqueness of the Church of Antioch" at the Clergy Symposium at the Antiochian Village.



A Life Testimony by Metropolitan Saba

After much anticipation, *A Life Testimony* by His Eminence Metropolitan Saba has just hit the shelves at the Antiochian Village Bookstore.



His Eminence wrote this deeply personal and inspiring account after nearly losing his life to COVID-19. Now available in English and Arabic, the book reflects his spiritual journey, pastoral abilities, and insights into Orthodox Christianity.

Sayidna Saba shares his experiences of faith and leadership to encourage and inspire readers in their own journeys. He also shares his vision for spiritual renewal and growth, and reveals his deep love for our Lord Jesus Christ, His Church, and its people.

Each chapter of *A Life Testimony* explores pivotal moments in His Eminence's theological formation and pastoral journey. The book includes personal anecdotes, reflections on scripture, and insights into the practical aspects of ministry.

Discounts are available for bulk orders. Order your copies today from the Antiochian Village Bookstore at store.antiochianvillage.org.



Summary of *A Life Testimony*

Author: Metropolitan SABA (Isper);
 Foreword: V. Rev. Fr. Chad Hatfield; Translator: Dr.
 Afaf El Gemayel-Hamod; Editors: Rt.
 Rev. Archimandrite Jeremy Davis &
 Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Calinic Berger
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 Archdiocese of North America, 2024
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 ISBN: 979-8-9905784-1-8

Balamand Offers Online Theological Courses in Spanish

The St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology at the University of Balamand has pioneered two unique programs that offer outstanding courses of study enabling Spanish-speaking parishioners to earn two complementary degrees: a diploma in Orthodox Catechesis and a diploma in Biblical Interpretation.

Diplomas are awarded upon the completion of 12 and 10 courses, respectively, and can be undertaken

over five semesters. The new semester begins on Friday, March 7, 2025.

This semester, an enriching course offering covers fundamental principles of the Orthodox Faith, such as:

- Introduction to the Liturgy: a deep dive into the liturgical cycle.
- The Divine Liturgy: a detailed study of the form and theology of the Eucharistic services.
- The Gospel of John and Revelation: a course on New Testament interpretation.
- The Psalms: a course on interpreting this precious book of spiritual poems.

These courses are of great benefit to the Spanish-speaking faithful, providing them with tools to strengthen their relationship with God and deepen their understanding of the Church. Each course is \$50 (USD).

These unique offerings benefit the pastoral and educational work of our Antiochian Spanish-speaking communities.

The Institute of Theology warmly welcomes Spanish-speaking parishioners to enroll in these courses to access continuous education in the Christian life.

RESOURCES

Website: cursos-balamand.net

Email: cbbcursos@balamand.edu.lb

Program information in English: <https://shorturl.at/WzUow>

FB: CBB.y.SOFIA.del.Balamand; Instagram: cbb_sofia; X: CBB_SOFIA YT: CBBcursos

Report on Orthodox Women's Retreat 2024 Calgary, Alberta

Esther G. Juce

This was my first time attending the Calgary's Orthodox Women's Retreat. I had heard about it only in 2020, when I was able to take in some sessions virtually. But the Good Lord said, "Come and see," and He is right – nothing compares to being there in the flesh.

Some 40 women gathered at a charming retreat centre called Entheos, tucked away in an enchanted forest setting 15 minutes west of Calgary, enjoying good fellowship, good food, and a wonderful selection of books and icons for purchase. Participants hailed from the four western provinces, including several women who were born in Romania, Syria, and Ukraine. We had a liturgically rich schedule and were served by priests from almost every Orthodox jurisdiction in Calgary.

Fr. Phillip Eriksson, rector at St. Peter the Aleut parish in Calgary, gave the main presentation on one of the pillars of Great Lent, the Prayer of St. Ephraim: "O Lord, Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. But grant rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to your servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my sister or brother, for you are holy, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."

While this prayer is well-known to the average Orthodox Christian, many have not been exposed to its deeper meaning. Using the wisdom of such authorities as Alexander Schmemmann, Vassilios Papavassiliou, and Thomas Hopko, Fr. Phillip parsed St. Ephraim's Prayer into its constituent parts. He then demonstrated that each quality is a step on one of two ladders, one of ascent or one of descent.

The first rung of decline is "sloth," popularly understood as laziness, but more profoundly meaning lack of discernment. Ironically, a slothful person may be extremely busy, because they lack the critical thinking to say, "No". The positive counterpart of sloth is "chastity." Most people stereotype this quality as being sexually continent. However, the pristine meaning is whole-mindedness, which makes discernment possible.

Sloth impairs vision and spirals down to "despair," or pervasive negativity. Its opposite is "humility," which is the ability to see things as they truly are, and thus paves the way up to true self-knowledge.

The natural successor to the negativity of despair is "lust of power," the desperate desire to control ourselves and others. This ends in self-centeredness and exploitation. In the opposite direction, true self-knowledge is an affirmation of one's personhood, enabling one to cultivate "patience," also understood as endurance.

The final level in the descent of the soul is "idle talk" or gossip. This is spiritual murder, for if one can't control others, one can always slander them. Diametrically opposed to idle talk is "love," which is the height of all virtues.

Fr. Phillip ended his engaging presentation with these words: "The spiritual struggle of Lent and of the Christian life as a whole is not a matter of avoiding the passions, but of mastering them."

We also were able to enjoy a presentation about the life and glorification of St. Olga of Alaska, truly an example of love and dedication. It has been decided that Matushka Olga will be the patron saint of the Women's Retreat.



All who were present at the retreat were touched by the good will of the organizers, the clergy, and the participants. Personally, it was a joy to be in the presence of like-minded women who are also striving to follow Christ, having understood each other both by what we said and what we didn't say; we spoke the same language of Christ's love. The gathering was beyond simply listening to an inspired presentation. It culminated in the fellowship as members of Christ's Body, making and strengthening friendships that last a lifetime.

The next opportunity for such fulfilling fellowship and learning will be offered at the Orthodox Women's Retreat from September 19–21, 2025. May God bless it!

Department of Charities Highlights

It's 9:45 a.m. and already there's a line forming outside the doors of the Saint Seraphim Orthodox Center. Inside, a team of volunteers is completing the last preparations for lunch – heating

soups, setting out sandwiches and snacks, making sure the coffee is hot and ready. This is the scene most every Thursday and Saturday in the small rented-out space in downtown Chambersburg, PA. On these days, the center is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., providing the needy of the community a safe, warm space to enjoy a free meal.

The Saint Seraphim Orthodox Center (SSOC) is a ministry of St. Mary's Orthodox Church, also located in Chambersburg, PA. It was founded in 2009 by several long-time members of St. Mary's, including Dn. Evangelos Prieston, former priest Fr. Ted Pulcini, Fr. Thomas Kline, and Connie Volutely. Since 2009, SSOC has served over 10,000 meals to those in need and currently serves about 70 meals every week. It is 100% volunteer run, with over 20 individuals volunteering on a regular basis. The center even receives support and volunteers from other local churches. A grant from the Antiochian Archdiocese covers the rent for space, with all other needs provided by church and community members.

The SSOC is strategically located in the neediest part of town and serves guests who would otherwise likely have no experience of Orthodox Christianity. A large icon of Christ the Good Shepherd adorns the front window, blessing those who drive by as well as those who enter. Inside, icons adorn the walls, there are introductory Orthodox reading materials available, and a Bible study is offered on Thursday afternoons. Volunteers do their best to share their love for Christ and their Orthodox faith with those served by the center. Holy Saint Seraphim, pray for us!

2024 Annual Thanksgiving Community Project St. Mary's Yonkers, NY

On Wednesday, November 27, 2024, the teens and parish members of the Virgin Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church of Yonkers, NY, participated in their 26th annual project where 110 families from the local community were provided with a complete Thanksgiving dinner package. This project is coordinated with the efforts of the Family Services Society of Yonkers, a well-established (since 19th century) agency in Yonkers that cares for needy families throughout the year. Working with a local supermarket, provisions are made to purchase all food items, including a large list of items to provide needy

families with a complete Thanksgiving dinner, lending to our motto “charity with dignity.” A large amount of the donations needed for this project come from the generosity of the parish members with a substantial contribution from the Antiochian Archdiocese Food For Hungry People grant program.

This annual project has become a respected part of the local community with many hopeful families placing their names on the list. The hope is to increase this project next year to feed 150 families.



Order of St. Ignatius inducts / elevates 11 members at St. Joseph Orthodox Church in Houston

St. Joseph Orthodox Church in Houston, Texas, had nine members join the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch and two members elevated to Life Membership at an induction ceremony led by His Grace Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) on February 11, 2024. The nine inductees included four Knights and four Dames, plus one Life Member. This was the first induction at St. Joseph since November 2019, when seven new members were brought in by His Grace Bishop BASIL (Essey).

One of the new Life Members, Margaret Vranesevich, was elevated two days before her 70th birthday. She explained, “I joined the Order in 2009, together with my [late] sister Mary Ann. I was inspired by the example of a single mother in

our church who was a member. The Order does so much good in the Church: scholarships for children, camps, higher education. Yes, you can give money to different Orthodox organizations individually, but this is a one-stop shop to give to so many good causes. I believe in the Order and want to be part of it for the rest of my life. Life Membership is something I wish Mary Ann and I could have done together. It is something I will always have.”

Roger David, Chair of the Order, commented: “On behalf of the Order of Saint Ignatius Governing Council and its over 2,800 members we are thankful to welcome the new members. You are joining the ranks of those who, even [in the] pandemic that only brought fear and uncertainty, never wavered, and kept the gifts coming, the gifts which have now grown exponentially. The Order had expected to experience a 30% decline in member giving in 2020 and 2021 only to realize a decline of less than 5%. We are overwhelmed with your generosity that is so much more than annual payments or a one-time gift. Your gift is an act of faith. An act that is infinite in its effect as it touches the lives of so many you will never know and from whom you will never receive personal gratitude. You have given as God teaches us to teaches us to give: unconditionally and without recognition. This is the miracle of the Order of Saint Ignatius of Antioch.”



2024 ARCHDIOCESE ORATORICAL DIOCESAN JUDGES' CHOICE

Jenna Mullinex, Age 17

St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas
The Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America

St. Mark the Ascetic once said, “When tested by some trial you should try to find out not why or through whom it came, but only how to endure it gratefully, without distress or rancor.”

The life we are all called to live as Christians is one riddled with trials and tribulations. People we love die. We lose jobs. Our families might splinter. We can find ourselves caught in the day-to-day clutches of anxiety and depression. Yet, despite any and all hardships, we as Christians know two things. We have been called to love God, and God has promised goodness to us who love Him. However, some days that promise can seem very far away. That day came for me the morning of April 30, 2021, Good Friday. My Godmother, someone I was devoted to, was found dead at her kitchen table. She was only 43. She had been everything to me. It was her family that had helped bring mine into Orthodoxy, who helped to foster a love for the Church within me. Now she was gone without warning, taken from me. I was 15.

How are we supposed to love God when things like this happen to us? How can we be sure that any

of it can be for good? I asked God why so many times that year. Why had my Godmother died? Why was I still here? He never answered me. I still don't know why, but what I have begun to understand is what St. Paul means when he says, “All things work together for good to those who love God.”

What does it mean to love God? The first thing to understand is that love is an action. In our culture love is associated with feelings, a very strong emotional experience. People will tell you love is something that happens to you, something you “fall” into. It comes and it goes, and we have little to no control over it.

This is not true. Love is an action, always. In John 14:15, Christ said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments.” In other words, “If you love Me, do something.” When bad things happen to us it is not our job as Christians to work up warm feelings of emotional intensity for God and the Church. That is neither practical nor likely. However, what we can do – what we should do – is keep Christ's commandments. In this way, we show our love through our actions, even when we are suffering.

This concept of love and our works being connected is very important to me since, for a time, I was raised in a Protestant community. I was taught there that my relationship with God had less to do with what I did and more to do with how I felt. It didn't ultimately matter what I did in church, or if I even went to church. Nor was there any importance in visiting sacred places, or any necessity in offering prayers. My love, and its revelation through my relationship with Christ, often seemed 100% locked into my emotions. How I felt was what mattered. But this isn't the right understanding of love – it can't be.

There are times when we do not feel like loving God, when we do not want to. What then? What will

you do when it is your turn to lose someone you know, someone you care about? When it is your turn to ask why? It is in times like this that we must hang on to St. Paul's words. "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." To those who are called. God is not calling our emotions; He is commanding our actions. Go to liturgy. Take communion, pray, give, to those who need it, and walk in the Scriptures. The Church is our refuge in times of affliction, and oftentimes Christ is the only one who can understand us in our hour of need. Only He can honestly promise that all will be good.

But what does this promise of all things working for good mean? Oftentimes in our society when people say things are good, they mean that they are happy. All is well; they have what they want, what they desire. Now, there are times when this idea is not wrong, but we, as Christians, must understand that it's not what St. Paul means when he tells us all will work for our good.

A common misconception is the idea that God "just wants us to be happy." This was a line that I was fed repeatedly at my private Evangelical high school. I remember one conversation in particular with my Bible teacher during junior year. Someone in the class had asked him what it looked like to pursue God's goodness, to keep sin at bay. His answer had been, "Don't let sin come to you. If something makes you happy, then go after it. Happiness is goodness, and God only wants the best for you." That answer confused me. I remember thinking that couldn't have been right. Nowhere in the Scriptures is this anyone's understanding of God's goodness. We know that it certainly wasn't St. Paul's understanding. In 2 Corinthians, verse 11 he writes, "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked..." and he goes on to list the many hardships and dangers he faced throughout his journeys. The point is, St. Paul lived a

life harder than most of us can imagine. It's certainly more difficult than anything I've ever been asked to do. Yet he still wrote about the promise of goodness that God gives to the faithful. He does so because goodness is that which comes from and leads us to God.

God told St. Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." The same is true for us. Christ promised that He would always be with us. Through His grace, goodness is perfected within those who love Him. That is what goodness is. It is the healing of our hearts and the sanctification of our bodies, because, at the end of the day, that is what God intends for us – to be restored to our original role within creation, for us to be His saints. This is only possible through the acceptance of God's grace and an active service to Christ and His Church. We are God's children, called to Him through the power of His love, and God is good. Therefore, nothing that befalls us, no matter how tragic, will ever be able to destroy us completely, if we remain faithful to Him. We are one in Christ Jesus and His Spirit is within us, His promise of what is to come. This is how we know it will all come together for good.

When I lost my Godmother, I could neither imagine a life without her, nor understand why. However, I did understand the Church. Christ told His followers, "Come to Me, all you 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 for your souls." The Church is our only sanctuary in times when we must suffer. Continuing to walk in our love for God, even when we do not feel like it, is the only way we can find the true goodness God promises. Christ, the Lord of all who suffer, will understand, and He will comfort you just as He comforts me. He is the only one who can assure us that all will be well again. To Him be all power and glory forever, Amen.

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