Being the Right Kind of Christian Witness  

BISHOP JOHN

I like ice cream. That can’t be too bad, because Patriarch IGNATIUS and Bishop ANTOUN really liked ice cream a lot. What I like more than ice cream, however, is watching little kids eat ice cream. What a delight! It seems that every lick surprises them. If I didn’t fear having my intentions misinterpreted, I might go to the mall and just watch kids eat ice cream for a whole afternoon. Another thing I love is watching people get excited about God. They seem not to be surprised by the fact that God loves them; when they discover this mystery, they can hardly contain their joy. This joy reflects participation in a relationship that is so totally trustworthy, without fear, and without limit.

Such love allows us to get past ourselves and rediscover ourselves. This is possible through the joy and peace of the God who created this world for us out of His love. Such love brings security. We know that God cares so much that He will be with us, no matter what we suffer, whether that suffering comes because of our own errors and sins, or the errors and sins of others.

Here is a protection and steadfastness that evil cannot take away, even if we suffer and our bodies die. As we are loved, so we are called to love in His love. This love is something that takes much time, practice and experience, before it can mature. We may think that we have arrived as we get glimpses of joy and peace at every stage of our lives. Yet age has shown me that God’s love, like the finest things of this world, gets even better with age. Rather than being impatient or frustrated in our youth by the seeming incompleteness or weakness of our love, we should embrace this truth with hope and expectation. What is great, can be greater and greater.

In our relationships with one another, it is our commitment and resolve that grow as the years pass. God, however, is beyond any growth – a fulness, a Oneness of being. As we come to grasp more surely the truth that only what is eternal lives past the grave, we come to recognize what really
matters, and to live love in this wisdom. God is Truth, and wisdom is an expression of the Truth. Truly, God is love, because in His person He expresses not only selflessness, but a total embrace. An acceptance of God makes one with Him, and ultimately, one with all who are one with Him.

Marriage is a great blessing and Mystery of the Church, because it can express this oneness of God with His Word and Spirit, this oneness that, through Christ, He extends to us. By His Spirit, through Christ, He Joins Himself to us and to His Son, with whom He is One.

To serve as a leader in the Church, we have to get past ourselves and allow God to express His love through us. This truth extends to all levels of leadership in the Church. Parish Council members and officers, as well as choir members, church school staff, ushers, coffee-hour hosts, and clergy all must serve in the Oneness of God. We must let go of our ego, pride, and sins. Otherwise, we who stand in place of Christ’s apostles become a scandal to ourselves and to the world.

The world needs to see Christ in those who follow Him. What other source of the truth of the living God can the world encounter, other than the witness of His saints? Although the Church, like Christ, is divine and human, and we fall short, our best is a reasonable offering (cf. Romans 12:1–2). In our humanity we express the God to whom we were united in baptism, and whom we serve, and in whom we live, as Christians. This is particularly important for church leaders. This is our mission – in this world, at this time, and in every place we find ourselves.

Metropolitan JOSEPH often reminds us that the business of our Church is saving souls. Souls are saved by showing others how to receive and share the unity and life of God. We do this by sharing God’s love, teaching His truths, showing His mercy to each other, and caring for one another as God cares for us. Anything less than this is a corruption of God’s gifts and our mandate as Christians.

Visiting parishes and seeing people love and care for each other in godly ways is for me like watching little ones eat ice cream. I am delighted. I am energized. We must let go of our egos, pride, and personal desires to see the unity of the Orthodox Church strengthened and consolidated during your auspicious era. It seems from your letter that you have resolved to continue the process of granting autocephaly and finalizing it on the day of the Holy Theophany. Thus, we appeal to you not to take any decision that does not carry the consensus of the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches. For it is unreasonable to end a schism at the expense of the unity of the Orthodox world.

In this letter, we wish to express to you, with fraternal love, that we continue to consider that it is our desire to see the unity of the Orthodox world strengthened and consolidated during your auspicious era. We therefore adjure Your All-Holiness to call your brothers, the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, to examine these matters, in order to safeguard our Church from the dangers that will not lead to peace and harmony, either in Ukraine or in the Orthodox world.

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الأرثوذكسية الواحدة في عالمنا اليوم، تعليق هذه الإجراءات وتأجيلها، حتى تتمّ دراسة المسألة الأوكرانية وا يجاد حلّ
بطريرك أنطاكية وسائر المشرق

تناصرت الأرثوذكسية في الشؤون الدولية، والتي تعزّز على طالب على محطاتها، وتغلق على محطاتها تدبرص فيها، يقدّم في الواقع من تجارب الكنيسة الأرثوذكسية

دعا نسالة رسامة الأوكرانية في 24 كانون الأول 2018 والتي تعزّز فيها بالتفاوض المعلامنة بالكنيسة الأرثوذكسية

القديسة خلص العالم.أوخاصّة في عهدكم الميمون، يشهد لحقيقة ربنا يسوع الذي تجسد من

Do we have this concern? because I have these worldly concerns about the Church addressing different cultural phenomena that we would say assail the Church, or changes in the culture that concern us. "I have a certain perspective on this, as I've been studying Western culture since the Twelfth Century. (This doesn't make me complacent in answering these questions.) I would like to place the question in the eschatological context, or the context of the kingdom.

I said as an aside yesterday that in the Western European Christian experience, you have St. Augustine in the Fourth Century, saying essentially, "I believe, therefore I am." You get to the post-Renaissance and the scientific revolution of Descartes, and he says, "I think, therefore I am." Move a hundred years forward, and it's "Who am I? Not only "Who am I?" but "What am I?" These are fundamental, existential questions that the world is responding to in almost a rapid-fire, machine-gun way. I would like also to say that I do not believe that this is completely negative. The world is looking for answers, and the only place it knows to look, because it's done. That's why it seems like the Eastern Church doesn't have the kind of preoccupation with the world that the Western Church does, or that the Western Church is perceived to have. Having said that, I personally admire when they do speak out on certain issues. But they have more of an affinity for it anyway, since they teach the world how to deal with it, but before that I would like to answer a few questions that I had after I left yesterday. One had to do with what I said about Jesus as the Real Arch-Pastor. I had said that He led no social movement, He didn't create any change in the world, nor did He even advocate a change from the tyranny of the Roman Imperium. Someone asked, "Well, how do we deal with the world? ...
Besides the raisons d'être, the very purpose, of the apostolic succession, referenced already by all our hierarchs, in particular His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH.

Let me bring out some of the things in the Liturgy, to hear exactly why we are concerned with a dynamic movement from the Priest of God, especially in the mystery of holy baptism, the anaphora, the eucharistos – and then appreciating it from a distance. It was a good tree, but, because it was lazy, he ate of the tree. He took that fruit for itself, and then they were trapped by the pleasure it gave him, by the passions. Once he was trapped by that, he became imprisoned by his present satisfaction in that thing. St. Maximus says that God would eventually have allowed him to take pleasure in the material world, but only after he could detach himself from that by thanking God – eucharistos – and then appreciating it from a distance. Then St. Basil the Great – we celebrated the feast day of St. Macrina, his sister, and St. Emilia, his mother – said man treated the gifts that God gave him so casually that he became lazy. Because he was lazy, he ate of the tree. Both those explanations apply: man had an unusual desire to have the things of the world, to think that those things in themselves could make him happy. As we all know, however, “I can't get no satisfaction.” It was impossible. This is why he had to leave, on Forgiveness Sunday, paradise itself.

Let us keep this in mind as we go on. Now, Jesus rejected that reverse order that the Adversary had offered. As we know, in the temptation scene. The two most detailed accounts are St. Matthew’s and St. Luke’s; I want to use St. Luke’s because the part regarding the kingdoms of the world is more elaborate than that in St. Matthew’s. We read, “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil, and He ate nothing in those days. And when they were ended, He was hungry, and the devil said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered in complete alacrity and calmness, in the peace that He had from His Father, “It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone.” And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said, ‘To you I will give all authority and glory, for it has been delivered to Me, and I will give it to whom I will. If you then will worship Me, it will be yours.’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”

What, then, is the purpose of all of this? He came to call the Apostles, these special people, right after the temptation, to take them out of the world. It is described by the Adversary’s spirit: “bread,” which the devil wanted to be an autonomous thing of its own. He wasn’t looking at the bread, but at the pleasure it gave him, by the passions. As we all know, however, what did He teach them? Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. And I’ll think those are the two most direct propositions that apply directly to the priesthood.
A kind of a basis for the priesthood is that the Apostles are being considered by Jesus to be His brothers, as having an equal access to the Father (Romans 8), “Abba, Father.”

Apostolic succession, to the struggle to reverse the love, the misfire of desire to the struggle to reverse the love, is significant for the statement made by our Lord in Scripture, because, when Jesus asked them, “Who do men say that I am?” Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and, of course, Peter was speaking for all. So it wasn’t a prerogative of the one; it was a consensus of the whole.

We have this understanding that the Twelve are really equal in their love for the Lord, and that’s the basis for the hierarchy as they go forward. What did He say to be with them? He sent them out to preach and to have authority in the same way that He had authority (Mark 3, 10, 11, and the other synoptic gospels). For this reason, already when Christ was here with us He gave the Apostles to be over the future community, because they were the ones who shared that life, that love, and they were the ones who discovered who had the bread, who had the fish. They were already active members in the ministry, even before they were invested with that special power to bind and loose (the twentieth chapter of the Gospel of St. John). They were active in ministry even before they were invited to the Last Supper, which was a radical change in the Seder meal of that Passover meal.

Therefore Jesus confers upon them His own authority. “All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to Me so that you can make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And I am with you always, even to the close of the age.” “I am with you, and with everyone that’s with you, until the close of the age.” The apostolic succession itself is a guarantee of Christ’s continuing presence in the continuation. I think that’s really the meaning of the last sentence: “I am with you always, even unto the ends of the earth.”

This kind of close relationship is remarkable. “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16). Indeed, the light of that resurrection was given to the Apostles in all that Jesus did. Their mission was thus not in contradiction; it was their mission, and that’s why He took them from a state in which, if I may say, they were always obedient. Remember, they were obedient to their father, the sons of Zebedee, and He said, “Come, I will make you fishes of men.” Immediately, they left the boat of their father, and they followed Him, because they were already trained in that kind of obedience. As we know from the seventeenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel, they were ready, prepared by the Father to be received by the Son, already providentially prepared by the Father Himself. So when Jesus came to them, they were already known, in a very charismatic call from the Father.

The writings of the Old Testament provide the background to this notion of stone and rock and the foundation of the Apostles. The Scriptures report on the liturgical garments and adornment of the Aaronic priesthood, laying particular weight on the stones that are placed on the shoulders of the ephod worn in the service for the most holy place, and particularly on the Day of Atonement (Numbers 16). The stones were prepared, enclosed in settings of gold filigree, engraved like the engravings of a signet, according to the names of the sons of Israel. And he set them on the shoulder-piece to be stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel, the Lord commanded Moses: “And remember, it’s not a past event, but is actually a present blessing that enters our life. It’s not diffused, or diluted, or neutralized in the future community. I think that’s really the meaning of that verse. The Lord’s Prayer first so they can teach the people. How do we know that’s preserved beautifully in the Orthodox Church? In the liturgy itself, where the hierarchy leads: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” That’s why Orthodoxy has kept it resplendent and pure. Just as Jesus gave the prayer to the Apostles, He gives it to those in the apostolic succession, and we lead it.

It’s not diffused, or diluted, or neutralized in a kind of vague priesthood of everyone. There’s nothing wrong with the “priesthood of all believers,” but that is not the main thing here. It has to come
through the first of grace that’s delivered to the Apostles, to the hierarchs, to the priests, to the people. Isn’t it interesting that He calls them the fathers in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. He’s getting them ready to take up His ministry. “Truly, truly, I say to you: greater works than these will you do, because you have loved Me, because I send you the Spirit.” The possibilities of power on earth, for the ordained clergy, I think are far greater than they envision, because we are enshrouded by the tent of scientism that says, “Okay, you’re a material thing. You may have a soul, but it’s so vague.” Christ spends all His time building up the spiritual power of the Apostles before He invests them with the breath of life, that’s renewed in the twentieth chapter of St. John’s Gospel.

“Apostolic Succession”

“Apostolic Succession”

“someone comes to the Father except by Me,” and, “You from heaven, He said, “I am the bread of life. No Gospel of John, when He talked about the manna... everything.

“Words, “Ask whatever you will,” because by the time... will and it shall be done for you.” Those are powerful words, “If you abide in Me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you... and possess the power of the Apostles. “If you abide in Me and We accept the Father in my name, He may give it unto you” (John 15:16).

After this, Jesus expands and broadens this authority, universalizing it— and it’s hard to say this— making it identical with His own, as long as they remain in the Holy Spirit, the Consecrator of their spiritual gifts, the Counselor to make sure that they... in Christ, and the Comforter, that when they suffer for Christ He will be in their midst. It’s so beautiful to think about these things in the life of St. Peter himself. You recall from the Gospel of John, that, following Peter’s denial of Jesus, the Lord brought Peter back to Himself so beautifully. Somewhere, perhaps in The Medicina of Repentance, I read that, for the rest of his life, whenever St. Peter heard the rooster crow in the morning, he cried all over again, but he never stopped trusting that the Lord had called him back. He returned to communion and as the elder leader of the Twelve, also, when they were bringing him in Rome to crucifixion, he insisted on being crucified upside-down, “because I do not deserve to be crucified like My Lord.” So the Spirit of Jesus is all three: He is the consecrator, He is the counselor, and He is the comforter.

Later in St. John’s Gospel, Chapter 20, when they receive the Holy Spirit, He re-creates them, these people. We read in Genesis, “Then God formed man... from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (2:7). In the Gospel of John, Chapter 20, even before they get to the fullness of the Book of Acts, Chapter 2, event, the Pentecost, when they believe they got theidea of the charismata, soon the sacraments become so elemental, unreal, invisible, and without tangibility, palpability, or availability, that they don’t matter. All that matters is what you think about Him. How can that save? How many of you are doctors? Perhaps somebody is a doctor. Well, you’re spiritual physicians. We travel so much in hotels, don’t we, brothers, that we often get those bronchial colds? The whining and wheezing of the furnace or the air conditioner becomes ever-present. I try to forget them. People say, “Put earplugs in.” It doesn’t work. Then you get chest colds, and you have to take azithromycin, which is a great medicine. If you take five of them, you’re good. Sometimes I just go to the doctor. But my analogy is this: The doctor can say to me, “If you take this antibiotic, you’ll be better.” I could say, “Okay,” but if I kept it on the shelf, I wouldn’t get better. I can say, “Christ is our Lord and Savior, and He has saved me,” but if I don’t take that body and blood of Christ, if I am not in the kingdom of God through baptism, if I am not being disciplined by the holy orders, if my marriage has not become sanctified and the two become one flesh, and so forth, that is not really a partaking. That is a thinking of partaking. It’s not the same thing. So this is the guarantee of the apostolic succession, and the only way forward, it seems to me.

I’m going to end with a reflection on the epiphelis. Remember when Jesus said a startling thing in John 16? He said, “You no longer have to ask the Father in my name. Whatever you ask the Father, He will give it to you because you have loved Me and He has loved Me.” What did they ask for? “Send down thy Holy Spirit upon these gifts here spread forth, and make this bread the very body of thy Christ, and that which is in this cup the very blood of thy Christ, changing them by thy Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen.”

As the Prophets beheld, as the Apostles have taught, as the Church has received, as the Teachers have dogmatized, as the universe has agreed, as Grace has shown forth, as Truth has revealed, as falsehood has been dissolved, as Wisdom has presented, as Christ awarded: thus we declare, thus we assert, thus we preach Christ our true God, and honor His saints in word, in writing, in thought, in sacrifices, in churches, in holy icons, on the one hand worshiping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord; and on the other hand honoring His saints as true servants of the same Lord of all, and accordingly offering them veneration.

This is the Faith of the Apostles; this is the Faith of the Fathers; this is the Faith of the Orthodox; this is the Faith which has established the universe!

As the Word has spoken, as the Word was written, as the Word was put into words, as the Word is being spoken, as the Word is being written, the Word is being preached, the Word is being taught, the Word is being followed, the Word is being believed, the Word is being done, the Word is being lived, and thus we declare, thus we assert, thus we preach Christ our true God, and honor His saints in word, in writing, in thought, in sacrifices, in churches, in holy icons, on the one hand worshiping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord; and on the other hand honoring His saints as true servants of the same Lord of all, and accordingly offering them veneration.

All of the talks of the Clergy Symposium are available at Ancientfaith.com. Special thanks is given to Ancient Faith for transcribing and making these talks available.
I had a conversation with someone. It ended very beautifully. One of our young ones was sent by his or her parents to come see me, because he was available, I found myself at the chanter’s stand, and it says something unusual about it—it was trembling. The hand of a priest is an awesome thing. And it’s awesome to be touched by the hand of a priest. I remember the very first time the hand of a priest touched me. I remember making my first confession, as a twenty-five-year-old young man. I remember the first time, when I was done, I thought I was going to die! I did. Neurosis is not even a word sufficient for describing my experience. And, I remember when I was done, the priest putting his g_perms over my head, and then I felt his hand, I can feel it now, for the first time on my head. What a relief! It’s awesome to be touched by the hands of a priest. It’s even more awesome, as a priest, to touch heads, to be able to touch them regularly in the confession, and especially on Great Saturday, to be able to stand at the font as a witness and a participant, a servant of the sacrament of baptism, and to be able to bring people into a union with Jesus’ death and resurrection, to be an agent, to help people attain eternal life. It’s an awesome thing. It’s most awesome, however, to touch the head of Jesus, and that’s what is happening today. John was the humble one, being humbled. This is the man that Jesus said, “Lord I have need to be baptized by You.” Here was the humble one, being humbled. This is the man who lived in the wilderness his whole life. He was so pure he refused even earthly marriage. He lived literally with the angels, but in the presence of Jesus, all he could think about was his need of the forgiveness that Jesus came to bring. “Lord, I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” Jesus said to John something very similar to what He said to Peter before He went to the Passion, when He told Peter that He was going to wash his feet. Peter said, just like John, “No, No!” Jesus said to Peter, “Peter you’ll have part in Me unless you wash your feet.” Jesus said something very similar to John. “It’s necessary. It’s necessary for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus didn’t just humiliate Himself, brothers and sisters, to become one of us. That is part amazing. He also humiliated himself to take on the very condition of a sinner. He presented himself to John, in the condition of a sinner, the sinless One. He went into those waters, for us. When He went under the waters, He foreshadowed His going under the earth, to plunder hell. When He came up out of the waters, He foreshadowed His resurrection and His bestowal of life. As soon as He did it, the heavens broke open! He revealed in a blaze of light His Father, who spoke and said, “This is my Beloved Son,” and the Holy Spirit descended as a dove. The Baptism of Christ opened for us the truth that He had come to save us and to induct us, to invite us into a life of the knowledge of God.

Here is the very essence of the Christian life: To know the Father, and His Son, and the Holy Spirit, to know and love the Holy Trinity. “This is eternal Life,” St. John writes in Chapter 17, quoting Jesus, “this is eternal Life that they might know Thee, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.” Those dragons, as described in the Psalm, that hid in the midst of many sorrows, MIDST OF MANY SORROWS. NORMATIVE WAY WE CHRISTIANS LIVE. WE CARRY THAT JOY CAREFULLY, IN THE GLORY OF THEOPHANY.
the waters, those demons who possessed the waters and the lower parts of the earth, were terrified, when Jesus broke their necks. When He went Himself into the waters, He sanctified them and He turned the waters from “cauldrons of darkness” to “bearers of light,” literal spiritual electricity. The energy of grace was now being carried by water, communicating life—which is what baptism is all about. This is what He did, He came not because He needed the waters, He came because the waters needed Him! And He made them Holy, and He made them capable of giving us life, so that we can be born of water and the Spirit.

John was thrilled. Yes, he was frightened, and his hands trembled, but he also saw the very thing he had been looking for his whole life: he saw the Holy Spirit descend, he saw salvation in the Messiah and he laid aside his baptism. From this moment, he was preparing people for was done. The reality is here. Then he says these beautiful words, “He who has the bride, is the Bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him, rejoices exceedingly, and for this reason, my joy is full!” That’s John the Baptist.

When you think of John the Baptist, do you usually think of joy? Or do you think, rather, of extreme asceticism? Usually we think of extreme asceticism, the man who ate hardly anything. He ate and he laid aside his baptism. From this moment, he was preparing people for the reality is here. Then he says these beautiful words, “He who has the bride, is the Bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him, rejoices exceedingly, and for this reason, my joy is full!” That’s John the Baptist.

When you think of John the Baptist, do you usually think of joy? Or do you think, rather, of extreme asceticism? Usually we think of extreme asceticism, the man who ate hardly anything. He ate, but we think of John the Baptist, we usually think first of his great efforts, of his great devotion, his ascesis, but we should also think of his immense joy; because this is the witness from his own mouth!

Why did he have so much joy? All of his efforts were for one purpose. He wasn’t trying to buy salvation; he wasn’t trying to be ascetical and fast so much that God would owe him something. He did all of those things because, with prophetic foresight, he knew the result would be that he would be near God. He would be able to stand next to his friend, the Bridegroom, and hear His voice. His joy at being near Christ would overflow.

This is what’s behind us, brothers and sisters, and all of our spiritual efforts; this is why we come to church: isn’t it to be near God, to stand near Christ, to hear His voice? When we fast, when we labor, it’s for this reason. It’s to be near Him, so that the result could be that everything He is just splashes over on us. His joy can be our joy. That’s why we do it, and that’s what we miss when we somehow allow the feast of God to be abolished from our lives. We’re just thinking wrongly when we assume that worship is the means of securing joy for the rest of our life!”

Christ is baptized – in the Jordan! Amen.

Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), the official campus ministry of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, opened registration for OCF’s Real Break 2019.

OCF’s Real Break aims to prepare college students to be socially-informed Orthodox Christian citizens of this world, while directing their focus on the world to come – the kingdom of heaven. Built on a foundation of fellowship, education, worship, and service, Real Break provides students the opportunity to understand the true meaning of seeing Christ in the other – traveling to all parts of the world deepening their faith, serving those in need, and cultivating relationships with like-minded peers.

OCF will offer nine Real Break trips in 2019.

Destinations for the Spring Break trips in March include Romania, Albania (OMC), Houston (IOCC), Project Mexico, Jerusalem, Thessaloniki, and Alaska. OCF will also offer two trips in the summer of 2019: one to Mt. Athos (men only) and one to Jerusalem (women only).

Registration costs vary according to the trip and limited scholarships are available for those who qualify.

For more information about Real Break 2019, or to register, visit http://www.ocf.net/real-break-2019/. In addition, please feel free to contact OCF’s National Programs Manager, Donna Levi, for more information: donnal@ocf.net or (617) 850-1227.

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n October 12, 2018, at the request of our father and Metropolitan JOSEPH, deacons and ‘soon-to-be’ deacons from throughout the Pacific Northwest Deanery (as far away as Homer, Alaska, and ‘Twin Falls, Idaho) gathered together for a Training Workshop for Deacons, at Holy Cross Orthodox Church in Yakima, Washington. Our well-qualified instructor was Fr. Michael Habib, our Dean and the Pastor of St. Ignatius of Antioch Orthodox Church, Twin Falls. Fr. Michael, who spent years traveling and serving as a sub-deacon with Sayidna JOSEPH before his ordination to the diaconate and then to the priesthood, provided a very thoughtful and informative program focused largely on rubrics of hierarchical services, along with some other general questions.

Fr. Michael started our day by reading a letter from Sayidna, sending all his blessings, support and love to all of us and our families, and reminding us of what our diaconate means. “It is a holy office, it is a holy diaconia: You have to do your service with fear of God, love, faith, obedience, faithfulness, prayerfulness, honesty, and without preconditions or complaints, but rather with joy. Your ministry is no less than the heavenly Kingdom itself.”

One of the recurring themes of the day was “muscle memory.” Each deacon took turns practicing the movements and duties of the deacons in various parts of the various hierarchical services. We would start with theory and then move to the practical, hands-on movements, developing that muscle memory that we hoped would be recalled during the actual services with our hierarchs. This practical portion was very helpful to all of us. When some of us only see a hierarch once every couple years or so, this kind of workshop is very important.

We finished the day with common questions about general rubrics in the various services of the Church. The conversations and clarifications were extremely helpful for all of us, and we enjoyed some wonderful fellowship with our brothers. At the end of the day we unanimously agreed to make this workshop an annual event, and set our calendar for next year’s date!

Rubrics education is very limited in most of our training, so having a forum to clarify issues and practice the movements of the services not only can be very helpful for the clergy, but help bring consistency in our liturgical life. This was a welcome workshop for all of us, even those who have served numerous hierarchical services. I would encourage deacons throughout the Archdiocese to consider workshops like this for their deacons.
The Importance of Scripture

Fr. Aaron Warwick

Growing up in an evangelical community, I was taught to love Scripture from a young age. When I went to college and took classes about the Bible and learned more about the early Church and converted to Orthodox Christianity, my previous understanding of Scripture was challenged. By the time I went to seminary, I was learning more and more about patristics, canon law, Church history, and the many other topics we evangelicals convert to Orthodoxy discover as part of Orthodox tradition.

Thankfully, in seminary I was reminded of my first love as a Christian—Holy Scripture—by Fr. Paul Nadim Tarazi, now Professor Emeritus at St. Vladimir’s Seminary. Fr. Paul rekindled the love of Scripture in my heart. In addition to learning about the content of Scripture in his classes, we were reminded how our Orthodox liturgical practice revolves around the sacred texts. For example, at the “Little Entrance,” we process with Scripture and “worship” and “fall down before Christ, who is found in the text. As a priest of the Orthodox tradition.

While emphasizing the value and importance of Scripture, Fr. Paul did not treat Scripture as a magical book that fell directly from the heavens. As a scholar, Fr. Paul analyzed every chapter in an attempt to help make sense of the book as a whole. After six decades of this strenuous and holy labor, Fr. Paul has left us with a gift, the culmination of his life’s work, his most recent book, The Rise of Scripture. Out of the many concepts and principles discussed in The Rise of Scripture, I would like to highlight three themes that stand out.

First, in an age where biblical scholars and modern skeptics highlight apparent contradictions or different strains of thought in the biblical text, Fr. Paul shows the coherence within all of Scripture, including between Old and New Testaments. Far from being a hastily organized compilation of disparate stories put together by superstitious ancients, Fr. Paul shows how sacred Scripture flows from a wise, erudite school. He convincingly shows that not one dot, not one iota, appears in Scripture by accident. Every chapter and verse leads us to dismiss our pride and to put our trust in the biblical God.

Compared to most other modern scholars who view the Old Testament as being written and (or) compiled much earlier, Fr. Paul convincingly argues that its production was rather late. In fact, Fr. Paul makes the case that Scripture arises in response to Alexander the Great and his empire’s imperialist way of life. In a sense, the Old Testament is an anti-Homeric epic, contradicting the glorification of man and his triumphs found in Homeric epic. While critiquing the way of the Great and his empire’s imperialist way of life. In a sense, the Old Testament is an anti-Homeric epic, contradicting the glorification of man and his triumphs found in Homeric epic. While critiquing the way of

Nadim Tarazi, now Professor Emeritus at St. Vladimir’s Seminary, Fr. Paul has now shared the culmination of his life of ministry, teaching, and study in The Rise of Scripture. Fr. Paul has now shared the culmination of his life of ministry, teaching, and study in The Rise of Scripture. Fr. Paul has now shared the culmination of his life of ministry, teaching, and study in The Rise of Scripture. Fr. Paul has now shared the culmination of his life of ministry, teaching, and study in The Rise of Scripture.
ORDINATIONS

ANDREWS, Deacon Demetrios (James Peter), to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on January 13, 2019, at St. Columbia Orthodox Church, Lafayette, Colorado. He is attached to that parish.

BECK, Steven, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 16, 2018, at St. Ignatius Church, Twin Falls, Idaho. He is assigned to that parish.

BLIZZARD, Constantine, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL on December 15, 2018, and to the holy priesthood on December 16, 2018, at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas. Father Constantine serves as a chaplain with the U.S. Air Force at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

BRUCE, Benjamin (Beau), to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on January 6, 2019, at Holy Admire Mission, Atlanta, Georgia. He is assigned to that mission.

COLEMAN, Michael, to the holy diaconate by Bishop BASIL on January 6, 2019, at the Church of St. John the Forerunner, Cedar Park, Texas. He is assigned to that parish.

GRESHAM, John, to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on December 9, 2018, at the Church of St. Basil, Hampton, Virginia. He is assigned to that parish.

HENNINGSHEM, Deacon Michael, to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on January 5, 2019, at St. George Cathedral, Worcester, Massachusetts. He is appointed Pastor of St. Stephen Church, Springfield, Massachusetts.

LASSATER, Herman (Phillip), to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN at St. George Cathedral, Worcester Massachusetts on January 5, 2019. He is completing his seminary work at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Boston.

LISTON, Deacon Ambrose, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 9, 2018, at St. Raphael Mission, Thousand Palms, California. He is assigned as Pastor of the St. Paisios Mission Chapel in Yuma, Arizona.

MAHER, Patrick, to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on December 2, 2018, at St. Paul Church, Emmuska, Pennsylvania. He is assigned to that parish.

NASRALLAH, Nicholas, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on November 11, 2018, at St. Ignatius Cathedral, Los Angeles, California. He is assigned to that parish.

ROBINSON, Jesse, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 2, 2018, at St. Ignatius Church, Mesa, Arizona. He is returning to seminary.

ROMERIO, Matthew, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 13, 2018, at Holy Transfiguration Church, Boise, Idaho. He is assigned to that parish.

ELEVATIONS

FENN, Fr. Mark, to the dignity of archpriest by Metropolitan JOSEPH on December 13, 2018, at Holy Transfiguration Church, Boise, Idaho.

DEPARTED

CHAHOUH, Father Ibrahim, of St. Mary Mission in Murrieta, California, on January 13, 2019. He is survived by his wife Jouhyan and son Georgios. Memory Eternal.

KARAM, Deacon John A. St. of Hanover Township on December 1, 2019. Wilkes-Barre, PA. John Karam was born December 2, 1937, in Wilkes-Barre, the son of the late Abraham and Eva Saba Karam. He was a graduate of G.A.R. Memorial High School, Class of 1955, and served in the U.S. Army. He worked in various manufacturing jobs throughout the Wyoming Valley area. As a member of St. Mary’s Antiochian Orthodox Church, Wilkes-Barre he served as deacon for over forty years, and in 1979 he married Donna Boyer. Deacon John was a member of the Foremen and Superintendents Association. As a fourth-degree black belt in karate, too, he was a coach at the Wilkes-Barre YMCA. Deacon John and his wife, the former Judith A. James, celebrated their sixty-first wedding anniversary on October 4, 2018. He was preceded in death by his sisters, Olga Higgins, Dorothy Abda, Adele Macey and Mary Romanasuki; and by his brother, Abe Karam. In addition to his wife, he is survived by his son, John Kar- rum Jr., and his wife, Diana, of Humlock Creek; by his grandchildren, John III, and several nieces and nephews.

SAM, Jean, on January 8, 2019, in Bonita Springs, Florida. Jean was born in Detroit on September 1, 1928, to parents George and Catherine Sam. Jean received her education at Wayne State University up to a post-graduate level, and worked at General Motors in Detroit. A longtime member of St. George, Detroit, Jean sang in the choir, was a member of the Ladies of Orthodoxy, and was a member of the Parish Council, and also chaired the Finance Council. Jean was a tireless supporter of the Department of Charities. In 1990 she was appointed President of the Antiochian Village, before serving as Curator. She conducted workshops and seminars throughout the Archdiocese in many ways, serving as President of our pilgrimage of justice and peace.”

This past summer, in Geneva Switzerland, His Holiness Pope Francis, His All-holiness Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, and church leaders from around the globe gathered to celebrate the founding in 1948 of the World Council of Churches. This unprecedented gathering bore witness to seven decades of work and witness, during which Chris- tian churches entered into a fellowship of churches “which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (WCC Basis). On the occasion of the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to the WCC, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the WCC, observed, “Walking, praying and working together is not only the theme chosen for Pope Francis’ visit to the WCC in June 2018 on the occasion of the Council’s 70th anniversary; this describes and celebrates our long history. It is our promise for the future, our road map for the coming years, and our policy direction in our activities, and it signals the renewal of our common commitment to continue together our pilgrimage of justice and peace.”

His Holiness, in remarks to the WCC during the 70th anniversary gathering, remarked, “If we are here today, it is also thanks to all those who went before us, choosing the path of forgiveness and sparing no effort to re- respond to the Lord’s will ‘that all may be one’ (cf. John 17:21). Out of heartfelt love for Jesus, they did not allow themselves to be mired in disagreements, but instead looked courageous- ly to the future, believing in unity and break- ing down barriers of suspicion and of fear. As an ancient Father in the faith rightly observed: ‘When love has entirely cast out fear, and fear has been transformed into love, then the uni- tivity brought by us our Saviour will be fully real- ized’ (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, ‘Homily XV on the Song of Songs’).” We are heirs to the faith, charity, and hope of all those who, by the non- violent power of the Gospel, found the courage to change the course of history, a history that had led us to mutual distrust and estrangement, and thus contributed to the internal spiral of continual fragmentation. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, who inspires and guides the journey of ecumenism, the direction has changed and a path both old and new has been irreversibly paved: the path of a reconciled communion aimed at the visible manifestation of the fra-ternity that even now unites believers (June 21, 2018, Geneva).

The history of the ecumenical movement is very closely linked with the Orthodox Church, as the first concrete proposal to establish a “hierarchy of churches” was issued through a 1920 encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, calling on all “Churches of Christ” to form such a fellowship. The World Council of Churches today numbers among its 350 member churches (representing more than 550 million people in 120 countries) most of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. To be sure, it is said about the contributions of Orthodox theologians to the work of overcoming misunderstanding and division, and about Orthodox perspectives helping to shape and modify modern issues. The faithful, active and committed participation by Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches in the contemporary ecumenical movement continues to provide a crucial voice and perspective from places where Christians are under stress.

Orthodox ecumenists, including those from the Church of Antioch, have brought to light the reality of Christians living outside the West, including the inter-religious context of indigenous Christians of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, for example. Perhaps the Church of Antioch best demonstrates the witness of the Orthodox Church as not self-contained, but “dispersed like salt,” demonstrating its identity
since 1998, she has been a parishioner of St. Mary, Princeton, New Jersey, a development experienced by displaced Palestinians as the “Nakba”; leaving Israel, a development imposed by force. The Word of God, and the Word was God. But by 1935, there was a problem with the Word. The problem, from the perspective of a small-town priest named Seraphim Nassar, was that the prayers and services of the Orthodox Church were not written down and presented in English. At St. George in Spring Valley, Illinois, where in 1925 he was assigned as the seven-year-old congregation’s first full-time priest, Nassar ministered to his elders of the congregation, many of whom had immigrated to the United States from Lebanon. Arabic was also the language of the most comprehensive service texts available to priests and laypeople. The all-Arabic services presented younger generations, for whom English was their first language, with a significant obstacle to understanding, quite literally, what in God’s name was going on as they sat in the pews every Sunday. Nassar was sharp enough to recognize that the language barrier was present not just at St. George in tiny Spring Valley (population 5,000) but in Orthodox churches across the whole of North America, where services were conducted in the mother tongue of their people – Greek in Greek Orthodox churches, Russian in Russian Orthodox churches, and so forth. The priest shuddered at the thought of native English speakers of the Orthodox Church in North America and South Korea in a powerful symbolic presence together during the anniversary celebration. WCC leadership in Africa supports initiatives for peace and reconciliation by member church leaders among Christians, and through interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

Ecumenical (inter-Christian) organizations, such as the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, and the Global Christian Forum, (and in the United States, the National Council of Churches and Christian Churches Together), to name just a few among many, as well as interfaith organizations such as Religious for Peace, bring into dialogue those who recognize the importance of addressing the disunity of Christendom and humankind, and those who would understand both their modern historical vocation and their ancient calling. Seventy years of engagement by Orthodox theologians and representatives, of continuity with the living tradition of the undivided Church, have demonstrated the possibilities for bringing Orthodox theological and spiritual resources to the elaboration of ecumenical thought and ecumenical encounters. Without doubt, the ecumenical movement has encountered challenges. Some, who misunderstand or do not share Orthodox ecclesiology, would prefer different models or expressions of not-yet-achieved unity, yet throughout history, thoughtful, faithful ecumenists have searched for language that respects and reflects the integrity of the tradition in which he or she is rooted, while being respectful of those from other traditions. This mutual respect could be understood as founded not in a “suspension of all judgment,” but rather in faithful recognition that the grace of the Holy Spirit cannot be confined by the human boundaries established by mankind. Orthodox engaged in consultations and work together with Christians from other traditions are mindful of the possibility that the very presence of Orthodox Christians in those settings may become for the other a door opened into the Orthodox Church, an element of the “liturgy after the Liturgy.”
the copyright as members of a new body with a rather

sisters of the sisterhood of the propagation of divine services and religious teachings in the United States, of which Nasser served as president.

The 3,146-page doortopper of a volume would come to be known colloquially among generations of priests and chanters as “the Nassar Five-Pounder,” or simply “the Five-Pounder.” A book identified by its weight certainly doesn’t scream “page-turner”—but due to its comprehensiveness, the elegance of its translation, as well as Nassar’s promotion of the book and English-language liturgy throughout the U.S. and Canada, the Five-Pounder became standard for Orthodox altars and has been widely acknowledged as the text that, for at least half a century, helped Orthodox Christianity survive and thrive in North America.

Even as the Five-Pounder has fallen out of favor during the past two decades with the release of new service-text translations, the Five-Pounder continues to be an everlastingly source of pride among members of St. George of Spring Valley, a conspicuously modest church on a residential street in a two-story town nestled between the Illinois River and Interstate-80 precisely 100 miles southwest of Chicago. That is where I grew up, where my family continues to attend services, where the Five-Pounder is still everpresent. During my years of service as an altar boy, that brick of a book, bound in midnight-black cloth, was always within reach of the priest. It was ceremonially presented to all Sunday school students upon the occasion of their high school graduation. As a child, before I learned to read, I conflated the Five-Pounder with the Bible; whatever was written on its hundreds of pages seemed utterly fundamental to unlocking some mystery of understanding of the divine.

As St. George celebrates the 100th anniversary of its founding this year, the service book the church produced stands as a kind of monument, an eternal reminder of the immense contributions of the house and build an actual church. The Five-Pounder was an essential tool in their new mother tongue. Nothing much was available on a topic of that volume, that was what people were trying to use. But it isn’t useful. And there isn’t much in it. It’s a much smaller book and had a smaller scope. There was nothing else, absolutely nothing else that had the amount of stuff you needed.

Anysia Zadie Medawar (daughter of Five-Pounder assistant and St. George of Spring Valley chanter Sadie Abraham Zadie): Seraphim Nassar came to St. George in 1925, early in the life of the church. The church building, which was purchased in 1918, was a remodeled house—it wasn’t really a church. And then in 1932, the congregation did what they had to do to demolish the house and build an actual church.

Samos: This was a time when the Antiochian Orthodox Church in North America was in flux. From the end of 1934 until 1936, there was no Antiochian bishop on North American soil. Eventually they got a metropolitan from Lebanon to sort of shepherd them until the churches could come up with a way to nominate candidates for the episcopacy and the Holy Synod of the Church of Antioch would elect them. They elected Metropolitan Bashir as well as Metropolitan Samuel David in 1938. Something tells me that Father Seraphim Nassar went to Metropolitan Antony Bashir and said, “Look, I can do this for you.” Nassar had to be a man of tremendous vision. He saw what was happening. He saw children leaving the church because they didn’t speak their parents’ language or the language that the clergy were using in the church. He knew English is what the children and the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren and all subsequent generations are speaking in this country and what they would be using to evangelize others to bring converts into the faith. Of course, Metropolitan Antony blessed the project and by 1939 he had declared English as the official language of what is now the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

Father Edward: Nassar wanted to do it. It was his vision. He wanted to do it for the young people that didn’t understand Arabic. The young folks didn’t understand literary Arabic anymore. In fact, a good deal of the adults didn’t either, to tell you the truth. There’s a good bit of difference between literary Arabic and colloquial spoken Arabic. If people aren’t educated in literary Arabic, they can’t understand it. It’s just noise to them. Not every parish had an Arabic chanter—and some of those weren’t of very good quality. They didn’t know much Arabic, so they were torturing the Arabic when they were singing it, making it even more incomprehensible.

What would it have meant to church life if there would have been no English text? It would’ve been a disaster. A huge disaster. The services might’ve actually stopped because there wouldn’t have been anybody in a lot of parishes who could have even read, alone sung, the Arabic. Church life would’ve come to a stop.

Thank god for the sake of the Archdiocese that Nassar saw this coming.

Bishop Anthony Michael (Diocese of Téodose and the Midwest): Nassar was a pioneer. I guess the metaphor would be that he established the first textual settlements in America. Kind of like a Lewis and Clark or something like that—who somebody who planted the flag, got everything going, purchased the territory. And then people built on it from there.

Father Edward: What Nassar did was absolutely unique. In the whole Orthodox of America, what he created was absolutely unique and 100 percent

PART 1: PUBLISH OR PERISH

“I, Father Seraphim Nassar, son of George, son of Elias Nassar, Orthodox in doctrine, born in Mar- sin, having long realized the dire need of my Ortho- dox Christian brethren in the lands of their dispersion, and especially of their offspring for whom the English language has become the mother tongue, was moved by religious zeal and Christian love to undertake the translation into English of an unabridged prayer book, unlike the compendiums that are now in use, for these latter do not include such prayers and services as the Great Horologion, the Psalms, the Prophecies, the Epistles, the Gospels, the Octoechos, the Menaion, the Triodion, the Pentecostarion, the service of the Holy Mass, and the Typikon, all of which are necessary for every Orthodox worshipper, especially chanters, lectors, and, of course, Priests.”

—Father Seraphim Nassar, from the preface of Book of Divine Prayers and Services of the Catholic Orthodox Church of Christ

“Since most of the children of our Orthodox Church in these American countries are occupied with their worldly affairs, deserting their Church, and turning away from the worship of their Creator, on the pretext that they are ignorant of the language of their parents Church, religious zeal and Christian love have moved your son the Priest, Seraphim Nassar, most unworthy sinner and captive to iniquity, to translate the services of our Orthodox Church into the English language, for their enlightenment, and to arouse them from the slumber of their inadvertence, and to lead them to worship their Creator.”

—Nassar, from his petition to Antony Bashir, archbishop of New York and all of North America, seeking permission to publish Book of Divine Prayers and Services

Subdeacon Peter Sama (online liturgical guide of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America): The emigration from the Middle East to North America began around the 1970s, 1880s. So by the mid-1930s, there or four generations later, their descendants were speaking English and not even a lick of Arabic. Orthodox Christians in the English-speaking world, especially in the United States and Canada, needed a service book that would help the churches at that time perform the divine services in their new mother tongue. Nothing much was available on a topic of that volume, that was what people were trying to use. But it isn’t useful. And there isn’t much in it. It’s a much smaller book and had a smaller scope. There was nothing else, absolutely nothing else that had the amount of stuff you needed.

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Father Edward: What Nassar did was absolutely unique. In the whole Orthodox of America, what he created was absolutely unique and 100 percent
necessary for everyone. There would’ve been nothing in English, nothing, if we hadn’t had his work. The Spring Valley church – you can almost credit them with the survival of Orthodoxy in this country.

PART 2: DOING THE HEAVY LIFTING

After years of search and investigation I was successful, by God’s help, in finding a capable person to fulfill my long cherished desire to bring this project to completion. This solemn undertaking was begun and finished in the town of Spring Valley, Illinois, in the United States of America, with the efforts and assistance of a group of God-fearing and devoted daughters of religion, who both in virtues and number represent the most essential of Christian graces – faith, hope, and charity. Thus I was enabled to complete this book according to the pattern I had laid down, so that it fulfills all the indispensable requirements of a full service book for use in Orthodox Church.

—Nassar from the preface of Book of Divine Prayers and Services

Medawar: When Father Seraphim came to St. George, the three Abraham sisters were so religious and so was the Abraham family, and he knew that. He picked the sisters to assist with the Five-Pounder because he knew they would put in tons of work for him. He had to choose assistants who knew the Arabic, which the sisters did. I think the whole Abraham family was taught Arabic, because my grandfather, their father, as I recall, only spoke Arabic in the house. They had to speak Arabic in the house. And Nassar had to know people could sing those songs, so he had to translate the text into English with the Byzantine tone in mind. I’ll tell you, the three sisters were very good when they sang, especially my mom [Sadie Abraham]. My mother used to be quite a singer. She had training in that, and she and her sisters felt so strongly that the church needed music and singing. Mom loved to sing and her sisters completely harmonized with her. Mom was the lead and the other two had their parts. I can’t even explain how she felt about it. Very strong feeling. All three of them were very much into whatever the church wanted them to do. So that’s what I think Father Nassar saw when he picked them.

Samoan: Even though women were gaining more rights at that time and more respect, it still wasn’t a lot. But here come three sisters, who Nassar saw modeled after the Christian graces of faith, hope, and charity. They saw to it that their Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters would be helped in this country and in Canada. For three sisters to have that much influence and foresight and grace and perseverance to see this project through is a tremendous testimony to them and to their efforts.

Elizabeth Abraham Fossa (late Five-Pounder assistant and chanter at St. George of Spring Valley): The Five-Pounder really was a lot of responsibility. That really was, but I enjoyed it because the teaching we had received at home through my father and mother about prayers and that the best thing in life is to remember your creator. So that was kind of embedded in us. Love for God was a natural thing.

My father had set up on a table an icon, a candle, a little incense, and he would read the vespers prayers. That was every night. We could play all we wanted to, but when we were commanded to come into the house for prayers we had to. Many, many, many evenings we sat in our family room at home — we called it the sun parlor – my father would take out the book of psalms and he would read that to us, but it was in Arabic. He’d say to us: “Now, remember, there’s no English speaking at this table. You cannot speak English. If you have to discuss something between yourselves in English, you wait until you go outdoors.” The purpose of this was because he wanted us to understand Arabic. If we didn’t know what dad had said, mom would explain it to us. She knew a little bit more English than my dad did. He never did care to learn how to speak better. He got by with a few words, but my mother was much, much better in the English language than he was. So she would explain it to us and we would sit there and listen. If we hadn’t understood Arabic, this whole thing would never have started.

Father Edward: Nassar had the genius, and there he was in Spring Valley, and he used the people around him. Because that was his parish, that was his family, and he could do that. Every priest does stuff like this for the church. They use the parish, they use the facilities of the parish, they use the people in the parish to work for the diocese, to work for the greater church. It’s your contribution to the greater church. And because Father Seraphim was there in Spring Valley and he was doing it, the parish went with it.

The Abraham sisters had secretarial skills. At that time, generally, it was only women who had those skills. So when a priest needed somebody with basic secretarial skills, that was going to be women. And that’s why he had them. They knew how to type. They probably could take shorthand notes too.

Medawar: Elizabeth was the one I am sure, I am positive, did most of the typing. I’m pretty sure she was instrumental in that. The other two sisters were also instrumental, but not as much as Elizabeth. She had typing skills. Aunt Elizabeth was very smart. She was extremely smart and could catch things right away from Arabic to English. The other sisters, I think, were more focused on the music.

Father Edward: Nassar also hired Habib Katibah, a graduate from Harvard’s school of theology, to spend several summers with him out in Spring Valley and make the English right. It’s a shame that Nassar didn’t write down Katibah’s name in the book. That would have been the right sort of thing to do. He worked with Nassar for, like, four or five summers. He went out to Spring Valley, lived there. He might’ve stayed with the priest or one of the parishioners at the time, and Nassar paid him for the work.

Medawar: Katibah was very learned. Aunt Elizabeth said that he was very instrumental in helping them and helping Nassar with the translation. He stayed in Spring Valley a long time.

Father Edward: Saint Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn, when he was in this country, put together a service book in Arabic called The Book of True Consolation in the Divine Prayers. It was published in 1898 in New York City. That was edited down to make it a little bit smaller. And it was that second version that Father Seraphim Nassar chose to translate into English.

Samore: Greek is predominantly the original language of all of our services, all of our hymnography in the Orthodox Church. I don’t think Father Seraphim spoke much Greek, if at all. So he translated from Saint Raphael’s Arabic translation of the original Greek.

Father Edward: A translation of the Five-Pounder’s length is a huge deal. And for each one of the people involved, it was a huge deal.

Samore: It was a huge undertaking. People think it’s just translating from one language to another, simple phrases, get the gist of it. Good translators know better than that. There’s an expression we all know of: “lost in translation.” There’s such tremendous meaning in the words that we use, especially in Orthodox Christian hymnography. You have phrases that refer to scripture. You have phrases that refer to lives of the saints. You have the very doctrine of the Orthodox Church that’s told through our hymnography. One mistake, one misstep could render a whole translation either unreadable or even heretical. That’s important to get it right – to get the context right, to get the meaning right. The depth of the hymnography that expresses theology, doctrine, dogma, lives of saints, events in church history – it is so important to get right that when we don’t, we get confused.

Another thing is they had to get the syntax correct. Sentence structure has to make sense. What we might say in Greek or Arabic may not come out the
same way in English. And in Greek and Arabic, the adjectives go after the noun. In English it's the other way around. So they had to make sure the conventions of each language were honored so that it was faithful to the original meaning and to the meaning as it comes across in the new language so that the people speaking that new language, English in this case, didn't miss a thing.

Foras: It was difficult to put it to, to say it in English because the words in Arabic sometimes – it takes one word in Arabic to maybe three words in the English.

Father Edward: For Nasar, whose English was a learned second language, this is a huge undertaking. Huge. He clearly was a gifted, gifted man. I've corrected stuff typed up what Katibah had written out, so that it

He said, “Well, is this all correct?” Certain phrases from the Bible, certain chapters from the Bible, certain verses from the Bible. He’d ask me, “Do you think this version sounds better or the other version sounds better?” Then I would tell him what I thought.

Father Edward: I don't know exactly how long it took to do the translation. I know it was years. It just shows how big of a project it was. It was a huge job, an enormously huge job.

Medawar: I think it took them at least three years to produce the Five-Pounder. The least would be three years. In 1935, my father was married, and I know they were working on the book. And then I was born in 1938, the year the book was published.

Foras: The publisher, Blackhawk Press, was in New York. That was set up by Mr. Katibah for Father Nasar like a year in advance. So when all of the work was completed, we started sending completed translations for Blackhawk Press to print.

The distribution, a lot of it, was mailed from Blackhawk Press through the authority of Father Nasar. He gave them names and addresses and Blackhawk sent them direct. But most of the books were sent to Spring Valley. My father had a little sewing factory behind Father's house. When those books were first shipped, we put them in the factory building. So from then on, the Five-Pounder was quite established and we shipped books to every point in this country: Alaska, Europe, and abroad.

Foras: This was years and the Sisterhood of the Propagation of Divine Services and Religious Teachings in the United States was my mother and my aunts. Nasar gave them the copyright to the book, kind of handed it over. The book was theirs. It belonged to them. Nobody could infringe on that.

Father Edward: Ladies guilds did all sorts of amazing things to raise money to support their parishes. If it hadn't been for them, the parishes wouldn't have survived. And I really don't doubt that this society mentioned in the books, the Sisters of the Sisterhood of the Propagation of Divine Services and Religious Teachings in the United States, really was propagating the church in Spring Valley.

PART 3: WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

“Finally, I trust that this work of mine may receive the commendation and call forth the satisfaction of my superiors and the rest of my revered brethren the Priests. I pray that they meet my weaknesses with their gentleness, that they correct my errors with their gentle reprovals, pointing out my mistakes; and that they cover my shortcomings with their gracious indulgence; and that they encourage me with their prayers.”

Father Edward: When I was younger the only English book in the houses of many Greek parishioners was a Five-Pounder. Nobody had anything in English except the Five-Pounder in this country until, oh my gosh, the 1990s.

Father Nicholas: It was very much used in all of our churches, from the time when it was published all the way until, I'd say, the late 1990s. When I was ordained a priest 41 years ago, the first gift was a Five-Pounder. It was a book everybody should have. It was a very important document. Every church you go to, there's a Five-Pounder somewhere. I think I have three or four of them in my church.

Samore: I like to say the Five-Pounder got us through the 20th century and into the 21st century, because of all the content that it has. Imagine, you know, going to church on a Sunday and we can only have liturgy because we don't have English materials of the Orthodox Church in this time. A lot of people can't envision that nowadays because we have all the English materials for these services. Nasar even added an appendix at the end of the book explaining the terms and beliefs of the Orthodox Church – an explanation of vespers and even an explanation of making the sign of the Cross.

Father Edward: The biggest mistakes ever found in the Five-Pounder were typesetting mistakes. There's only, like, four of them in the book. A couple lines are missing or a couple words left out – because the typesetter, when he typeset it, left them out, and nobody caught it when they proofed it. The rest of the thing is perfect. Just perfect. Marvelous in so many ways. And some of the stuff in there has never been matched. One of those is the Prayer of the Sixth Hour written by Saint Basil. I think the English version in Nasar is the absolute best of anything I've ever seen anywhere for capturing the real sense of it. Not just the exact
because he’s a saint after all. I’ve always felt that for us
I think that Saint Raphael, even if he changes the
the Lord.” That’s directly out of Psalms. Stuff like that.
praise, bless, and worship the Lord.” The actual accu-
new tree on which Christ was stretched defeated the
Cross, supersedes that and defeats the Devil. So the
Garden of Eden. So now the new tree, the tree of the

In the Arabic, his accuracy from the Arabic is spectacular.
and therefore Nassar’s got it. He’s absolutely got it. It’s perfect.
and nothing can match it anywhere.

And as a result, over the decades, as the Antiochian Archdiocese relied
on this book, they developed practices that were incomplete.

Since I use this book on a regular basis to com-
ple my services, I make notes of everything I correct.
Here’s a typo I just found: There’s a hymn on page 414
of the book. It reads “plead thou with Christ God to
have our souls.” It should read “to save our souls.” Dif-
f erent meaning. “Save” and “have” are totally different
words, but that one typo set things off. If we go to
page 301, it says, “O thou thrice-blessed tree,” refer-
ing to the tree of the Cross, “whereon the Lord Christ
the King was str
ring to the tree of the Cross, “whereon the Lord Christ
etched, and through which he who
was begeyled by the tree fell, having been begeyled by
thee, by the God that was nailed upon thee in the flesh,
who granteth safety to our souls.” This could easily be
misinterread because, again, the syntax is confusing here.
If you read it as is, it’s saying basically that the Devil
didn’t fall, Christ did. So the Department of Litur-
ics and the Department of Sacred Music for the Archdi-
ceo had to get together and figure out how to make
sense of this. So now we had to do a translation “and through which he who begeyled by the tree fell.”

The Devil tricked Adam and Eve with the tree in the
Garden of Eden. So now the new tree, the tree of the
Cross, superseded that and defeats the Devil. So the
new tree on which Christ was stretched defeated the
old tree in the Garden of Eden. So we have to make
that work out.

If you go down lower on that page, it says, “Let us
praise, bless, and worship the Lord.” The actual accu-
rate translation is, “We praise, we bless, and we worship
the Lord.” That’s directly out of Psalms. Stuff like that.

Father Edward: I like Nassar very much, because
I think that Saint Raphael, even if he changes the
word order, he captures a better lot of times the in-
ternal meaning of the Greek than other translations
that go directly from the Greek do. And maybe that’s
genius on his part and maybe it’s divine inspiration,
because he’s a saint after all. I’ve always felt that for us
in this diocese, his Arabic version should always have
precedent over everything else. And so Nassar’s trans-
lation of his Arabic, I think, should be the standard.
But that’s my opinion. And that was the opinion of
Metropolitan Philip. That’s not the opinion of the cur-
rent administration. And therefore, the current depart-
ment feels that the Greek should be the standard and
that we should be using translations that come directly
from the Greek and follow the Greek word order and
all the rest of that. And that’s why we see the changes
we’re seeing right now. They don’t sense that there’s
anything special about Saint Raphael’s work, and therefore
Nassar’s work. And I think that’s sad.

Samore: Other translations—dare I say, more accu-
rate translations—have come out from other sources,
meaning outside the Antiochian Archdiocese. For ex-
ample, Holy Transfiguration Monastery did translate
all 12 volumes of the Menaion, and that took them
20 years. Twenty years from Greek to English, comb-
ing over it meticulously. They were also translating not
only from Greek to English but to make sure that the
English translation matched the original Greek mater
for many of the hymns. Something Father Seraphim
and the sisters couldn’t do was match the meter. Holy
Transfiguration Monastery came out with other, more
accurate translations that are more faithful to the
meter, and the Archdiocese had to incorporate those
into the liturgical text, the service text that we produce
on the Archdiocese website at antiochian.org/liturgic-
day, for the benefit of the choir. Other translations
have succeeded Father Seraphim’s work. And we have
to use those. Now they are dual accurate built upon
when they fit the meter. But whenever we can, we stick
to what Father Seraphim and the Antiochian Arch-
diocese produced.

Father Edward: Right now we’re in the midst of
this big recovery of the Greek-style music, not just
here but in the old country too. It’s a big movement.
The need for translations that are metered is more
important than the need for translations that are ac-
curate. And there’s no doubt that the
accurate translations are, “We praise, we bless, and we worship
the Lord.” That’s directly out of Psalms. Stuff like that.

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that go directly from the Greek do. And maybe that’s
genius on his part and maybe it’s divine inspiration,
because he’s a saint after all. I’ve always felt that for us
get texts from the Internet.

Father Edward: In 1939, a year after the publica-
tion of the Five-Pounder, Archbishop Antony declared
that the priests had to serve 100 percent in English.
No matter what the choir or chancers answered— he
couldn’t control them, but he did control the priests.
He said he wanted the priests serving 100 percent
in English, so that the young folks could follow. All those
twentysomethings were getting married and having
children. Literary Arabic to them was just noise in the
air. The Bishop wanted them to be able to understand
the service, so they wouldn’t all become Protestants.
That was a huge possibility at the time. It was a whole
rush to Americanize the way we did things here. The
switch to English was a big part of it.

Samore: The Five-Pounder really gave us
tremendous help. It set the foundation and the start
of English-language materials for Orthodox Chris-
tians on this continent. It’s a classic, a landmark in the
Antiochian Archdiocese even 80 years after it came
out. Everyone talks about it still: “What does the
Nassar say?”

Father Seraphim’s work was not only important to
North America but was also groundbreaking for our
churches in the Archdioceses of Great Britain and
Ireland, and also in Australia, New Zealand, and the
Philippines. It’s due to the work of Father Seraphim
and the Abraham sisters that we have something that
we can share. We have something that we can give
to people so that they can worship God in trinity
properly. That’s what this comes down to. It’s all about
worship. It’s all about knowing who God is, wor-
shing Him, adoring Him, in triunity, properly.

Jake McTigue
The 2019 Eastern Diocese Parish Life Conference
June 26–30, 2019
at the Antiochian Village
Host Parish: St. John Chrysostom Church
York, Pennsylvania

– Details to follow –
Judges’ Choice, the Oratorical Festival
from the Diocese of Worcester and New England

They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42). In writing this, Saint Luke, the author of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, gives us one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. As an Orthodox Christian teen, I feel the need to uphold this standard as it is fully realized in the creed. In the United States today, we can see cultural and spiritual differences between our own society and Saint Luke’s doctrine in Acts 2:42. In many cases, the culture in which young people are formed is contradictory to our faith. We are told that bad things are good, and that the kind of life we want is the top priority, instead of what is right.

As I see it, society today is adversarial to Orthodoxy. We have a moral problem in this country! As young Orthodox people, we are called to resolve these problems, or at least not to adopt the views and behavior that lead to them. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

We continue steadfastly in Saint Luke’s doctrine, why? In order to uphold this standard as it is fully realized in the creed. Fellowship with Orthodox Christians is imperative in creating a spiritual environment and a medium in which the faith is reinforced. Fellowship is the community of Orthodox Christians.

The third pillar of our method is prayer. In the Gospel According to Saint Mark, the disciples were unable to cast out an unclean spirit from a person. Jesus told them that they were not able to do so because “this kind can come out only by prayer...” (Mark 9:29). As Jesus proclaimed in Saint Mark’s Gospel, prayer is a powerful thing. Through prayer, a boy was healed that day, and it is through prayer that our souls are healed. We can pray in a time of crisis, in a time of thankfulness, in a time of sickness, and in the face of any circumstances. It is always important to pray to God. The power of prayer should never be doubted! It produces miracles every day. Saint Dimitri of Rostov gives a fantastic definition of prayer. He says, “Prayer is turning the mind and thoughts toward God. To pray means to stand before God with the mind, mentally to gaze unceasingly at Him, and to converse with Him in reverent fear and hope.” Saint Dimitri explains to us that prayer is a clear communication with God as we give Him our unwavering attention.

To follow the Apostles’ doctrine we need the breaking of bread, fellowship, and prayers. Fortunately for teens, we have many opportunities for all three. The pillars of Teen SOYO embody them: worship, which includes breaking of the bread; witness; fellowship; and service. In SOYO, we bring people together who have the same Orthodox faith and we act in accordance with these pillars. We can solve this society’s moral issues by supporting SOYO and enlarging it in our communities. If we can create a strong SOYO for these thirteen and up to college-age, it will lead the teens, who are an enjoying their time together, to these moral principles. Through their behavior, the truth of these principles will emanate into society and the world.

Ladies and gentleman, I firmly believe that it is as difficult to be a Christian in society today as it was at the time of the Apostles. Today, Orthodox Christian values are under attack as they were back then. For example, the sacrament of marriage between a man and a woman is disregarded and violated. If we stand up for our beliefs, we are ridiculed, made out to be anti-progress, made out to be anti-society, and in some cases silenced. Today, some people are becoming afraid to believe in what the Apostles proclaimed. We need to continue to stand up for our beliefs, regardless of the results or consequences, and despite the fact that they are unpopular.

This is modern-day martyrdom! The faith doesn’t physically die for the faith in this country. Instead, we are given a kind of death through public scorn. Today Orthodox teens are outcasts in school and society if they don’t indulge in sinful acts. For a teenager who is insecure and just wants to be liked, it is very hard to persevere through it. It is even difficult to bless oneself before eating without feeling watched, or called a “weirdo.” It is tough to persevere through it. As an Orthodox teen, I feel the need to uphold this standard as it is fully realized in the creed.

In conclusion, Antiochian Village camp shows us teens how to make the right decision, not the easiest. Teen SOYO, working in accordance with the three pillars of Apostle Luke, gives us a way.

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OCCIF
A NEW WAY TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

As Orthodox Christians, we have been called upon to give as part of our daily lives. Tithing our time, talent, and other resources remains central to who we are. When plans are made to build our temples and social halls, we draw together to meet the need, as we have always done. Yet today we have new challenges. The budgets for building or remodeling our places of worship are much higher because of increased regulations governing their construction, and the cost of land. With no sign of these challenges changing, the question is, Can we find a rational, sustainable way to continue the growth of our Holy Churches?

The Orthodox Church Capital Improvement Fund (OCCIF) and its new Investment Certificate Program (ICP) were specifically designed to address this question by providing a way to make development funds more accessible to our Church. One big difference between OCCIF and secular lenders is that now the financial resources are coming from Orthodox Christians for the use of Orthodox Christians. Since its inception five years ago, OCCIF’s operation has helped the Church in many ways. For example, a loan from OCCIF to St. Raphael of Brooklyn in Thousand Palms, California, helped secure a permanent temple in months, instead of the years that it would take using conventional methods. By refinancing the existing mortgage of St. Herman of Alaska in Wasilla, Alaska, OCCIF provided terms to pay off their new mortgage at a much faster rate, significantly moving up their plans for needed expansion. Our growing portfolio contains similar success stories for other missions, established parishes, monasteries – and jurisdictions – of our Holy Church across the country.

As a pan-Orthodox ministry, OCCIF now offers a way for you to invest directly in the growth of our Church. In the secular context of lending, the repayment of a parish’s loan and interest makes a profit for the lender and its stockholders. With OCCIF, those same interest dollars are now returned to the OCCIF loan pool, letting us be of greater service to our own institutions.

Every Orthodox Christian can now invest directly in OCCIF through our new ICP expansion. The ICP was specifically designed to increase the amount of money we can lend. For this opportunity, OCCIF will repay each certificate holder a competitive interest rate over a fixed term. To make this investment opportunity available to as many Orthodox Christians as possible, we have made the minimum you can invest $1,000. Please visit us at www.occif.org, where you will find all the information you need.

You can help change the way we build our churches. We look forward to helping your community realize its plans for growth in the future, and to welcoming you as a participant in this new endeavor. Our strength to serve our Holy Church comes from the whole Body of Christ!
Every Antiochian Orthodox Church has a story...

The history of Who You Are, Where You Came From, What You’re Doing, Where You’re Going

We invite you to share your story as we celebrate together in Grand Rapids July 21–28. Remember those who came before you and think of those who will follow you.

Go to AC2019GR.ORG/FORMS and RESERVE YOUR PLACE IN THE CONVENTION SOUVENIR JOURNAL TODAY!

Don’t forget to register for the convention, buy your event tickets, and book your hotel rooms!