THE MIRACULOUS LADY
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There is a popular situation comedy which examines the complexities and humor of modern relationships in a group of young adults, called The Big Bang Theory. The show raises the question, “How did we all get to where we are today?” It’s theme song reviews the history of the world to its beginnings in a “big bang.” Although brilliant in its purpose and humor, the show’s premise fails to go back far enough. St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans succeeds, however. He opens his Letter to the Romans, the children of the Church far away from Jerusalem and Antioch, with a description of our current predicament, which began not in a “big bang,” but in the love of God the Father for His only begotten Son, the love of the Son for the Father and God’s Spirit, and the love of the Spirit for the Father and the Son.

Out of this love comes the sharing and multiplication of love in the creation of mankind and the world. All creation, by its very created nature, should worship its Creator. Of course, it is not as though God needs man to worship Him, but man, like any creature, needs to worship. He or she needs to be in a right relationship with the Creator. To understand our primordial situation, we begin with God and His love. To understand this concept better, I quote Fr. Thomas Hopko’s third talk on worship, found on Ancient Faith Radio’s website.

To understand how this concept applies to us, Antiochian and Orthodox in America, I call your attention to a gem of our modern times: Apostle to the Plains: Fr. Nikola Yanney. In this impossible-to-put-down book produced by the Saint Raphael Clergy Brotherhood (and available from the Antiochian...
Village bookstore, as well as Ancient Faith and most book-sellers), we read our story of how Antiochians left the lands of persecution by the Ottomans, and wound up in Nebraska and all over North and South America. Here we have a true narrative of Antiochian and American history. This book is an account of real Christians of modern times, struggling with the elements, personal tragedy; and the building of an Archdiocese and Orthodoxy on this continent. This book offers us not only a perspective on modern life, but a sensitive and concrete example of the theology of Saint Paul as expressed in Romans 1. Fr. Yanney followed God in faith from Lebanon to America, seeking the American dream of freedom, and, through losses, trials and hard work, he discovered God’s tangible love. Building churches as a priest, he discovered God in the lives and pains of God’s people, not in Rome or Damascus, but in the American relocation of many Antiochians.”

It is said that to understand who you are, you need to understand where you come from. *Apostle to the Plains: Fr. Nikola Yanney* is a story of where we Antiochians in America came from, and is a must-read. We came not from a “big bang,” but ultimately from the love of the Holy Trinity. This love compels us to seek the Kingdom of God and praise the life-giving Holy Trinity.
THE CRISIS: WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY UP AGAINST?

Our teenagers are grappling with questions and situations, that for the most part, they are not effec-
tively equipped to address. Every day, many of their Orthodox Christian values related to person,
identity, gender, and relationships are being ques-
tioned, mocked and marginalized. We live in a so-
 ciety overly saturated with sex, where intimacy has
been distorted and marriage has been redefined.
There is a growing disconnect between what society
allows and encourages, and what the Church
 teaches as truth.

We need only to glance at any one of the mental
health statistics available to see the impact this has
on our youth. The statistics are overwhelming.

SUICIDE

Numbers from The National Institute of Mental
Health (NIMH) tell us that by the time you finish
reading this article, eight people from around
the world will have successfully taken their own lives.
According to the Centers for Disease Control, sui-
cide is the tenth leading cause of death for all ages in
the world will have successfully taken their own lives.
Globally, suicide is the second leading cause of death
for young people 15–24 years old.

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

The statistics on other mental health struggles continue to be staggering as well. According to the
NIMH, 32 percent of teenagers, ages 13–18, have an anxiety disorder.

The World Health Organization reports that nearly 800,000 people die by suicide in the
world each year. That’s roughly one death every 40 seconds. Globally, suicide is the second leading
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OUR TEENAGERS ARE GRAPPLING WITH QUERIES AND SITUATIONS, THAT FOR THE MOST PART, THEY ARE NOT EFFECTIVELY EQUIPPED TO ADDRESS.
Confessing Your Financial Sins

Fr. Michael Tracca

IN GOD WE TRUST

here are many wonderful books and articles on the subject of confession. However, there are almost none that deal specifically with the connection between confession and our own financial sins. There is a wonderful Jewish saying that goes, “The longest path to the one that leads from the heart to the pocket.” According to several recent money magazines, the average American household has an outstanding credit card balance of over $8,000, a rising level of overall debt, an average retirement account balance that is woefully short of their needs for retirement, and little to nothing saved for their children’s education. While it would be nice to think that these statistics do not apply to Orthodox Christians, I have yet to find any proof that Orthodox Christians are statistically different from the rest of the population in this regard.

What is going on? The answer very simply is sin. Most of us would like to do a better job with our finances. We don’t deliberately go out and rack up thousands of dollars of credit card debt overnight, or find ourselves with car payments and incredibly high mortgages. Sometimes circumstances arise in our lives that force us into our particular choices. Nonetheless, we still have a responsibility to God to be good caretakers of His gifts, and not to squander them foolishly or selfishly.

God places great importance on stewardship not only of our time, but also of our material possessions. If we have fallen short of God’s intention, the simplest and most sincere place to begin is with confession. One of the greatest treasures of the Church is the ability to confess our sins, because by releasing our sins to God we can be lifted up and reinvigorated with life. The Sacrament of Confession makes all this possible. 

FAITH, LOVE, AND MONEY

There are three things in this world that most people cherish: their personal faith, the people they love, and money. It would seem that, as a matter of course, most Orthodox Christians would confess something regarding each of these important areas of their lives. It is my experience, however, that only two of the three are usually discussed. The issue of money, which is often the most troubling and the most painful, is sadly omitted. It is one thing to confess frustration or anger with a spouse or loved one, or to describe moments of doubt about God’s love, but to tell God and another human being that you ran up a really large credit card bill, or that you lost a significant portion of your savings in the stock market – now that is really painful!

Many books on confession emphasize making general remarks about your sins. While this is good to a point, we should also be honest about the fact that the spiritual father who is hearing your confession can’t really help you if you do not provide any specific details.

In his book The Inner Kingdom, His Grace Bishop Kallistos Ware refers to a very important passage in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers: “If unclean thoughts trouble you, do not hide them, but tell them at once to your spiritual father and condemn them. The more we conceal our thoughts, the more they multiply and gain strength. . . . [But] once an evil thought is revealed, it is immediately dissipated. . . . Whoever discloses his thoughts is quickly healed.”

Clearly, most priests are not marriage counselors, financial advisors, or medical doctors. They are, however, spiritual counselors, and a confession is honest, complete, and genuine can truly begin to bring about proper healing. It is to God to whom we are confessing, and it is the priest who stands as a witness to the confession.

GROWING UP FINANCIALLY

If we are honest with ourselves and with God, it is safe to say that most of us have never had much training in managing personal finances. We start out as children with the notion of saving and putting money into some sort of piggy bank. We gradually move up to our own checking account, a credit card, a car payment, and finally to a mortgage. As most of us know, there is a huge difference between the days of stuffing change into a piggy bank and making the monthly mortgage payment. All of us grow up receiving instruction in everything under the sun, from driving a car, to getting a job, to cleaning our homes. Sadly though, we receive almost no instruction in how to manage money. Is it no wonder that one of the greatest sources of marital strife is money? Even if we have been taught something about money, we must examine what, exactly, we were taught. Were we taught to balance a checkbook, or were we taught “Money is a blessing that should be shared”? For many people there is almost no connection between their financial lives and their spiritual lives.

IS MONEY INHERENTLY BAD OR EVIL?

Money is not inherently bad or evil. It is simply a product of what we do with our labors. It is not a measure of our worth in the eyes of God, despite what many people may think. I personally think of money as an instrument that can be used for good or bad. We can also think of money as a kind of life substance, much like air, food, or water. It permeates almost everything we do. We need money in order to take care of ourselves, our families, and our community. And much like the way we use these other elements, how we use our money reveals who we are and what we believe.

A priest I know once told me of a visit he took to one of the monasteries on Mount Athos. He went there and asked the abbot to hear his confession. The abbot immediately rebuked him, saying that this man could not be a good priest because he was quite overweight. You can imagine how shocked the priest was to hear these words. He realized, however, that in this particular case the abbot was correct. My friend had to admit that he was a gluttonous person. I am pleased to say that the priest has lost considerable weight and now enjoys a healthy relationship with the abbot. The point is that change would never have occurred without the trust and honesty revealed in confession. Confession reveals to us where we are failing to act in accordance with God’s will.

In fourth-century Egypt, there was a monastic theologian named Evagrius Ponticus. He described the beginning point of sin as logismos, or intellectual activity. It is not so much an intellectual debate, but rather a secret thought that has the power to stir the mind, a kind of secret dialogue. This thought has the ability to move someone to a secret decision against God’s laws. Evagrius goes on to explain that “demons fight rather by means of present things.” By present things he means ogogogma, or objects, contact with these objects gives rise to passions. In our modern world, there is probably no greater example of what Evagrius is speaking about than a credit card, because it symbolizes and makes available all the things that it can buy. Think for just a moment whether or not Evagrius’ argument makes some sense. Almost everyone uses money in concert with their feelings to some extent. When people are happy, they tend to buy...
and others so begrudgingly? The answer, quite simply, is a fundamental principle that is sadly being lost. We would have nothing, our wealth is truly His. As Deuteronomy 8:18 says: “You shall remember the Lord your God, for He bestows it upon us. As Deuteronomy 8:18

unhealthy ways. We tend to view wealthy individuals as more powerful, more intelligent, or more successful. These distorted perspectives subconsciouslly move us away from seeing money as a gift from God and us as the caretakers of this treasured gift. Money then becomes not so much a by-product of our labors as a kind of end in itself. It provides momentary elation and satisfaction, but it often also results in more hidden.

There is no magic pill one can take to eliminate debt. It requires a determined will and the belief that there is a better way. Much like St. Mary Magdalene, who after her conversion spent the next forty years in the Sinai desert, if we have made a mess of our finances, it may take a long time to recover. This is why it is imperative that we discuss the subject of money openly and frankly with our family and our children. One of the greatest tools of the evil one is secrecy. We should be no more afraid to discuss money in our households than we should be to discuss Jesus Christ.

As you can see, all of these questions involve “I,” because the process of salvation begins with each of us as individuals. If we are not responsible, then how can we expect those around us to be?

LIFE IN CHRIST

If we are to walk in the Spirit, we must live a life that is pleasing to God in all its facets. Our personal finances are no exception. They are an integral part of who we are; they help define and shape our lives. We should not lose sight of the fact that we have been called to live in the world and to be witnesses of Christ’s glory on earth. In our daily struggles, we must endeavor to be good caretakers of all the bounties given to us, to be responsible children of God, and to pass on to each succeeding generation the importance of good stewardship.

And when we have fallen short of God’s glory, we need to partake of the healing that is afforded in confession. Nicholas Gamvas, in his book The Psychology of Confession and the Orthodox Church, makes a wonderful point about confession. He says: “The receiving of forgiveness and absolution are aspects of confession that have no clear counterpart in psychotherapy. The Christian who feels truly forgiven and cleansed before God is also free of guilt about his/her own shortcomings.”

Much like a surgeon who has to cut away part of our skin to get to a particular organ in our body, we must be willing to peel away the layers of hurt, fear, and anger, in order to begin to heal. Our Lord loves us infinitely more than we can love ourselves. He alone can forgive us when we can’t forgive ourselves. I encourage you to take the Sacrament of Confession seriously as the starting point of true healing.

I’M SORRY FOR MY SINS

Now What? There are tremendous dangers associated with money. If the average person has a credit card balance of $8,000, it may take over five years to pay it off, making slightly more than the minimum payments. We are inundated with countless offers to spend more and to borrow more. In fact, it is actually getting more and more difficult to pay for things with cash. As we move ever closer to a cashless society, the sins of overspending become ever more hidden.

The fact is that we really don’t make the money: God bestows it upon us. As Deuteronomy 8:18 says: “You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant.” We would have nothing without God, and our wealth is truly His. This is a fundamental principle that is sadly being lost.

Why do some give of their wealth so effortlessly, and others so begrudgingly? The answer, quite simply, is often fear. There is a kind of silent fear in many people’s hearts that God will not provide for them or that they somehow have to take all financial matters into their own hands. It’s okay to talk about God, but not when it concerns their personal bank accounts. While this couldn’t be further from the truth, it is definitely a widely held fear. As with any fear tied to a misundestanding about God, this can and should be overcome through open and honest confession.

CONFESSING YOUR FINANCIAL SINS

If I MADE IT, WHY CAN’T I SPEND IT?

We are raised in America to view wealth in very unhealthy ways. We tend to view wealthy individuals as more powerful, more intelligent, or more successful. These distorted perspectives unconsciously move us away from seeing money as a gift from God and us as the caretakers of this treasured gift. Money then becomes not so much a by-product of our labors as a kind of end in itself. It provides momentary elation and satisfaction, but it often also results in even greater pain and suffering for both parties.

The Word11

Fr. Michael is also a certified public accountant.
to discern what we might agree with, and what we might disagree with, we need a guide, and not someone who simply shuts our questions down. We learn true discernment. This discernment allows us to reconcile our beliefs with the beliefs of the community. We become disciples; we subscribe to the beliefs of this community, and we put ourselves under God, living out the call expressed to us in baptism. In the end of the Gospel of St. Matthew, Christ commissions His disciples, sending them out into the world to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” We hear this at the baptismal service, and it’s easy to think things end there. Christ, however, goes on to tell us that the disciples are to teach the new disciples to observe everything that He commanded. As disciples, we are bound by those commandments—and to be clear, they are commandments, not suggestions.

So what does that have to do with the Divine Liturgy? In the Divine Liturgy, we are taught the high calling of our discipleship: to offer ourselves as Christ offered Himself. Following the Creed, we pray the prayers of the Anaphora. The word describes the silent prayers that the priest reads before we ask the Holy Spirit to descend on the gifts and change them into the Body and Blood of Christ. There are two authors of these prayers, St. John Chrysostom and Basil the Great. The Liturgy of St. John is celebrated most often, with the Liturgy of St. Basil being celebrated during Great Lent and a few other times throughout the year. Through these prayers, both saints teach us about the self-offering character of Christ, and recount the story, culminating in His crucifixion.

This is perhaps most notable in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. The priest exclamations: “Sing the triumphal hymn, shouting, proclaiming, and saying,” with the choir finishing the sentence with words by now familiar, from Isaiah: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of Thy glory; Hosanna in the highest.” The silent prayer goes on: “With these blessed powers (the angels) we also, O Master who lovest mankind, cry aloud and say: Holy art Thou and all-holy, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit; holy art Thou and all-holy, and magnificent is Thy glory, who hast so loved Thy world as to give Thine only-begotten Son, that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life, who, when He had come and had fulfilled all the dispensation for us, in the night in which He was betrayed or, rather, gave Himself up for the life of the world…” This prayer points directly to Christ’s self-offering, showing us how to offer ourselves. Anaphora is Greek for “bearing up.” The anaphoras answer the immediate question: What are we bearing up? At the high point of the anaphora, the priest or deacon raises the diskos and the chalice and the priest says, “Thine own of Thine own, we offer unto Thee, in behalf of all and for all.” As I wrote for the article in the September issue, this powerful moment reminds us that the gifts are offered on behalf of all and for all; for the entirety of the world on behalf of the entirety of the world. At the same time, we admit that this is not the best translation of this phrase—rather, it could be, “Yours from what is Yours, we offer to You, in everything and through everything,” reminding us that we serve God by offering ourselves to Him in everything we do. Another way to say this, as Bishop JOHN of the Diocese of Worcester states regularly, would be, “We are called to bring God to the world, and to bring the world to God.” We begin the process of bringing God to the world when we offer ourselves to others.

Conversely, others might be called to find God. Just as the disciples were instructed to make disciples of all nations, we are given this same commission as disciples ourselves. As we follow the discernment process, we become more secure and confident in our faith. We are then able to have different conversations within our other communities, answering any questions people in them may have. Our local parish, that is, the Body of Christ, becomes our base community, showing us the community after which all other communities should be modeled. It is the Church that reminds us that we are called to be servants of Christ Jesus—and of others.

Gregory Abrahim, O.Minn.
or Christian people, there can be no questions of more importance than these two questions. They concern the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Each question is important. If the “people” regard Him as the Son of God, they can build a human society guided by his teachings. The second question is one that affects each person who hears the gospel. The answer of each will determine how they live for the rest of their lives.

St. Peter, inspired by the heavenly Father, certainly gave the correct answer, but the issue of the identity of Jesus did not simply go away; and probably never will. And this is the reason why the followers of Appolinarius of Laodicea believed that the Word of God simply united with human flesh, with the Logos replacing the human soul of Jesus. These early heresies did not go unanswered. In the first century, St. Ignatius of Antioch continued the fight against the incipient Docetists. In the second century, Docetism became more fully developed in the form of Gnosticism, a serious heresy that spread throughout the Mediterranean world. The “gnostic” Jesus was born without any participation of the material world. He was part of the gnostic pleroma (fullness) of divine beings who descended to the material world. In his famous Adversus Heresies, St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, defended the historical Christ.

As troublesome as these early years were, in the fourth century a heresy arose that might be compared to a plague of locusts. Arising out of Egypt, it spread throughout the East. The Gothic tribes carried it to western Europe, Spain and North Africa. Named after its founder, Arius, a priest of Alexandria, St. Athanasius, and consequently no salvation. (These heretics were forerunners of a later group, called Docetists, or “Illusionists.”)

The identity of Jesus was debated for the next four centuries. And the theologian who would write the definitive answer to the question was St. Cyril of Alexandria (A.D. 376–444). He has been called the greatest christologist.

Between the Apostles Peter and John, and the fifth-century era of Cyril, the question of the identity of Jesus arose many times. It would be impossible here to cover in any detail the entirety of the christological controversies in the first four centuries. However, some of the most noteworthy figures would include the Jewish-Christian sect of the Ebionites, who simply regarded Him as the natural son of both Joseph and Mary; Theodotus of Byzantium, who in the second century argued that Jesus was a human being “adopted” by God, probably when He was baptized by John in the Jordan; and the third-century Sabelius, who advocated the concept of modalism, in which the Three Persons of the Godhead were simply three different “modes” of the One God.

While some denied the full divinity of Jesus, others would eliminate his complete humanity. The Docetists denied that Jesus had a human body. The followers of Appolinarius of Laodicea believed that the Word of God simply united with human flesh, with the Logos replacing the human soul of Jesus.

In 431, the Third Ecumenical Council met in Ephesus to challenge the teaching of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who refused to accept the term Theotokos ("God-bearer") for the Virgin Mary. It is during this controversy that St. Cyril of Alexandria became perhaps the most important defender, not only of the title Theotokos, but of the identity of Jesus Christ. Cyril was a most prolific writer. Prior to his controversy with Nestorius, his works were largely exegetical and anti-Arian. We will look more closely at St. Cyril and his work in the context of the Nestorian controversy.

THE LIFE OF CYRIL

We know very little about his early years. He was born in the town of Diodoussa, Egypt, about 378 A.D. His maternal uncle, Theophilus, was the Archbishop of Alexandria. It is most likely that his uncle guided his education. St. Cyril’s education involved the study of the theologians of Alexandria: Origen, Didymous the Blind, St. Athanasius, and even St. John Chrysostom. John McGuckin notes that “he was evidently schooled in rhetoric, but the substance of his learning is built upon the twin pillars of biblical theology and the prior patristic tradition.” Scripture and the Church Fathers will be the bedrock of his theology. We meet St. Cyril in a somewhat awkward situation, at least for us. He was in Constantinople with his uncle Theophilus, where they went to depose St. John Chrysostom. A group of Egyptian monks had come to Constantinople, complaining of how they were being treated by Bishop Theophilus. In 403 A.D., Emperor Arcadius demanded that Theophilius come to Constantinople to apologize to St. John. Theophilus arrived with twenty-nine of his suffragan bishops, (a lesson Cyril would remember later), held a council, and challenged St. John. As things turned out, it was St. John Chrysostom who was called to apologize. St. John was deposed from his office at the Synod of the Oak in 403, with the support of Theophilus and Cyril. He was not deposed for his theology, but rather for disciplinary reasons. This did not prove to be a permanent estrangement between these two Fathers of the Church. Cyril would later use the writings of St. John and speak of him as a standard of Orthodoxy. During subsequent years, Cyril was groomed for the position of archbishop. After the death of his uncle, he was consecrated on October 18, 412.
NESTORIUS AND THE CONTROVERSY

Nestorius was born in the city of Germanicia in the province of Syria. He was a student of Theodoret of Mopsuestia. He lived as a priest-monk near Antioch. It is likely that he was chosen to be the Patriarch of Constantinople because of his fame as a preacher. He was probably recommended by Patriarch John of Antioch, who was his friend. In 428, Nestorius arrived in Constantinople with a number of monks, the most problematic of whom would be the priest Anastasius. Nestorius managed to incur the antipathy of the monastics in Constantinople, sending them back to their monasteries, and also the very rich and powerful sister of the Emperor, Pulcheria. He publically refused to give her communion in the sanctuary with her brother. (This was a privilege of the Emperor.) Pulcheria opened a church for herself and the dissident monastics. Although her brother initially supported Nestorius, Pulcheria and the monastics allied themselves with Cyril. John McGuckin describes Nestorius as a “consistent, if not too clear, exponent of the longstanding Antiochene dogmatic tradition.” Nestorius was greatly surprised that what he had always taught in Antioch without any controversy whatsoever should prove to be so objectionable to the Christians of Constantinople.

Nestorius’s rejection of the term Theotokos was not new. It had been rejected by his teacher Theodoret of Mopsuestia back in Antioch. What had been a non-issue in Antioch, became in Constantinople a debate that rose to the importance of Arianism and Appollinarianism, both of which were resolved by an Ecumenical Council. Nestorius decided to hold a public debate over the issue of the term Theotokos. His spokesman was the monk Anastasius, who “repeated the longstanding argument: ‘Let no man call Mary Mother of God for she was but a woman, and it is impossible for God to be born of a woman.’” Nestorius was fond of using the expression strictly speaking in his writings. His adversaries mocked him by saying, “If Mary is not, strictly speaking, the Mother of God, then her son is not, strictly speaking, God.” What troubled his adversaries was that his refusal to accept the term Theotokos implied that there were two separate persons in Christ, one divine and one human. A divided Christ meant that there was no real unity between the divine and the human. If so, this called salvation itself into question. Believing that a council would decide in his favor, he asked the emperor for one. The Emperor, however, called the Council not in Constantinople but in the City of Ephesus, which was the most important shrine of Mary. This placed Nestorius at a serious disadvantage.

THE ISSUE

The complex theological question was “How did the Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, unite Himself to humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ?” “What was the relationship between the divine and the human?” At issue were the full divinity of Christ and His full humanity, and, most important, His existence as One Person. Was His humanity simply “absorbed” by His divinity? What did it mean either to say that Mary was Theotokos, or to deny it? To whom did she give birth? Nestorius’s rejection of the term Theotokos not only put him at odds with the Patriarch of Antioch, it placed him at odds with the mother of Jesus Christ. Cyril was his adversary. In the dispute, Cyril would clarify the questions regarding Christology and permanently make the term Theotokos, or Mother of God, an established part of the theology and piety of the Church.

THE COMPILING FACTORS

Language

Among the complicating factors of the controversy was language. In English we can simply say that Jesus had a human nature and a divine nature, and that they were united in One Person. Unfortunately words such as ousia (nature) and hypostasis (individual) might be used interchangeably. The terminology was problematic.4

Antioch versus Alexandria

A further complication was the differing theologies of Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. Each had its unique history as a theological center. “Antioch tended to hold apart Christ’s divine and human natures, and the Alexandrian school . . . stressed their dynamic unity.”5 Each school had its own theologians. Antioch had Lucian, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodoret of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Cyrus. Alexandria had Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Didymous the Blind, and the great St. Athanasius. Each school had its representative in the current debate: Nestorius of the Antiochian, and Cyril of the Alexandrian.

Alexandria versus Constantinople

The third Canon of the First Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) stated that “the Bishop of Constantinople . . . shall have the prerogative of honor after the Bishop of Rome, because Constantinople is New Rome.” Although Constantinople, founded in 320 A.D., was the New Rome and the City of Constantine, Alexandria was far older as a
The appeal of Cyril


The Antiochian Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428) had been used for more than 200 years in the church, both in Scripture and church literature. The term chotoko was first used for a new way of denying the Word of God became incarnate in the womb of Mary, who is truly the mother of the Logos as he liked to be called. His work is important in the history of the church, as it laid the groundwork for the later development of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The church in Alexandria was founded by the Apostle Mark. It was the city where the bishop of Alexandria was settled. Antioch accepted the term theotokos without reservation, while Alexandria did not.

The term theotokos was not used by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. On the contrary, the Council decided to reject both the Council headed by Cyril and the other after the emperor had been victorious. His theology and language would have been overruled. The term theotokos was affirmed unequivocally by the Council.

2. Ibid., p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 29.
4. Ibid., p. 139.
5. Ibid., p. 21.
8. Ibid., pp. 163.
9. Ibid., pp. 173.
10. Ibid., p. 183.
11. Ibid., p. 193.
12. Ibid., p. 203.
13. Ibid., p. 213.
15. Ibid., p. 233.
17. Ibid., p. 253.
18. Ibid., p. 263.
20. Ibid., p. 283.
21. Ibid., p. 293.
22. Ibid., p. 303.
23. Ibid., p. 313.
24. Ibid., p. 323.
25. Ibid., p. 333.
26. Ibid., p. 343.
27. Ibid., p. 353.
28. Ibid., p. 363.
29. Ibid., p. 373.
30. Ibid., p. 383.
31. Ibid., p. 393.
32. Ibid., p. 403.
33. Ibid., p. 413.
34. Ibid., p. 423.
Allowing for potential weather events, I had scheduled my arrival on Thursday, but flights did not cooperate. Staring at the overhead screen after checking in, it dawned on me that, due to delays, I likely would miss my connection in Denver.

When this was brought to the attention of the customer service rep, I was assured that, at present, everything should work out. That would be nice for the folks at St. John, Rapid City, South Dakota. They, along with Holy Resurrection, Gillette, Wyoming, had been without a priest for two years.

It’s a two-hour drive between those communities, and leaving out of Gillette for the return flight made the most sense—thus, that was my roundtrip destination. It was my second Christmas visit to the Black Hills region. Both were planned for a day or two before Christmas, to let me get back to my parish in Houston for the Feast.

Alas, because of a long delay pulling up to an available gate in Denver, I just missed my connection. As it was “Christmas weekend,” there were few alternatives; none that would work. “I can get you there tomorrow evening,” the flight rep said. “No, you see, I’m a priest and one of the parishes I’m visiting will be without a priest for two years.”

I searched up rates for a one-way rental car to Denver. Have you ever tried to rent a car for next-day travel, one way, on Christmas weekend? Not good! I called the Chairman of the Department of Missions and Evangelism, Fr. John Finley. After listening to my dilemma, he said, “Do it! Just do it! Don’t worry about the cost. We’ll find the money.”

Thank God for the ministry of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. While the extra car rental wasn’t cheap, it was less than the annual pledge of a Knight or Dame. Such situations would find little or no solution without the help of the Order; and the Order supports the work of the Department of Missions and Evangelism.

On Friday morning, December 21, I began the six-hour drive to Gillette—where I switched to my previously scheduled (and pre-paid) rental car. Then I drove two and a half hours to Rapid City. There I heard confessions, served Great Vespers, heard more confessions, and enjoyed the fellowship of the people of St. John. On Saturday, December 22, it was Orthros and Divine Liturgy, followed by the singing of carols, and fellowship. A full house! I drove back to Gillette for Great Vespers, confessions, and fellowship at Holy Resurrection.

On Sunday, December 23, I served Orthros and Divine Liturgy. This was followed by the singing of carols and fellowship. A full house! I drove back to Gillette, Wyoming, for the return flight made the most sense; thus, this was my second Christmas visit to the Black Hills region. Both were planned for a day or two before Christmas, to let me get back to my parish in Houston for the Feast.

As I stated to His Eminence, Metropolitan Joseph, in my report, “All in all, it was a joyful weekend—bringing a bit of Christmas (early) to these thirty communities.” That’s just a part of the ministry of The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch: bringing the joy of Christmas to those without pastoral care. I’ve experienced it: The Order provides drink for those who thirst. Thank you!
DEPARTMENTAL NOTES
The Department’s “Guidelines for the Protection of Children and Volunteers” is a project headed by Anna-Sarah Farha as part of her task as the Associate for Church School Directors. It has been developed in collaboration with other staff members. Recently, we conf ered with companies that provide background checks, which would streamline the process for parishes, but postponed the expected completion date of this project. We plan to have a package ready for the spring. We have also begun planning for a one-year high school program on moral issues.

OTHER recent topics of discussion on our Facebook page have been how to organize successful Creative Arts workshops, and how to make Sunday Church Schools welcoming to all students — based on recommendations from Summer Kinder’s book, Of Such is the Kingdom: A Practical Theology of Disability.

AOOCE SOCIAL NETWORKING MINISTRY
To nurture the children God has placed in our care!

Greetings Teachers and Parents,
We invite you to join our online communities for these upcoming series:

Parents will get a sampling of Fr. Michael Shanbour’s new catechism book, The Good Samaritan: A Children’s Catechism. Snippets from the “lessons,” (chapters) of the book will be provided, along with suggested activities and/or resources related to the lesson in focus.

Teachers will find posts about Brain-Based Teaching and Learning, a theory and methodology centered on creating lessons and educational experiences which target the way that students’ brains are best able to learn.

We continue to pin helpful links as well as our blog posts to our Pinterest boards, where you can find many wonderful ideas for Orthodox parents and teachers.

Kristina Wenger, Staff Assistant for Social Network Ministry

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH SCHOOL DIRECTORS
Starting this month on the Orthodox Christian Church School Directors Facebook page, I will be reporting in real time from my home parish of St. George Church, Jacksonville, Florida, about the inaugural year of our Church School’s First Confession Program. Follow along as I share curriculum, resources, photos, administrative details, and more.

Other recent topics of discussion on our Facebook page have been how to organize successful Creative Arts workshops, and how to make Sunday Church Schools welcoming to all students — based on recommendations from Summer Kinder’s book, Of Such is the Kingdom: A Practical Theology of Disability.

AARON SOFIA FARHA
Diocesan Coordinator for Miami and the Southeast and Associate for Church School Directors

TRAINING UPDATES
The Department of Christian Education plans and facilitates teacher and Church School Director workshops across the Archdiocese. We have two levels of “prepared” workshops for teachers, each with a certificate of completion, and a workshop for Church School Directors. Here is a listing of our prepared training modules.

Teacher Training I includes the following courses: Overview of Orthodoxy, Teaching Techniques, and Curriculum & Resources. The courses in TII are conducted by one trainer. A typical schedule is 9 a.m.–4 p.m. A light breakfast and lunch are provided by the host parish.

Teacher Training II consists of training on the Elementary and the Middle School/High School Level. The workshops are scheduled concurrently, with one trainer for each level. The typical day is 9 a.m.–4 p.m., with a continental breakfast and lunch provided by the host parish.

Elementary Level courses include Enriching the Classroom Experience, Child Development and the Exceptional Learner, and Creative Expression, Elementary.

Middle School/High School Level courses include Adolescent Needs, Moral Issues Overview, and Creative Expression, MSHS. The Creative Expressions Courses for elementary and middle school/high school can be one session.

Church School Director (CSD) includes the following courses: Introduction to Church School Ministry, Build Your Staff, Build Your Students, Curriculum & Resources for the CSD.

We can also tailor sessions specifically for your needs. Please contact me at aodce.events@gmail.com for more information.

Linda Abiboff
Staff Assistant for Special Projects and Website

CREATIVE FESTIVALS 2020
“God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Through the lesson plans, theme song, posters, suggestions for using the theme throughout the year, and other resources provided by the Department of Christian Education, the students will gain a greater understanding of this theme. These resources, along with a listing of where to send entries in each diocese, can be found at w1.antiochian.org/festivals. Please note that the due date for most dioceses is April 1.

My Thoughts on the Theme
By Carla Bulata

The theme is a critical one this year. It is a corrective to the idea that we exist in a “neutral” world and that Christ, like Santa, will reward the good (which trivializes Christ’s death and resurrection). While indeed we will come to judgment, or rather our life will be our judge, our faith has never seen the world as “neutral.” On the contrary, our faith teaches us that the world is “fallen” and humanity with it (yet not totally bereft of God’s imprint of goodness and beauty). Jesus did not need to condemn the world. Since we are his stewards, we and all Creation have been condemned since the time of Adam and Eve.

Jesus needed to rescue us (the name Jesus means “God saves”) from sickness, sin and natural disasters. God’s love of Creation, and desire to keep it from corruption, is noted by St. Athanasius: “For it were not worthy of God’s goodness that the things He had made should waste away, because of the deceit practised on men by the devil” (On the Incarnation, 6:5). The devil’s ultimate weapon was death. Alone to be feared, indeed, but more significantly, the cause of hopelessness. The despair, killing, cheating, cruelty and all other sins can be traced to the deceit of the devil, the belief that “this world is all there is to existence, and that we are our own masters.” Christ has saved us from that false belief and brought us into the way of life of the Kingdom. He has given us His Spirit as a pledge of the Truth, and His love, peace, and joy as signs of His abiding presence. Jesus came into the world to rescue us for the Kingdom, both here and now, and for all eternity. That is the good news.

BOOK OVERVIEW
By Kristina Wenger

TENDING THE GARDEN OF OUR HEARTS: Daily Lenten Meditations for Families
By Shasta Bjeletich and Kristina Wenger

Tending the Garden of Our Hearts offers one meditation each day of Great Lent and Holy Week, including a final meditation for Pascha. The themes are loosely based on the Lenten Activity Calendar I wrote years ago, found at https://orthodoxchristianparenting.files.wordpress.com/2015/02. Some meditations feature a scripture. On other days, we learn from the life of a saint. Every meditation concludes with a few questions, then a discussion question. This question allows readers to make the book their own as they talk together about how to apply that day’s lesson. The book concludes with a fairly extensive appendix of related ideas for each week’s theme. The appendix begins...
with suggestions of ways to count down to Pascha. This should help solidify and mark the passage of time, especially for young children. At our website, there are a few printable pages and supplemental resources related to some of these ideas. They can be found at https://tending-the-garden.com.

Here are a few gleanings from the book:

“Have you ever prayed for someone who was mean to you? God asks us to pray for our enemies, because mean people really need our prayers to help their hearts soften so they will repent, and also because when we pray for someone, we begin to see them as God sees them. We begin to love them and to feel sad for them because they are twisted up and mean and unhappy” (36).

“We Orthodox love to light candles at Pascha and the Second Coming of Christ could happen today, or it may happen for a while, but simply returning to prayer begins to warm us up again” (83).

“In the Third Century, a terrible plague fell upon the Roman Empire. While most people were running from this plague, persecuted Christians were caring for its victims. This is not the only story in this vein. Stories about acts of mercy and unconditioned love are present throughout the history of Christianity.

Fast forward two millennia. From 1950 to 1990, the Hill District of Pittsburgh lost over 70 percent of its residents as a result of urban redevelopment. Today over 40 percent of the residents live below the poverty level. For over thirty years the area did not have a supermarket. Fr. Paul Abernathy, Pastor of St. Moses the Black Mission in Pittsburgh, knew that he wanted to go in and care for the people left behind while everyone else was trying to leave. His ministry has grown to a full medical clinic, daily spiritual care, and a gun-violence response unit to help communities heal. Fr. Paul and a strong team of leaders are remaining in the community and are performing daily acts of mercy in a way that would have been considered an afterthought and lost cause. They are redeeming the suffering through a Christ-like presence.

Within the DNA of Christianity is a desire to help and make a difference. Many Christians, however, are stuck at ground zero. Many, like me, are not sure where to begin. How do we, inspired by Jesus’ acts of mercy to those in need, become a catalyst for change in our own communities? How do we live up to our tradition of caring for others when no one else will?

The Department of Missions & Evangelism is organizing a new kind of mission trip. In this new effort, the Department is partnering with Fr. Paul Abernathy and the Neighborhood Reconciliation Project (formerly FOCUS Pittsburgh) to provide an opportunity for service and training. The Neighborhood Resilience Project is a training center for learning how to be present in the community and be a catalyst for change.

This summer the Missions and Evangelism Department is piloting these new mission trips comprised of service and training. A standard trip is seven days long. Each morning will be an investment in the Hill District, with projects such as beautification and feeding the needy. Each afternoon the leadership team at the Neighborhood Reconciliation Project will train volunteers how to be present in their own communities and become a catalyst for change.

Special attention will also be given to the demographic hometown of the volunteers. For example, many of our churches are not located in inner-city areas, but out in suburbia. Commuter churches are different demographics. Fr. Paul and his team are prepared to equip the volunteers from both the inner-city and suburban churches.

Each day during the trip, volunteers will experience firsthand what it means and looks like to be fully present in a community. After the experience, trainers will teach the volunteers how to be fully present in their own community. Just as those Christians did back in the Third Century, volunteers will be equipped to care for those back home for whom no one else is caring.

For more information about these mission trips, as well as registration details, visit www.james218.com.
HOSPITALITY
IT’S EVERYONE’S JOB!

I’ve been thinking about writing this article for many years. Until recently, I thought the title would be “Every Church Needs a Sam and Mae.” Let me explain. My husband and I first visited an Orthodox Church in 1995. We were approached immediately after Liturgy by a kind man named Sam. He insisted, in his own special way, that we join him and his wife, Mae, for a cup of coffee and a donut in the church hall. He and his wife introduced us to other parishioners, invited us for dinner, and made us feel welcome throughout our time in that parish. We watched as they offered this same hospitality to many other newcomers over the years. Their hospitality bore witness to Christ’s love and left an impression on us.

We have been blessed to visit many Orthodox parishes while traveling. Because of work-related relocations, we’ve been members of several church-parishes while traveling. Because of work-related relocations, we’ve been members of several churches. Over the years, I have fallen into the habit of socializing with those I know – you know, “the ones that know your name.” I adopted the conventional wisdom that the role of hospitality belonged to others: founding members of the parish, cradle Orthodox, or members of the hospitality committee. Fast forward to recent times: one Sunday during coffee hour, a couple new to our parish was expressing how hard it is to feel like they belong. Again, the thought of my article surfaced with the words, “Why doesn’t every church have a Sam and Mae?” Later as I reflected on our conversation, I realized what should have been obvious long ago: hospitality is everyone’s job!

It doesn’t belong to those who are cradle Orthodox. It doesn’t belong to those older, retired members of the church. It doesn’t even belong to the hospitality committee (if your church has one). We can be the “Sam and Mae” in our own churches. It is not the job of a few, but belongs to everyone. Are you familiar with these lyrics: “Sometimes you want to go/ Where everybody knows your name/ and they’re always glad you came.”

The lyrics describe a bar, and they come from the theme song of the old situation-comedy, “Cheers.” Ironically, these lyrics could and should describe a church. Over the years, I have fallen into the habit of socializing with those I know – you know, “the ones that know your name.” I adopted the conventional wisdom that the role of hospitality belonged to others: founding members of the parish, cradle Orthodox, or members of the hospitality committee. Fast forward to recent times: one Sunday during coffee hour, a couple new to our parish was expressing how hard it is to feel like they belong. Again, the thought of my article surfaced with the words, “Why doesn’t every church have a Sam and Mae?” Later as I reflected on our conversation, I realized what should have been obvious long ago: hospitality is everyone’s job!

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Thank you, Sam and Mae, for giving us a beautiful example of hospitality. Memory Eternal, Sam, and the newly departed handmaiden, Clara (“Aunt Mae”) Salem!

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Thank you, Sam and Mae, for giving us a beautiful example of hospitality. Memory Eternal, Sam, and the newly departed handmaiden, Clara (“Aunt Mae”) Salem!
As I was preparing this occasion a significant memory from my childhood came back to me, and I was flooded with emotion. It was a sweltering summer day in 2003. The sun was hot and the air was thick with humidity. My parents took me and my younger brother to the beach. As we walked along the shore, I noticed something unique about the beach. There were many people there, but they all seemed to be enjoying themselves. I wondered why this was the case, so I asked my parents. They explained that it was because the beach was a place where people could come together and enjoy each other's company.

I remember feeling a sense of gratitude that I had this opportunity to be with my family and experience the joy of the beach. I realized that this was something I needed to remember and cherish for the rest of my life. From that day forward, I made a conscious effort to spend more time with my family and enjoy the simple pleasures that life has to offer.

GROWING INTO ORTHODOX MANHOOD

Judges’ Choice, the Oratorical Festival
for the Diocese of Worcester and New England

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One of the most powerful and memorable verses of the Bible came as an encouraging reminder from a wise apostle to young Christians struggling in the world against demons and temptations. It is a reminder “to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10) and encourages me to trust that He will strengthen me to do all things. It is a reminder to me that no matter where I go, He is there, and only He has the power to enable my success. So, as I go off to college, and leave the safety of my family, both at home and in my church, I may face the same struggles as my father. I must remember during times of trials and tribulations, attacks of adversaries and aggressors, facing failures and temptations that I “can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Facing such times, my faith in Christ will help me to grow up to be the kind of man my father worked to make me. My father must know that because of his witness: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”
As Father Saba stated throughout the weekend, we gave great thanks to a faithful Parish Council (led by Ms. Darlene N. Haddad), a dedicated committee (chaired by Mrs. Karen Nawas), the scores of generous sponsors, countless volunteers, and all who supported and attended the events. These all made for a truly historic weekend. It will be remembered by all those who desire to grow in the faith and to be themselves miracles in the world.

The four-day celebration brought together many generations of the Saint George Cicero community to commemorate a miracle which is still very much present in the lives of the members. Miracles continue to take place, bringing together the faithful in a unity of peace. Thanks be to God!

Please, visit the church Facebook page for a complete photo gallery of the entire weekend.

Metropolitan JOSEPH PRESES AT RETIREMENT CELEBRATIONS

His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH visited St. Elias Cathedral, Ottawa, Ontario, from November 26 to December 1, 2019, to preside in the celebrations of the ministry of Archpriest Ghattas Hajal on the occasion of his retirement. It was a time full of blessings, in which the Rock gathered around their chief shepherd to express their love to him and to Fr. Ghattas. Fr. Ghattas has served this parish for 28 years, and the Antiochian Archdiocese for almost 30 years, the majority of his 43 years in the holy priesthood.
Many events marked the occasion, including a luncheon at the Lebanese Embassy in Ottawa, hosted by His Excellency Fadi Ziadeh, Ambassador of Lebanon to Canada. The Ambassador honored His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH and thanked Fr. Ghattas for his years of service.

In addition to the various midweek meals hosted by the faithful of the Cathedral, His Eminence presided over a special Parish Council meeting, which was followed by a dinner hosted by Council President George Hanna.

In a highlight of the week, His Eminence led a pilgrimage to the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Virgin Mary the Consolatrix, in Lachute, Québec. There, His Eminence was joined by His Grace Bishop ALEXANDER of the Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada and Upstate New York, and several clergy and faithful from the Ottawa and Montreal areas.

Metropolitan JOSEPH had desired to meet with the various ministries at St. Elias in Ottawa, through the prayers of each month for Daily Vespers, fellowship and a Bible Study. The group had only been anticipating fifty people! We are truly blessed to have had such a wonderful turnout for both Divine Liturgy and the presentation.

The St. John Chrysostom Orthodox Fellowship of Lancaster County has been meeting on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month for Daily Vespers, fellowship and a Bible Study since October 2017. The Fellow-ship is under the guidance of V. Rev Father Peter Pier, and enjoys the blessing of His Grace Bishop THOMAS. The website for the group is elc-orthodoxy.org.

Friday evening, the feast day of St. Andrew the First-called Apostle, as well as for Great Vespers on Saturday evening, to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Later Saturday evening, the Cathedral hosted a gala celebration to mark the retirement from active ministry of Fr. Ghattas.

Over 500 people came to the gala to express their gratitude for the leadership, service and dedication of Fr. Ghattas. The parish prepared a short video tribute to Fr. Ghattas that highlighted his journey from the world of high finance and through the holy priesthood. The program featured several speakers who spoke lovingly of Fr. Ghattas, who in turn thanked His Eminence, his parish and his community for their support and love throughout the years. Sayidna JOSEPH conclud- ed the evening by speaking of the appreciation he has for Fr. Ghattas, adding that he is worthy of the honor his flock has bestowed upon him.

On Sunday morning, His Eminence led the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy. Joining him were Fr. Ghattas Hajal, Fr. Joseph Purpura, Fr. James Griggs, Fr. Mark Wyatt, Fr. Milad Selim, Fr. Nektarios Najjar, Dn. John El Massih, Dn. Alexander Moisa and Dn. Yakoub Daoura. In his sermon, Sayidna JOSEPH again thanked Fr. Ghattas for his service to the Orthodox Church and to the Antiochian Archdiocese. Then, His Eminence appointed the Cathedral’s assistant pastor, Fr. Nektarios Najjar, as the new Pastor and Dean, saying: “The trust is being transferred from one trust-worthy priest to another trust-worthy priest.”

The final event of the week was a luncheon that followed the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, attended by over 550 people. St. Elias Teen SOYO chapter members served as Masters of Ceremonies, and speeches were offered to thank Fr. Ghattas by the different youth ministries and all organizations of the parish. Those shed light on Fr. Ghattas’ pastoral work and contributions.

We pray that the Lord God will grant Fr. Ghattas many years of health in his retirement, and that He will bless the ministry of the new Pastor, Fr. Nektarios, and all the faithful of St. Elias Cathedral in Ottawa, through the prayers of our Holy Master and Chief Shepherd Metropolitan JOSEPH.

To see photographs from the events, go to https://www.flickr.com/pho-tos/antiochianarchdiocese/albums/72157712078021877

FR. JOSEPH HUNEYCUTT VISITS ST. JOHN CHRYSTOS TOM

The St. John Chrysostom Orthodox Fellowship of Lancaster County, a satellite community of St. John Chrysostom, York, Pennsylvania, invited V. Rev Father Joseph Huneccutt to celebrate Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. John Chrysostom on the evening of November 12, 2019. Thirty-five people attended. On Wednesday November 13, the group invited the local community to hear Fr. Joseph’s presentation on the topic, “The Ancient Church Today,” and over one hundred and ten people came.

The group had only been anticipating fifty people! We are truly blessed to have had such a wonderful turnout for both Divine Liturgy and the presentation.

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ORTHODOX WOMEN’S RETREAT 2019

Tonia Howell

After one has attended the annual Orthodox Women’s Retreat for a number of years, the smell of freshly baked cinnamon buns becomes synonymous with the welcome to another gathering of ladies acknowledging his excellent story-telling ability, including

Tryphon also served Saturday Morning Prayers and in Our World, An Exercise in Martyrdom” Fr. Abbot

ton, who spoke on the theme of “Incarnating Christ Merciful Savior Orthodox Monastery in Washing-

St. Peter the Aleut (OCA) who heard confessions on Saturday evening; Fr. Phillip Yannituk from St. Vladimir’s Ukrainian Orthodox

church who served Friday’s molieben opening prayers; Fr. Patrick Yamniuk from St. Vladimir’s Ukrainian Orthodox

Church who served Great Vespers and heard confes-
sions of usefulness and hopelessness, including the

the faith, we must not impose but show uncondi-
tional love, commit to unceasing prayer and express our faith gently in the loved ones presence.

His second presentation included the miraculous and heart-warming story of the provision for his monastery on Vashon Island. In the planning stag-
es, an entrepreneur offered his services to construct the complex for a very reasonable fee, for which he received payment upfront. Devastation soon came when the realization set in that he had absconded with the money. Word of this, and the monks’ plans to leave, brought the hearts and hands of their many neighbours near and far to amply provide for the acreage and the raising of the buildings! From this we can learn, that, through the positive acceptance of the trials of life (our “martyrdom”) salvation is affected.

He also emphasised that our present joy in wor-

ship is essential to prepare us for heaven where we will praise without ceasing. In the Divine Liturgy we join with the Church Triumphant (those now in the eternal presence of Christ), which implies that, no matter how few may be attending a service, the temple will be filled with unseen saints. When distress makes it difficult to pray, we are to be silent before God, perhaps through venerating the icons, praying the Jesus Prayer, or making very brief pleas – “Lord, dispel my darkness.” We are to be angels unaware to others who suffer. With unbridled screen-use con-

tributing to our cultural disease, we were admon-
ished to set limits. However, we Orthodox must face these challenges head-on in our parishes and congregations.

In his third talk, Abbot Tryphon counselled us to show non-judgemental compassion toward those who experience gender confusion, but to speak the truth in love should they desire Orthodox conversion. Suicidal tendencies arise from feel-
ings of uselessness and hopelessness, including the

must not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by another’s unforgiveness. In closing, Abbot Tryphon assured us that, since God exists outside of time, He “heard our prayers even before we were born”.

Even if our final hour had not been spent in the dining room, we would have undoubtedly departed with a sense of our cup running over with the bless-
ings of much food for thought and prayer and of the joy we shared in fellowship as sisters in Christ, from many different expressions within our beloved Orthodox faith.

In the fourth session, he dwelled on forgiveness, especially addressing the question of how to for-
give someone who has deeply wounded us, we are to consider God’s infinite mercy in forgiving the worst of our sins. We are to understand that only God knows the heart of the sinner. Conversely, we