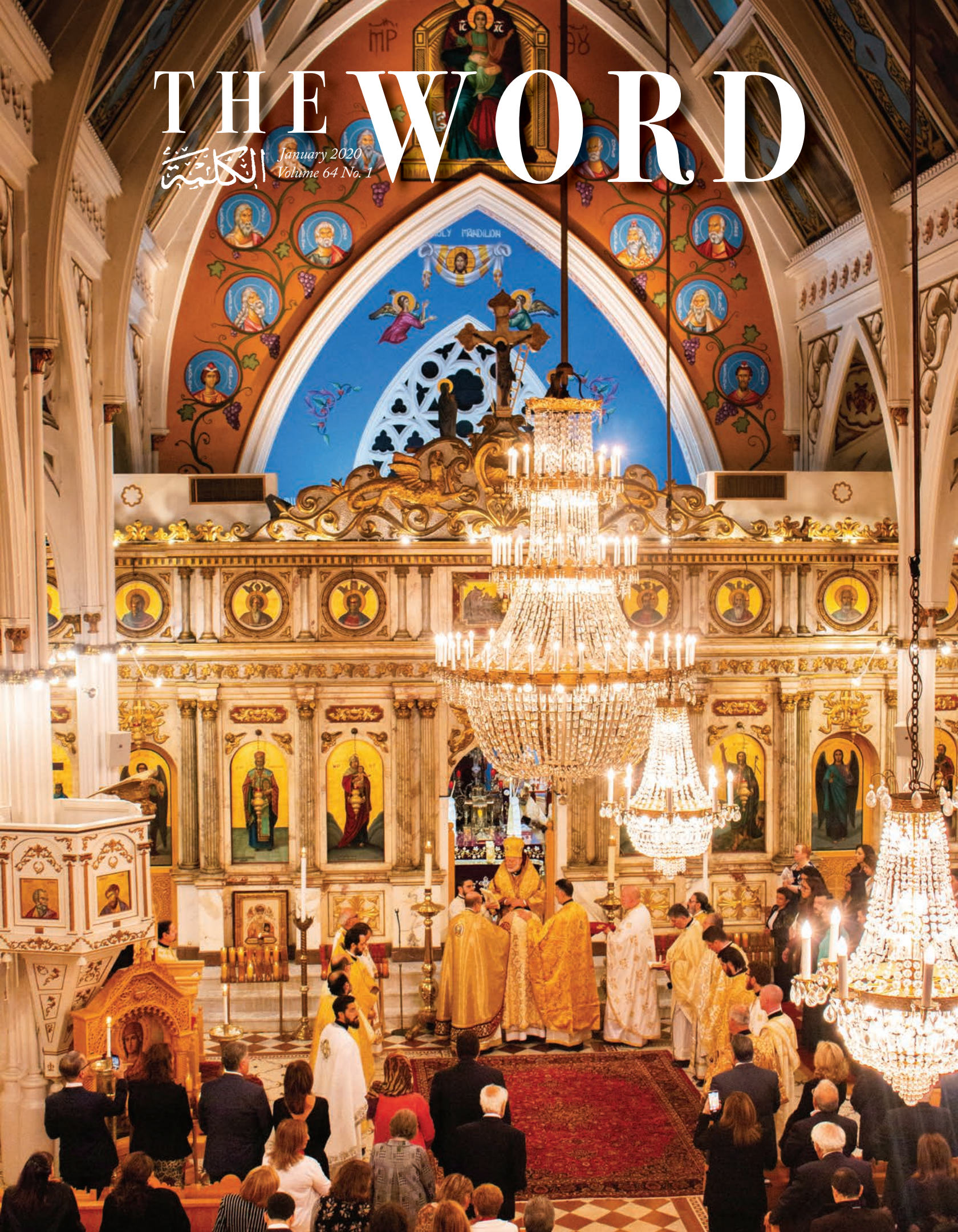


# THE WORD

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January 2020  
Volume 64 No. 1





# THE WORD

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**CORRECTION:** Last month's cover icon of St. John Damascus was written by Khourieh Randa Al Khoury Azar (Randa.azar@gmail.com). His Feast Day is December 4.

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

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## COOPERATION NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION



Metropolitan JOSEPH offers our parishes, clergy, and organizations the Archdiocese Board of Trustees as the model of cooperation, mutual respect, honest exchange of ideas, sharing of hopes and disappointments, generosity and love. These are the positive traits that make serving God as Christian stewards in our Archdiocese a joy. Archdiocese Board members make great efforts to attend and participate in Board meetings, often traveling an entire day and staying for days at their personal expense for each meeting. Each is appointed to a leadership responsibility within the Archdiocese department structure, or serves on special committees. They prayerfully consider all the issues presented, and use their personal and professional gifts whenever appropriate. People rarely speak out of turn, and always with respect for the time of others. In other words, Board members don't speak just to speak, thus keeping the meetings efficient.

The clergy of our Archdiocese are well-trained and very dedicated. They have offered up their lives to God, and God has given them to the parishes under the leadership of Metropolitan JOSEPH and our diocesan bishops. Their role is to live among the faithful of the community as examples, to lead the community at the altar in

worship, and to guide the community, wherever it is gathered, with love and respect. The faithful, in turn, are given all their resources and gifts by God to work with the clergy and each other honestly and cooperatively. Together, they build up the Church. Like a marriage, each is to obey, love, and serve the other, faithfully discerning and following the will of God. This requires an assumption by everyone of good will, working to understand each other, refraining in criticism from using words like "always" and "never," checking to see that our understanding of things is correct, and humbly seeking God's will.

When disagreements occur, as we expect in a fallen world, we are wise to deal with the issues at hand, never questioning the authenticity or motivations of the other. Let the conflict be about the issues, and never personal. There is no room in the Church for pride and egotism. The Church is God's. It has been consecrated to Him and it originates in Him. We are created to cooperate with Him. It is He who lives with us in His Church, and who dwells with us in our bodies, which are also called temples of God, or of the Holy Spirit.

Metropolitan JOSEPH and the current Board of Trustees of the Archdiocese have dedicated themselves to transparency, accurate reporting, insurance protection, and full disclosure of all the properties and funds of the Archdiocese,



The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

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Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend  
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend  
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend  
Bishop NICHOLAS

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*Al Kalimat* in 1905  
by Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny)  
Founded in English as  
*The WORD* in 1957  
by Metropolitan ANTONY (Bashir)

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Editorial Office:  
*The WORD*  
2 Lydia's Path  
Westborough, MA 01581-1841

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registrar@antiochian.org

including the chanceries, camps, and parishes. To accomplish this, Fuaz El Koury, Vice Chairman, and Salim Abboud, Chief Financial Officer, have asked the cooperation of the parishes to gather this information. They have solicited the assistance and support of fellow Board members, Archdiocese staff, bishops, clergy and financial professionals in this colossal task.

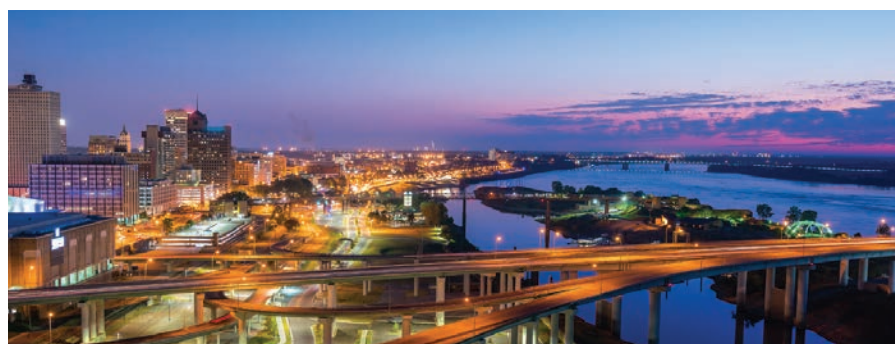
The Archdiocese is also trying to update its databanks to communicate better with the faithful. Please be sure that your parish has listed you correctly on the mailing list, so that you can continue to get *The WORD* and keep up with what is going on in the Archdiocese. Have you moved in the last few years? Send your address and e-mail to our registrar, Marlene, at registrar@antiochian.org.

Metropolitan JOSEPH has also made the Archdiocese Web site a priority, recognizing that all the faithful have many fine ideas and activities to share with each other throughout our Antiochian Orthodox family. In addition to *The WORD*, the Antiochian.org site is a wonderful guide to events in the Archdiocese and a trove of theological articles and information.

At one time, many folks assumed that too much information about the finances of the parish and Archdiocese would confuse people and discourage contributions. Certainly, that is not true today. The more people know the good works being done by the parishes and the Archdiocese, the more they are willing to participate. I am encouraged by the spirit of transparency and mutual accountability demonstrated by our Metropolitan and Board, and hope that the parishes all emulate this spirit to the building up of the churches and for the glory of God.

Happy New Year!

Bishop JOHN



## Barbecue, Blues, and Beatitudes



Join us in **Memphis, June 10-13**  
for the **2020 Parish Life Conference**



**Register today:** [antiochianevents.com/miami](http://antiochianevents.com/miami)  
**DIocese OF MIAMI & THE SOUTHEAST**

"FROM THESE STONES"

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

# A PROBLEM OF BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS

Archpriest Steven C. Salaris

**T**wo times recently, I was a guest homilist at another Orthodox church. No problem there: I love to preach the Gospel. On both occasions, I arrived at the host parish with sermon prepared, but needed a Bible to read some Old Testament passages. To my dismay, these parishes were completely lacking Bibles! One parish did have a couple of Orthodox Study Bibles (just the Psalms and New Testament). Fortunately, the priest found one of his old Bibles stashed in the sanctuary. In the other instance, I could not find a Bible anywhere in the church. *That* was awkward.

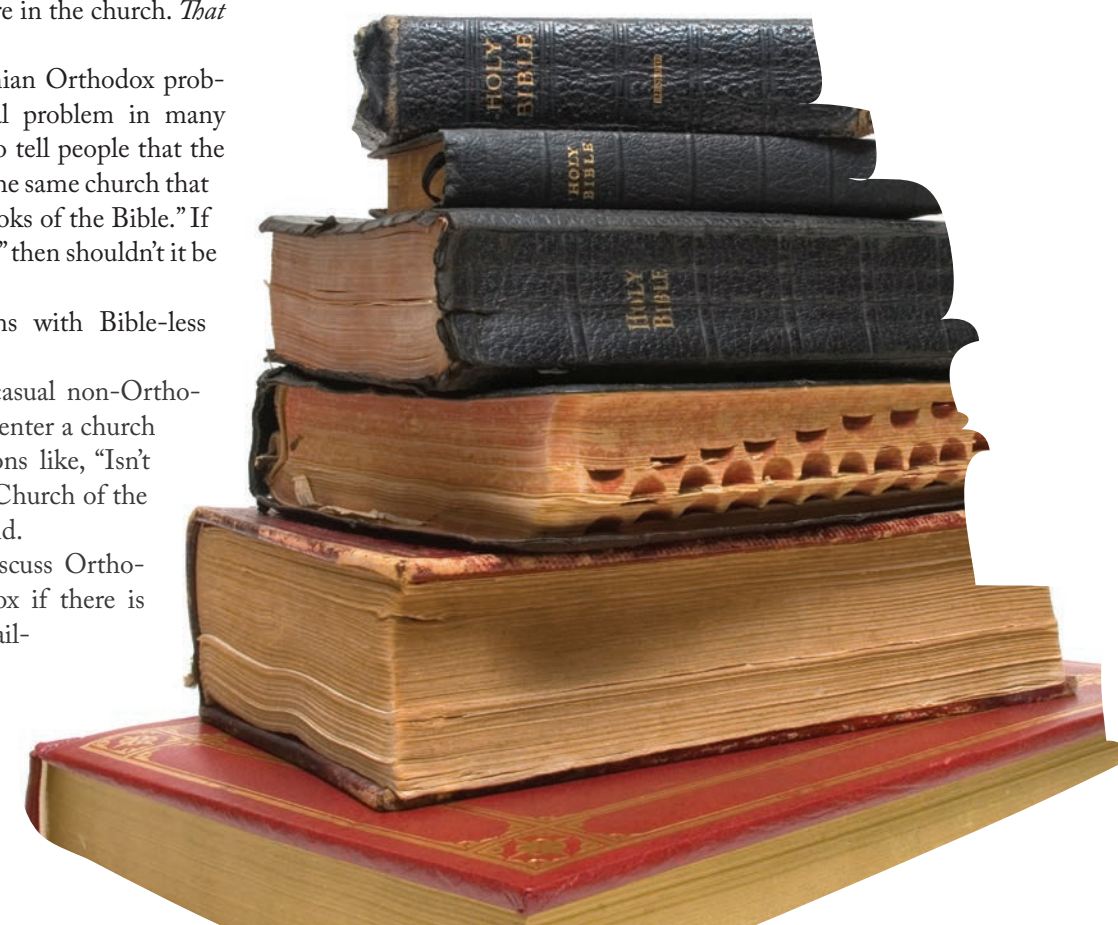
This is not just an Antiochian Orthodox problem, but a cross-jurisdictional problem in many churches. We Orthodox like to tell people that the Bible is "our book," or "we are the same church that composed the canon of the books of the Bible." If we are that proud of "our book," then shouldn't it be found in the church?

There are several problems with Bible-less Orthodox churches.

- 1) It is suspicious to the casual non-Orthodox observer when they enter a church with no Bibles. Questions like, "Isn't this supposed to be the Church of the Bible?" arise in one's mind.
- 2) It is very difficult to discuss Orthodoxy with non-Orthodox if there is not a Bible readily available to which one can

refer. When we dialogue with those Christians who have little or no Tradition, Creeds, Church Fathers, Councils, Canons, and so forth, the only tool we have are the Scriptures. When you can point out a text and that person is able to read it for himself or herself, the effect is sometimes astounding.

- 3) Our worship is biblical. The sacraments are scriptural and large parts of the texts of liturgical services like the Divine Liturgy are either direct quotes of Bible verses or paraphrases of them.
- 4) Our theology is biblical. What we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, and so forth is found in those apostolic writings in the New Testament. Look at icons of the ecumenical Councils. Most of them





have the Bible as the centerpiece. We Orthodox love to talk about the divine energies and *theosis*. These concepts are foreign to many non-Orthodox until we show them these concepts in the Bible. For example, the Greek word for “energy” is *energeia*; it is unfortunately translated as “work” in our English Bibles. This word appears several times in the New Testament. So, for example, Colossians 1:29 could be translated, “To this end I also labor, striving according to His *energy* which *energies* in me mightily.” St. Paul says that his sacrificial service for Christ is made possible by His divine energy. A discussion about *theosis* can begin with 1 Corinthians 15. Christ is risen from the dead in a new, deified body that can walk through walls, appear and disappear, and so on. We will be raised from the dead and receive a new body, just like Jesus. Resurrection is part of *theosis*.

Last, but not least: having Bibles in church is a courtesy to our guests and visiting clergy. When traveling to another church as a guest homilist, the priest has to carry vestments, cassock, jibbe, and so

forth. Not having to bring his Bible, in addition to all that, is one less thing he has to worry about, or, often enough in my case, forget.

So, what can we do to rectify this problem? The answer is simple: purchase Bibles for the nave, the bookstore, and the altar area. Bibles provide a quick reference source for sermons, lectures, and so on. Bibles in the sanctuary are useful when that visiting priest needs to read from one during his guest sermon. Orthodox Study Bibles in the parish bookstore can be purchased by inquirers or given as gifts to newly enrolled catechumens.

We are the Church that wrote the books of the New Testament and compiled the canons of both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. We must uphold that legacy by having “our book” available to all who enter our parishes. It is my prayerful wish that every one of our parishes would have Bibles available in the nave, the sanctuary, and the bookstore. It is a simple testimony, and primary witness, to our One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church – the Bible. Shouldn’t it be in *your* church?

Archpriest Steven C. Salaris, Pastor  
All Saints of North America Church, Maryland Heights, Missouri

# Willing to Go on a Domestic Mission Trip This Summer?



The Department of Missions and Evangelism is now offering domestic mission trips for the summer of 2020. For our launch, we have partnered with Fr. Paul Abernathy and his awesome team at The Neighborhood Resilience Project (formerly known as FOCUS Pittsburgh). Learn more about what Fr. Paul is doing by watching

his TEDx Talk in Pittsburgh at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcbu58p0fbA&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcbu58p0fbA&feature=emb_logo)

We have two sessions scheduled for July. Each session will provide an opportunity for training and service. Volunteers will return home with some ideas of how they might be catalysts for change in their own communities. Each “trip” is 6 days, with 2 days of travel, and 4 workdays, beginning with arrival on Wednesday and ending with departure the following Tuesday. The cost for food, lodging (at Duquesne University), and Catalyst training is only \$400 per person! For other details, including dates, fund-raising ideas, and registration, go to [www.james218.com](http://www.james218.com).

Please share this opportunity in the church bulletin and with your congregation by e-mail. If you have any questions, contact Dn. Adam Lowell Roberts at 615-971-0000.

# Bringing Our Wounds to Christ

Nicholas Papas, Houston, Texas

On our way to the coffee shop, Zoe kept slipping into random stores and announcing to the strangers she met that she had a “boo-boo.” Either that, or that her name was “Yo-ee.” Since she was facing away from me, and since she has the articulation of a two-year-old, I couldn’t quite tell.

She had recently taken a spill that really hurt her front teeth. This was the “boo-boo” that she was telling strangers about, I assumed. It got me thinking. I wondered how much that “boo-boo” must be on her mind, that she would introduce herself with “I have a boo-boo”? The spill she took and her trauma, the subsequent visits to the dentist’s office, and the probings and attention paid, made this boo-boo a big part of her little life. So, it made sense that introduced herself with “I have a boo-boo.”

She might be on to something! Maybe this is how we should greet one another! “Hello” and similar introductions are nice and cordial, but “I have a boo-boo” – *that* might cause a revolution in human interaction.

How would it affect our relationships if we saw one another as wounded? Or, to expand the idea, how would it be if we saw one another as wounded, cute, innocent, scared, little toddlers? In pop culture, one of the greatest moments on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was when Captain Jean-Luc Picard had an epiphany. In the “Chain of Command” episodes, Picard was able to see his torturer as merely a scared little boy, acting out of fear.

In the examples of the holy, suffering martyrs we observe the same phenomenon. They are able to see their persecutors with compassion, forgiveness, and understanding, and as wounded, fear-filled children of God. We see this in the example of Saint Elizabeth, the Grand Duchess, who repeated the words of Christ about her torturers: “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It was Jesus, our perfect example, who said these words originally at His passion: “Forgive them ....” Isn’t this the ultimate example of how we ought to perceive the wounds inflicted on us? Jesus sees His persecutors as the fallen children of Adam and Eve. Shouldn’t we? He sees them as

children that “know not what they do”? Shouldn’t we?

Some icons, too, seem to nudge us to seeing the little child in one another and ourselves. A hallmark of some ancient (and contemporary) Coptic and Arabic icons is the depiction of saints as youthful or child-like.

Maybe Zoe’s “new” introduction is really an old one revisited. Jesus has already given this style of greeting to us in His appearance to the Apostles after His resurrection. Jesus greeted Thomas with “Look at my hands and my feet”. Could this be translated into toddler-speak as “I have a boo-boo”?

What would the effect be if, when we greeted each other, we were inspired to remember that we are all merely scared and wounded children? Would we be able to have compassion, patience and forgiveness towards one another? I suspect we would. Furthermore, what if we could turn a “boo-boo” greeting towards the vision we have of ourselves? Introspection like that might cause an even bigger revolution. Maybe we would be able to give the cute, little, wounded, fear-filled child within ourselves the things he or she needs; forgiveness, hugs, consolation, emotional and mental provisions, and, best of all, a true, healing relationship with God. When Jesus showed His “boo-boos” to the Apostles He was taking away their fear. He means to take away our fear, too. He shows the Apostles and us not only His wounds. He shows us His humanity and approachability, while as God He shows the answer to the *why* and *how* questions of our “boo-boos.”

Perhaps seeing the “boo-boos” in ourselves and others will bring us to the point where we can humbly bring them to Jesus. He has “boo-boos” too! Maybe we will be able, with some fear removed, to approach and introduce ourselves to God. And maybe we will even be able to mutter to Him with peaceful sincerity and childlike innocence, “I have a boo-boo.”







# MORE THAN WHAT WE SEE

Fr. John Oliver

IN THE 1989 FILM *DEAD POETS SOCIETY*, ROBIN WILLIAMS PLAYS MR. KEATING, AN ENGLISH TEACHER AT FICTITIOUS WELTON ACADEMY. IN ONE SCENE, HE GATHERS AROUND HIS DESK THE YOUNG MINDS TO WHOM HE LABORS TO TEACH THE VIRTUE OF POETRY: “WE DON’T READ AND WRITE POETRY BECAUSE IT’S CUTE. WE READ AND WRITE POETRY BECAUSE WE ARE MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN RACE. AND THE HUMAN RACE IS FILLED WITH PASSION. MEDICINE, LAW, BUSINESS, ENGINEERING, THESE ARE ALL NOBLE PURSUITS, AND NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN LIFE. BUT POETRY, BEAUTY, ROMANCE, LOVE, THESE ARE WHAT WE STAY ALIVE FOR.”

**M**aterialism is the view that *what you see is what you get* – that there is nothing more to the cosmos than the crude materials of observable reality. Secularists who would purge culture of all religion tend to be materialists, as are those whose chief goal in life is the acquisition of riches or fame or power. Mr. Keating, however, wants his students to see a *spiritual* part of reality – what he calls “poetry, beauty, romance, love.”

Holy Scripture sees two aspects to reality, also. Christ appeals to materiality – to the hard data of the observable and the provable: when approached by the disciples of the imprisoned Forerunner about whether He is the true messiah, Christ responds with a challenge to look at the facts: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.” But He also draws our attention to the spiritual and angelic – the *kosmos noetos*: “What does it profit a person to gain the whole world, yet lose his soul?”

The world of the materialist is one-dimensional, and is suffocated by hopelessness because of the inevitability of death. In contrast, those who recognize both physical and spiritual realities have the possibility of broader horizons and deeper experiences. Knowing we are more than material can generate sustaining hopefulness and optimism.

Yet spiritual experiences aren’t always sweet and happy, are they? Yes, angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim and heavenly hosts glorify God everywhere and at all times, in radiant glory. They are present now in the space around you while you read these words. But there’s so much going on in, say, the story of two crazed men, Christ, and a herd of pigs on a hill. Here, we deal with violent and unclean spirits, the tragic detritus from a rupture in the spiritual realm long ago.

We often talk of “God’s will,” but the devil has a will for our lives, too. It is to “steal, kill, and destroy.” What were the swine doing before they were swarmed by unclean spirits? Grazing. Afterwards?

Frenzy, madness, death. As it goes with pigs – from normal to nightmarish – so it goes with people. Thanks to a savvy social-media presence and the promise of a lifestyle without limit or restraint, organized satanism is on the rise in America. One response? You have no idea what you are dealing with.

What lies at the root of the devil’s hatred of those two poor men and those grazing pigs? What is the root of the devil’s hatred of you, of all that is human and good and true and beautiful? *Envy*. Why did Lucifer fall? Envy of the greatness of God. Why utter chaos in the demonic world? Envy of each other. Why steal, kill, and destroy? Envy of our privilege as human beings. Why Judas’s betrayal of Christ, why the Temple High Priest’s hatred of Christ, why the Jews revulsion for Jewish converts to Christ, why did one-third of all angels fall from heaven? Envy.

By the grace of God, however, envy is not without cure. When we find reasons to be grateful; pray for a spirit of contentment; shift our focus to the goodness in our lives; remind ourselves that no one has it all; limit our exposure to what we are prone to covet; believe that every blessing God wants to give me for my happiness is already inserted into this imperfect package that is my life; even thank our guardian angel for protecting us from the unclean spirits who are envious of us – we are more likely to free ourselves of envy.

The Christian knows there is more to life – and to death – than meets the eye. What you see is *not all* what you get. Instead, we profess an unshakable belief in broader horizons, in deeper experiences, and in a most optimistic transcendence. Let us humble ourselves before God and neighbor, and heaven with all its radiance awaits.

Fr. John Oliver, Pastor  
St. Elizabeth Orthodox Church, Mufreesboro, Tennessee



# PRAYING FOR THE DEPARTED

Fr. Andrew Harmon

VIN SCULLY WAS THE LONG TIME BROADCAST ANNOUNCER FOR THE LOS ANGELES DODGERS. HE ENDED UP RATHER FAMOUS THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE COUNTRY AND WAS CONSIDERED TOP-NOTCH IN HIS FIELD. BACK IN 1991 HE WAS GIVING THE LINE-UPS FOR A DODGER GAME, AND HAD TO EXPLAIN A LITTLE ABOUT THE DODGERS' FAMOUS STAR AT THAT TIME, ANDRE DAWSON. HE HAD HURT HIS KNEE A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO. SCULLY SAID, "ANDRE'S KNEE IS STILL HURTING TODAY SO HE WON'T BE PLAYING. BUT THEY HOPE HE'LL BE BACK SOON AND HE'S NOT GOING ON THE DISABLED LIST. THE DODGERS SAY ANDRE IS 'DAY TO DAY'." THEN THERE WERE A FEW SECONDS OF SILENCE BEFORE SCULLY WENT ON TO SAY, "YOU KNOW....WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, I GUESS WE'RE ALL 'DAY TO DAY'" (GEORGE F. WILL, "THE LAST WORD," *NEWSWEEK*, SEPTEMBER 5, 2005).

Vin Scully hit the nail on the head – we all are day-to-day. We never know which day will be our last. Sooner or later, we all leave this life, but when that is we can't know. So we are day-to-day.

In today's Gospel reading from Luke 16, our Lord Jesus Christ tells a story about a man who was surprised when his day of death rolled around much more quickly than he expected. Jesus doesn't give a name for this man, but tradition calls him "Dives." And he does take quite a dive! So I'll refer to him by that name.

Dives was a very rich fellow who really enjoyed his wealth. He was living high, living it up. As Jesus describes it in verse 19, he was "clothed in purple and fine linen, and he feasted sumptuously every day." He never gave death a thought at all. He sinned greatly by totally ignoring the poor beggar at his gate, named Lazarus. He was too busy enjoying his wealth to give the poor Lazarus even a bite of food.

Like all of us, Dives was living day-to-day, even if he didn't realize it. His day of death came unexpectedly. He went straight to hell. We are all day-to-day, like Dives. As it was for Dives, that day will come to us sooner or later. When it does, we will go to one of two destinations – either heaven, like poor Lazarus in the story, or hell, like rich Dives.

What about us who are left behind when that day comes for our loved ones? What do we do? We pray for them! At least, we Orthodox do. Not all Christians pray for their departed loved ones. Some consider it wrong to do so, and of no use.

The pastors of North Royalton meet one morning a month for breakfast and discussion. We eat and we talk and we've all become good friends over the years. Commonly, two Orthodox are present (two priests – we have the majority, so maybe that's why we meet at Mom's Deli, a Greek place!). There are also Roman Catholic, Southern Baptist, Lutheran, and Assembly of God pastors.

At one breakfast some time back the discussion was about the ways different churches do funerals. We all learned a lot. It became obvious that there was a big difference between how Protestants do funerals, on the one hand, and how Orthodox and Roman Catholics do them on the other. The big difference was that in Orthodox and Roman Catholic funerals the focus is on praying for the person who died. In Protestant funerals there is no praying for the person who died.

Now don't worry – when we discussed this large difference, it didn't lead to pastoral food fights. No one got mad and threw pancakes across the table. We all stayed good friends, of course, but we realized

there really was a big difference with funerals.

Yes, we Orthodox sure do pray for the departed – a lot! We do so at funeral services, memorial services (we will have a ten-year memorial service today), grave blessings, our own personal prayers.... Pretty much all the time! Why, when many other churches specifically do not believe in praying for the departed?

Why not? We pray for our loved ones when they are in this world with us. So when they die, we just keep right on praying for them. They are not dead. They are alive, even if their bodies are in the grave. We pray and hope and trust that they are in heaven with God, very much alive! Heaven is not far away. Jesus said in the gospels, "The Kingdom of heaven is among you." It's close, just a breath away. That means that our beloved departed are also close – so we pray for them.

What does the Bible say? It's in the Bible. In 2 Maccabees 12 of the Orthodox Old Testament, St. Judas Maccabeus prays for the souls of the soldiers in his army who had just died in a battle. In the New Testament, St. Paul prays in 2 Timothy 1:18 for a friend who had died. The deceased friend's name was Onesiphorus. St. Paul prays that God will be merciful to Onesiphorus on Judgement Day.

Church Tradition, too, is very strong here, going way back to the early centuries of Christianity. Our "spiritual ancestors," going way back, prayed for their departed loved ones like we do today.

It's the right thing to do, and it's also the natural thing to do. In the denomination in which I grew up, praying for the dead was forbidden. It just was never done, and was seen as wrong. I remember as a teenager being at the funeral of an uncle who had died. He had been sick for some time and, of course, our family and relatives had been praying strongly for him. At the funeral, however, now that he was gone, there was no more praying for him. I remember thinking distinctly that this was odd, unnatural, and maybe wrong. Pray, pray, pray for him while he was here and then, after his death, stop praying for him completely? After all, we believed entirely that he was still alive, even though he had physically died, but now it was wrong to whisper a prayer for him!

Praying for our loved ones is natural and good – because we believe in life after death. We pray for people while they are alive in this world, and we keep praying for them after they leave this world.

Of course, there is much mystery involved in all this. We can't even come close to explaining exactly how it works! We just know so little about "the other side." We pray for those who have died because our prayers really do help them.

Back in 2005 our late Metropolitan PHILIP gave a speech in Toledo. He told a story, how late one night, towards midnight, he got a phone call. It was a woman whose family he had gotten to know through several visits to their parish over the years. She was rather weepy and upset, and asked the Metropolitan if he could come and perform her husband's funeral. The Metropolitan said, "You have my sympathies, I'm very sorry. Maybe I can come ... what day will it be?" "I don't know yet when it will be" the woman said. His Eminence said, "Well, what day do you think it will most likely be so I can check my schedule." She hesitated and then said, "Well, he hasn't died yet." "He hasn't died? Is he right on the verge?" "Well, probably not. But he hasn't been feeling well the last few days, so I figure he'll probably die soon. And I want to get things ready." The Metropolitan was rather amazed but kept his composure and said, "Just call me back once he's died!" In his speech, the Metropolitan said that woman got quite a surprise. Her husband lived for many more years. In fact, the woman died before he did!

Actually, death is often surprising. We think someone is about to die, and then they live on for years. Every priest has had that happen. We rush to a hospital to give the last sacraments to someone whom every one is sure is dying. They live for years afterwards! Of course, however, it works the other way, too. Someone is in the peak of health it seems, and, suddenly, he or she is gone! We never know when we will go. But one thing we know for sure – we will go, sooner or later. What do we who are left behind do when someone does die? We pray for them. Praying for our departed loved ones is a big part of our spiritual life as Orthodox Christians. In our funerals, memorial services, grave blessings, every liturgy, many of our other worship services, and in our own personal prayers, we pray for those who have died.

It is right to pray for the departed, and not just to remember and honor them, although that's very good to do. The main reason we pray for them is that our prayers help them in their life beyond. There is a great mystery in all this, and as precise as we wish to be, we have to admit that the mysterious nature



of our subject limits what we can know.

There are four particular things for which we can pray for our departed loved ones. **First**, we pray for the forgiveness of their sins. We see such terminology very often in our prayers for them. When St. Paul prayed for his deceased friend, Onesiphorus, in 2 Timothy 1:18, this is what he asked for: “May the Lord grant him to find mercy on that day.” “That day” refers to Judgment Day. Paul prayed that God would be merciful and grant Onesiphorus forgiveness on that day.

Praying for forgiveness for the departed is definitely mysterious! The services assume that the departed one for whom we are praying is saved – that they have gone on to be with God. Yet in those same services we pray that God will forgive them. So the question sometimes arises, if they are saved and in heaven, then why pray for God to forgive them? Aren’t they already forgiven if they’re in heaven? Good question! And there is not a quick and simple answer....

Some think it has something to do with life after death and prayer itself being somehow “above time” – so maybe something like “retroactive” prayer is possible? Others think it has to do with asking for forgiveness for them when they stand, still in the future, before the final Judgment Seat of God at the end of the world. That seems to fit what St. Paul was praying for his friend Onesiphorus in that passage I quoted earlier from I Timothy.

And maybe both answers are right! We obviously don’t know the details. But we do definitely pray that our departed ones will be forgiven for their sins by God – and we know God is merciful!

**The second thing** we pray for the departed is that they will progress spiritually in the life to come. That they will get closer to God, go deeper into the light and joy of God..... We believe that people in the next life are not static and unchanging. They can grow. St. Gregory Palamas, our great Father from the late Middle Ages, wrote – “Do not the saints progress infinitely in the vision of God in the age to come?” (*The Mind of the Orthodox Church*, Metropolitan Hierotheos, 1998, p. 34) “Progress infinitely”—Growth in God that goes on forever – we pray that for those who have died.

Compare the souls of the departed to a bottle that you wish to fill with water. You pour water into it and just as it’s getting full, the bottle starts to grow..... So you pour more water in..... And the

more you pour, the more the bottle expands..... And this keeps going on and on and on..... I guess until you run out of water! It’s similar for those in heaven. God’s light and love just keeps pouring into them....and they grow and expand so as to receive more and more of God in their lives. And they’ll never “run out” of God because He is infinite! As St. Gregory said, they can “progress infinitely.” And we can help with that by praying for them.

**The third thing** we pray for the departed is for rest, for “repose” as the services say. We don’t mean by that unconscious “sleep.” We mean a restful state where they are awake and can still communicate but are at rest from the woes and worries and pains of this life. They have only rest, peace, and joy in the presence of God. That’s what we pray for them....

**And the fourth thing** we pray for them is to be resurrected at the end of the world. We pray that God will one day in the future raise up their bodies to be reunited with their souls in a new and glorified state of being in which they will live forever in the New Heaven and New Earth.

We most specifically pray that by something that we eat. When we have memorial services – 40 days, 1 year, etc. – we almost always have and eat the memorial wheat, the koliva. It is a way we remember our departed. But it is much more than that. Our eating of it is a “physical prayer” that they will one day be resurrected by God.

Both Christ and St. Paul in the New Testament compare death and resurrection to the planting of grain. A kernel is planted in the ground and appears dead. But one day it springs back up out of the ground, transformed into a plant that will grow and bring forth good fruit. When we bury a loved one in the ground, they seem to be dead. But....one day when Christ comes back they will spring out of the ground in the General Resurrection. And they will go forth to bring forth good fruit in the new world to come.

So as you eat that wheat in memory of someone who has departed, remember their upcoming resurrection and whisper a little prayer for them – “God, raise him up!” God will answer that prayer and raise them up on the last day. And our departed whose souls are now with God are eager, even impatient, for that great day of resurrection. We know this from Revelation 6:10. In that passage, St. John has a glimpse of the souls of martyrs currently in heaven, right under the heavenly throne of God. There

they are right in God’s presence, but yet they aren’t totally satisfied. They are impatient for the final day of resurrection – they want their bodies back! And they cry out to God, “How long?”

They won’t have to wait forever – that great day of rising up will come when Christ returns at the end of time.

So we pray for them – for their resurrection and that they might be patient now as they wait for it!

So four particular things we are praying for our departed when we pray for them – One: forgiveness. Two – Spiritual growth in the next life. Three – Rest in God’s presence. Four – Resurrection when Christ returns.

Do we pray for those in hell? As you can imagine, again no simple answer!

It’s important that we remember that we don’t really know who is in hell! There might be some we think are there who aren’t! And some we think aren’t there are!

The prayers in our services assume the person we’re praying for has gone to heaven, but that doesn’t prove they have! So we could be praying sometimes for someone that is actually in hell – you might even guess that sometime when we have a memorial for someone and you knew that person well – and you’re thinking – “I really doubt my cousin Bob went to heaven” But how can we know? So we pray for cousin Bob.

So we probably “accidentally” pray for people in hell, not knowing where they are. And that’s okay. Don’t worry about that. Because in our Orthodox history, there are stories and statements from Saints that talk about how prayer for those in hell can help them and comfort them and ease their suffering. So praying for those in hell, whether accidentally or on purpose, is fine to do.

There are no official church prayers asking that someone be “transferred” from hell to heaven. Some Saints, important Church Fathers actually, say it is possible, especially before the final Judgment Day at the end of time. Some say even later. We won’t go into all that now! So why no prayers for transfers from hell to heaven? Maybe because we just know so little about things of that type. And maybe because we don’t know who is where to start with.

There is one official service prayer for those in



hell. It’s in those long Pentecost Kneeling Prayers we pray on our knees at the end of the Pentecost

Sunday liturgy. We pray for “rest and consolation” for those in hell. There is no request made that they get out of hell. But how can we help but hope that that “getting out” might somehow be possible..... Some of our great Saints and Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Isaac of Syria, Maximus the Confessor, Silouan of Athos) hope that.....so we can, too.

So it’s fine to pray for those in hell, even though we don’t know who is!

We all have many who have gone on before us....we should remember them in our prayers all the time.

There was a man who was getting old and attending lots of funerals – all of his friends and relatives were dying one by one. His son said, “Dad, it’s kind of sad that you have almost no friends left.” The father replied, “Oh, I still have all kinds of friends! It’s just that most of them are now in heaven. But they are still alive and still my friends!” (in “Our Daily Bread”, 9/25/04)

Your mother who has gone on? She is still alive and she is still your mother.

Your friend who has died? He is still alive and he is still your friend.

Your husband who has fallen asleep in Christ? He is still alive and he is still your husband.

Be faithful to Christ now, so that in the future you will see your departed again in heaven. Pray for those who have died and look forward to being with them again – forever!

Fr. Andrew Harmon  
St. Matthew Orthodox Church, North Royalton, Ohio



# St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology Changed My Life.

Scott Speier, M.Div.

It was 1986, I was 18 years old, and I had just graduated from high school. My home church in Goleta, California, an Evangelical Orthodox Church, was about six months away from being united to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church through the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America.

At the time, I had many options to choose from concerning my education. I had done well in high school – my twin brother and I tied for valedictorian. I always believed, however, that my faith came first. It was time to put that into action.

I decided to spend my first post-high-school year studying the Orthodox Faith through classes offered by St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology. At the time, we had daily classes and met at the church. The class sizes were small, but the attention to detail was great. Subjects included Old and New Testament Studies, Liturgical Studies, Church History, Christian Ethics, Patristic Writings, and more. I was introduced to authors such as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann and Fr. John Meyendorff, and read treasures such as St. Athanasius's *On the Incarnation*.

I studied with professors such as Fr. Jack Sparks, Fr. Richard Ballew, and Fr. Jon Braun, who loved God, loved His Church, and were brilliant scholars and teachers. Through worship and study, I met our Lord and committed my life to Him. By the time I finished the year, I knew that it was in and

through the Orthodox Christian Church that my faith would grow, that I could truly know God, and that I would raise my family. I am so grateful for the Academy.

Fast forward a few years. I went on to study biology at UC Santa Barbara. From there I went on to UC Irvine for medical school. I now practice emergency medicine in Ventura, California. I have five children and two grandchildren. I am a member of St. Athanasius Orthodox Church in Goleta, and I am truly committed to God and His Church.

Now I serve as the newly appointed Chairman of the St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology. For about the last 15 years, the Academy's scope has been narrowed to the education of prisoners through correspondence courses. This is a mission we will continue. It is a new day, however, for the Academy. I am excited to announce that our new focus is the offering of correspondence courses online in a distance-learning format for the completion of an Associate of Arts Degree. These same courses that made a profound impact on my life are again available to all.

In addition, we are now offering special classes to homeschooling families in a tutorial format online, and we are developing coursework for a Bachelor of Theology Degree. At the same time, any course offered online can be taken by those who do not wish to earn a degree, but are simply interested in growing in their knowledge and faith.

St. Athanasius Academy is now offering online Orthodox studies for homeschooling families. For Grades 6 to 8, we are offering

- "The New Testament," with Fr. Joel Gillam
- "Lives of the Saints," with Fr. Michael Heningham
- "Virtues and Passions," with Fr. Paul Girgis

For high school, we are offering

- "The Old Testament," with Fr. David Bibeau
- "World History," with Fr. James Purdie
- "English," with Fr. Fred Shaheen
- "Virtues and Passions," with Fr. Paul Girgis

Registration for Fall 2020 opens next month, so check out the details now at [www.saaot.edu](http://www.saaot.edu).



## Diocese of Charleston, Oakland and the Mid-Atlantic Holds Annual Retreat for Deacons

Deacon Ned Trbovich

The Diocese of Charleston, Oakland, and the Mid-Atlantic held its annual retreat for deacons during the weekend of October 25–27 at St. James the Apostle Orthodox Church in Taneytown, Maryland. Bishop THOMAS, Fr. James Hamrick, Fr. Timothy Barkley (our host), and nine deacons attended, making this retreat one of our largest such retreats in recent memory.

We had the usual services: Vespers on Friday and Saturday evenings, Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on Saturday morning, and Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. On Saturday afternoon, Fr. James Hamrick of St. John the Baptist Mission in Lewistown, Maryland, presented the first lecture, on the

Celtic Saints of the Orthodox Church. Those of us with an "Eastern" bias forget that for the first thousand years of the church the western part of the Church was in full communion with the eastern churches, and the western Church produced many saints, St. Patrick being just one of many. Not only did Fr. James present us with a detailed written account of these saints, which we can use as a valuable reference in future, but his lecture brought to life the accomplishments of these saints in vivid and interesting ways.

Deacon John Gresham, who is assigned to St. Basil the Great Orthodox Church in Hampton, Virginia, presented the second lecture, on the African Saints of the Orthodox Church. He did not give a detailed, scholarly presentation on those saints, however. Instead, his talk came from the heart, as he shared with us how his initial exposure



to these black saints, and his developing knowledge of them, guided him to his eventual conversion to the Orthodox faith. (Deacon John was a Baptist minister for over 17 years at a parish in West Point, Virginia.) It is one thing to have a history lesson about saints of the early church. It is quite another to hear firsthand that these saints can and do still affect, in dramatic, inspiring, and encompassing ways, the lives of those living hundreds and hundreds of years after the saints reposed. Deacon John explained that, despite being a Baptist minister for many years, he still yearned for a deeper prayer life, and he found it in the Orthodox faith, and in the examples of humility and spirituality so vividly provided by the black saints.

The formal retreat ended with a brief but inspir-

were very grateful for the hospitality provided by Fr. Timothy and the parishioners of St. James the Apostle Church. They prepared delicious and bountiful lunches on both Saturday and Sunday after liturgy, and the parish generously paid for the deacons' dinners on Saturday evening at a very nice restaurant. We deacons, however, received an even greater blessing than food from St. James parish. At every deacon retreat we discuss and decide where we will meet for next year's retreat. (Next year it will be in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.) A year ago, when we decided to meet at St. James parish, it was located in Westminster, Maryland, with no proper church building, but a rented commercial location. We had no idea a year ago, by the time of this year's retreat, through the faith



ing discussion with our spiritual father, Bishop THOMAS. His Grace emphasized the importance of deacons preparing themselves adequately when serving, whether with a priest or a bishop. He also spoke about the use and misuse of laptops and other electronic devices as aids during church services. Several contemporary issues involving Orthodox church doctrine and practice, and attacks by non-Orthodox on Orthodox doctrine and practice were raised, and His Grace emphasized that we need to read what the Church Fathers taught about such matters, in order to have a proper response. In the area of administration, Bishop THOMAS appointed Deacon Abraham Cavalier as the chaplain of the deacons.

All of the deacons who attended the retreat

and efforts of the parishioners of St. James, and the operation of the Holy Spirit, that this year's retreat would coincide with the dedication of a real church edifice for the parish. This beautiful building was acquired a few months ago from the Presbyterians of Taneytown, who were in the process of closing the building because of dwindling members. I know I speak for all of the deacons at the retreat, when I say that it was a great pleasure and unique privilege for us deacons to serve with Bishop THOMAS at the first Hierarchical Divine Liturgy in this church proper. May God grant Fr. Timothy and the faithful of St. James many years!

# ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

## ORDINATIONS

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

LASSETER, Deacon Herman (Phillip), to the holy priesthood by Bishop NICHOLAS on Sunday, November 10, 2019, at St. Peter Church, Madison, Mississippi. Father Herman is completing his seminary training at Holy Cross in Boston.

## ELEVATION

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

## ASSIGNMENT

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

## SAVE THE DATE

### Winter Sacred Music Institute is February 20–23

The new Chair of the Department of Sacred Music, Mareena Boosamra Ball, invites all church musicians to save the date for this year's Winter Sacred Music Institute (SMI). This will be held in Southern California on February 20–23, 2020. The host parish is St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church, Van Nuys, California. Attendees should select flights that arrive at the Bob Hope Airport in Burbank, California. The theme is "Music as Prayer: Technique to Support Beautiful and Meaningful Worship." Each Sacred Music Institute offers a variety of sessions on topics of interest to those who participate in the ministry of music within the life of a parish. These sessions cover such subjects as chant, conducting, vocal technique and music theory. There is also time in the weekend devoted to worship, reflection and building relationships.

# Save the Date!

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

## 2ND ANNUAL SPRING RETREAT & PILGRIMAGE

### APRIL 3-5, 2020

### ANTIOCHIAN VILLAGE CONFERENCE CENTER

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





# COME VISIT WITH ST. NEKTARIOS

Lindsey Weber and William Weber

How can one begin to write about the spiritual treasures hidden in plain sight in Greece? Or, even more, explain God's grace in His saints that is waiting to be found within her churches and monasteries?

The centennial of the falling asleep in the Lord of St. Nektarios is coming up next year. He is perhaps Greece's most beloved, contemporary saint. There will be great celebrations as the date of November 9, 2020, draws near. In honor of the Saint and his coming day, I want to dedicate this account of our pilgrimage to Greece as it relates to him.

Before beginning, a brief word is in order about why he has been honored so much by God and the faithful. He was full of the virtues. Slandered by hierarchs, left homeless and hungry, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" like our Lord (Isaiah 53:3), St. Nektarios humbly forgave time and again, persevering with joy and love through tortuous trials, showing the love of Christ to everyone he met, ever stooping to serve, but never lowering himself to fight back in word or deed.

St. Nektarios is especially known for the monastery he founded and nurtured on Aegina, a lovely island just an hour or so by ferry from Piraeus, the port of Athens, Greece. Visiting this



island is only a day trip, some people say. But if one is to stop and experience the saints there through contemplation and prayer, a longer stay is recommended. My husband and I were able to visit this holy isle for three days this summer. Lodging at Souvala, the second ferry port on the island of Aegina, we had easy access to St. Nektarios' monastery, Holy Trinity, as well as other inspiring monasteries.

Our taxi driver would let us off at a specific monastery and then return for us at a pre-arranged time. Having a designated time for pick-up was most helpful, as cell phone reception could be difficult on remote mountain monasteries and churches. Throughout our pilgrimage we found that arriving early to holy places, — seven in the morning or so, gave us precious time be-

fore crowds arrived. How amazing to spend time with the Lord in the presence of his saints, with their relics and icons, without the press of others waiting to do the same. Coming early allowed us to be there for Divine Liturgy, where we were blessed to hear the beautiful angelic voices of the nuns at Holy Trinity and venerate the relics of St. Nektarios, without being hurried.

Following the Liturgy, we had the delight of visiting St. Nektarios's cell and striking up a

conversation with four pious pilgrims from Romania. The mother said a beautiful prayer with her limited English — for the Lord to "put glue on our heart to God." The ladies asked us if we would like to join them at the his sarcophagus for a spontaneous Akathist to the Saint. As the Akathist progressed, alternating between Romanian and English, the fragrance began. Though other relics of the saints that we venerated emitted a beautiful aroma, I still struggled with skepticism. So I began sniffing the nearby flowers — perhaps they were what I was smelling? They were artificial! And besides, our new friends were also enjoying the heavenly fragrance.

Our next holy site was the Monastery of Panagia Chrysouleontissa, the highest point on the island. The drive up was spectacular, as we climbed the mountain road while looking down over the island and the sparkling Aegean below. As happened repeatedly throughout Greece, we met inspiring monastics. A warm, endearing nun directed us to the centuries-old miraculous icon of the Mother of God, from which the monastery gets its name. Before

this icon, St. Nektarios himself had prayed; and he used to come many times to visit this monastery as part of his own pilgrimage. It was here he came to commune with the Lord shortly before his passing.

Returning by ferry to the Greek mainland, we visited St. Nektarios' room at the Aretaieion Hospital in Athens. There we were warmly ushered into the room where the Saint spent his final days on earth and passed on to the Lord. Today this precious space is preserved as a chapel where people come and pray and place their requests to the Saint under his pillow on his bed. It is awe-inspiring to stand in this holy room where his first posthumous miracle was performed right after his repose. As a nurse prepared the Saint's body for burial, one of his garments was set on the adjacent bed where a paralytic lay. The invalid immediately got up and walked! The testimony of the healed man may be seen on the wall as you enter. Also in connection with the Saint's passing, a heavenly fragrance filled the room. Those in the hospital smelled it for weeks. And for many years after his death, his body remained incorrupt and continued to be fragrant. Even today, people may still encounter his sacred aroma.

Before flying back to America, our final visit was to Spata, a small village near the Athens airport. We walked up to the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God to venerate the icons and relics and pray before them. After praying for a while, we began to notice a sweet smell, which we soon realized was coming from a relic of St. Nektarios! I never seem to learn, O me of little faith! I ended up asking one of the church members, "Did someone clean the cover over these relics with something that had a perfumed smell?" "No," they answered. It was indeed the fragrance of the Saint. To many Orthodox Greeks this would just seem normal, unlike skeptical me.

I really should have known better. On our trip we had been blessed several times to experience the

**St. Nektarios humbly forgave time and again, persevering with joy and love through tortuous trials, showing the love of Christ to everyone he met, ever stooping to serve, but never lowering himself to fight back in word or deed.**

heavenly scent of God's saints. While we were venerating a saint's relic in Thessaloniki, the priest commented that it always exuded a beautiful fragrance. A priest on the island of Corfu, Greece, informed us that a particular relic, which was redolent at the time we were there, did not always emit a fragrance. Over the course of our pilgrimage we noticed that in some cases a lovely aroma would become delightfully noticeable as prayers were being offered. The most important thing is to entreat His grace-filled saints to pray for us and those for whom we seek God's mercy. "Wondrous is God in His Saints!" (Psalm 67:36 LXX).

*A number of resources are available on saints and pilgrimages. Saint Nektarios, The Saint of Our Century is an outstanding biography. An excellent online resource for St. Nektarios and other saints is the "Saints and Feasts" section at <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/>. For visiting Greece, an indispensable resource is Evlogeite, A Pilgrim's Guide to Greece. For visiting monasteries in the United States, Atlas of American Orthodox Christian Monasteries is very useful. The saints await your visit!*



# A Prayer-Rope for the Entire World

Archpriest Andrew  
Stephen Damick

(Adapted  
from a  
sermon  
delivered  
November 10,  
2019, at  
St. Paul Church,  
Emmaus, PA)

A LITTLE OVER FIVE YEARS AGO, IN OCTOBER 2014, THE PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH, JOHN X, MADE A PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY MOUNTAIN OF ATHOS IN GREECE, THAT PENINSULA THAT IS HOME TO ROUGHLY THREE THOUSAND MONKS, SPREAD AMONG TWENTY MONASTERIES AND VARIOUS OTHER MONASTIC COMMUNITIES. WHILE HE WAS THERE, HE GAVE A SPEECH DESCRIBING SOME OF HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT THE HOLY MOUNTAIN BASED ON THIRTY YEARS OF EXPERIENCES WITH THE PLACE. HE REFLECTED ON ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH AND WITH THE WHOLE ORTHODOX WORLD. AMONG HIS WORDS, HE SAID THE FOLLOWING:

The mountain is a prayer-rope for the entire world. At the same time, it is an oasis from which Orthodoxy throughout the world drinks. I drank from it myself personally and learned here and in the Athonite Monastery of Saint Paul that this mountain with its monasteries, sketes and cells is the place where the dough of theology is kneaded with prayer. I learned that the theologian is the one who prays and loves. He does not disdain the knowledge that he acquires in school and he does not disdain the piety and prayer that he sees in monasteries. Rather, he arrives at both in the symphony of his life in order to become a being who hymns God Most High, in every resting-place of the Spirit over the course of his life.

Although this is our Patriarch reflecting on experience in a place to which most of us will never go, and whose life is something we will not take up, I think this observation is exactly relevant and timely for us today, in so many of our parishes. It is helpful when we gather together for parish meetings or council meetings, or as individual ministries, and consider what it means for us to be Orthodox Christian parishes, and what we do with that from here on out.

First, Patriarch JOHN says that “the mountain is a prayer-rope for the entire world.” He is using the image of a prayer-rope, a simple cord of knots used to focus meditative prayer, as an icon of Mount Athos in relation to the world. One of the accusations often leveled at monks and nuns is that they

are essentially useless people, because they spend so much time praying, and not doing something “practical.” That same accusation is sometimes leveled at parish churches, as well, that we do not really accomplish anything good, because we are not social activists. Indeed, we may be considered to be bad for society. Our way of life, we hear, is just parasitical on society and possibly even an attempt to control other people. Once someone gets a closer look at the vigorous life of prayer, fasting and obedience to a spiritual father, the accusations of this sort may well mount up.

We are called to be that prayer-rope for the entire world, however, no matter what the world might think of us. The prayer that we accomplish here together is not only for our own spiritual benefit, though it is obviously to our benefit. Rather, it is truly for the whole world, moving from the local to the global to the cosmic. In our common prayers,

creation – the universe. In all these petitions, too, we pray not just for the places, but for the people in them.

The prayer that we come together to offer to the Holy Trinity is the first element of our mission in this world. The reason that we make this first is because the sustenance and healing of the world is something that comes from God. He is the Source of all good things. We may be tempted to think that the “real work” will come from mankind, but that is not compatible with Christianity at all. The state of our world should be enough to dispel the idea that we can be successful at this without God’s help. God is at work in this world, but His work is not yet complete. While He is working, we can participate first of all and most of all through prayer.

The image of the prayer-rope is especially apt, because it is a steady, meditative prayer that, over and over again asks for mercy, with the quintessen-



we pray for “this holy house,” but also for “this city and every city and countryside.” We also pray for “peace for the whole world.” And when we pray for “the whole world,” the Greek there for “world” is *kosmos*, which refers not just to this planet but to all

tial prayer being offered on such ropes being the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” As he says, “the dough of theology is kneaded with prayer,” meaning that the teachings of Christ come to their fullness of presence and effect



“Lord  
Jesus  
Christ,  
Son of  
God,  
have  
mercy  
on me.”

in this world through prayer, especially faithful, persistent prayer.

The second point that I would like to mention is summarized in this sentence from our Patriarch: “I learned that the theologian is the one who prays and loves.” This sentence may be seen as something of an expansion and commentary on the ancient saying of Evagrius of Pontus: “The true theologian is one who prays truly.” So we may see that the Patriarch is perhaps telling us what it means to pray truly. To pray truly is to be one who prays and loves. As Christians, we are all theologians and should seek to be theologians – those who bear the Word of God and words about God.

This is an area, I think, where we have some of the most work to do as Orthodox Christian Americans. For most of us, we come to church, pray together, eat together, and possibly do some work together – so there is indeed some prayer and love happening. In most cases, however, when one of us has a need for love, we don’t have that need met by one another. There are, of course, some exceptions, and they are beautiful.

In more ways than just where we live, however, so many of our communities are “commuter parishes.” We commute to the church, do some things together there, and that is the extent of our relationships. This is not wholly the case for all of us, and I commend those who connect with each other outside these walls. That needs to be worked on intentionally, however, and not just left to family ties or happenstance. The same needs to happen between parishes, which often do not see other churches as being within their responsibility. So both within and between parishes, our network with each other is not very strong – not yet.

Finally, the Patriarch says that the theologian (that is, the Christian) “does not disdain the knowledge that he acquires in school and he does not disdain the piety and prayer that he sees in monasteries.” He says very clearly here that there is no contradiction at all between the knowledge arrived at through education, and piety and prayer. He speaks of monasteries, but he is on Mount Athos. He could just as easily speak of the piety and prayer of parish churches.

Today, we sometimes believe that there is a contradiction, and even conflict between these two: an educated person is not interested in prayer, and the prayerful person is not interested in education. This,

however, is a distortion of the human person, to whom God has given so many capacities, including the ability to learn, and prayer. It is no more a contradiction to love both prayer and education than it is to love both education and physical health, or both prayer and the preparation of food. Indeed, in an integrated, healed human person, all these things interpenetrate each other and inform each other.

More deeply, though, his observation that education and prayer do not contradict each other teaches us something about one of our key problems: if we do pray, we have put prayer into a box. Prayer is not something that, once done, accompanies us in all things. I recently acquired a prayer book that has prayers for moments like bathing and putting clothes on. If that sounds weird, it’s because we’ve put prayer into a box.

Finally, this beautiful paragraph from Patriarch JOHN of Antioch concludes this way: “He arrives at both in the symphony of his life in order to become a being who hymns God Most High, in every resting-place of the Spirit over the course of his life.” This is what we as Christians are: beings who hymn God Most High, “in every resting-place of the Spirit,” throughout the courses of our lives. In this way, we find our life consummated in our song to God.

As we consider who we are as Orthodox Christians and who we are together as parishes and as a larger Orthodox community, I pray that this is where we would arrive together: each and together a symphony of life which culminates in a hymn to God. This is not merely poetic language – or rather, it is poetic language used to express something difficult to express. Yet if we can at least begin to see that this is the purpose and true nature of our life as Christians, then our priorities and our actions will begin to be reordered.

We are fragmented. We are compartmentalized. If we will seek to reintegrate our lives by prayer in everything, and by everything in prayer, then I believe that we would find a new joy, a new song, a new vitality in each of our lives, and in our common life as individual parishes and as the whole Orthodox Church. It is Christ Who gives the song and to Whom we sing it. This is our life – indeed, our whole life.

## The Road We Take to the Cross

I can still point to the summer of 2013, when I attended the CrossRoad program, as one of the most transformative moments in my faith. My CrossRoad journal still sits on my bookshelf, five years later, next to my yearbook and camp photos. From time to time I pull it out and flip through the pages of hastily scribbled notes. I recall the ten days I spent learning about the meaning of vocation, and how to transition in my faith from high school to college and beyond. The floppy leather binding is worn, having survived more moves than I can count, and the rings are bursting with pages of added notes from alumni reunions and College Conference. As I open it up, the entry marked “Day 1” brings me back to the inauspicious beginnings of what would turn out to be an eye-opening ten days.

“Ride over wasn’t fun.” That was my first note in the journal. I had graduated from high school a few weeks prior and was set to begin college in the fall. The gargantuan tuition bill had arrived, setting everyone in my family on edge, a situation I concluded was entirely my own fault. The car ride with my parents was an unpleasant, close-quarters exercise in surly teenage glowering punctuated by tense arguments. In short, everything was miserable and I was determined to have a terrible time.

If you skip ahead to the very last page of my journal you will find, written in large letters, “CrossRoad: The road WE take to the cross,” with the word *WE* circled furiously. The pages in between describe a transformation from a scared, angry teenager, to a young man hungry for spiritual knowledge and eager to share it with the world. I learned that the cross is an awesome paradox of humility and

triumph. I learned that the road can be hard, but that we have steady guides in the church, the prayers, the Scriptures, and the Church Fathers and Mothers. Yet the most important thing I got from CrossRoad was that *WE*. It was the 30 other young people with whom I opened myself up, laughed, danced, sang, prayed, questioned, learned, and grew. Although I did not know it at the time, that *WE* also included the greater community of people who had also attended CrossRoad in the past. They would be integral in supporting me as I walked the often difficult road through college. I was changed and prepared in a way I could not have anticipated, and I do not think anyone can describe it better than 18-year-old me, who wrote, “I’m scared of being hit with all the things I was able to escape from...but I’m excited to be a better me.”

What is CrossRoad? In their own words, “CrossRoad is a ten-day academic summer institute that prepares high school juniors and seniors to make big life decisions and invites them to connect with the Orthodox Christian theological and spiritual tradition. Participants from all over the country come together to experience daily worship, take theology classes from some of the best professors in the country, visit local parishes, serve their neighbor, tour the city, and even spend a day at the beach.”

If you or someone you know would be interested in this transformative opportunity, you can find more information at <http://www.crossroadinstitute.org/>. Applications for 2020 are due February 1. It is my wish that every young person would have the opportunity to discover the joy and comfort I found in the Church during this critical period of transition, and CrossRoad is one of the best places to take that first step. I look forward to meeting you on the road to the cross.



# CREED AND COMMUNITY

## LIVING THE LITURGY — A PRACTICAL REFLECTION

### PART 5 OF 10

We often welcome the New Year with resolutions – promises we make to ourselves and goals we set; things we want to change, to give ourselves a fresh start. In fact, we do this every time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, supported and strengthened by a community gathered together for a purpose. This is a community that supports our “laying aside of our earthly cares,” and our preparation to receive the Eucharist. This community is centered around shared views and beliefs. These views and beliefs are taught through the hearing of Scripture and its explanation in the sermon, and is expressed in our Creed.

What is a creed? A creed is defined first as “any system, doctrine, or formula of religious belief” or as “any system or codification of belief or of opinion.” A third definition comes closer to our meaning: “an authoritative, formulated statement of the chief articles of Christian belief ....” Our Creed (the Nicene-Constantinopolitan) is broken up into three major sections: the first deals with God, the Father; the second with Jesus Christ; and the third with the Holy Spirit and related matters, such as the make-up of the church.

Where does our Creed come from? It is called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed because it was formed at the first two ecumenical councils. An ecumenical council was a meeting called by the emperor that included all the bishops from the entire Christian world at the time. The first of these councils was called in Nicaea in 325, to correct the teaching of a priest named Arius. Arius taught that Christ was a creature, created at some point by God the Father, and thus that there was a time when Christ did not exist. Because of this false teaching, and its increasing popularity, the Fathers of the Church that gathered together began writing a new statement of faith, a new creed. According to tradition, the discussion got so heated that St Nicholas reportedly slapped Arius, and was imprisoned for a little while as a result!

Up to that point, the Church used what was

called the Apostle’s Creed. In this Creed, Christians stated: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven; He is seated at the right hand of the Father; and He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.” Many of these same statements were included in the Creed that was written in Nicaea, and we see them still today, but they were made more emphatically, to counter the work of Arius. This is why expressions like “only-begotten” and “begotten of the Father before all ages” are included in our Creed.

After Nicaea, two other debates arose, one started by Apollonarius and another by Macedonius. Apollonarius taught that Christ had a human body, but that He did not have a rational, human soul like ours. According to Appolinarius, Christ’s mind or soul was divine; his Orthodox opponents saw that this meant that He could not be truly human. Macedonius on the other hand, taught that Christ is eternal, but that the Holy Spirit was created by the Father through the Son’s actions. This meant that there was no Trinity. Because of these teachings, a second Ecumenical Council was called in Constantinople in 381. The Creed reflects these controversies in expressions like “was made Man,” and “proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and Son together is worshiped and glorified.” Hence we have today’s Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, Begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten,



not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; And ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; And He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets; And I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the age to come. Amen.

The statements found in the Creed as we know it today are the only statements that the Church speaks about “dogmatically,” that is, with authority and without interpretation. A respondent to a survey on worship said that the Creed is his favorite part because he knew the words. This raises the following questions: Does simply knowing the words matter? Does saying them together affect our sense

of community? Does the Creed bring our community together? The answer to all these questions is Yes! It is powerful to be together, praying together in the same way. By contrast, when we go to a different Orthodox Church and the words of the Creed are different, or maybe they’re sung, we can feel like we don’t belong, that somehow we are not a part of this community. We may have a similar feeling at times, but about something we don’t want to talk about: What if I don’t believe what we are saying?

It’s normal, at some point, to have doubts about things. In fact, it might even happen several times in our lifetime. The great part about living in community with others is that we don’t have to go through that alone. Chances are good that any questions we might have, others have also had at some point. When we open up the discussion and share with one another, we become more unified as we respond to each other, and to God, who invites us to worship Him. Working through our doubts often helps strengthen and even solidify our faith. Those of us who were baptized into the church as infants didn’t choose these things. At some point, we each have to take an important step, to consciously acknowledge that, for me, the Church is *my* Church. That step begins when we are unafraid to ask the questions we may have, to discuss these things within our community, and to draw closer to God through His community.

Gregory Abdalah, D. Min.



# ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

Judges' Choice, the Oratorical Festival  
for the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America

Every child I babysit knows I have two rules: 1. “No whining”; 2. “You can’t say can’t.” The first rule is very helpful when trying to understand an upset child; the second is useful in encouraging people to overcome their struggles. When people are struggling, they too often find themselves bound by the word “can’t.” Because “can’t” is an absolute negative, it suggests that we will never be able to overcome our weaknesses, problems, and passions. St. Paul tells us, however, that all things are possible “through Christ who strengthens” us.

Christ strengthens us, but first we are sometimes allowed to suffer. Life is difficult, or, as Westley from *The Princess Bride* puts it, “Life is pain, Highness. Anyone who tells you different is selling something.” Suffering is not detrimental; it is crucial to our humility. By struggling and suffering we are humbled and enabled to see that we need Christ. In 2 Corinthians, St. Paul writes that in response to his own plea for his suffering to end, Christ tells him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” St. Paul encountered a “can’t,” and he begged for his suffering to end, acknowledging that he needed Christ. By recognizing his weakness, he was able to accept God’s grace. Believing in Christ doesn’t end our suffering, as St. Paul shows, but rather it allows Him to strengthen us. Through Christ are we able to endure suffering, and through Him we are made perfect.

Even in the midst of difficulty, we are called to praise Christ in His glory. Three years ago, while at Camp Saint Raphael, I tried to work up the courage to chant. On the second day of camp at Vespers, I went up to the chanters stand and stood right next to my counselor. I chanted with the group, my hands trembling and my voice slowly getting stronger, until my counselor asked me if I wanted to do a verse.



As she whispered its beginning, I hesitated, and by the time I finally did chant something, it came out squeaky and indistinct. I was barely heard, and if it weren’t for the prayer books, no one would have understood what I sang. I could feel my face turning red, and I stopped chanting.

At the end of Vespers, I ran out of the chapel, tears streaming down my face. I was mortified, humiliated, and honestly believed that I would never be able to chant. When my counselor found me upset, she comforted me and told me that “we

were created to love and worship God. Instruments can play symphonies, but no earthly thing can play the words written on our hearts.” My tears stopped and my heart rejoiced with a love and understanding that I had scarcely felt before. I was still wary of chanting, but I knew that with practice and God’s help, I could learn to praise Him.

The next day at Orthros, a new camper was chanting. I stayed away from the chanter’s stand, still wary, but I applauded her bravery. That evening at Vespers, there were two new chanters. By Thursday evening, campers of all ages were lined up across the back wall to the end of the chapel, each trying a verse or two. After that night, a rotating schedule had to be made because so many campers wanted to chant. One of the younger campers came up to me later and explained why there were suddenly so many people willing to try a turn at the stand. She said that I had given them the “OK” to chant. I was stunned. My weak and squeaky voice somehow encouraged all of those children to offer their voices in praise of God. It confirmed for me the common saying that Christ doesn’t call those who are qualified, but qualifies those who answer His call.

A great example of this is St. Romanos the Melodist. Ironically, St. Romanos also struggled with making his voice sing what his heart felt. Born in Syria in

the Fifth Century, St. Romanos grew up with the love of God in his heart. He was always the first to come to church and the last to leave. He became a reader, and on the eve of the Nativity, he was told to chant the improvised hymns. Paralyzed, he couldn’t think of anything to sing. Another reader took over for him, but tears flowed down his face as he hid behind the rest of the chanters. After the service, he prayed to the Theotokos, asking, “What shall I say to glorify thy newborn Son?” That night, the Theotokos came to him in a vision, giving him a scroll and telling him to swallow it. The saint did as he was commanded and then woke up, full of joy and hymns for Christ. The next morning, St. Romanos went out to chant and without any hesitation or premeditation, sang “Today the Virgin gives birth to the transcendent One.” St. Romanos had been given the gift of understanding, composition, and hymnography, writing hymns for the rest of his life as he continued to answer Christ’s call.

St. Romanos didn’t think that he was worthy to chant. He could have let himself be bound by “can’t.” Instead, his humility allowed God’s grace to strengthen him. Likewise, St. Paul’s statement, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” is a sentence of humility, not boastfulness. He was stating that the only way he had learned to be content, was with Christ’s help. He tells the Philippians that he has learned “both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” What St. Paul means is that he is full of Christ, but still hungers for the Kingdom of Heaven. He is content with all that God has given him, but he still acknowledges that he needs Christ. He has learned to live with limitations and struggles because he knows they are opportunities for discovering God’s grace.

Christ strengthens us, not to become wealthy or powerful for our own sakes, but to resist temptation and transcend our fallen nature. There have been many times that I have given into sin, but each time I fall, I try again; I try and I fight. Through my acceptance of Christ’s mercy, I am renewed in the Church, following the path of the saints. In the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Abba Moses asked Abba Silvanus, “Can a person make a fresh start each day?” Abba Silvanus replied, “If he is diligent, a person can make a fresh start every day and every hour.” This hope of making a fresh start every day is crucial to being an Orthodox Christian, because it shows not only that a person can continue to grow, but also that he or she can continue to be forgiven. Even though life is hard, we

have Christ’s strength. Psalm 141 at Vespers teaches us to ask for God’s help, crying out “deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I.” We are not strong enough alone, but with Christ, “all things are possible.”

I attempted to chant again at the most recent Winter Sacred Music Institute. I went in the mornings for Orthros to chant with them and stood with the chanters in the evening. In my mind, I had decided that “I won’t say No to Christ.” If someone had asked me to chant a verse, I would say, “Yes,” trembling or not. The weekend started to fly by, and I wasn’t yet asked, probably because there were about twenty chanters there. Sunday came and I chanted Orthros with them and then proceeded to take my place with the other teens at the front of the choir. There were three verses that needed to be done for the priest’s communion and there were three girls in front of me ready to chant them. It was a hierarchical liturgy and – as I am sure you all know – that means it went longer than expected. They needed another verse. A chanter dashed up to me with a book and the director pointed at me and gave me my pitch. This was it. No turning back. I read it quickly in my mind as the choir finished singing and then out came the verse! I do not honestly remember even chanting it. I remember trembling and my dear friend giving me a thumbs up halfway through the verse. Afterward, my Godmother – who herself is a choir director – came up and said, “First of twenty thousand!” Had I done it? No. Christ had. He had strengthened me. I felt so at peace and full of joy. Dread and terror no longer held me captive in my own thoughts of what I could and couldn’t do.

I mentioned that every child I babysit knows my two rules, but the two rules are not just for kids. I am learning to apply “No whining,” and “You can’t say can’t,” to my own life. Whether the issue is getting a child to eat his veggies, or chanting, or something much more difficult, when we say “can’t,” it binds us. It is a form of pride, and we use it to ignore Christ and His help. If I tell myself that I “can’t” do something, I am stating that my weakness is greater than Christ’s strength. It’s through my weakness that I am lead to humility.

By allowing myself to be weak, I can accept that I need Christ’s grace to strengthen me. Only through suffering and humility can we be strengthened by Christ to glorify Him.

Anastasia Likiardopoulos, St. George Cathedral, Wichita



# COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

## ST. NICHOLAS, BROOKLYN, CELEBRATES SEVERAL MILESTONES

Seven hierarchs, assisted by almost two dozen clergy, gathered in worship around the holy altar at the Archdiocesan Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Brooklyn, New York, on Sunday, October 20. They thanked God above all for the body and blood of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ; and also for the centenary celebrations

Wichita, Bishop THOMAS of Charleston, Bishop JOHN of Worcester, Bishop ANTHONY of Toledo, and Bishop NICHOLAS of Miami. Their special guest was His Eminence Metropolitan HILARION of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, who represented His Holiness, Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia. The Russian Church

“We must continue to remain the salt of the earth, to preserve Christ in our hearts, and to save this world from madness and decay,” Metropolitan HILARION said in his homily. “We must do all that we can to transfigure it. Each of us is a disciple of the Lord, with humility and love, bringing the gospel to those near and far. Such was the ministry of St. Raphael of Brooklyn, who came here 125 years ago, to found the com-



of the Cathedral on State Street and the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Syro-Arabian Mission by St. Raphael of Brooklyn; for the elevation to the dignity of Archpriest of the Cathedral's assistant priest, Fr. Adrian Budica; for the quarter-century anniversary in the priesthood of the Cathedral's Dean, Fr. Thomas Zain; and for the tonsuring of his son, George, to the rank of Reader.

Leading the celebrations was His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH, Primate of the Antiochian Archdiocese, joined by Their Graces Bishop BASIL of



provided St. Raphael as a priest in 1895 – and consecrated him as Bishop – for the founding of the Syro-Arabian Mission, the precursor of the Antiochian Archdiocese.

munity of this church.”

At the conclusion of the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, Metropolitan JOSEPH welcomed Metropolitan HILARION, who arrived in the U.S. the night



in Brooklyn, served as Master of Ceremonies. Fr. Thomas's wife, Khouria Claudia, Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Mr. Roger David, President of the Order, spoke lovingly of him. His Eminence presented Fr. Tom with the Certificate of Meritorious Service, honoring his years of service as priest, Cathedral Dean, and Vicar General, and in his other roles in the Archdiocese.

Peter Samore

## BISHOP ANTHONY VISITS ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST, BAINBRIDGE, OHIO

His Grace Bishop ANTHONY visited St. Luke the Evangelist the weekend of September 14–15, 2019. The weekend marked his first visit since the parish acquired its new building on 12 acres of property in Bainbridge, Ohio, earlier this year.

The building was originally built in the mid-1980s as a Catholic church, but had been used as a Protestant church for the past 20 years. The parish has been working to transform the space into an Orthodox church since moving into the building this past spring. The first phase of temple beautification was completed a few weeks before Bishop ANTHONY's visit. The parish had installed the principal iconography, provided by Fr. Jonah Campbell of Damascene Gallery in Wayne, West Virginia, in the church nave.

The hierarchical visit formally began Saturday evening with the reception of the Bishop at the church by St. Luke's pastor, the Rev. Fr. Matthew Thurman, followed immediately by Saturday Vespers. The chanting for the

before. “Your presence here for this great celebration is greatly appreciated,” Sayidna said. “We thank you for bringing the blessing of the holy Patriarchate of Russia.” Sayidna also stressed the enduring relationship and shared history cherished by the churches of Antioch and Russia.

His Eminence recalled the pilgrimage of Archdiocesan clergy and laity he led in May to Russia, where he visited Metropolitan HILARION. “You cannot imagine the joy and the richness of the faith we brought home with us. We have witnessed the beautiful way of faith in Russia. People are strong and deep in their faith.” Sayidna then turned to the congregation and said, “Go to Russia and see the spirituality and the piety and the monasteries,

and the experience of many holy fathers and mothers. St. Raphael experienced all of that.”

Earlier that weekend, Sayidna JOSEPH convened the autumn meetings for the Archdiocesan bishops, the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the Antiochian Village Council, and the Board of Trustees.

On Saturday night, following Great Vespers, a banquet was held to honor Fr. Thomas Zain's 25 years in the holy priesthood. Joining the Archdiocesan leaders at the Brooklyn Law School were the President of the Borough of Brooklyn, Mr. Eric Adams; and the Honorary Consul General of Lebanon in New Jersey, Mr. John Abi-Habib, and his wife, Mrs. Sonia Abi-Habib. Fr. Michael Ellias, Pastor of St. Mary Church





service was led by St. Luke's head chanter Tyler Stevens, assisted by Ben Thurman.

After Vespers, parishioner John Dumot hosted an all-parish dinner in his home. A lively discussion with Bishop ANTHONY followed dinner, on the subjects of how far St. Luke has come as a parish, the beauty of the church nave, and priorities for the parish moving forward. His Grace challenged the parish eventually to build a new church temple on the property. The first priorities, however, were to grow the size of the parish and pay off the existing mortgage on the new property. Bishop Anthony also entertained parishioners' questions about the faith.

His Grace's visit continued on

Sunday morning with Orthros and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy for the Sunday after the Exaltation of the Cross. Deacon Macarius Tolbert of St. Matthew Antiochian Orthodox Church, North Royalton, Ohio, assisted in serving both services.

A highlight of the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy was music offered by St. Luke's Sunday Liturgy Choir, under the direction of Andy Susick. The Choir was formed this past June to lead the parish in congregational singing.

Three special celebrations took place at the end of the Liturgy. First, His Grace blessed the church nave and new iconography with holy water. Second, Bishop ANTHONY led the Procession of the Cross in observance of the weekend's festal celebration. Finally, parishioners Mike Bifano and Randy Verbrugge were inducted into the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch with George and Anne Thomas serving as their sponsors.

After Liturgy, the parish enjoyed a formal luncheon with the Bishop, followed by a question-and-answer session with His Grace and the parish's church school students.

#### BISHOP JOHN VISITS HOLY TRINITY, LYNCHBURG

Holy Trinity parish in Lynchburg, Virginia, hosted Bishop JOHN, November 9–10. Bishop JOHN oversees the Western Rite parishes in our Archdiocese. His Grace was formally received at Vespers on Saturday and encouraged us with his homily. Supper with the clergy and Parish Council followed at Fr. Alban and Khouria Helen Waggener's

home. On Sunday, His Grace presided at Matins and Mass, and preached. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, he elevated Fr. Alban to Archpriest. A picnic followed at a parishioner's home, at which the Bishop answered many questions from our Inquirers and the newly-illuminated. We were blessed with a beautiful day and the loving ministry of our beloved hierarch.

Fr. Alban Waggener

#### BISHOP NICHOLAS ORDAINS A PRIEST AT ST. PETER CHURCH, MADISON, MISSISSIPPI

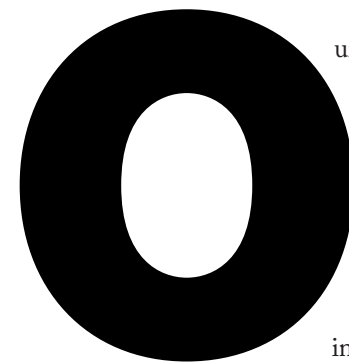
His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS made his arch-pastoral visit to St. Peter Church in Madison, Mississippi, November 8–10, 2019. The highlight of his visit was the ordination to the priesthood of a son of St. Peter's, Deacon Herman Lasseter, during the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. Fr. Herman is completing his third and final year at Holy Cross Seminary. A wonderful banquet honoring Fr. Herman, Khouria Nikki (Emelia) and their children, Titus and Thatcher, was enjoyed afterwards by a full house of the faithful of St. Peter and other members of Fr. Herman's and Kh. Nikki's families.

His Grace kept a very full schedule of meetings with the various organizations and clergy of St. Peter Church and encouraged everyone to participate in the life of St. Peter's, and the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast.

## Fr. Constantine Nasr Visits St. Simeon Orthodox Mission

Karen Sibert Haddy

OUR PARISH FAMILY AT ST. SIMEON ORTHODOX MISSION IN SANTA CLARITA WAS SINGULARLY BLESSED RECENTLY, WHEN THE VERY REVEREND CONSTANTINE NASR ARRIVED TO LEAD US IN A DAY-LONG RETREAT, TITLED, "RENEWAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES: PRACTICAL STEPS."



ur parish family at St. Simeon Orthodox Mission in Santa Clarita was singularly blessed recently, when the Very Reverend Constantine Nasr arrived to lead us in a day-long retreat, titled, "Renewal of the Holy Spirit in Our Lives: Practical Steps."

Readers may know of Fr. Constantine from his twenty-five-year career as the head priest of St. Elijah Antiochian Orthodox Church in Oklahoma City, and his pioneering work in missions and evangelism. Fr. Constantine has helped establish missions in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, and Colorado, and has been an invaluable guide to our own Very Reverend George Ajalat in the startup of our mission here in Santa Clarita, California.

Some of our parishioners know Fr. Constantine from joining him on one of his remarkable guided tours of the Holy Land. Still others have heard of him as the head of the Nasr Orthodox Foundation, which works to strengthen the Church's presence and to support Orthodox Christians across the Holy Land. In Taybeh, Palestine, the ancient Christian village on the West Bank where Fr. Constantine was born, the Foundation supplies the Secondary Greek Orthodox School with books, sponsors tuition for students, and has furnished a

computer lab, a room for Christian Education, and a teachers' lounge, among other projects.

We began the day with Holy Liturgy to celebrate the holy, glorious and all-praised leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul. Then, after coffee, we settled in to hear Fr. Constantine speak. Rarely sitting down, mostly standing and moving around the church, Fr. Constantine began by focusing on our need to remember that we are created in God's image and likeness, but of course as human beings we often sin. While the Church is perfect, he pointed out, it has a human face. But if we remember to invoke the Holy Spirit for only five minutes a day, he advised, "it will be a great help to you."

"Ask the Holy Spirit to be within you," Fr. Constantine urged. "When you wake up, look at yourself in the mirror. Tell yourself, 'I want the Spirit of God to be in me today to move forward.'" Don't think about tomorrow, he said, just work on today. "You know how to please God," Fr. Constantine said. "Do the right thing!"

"Ask yourself, 'Will God be pleased with me today – with what I say, what I do, where I go?' When you ask that question, God will speak to you through your conscience. Is the answer Yes? Then you are on the right path. If the answer is No – you are paying a price. If you follow that inner voice, your life will be enriched. You are the winner, because God speaks to us by the Holy Spirit. That is a real practical step," Fr. Constantine said.

Of course, nothing comes easily, Fr. Constantine



emphasized. “You have to make the effort. You have to open the book.” The Bible can be “the GPS to enable us to connect to the Creator and help us in the struggle to be like him,” he explained. “This world will lead us to darkness, but light leads to light. Abundance of life is being with God, moving with God, obeying the teachings of God. If you do that, your life is full – full of the Holy Spirit. It only depends on you and me if we wish to invoke that Holy Spirit.”

Fr. Constantine spoke on seven major topics to amplify his practical advice about bringing the Holy Spirit into our daily lives:

*Water* – Water is a recurring theme throughout the Bible and our lives, beginning with the water of Baptism. Fr. Constantine spoke about the “living water” that Jesus offers to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, and reminded us of the words that we sing from Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Even in a mundane act such as washing our hands, Fr. Constantine advised, we can take a moment to cleanse our thoughts from evil things. “Jacob’s well – let it be here!” he said. “Draw near to quench the thirst!”

*Light* – Two parables in the Gospel of Matthew tell us about light. The first is from Matthew 5:14, where we are advised to let our light shine and not hide it under a bushel basket. “Candles remind you of God’s light, to be illumined, to shine,” Fr. Constantine said. “Whatever you do, whatever you say, it shows. People can see, hear, analyze what kind of person you are. The light of Christ illumines us all,” he said, and we can use it to walk in the light, not in darkness, and help light the way for others.

The other parable from Matthew 25:13 tells of the ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. The five who were wise took oil with their lamps and were ready to meet the bridegroom when he came. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming,” the Gospel warns us. Fr. Constantine promised that we too can aspire to be “the light of the world” if we take care to keep the candle burning, oil in the lamp, and the light switch on. “Use practical and tangible things,” he advised.

“Think of God when you turn on the light! If I have the light of Christ in me, it can change everything! That is what God expects from us: to do something good with this gift of light.”

*Bread* – “Jesus was born for one reason only: for our salvation, yours and mine, as the expression of the ultimate love of God,” Fr. Constantine said. “He reveals Himself as the bread of life. ‘He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.’” We draw near to Christ to nurture both our physical bodies and our souls, Fr. Constantine explained. “Communion requires bread and wine. The Eucharist is the medicine of immortality. We come to renew ourselves by the Spirit at the heart of the Church. This is the heavenly table of the Lamb, which is laid for you.”

Fr. Constantine looked around the church and asked many in the group how they came to be Orthodox. The answers were surprisingly varied, coming from people whose background was Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Jewish, Byzantine Catholic, and Evangelical. This shows, Fr. Constantine explained, that so many people have “hunger for the truth, for the right food. We have the food! What was given to us – this is the Church handed down. Nothing has been changed; it is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Because of the Holy Spirit, we have the one true, catholic, and apostolic Church.” To remind ourselves, he advised, we can take a bit of the blessed bread home after church, symbolic of the feeding of the 5000, to remember during the week that we are a family, sharing the same food and the same blessing.

*The Cross* – “The cross of Jesus is heavy,” Fr. Constantine said. “Whether we wear a cross or not, we have a cross to bear. Just by being Christians, we have a cross to bear. Christ said, ‘Take up your cross and follow me.’” However, Christians are not alone; we help each other. By wearing a cross, in a practical way we connect with our Savior and his sufferings. “All of us have crosses in all colors and in all shapes. We all have our sorrow days,” Fr. Constantine declared. “We all have our victorious days. The way to have abundant life is to connect with the cross. Let it shine!”

*The Span of Life* – “When I was a little boy, I could not wait to grow older,” Fr. Constantine said. “To shave my beard. But as I became older and older, I realized that time passes so fast. We need to understand that life is a gift and lifespan is a little measure: threescore years and ten. Beyond that is a bonus! Time passes and we are climbing the steps, ascending to the glory of God.”

The more we think of death, the more we come to value life as a precious gift of God that must not be wasted, he advised. But we can’t wish it back again. “Wishing will take me down to depression,” Fr. Constantine said. “But in God, our life will be eternal. At the end, you want to be with Christ as a triumphant – remembered as a faithful man, mother, grandmother, servant. What kind of crown in the end are you going to have? Making the sign of the Cross, saying we are Orthodox, will mean nothing if we don’t make it our daily life. But with repentance and change, you reconnect with your Savior. God will send us a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to lead us to eternal life, to have our name written in the Book of Life.”

*The Tree of Life* – The theme of trees is woven powerfully throughout the Old and New Testaments, beginning with the Tree of Knowledge in the garden of Paradise. “Many people today are trying to find their roots, where they came from,” Fr. Constantine said. “Those of us who share a family tree, we are blessed. We are living in a transient society. Our relationships may be cut as time passes, but they are restored through connections,” as they are here at St. Simeon for us.

Just as branches must be trimmed from a tree to keep it healthy, and branches may be grafted for new growth, “if I don’t trim, fertilize, and protect my garden, I am going to get nothing out of it,” Fr. Constantine explained. “Your mind is the branches of the tree. If they are going right, left, and everywhere, trim those things that will lead you to darkness, and will not lead you to good fruit. Invest your time and talent. I can see in Scripture how we can put on Christ by grafting Christ in us.” “We look at God’s creation and see if we are connected to that eternal tree of life,” Fr. Constantine said. “Love and compassion in maintaining a tree of life is like

fertilizer and water. Without it, there is nothing there. God wants us to be in that tree of life, and our church is that tree. Through that baptismal font, we become part of that grafting.”

*The Aroma of Life* – Near the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, there is a street where you smell all kinds of spices, Fr. Constantine said. But as everyone knows, aromas can be good or bad. The smell of incense is a source of aroma, giving thanks to God, he explained, an aroma of the spirit to connect us to God. “The censer has four chains with three bells each, representing the apostles who’ve come to tell you a story. When the priest censens the icons and then you, he is honoring you for being in the likeness of God.”

The question for us to answer, Fr. Constantine said, is What kind of aroma do we bring to Christ? “We must take all this outside into the world; share the aroma of Jesus, the Gospels, with people outside. Wherever you go, represent Christ in all things. Whatever we do, we impact this world either for good or bad.”

*Conclusion* – “The last word I want to say,” Fr. Constantine said, wrapping up the day, “is that this life that we receive is given to share the love and compassion of Jesus. We are created after the image of God to become like God. We are to be reminded of all cleansing and washing of sin through confession. We are reminded to be his light, to share his light. To partake of Him and remember Him as the bread of life. We are remembering all other things: aroma, the tree of life, and the span of life. Finally, we remember that life is a gift, and life should not be taken for granted or be abused. It should be appreciated and lived to the fullest in Christ. I hope that your light will shine. Let your light shine for all men.”

Of course, it isn’t possible to do justice to the full depth of Fr. Constantine’s discourse in one brief article. For the listeners, it was a remarkable opportunity to hear a great speaker give us advice of incalculable value, along with some very practical tips for inviting the solace, guidance, and strength of the Holy Spirit into our lives every day.

Karen Sibert Haddy



# Indiana Couple Discovers the Orthodox Faith – 72 Miles From Home

David E. Sumner

After two of her sisters were chrismated in the Orthodox Church, Loni Freeman of Portland, Indiana, became increasingly drawn to the faith. She read books, listened to podcasts, and visited Orthodox churches. Her husband, Ron, however, was not interested. They were active members at a Methodist church where he had been a Sunday School teacher for 20 years, worship leader, and church council member. He was also a founding board member and past president of Youth



for Christ of Jay, Adams, and Wells counties and was often invited to speak at churches in the area.

Both Ron and Loni grew up in evangelical churches and raised their four children in a Christian home. Ron is President and Chief Executive Officer of Jay Petroleum, the parent company of a chain of thirty-four Pak-A-Sak convenience stores, with 450 employees in Indiana and Ohio. He is also a member of the Huntington University Board of Trustees, where he is an alumnus of the Christian college.

Loni and her sisters grew up in a Baptist family. Her sister, Lisa, was chrismated at St. Elijah Orthodox Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 2010. “She had a library full of Orthodox books that we passed around, as well as videos and podcasts from Ancient Faith Radio. I remember being skeptical, fascinated, inspired and confused all at the same time by what I was learning. Some days I was so captivated by Orthodoxy that I devoured books by the hour or listened to podcasts all day long. Loni says that *Becoming Orthodox* by Peter Gillquist was the most influential book in her journey. “That is the first book that my sister gave

me and made me want to read something else about Orthodoxy.”

She finally convinced Ron to visit a Fort Wayne Orthodox church. While they were driving home after their second visit, they were talking about the service, she asked him what he would think if she became an Orthodox Christian.

“I was unprepared for the look of pain and shock that crossed his face,” says Loni.

Ron says, “That was a wakeup call for me because I had just considered it a bit of a fad for her. After 36 years of being of the same mindset about Church, faith and all of that, I found it very difficult to accept. That was a tough couple of days for me, and we had several long talks about what it meant. I told her at the time that it felt like a spiritual divorce.”

“My roots in the Protestant faith run very deep. So, when Loni initially presented me with Orthodoxy, I wasn’t all that interested because I thought I had already found ‘the pearl of great price’ that Jesus was speaking of. But I really wanted to understand what motivated her to consider it. Whether it made sense for me wasn’t the point. I just wanted to understand and accept what she was doing. I just started praying in the morning and asking God to open my eyes to truth. I just wanted to know the truth. For ten weeks, I spent every free moment examining the faith; first its theology and then its history.”

Ron says, “My most influential book was *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* by Dr. Bradley Nassif. He did such a wonderful job in the first thirty pages of explaining what Orthodoxy is and its differences with Protestantism, and did it in such a gentle way. For someone who was Protestant, it made me want to know more.

“In the end, I discovered that I had reached the boundaries of my Protestant faith. As I prayed each morning, I asked God to reveal his truth to me. The walls of those boundaries began to dissolve. The thing that made me feel like I had to become Orthodox very quickly was the Eucharist. I was reading the verse in John where Jesus says, ‘If you do not partake of my body and blood then you have no life in you.’ I’ve read

that verse for years and years, and then suddenly, I felt like Jesus was speaking to me personally. I quickly came to believe if I wanted that, the only way I could have it was to become Orthodox. That was very much a turning point for me.”

They began to visit Orthodox churches and discovered the nearest two were more than an hour away: one to the north in Fort Wayne, and the other to the south in Fishers, an Indianapolis suburb. The driving time either way was about the same. The first time they visited St. George Orthodox Church in Fishers, they were immediately struck by the beauty and iconography of the new temple that was completed in 2013. They felt a warm welcome by Fr. Nabil Hanna, Pastor, and the congregation, more than a third of whom are converts from other faiths. “We were very, very impressed,” he says.

At the ages of 60 and 62, Ron and Loni were chrismated on January 6, 2018. They have become active members and Ron was recently elected to the parish council. Now they drive 72 miles each way to worship on Sunday. Sometimes they drive to attend midweek meetings and Lenten services.

They appreciate their pastor and friends at the Methodist Church, who were very understanding of their decision to leave. “But it’s not easy to say good-bye, and I sometimes mourn the loss of fellowship and history that it took us to leave our Methodist and Protestant history behind,” says Ron.

Loni was asked if she had any advice for someone whose spouse doesn’t seem interested in the Orthodox faith. “The only thing you can do is be patient and pray because truly it’s a work of the Holy Spirit. I would say don’t be critical. Sometimes I would go to church with him and then point out things that didn’t line up with my new theology. It was super hard to go there and not see things that I knew were not quite right.”

“That was not a good thing to do, because it just made things worse,” says Ron.

As Loni reflects on the last three years, sometimes she wonders, “Why were we so blessed?” She says, “We were reasonably happy in Protestantism for all these years, but God had something more to show us.”

David E. Sumner is a member of St. George Church, Fishers, Indiana, and a convert to the Orthodox Church. He is an author and retired journalism professor.

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