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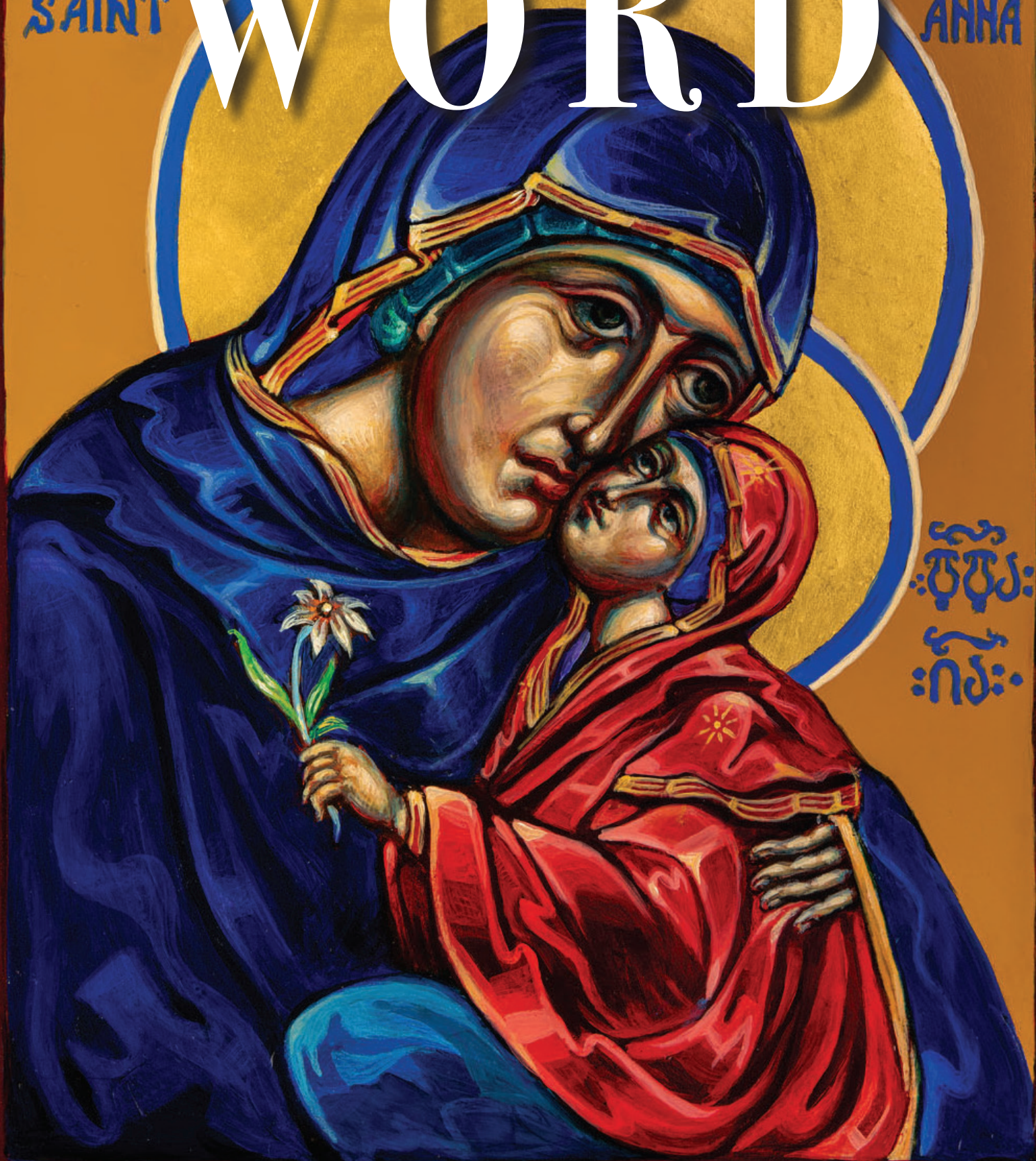
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# WORD





# THE WORD

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

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# WHAT SHALL I RENDER?

Bishop JOHN

I WILL WALK BEFORE THE LORD IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING. I BELIEVED, THEREFORE HAVE I SPOKEN: I WAS GREATLY AFFLICTED: I SAID IN MY HASTE, ALL MEN ARE *LIARS*. *WHAT SHALL I RENDER UNTO THE LORD FOR ALL HIS BENEFITS TOWARD ME?* I WILL TAKE THE CUP OF SALVATION, AND CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD. I WILL PAY MY VOWS UNTO THE LORD NOW IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL HIS PEOPLE. PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD IS *THE DEATH OF HIS SAINTS*.

– PSALMS 116:9–15

**W**hen I awoke this morning, a line from this psalm was in my head, on my heart, and singing in my body: *What shall I render unto the Lord?* I usually awaken pleased to greet the day. I've buried enough friends to know that every day is a precious gift, so I begin each day greeting God and thanking Him for the day. This

day, however, was different. Undeniably, I was shaken by this psalm, so I share it with you in the hope of understanding the message and getting on with my day.

We understand the psalms to be prayers. They are the largest portion of our corporate worship as the Church, the called-out and gathered community of God. It is our prayers that define us. What we pray is what we believe,

The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend  
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend  
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend  
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend  
Bishop NICHOLAS

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and what we believe is who we are. Our belief is not reduceable to cognitions or thoughts. Our faith is our connection to God Himself and to each other. It is what unites us. Ultimately our prayers originate in God, who gives us our senses and life itself, so that He can share Himself with us. We in turn recognize His presence and respond. Sometimes we respond out of our hearts; this morning I respond with the words of the psalmist, indeed the words of the Church.

I said before that it is our prayer that defines us. We know from God's revelation that we are created by God in His image and likeness. God creates and God gives abundantly. So it is our very nature to be creative and giving. Anything less contradicts how we are created to be. When we act, usually out of fear, contrary to our nature which is in the image of God, we experience the discomfort of what social scientists call "dissonance." *Dissonance* is that uncomfortable feeling we have when we know something isn't right, that it doesn't fit. Heaven is orderly, so we need things to be orderly, predictable, beautiful, and peaceful. This is how we are created to be, but the world isn't orderly right now. Our basic prayer, given to us by the Lord, says, "... on earth as it is in heaven." The world is in disorder because it isn't reflecting heaven. So what can we do?

When we pray, we connect with God "who art in heaven." We transcend the disorder around us and embrace "Our Father," but literally "baba," or, "Daddy." Holding on to God as Daddy, we share His calm, eternal life, timelessness, and peace. We forget, for the moment, imposed isolations, quarantines, shutdowns, and restrictions, and instead share our unity with Him and, in Him, with each other. In Christ there is no separation between people, because in Christ even the dead are alive and with us. As I have reminded you so many times, even the yet-to-be-born share life with us in Christ and in the Church. When we pray the prayers of the Church, we unite ourselves to all those of the Church who share the same prayers.

When I pray, I am in Christ and united to God. When I pray the prayers of the Church, I am in the Church which is in Christ. When I embrace "Our Father," I am in heaven which is also in Christ. So my question remains, *What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?* All I have is myself, so that is what I will offer today: myself, as the best I can offer, is in His image and likeness. His image and likeness is without my fears and sins. It is without my greed or neediness. It is without my holding on to anger or slights or wounds from disrespect. It is with the newness of the day that I render myself unto the Lord, who values His saints (people) and offers salvation.

May the new day and the New Year be blessed with our transcendence of earthly cares and our embrace of heaven.



# Christ Is the Healer's Prototype

Ioana Popa, MD, BCC

WE LIVE IN A TIME OF GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY, IN WHICH, AS HUMANITY, WE ARE SUD-  
DENLY AND DIRECTLY FACING OUR OWN PHYSICAL FRAILTY AND DEATH. AS SCARY  
AS THIS CAN BE, OUR CURRENT REALITY IS STOPPING US IN OUR TRACKS AND IS  
REVEALING A HIDDEN INVITATION TO TURN TOWARDS OUR INNER SPIRITUAL WORLD  
AND JOURNEY. IF WE BECOME AWARE OF THIS INVITATION AND CHOOSE TO TURN  
TOWARDS UNION WITH GOD IN OUR INNER CHAMBERS, THE LANDSCAPE CHANGES  
COMPLETELY TOWARDS HOPE AND PEACE, WHICH SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTAND-  
ING. SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS AND SOME CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGICAL  
METHODS CAN REMIND US OF THIS REALITY AND STRENGTHEN US ON THIS JOUR-  
NEY. ULTIMATELY, CHRIST IS THE PROTOTYPE OF THE HEALER FOR ALL.

**D**uring healing encounters, many professionals use their skills and presence to bring hope to people in need. Standards have been developed, establishing professional, ethical and vocational guidelines towards better and compassionate care. In this article, I will discuss two opposing views on the role of healers in spiritual interventions: that of an expert, and that of a companion. The argument is that Orthodox Christianity can offer greater richness to the contemporary conversations of healing in general, and in spiritual interventions in particular, by seeing healing through the lens of union with God, and by following the example of Christ's life. Christ seems to invite the other into the healing process through awareness and will. I will also briefly review two contemporary psychological methods which can enhance the healing process by engaging the same awareness and will: Psychosynthesis and Internal Family Systems. Following Christ as the model, healers do not need to hold one position or the other, but with God's grace and using skillful methods, can integrate both and move fluidly between them, towards a renewed way of being.

## HEALER'S DILEMMA: EXPERT OR COMPANION?

Currently, there is a wide spectrum of healing professions, from psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists, to nurses, doctors, physician assistants, nurses, priests, chaplains, life coaches and spiritual directors, and so forth. Each vocation has its own set of skills and, in most cases, professional standards. In healing encounters, including spiritual interventions, it is not uncommon for the practitioner to wrestle with an explicit, or more often implicit, tension between two healers' roles: that of an *expert*, or of a *companion*. On one extreme, the *expert* is the one bringing either psychological structures or theological truths and rituals, utilizing particular sets of interventions and skills; and on the other extreme, the *companion* relies fully on presence, compassion, empathy, support, and unconditional love to do the healing work. With such a variety of vocations and techniques in today's world, it is difficult at times to pick and choose. Nevertheless, it can be very helpful to recognize each of those two roles and to ponder when to choose one over the other, or both. As we shall see, Christ transcends both positions at various times, pointing towards a new way of being.

## THE EXPERT

Many healing interventions and methods assume that the healer's position is that of an expert, *correcting* whatever is unhealthy or underdeveloped. The medical model is based on this assumption, but *correction* has a widespread use beyond the strict definition of healing. It may range from parenting techniques, learning new skills, training in any discipline, spiritual correction, or asceticism, all the way to modern medicine and psychology. Its uses may appear in everyday experiences, including our pandemic times, though not limited to them: a doctor intubating a critical COVID patient who cannot breathe, a nurse giving medications, a parent teaching a child, a surgeon removing an appendix, a priest advising a parishioner, a stroke victim re-learning how to walk, and so on. Ultimately, the assumption is that the healer must alter, fix, or correct that which is wrong, defective, or non-functional.

From a Christian perspective, corrections are necessary at times, since the path to healing and salvation is described in the Gospel as a narrow path. Jesus urges us to *enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it* (Matthew 7:13–14).<sup>1</sup> The early Christians spent much of the first millennium clarifying important theological points, correcting serious heresies, trying to inspire people to live a simple and loving life with high moral standards. Many Christian or spiritual traditions emphasize specific corrective actions and define clear paths to live a wholesome life.

At an extreme, however, full and absolute adherence to this position has obvious limitations. It is assumed that the person who seeks help has some defects or deficiencies which have to be corrected or fixed by the expert healer. This implies that the suffering person has no inner, natural ability to move beyond the sickness. This framework can imply, too, that the person is ultimately broken, so that he or she needs someone or something outside of their being to rescue them. The need for experts is undeniable, but it is not enough. In fact, the person in need of healing may feel that their identity and freedom are being denied. Sebastien Falardeau urges chaplains to be aware “of the violence inherent in the hermeneutics proposed by modern approaches towards spiritual care” and invites them to readjust their pastoral theology, towards compassion.<sup>2</sup> Yes, the violence of cutting

someone's leg in surgery is needed on occasions, but it is not the only way to heal legs.

## THE COMPANION

Although the medical model is ubiquitous in the healing world and so ingrained in our contemporary culture that we seldom challenge it, there are other emerging psychological frameworks which point to a different foundation. Within the intimacy of the healing process, the secular psychological world found that most people had a natural healing ability, unconstrained by scientific theories. This awareness started a slow shift in the psychological paradigm, beginning with Depth Psychology (Carl Jung), Psychosynthesis (Roberto Assagioli), Humanistic Psychology (Abraham Maslow), and continuing with our contemporary Mindfulness based therapies and the more recent framework of Internal Family Systems (Richard Schwartz).

This opens up the possibility that psychological healing, which can ultimately lead to spiritual healing, can happen beyond the expert healer, whether an outstanding mental health professional using evidence-based medicine, or a psychotherapist, or a prominent spiritual leader. The healer is a *companion*, helping the other access his or her own healing presence and trusting this unnamed presence which is in all of us to unfold the healing. In Judeo-Christian tradition this unnamed presence is unequivocally God. When Moses asks God how to name them to his people, no name is given and God answers *I am the existing one* (Exodus 3:14). It is as if God is inescapable, and will be revealed to anyone who seeks Him: *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be open* (Matthew 7:7). Christianity has asserted long ago that God, the Holy Spirit, and Christ represent the ultimate healers, and if indeed *the image of God is within you* (Luke 17:21), it follows that the healing ability is present already inside each of us. This is not to say that the above psychological methodologies have no particular set of complex and refined skills, but those skills take in consideration and engage this mysterious presence in the process of healing. Thus, the healer learns not only how to expertly apply skills, but also how to be a *companion* and be present and aware, thus allowing this healing presence to intervene in both the healer and the sick.

This is not a new concept in the realm of biology, as any living organism has intrinsic healing mechanisms imbedded in the DNA. For example, after a bone is

broken, the cast is not the healing agent, but it provides the straight path for bone to heal itself. Under the right conditions any tissue in our bodies has this ability. Even a medication such as Prozac is not in itself the healing agent, but produces some changes in the cellular brain interactions, thus allowing the natural neurotransmitter Serotonin to balance itself. To paraphrase Pierro Ferrucci in his book “What We May Be”, if this is how the universe works, why would one assume that the human psyche is different?<sup>3</sup>

Taken to its extreme, this framework can lead to limitations and to a subtle but firm belief that each person has everything inside to heal psychologically and spiritually. On the same level this belief can send the message that one only needs to discover their inner healing compass in order for healing and self-actualization to happen. This consequently could promote a sense of self-sufficiency or egocentrism. Another possible danger is that of a full reliance on only presence, compassion, rituals, and spiritual experiences as the healing agent, without particular skills, potentially leading to spiritual bypass. *Spiritual by-pass* is a term used in some psychological methodologies to describe the process of avoiding inner psychological unresolved past pain by resorting and seeking spiritual rituals, insights and mystical experiences. This process is very common and wide spread among spiritual and religious seekers as most human beings are trying to find release from psychological pain, and many religious rituals and spiritual experiences can provide quick shifts in states of consciousness. The danger of spiritual by-passing is that it skips the first and necessary step towards spiritual healing, which is that of psychological healing, maturity, and integration.

What does it mean to go beyond the two healer's positions? This answer has to do first and foremost with the meaning and purpose of healing.

#### HEALING IN THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH: THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS GOD.

In many healing professions nowadays, the ultimate goal seems to be the human restoration to a normative equilibrium: a physical, emotional, and psychological health. What one does with this equilibrium is then assumed to be determined by each individual, as long as people are socialized and respect one another. From a spiritual perspective, however, healing is more complex, and transcends the individual's health. Healing discussions will thus include exis-

tential questions such as: What is the meaning of life and death? Is death the ultimate destination or not? And if not, what does it mean to heal from a larger perspective of life after death?

In the cosmological context of the Orthodox Christian Church, the healing path for each human is a movement towards wholeness and restoration of the relationship with the creator of the universe. Throughout scripture, liturgy, hymnology, iconography, monastic tradition, and theological writings, the message is both simple and straightforward: Christ is our healing God, and the church as the community of believers, is our hospital<sup>4</sup>: *come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28). Christ, the incarnate God, is the ultimate Lover of our soul and Healer of every human being, longing to connect and to bring salvation to all. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me* (Revelation 3:20). The hearing of God's voice and the opening of the door implies two things: on one hand the human consciousness and awareness of the divine knock; and, on the other hand, the human choice and act of will to enter into this universal relationship.

The good news of the empty tomb redefines the modern understanding of healing as just attaining health. Christ embodies this ultimate healing by conquering death through His resurrection, with such vitality, boldness and selfless love for all mankind. His ability to transcend sickness and death is the ultimate healing paradigm, never experienced before or after in human history. The theologian Dumitru Staniloae in his book “The Holy Trinity” remarks: “In taking on a body, the Son of God experienced the suffering





that humans go through in their bodies, but by enduring them without separating Himself from God, He made enduring suffering - and even death - into a demonstration of the Spirit's power."<sup>5</sup> Christos Yannaras points out that "[Christ's] personal existence constitutes the possibility of man's attaining at some time the freedom of life which characterizes God himself, that is eternal life which is not bound by natural limitations"<sup>6</sup>.

Christos Yannaras continues: "Many religions and philosophies proclaim the 'immortality for the soul', but the Church is differentiated from all these, because [the church] understands immortality, not as an uninterpreted form of "survival 'after death, but as a transcendence of death by means of the relationship with God"<sup>7</sup>. St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria makes a similar point, nuanced twofold: the Resurrection on one hand shows God's love for humankind by undoing corruption (as death is transformed into the resurrected life) and on the other hand by turning humans back to incorruptibility "by making the body his own and by the grace of the resurrection banishing death from them as straw from the fire."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the Christian definition of healing is seen as the movement through life, suffering, death and resurrection towards the union with God and energized by God: "God, then, intervened, not in order to compel man to be like Him, but in order to be himself life man, by guiding the personal potential of human nature to the extreme accomplishment of hypostatic union with Divinity - an accomplishment unattainable even for man before the fall."<sup>9</sup> Christ's resurrection points to the fact that the ultimate healing goes beyond health or sickness, life or death, and is reaching far beyond any human understanding: *for my counsels are not as your counsels, neither are your ways My ways* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

#### BEYOND EXPERT OR COMPANION IN SPIRITUAL HEALING: CHRIST AS A PROTOTYPE FOR HEALERS.

The argument of this article is that in spiritual interventions healers do not need to hold one position or the other, but integrate and move fluidly between both, as we will see from Christ example. Being trained and fluent in both healing positions, that of the expert and that of the companion, allows the healer to make decisions based on each particular situation, while relying on the ability of the Other to access their own image of God, expressed through their will

and consciousness. Healers will benefit from learning and leaning into Christ as prototype for healing, accessing thus image of God both within themselves and in the one in need of healing, revealing the pattern on the Trinity in the healing process. Christ moved beyond dualistic thinking and integrated these opposites: life and death on the cross, masculine and feminine, or accepted and rejected etc. His resurrection from earthly death is the *seal* of this integration, and brings awareness and possibility of a third way to resolve tensions between two opposites views.

Throughout the healing encounters and teachings, Christ is the true prototype of this dance between the two positions. He is an expert as he quickly intervenes without asking any questions when there is no consciousness or will preserved in the other, as in the case of Peter's mother who had fever<sup>10</sup>, that of the little girl who died<sup>11</sup>, or the people possessed by demons<sup>12</sup>. He is the expert while teaching and using His word (incarnate Logos) to speak authoritatively on behalf of God the Father about the path towards healing: *If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.* (John 7:38). On the other end, in the case of the paralytic by the pool in John's gospel<sup>13</sup> or that of the lepers,<sup>14</sup> Christ is clear to elicit first the longing and inner motivation of the other, aligning the will and consciousness, thus being more of a companion. One of the quotes attributed to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the famous author of the Little Prince, is saying in the same spirit: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea". Although in all gospels there are many healing encounters, this article focuses on only four accounts of Christ and various lessons for the healer in spiritual interventions.

**1. Cleansing of the Leper - Free Will and Human Dignity** (Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16). The encounter starts with the leper asking Christ: *Lord, if you will, you can make me clean* (Matthew 8:2). It is as if the leper is not putting any pressure on Christ, but acknowledges first His free will. Jesus in turn accepts the invitation saying, *I am willing, be cleansed* (Matthew 8:3), and Mark adds that Jesus even was *moved with compassion* (Mark 1:41). This brief exchange is packed with deep respect for each other's free will and dignity, leading to clarity of intention and aligning of wills. Initially, Christ positions



himself as a companion before actually performing the healing.

As Christ is healing the man, he truly respects the Jewish tradition and asks the leper not to say anything to anyone but to bring himself to the priest and to give an offer: *as Moses commanded* (Mark 1:44). This comment is striking from a psychological point of view. As human healers, when one experiences great success in work, it is natural to feel an urge towards recognition. The much-needed modern confidentiality laws put a break to this natural desire to be affirmed and recognized for good works. How much more significant Christ's gesture is, because during His times there were no legal constraints of confidentiality to block this natural human tendency of reaping the fruits of the healing process and building a reputation. As a leader, this is even more striking, as leaders across centuries built their successes and let the world know of their deeds in order to impress others. Christ does not need nor have external constraints to block those impulses and He truly empties himself to perform an amazing act of healing without any personal benefits nor need to affirm His self-worth. He simply responds to the heartfelt request from the leper.

It is worth noting that at the end of this encounter, Christ separates himself from the people he healed, *so He himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed* (Luke 5:16). Christ models for us what a healer's attitude and process looks like, not only during the healing, but also right after. In a similar way, many of us healers would benefit by separating both physically and emotionally at the end of the healing encounter, in order to regenerate. This separation in the healing cycle is of paramount importance, and was elaborated in a previous article<sup>15</sup>.

**2. The Woman with a Hemorrhage - Faith Beyond Boundaries** (*Matthew 9:20-26; Mark 5:2-43; Luke 8:40-56*). In this miracle, the woman was aware of her desire to be healed, but Christ as the healer actually is not even aware of her presence because of the size of the crowd. Yet healing occurs spontaneously, as if Christ cannot help but heal others just by who He is, man and God at the same time. The woman's inner dialogue was one filled with great fear, since due to the times, she carried a double burden of being 'unclean' due to twelve years of bleeding, and of having no rights as a woman. At the same time, however, her inner dialogue had focused clarity and directionality of her will: *if only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well* (Matthew 9:21).

In hindsight, knowing that Christ is both God and man, His response is not surprising. However, through the eyes of the time, it was probably quite shocking. First, it was surprising that Christ was even aware that someone touched him and power came out of him. Second, His response was compassionate and filled with grace instead of a typical human response of anger, criticism or need for punishment arising from being touched by an unclean woman without permission, violating the need for personal space: *daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction* (Mark 5:34). There was no judgment and no repulsion coming from Christ. He embodies openness, fearless courage, and respect to all humankind, especially for the dejected of his time. Who are the rejected ones in our times and in our churches, and in what situations and through which means are we to respond in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with fearless compassion and courage?

Interestingly, it appears that Christ's human awareness was lagging behind his Godly nature to heal and love, as he only noticed that *power going out* (Luke 8:46) of him as it happened, but not before. This nuanced experience is also a unique model for healers: there is no need to strive nor to be aware of all the implications and consequences of our healing actions or words. It is as if, by having faith and allowing oneself to be a vehicle of God's providence and healing power, healing already happens, whether the healer is aware of it or not. Thus, faith seems important not only for the one that is healed, but also for the healer, as the healer becomes more of a conduit of God's healing power. Between this example and the verse: *therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them* (Mark 11:24), it is as if Christ is in a constant state of prayer, with the invitation for us that prayer does not have to stay only on a conscious level, but with practice can become an implicit state of being<sup>16</sup>.

**3. The Man with a Withered Hand - Redefining Healing** (*Matthew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-11*). While in the synagogue, Pharisees questioned Christ: *it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath?* (Matthew 12:10), in order to test him, as they did not seem really interested in the answer. Christ seeks out the man with the withered hand and invites him to be healed. This time, the healing is prompted by Christ's desire to correct the underlying cultural and religious assumption of the time, the association of the healing with "work" which was forbidden on the Sabbath. The new

1. Throughout this paper I will use Bible quotes from *The Orthodox Study Bible*, New King James Version (Thomas Nelson, 1982).
2. S. Falardeau, *Soul to Sell in Spiritual Care: Violence of Hermeneutics and Theories in Spiritual Care Industries, Pain and Suffering and Resilience*, OCAMPR (California: St Sebastian Orthodox Press, 2018), pp. 141, 142.
3. P. Ferrucci, *What We May Be: Techniques for Psychological and Spiritual Growth Through Psychosynthesis* (New York, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2004).
4. It is interesting to note that both *hospital* and *hospitality* have the same root in Latin. *Hospitality* means “host, guest, or friendliness to guests” and *hospital* means “a guest chamber.”
5. D. Staniloae, *The Holy Trinity. In the Beginning There Was Love* (Brookline MA, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012), p. 53.
6. C. Yannaras, *Elements of Faith. An Introduction to Orthodox Theology* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1991), p. 92.
7. Ibid, p. 65.
8. Saint Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Yonkers, New York, 2011), p. 67.
9. Op. cit. p. 93.
10. The account of the mother of Peter is present in all synoptic gospels: Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39.
11. The little girl is Jairus's daughter (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56).
12. There are many accounts of people with demons, with lost reason, will and consciousness, healed by Christ. Interestingly, in all conversations, we hear the demons

story and deeper meaning of healing is thus restored as an act of mercy, grace, and the restoration of human dignity and completeness, rather than a compulsory act or following the rules of a religious group.

In Luke, it is apparent that Christ is aware of the scribes and Pharisees' trap, as they watch him. It is inspiring to see Christ's courage to do the right thing in spite of the consequences, which later leads to His death. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what does it mean to heal with courage? Every healer at some point in his or her life has to face this question and choose an answer.

**4. Healing of the Paralytic - The Faith of the Community** (Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26, John 5:1-7, 8-9). In the parable of the paralytic, which is present in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Christ clearly questions the Pharisees and opens the possibility of interchangeability between physical and spiritual healing. In all three gospels, Christ asks in a similar way: *For which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say rise and walk?* (Matthew 9:5; Mark 2:9; Luke 5:22). It is often easy to think of forgiving sins only from a spiritual perspective, without a particular impact on the body and vice versa. Nonetheless, today's psychology and science confirms the interconnection and bi-directionality of the mind and body connection.

In this particular encounter, Christ's healing is prompted and inspired by the faith of the community. In various other miracles, Jesus waits to hear what the other is longing for. For example, Christ asks the blind man: *what do you want me to do for you?* (Luke 18:41). However, during this encounter, the intention and the desire for healing is brought forth by the community. The people around the paralytic went to a great length to remove the roof of the house and lower the bed, in order to bring the sick to Christ. The faith and alignment of the will of the entire community are powerfully embodied in this action and therefore move Christ's heart. With a sense of tenderness, Christ exclaims: *son, your sins are forgiven* (Mark 2:5), thus healing him both spiritually and physically.

Interestingly, in John's Gospel there is also a story of a paralytic (in John 5:1-7, 8-9), who has the same ailment, but is in an opposite predicament vis-à-vis of his community. Although the paralytic has been sitting next to the pool surrounded by people for a long time, he has no one to show any interest in helping him and moving him into the healing water. Everyone around him seems to be concerned only with their own interest and ignores the fundamental

reality: this man, even with the greatest intentions of pursuing healing, has no means of acquiring it. This time, Christ reaches out to the paralytic in his usual fashion and asks: *do you want to be healed?* (John 5:6). The paralytic seems so hopeless in the face of his community's indifference and cannot even fathom that his condition could be reversed. Over and over, we witness the alignment of the will, consciousness and healing intention of both the healer and the sick one, as a catalyst in the process. Christ heals him with the same command as in the other Gospels: *rise, take up your bed and walk* (John 5:8) and the man miraculously starts walking. The faithful crowd in the synoptic Gospels seems to be amazed and glorify God after the healing, but in John, curiously but not surprisingly there is no mention of the community's response.

#### MODERN PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS HOLDING BOTH HEALER'S POSITIONS: PSYCHOSYNTHESIS AND INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS.

Twenty centuries after Christ's incarnation, humanity continues to learn and grow in consciousness, as well as develop new frameworks of understanding the world we live in. Two modern psychological approaches, Psychosynthesis and Internal Family Systems assume the healer is both a companion and an expert, bringing presence along with highly developed skills. The healer has the ability to hold contradictions and promote with presence and consciousness the inner integration and transformation of the other. Both methods deal with tensions and polarities by finding a third solution, which from a Christian lens points to the Trinity. In Psychosynthesis, the movement is towards synthesis of all opposites leading to a higher integration<sup>17</sup>. In the Internal Family Systems view, any polarity is overcome by healing past exiled hurts, which leads to internal healing and Self-leadership<sup>18</sup>.

The embodied Presence (Psychosynthesis)<sup>19</sup> or True Self (Internal Family Systems)<sup>20</sup> of the healer will assist the healing process. Both methodologies are open to the 'mystery', and although they do not have a theological framework, as pure healing methods they actually do not need one. As Roberto Assagioli, the founder of Psychosynthesis noted, "Psychosynthesis does not aim nor attempt to give a metaphysical nor a theological explanation of the great Mystery – it leads to the door, but it stops there".<sup>21</sup> In the Eastern Christian tradition, this can be understood as methodologies pointing to Theosis, but stopping in the middle step of Illumination.<sup>22</sup>



Orthodox Christians believe the ultimate Healer is Christ and the healer works in or through Him.

**1. Psychosynthesis – The Journey Towards Psychological Integration.** Psychosynthesis is a healing model developed by Roberto Assagioli in Italy. As a psychiatrist, Assagioli envisioned healing as an integrative process of all human faculties, unified with the universal presence. In his book “Psychosynthesis – A Collection of Basis Writings”, he describes the starting point in his methodology “from within, of beginning with the self of the individual, with his presence.”<sup>23</sup> The healers’ presence is a way of being, encompassing openness, compassion, active listening, and clarity, which can bring a shift in awareness in the other. It is the “ability to be free, awake and aware in the present moment. We can see this as a loving presence that compassionately contains, observes and interacts with the content of the field of consciousness.”<sup>24</sup>

With skilled, powerful questions and presence, the healer-guide helps people access their own presence and dis-identify from various subpersonalities (our younger versions), moving them towards psychological integration of various functions: thoughts, emotions, desires, body sensations, intuition, and imagination. In his book “The Soul of Psychosynthesis. The Seven Core Concepts” Kenneth Sorensen stresses that the “presence constitutes the soul of Psychosynthesis. Its practitioners need to understand how to be present and how to work with presence with their clients”.<sup>25</sup> It activates in an almost domino effect the presence in the other, which ultimately will ignite the psychological healing and integration.

In Psychosynthesis, presence and awareness are not enough though - what one does with this is of equal importance. Psychosynthesis is one of the few psychological frameworks to draw attention to the will. Assagioli remarks that: “the will can be truly called the unknown and neglected factor in modern psychology, psychotherapy and in education”<sup>26</sup>. He goes on to elaborate on the stages of will with clear and effective techniques on how to engage, strengthen, and train it<sup>27</sup>. Another important contribution of Psychosynthesis is the conceptualization of types of will (strong will, good will and skillful will)<sup>28</sup> and the realization that the will is different than desire. Various desires and parts of self can hijack our will, but there are clear methods to become aware and dis-identify from them, thus freeing the will. A skillful, strong and good will, in the service of the entire being, humanity and creation, can become effortless and

can orient life towards integration, healing<sup>29</sup>, and I would add God. There are many more concepts and techniques in Psychosynthesis which could have a high impact in spiritual interventions and the healing process, but this is beyond the scope of this article.

**2. Internal Family Systems – The Journey towards Internal True-Self Leadership.** In the Internal Family Systems model developed by Richard Schwartz there is a similar fundamental assumption that all humans have at the core a *True Self*, which is to be distinguished from any parts, a false self or ego. When a person embodies True Self, Schwartz remarks, “others describe such a person as open, confident, and accepting – as having presence”<sup>30</sup>. True Self has distinctive qualities of calmness, curiosity, clarity, compassion, confidence, creativity, courage, and connectedness (8 C concept)<sup>31</sup>. It is from this place of True Self, in both the healer and the sick one, that internal healing happens. From a Christian perspective, one only needs to look at the fruits of the spirit in Galatians to encounter those qualities: *but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law* (Galatians 5:22-23). *But now abide faith, hope, love, this three; but the greatest one is love* (1 Corinthians 13:13).

In the inner psychological world there are also parts or subpersonalities that have roots in emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and body sensations. Although the True Self never disappears, parts can easily blend and overshadow this core. The refined IFS techniques help parts to unblend<sup>32</sup> and reconnect with the sense of True Self, which in turns heals exiled parts, and subsequently the entire inner system. The IFS techniques are very powerful in releasing shame, trauma, and past pain. A fuller explanation of the Internal Family Systems through an Eastern Christian lens is developed in a previous article.<sup>33</sup>

## CONCLUSION.

Healers in general and spiritual healers in particular could benefit by drawing parallels with Christ as the ultimate healer prototype engaging the awareness and will of the other, and by using effective and skillful methodologies of healing such as Psychosynthesis and Internal Family Systems. Christ adjusts His interventions based on what is needed in the other and He is masterful in eliciting and aligning the awareness and will of the other, if accessible, as a catalyst in the process. On one hand Christ, as True Self and

conversing with Christ, and not the possessed person.

13. Healing of the paralytic (by the pool) appears only in John 5:1-7, 8-9.
14. Healing of lepers appears in Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16; and the healing of ten lepers appears in Luke 17:11-19.
15. Popa, I. “Healing the Healer – Introduction to Internal Family System (IFS) and the Cycle of Caring in Understating the Pain and Suffering of the Healer”, Pain and Suffering and Resilience, OCAMPR (St Sebastian Orthodox Press, 2018), p. 61.
16. This topic was developed further in another publication: I. Popa, “Watchfulness, Contemplation, and Resilience: Intersection of Psychology and Theosis in Healing the Healer,” Pain and Suffering and Resilience, OCAMPR (California, St Sebastian Orthodox Press, 2018).
17. R. Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis. A Collection of Basic Writings* (New York, NY, Penguin Books, 1981).
18. I. Popa, *Healing the Healer – Introduction to Internal Family System (IFS) and the Cycle of Caring in Understating the Pain and Suffering of the Healer,” Pain and Suffering and Resilience, OCAMPR (St Sebastian Orthodox Press, 2018), p. 71.*
19. Op. cit., p. 4.
20. R. Schwartz, *Introduction to Internal Family Systems Model* (Oak Park, Illinois, Trailheads Publications, 2001), p. 30.
21. R. Assagioli, *Psycho-*

- synthesis. A Collection of Basic Writings* (New York, NY, Penguin Books, 1981), p. 7.
22. I. Popa, "Watchfulness, Contemplation, and Resilience: Intersection of Psychology and Theosis in Healing the Healer," in op. cit., p. 121.
23. Op. cit., p. 4.
24. K. Sorensen, *The Soul of Psychosynthesis. The Seven Core Concepts* (Kentaur Forlag, 2016), p. 73.
25. Ibid, p. 73.
26. R. Assagioli, *Psychosynthesis. A Collection of Basic Writings* (New York, NY, Penguin Books 1981), p. 125.
27. Ibid, p. 127.
28. K. Sorensen, *The Soul of Psychosynthesis. The Seven Core Concepts* (Kentaur Forlag, 2016), p. 93.
29. Ibid, p. 86.
30. R. Schwartz, *Introduction to Internal Family Systems Model* (Oak Park, Illinois, Trailheads Publications, 2001), p. 31.
31. Ibid, p. 34.
32. *Unblend* is a term coined by Internal Family Systems, which means at the core the process of dis-identification or detachment from a reaction, feeling or part.
33. I. Popa, *Healing the Healer – Introduction to Internal Family System (IFS) and the Cycle of Caring in Understating the Pain and Suffering of the Healer*, in op. cit., p. 66.
34. J. Allen, *Inner Way. Towards a Rebirth of Eastern Christian Spiritual Direction* (Brookline, MA, Holy Cross, 2000), p. 4.

Presence, shows tenderness, openness, and compassion towards any human needs and longings, no matter how 'wrongful' or 'disgusting' they might have seemed at the time. Christ empties Himself of His own desires (kenosis) to meet the needs of others. He uses his presence to activate the will and awareness of the sick, which together become full 'partners' in the healing process. On the other hand, Christ clearly demonstrates His role as the expert, with high healing abilities and skills. Not many healers or spiritual leaders can boast of successes such as the physical healing of paralysis, chronic bleeding, hand atrophy, fever, blindness, near-death, along with the spiritual healing such as the casting out of demons and forgiveness of sins. He acts with clarity and courage, correcting human distortions, both in the body and the soul. The healing is not really a human accomplishment, but a divine flow through the human healer. In a similar way, in both modern methodologies there is trust and faith in the unknown and the mystery in both the healer and of the other.

Christ's healing encounters model that faith and hope in the healing process are needed not only for the healed one, but also for the community and the healer. In addition, Christ's healing miracles do not happen in a void, but within the cradle of relationships. Psychological studies prove the same point: most therapies heal within the therapeutical relationship between the healer and the client. The relationship goes beyond the exchange of emotions, thoughts and words, to include an energetic presence, one could say the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, as Christ models, the line between physical and spiritual healing is a fine one. Finally, Christ lets go of his ego, takes no credit for His healings and then models self-care as he withdraws into the wilderness to regenerate.

The elements of healing brought forth by Christ are also fleshed out within those secular psychological approaches, and although they use a different language, they nonetheless point to the same reality. The fact that secular modern psychological methodologies can point to an ultimate healing reality resting at the core of each human being, beyond what we can perceive with our senses, should not surprise Christians. The Orthodox Christian community has been affirming for centuries in prayers and liturgy that God is *everywhere present, filling all things* and His mysteries are revealed to all of us everywhere in the creation. Christ also affirms that while our foundation is the past, we can also embrace the new, as every *scribe instructed concerning the*

*kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old* (Matthew 13:52).

In his book "Inner Way: Towards a Rebirth of Eastern Christian Spiritual Direction", Fr. Joseph Allen reminds us about the power of the Holy Spirit to move us beyond our humanly constructed frameworks or traditions: "Our understanding of this issue [*revival of Spiritual Direction*] is closely linked with our understanding of Christian pneumatology: that the Holy Spirit abides in every ages, passes beyond the walls of any church, and, as St Paul notes, is the very source of all the 'gifts of ministry.'"<sup>34</sup> The pneumatological argument powerfully asserts that the Holy Spirit *blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes* (John 3:8). Therefore, we cannot confine it within time boundaries, nor various human societal structures, albeit theological or psychological.

Psychosynthesis and Internal Family Systems are both examples or methodologies developed in our current times, and although coming from a psychological perspective, they can benefit greatly and be integrated successfully in healing interventions by healers, Orthodox Christian included. Both methodologies are able to utilize not only presence, awareness and will in the healing process, but have also very effective healing steps. They both activate awareness, will, a balanced presence, compassion and courage, along with connectedness on multiple levels: internally, with our community, all humankind, and ultimately creation. This could facilitate sustained healings in spiritual interventions, thus facilitating the movement of the willing person towards encountering the living God.

Christ is an inspiration for us to continuously flesh out His tremendous and inexhaustible wisdom, within the realities and knowledge of our current times. More research is needed on the topic, and as John attests in his gospel about Christ's earthly ministry, *there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books what would be written* (John 21:25). Without any doubt, Christ's infinite influence continues to unfold now and until the ages to come.

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Editor's note: *The following is from a booklet published by our Archdiocese in 1956. Some of the references are admittedly culturally dated because they reflect the circumstances of the 1950's in America. We print it here because it shows that the vision of our Church hierarchy for church membership and leadership has remained consistent. In the past we printed documents of St. Raphael expressing the same Orthodox vision for the Church on these American shores. This unsigned document is from the office, and I believe the pen, of Metropolitan ANTONY (Bashir).*

# THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THE CHURCH

**A** sunny deck and a steamer chair and nothing to do but lie in it, with the sea to watch, and the throb of distant engines lulling you to sleep, and your every comfort cared for – that is all well enough for a week or two. But would you be willing to sail the seas your whole life long as nothing but a passenger? The boredom of it would prove intolerable. There are thousands of men who spend their lives in sailing the seas, but they are members of the crews of the ships that bear them, alert with interest in their work and proud of their skill. The officer on duty on the bridge, the steersman, the engineer, each knows he is helping to make the great ship go. The trouble with many church members is that they remain mere passengers, year in, year out. They never find any way to help to make the ship to go. They are mere baggage, and sooner or later they find themselves bored by the voyage.

In this list of duties of a church member to the church let us put first one duty which, if it is performed, should sooner or later involve most of the other duties.

## FIND SOMETHING TO DO FOR THE CHURCH.

Do not be content merely to sit in a pew. "That which is not expressed, dies." And Orthodox Christianity finds precious little expression in mere pew-sitting. Do something in person. Write checks if you can, but never let that take the place of first-hand service in the work of your parish.

Are you an accountant? Somewhere there is bookkeeping to be done and done in a better way than it has ever been done before. There are charts

to be made to visualize for the members the budget and work of the church.

Are you a writer, or editor, or advertising man, or have you literary ability? Find how publicity can be made more effective in your parish. Volunteer to edit the calendar, or a weekly or monthly bulletin or parish paper to be mailed to the parishioners.

Are you a stenographer? There are always letters, minutes, addressing and mailing of notices and bulletins.

Have you artistic ability? Think of what attractive posters might do to call attention to the meetings and work of the church. Note improvements needed in decoration of Sunday School rooms and meeting hall.

Have you musical ability? Somewhere in your parish it is needed – in an orchestra, or in the choir of the church, or in a junior choir, or in special programs.

Have you dramatic ability? Those in charge of young people's work will be glad to have your help. Are you a carpenter or a mason? Somewhere in the church is an improvement that the trustees will be glad to have attended to.

Are you a business man or lawyer or banker? There is heavy work each year in the financial canvass and in the making of budgets. The priest knows people facing business trouble, who need some disinterested person to help them to see through their difficulties.

Are you a physician or dentist? Doubtless you do much charity work already. But the priest occasionally has cases of distress laid on his shoulders, and would be glad to know that you are willing to do needed work from time to time as a member of the parish and the Church's ministry.

Women with homes rather than businesses will

find waiting for them such work as helping with the social program for the young people, including the furnishing of homes for entertainments; calling on new members, invalids, and old people; and befriending friendless persons . . . an experience which will prove immensely broadening and interesting. Men are needed from time to time as ushers, and women to take charge of the church kitchens and sometimes see that the church is given that kind of housecleaning which not one male sexton in a hundred is capable of conceiving, let alone of carrying into effect. Flowers need to be furnished for the Altar. Altar linens and coverings need to be made and cleaned. Decorations need to be made for special occasions. Phoning and addressing sometimes threaten to consume hours desperately needed by the priest for the preparation of services, sermons, and other duties. Nurseries maintained during the Divine Liturgy will allow parents of young children to attend. There are old people and invalids who will be glad to attend church if someone will drive them there and home again. There are women's aid societies and men's brotherhoods needing loyal workers.

We have left to the last the most important part of the work of the church, that of the Church School. For, "what shall it profit the Church if it gain the whole world and lose the coming generation?" Teachers are needed as well as substitutes, secretaries of records and supplies, musicians, and leaders of young people's clubs, Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and guilds. Many parishes are looking also for older folk to act as counselors to young people and older boys and girls in working out their own programs. There is probably a summer Church School in June. If you feel unprepared for such duties as these, you may receive the necessary help and training from your pastor.

For young people, the obvious field of service open to them is in the working with young people of their own age and also with boys and girls who are somewhat younger. Often the best possible leader for a group of boys and girls is someone only "a few jumps" ahead of them in experience. Such a leader may require advice and help from older folk, but often only such a one can supply the understanding and enthusiasm needed. And often the willingness of a younger person to engage in such work will prove more impressive to boys and girls than the volunteering of some older person. Church and Vacation Schools, Scouting, youth groups, and

other such organizations can be immensely encouraged by the leadership of young people.

Young boys and men can be of untold help to the priest in the worship services by becoming servers or "Altar Boys." Teen-age boys sometimes think they have "outgrown" the position of server . . . but one can never be too old to serve in the Sanctuary at the corporate worship of Almighty God.

"Silver and gold have I none," said St. Peter: "but what I have, that give I thee." Find what ability you have and give it. The first thing the church needs from you is active service. If you give it, you will find yourself, not a bored passenger, but an alert, enthusiastic member of the crew.

### ATTEND CHURCH

Every Orthodox Christian is duty-bound to join at specified times in the public worship of God, especially on the Lord's Day (Sunday). We attend the celebration of the Liturgy to give to Almighty God the adoration, praise, and thanksgiving which is His due. Some people who do not "feel the need" of the religious help that can come to them through the Church services, conclude that it is right for them to stay away, excusing their absence from public worship on the grounds that they "get nothing out of it." But worship is a giving of ourselves to God, rather than a getting something from Him; it is a sacred duty, not merely something that we do to fulfill our own need. It is, of course, true that we do secure real help from God when first we have drawn near to Him; but the honoring of God is the primary thing, our own satisfaction secondary. For Orthodox Catholic Christians, worship is only complete when we join ourselves with the sacramental offering of Our Lord in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. Our motto ought to be, "The Lord's own service, on the Lord's day."

The reason we usually care for anything is because it has something to do with someone we love. We do not have to be told to do it. We just do it. Those who love God go to church to worship Him. The Divine Liturgy is the one really thrilling thing in all the world, even of sand, sea, and sky. It is the one undimmed truth and the one unfading splendor on earth and in Heaven. It is the one symphony that is celestial. It is the one drama that is divine. It is the one great, gleaming, golden arch that spans from earth to Heaven. The pontiff who build this Bridge to God. And over it walk men and angels.



The truth that the Liturgy contains is simply astounding. The act which expresses that truth is astoundingly simple. It is astounding because it announces that God came to earth and was Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and dwelt with us, and suffered and died for our sins, and rose from the dead to restore to us everlasting life, and ascended into Heaven to prepare a place for us. But the supremely astounding climax in the Liturgy is the moment when God Who did all this appears in person, sacramentally veiled, and offers Himself as nourishment for our souls.

The Liturgy is astoundingly simple. So simple that it shows forth in one act things which, if they should be written every one, even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. So simple that old men and children, young men and maidens, virgins and matrons, the learned and the unlearned, may hear each in their own language of their own hearts, the wonderful works of God, and see with their own eyes the mighty thing which has come to pass.

When all the world is mixed and muddled and distracted, and willful and wanton and soiled, and mad and sad and wistful, the Liturgy is the massive miracle of truth and light and joy and hope and comfort and peace and sanity and stability, the one thing on earth that shall not pass away.

Besides going to church to honor God, we go in order to help ourselves. It is difficult to make one coal burn alone, but together with other coals it burns readily. Who can resist the spirit of Christmas? It gets into the very atmosphere. Even Scrooge capitulated. And so with the spirit of corporate worship. It has been said that ordinary people at all levels help each other to be a little more supernatural than each could have been alone. This is another way of saying what Christ said. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

We need to worship because life proves too much for us, or not enough. Sometimes life terrifies us, and again it bores us. We need reinforcement in order to meet its tragic moments, and we need zest to meet its monotonous ones. Whether life proves too much for us or too little, sooner or later we succumb to spiritual weariness. And then public worship is our salvation.

Life may have proved too much for us, have imposed on us a task too great, a sorrow too deep, a

defeat too crushing, a temptation too dangerous. Or life may not have proved enough, so that we find ourselves "filled with a weariness of all that is old and habitual," we find "ambition's sails drooping," and come to a bitter doubt of the worth of all our efforts. In either case, public worship proves our spiritual self-preservation: it renews the spirit as sleep renews the body; it cleanses, sanctifies, and leads us along the road to salvation. Whether it be the "too-bigness" of life or its "too-littleness" that distresses us, church worship brings us the experience of God which lifts us out of our burdened lives or out of our bored ones. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."

There is more to being a Christian than going to church, but if you unnecessarily stop going to church, your interest in the Church will very probably die. You will in all likelihood become dead wood on the church roll, and it would be better had you not been baptized and joined the Church at all. Recall your vow of allegiance to Christ at Baptism spoken by your sponsors, attend church worship resolutely, and strive to bring your life into conformity with what Christian worship implies. Every true Christian will, without fail, be present in church every Sunday and Holyday.

Attend the divine service of your church in worshipful attitude. Make your contribution to that corporate spirit a helpful one. Pray for the worship when you have entered . . . for yourself, your fellow worshippers, and those who minister. During the Liturgy give your whole attention to the divine drama being reenacted: pray with the priest as he prays, let the Liturgy be your prayer. Especially during the opening minutes of the Liturgy, take care to maintain an attitude of desire and expectation.

## SUPPORT YOUR CHURCH FINANCIALLY

Jesus did not care about money for its own sake. "His only purse was a fish's mouth." But He cared about money tremendously for the sake of man's spiritual welfare. It has been claimed that one verse in seven in the Holy Gospels refers to money. Christ was a skilled physician of souls and He knew how avarice preys on men like a spiritual cancer, and how their miserliness<sup>1</sup> toward God and their

fellows proves their own great spiritual hindrance.

In the Liturgy we repeat that great old Creed, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth . . . And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord . . . In one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church . . . one Baptism . . . the Resurrection of the dead, and the Life of the world to come." And then, on the instant when our lips prepare to say, "Amen," away below the level of our conscious thoughts an inexorable conscience asks: "Do you believe it? How much do you believe it? How much have you given to it this week? As much as for that entertainment, that dinner out, that unnecessary luxury?" Or in some "date with adversity," when we desperately need help and kneel to pray for it, our conscience will mock us if it can. It will ask us what right we have to pray. Some deep ingrained honesty within us sits in judgment on our prayer, and if we know that we have not played square with God, and have refused God the support His Kingdom needs, that prayer is stifled on our lips. We may not know what has discounted the Creed, or hindered our prayer. We may only know that our "Amen" reverberates in our mind as if it had been followed by a question mark. We may sigh to ourselves that prayer has never seemed very real to us, but the real difficulty is that deep within ourselves we know that we have no right to lift our souls to the earnest God who waits on our laggard loyalty. An Old Testament prophet said that when men quit robbing God, God would pour them out a blessing such as there would not be room enough to receive. This is not because God sells His blessings, but because His richest blessings can come only to those who are loyal to Him.

So, when that deep-seated conscience sits in judgment on our worship, or our prayer, if we can answer, "Yes, I believe – by this old coat, by the hat I went without, by the old car I still am driving," then the question mark changes into an exclamation point. We have witnessed our belief at the judgment bar of our conscience. We have proved it to ourselves. And also, we might add, to the world, for the world is not looking for a religion the expansion of which is worth to its devotees the present average of only three cents a day.

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over . . . For with what measure ye mete it shall he measured to you again."

Every Christian is expected to give to his church, and to give regularly and in proportion as he has been prospered. "Upon the first day of the week," wrote St. Paul, "let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper." The only safe way to take care of such a duty is to systematize it. Except for those few of us who receive our income in one yearly sum, the only way we can possibly give what we ought is to give it in small installments; so that if we give our church moneys only once or twice a year it is proof positive that we have not come near the line of sacrifice, and are only "tipping the Lord." We ought to give a sum we could not pay in one yearly contribution!

"Let each one of you lay by him . . . as he may prosper." Jesus cared more about proportion than about amount. It took His eyes to see the widow's little coins larger than all the payments of the rich who had passed that same treasury box (Mark 12:41-44). And still He sits over against the treasury and beholds how we cast money into it! We are not to give what is left. We are to give in proportion as we have prospered. What proportion? The Jews, we often hear, gave a tenth. Actually they gave a good deal more than that. Are we less indebted to God than the ancient Jews? Some of our gifts will go, of course, to other welfare causes, not to the Church, but a generous share of them we owe to the Church.

It costs money to operate the church in which we worship. We do not want to be slackers. Once a year, in most well-organized parishes, every member is asked to subscribe for its support. Your duty as a member is to make your subscription loyally and sacrificially.

You also are asked for time to time to subscribe to the benevolent budget of the diocese, from which payments are made to support the national enterprises of the Orthodox Church, to its work of Christian education, and to various other undertakings.

Young parishioners should begin to support the Church as soon as they begin work or receive a regular income of some sort. Their subscriptions may not be large, but they are important subscriptions because they will continue for a long time, and the challenge of Christian stewardship is far better faced in early years than at that most difficult time of all, when the establishment of a home makes perhaps the heaviest drain of a lifetime on one's income.

Those who love God go to church to worship Him. The Divine Liturgy is the one really thrilling thing in all the world, even of sand, sea, and sky. It is the one undimmed truth and the one unfading splendor on earth and in Heaven. It is the one symphony that is celestial. It is the one drama that is divine. It is the one great, gleaming, golden arch that spans from earth to Heaven.



## GROW IN GRACE AND CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

Just as water cannot rise above its own level, so you cannot contribute to the Church more than you really are. One of your duties to the Church, then, is to grow, yourself, in grace and Christian knowledge.

We have a positive duty to spend some time in private prayer each day. Our daily private devotions afford us an indication of our spiritual condition. They are reliable tests of spiritual vitality. If we are normal, our morning and night prayers will be regular. If they are irregular there is something wrong somewhere. It will be well to provide ourselves with a book of prayers to form a scheme of prayer. We need a model form which will illustrate the scope and content of private prayer. In time, undoubtedly, we will color our own prayer life; we will pray more and more in our own words. But we will retain the outline, and the structure will be the lasting legacy of our book.

We will need a visible sign to serve us as a reminder of our duty to pray. We ought to have an icon hanging on the wall of our bedroom. Bring the icon to the church to be blessed. Then pray your way through life before it.

The spirit of private daily prayer is this. In the morning you renew our life vow to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant into your life's end. Give thanks that you were allowed to awaken to a new day. Ask God's blessing on your day's activities. The Christian signs himself with the sign of the Cross to show that he intends all through the day, wherever he may be, whatever he may do, to be loyal to God. Loyalty is the watchword by day.

At night you commend those for whose well-being you are responsible to God. You pray for forgiveness for your failures. You return thanks for your mercies. You pray for blessing. Then in simple faith you take your rest. Trust is the watchword by night.

Private prayer ought to include not only vocal prayers, but also some time (perhaps only five minutes per day at the start) for mental prayer, or "meditation." The latter word is apt to suggest something strange and forbidding to those who have never tried it. Actually, mental prayer is the simplest and most natural, as well as one of the most rewarding forms of prayer. While various formal schemes or "methods of meditation" have been used, and have been found helpful by man, mental prayer, in its

essentials, requires only a quiet place to retire to, and some sort of a time-keeper, so that we may give the full time we intend to this coming apart with God. We may kneel, or sit, or take any other posture that is helpful to us; not too comfortable, lest we fall asleep; not too uncomfortable either, lest our thoughts be centered more on our own physical distress, than on God. We try to make ourselves quiet, to "calm down" inside; we try to remember that God is with us. We think of His love and goodness, and praise Him for them: we ask His help; we thank Him for His many blessings; we tell Him of our sorrow for our sins and failures; we resolve with His help to carry out His holy will more perfectly in the future; perhaps applying our resolution to some very definite situation which may present itself to us that very day. All these prayers are mostly in thought, rather than in words. We may use, as a help to get started in our prayer, some words taken from the Gospels, Epistles, or Psalms, or a few words from one of the great devotional classics, such as "My Life in Christ" by Father John of Kronstadt.

We also have a duty of praying for others – the duty of intercessory prayer. How this duty will be carried out is something that must be determined by the individual. Many people find much help in compiling personal lists of intercessions, with the names of relatives, friends, the sick, the departed, the needy, the work of the Church, its local work, the world-wide activities, noted down. They can then go through this list, in whole or in part, every day lifting up these persons or objects to God, asking His blessings on them. Such unselfishness will lend wings to your prayers. For most of us are lamentably self-engrossed in our praying. If your experience of prayer is disappointing, the priest will be able to suggest helpful books, and perhaps some prayers which may deepen and enrich your own.

Take care, also, of your Bible-reading. Stake out certain areas from time to time for intelligent study, and pursue such study with the aids of handbooks or introductions, about which the priest, again, will be glad to advise you. We ought to have the following intentions for Bible reading: learning, patience, comfort, hope. We are to learn to know God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. The Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth, speaking through the Church, the infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture. We are to learn to glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation works patience. We are to learn to find our

comfort in friendship with God. We are to learn, from our experience in God's friendship, to hope all things.

The Bible is our best collection of lives of the saints. Everything came true for the saints and they lived happily ever after. The Bible is the Book of Happy Endings. As to making a rule about reading the Bible, we ought to read it daily. We may safely resolve to read "a few verses daily." This would mean two or more verses. We can always do that, no matter how rushed a day may be. We may have enough time and freedom to give five or ten or fifteen minutes. A good time for reading the Bible is at supper time when the whole family is together.

Books on religious subjects, written for laymen, are pouring from the presses today – such books as will deepen your faith, broaden your religious horizons, answer many of your questions. Excellent church journals are published, concerning which your priest will be glad to give you information. It would be well if every parish possessed a library of the excellent Orthodox spiritual writings which have appeared in the past few years. Do not depend on the pastor's sermons alone for the enrichment of your Christian knowledge and experience. Strike out for yourself. Study your Bible and read religious books and lives of the saints.

The best way to grow in grace is by approaching the Sacraments more frequently. Periodic self-examination, accompanied by real purpose of amendment, with the help of God's grace, is necessary for spiritual progress; and this is most fruitful and effective when accompanied by sacramental absolution which is received in the Sacrament of Penance. The promise of the Gospel is that Our Lord will give us power to become the sons of God. He makes us His children in Baptism. He gives us the power of children of God in Holy Communion. The power is renewed with every Communion. It is developed by filial devotion.

When we stand with hands crossed over upon our breasts at the Altar, we offer and receive a gift. Our gift to God is ourselves, our souls and bodies, our understanding, memory, will and affections. God's gift to us is Himself. His sacred humanity unites our own with Him. The fire of His love consumes the evil that is in us and releases the good which He has made possible for us. That good is rightly called virtue or power. It is the power of the sons of God. It is the energy released by the action

of Divine fire upon human nature. It is stronger than any force opposed to God. It prevails over every enemy of the sons of God. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him."

## DRAW OTHERS TO THE CHURCH

Your friends need the Church, and your parish needs your friends. In all probability you have friends who do not belong to any church. There is a real opportunity for you to do missionary work by bringing these people into Orthodoxy. How many Orthodox Christians are there who have never invited a non-Orthodox friend to visit their parish church for services? And yet the Orthodox Church of Christ offers what millions are searching for. It is fundamentally designed out of ancient experience to express and meet the needs of men in the fullest sense, to conserve the great values of the past and to be open to the demands of present and future. It reinforces its members where they need strength and security, and in doing so sets them free to serve. It lifts them up always to God and keeps before them "the first and great commandment" to love God emotionally with the whole heart, actively with all strength, and intelligently with the mind. In Orthodoxy we possess a great treasure, and it is our duty to learn about our Faith so that we can readily explain it, and what it means to us, and why others ought to share in it.

And you can appeal to the unchurched Christians about you with an effectiveness which no one else can have. The priest's words they discount because it is his professional duty to speak them. Here, then, is an open door of service for you. You need not be able to quote long passages of Scripture, or argue the fine points of theology, or preach a kind of sermon. Is it so difficult to invite a neighbor to attend church with you?

Christ's last command to the Apostles places upon His Church and its members the obligation to make converts. Of course every member of Christ should strive to grow in grace and to develop his personal spiritual life. But growth in grace is greatly a matter of wanting to share with others. Belief in Christ means ever so much more than assent to the Creed. Right belief (Orthodoxy) means the joyful will to make Christ and His Church known to our neighbors. The chief chaplain at one of the Naval Training Schools during the last War interviewed



a large share of eighty thousand young Americans, and found that one of the principal criticisms these young men leveled at the Church was that of its amazing muteness. They said if one of their fellows found a good brand of cigars or a good entertainment he did not keep the discovery a secret. They thought that what we like to call our “reverent reticence” was really our lack of faith in our own religion. If God is real and kind and near and helpful, if He can make weak men strong and lonely hearts glad and defeated lives victorious, how can we keep quiet about it? Jesus still says, “Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.”

Young people who are dating or are engaged to marry someone who is non-Orthodox, are in an excellent position to bring in new members to the church. It is not too much to believe that if someone is interested enough in you as a person to fall in love with you, he or she must also be interested in your religious background, because it is one of the things that makes you what you are. You must be able to present your faith to your possible life partner in such a way as to set forth your ideals. Invite him or her to attend church with you and join you in your family devotions. Let your future marriage partner know that you love your church and that you will not be deprived of the comfort of its sacramental life. In this way only is that mutual understanding possible on which a happy, successful and durable marriage can be founded.

### PROMOTE A SPIRIT OF LOVE WITHIN THE CHURCH

“A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you . . . By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.” This is one of the supreme tests. Not participation in the Sacraments, not listening to sermons, nor engaging in Christian activities, nor even giving money, is the final criterion. The hardest is that of love. It has been pointed out that even the Lord Himself could not, after years of patient training, get twelve men to sit down together at a table on the last night of His life without an exhibition of petty irritations and wounded vanity. His supreme prayer for His followers was that they might be one.

When St. Paul wrote to his converts at Corinth, he was hurt by their idolatry, their greediness, their drunkenness, and their shocking immorality, but

worst of all to Him was their wrangling within the church. Some liked one presbyter better, some another. Some thought themselves more spiritual than others. Some were lax in conduct; some were strict. And each group despised the other. St. Paul told them, “Though I could preach with the tongue of men and of angels, though I could pray with great fervency, though I knew all manner of Biblical mysteries, though I had all faith, even to remove mountains, and though I gave away everything, even my life, and yet had not love, I should have zero!”

And St. John said: “If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.”

It has been said that our immediate task is not to Christianize the world, but to Christianize the parish. It is useless to *preach* the brotherhood of all men if we have not *realized* the brotherhood of all men, if we have not realized the brotherhood of Christians within our churches. Study, then, the peace of the parish. Refrain from criticism of its priest or its members. Express your views in parochial meeting, but if the majority do not agree with you, acquiesce in the will of the greater number. Be tolerant. Every healthy organization exists in a state of reasonable tension between enthusiasts for that which is new and devotees to that which is old. Both groups have their function, and each needs the check of the other. Do not create dissension. For he who sins against love within Christ’s Church, however faultless his conduct otherwise may be, fails of Christlike spirit in the most important test of all, and deals the deadliest blow of all to the life of the parish.

Loneliness is the major social evil, it has been pointed out. People are entertained enough and organized enough but in our cities they become more and more friendless. Here is the parish church’s great opportunity. Help, then, to make new members at home. In every way possible promote the warmest fellowship and unity and love within the parish of which you are a part.

### STAND BY THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH

The parish should be “not the priest’s field but his force.” Its members are “not sheep to be tended but soldiers enlisted for a desperate warfare.” The

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priest is the divinely appointed commissioned officer who leads us in the battle against sin and evil, and attempts to lead his army to the final victory of salvation. The priest is the father of the family of Christ, the “small Church,” which exists for mutual work and assistance and together ascends the spiritual ladder to God. The priest is the ambassador of Christ, working to save not merely your soul, but the souls of all the others in the parish. If you do not care for his person, at least you should care for his powers, his office, his apostolate, and consequently should help him promote the cause for which he is striving. Give your priest, then, the utmost loyalty.

The priest may have his human imperfections. The correcting of these ought to be left to his bishop. You may sometimes be tempted to criticize his sermons. Remember that no human being can maintain the highest level of preaching week after week. He must study, write, speak on many occasions, call and guide the various parochial activities and be involved in diocesan work. The priest is frequently underpaid and often his labors are rewarded like the man in the fable whose hand was bitten by the dog he saved. His work should be judged with sympathy, and your criticism of him should be constructive. Tell him when he has helped you. Suggest to him ways in which he might help you or others of whose need you know.

Unless you are in particular need of his help, do not expect him to come to see you often. If you are in need, do not expect him to become aware of it by telepathy, but let him know. Remember that if he calls more frequently at another home it may be because its members are indispensable in the work of the church, or have special need of his help. When he does call at your home it is in order to know you, and to understand your needs in order that they may be met by the ministrations and work of the church. He wants to meet all the members of the family, and will be sorry if you send the children out of the room. Teach your children not to ignore the priest but to greet him and ask for his blessing.

The priest will not thank you for unfavorable news about other members of the parish, for he must minister to all its members, and in order to do so needs to think as well of them as possible. He will wish to know, when he calls, how he can help you or anyone of whose need you know. And he will deeply appreciate your confidence if you will give it to him.

He needs your prayers. Every priest knows at

times an access of power which he can attribute only to the prayers of his people. And he needs your help. One of the most wearing of his tasks is to discover workers for the activities of the parish. He cannot carry all its duties by himself, and he should not even if he could, for that would rob his people of the experience and privilege of Christian service. When he comes to you for assistance, then, do not make him hear words he has already heard only too often, “Can’t you find someone else?” Accept the work for which he has chosen you gladly, and save his powers of persuasion, for he has more than enough need for them.

## BE LOYAL TO THE CHURCH

The Church has incurred criticism and endured attack in every age. Much of this arises from the sheer enmity of the forces of evil. Let the Church move against war, economic injustice, political corruption, crime, or vice, and the world’s hostility is quickly aroused. Church members should be prepared intelligently to defend the good name of the Church, instead of weakly acquiescing in the wholesale criticism of it. It goes without saying, surely, that members of a parish should refrain from disparaging its efforts and magnifying its failures, or spreading evil reports of its members or officers. How blameworthy are those who publish far and wide the misdeeds of a priest! If trouble arises in the life of the parish, the matter should not be aired in public but rather treated as a family affair.

Our duty as loyal members of the Church is to listen to the voice of Christ teaching through His Church; obey its teachings; give glory to God by our good lives, and help others to find their way into the Church. We are disloyal to God and the Church when we sin by irreligion and sacrilege and superstition, and when we fail to walk in God’s paths, do not love Him and do not serve Him with our whole heart and soul (Deuteronomy 10:12). We are guilty of sacrilege when we treat persons, places or things consecrated to God irreverently. How can we expect others to respect our churches, if we ourselves do not. Those people who make use of charms and amulets, who resort to fortune tellers and other superstitious practices, are also disloyal to the Church and God.

Those who leave the Church in times of persecution, or to make a good marriage, or for business purposes, or for some other unworthy motive sin

greatly against God and the Church, and through this disloyalty bring down upon themselves the harsh condemnation of God. St. Cyprian said, "He cannot have God for a Father, who has not the Church for a Mother."

The parish needs your critical loyalty. You will undoubtedly discover aspects of its life and work which need improvement. Help to improve them. Attend parochial meetings and prepare yourself to vote intelligently. State your convictions but be ready to accept the will of the majority.

### GIVE EVIDENCE OF THE POWER OF CHRIST BY A CHRISTIAN LIFE

It is the sermons parishioners preach by the manner of their lives which, far more than those preached by any priest, bring other people to Christ or drive them away from Him. It is not what we say, but what we do or do not do . . . the laugh with which we do not greet a story, the criticism or cynicism from which we refrain, the slight shabby business practice we avoid, the easy conformity into which we refuse to fall . . . that speaks more loudly for Christ than anything we might say to witness for Him with our lips.

Who is the most formidable enemy of a physician? Is it another doctor who happens to be a competitor? No. It is a patient who goes around saying, "I took the medicine that doctor gave me, and it made me worse." Now if Christianity professes to be able to heal men and women, to make them better, every church member who is not made better is a serious argument against the truth of Christianity in the eyes of unbelievers. All professed Christians who exhibit in their lives selfishness, cheating, hardness of heart, meanness, jealousy, envy, hatred, are terrible indictments against the Christian religion to non-Christians.

Of course the presence in the Church of members who are sinners proves it to be Christ's Church no less than does the presence of its saints. We could be very certain that the Church would have ceased to exist if there were no sinful Orthodox Christians. For the purpose of the Church is to transform sinners into saints. If everyone were saints to begin with, there would be no reason for the Church. Christ did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Many non-Orthodox persons do not understand this, however, and when they see Orthodox Christians behaving sinfully they

condemn the Church. Such actions bring dishonor upon the Church. When Christians behave badly, it is as if they carried a placard on their breasts, proclaiming in large letters: CHRISTIANITY IS A FAILURE. Many generals have addressed these words to troops ordered abroad during the last war: "Remember that the honor of the Army and of our Country depends upon your individual conduct." Just so the honor of Christ's Church depends on your individual conduct.

The worst heresy, it has been said, is the heresy of those who proclaim their belief in Christ as God, but do not treat Him as God. Jesus Himself said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father who is in Heaven."

This means that we are not merely to refrain from sensational sins, but also from those less sensational ones such as hypocrisy, worldliness, intolerance, and selfishness, which, one writer has recently said, were the sins which Jesus hated above all others, and which, it may be added, are precisely the ones which, in church members, most often bring Christianity into disrepute among those who are not Christians. Christian morality involves abstinence, not only from sexual irregularity and drunkenness, but also from hard bargains with customers or employees. If we take Christ in earnest, we cannot live for outward show or passing pleasure or physical comfort. Every Christian knows deep in his heart, that to take Christ in earnest means a life lived as if the things Christ stood for were true. That means a life of irreproachable honesty, a life of unfailing kindness, a life which obviously puts first the things of the spirit and not the things of sense. If it can be said of us, after we are gone, that we have made "faith in goodness easy to other men," we shall have witnessed for Christ and His Church, not only by word but, in that far more difficult and far more significant way, by the manner of life we have lived.

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1. The editor substituted a more modern term for an archaic one.



# ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

## ORDINATIONS

BARWELL, Deacon Andrew, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on November 1, 2020, at St. John the Baptist Church, Post Falls, Idaho. Fr. Andrew is assigned as priest of All Saints of America Church, Homer, Alaska.

BRUCE, Deacon Benjamin, to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on September 13, 2020, at St. George Church Boston, Massachusetts. Fr. Benjamin is assigned as Pastor of the Church of the Advent, Atlanta, Georgia, effective September 14, 2020.

EL MASSIH, Deacon John (Rassem), to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan JOSEPH on August 30, 2020, at SS. Peter and Paul Church, Potomac, Maryland. Fr. John is awaiting assignment.

LONG, Deacon Elisha, to the holy priesthood by Bishop BASIL with the name *Nicholas* on the Great Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, November 21, 2020, at St. George Cathedral, Wichita, Kansas. Father Nicholas is assigned as third priest at St. Elias Church, Austin, Texas.

McNEIL, Sub-deacon Michael, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on November 1, 2020, at St. John the Baptist Church, Post Falls, Idaho. Deacon Michael is attached to the Three Hierarchs Church, Wenatchee, Washington.

TUBBS, Sub-deacon Michael, to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on November 1, 2020 at St. John the Baptist Church, Post Falls, Idaho. Deacon Michael is attached to St. John the Baptist Church.

## ASSIGNMENTS

SHAHEEN, Father Stephen, to the pastorate of St. John the Evangelist, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, effective January 1, 2021.

## REPOSED

SAKKAB, Fr. Hanna, reposed November 10, 2020, after 66 years of priesthood. He was ordained in 1954 in Beirut and served in many capacities in the Middle East before coming to America in 1975. Here he served the parishes of Detroit, Michigan; Miami, Florida; Charleston, West Virginia; and then St. Elias parish, Syracuse, New York, for 22 years. In 1998 he moved to San Diego, California, to serve St. George parish until his repose. Father Hanna was an inspired patriot of his homeland, Palestine. With an appreciation for natural beauty, and through a mastery of Arabic language and grammar, he authored a collection of fine, classical Arabic poems, hundreds of which will be published in two volumes. He is survived by his Khouria Mary and their children.

### Food, Faith and Fasting

Join us for virtual workshops utilizing the Eastern Orthodox Christian Tradition to aid us in caring for body and soul alike.

In these workshops, the participant will attain practical tools to care for health in a spiritually minded manner.

The Zoom platform will be utilized for the live virtual sessions. Instructional portion of sessions are from 8pm-9pm EST, followed by Q & A.

**Presenter:** Rita Madden, MPH, RDN author of *Food Faith and Fasting* holds a Master of Public Health and is a Registered Dietitian. She also hosts the Podcast Food, Faith and Fasting on Ancient Faith Radio.

### Virtual Live Workshops Starting January 2021

#### Food Faith and Fasting 5-Part Series

- Topics include: food choices, eating in balance, fasting, exercise and managing stress.
- It is suggested one participates the 5-part series in its entirety, as it provides the foundation for all other workshops. However, sessions can be booked individually as well.

#### Fasting with Diabetes

#### Nutritious and Delicious Eating on a Budget

#### Quick and Easy Fasting Cooking Demonstrations

Learn More Here: <https://foodfaithfasting.gumroad.com>

**FOOD  
FAITH and  
FASTING**  
*A Sacred Journey to Better Health*

# MOTHER OR FATHER ‘TO-BE’: A PLEASANT, BUT MISLEADING TITLE

Daniel Manzuk

On Mother’s Day, an Orthodox priest approached a pregnant parishioner and presented her with one of the flowers handed out to mothers. She politely refused, as she was only a “mother-to-be.” The priest countered asking if she was indeed pregnant, to which she said “Yes.” The priest then said, “Then you are a mother.” He added that he was sure she was taking care of the child already, which she heartily affirmed, and she accepted the flower.

That “mother-to-be” is a common way to refer to a pregnant woman, but it is a misleading one, as it overlooks the fact – one hopes – that the woman is already taking care of the child *in utero*, just as she plans to care for him or her once born. Note that, after the greeting of the Virgin Mary (carrying Christ in her womb only a few-weeks after His conception) reached the ear of St. Elizabeth (causing the six-month-old fetal John the Baptist to leap in her womb), she doesn’t exclaim, “But why is this granted to me, that the *Mother-to-be* of my Lord....” Instead, she says simply, “But why is this granted to me, that the Mother of my Lord...” (Luke 1:43). Saints Mary and Elizabeth were already moms.

Once conception happens – the ovum is fertilized – a human life is created, and the woman in whom this happens becomes a mother. By the same token, the man responsible becomes a father. The mother cares for herself and the child she carries; the father cares for both, and himself, just as St. Joseph did with the Theotokos and Christ.

NOTE: For a millennium and a half, if not longer, the Orthodox Church has celebrated three Conceptions as Major/Great Feasts; two natural, but miraculous – St. John the Baptist by Ss. Elizabeth and Zacharias (September 23), and the Virgin Mary by Ss. Anna and Joachim (December 9) – and one beyond miraculous – the incarnate God-Man, Christ, by Mary and the Holy Spirit (March 25). Also, there is a Chinese tradition whereby one’s birthday is

calculated back about nine months from the date of one’s birth. When we each recognize that it was I who was in my mother’s womb, right from the start, we are making no new discovery: conception as the beginning of human life has been accepted from ancient times. Only in America since the 1960s has this been called into question, as abortion gained social acceptance. We, however, can look back to St. Basil of Caesarea, who wrote on the subject, “With us there is no nice enquiry as to its [the child’s] being formed or unformed” (*Letters*, 188).

In Genesis it says, “Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If all is well, why am I like this?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord” (Genesis 25:21–22). Rebekah had to deal with the sibling rivalry between Esau and Jacob in her womb, just as she would once they were born. Thus, the only difference is, very simply put, a matter of location and specific care/tasks. All the prenatal care and precautions are just as much aspects of motherhood/fatherhood as all the post-natal care and precautions.

The more apropos term, then, would be “expectant mother/father.” The parents who are waiting to be able to see their child as more than an image in an ultrasound, and feel the child as more than a living being that sometimes moves (for the mom) and occasionally kicks (for both). They are “in expectation” of seeing their child face to face, and holding the child in their arms, just as, during the Nativity Fast, we are in expectation of welcoming Christ “face to face,” rather than just a bulge in Mary’s belly. The child is theirs, and they are the child’s parents – not “parents-to-be” – from the moment the child was conceived.

Daniel Manzuk



# THE FLOCK OF CHRIST

Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) and Peter Schweitzer

**T**he Church is the Body of Christ, and it is founded by the Lord Jesus Christ who gave authority to His Apostles to preach the Good News to the ends of the earth. The successors of the Apostles are our patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops. Their divine vocation is to “rightly divide the word of truth” for the lay faithful, whose task it is to follow the path of salvation within the ark of salvation the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Priests are to

assist the bishops in the task of salvation. To be certain, the Church is a hierarchy, but not in a worldly, secular sense. In the Gospel of Saint John, we learn the manner in which bishops and priests are to conduct themselves regarding the laity. They are to serve them and lead them on the narrow path of salvation. They are to sacrifice for them and even lay down their lives for them if that becomes necessary. In the secular world, hierarchical structures tend to serve the interests and goals of those in positions of

power and authority. They make decisions based upon a rational calculation of self-interest and the interests of the organization. This is not so in the Church. In fact, it is just the opposite. The good of the least among the flock is paramount, and that good is concerned with eternal salvation.

St. Gregory the Theologian reminds us that the minister of the Church – deacon, priest, or bishop – must attain a certain spiritual stature in order to assume the ministry of salvation: “One must be purified before purifying others, be instructed before instructing, become light in order to enlighten, draw near to God before approaching others, be sanctified in order to sanctify” (Oration 2,71). The holy fathers have attributed these three stages of the spiritual life to the three degrees of ordained ministry in the Orthodox Church. It is assumed that a man aspiring to the diaconate is in a state of purification, or at least well on his way, before ordination to the diaconate. A priest must be illumined before ordination and the exercise of his priestly ministry. Finally, a bishop must be





sanctified if he is to sanctify. These are sobering and awesome words for those of us in sacred orders in the Church. If the ministry of the Church is to purify, illumine, and sanctify the faithful, the Church's ministers must be capable of fulfilling those tasks.

Please take careful note that none of these qualities expounded by Saint Gregory the Theologian and the holy fathers have to do with anything other than salvation. This means that the deacon, priest, and bishop must have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). When Saint Paul speaks of the "mind of Christ," he is referring to what we now understand as the *nous*. And who has the *nous* of Christ other than the one who is diligently walking the path of purification, illumination, and *theosis* (sanctification)? In concrete terms, the illumined and the sanctified person is able to discern properly the signs of the times and the proper spiritual needs of the flock of Christ. That in no way means the illumined or sanctified one is infallible; far from it. However, the Spirit of God is operating within such a person so as to assist him in his sacred duties.

God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:10–16).

The holy fathers have written about the ordained ministry in this fashion so as to protect the flock of Christ. This flock will be able to follow their shepherds with confidence and love, because they can discern within them the loving, salvific fruits of the Holy Spirit. That is why it should never be heard that a bishop, priest, or deacon responded to a member of the flock (or one another) in a passionate manner, such as in anger, envy, jealousy, spite, or hatred. Such passions should not be associated with any member of the clergy, God forbid. If a burden must be assumed, the superior in the community must be willing to assume that burden himself rather than laying it on the back of the flock. If a bishop has to consider the transfer of a parish priest, that bishop must first consider the spiritual, emotional, financial, and physical impact upon the priest and his family. As a bishop myself, this is a formidable task. It is rarely easy. Yet, I know that I will have to give an account of my stewardship of the flock, including the priests and deacons who assisted me. I will have to account for every uncharitable word or deed, or any time I placed an undue burden upon one of my deacons or priests.

The lay flock of Christ have similarly awesome responsibilities in the Church. They must assist their priest and bishop in spreading the Gospel, teaching the uninstructed, caring for the sick and the poor, and being obedient to the teachings of Christ as handed down to them by the Church through their bishops and priests. None of this is possible if one has not diligently engaged in spiritual warfare in the manner prescribed by the Church and the holy fathers. Passions must be identified and rooted out, and repentance must follow. In fact, repentance never ends. If that is our mindset, we have the assurance that our thrice-holy God will never abandon us, or allow us to stray away from the only ark of salvation – the holy Orthodox Church.

# CORONAVIRUS LEADS TO RECORD NUMBER OF ATTENDEES AT SACRED MUSIC INSTITUTE

Peter Samore

Not even a global pandemic could stop 357 voices from across the Antiochian Archdiocese – and other Orthodox Christian jurisdictions – from gathering to learn how best to worship and glorify God through singing/chanting and conducting. Without missing a beat, the Department of Sacred Music hosted its 35th annual Sacred Music Institute (SMI) and ninth annual Youth Music Ministry (YMM) – virtually via Zoom meeting – on the

weekend of July 17–19, 2020. The theme served as a comfort uring troubling times: “God Is with Us: Music of the Nativity of Christ.”

From his office at the Archdiocesan Headquarters in Englewood, New Jersey, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH welcomed the attendees and teachers. He had hoped to greet each one of them in person – as is the yearly custom at the Antiochian Village – but Sayidna found silver linings. “This



generation has its turn to sacrifice for the common good and safety of our brothers and sisters, while denying our own wants and desires.” He continued, “This time has hopefully allowed us to pray more, be with the family, look inwardly and see that, while we commune with God in the church in an intimate way as the body of Christ, He is also ‘everywhere present and fillest all things.’” Sayidna JOSEPH was also thankful that the SMI and YMM could gather virtually.

Throughout the weekend, the hundreds of small faces filled computer and tablet screens, actively listening to their instructors, taking notes, and even activating their microphones to chime in with answers during the interactive learning. In the break-out sessions, the instructors shared views of their course work and presentations on their screens so the students could easily follow along. Those students flashed “thumbs up” signs every time they understood something new.

The evenings – or late afternoons, depending on the time zone – were filled with poignant presentations. Fr. John Erickson, the former Dean of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, talked about “celebrating the fullness of time in a time of uncertainty.” He stressed that our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ came into the world at just the right time to save us (Galatians 4:4–7). Fr. John reminded participants that superficiality – and our panic during these troubling times – could lead to forgetfulness of the centrality of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

Joshua Sturgill spoke on the life, conversion and musical compositions of Maia Aprahamian. Fr. John Finley and Dr. Michael Farrow told us of the history and use of paraliturgical music for the Nativity of Christ. Iconographer Khouria Erin Kimmett offered a presentation entitled, “God Is With Us in Icons and Song,” weaving together the symbolism seen in the Nativity icon with the hymnography of the feast. A forum of experts on Byzantine chant – Dn. John El Massih, Chadi Karam and Dr. Jessica Suchy-Pilalis – discussed composition, under the moderation of Charlie Marge. Greg Abdalah and Danielle Pronkta taught our youth how to sing and discussed the service of the Royal Hours, which is celebrated at Christmas, Epiphany and on Holy Friday. Stephen and Amanda Jacobs hosted a virtual Christmas concert featuring their choir of St. Michael the Archangel Antiochian Orthodox

Church in Louisville, Kentucky. They shared YouTube videos of their favorite pieces and told attendees how to host concerts as a ministry and outreach to those seeking the True Faith.

And on Sunday night, the children and grandchildren of Fr. Elias Bitar – of blessed memory and eternal repose – invoked fond, historic memories of the “Voice of the Archdiocese.” They played videos highlighting his life in Christ and some of the hymns he chanted beautifully. They recalled his impact on students of sacred church music, and also the Christian love that he showed toward everyone he met.

“Everything my father did was rooted in offering,” his oldest child, Katrina Bitar, said. “To know him was to be loved by him. He never sought glory for himself, and never desired to do anything but lift burdens and respond to the needs that he encountered. He sang with purpose, and he taught because it was natural to pass on what he was gifted with.”

Mrs. Mareena Boosamra Ball, Chairwoman of the Department of Sacred Music, closed the virtual SMI and YMM by thanking everyone who made them so successful, including instructors Kh. Nancy Hanna Long, Dr. Nick Jones, Amy Hogg, Dr. Zhanna Lehmann, Regina Roum, Kh. Suzanne Murphy and Chris Holwey. She also thanked Kris Howard for mastering Zoom to bring our Metropolitan JOSEPH, instructors and students together. Mareena reminded the participants, especially those who have not been able to sing and chant in church during the coronavirus pandemic: “We’re here for you, and we want you to feel like you can reach out to us. We’re here to help you get through this.”

Mareena also said the virtual programs will likely become a component of the in-person SMI and YMM when they resume, God willing, next year. Mark your calendars for the Winter Sacred Music Institute, March 4–7, 2021, in Wichita, Kansas, as well as the Summer Sacred Music Institute, July 14–18, 2021, at Antiochian Village, which immediately precedes the Archdiocesan Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. If you missed the virtual conferences, you can join the Sacred Music page on Facebook. (It’s a closed group, so please ask for admission). Throughout the year, you can find interesting and helpful materials and some of the virtual classes from this year’s SMI.





## ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN **WHY I SERVE**

Khouria Suzanne Victorine Murphy

I GUESS IF YOU GREW UP IN A LARGE ITALIAN FAMILY IN THE 60'S AND 70'S, AS I DID, YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE TO ASK WHY YOU SERVE: YOU DID, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF YOU. WHEN YOUR AUNTS AND UNCLES CAME FOR COFFEE, YOU MADE SURE THAT THEY HAD EVERYTHING THEY NEEDED. DID THEY NEED MORE COFFEE? YOU POURED. OH, ANOTHER PIECE OF MY MOTHER'S FAMOUS CAKE? YOU DISHED IT OUT. SERVICE WAS A BIG CULTURAL PART OF MY LIFE. SO WAS GOD – AT LEAST FOR A WHILE. I OFTEN FELT GOD HAD SOMETHING IN MIND FOR ME. LITTLE DID I KNOW.

I attended church faithfully as a child; well, at least until age 13. Then I drifted away, attending only to get more proficient in the language that I was studying in school. (This was Portuguese, as my father's family is from the Azores, and our parish priests all came from "the old country.") By the time I went off to college, regular church attendance was not a priority.

As I moved out of my family's home, out of church, and into my own life, the trend in popular culture was about getting what *I* need, not what others needed. As I floundered about through college, I could hear God's quiet voice telling me, "I am still here." However, like Jonah fleeing from Nineveh, I ran the other way. "I don't need that," I told myself.

Well, yes, I did. Things came crashing down during my sophomore year in college. I needed something. But what? A friend of mine invited me to her church, but I wasn't ready yet. It took me another full year of wandering around aimlessly, searching for answers to questions I couldn't even verbalize. Finally, in my senior year, that same friend who had invited me to church, handed me a Bible, and said, "Read this." Well, I did; and then I started going to church with her.

After graduation from college, I returned to my family home for the summer before starting grad school. Most Sundays I went "church shopping," hoping to find a good fit. Summer ended and I started a new adventure, and a new search for the right place to worship. How was I going to find the right fit? I decided to attend a Campus Crusade activity and found the church where many of the members of the group attended. To cut a long story short, and spare you the details, that's how I met my seminarian future-husband.

I had planned to go to D.C. and do more study after I received my Master's degree. God had other plans. I married, we started a family, and moved to our first church assignment.

Well, after seven years, four children, three churches in different parts of the country, and discovering *the true Faith*, we realized that the Orthodox Church was where we belonged. We were chrismated as a family, notified the church we were serving that we were leaving, and headed back East.

We actually had no place to go, no employment, no place to live; we just took a step in faith. But God is always faithful! With help from family and

friends, we had gas for the car, a roof over our heads (albeit, my parents' roof) and storage for our belongings (my dad's barn).

Then, the challenge was to find work and our own place to live. We started combing the papers for all kinds of jobs. My husband and I agreed that whoever found a job first, we would go in that direction. Since, I had a teaching certificate, I looked for teaching jobs. Within a week, I had two interviews. At my very first interview, I was offered a job, and given service credit for "life experience," which gave me a salary that was two pay-tiers above what I was actually qualified for on paper! When does this ever happen? Oh yeah, when you leave everything to serve God and put your life in His hands.

I must admit, I went to the job kicking and screaming. We had four children by then, and two of them were still at home under the age of four. I wasn't ready to be a "working mom." My husband had to take on the job of "Mr. Mom," which he wasn't ready for, either, but he did it well! Thankfully, he found a night job selling shoes at Sears, so he could watch the children during the day until I got home from school.

As soon as I started my teaching job (fifty miles from my parent's house), I asked around to see if anyone knew of someone who was renting an apartment in the town where I was teaching. By this time, we had drastically overstayed our welcome at my parents' house. I wasn't having much luck. So, one evening, my husband and I and our four children were saying our evening prayers. We ended the prayers with a heartfelt plea to the Theotokos: "Please help us find a place to live." The next day at work, a co-worker told me that her brother had an apartment for rent, however, he believed it would be much too small for our family. The rent was right, however. We ended up living there for eight years.

Within nine months of leaving the Episcopal Church and moving back to Massachusetts, we had found a church home at St. Mary Orthodox Church (Antiochian) in Cambridge. We had been chrismated at St. Mary's Cathedral in Minneapolis (OCA), but St. Mary, Cambridge, felt like home. Still a lay family, my husband and our two oldest boys volunteered as Altar servers. Within a year, I was a member of the choir, and we were both teaching Sunday School. My husband went back to school and got a second Master's degree (in Education), and enrolled in the St. Stephen's Program, all

while working several part-time jobs. We were *very busy*, but our service in the Church was the focus of our life.

When our children were old enough, each participated in Teen SOYO and in the Bible Bowl at Diocesan and N.A. levels. All of our children became “professional campers” at the Antiochian Village – never missing a year from age nine through college (as campers, counselors, camp staff, and volunteers).

Their love of the Village inspired me. So what did I do? I went with them and served as a volunteer at the Village. I did this for many years. These were truly some of my most memorable summers, helping out in any way I could, and breathing in the holiness that is in the air at the Antiochian Village! I loved to see all the children who attended camp. I made lifelong friends with other volunteers and counselors. The Antiochian Village teaches everyone who attends how to *serve*. The “Holy Mountain” of Metropolitan PHILIP’s vision is truly that.

Eight years after we began attending St. Mary, my husband was ordained by Metropolitan PHILIP as a deacon and then a priest. He sent us to St. Michael’s Parish in Geneva, New York. We are now entering our nineteenth year here in the Finger Lakes Region. Our children are all grown up and have lives of their own. They are all very active and dedicated members of the Orthodox Church. They learned the lesson of service very well. We are humbly joyful for God’s holy presence in their lives.

### WHY DO I SERVE?

God has given me His abundant love.  
God has never abandoned me and my family.  
God has given us exactly what we needed when we needed it.  
God continually blesses me and my family.

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TELL US ABOUT SERVICE?

“Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may *serve* me” (Exodus 8:1).

“You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall *serve* Him and cleave to Him” (Deuteronomy 10:20).

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and *serve* Him in sincerity and in faithfulness” (Joshua 24:14).

“*Serve* the Lord with fear and rejoice trembling” (Psalm 2:11).

“*Serve* the Lord with gladness; come before His presence with singing” (Psalm 100:2).

“For the Son of man also came not to be served but to *serve*” (Mark 10:45).

“If anyone *serves* Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, My servant shall be also. If anyone *serves* Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:26).

Now that my children are all adults and I am a grandmother, God has opened another way for me to serve Him and His Holy Church. He has blessed me to be a servant of the “Servants of God” – the modern-day “Myrrh-bearers” – the Antiochian Women of North America. I am humbled and grateful to have been entrusted with such an important task as NAB President. May God grant me the strength and wisdom to complete this task according to His will. How could I have ever imagined, back in college when I was trying so hard to run away from God, that I would be serving Him and the Church in this way forty years later? God certainly has a lot of patience – and mercy, and grace, and persistence!

My chief goal for my time in office as President of the North American Board is to engage the young women of our Archdiocese, and help them to remember that *service* to God, and to each other, is the highest calling. It is what gives life meaning. Our young people are being taught by society that they should seek ways to satisfy their own desires, to get what they want, and to get it now. Our Lord God Jesus Christ, however, has granted the Antiochian Women the great gift of being role models of *service*, just as He modeled service for us by obedience to the Father, and death on the Cross. We must call our young women back to *service*, to remind them that we are the Myrrh-bearers, the first witnesses of the Resurrection. We are the Antiochian Women: *A Sisterhood Serving Christ through Serving Others*.

Khouria Suzanne Victorine Murphy  
President of the Antiochian Women, North American Board

(This reflection first appeared in the Fall 2019 issue of *DLAKONIA*. It has been edited by the author for publication in *The WORD*.)



# THE DIOCESE OF MIAMI AND THE SOUTHEAST HOSTS VIRTUAL PARISH LIFE CONFERENCE

In light of the 2020 Parish Life Conference cancellations this summer, the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast undertook to keep parishes and parishioners spiritually and socially connected *virtually*. Under the love and guidance of His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS, and through the efforts of His Grace and the Executive Board, the DOMSE held a successful Virtual Life Conference (“VLC”) June 8 to 13, concluding on Saturday with Divine Liturgy via Zoom.

The VLC theme was “There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18), beautiful

and appropriate in light of the current pandemic. The guest speakers centered their presentations on this theme and brought various points of view to the forum, engaging in thoughtful conversations with participants via Zoom.

Bishop NICHOLAS officially opened the VLC after his weekly Live Streaming address on Sunday, June 7, 2020. On Monday morning, a full schedule of events was put into motion.

Each day began with a very successful Kids Club, organized by Mrs. Anna-Sarah Farha, Diocese Christian Education Coordinator. Young and



old alike enjoyed the online books, videos, stories and activities planned each morning.

Each evening was dedicated to a different organization and began with a guest speaker, followed by a business meeting. On Monday evening, Teen SOYO welcomed speaker Rev. Fr.

Joseph Abouid, who spoke about the VLC theme. The video of Fr. Joseph can be viewed on the DOMSE YouTube channel at [youtube.com/domsevideos](https://youtube.com/domsevideos).

President Asa Keim and Spiritual Advisor V. Rev. Fr. Philip Rogers planned a thoughtful spiritual evening, conducting business and Teen SOYO Elections. Many thanks to Asa Keim for his love and dedicated service to SOYO as outgoing President, and congratulations to incoming President Gabi Bleam.

Tuesday evening, the Young Adult Fellowship welcomed Protodeacon David Keim, who spoke about Orthodoxy in the workplace. This was followed by an engaging question-and-answer session. The video of Protodeacon David can be viewed on the DOMSE YouTube channel at [youtube.com/domsevideos](https://youtube.com/domsevideos). V. Rev. Fr. David Bleam led the Young Adults in the Akathist for Saint Raphael. Chairlady Sueanna Keim Alter spent many fruitful hours organizing this event for the Young Adults.

On Wednesday, the Antiochian Men began the day with "Books, Breakfast and Brotherhood." Antiochian Men President Michael Baclig's careful attentiveness to detail led to a very well-attended evening. It began with guest speaker V. Rev. Fr. Alexis Kouri, who spoke about the VLC theme, followed by the Antiochian Men business meeting. The video of Fr. Alexis can be viewed on the DOMSE AMEN channel at [youtube.com/amen-domse](https://youtube.com/amen-domse).

Thursday morning welcomed the Antiochian Women to "Books and Breakfast." That evening, the Antiochian Women welcomed speaker Khouria Lara Oliver, who offered helpful insights into family and service. The video of Kh. Lara can be viewed on the DOMSE YouTube channel at [youtube.com/domsevideos](https://youtube.com/domsevideos).

Antiochian Women President, Sh. Shell Keim's boundless energy in organizing this event was rewarded with 97 in attendance. His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS was present at each virtual gathering. All organizational meetings and prayer groups were well-attended each day. Mrs. Anne Castrodale,

Diocese Oratorical Coordinator, worked alongside the technical team to make possible the Virtual Oratorical Contest. Sh. Shell Keim, worked hand-in-hand with Khouria Nora Bleam of Pensacola to put together an entertaining Virtual Talent Show. Amazing and creative people worked behind the scenes! The Talent Show video is not public, because it includes the names of children and their parishes.

All events were made accessible via Zoom and/or YouTube through the tireless efforts of Michael Baclig, Elias AbuGhazaleh and Bryce Kirk. Through various social media outlets, including e-mail, the VLC marketing campaign was highly successful. A total of 629 individuals registered for the VLC, with a breakdown of attendees as follows:

Clergy 62  
Antiochian Women 250  
Antiochian Men 118  
Young Adults (YAF) (20+) 53  
Teen SOYO (13–19 years) 64  
Children (4–12 years) 65  
Infants (up to 3 years old) 17

Celebration of the Divine Liturgy was the culmination of the Virtual Parish Life Conference on Saturday morning, June 13, 2020. It was hosted via Zoom by V. Rev. Fr. John Oliver of Saint Elizabeth Orthodox Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

The Diocese was fortunate to have talented technical and organizational people on the Executive Board: V. Rev. Fr. Philip Rogers, Teen SOYO Advisor and Host Pastor of the 2021 PLC in Memphis, Tennessee; Elias AbuGhazaleh, DOMSE Treasurer; Noura Soufia, DOMSE Secretary; Sh. Shell Keim, Antiochian Women President; Michael Baclig, Antiochian Men President; Sueanna Keim Alter, YAF President; Asa Keim, Teen SOYO President, Anne Castrodale, Oratorical Coordinator; Anna-Sarah Farha, Christian Education Coordinator; Bryce Kirk, AMEN Social Media Director; and Andrea M. Abu-Akel, DOMSE Parish Life Conference Coordinator.

While the Virtual Parish Life Conference was successful, we pray and hope fervently that next year we will all be attending *non-virtual* Parish Life Conferences!

# The Falling Asleep of Father Jean El Murr

JANUARY 6, 1958 - MAY 19, 2020

When word began to spread of the falling asleep of Father Jean El Murr, Priest of Saint George Orthodox Church, Montreal, no one was hard-pressed to express the impact. He was a man of incomparable divine and godly love, and all who had the opportunity to meet him are bereft at his passing. Father Jean faithfully and generously served the parish of Saint George for the past 17 years, 6 and a half years as a deacon (from March 29, 2003) and 11 years as a priest (from December 13, 2009). Father Jean also served as the Youth Director of the Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada, and Upstate New York from 2000–2005. We thank him and his wife Khouria Souhaila Maatouk for their ministry, and all the good things they have done for the parish and diocese.

A ministry of love was Abouna Jean's earthly assignment, whether as layman, deacon, youth director or priest. He was forgiving, and conciliatory, and covered the shortcomings of all. His character loomed large, despite a small physical stature, as a living example of what we are called to be in the image of our Lord. He was a keen and insightful student of Orthodox theology, its authors of different traditions, and especially of prayer and service texts. By these he became, like St. Paul, many things to many people: an Arab to the Arab; a North American to the North American; a youth to the teens and young adults, not only in the

St. George Orthodox Church (Montreal) community, but to all in our region/Diocese and the Archdiocese.

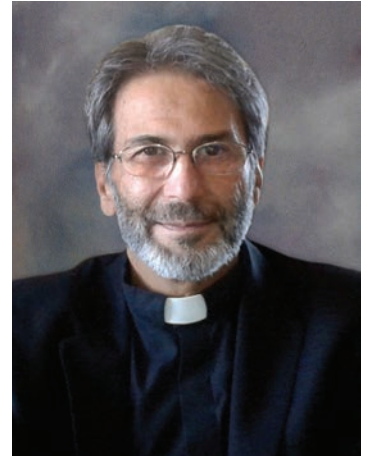
Complementing his thirst for knowledge was his drive to translate texts of Arabic, English, and French origins into the other languages, so that they could benefit everyone at St. George Church (a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic community), and those on both sides of the Atlantic. He was ardent in breaking down any barriers to worshipping the Triune God, in the True Faith, and in His Church. Abouna's love to worship at His altar was matched by his devotion to the Theotokos. He credited her throughout his life for saving him from despair during the darkest days of the illnesses which plagued him, again like St. Paul, with his thorn in his side. How lucky we were to be assigned by God a living example of Job-like forbearance and acceptance of God's will! Abouna never complained whenever he was ill, only blessed and praised his medical caregivers, the people praying for him, and most especially his deeply loved wife, Khouria Souhaila.

As a couple, Abouna Jean and Kh. Sue stand as *the* epitome of marital comity, loyalty, humility, acceptance, and *agape*. Their marriage showed (in fact, *proved*) to us all the unity and oneness we all hope to have with a spouse. They weren't just a team; they were a single breathing unit. Their devotion to each other was

directed outward to all whom they met, and to them they ministered, whether at Bible Studies, as Church School teachers, or especially in serving and mentoring teens and young adults. One of their spiritual children put it this way: "We went to him for wisdom and guidance, and he always answered us with prayer, patience, and love. He radiated peace and light, and everything we have today, all that we are is because of his guiding us, even from his hospital bed. All of his aspirations for us have come true."

There are numerous testimonials being written regarding Abouna Jean and the impact he had on people. This one captures the myrrh of his character perfectly: "There are places where we expect there to be only light. So when the darkness is present, it can feel even more intense. We must focus on the light to give us hope, when it feels like only darkness. Fr. Jean was an example of light in the Church. The only thing that surpassed his humility was his kindness."

Christ is risen, Abouna! Well done, thou good and faithful servant, and our dear "papa." Go into the rest of our Father's arms and pray for us.



Bruna Salhany  
Saint George Orthodox Church, Montreal



# COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

## BISHOP THOMAS VISITS ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM CHURCH

The Very Rev. Peter Pier, Protodeacon John Shumski, Deacon Jerome Atherholt, and Deacon David Hyatt, along with the

Parish Council and parishioners, warmly welcomed His Grace Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) on November 13, the patronal feast day of St. John Chrysostom Orthodox Church, York, Pennsylvania. On Sunday, November 15, His Grace ordained (Ray) Joseph Caputo and Michael Hornbaker to the sub-diaconate during the divine services.

While in York, Sayidna THOMAS presided over the Virtual Fall Retreat & Meetings of the Diocese of Oakland, Charleston and the Mid-Atlantic, which included a variety of edifying presentations by His Grace Bishop JOHN (Abdallah), Mother Gabriella, Fr. Turbo Qualls, Fr. David Alexander, Fr. Isaiah Gillette, Fr. Joshua Makoul, Fr. Thomas Soroka, and Fr. Martin Johnson. Additionally, the Antiochian Women's session was blessed to have His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH offer his Archpastoral blessing and encouragement. Video recordings of the presentations will be made available in the coming weeks on the YouTube channel of the Eastern Dioceses' Ministry Council.

## ST. NICHOLAS, GRAND RAPIDS, HELPS FEED LOCAL FAMILIES

In September, St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, became one of the first parishes to receive a grant from

the Archdiocese's *Food for Hungry People* (FFHP) *Charitable Outreach* program. As announced to the delegates assembled at last year's Archdiocese Convention held here in Grand Rapids, the program to which parishioners throughout the Archdiocese have donated for many years through the familiar coin boxes was making a major change. In addition to sending donations in for distribution, FFHP would now receive local requests for some of the funds received. Our parish applied for a grant to assist local children and families in West Michigan affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and with great joy, we received the news that the grant had been awarded in the amount of \$10,000. Our parish used this to support *Kids' Food Basket*, a local charity that has received nationwide attention for their efforts to feed needy children and families. This need increased greatly during the pandemic and its associated shutdowns, as so many endured furloughs and layoffs. During the pandemic, *Kids' Food Basket* is playing an even more critical role in bringing healthy food to low-income children and families in West Michigan. Through their emergency food response program, they are working diligently to redirect food to families with children living in low-food access neighborhoods and are helping community food pantries and food clubs restock their fresh produce. In the past 29 weeks,



*Kids' Food Basket* has distributed over 479,909 emergency meals at 70 community distribution sites located in areas densely populated with low-income families.

"We believe our mission at St. Nicholas is to seek and share Christ's love with everyone in our area, but especially the neediest among us. In the midst of this crisis, we are grateful for the support of *Antiochian Orthodox Charities/Food for Hungry People's* program. It allowed us to contribute to *Kids' Food Basket* in order to help feed some of the most

vulnerable people in our community" stated Fr. Michael Nasser.

Involvement in the worthy work of *Kids' Food Basket* is not new for our parish. Over the years, our church school and other ministry groups have supported *Kids' Food Basket* by volunteering, and the parish also awarded the *Gift of St. Nicholas*, our annual community charitable gift, to *Kids' Food Basket* in 2018. Since 2002, KFB has grown from serving daily sack suppers packed with fresh fruits and vegetables to 125 kids each weekday, to nour-

ishing 8,800 kids at 52 schools across West Michigan.

Julie VanGessel, Community Development Director at *Kids' Food Basket*, expressed her gratitude for the continued partnership of St. Nicholas. "*Kids' Food Basket* depends on the contributions of our partners as we battle hunger and the pandemic. We are grateful for the continued support of St. Nicholas." Our parish, in turn, is grateful to our Archdiocese for making possible this support, bringing food to hungry children throughout our area.

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To recognize and award Arab-American university students who excel in Media Studies.

### ELIGIBILITY

University students currently enrolled in the 2021-2022 academic year, with a minimum 3.0 GPA. Juniors, Seniors and Graduate School students majoring in Journalism, Television, Radio, and/or Film.

### APPLICANTS

Mail and include the following items to ADC's Research Institute, c/o Mr. Nabil Mohamad:

1. Two original letters of recommendation signed by professors of Mass Communications;
2. Copies of your relevant work: articles, film links, etc.;
3. Official academic transcripts (minimum 3.0 GPA is required);
4. Permanent home address, mobile number and e-mail address.

**Application Deadline: Monday, April 12, 2021**

Note that incomplete or late applications will not be accepted.

### Submit all materials to

ADC Research Institute  
Attn: Mr. Nabil Mohamad - ADC Vice President  
1705 Desales Street, N.W., Suite 500  
Washington, DC. 20036

Should you have further questions, call (202) 244-2990, or e-mail [organizing@ADC.org](mailto:organizing@ADC.org).  
The Jack G. Shaheen Scholarship Awards will be presented at the 2021 ADC National Convention.

## The Children's Relief Fund



The Children's Relief Fund, has been a godsend to hundreds of needy children and their families in Lebanon and other countries in the Middle East. You can help change the life of a child by being a sponsor for as little as \$400 a year, just \$7.69 per week, or \$1.10 per day. Donations in amounts less than \$400 are always welcome, too. Once you sponsor a child, we will send you his name, age and address. Your child in turn will correspond with you. She will send you letters about her life and pictures, and you will be able to develop a special personal relationship with her. You will be able to communicate with him or her at any time.

If you would like to make a difference in a child's life, please join us and become a sponsor. You may donate through PayPal on our website at <http://www.childrenreliefund.org/donate-now.html>

Alternatively, you may send a check payable to **Children's Relief Fund, P.O. Box 90072, Brooklyn, NY 11209**



## Food For Hungry People Appeal

Over the span of forty-five years, this campaign has had a tremendous impact throughout the world, helping to alleviate the suffering and hunger caused by poverty, war, and numberless tragedies. Through your generosity to the Food for Hungry People campaign, you embrace the world with the love of Christ, saving yourself as you work to save others.

Be very generous in your contribution to this campaign. As we practice the virtues that cleanse our souls, let us not forget or refrain from the "greatest of the virtues." As important as prayer and fasting are, they are of no avail to us if we fail to give to those in need.



You can give your gifts to the hungry in honor of a loved one on any occasion such as a birthday, baptism, anniversary, thank you, retirement or any other special event. "A Gift from the Heart" is also a thoughtful memorial. We will send a personalized icon card to the person you designate to inform them of the gift you gave in their honor.

You may also give by sending a check along with a personalized donation form (PDF) to

"Food For Hungry People", c/o Robin Lynn Nicholas, 4237 Dundee Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90027, [robinFFHP@aol.com](mailto:robinFFHP@aol.com)