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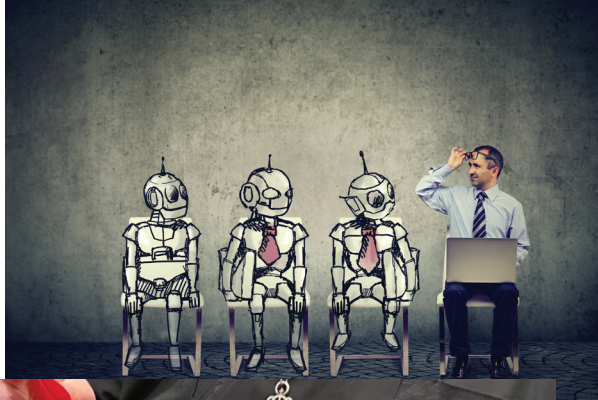
Feast of Theophany



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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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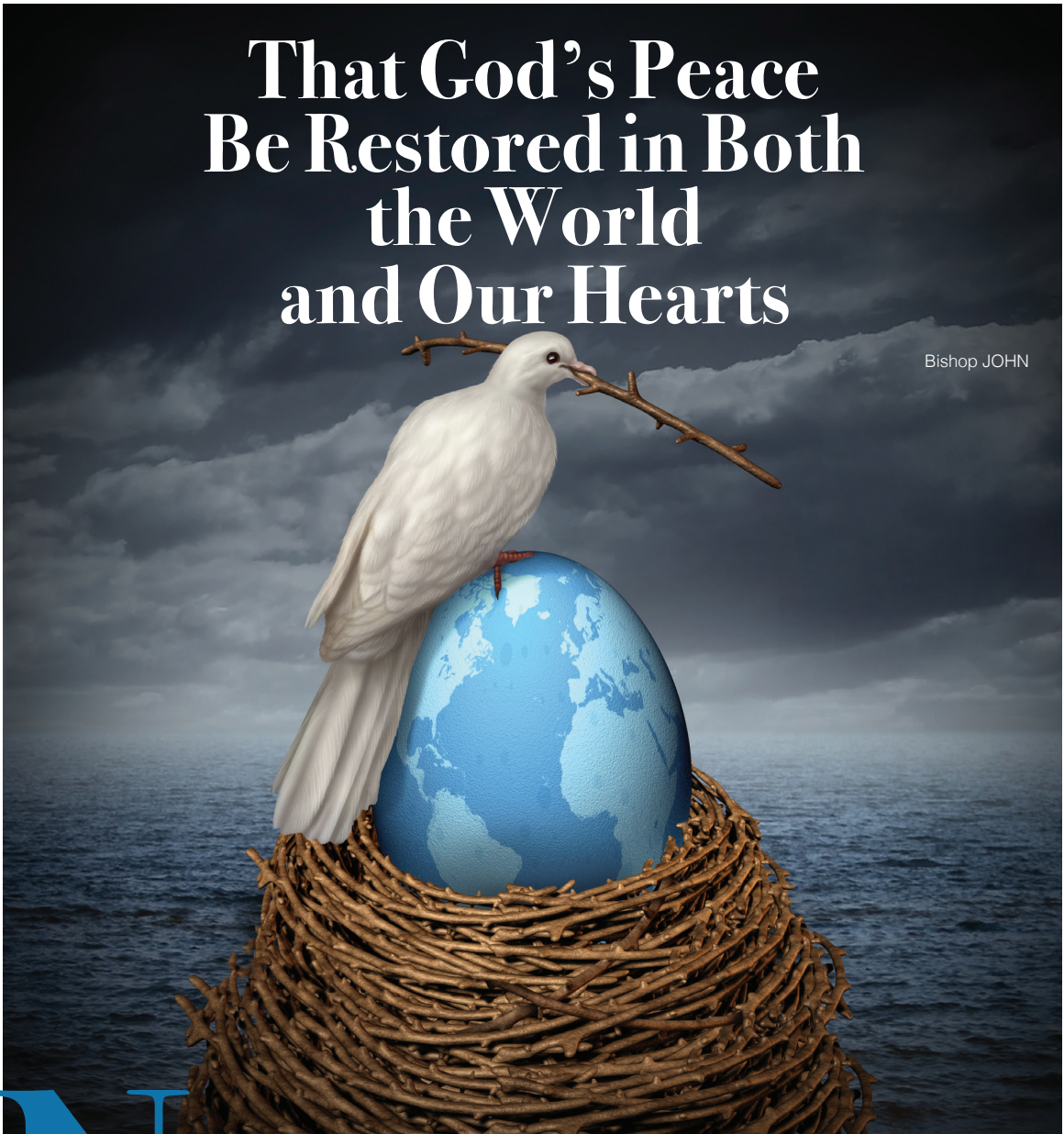
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That God's Peace Be Restored in Both the World and Our Hearts

Bishop JOHN



NONE CAN AVOID THE PAIN AND SUFFERING HAPPENING IN GAZA, UKRAINE, AND AFRICA THAT IS BOMBARDING OUR HOMES, MINDS, AND HEARTS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY PERSONAL TO THE ORTHODOX WHOSE SPIRITUAL AND NATURAL FAMILIES ARE MOST AFFECTED. WE SEE TERROR AT HOME FROM FRUSTRATED AND ANGRY PEOPLE WHO FIND NO OTHER WAY TO EXPRESS THEIR PAIN. AS I VISIT PARISHES, I AM ALSO CONSTANTLY MEETING CHURCH MEMBERS BEING MOBILIZED AND DEPLOYED TO SERVE THE AMERICAN MILITARY IN PLACES OF DANGER. O LORD, I DON'T KNOW HOW TO PRAY OR WHAT TO PRAY FOR ANY LONGER, EXCEPT TO ASK FOR RELIEF FROM ALL THIS SUFFERING AND YOUR GUIDANCE FOR ALL LEADERS WHO ARE INVOLVED IN THESE CONFLICTS.

The Most Reverend
Metropolitan SABA

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
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I would have thought that, by now, mankind would have a better system to resolve conflicts and satisfy human needs. Through science and learning we can travel to other planets and cure diseases, yet we have not discovered how to get along. I have not abandoned hope that God can provide peace in people's hearts that would guide us to love and understanding. In a post-Christian world, however, this seems so far away. Nevertheless, we encourage each other to model God's love and peace as a witness to our Savior who we know to be suffering with us. We know that every act of mercy and kindness changes the world. I encourage you to support each other with an understanding that salvation is open to those who suffer and die. Hold each other up in times of grief, fear, and sorrow. We still have the good news that Christ is Risen, and salvation is at hand.

Modeling God's peace changes our encounters with others. Even if it is but a drop of cool water on a parched tongue, it is helpful. People are visibly changed by the peace of others. Such peace changes our interpretations of our situations and brings peace to displace fear. Praying for the world has great value too. God hears our prayers and our prayers do affect each other. Praying reminds us that God is with us and is ultimately in control.

Whether our leaders acknowledge it or not, all authority belongs to God, and leaders are responsible to God for their stewardship of His authority. It is reasonable, therefore, for us to pray for our leaders, particularly for God to guide them. While we are responsible, as citizens of the Kingdom as well as of this world, to speak the truth in love, judging others can cost us our peace. We need to keep a healthy balance, monitoring how much we can involve ourselves in those things that separate us from our true love, God.

Many of us have experienced an increase in intrusive and obsessive thoughts, depression and generalized anxiety, because of the wars. We would do well to limit our television time (particularly news), and be sure we take care of our prayer life and get exercise for our bodies, and pursue areas of personal growth and interest. God has made us integrated persons of mind, body, and spirit. Health requires attention for each of these components.

May God's peace be restored and prevail in both the world and in our hearts.



WHAT IS TRUTH?

REDISCOVERING ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Subdeacon Scott Strickland

In an age of disinformation and artificial intelligence, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood. Moreover, in a postmodern world, we are told that we should “live our truth.” In this view, however, truth becomes subjective and individualized. Each of us becomes the sole arbiter of truth in a fractured and complex world. In Scripture, we see the pursuit of truth. In the Gospel of John, Christ says, “*To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears my voice.*” Pilate responds, “What is truth?” (18:37–8).

St. Cyril of Alexandria shows us that “Pilate’s dullness of apprehension arose from his stubborn heart, and his reluctance to admit the truth. Christ fitly adds the word, ‘*Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice.*’ For the word of truth gains a ready acceptance from those who have already learnt and love it; but with others it is not so.”

Christ Himself tells us that He is the way, *the truth*, and the life (John 14:6). He is truly sovereign over all things visible and invisible. He is truth incarnate. It is Pilate’s hardness of heart that obscures the very truth that stands before him. In this moment, truth is literally and figuratively on trial. Perhaps, deep inside, Pilate knows the truth, but he is too reluctant and fearful to admit it; the cost might be too high.

Immediately after asking, “What is truth?” however, Pilate springs into action. “And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and said unto them, I find in him no fault at all.” Pilate goes so far as to declare Jesus faultless and to suggest that Jesus be released based on the Jewish custom at Passover. Pilate acts prudentially in his acquittal. However, the madness of the crowd takes hold,



and an exchange occurs. Jesus is condemned, and Barabbas is released. We see a murderer walk free and a sheep led to the slaughter (Isaiah 53). In this exchange, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie” (Romans 1:25).

Like Pilate, we ask ourselves, “What is truth?” It becomes increasingly hard to navigate reality when even our eyes can deceive us. A.I. (or AI, “Artificial Intelligence”) and ChatGPT have shown us that both the written word, the static image, and video have all been compromised as presenters of truth. They can no longer be trusted to represent reality. This easy unreality undermines our trust elections, democracy, global foreign relations, and our world in general.

Here is a silly example, perhaps, but with one showing the dangerous potential for other situations. Pablo Xavier used Midjourney, an artificial intelligence image generator, to create these images that fooled most people on the Internet.

Ecce Homo (“Behold the Man”), Antonio Ciseri’s depiction of Pilate presenting a scourged Jesus to the people of Jerusalem



The development of A.I. has also made people with certain sets of skills redundant. So IBM recently laid off 8,000 workers because A.I. automated their tasks. To illuminate this transition, public speaker Johnathan Pageau uses the example of the development of fire. Today, almost all of us don't know how to create a fire by hand, because of the technological advancement of the portable lighter. While this is an incredible achievement, it also leaves us (individually and as a species) woefully unprepared to survive in our environment without this tool in one form or another. We have increased our technological power, but it has brought us closer to mortality in its absence. This was brought home to me this week as I tested Adobe's beta version of Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator 2024. Both programs now feature incredibly impressive A.I. tools that only a few years ago would have been viewed as God-like capabilities of photo manipulation and design.

Not surprisingly, and rightly, these tools are coming under fire for undermining the demographic that uses them. Why hire a graphic designer, if the software itself can generate impressive designs via text prompts, even matching existing styles? Does this eliminate the need for the designer, or the writer? Because A.I. feeds on the input and creativity of others, however, it still needs data and input to regurgitate algorithmic content. It is dependent upon farming the products of our intelligence. One might even say that this is a relationship of servant and master, with A.I. having the whip hand.

Some scholars claim that A.I. is moving towards autonomy. Expert Dr. John Vervaeke states, "We've never created a fully autonomous thing before ...

with the possibility of intelligence superseding ours." The assumption that A.I. is "only a tool" is dismissive and mistaken. We are looking at a fundamental change at every level of society, and it will exacerbate what many see as our current crisis of meaning and worth. Dr. Vervaeke states that A.I. will be "the biggest threat to our sense of identity ever." What if we can no longer discern A.I. efforts from human efforts? What makes our minds, our thoughts, different from A.I.? Only embodiment?

These questions make it imperative that we rediscover and reestablish our Christian anthropology in clear terms. As theologian Vladimir Lossky states, "It was the divinely appointed function of the first man, according to St. Maximus, to unite in himself the whole of created being; and at the same time to reach his perfect union with God and thus grant the state of deification to the whole creation." It is man's role to "reunite paradise with the rest of the earth" in a ceaseless communion. We must remember that man is fundamentally set apart and that, "the perfection of man does not consist in that which assimilates him to the whole creation, but in that which distinguishes him from the created order and assimilates him to his Creator. Revelation teaches us that man was made in the image and likeness of God."

On Genesis 2:7, St. Basil remarks that "he placed in man some share of his own grace, in order that he might recognize likeness through likeness. Nevertheless, being in such great honor because he was created in the image of the Creator, he is honored above the heavens, above the sun, above the choirs of stars. For which of the heavenly bodies was said to be an image of the most high God?"

In the entire cosmos, only man is made in the image and likeness of God. Only in man did God "breathe into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Man is even higher than the angels, as man stands at the intersection of divinity and all of creation. This renders man a cosmic priest, for through man all of creation is sanctified. This is the reality that must be brought into existence. So we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on heaven as it is on earth."

As a kind of precursor to A.I., however, social media has also obscured our reality. Individualized feeds garner our attention; we are presented with warped perceptions and micro-realities that would enslave us. St. Cyril says that "to men whose minds



Above Left: Adobe® Photoshop 2024 – My original image

Above Right: Adobe® Photoshop 2024 with A.I. additions – My edited image (with no retouching experience needed)

are warped, truth seems a foul and ugly thing.” This enslavement can include mental health problems, societal polarization, and addiction to digital dopamine dealers while living in an increasingly fragmented world. Incentives are electronically provided to engage our attention with the most violent and politically divisive content. As technology ethicist Tristan Harris often states, in an information economy it becomes a “race to the bottom of the brain stem.” Extreme content captures attention, and in our capitalistic society, our attention equals profit for advertisers.

Where we place our attention matters. In the Divine Liturgy, we often hear the phrase, “Let us attend,” or, “Let us be attentive,” often said or chanted by the deacon or priest. The Desert Fathers and Mothers spoke of this attentiveness as *agrupnia*, the spiritual discipline of wakefulness. We see this attentiveness (or lack thereof) in Scripture in the parable of the ten virgins, as well as in Matthew 24:42, Ephesians 5:14, and Thessalonians 4:6. We are to be both attentive and sober, because like a horse with blinders, where we place our attention directs our steps. This becomes increasingly important in a compromised world of digital manipulation, driven by both social media and A.I.

This sobriety and disciplined attention stands in stark contrast to the distraction of technology as an extension of human desire and power. As Pageau states, it is no mere coincidence that, in terms of volume, the Internet largely has been used in consuming pornography and accruing military power. Thirty-five percent of all global Internet downloads are pornographic. Globally, porn sites get more traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined. Our technological power amplifies our passions

and subsequently brings us closer to death. Ironically, perhaps, we also see a school of “transhumanists” who believe that technology will lead us to life – to the transcendence of death, an escape from what is viewed as the tyranny of human biology. Will A.I. provide enlightenment? Will our silicon sages lead us to the eschaton?

“Transhumanism” is no savior, and it would only result in the disintegration of our being and spiritual death. We can see this today in the progressive decay of social media networks. What were once billed as places for human connection, have now been revealed to be harmful and exploitative. As Lossky states, our goal is, “a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; the deified state of the co-heirs of the divine nature.” We become by grace what God is by nature. There are no technological shortcuts to this in the spiritual life – that life is inherently human, personal, and communal. Lossky observes that life in the Trinity “is a cross for human ways of thought.” All human philosophy, including transhumanism and the promise of A.I., ultimately fall at the foot of the cross. Christ is the way, *the truth*, and the life. We must exchange “unreality” for truth and be those that hear Christ’s voice in an increasingly isolated, individualized world. It is *imperative* that we take up our cross and cast away any substitutions (as charming and “productive” as they may be) for a life lived in Christ. As believers, we are obligated to rediscover our Christian anthropology so that we do not forget who we are in Christ.

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Ephesians 5:14).

Subdeacon Scott Strickland
St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Springdale, Arizona

The Hexapsalmos

AS A SERMON OF SERMONS

Th.D. Johannes Pulkkanen

Historically, the Orthodox morning service, the *Orthros*, goes back to early Christian all-night vigils in which the Psalms of David played a central role. This service commences with the reading or chanting of a particular set of six psalms, the *Hexapsalmos*, known already in the Fifth Century.¹ The church customs surrounding these psalms, 3, 37, 62, 87, 102 and 142, suggest that they bear significant meaning. (The Hebrew numbering of these psalms is 2, 38, 63, 88, 103 and 143.) The *Typicon* rules that they be read in a dimly lit church, with the reader's candle being the only source of light. If a bishop or an *igumen* is present, he should be the reader. If not, then even an ordinary reader will do. There is also a rule, though not always respected, that whoever enters the temple and hears these six psalms being read, should immediately stop moving. Those present should not cross themselves before the reader has finished.

This tradition seems to echo the saying of some elders that the guardian angel of each person will read these six psalms while that person hears his or her judgment. Thus each personal judgment will last exactly as long as the reading itself. According to certain elders this will also be so for the whole final judgment.²



Despite the fateful tone of these traditions, it is almost impossible to find a written interpretation of the *Hexapsalmos*, at least in English. This short article is a first attempt, trusting that others will follow.

The first of these six psalms, Psalm 3, says the following:

O Lord, why do those who afflict me multiply? Many are those who rise up against me. Many are those who say to

my soul, "There is no salvation for him in his God." But You, O Lord, are my protector, my glory and the One who lifts up my head. I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord will help me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord, and save me, O my God, for You struck all those who were foolishly at enmity with me; You broke the teeth of sinners. Salvation is of the Lord, and Your blessing is upon Your people.³

This psalm expresses very strong faith in the face of life-threatening opposition. Introducing the *Hexapsalmos*, it clearly reminds one that whoever

“comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 6:1). David’s fearlessness reminds us of the fact that faith is in many ways an unfair exchange. His assurance and joy convey that he knows for certain that the Lord God himself has taken David’s life upon Himself, to the degree that he really has nothing to worry about, even when facing the worst of storms. The exchange behind this is “unfair” in the sense that God takes upon himself David’s woes, while David’s assurance rests upon God’s perfect ability to bear them. This is a picture of salvation in Christ, in which sinners through faith partake in God’s nature (2 Peter 1:4) according to His design.

The following Psalm 37 indicates that this unequal exchange exists through conversion and confession:

O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath, nor chasten me in Your anger. For Your arrows are fixed in me, and Your hand rests on me; there is no healing in my flesh because of Your wrath; there is no peace in my bones because of my sins. For my transgressions rise up over my head; like a heavy burden they are heavy on me. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my folly. I suffer misery, and I am utterly bowed down; I go all the day long with a sad face. For my loins are filled with mockeries, and there is no healing in my flesh. I am afflicted and greatly humbled; I roar because of the groaning of my heart. O Lord, all my desire is before You, and my groaning is not hidden from You. My heart is troubled; my strength fails me, and the light of my eyes, even this is not with me. My friends and neighbors draw near and stand against me, and my near of kin stand far off; and those who seek my soul use violence, and those who seek evil for me speak folly; and they meditate on deceit all the day long. But I am like a deaf man who does not hear, and I am like a mute who does not open his mouth. I am like a man who does not hear, and who has no reproofs in his mouth. For in You, O Lord, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God. For I said, “Let not my enemies rejoice over me, for when my foot was shaken, they boasted against me.” For I am ready for wounds, and my pain is continually with me. For I will declare my trans-

gression, and I will be anxious about my sin. But my enemies live, and are become stronger than I; and those who hate me unjustly are multiplied; those who repaid me evil for good slandered me, because I pursue righteousness; and they threw away my love as though it were a stinking corpse. Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, do not depart from me; give heed to help me, O Lord of my salvation.

This psalm is clearly both a confession of sin and a prayer for mercy. As such it is a rather detailed one, reminiscent both of a person’s first general confession before the priest, and of continued awareness of sin and failure in the face of God’s mercies and His holiness. Its agony of failure is not just *any* agony, but the particular agony of first experiencing God’s graces, and then losing them by sinning.

These graces and the thirst for them is fittingly the very topic of Psalm 62:

O God, my God, I rise early to be with You; my soul thirsts for You. How often my flesh thirsts for You in a desolate, impassable, and waterless land. So in the holy place I appear before You, to see Your power and Your glory. Because Your mercy is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You in my life; I will lift up my hands in Your name. May my soul be filled, as if with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall sing praise to You with lips filled with rejoicing. If I remembered You on my bed, I meditated on You at daybreak; for You are my helper, and in the shelter of Your wings I will greatly rejoice. My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand takes hold of me. But they seek for my soul in vain; they shall go into the lowest parts of the earth. They shall be given over to the edge of the sword; they shall be a portion for foxes. But the king shall be glad in God; all who swear by Him shall be praised, for the mouth that speaks unrighteous things is stopped.

This psalm clearly connects with the two previous ones by its reference to the “desolate, impassable, and waterless” land of both enmity and sin. The solution is to enter the holy place, that is, the temple of God, where the soul tastes God to discover that His grace is “better than life.” From the perspective of Orthodox worship, this is naturally a reference to the Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy, the other divine

mysteries and inspired services.

What follows in this psalm is a description of the benign consequences, the central one of which is intimacy with God, the ability to follow so closely behind Him that His right hand can take hold of one's very being: "My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand takes hold of me." This psalm also lays forth that this intimacy dissolves both enmity and sin, and satisfies completely, even to the very marrow of one's bones.

Taken together, the first three psalms of the *Hexapsalmos* clearly describe both the entry into divine graces and the life in and through these graces in the Church. In this sense this sequence of three psalms appears to be complete. It says almost all that needs to be said. Yet the very fact that three more psalms follow suggests otherwise.

The following Psalm 87 is one of the most striking among the Psalms of David. In it there seems to be no hope:

O Lord God of my salvation, I cry day and night before You. Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my supplication, O Lord. For my soul is filled with sorrows, and my soul draws near to Hades; I am counted among those who go down into the pit; I am like a helpless man, free among the dead, like slain men thrown down and sleeping in a grave, whom You remember no more, but they are removed from Your hand. They laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places and in the shadow of death. Your wrath rested upon me, and You brought all Your billows over me. You removed my acquaintances far from me; they made me an abomination among themselves; I was betrayed, and did not go forth. My eyes weakened from poverty; O Lord, I cry to You the whole day long; I spread out my hands to You. Will You work wonders for the dead? Or will physicians raise them up, and acknowledge You? Shall anyone in the grave describe Your mercy and Your truth in destruction? Shall Your wonders be known in darkness, and Your righteousness in a forgotten land? But I cry to You, O Lord, and in the morning my prayer shall come near to You. Why, O Lord, do You reject my soul, and turn away Your face from me? I am poor and in troubles from my youth; but having been exalted, I was humbled and brought

into despair. Your fierce anger passed over me, and Your terrors greatly troubled me; they compassed me like water all the day long; they surrounded me at once. You removed me far from my neighbor and friend, and my acquaintances, because of my misery.

The tone of this psalm is not of jubilant trust, or being empowered to love God in the temple and obey Him in everyday life. The author does not even find hope and meaning in the self-scrutiny of confession, as in Psalm 37. Instead, his words convey a sense of hopelessness and undeserved suffering. Indeed, his language resembles that of the righteous Job the Long-Sufferer.

The sense of undeserved suffering is the reason why commentators usually interpret this psalm in terms of the Lord's innocent suffering. It is said to be a prophetic reflection of His innocent agony of separation, while being made sin for the sake of the salvation of all (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Yet a one-sided application of a Christ-in-the-psalms exegesis in this case can tempt one to forget the obvious fact that all the psalms describe authentic human experiences, however prophetic and spiritually significant they may also be. That this psalm is about Christ's suffering does not preclude that it is about *our* suffering as well.

What ties the two possible referents of this psalm together is the cross that the Lord exhorts his disciples to take upon themselves when following in his footsteps (Matthew 16:24–26). For many, this is and has been persecution and martyrdom. This is also about being disciplined and even ascetical for Christ's sake. Yet more generally, the cross is a reference to the suffering that the disciple encounters, despite having participated in what the previous three psalms describe. This must even apply to whatever damage was done by already confessed sin that does not appear to be healing without causing turmoil and pain.

There is an element of martyrdom in this too. Everyone suffers to some degree, both as a consequence of their own acts and by circumstances. Yet the author of this psalm remembers God and His graces in such a vivid way that it actually causes him to suffer greatly in the depth of his being. Outwardly the despair may look the same, but inwardly the difference is crucial.

Indeed, if the first three psalms had been

complete without the fourth, the cross would be absent. Yet the cross is obviously where the story culminates, the apex both for Christ and His every follower. This means in turn that the way of faith through repentance, confession, and other life-giving mysteries of the temple actually transforms ordinary human suffering into the cross that points towards the resurrection.

Another key theme in this psalm is the prayer that focuses on the divine Name with the kind of penetrating constancy that does not exist apart from the experiences of the cross. This manner of prayer allows one to rise above the constant bombardment of thoughts in a way that also becomes a source of spiritual discernment. In becoming pure it easily distinguishes between thoughts that give life and those that do not.

Thus this psalm, which is definitely about the way of the cross, is also about the vast themes of hesychasm, the Jesus Prayer, and spiritual discernment known, for example, through the *Philokalia*.⁴ Yet, ultimately, it is not particular practices or doctrines, but faith, manifesting itself through the cross, that makes one's prayer pure through the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is this grace, the divine energies which deify, to a degree here already, and completely in the world to come.

This is also what the following Psalm 102 echoes:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and everything within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His rewards: who is merciful to all your transgressions, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from corruption, who crowns you with mercy and compassion, who satisfies your desire with good things; and your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord shows mercies and judgment to all who are wronged. He made known His ways to Moses, the things He willed to the sons of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not become angry to the end, nor will He be wrathful forever; He did not deal with us according to our sins, nor reward us according to our transgressions; for according to the height of heaven from earth, so the Lord reigns in mercy over those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so He removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion

on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him, for He knows how He formed us; He remembers we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes; for the wind passes through it, and it shall not remain; and it shall no longer know its place. But the mercy of the Lord is from age to age upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness upon children's children, to such as keep His covenant and remember His commandments, to do them. The Lord prepared His throne in heaven, and His Kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, all you His angels, mighty in strength, who do His word, so as to hear the voice of His words. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, His ministers who do His will; bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul.

The repeated exhortation "bless the Lord" (*evlogeō*) reveals that the author's worship of God has now become personal and spontaneous in a way that only pure prayer can make possible. This is because the ability to "see" and experience God in a more direct and personal manner is clearly behind the process that these five psalms describe. Yet this psalm also conveys that the personal element of worship is by no means the opposite of common worship in the temple. Indeed, this psalm which begins with a personal "bless the Lord," nevertheless ends with a reference to the heavenly liturgy itself. In it, His angels, hosts, ministers, and works bless the Lord without end.

Thus the sequence of five psalms actually links together the earthly and heavenly worship through living spiritual experience. It manifests their fundamental spiritual unity. It points towards and reveals the work of the Spirit.

Once again the series of psalms thus far feels complete. Yet what is left is Psalm 142, which at first glance may not seem to be connected:

O Lord, hear my prayer; give ear to my supplication in Your truth; answer me in Your righteousness; do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for no one living shall become righteous in Your sight. For the enemy persecuted my soul; he humbled my life to the ground; he caused me to dwell in dark places as one long dead, and my spirit was in anguish

within me; my heart was troubled within me. I remembered the days of old, and I meditated on all Your works; I meditated on the works of Your hands. I spread out my hands to You; my soul thirsts for You like a waterless land. Hear me speedily, O Lord; my spirit faints within me; turn not Your face from me, lest I become like those who go down into the pit. Cause me to hear Your mercy in the morning, for I hope in You; make me know, O Lord, the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord, for to You I flee for refuge. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Your good Spirit shall guide me in the land of uprightness. For Your name's sake, O Lord, give me life; in Your righteousness You shall bring my soul out of affliction. In Your mercy You shall destroy my enemies; You shall utterly destroy all who afflict my soul, for I am Your servant.

The prayer “Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for no one living shall become righteous in Your sight,” means simply that nobody can actually become pure in the absolute sense of the word. Thus, even more than any of the previous psalms, this one makes it explicit that the whole spiritual journey that the *Hexapsalmos* lays forth, rests on God's personal will in a way that utterly transcends anything that might seem like a system to follow.

Thus the actual role of Church worship and traditions is to enable participation in their heavenly archetype in the heart of each worshiper. So in terms of both God willing and his people responding, it is the personal element that transcends everything. Services, doctrines, traditions, hierarchies, and so forth, all depend on the same will that decides to show mercy personally, and in the Church, despite no person being righteous in His sight. Through this mercy it is possible to be fully “in the system” and fully “above it” simultaneously. This is why it is so easy to love the Church and everything about it, in spite of her earthly imperfections.

“I meditated on all your works.” *Remembrance* is also a theme this psalm shares with the previous ones. They show that remembrance can be both the kind that fills one with “marrow and fatness” and the kind that borders on martyrdom. Yet this psalm adds a key element: the final triumphal hope and

confidence that God will act to destroy the enemies of righteousness.

The special thing about this hope is that it presupposes a very clear vision of the final divide between good and bad, and the future judgment of every responsible being. This indicates, paradoxically, that in Christian worship the remembrance of the past (*anamnesis* in Greek, *zikaron* in Hebrew) is ultimately about the future being already active, here and now, as a redeeming force.

Furthermore, the reality of the final judgment in the last words of this psalm is a reference to the final seal of meaning in the divine plan of salvation. The judgment sums up what has actually taken place, identifying the cross-bearers as the eternal kingdom of God, and putting an end to whatever hated the Cross.

Finally, in the light of the sixth psalm, the whole *Hexapsalmos* clearly appears as a sermon or a divine meditation that places every soul before the whole scope of salvation, showing God's children to be the joy of His eyes, the very meaning of history. It is indeed right to read and recite these psalms with the greatest reverence.

Johannes Pulkkanen, Th.D.
Orthodox Parish of the Transfiguration, Stockholm, Sweden
Sankt Ignatios Folkhögskola and College, Södertälje, Sweden

1. Robert J. Taft's *The Liturgy of Hours East and West – The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1985) pp. 195–199, 274.
2. See, for example, the prophecy of the Rumanin Elder Amrose of Dadiou at <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2010/07/elder-ambrose-of-dadiou-prophecies-and.html>
3. All rights reserved. “Scripture taken from the St. Athanasius Academy Septuagint™. Copyright © 2008 by St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology.” As regards the New Testament “Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.”
4. *The Philokalia* is a widespread collection of Orthodox Church Fathers' spiritual texts written between the 4th and 15th centuries.



THE JOYFULNESS OF JESUS AND MARY

Deacon David Lochbihler

*Behold the rainbow and bless Him who made it,
Exceedingly beautiful in its brightness.
It circles heaven with its glorious arc,
And the hands of the Most High laid out its course.*

– Wisdom of Sirach 43:11–12 (NKJV)

DRIVING TO CHURCH EARLY SUNDAY MORNING, I MARVELED AT THE MAGNIFICENT SKY. THE VIRGINIA CLOUDS LOOKED LIKE THEY WERE CARVED IN STONE, FILLED WITH AN UNUSUAL DEPTH OF TEXTURE. AS I PARKED MY CAR AND WALKED TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE, ABOUT TO ENTER THE BRIGHT, RED, DOUBLE DOORS, I NOTICED A BEAUTIFUL RAINBOW SPREAD ACROSS THE SKY, FORMING A SUPERB SEMICIRCLE ABOVE OUR CHURCH.

Our Sunday Lauds and Mass, our praying of the ancient psalms and celebration of the Divine Liturgy, express the joyfulness of loving Jesus the Logos and honoring Mary the Theotokos. The remarkable rainbow creating the panoramic crown upon our church foreshadowed the profound prayers and beautiful hymns our people in the pews would use to worship God as faithful Orthodox Christians across the globe have done for more than a millennium. Like Orthodox faithful everywhere and in every age, we shall experience “heaven on earth.”

We chant the Psalms during Lauds, praying to our Uncreated God. We are created. We cannot begin to comprehend within the narrow confines of our feeble, finite minds the essence of our Uncreated God. Yet still we pray, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.” In the West we bow; in the East we make the sign of the cross. “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.” This otherworldly prayer points to the most magnificent Mystery begun before time began and beyond even heaven and earth. The Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Even while chanting this profound prayer, joining the worship of millions across two millennia, we find ourselves trapped by time and needing to start “in the beginning,” though God always was and always will be.

The Divine Liturgy begins. More than what we see is present and in our midst. “And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”¹¹ We find ourselves immersed within, and surrounded by, an unseen reality far larger and more magnificent than ourselves.

When all is said and done, on a typical Sunday morning, we worship together for quite a while. One hundred forty minutes feels like fifteen, each and every Sunday. Our Uncreated God preceded and created time. Our worship mirrors dimly this timeless truth.

How can we sustain this enthusiasm for eternity during the ordinary events of our everyday lives? The answer lies in enthusiastically embracing the most extraordinary gift received from God during the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Eucharist.

“The sacred Altar is the focal point of the worshipping congregation, because there the Sacrament of the divine Eucharist is celebrated. The fact that the Book of the Gospels lies upon it demonstrates

the connection between Holy Scripture and worship.”¹² Receiving the Eucharist, consuming the actual Body and Blood of Christ, opens an infinite, ever-expanding universe of possibilities into our lives and our world. “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6:56, NKJV).

Two great feast days within our Orthodox tradition are The Feast of the Most Holy Body of Christ and The Feast of the Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Within the Monastic Diurnal, the Day Hours of the Monastic Breviary according to Saint Benedict, monks, clergy, and laity within the Western tradition offer these short readings. For Corpus Christi, “BRETHREN: I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me” (I Corinthians 11:23–24, pp. 412–413). For Precious Blood, “BRETHREN: Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own Blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:11–12, p. 553). Marvel at the miracle of the Body and Blood of Christ extended to all faithful Orthodox believers during each Divine Liturgy!

The indescribable joy of receiving Holy Communion! At that precise moment in time, in a miraculous way, the Trinity lives within us. “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him” (John 6:56, KJV). The Trinity communes with us. God the Father loves the Son and the Spirit; God the Son loves the Father and the Spirit; and God the Holy Spirit loves the Father and the Son. Abba–Logos–Ruah, three Persons, one God, immersed in a perfect uncreated communion of divine love.

As imperfect, created beings, we mysteriously share in this communion of divine love. “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16, NKJV). We cannot begin to love God and each other as God loves us. He is uncreated; we are created. His love is infinite; our love is finite. We always shall fall

short of God's divine, eternal love, even in heaven! "Only 'God is love.' Only God loves with that love of which the gospels speak."³

Yet look how closely, in a brief moment locked in time and space, we advance towards this perfect love! Corpus Christi: "Eat my flesh." Precious Blood: "Drink My Blood." The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Holy Communion. Our Liturgy is truly divine. Eucharist means "thanksgiving." We cannot stop there. Our hearts filled with gratitude. We must strive to love during the rest of the week because of this immense love we receive each Divine Liturgy.

Most world religions call their people to love. For many, a life of love draws one to the good, the true, and the beautiful. Christians are called and challenged to go one step further, loving not only God and neighbor, but also our enemies. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we

beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14, NKJV). The Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Logos, the God-Man, born in time and space within the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, made everything new. "In this is the staggering newness of Christian love – that in the New Testament man is called to love with the divine love, which has become the divine-human love, the love of Christ."⁴

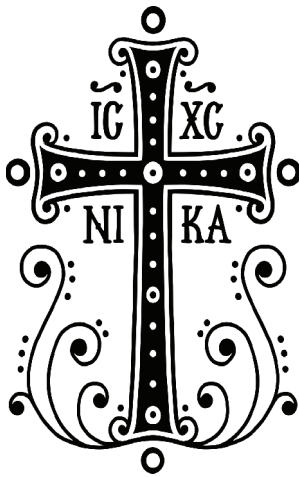
Our lives are changed each time we receive Holy Communion. We experience the eternal love of the Holy Trinity. "The newness of Christianity lies not in the commandment to love, but in the fact that it has become possible to fulfil the commandment."⁵ Just as works follow faith, divine love follows Holy Communion.

Deacon David Lochbihler
Saint Patrick Orthodox Church, Bealeton, Virginia

1. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1971), p. 73.
2. Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *Hesychia and Theology The Context for Man's Healing in the Orthodox Church*, translated by Sister Pelagia Selfe (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2007), p. 181.
3. Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, Kachur (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), p. translated by Paul 136 (emphasis in the original).
4. *Ibid.*, (emphasis in the original).
5. *Ibid.*

Available from Archdiocese Bookstore at Antiochian Village

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This year's Antiochian Women PROJECT seeks to honor our widowed clergy-wives for the years of selfless service they have given to our Archdiocese. Our love for them and our deep respect has moved us to establish a dedicated Endowment Fund, from which the yearly dividends will be distributed among them. The amount of financial support we can offer each year will directly depend on the amount of funding we raise through this year's PROJECT. So, let's show our heartfelt support for these well-deserving ladies, and inaugurate this Endowment Fund with a generous financial base. NORTH AMERICAN BOARD - ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF NORTH AMERICA

WHAT THE ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN ORGANIZATION MEANS TO ME

Lucy Hanna

Growing up, I witnessed my mother's dedication to serving others within our home, our extended family, and our church. We attended the Presbyterian Church near our home in Alexandria, Egypt. My mother went to church regularly on Sundays and maybe a few other occasions only, but she contributed to the charitable work by using her many talents. She was an excellent cook, seamstress, and master crochet artist. When she was not taking care of us, she was canning, sewing, and crocheting for the church bazaar for the benefit of the needy and other ministries of the church. We didn't have an organized ladies' group. Everyone, men and women, was contributing to the charitable work by using their God-given talents.

When I emigrated to the United States in 1968 with my husband and three little children, we settled in Portland, Oregon, and joined St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church. Again, the women there were very active in all aspects of the church life, without an actual organized ladies' group. As a young, busy wife and mother in her twenties, I did what I could to help while also working at a full-time job. The women of St. George were active in teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, serving on the parish council, cleaning, cooking, baking *prosphora*, as well as doing charitable and humanitarian work within the parish, in the community, and even for international charities.

At first, this seemed to be a bit intimidating to me. Most of the women were much more experienced than I, and I didn't know if I could measure up. Thankfully, they welcomed me and I learned so much from them. Before I knew it, I was involved in all of the activities mentioned above. At the Parish Life Conferences (back then called the "Family Life Conference"), I learned that women from all the parishes were also very active, doing the same things.

His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory, capitalized on this when he founded the National Organization of Antiochian Women in 1973. At the 1972 Archdiocese Convention in Los Angeles, he explained the important role of women in the church, and concluded with these words:

Last, but not least, we must realize once and for all that women have a definite ministry in the life of the Church. Very often we have the tendency to confine women's role in the Church just to the kitchen. Both the Old and the New Testaments testify beyond doubt to the important role which women played in the history of salvation. Time does not permit me to speak in detail about Ruth, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachael, the Virgin Mary, the ointment-bearers, the deaconesses, and many others who ministered to the Church and Christ, and were instruments of His Divine purpose in history. We don't have to consult the past too much in order to prove our point. If you just look around you in your own parish, you find those devout ladies serving God as Church School teachers, Choir members, youth leaders, and fundraisers. It is very disappointing that in some parishes women are not allowed to vote or to be elected to Church Councils. We must definitely do away with this medieval and archaic outlook concerning women. Our Church does not teach that women are inferior to men. Despite their different functions, men and women are equal in the eyes of God because both were redeemed by His precious blood. St. Paul said, "There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

I propose, therefore, that a National Sisterhood of Charity be organized in the Archdiocese. The structure and goals of this organization will be defined in the future. I propose that the President of this Sisterhood, by virtue of her office, should become a



member of the Board of Trustees of the Archdiocese and should report annually to this General Assembly.

Thus in 1973 the organization known as the Antiochian Women of North America was born. The North American Board (NAB) was formed and officers were elected. Soon after, a constitution and by-laws were completed and distributed to the regions (now Dioceses), whose members in turn elected their own officers, and then local parishes followed suit. Annual Regional Meetings were held at the “Family Life Conferences” and delegates represented the regions at the Archdiocese Conventions. Then committees were established with coordinators appointed to head them.

At first, I struggled with having a structured organization. It was very foreign to me to have officers: president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and committee heads. Why? We should all be serving and working together, right? Well, before long, the purpose of all this became very evident. It wasn't titles that women were seeking. It was for very practical purposes: to help us in our ministries. The committees were then formed to establish a focus and a purpose for our organization as a roadmap to guide us in a spirit of Christian leadership. The North American Board, with the guidance of the Metropolitan, the overseeing Hierarchy, and the Spiritual Advisor, investigate and find deserving charities like the annual project and other worthy causes. After all, our organization was established as a “sisterhood serving Christ through serving others.”

So why were there diocesan and local officers? In order to pass along the information, we have counterparts to the North American Board at the diocesan level, who in turn pass along the information to the parishes. It is therefore very important to have women representatives from every parish who are responsible to receive and distribute this information to the members. These would be the local chapter board or officers. Material therefore trickles down from the NAB to the dioceses, and then to the local chapters through the officers and coordinators.

Understanding all this, I delved into the Antiochian Women Sisterhood with all my heart, soul, and body. I took on leadership roles at the local, diocesan, and NAB levels, with one purpose in mind: to serve others. Of course, I made mistakes along

the way, but I always tried to do better. Beginning in Portland, and after my husband and I moved to southern California in 1986 and joined the parish of St. Andrew of Riverside, I was active and served in different capacities, but my heart was always drawn to the causes of the Antiochian Women.

One of my main goals was to encourage as many women of my parish as possible, especially the younger generation, to join the Antiochian Women. It was important that they know the purpose of the organization. It was important that they know *who* the Antiochian Women are. These are women who sacrificially give of their time, talent, and means to help the less fortunate; women who strive to emulate our Most Holy Mother, the Theotokos, and all the Saints, in doing charitable works; potentially every woman in every parish of the more than three hundred parishes in our Archdiocese.

At first, just as I felt when I was in my twenties and new to the parish, the younger women seemed to be a bit intimidated by the many more seasoned women in the parish whose service seemed effortless. They were afraid they might “mess up,” and not do things the “correct way.” It was incumbent upon us, the older generation, to encourage them; to let them know that “their way” may be better and more efficient than our old way. We taught them what we knew, then encouraged them to fly. We assured them that their variety of talents, when combined, make a symphony of good works to the glory of God. We let them know that we are here for them if they need help or advice, then pulled back, continuing to serve behind the scenes or in lesser capacities. It is the circle of life! Yes, these are the Antiochian Women of today! God bless them!

I am honored and humbled to have served Christ through the Antiochian Women since its inception 50 years ago. There is no better closing than a quote from one of the “Thoughts of Metropolitan PHILIP” of thrice-blessed memory: “What our future Church will be depends on what you are today. I have tried to serve you to the best of my ability and if I have stumbled along the way, it is because of human frailty. Do not forget, however, that I love you and care for each and every one of you.”

Through the prayers of our Mother, the Most Holy Theotokos, who is the role model for us all, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy upon us and save us. Amen.

CLERGY RETREAT FOR THE DIOCESE OF OAKLAND, CHARLESTON AND THE MID-ATLANTIC

Truth be told, initially I did not want to attend this year's Clergy Synaxis. The priests of the Diocese of Oakland, Charleston and the Mid-Atlantic get together some time in the fall every year at the Antiochian Village for this synaxis, and this year was no exception. For me, it's a long drive – about 7 hours. Given that I had already made that trek three times in as many months, I wasn't particularly excited. Sure, the drive is beautiful that time of year. The fall foliage is spectacular, and the sun casts amazing effects as the days get shorter. Still, I was tired. It was a long summer and the fall was equally packed with parish events, back-to-school obligations, and family visits. Plus, the featured speaker of the retreat was someone I had just heard present.

Fr. Evan Armatas is very personable, he is a wonderful speaker, and a very successful priest. So don't

get me wrong, but we had just experienced his wisdom at the Antiochian Convention a couple months back. His book, *Reclaiming the Great Commission: A Roadmap to Parish Health*, is everywhere. If I want to know more from him, I thought, we can read his book. Why drive seven hours and lose essentially a week's worth of parish work, just for this?

It's not uncommon for clergy to become isolated or lonely, or to find themselves lost in the wilderness of ministry. Even the best and most seasoned of priests can find their pastoral efforts becoming routine and stale. That's why it's important to have dedicated times for priests to gather for prayer, fellowship, and learning. The intimate setting

of the synaxis is cathartic and inspiring. You would think that after being a priest for over a decade that I would have remembered that. Once again, I am grateful for the reminder.

Spending time with my brother priests and Bishop THOMAS was just what this priest needed. The synaxis, as always, provided us with the opportunity to share and listen, and to be encouraged by each other. And as for Fr. Evan, let me say that he hit it out of the park.

Fr. Evan's presentations were a deep dive into his ministry. He peeled back the layers of his book and got down to the minutiae of parish life. His talks with us were neither a simple rehashing of his book nor an extended version of what he did at the convention. In his candid and joyful manner he spoke to us as fellow priests – as peers. He also took on a leadership role when he challenged our thinking and that sometimes routine and stale *modus operandi*.

In just a few days he gave me, and I'd dare say others, a new sense of purpose and direction to take back to our parishes and into our hearts. Several of his organizational methods are already being implemented in my parish. Other ideas that he gave us will take time to incorporate. In the meantime, his concepts have challenged me to do some spiritual reflection and repentance that I hope will carry on for as long as I serve. If you have not had the privilege of meeting Fr. Evan or reading his works, I highly recommend making room for his practical understanding and experience.

In the end, I am thankful. I am thankful to His Grace Bishop THOMAS, whose wisdom knows just what his priests need. I am grateful to my fellow priests, whose company never fails to edify. Of course, all of us clergy who attended are thankful and blessed to have had the chance to learn from Fr. Evan Armatas. I certainly am glad I went.



ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

AKKAWI, Majd, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on December 3, 2023, at St. John of Damascus Church, Carbondale, Illinois. He is attached to St. Ignatius of Antioch Church in Fitchburg, Wisconsin.

BOURASSA, Jacob, to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on October 18, 2023, at Emmanuel Orthodox Church, Brookfield, Massachusetts.

FAKHOURI, Simeon (Yazen), to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on December 9, 2023, at St. George Orthodox Church, Troy, Michigan. He is the Youth Director at St. George Orthodox Church, Cicero, Illinois.

HALE, Deacon Juvenaly, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on November 5, 2023, at St. Joseph Antiochian Orthodox Church, Houston, Texas. Fr. Juvenaly is assigned to St. Joseph Church.

HANNA, Deacon Samer, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on December 10, 2023, at the Basilica of St. Mary, Livonia, Michigan. He is assigned to the Basilica.

KHOREY, Archdeacon David, to the holy priesthood by Bishop ANTHONY on November 26, 2023, at St. Nicholas Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is attached to the parish.

NICOLAS, Elias (Elio) Nicolas, to the holy diaconate by His Eminence Metropolitan SABA on December 6, 2023, at Virgin Mary Church, Yonkers, New York. Deacon Elias works at the Archdiocese headquarters with His Eminence in

Englewood, New Jersey.

RUNG, Paul (Landon), to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on October 14, 2023, at Christ the Savior Church, Jacksonville, Texas.

ELEVATED

MATAR, Fr. Paul, to the rank and dignity of Archimandrite by Metropolitan SABA on December 6, 2023, at Virgin Mary Church, Yonkers, New York. Archimandrite Paul works at the Archdiocese headquarters.

McNARY, Fr. Mark, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop JOHN, on October 15, 2023, at St. Peter Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

SCOTT, Fr. David Graham, to the rank and dignity of Archpriest by Bishop JOHN on behalf of Bishop Alexander, with the blessings of Metropolitan JOSEPH, on August 27, 2022, at Niagara Falls, New York.

DEPOSED

Former priest Youssef (a.k.a. Youhanna) SEMAAN on December 21, 2023.

Former deacon Thomas CROWE on December 18, 2023.

DEPARTED

BUNDY, Khouria Suzanne, wife of the Archpriest Lester Michael Bundy, fell asleep in the Lord on September 29, 2023, the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel in the Western Rite.

Fr. Les and Kh. Suzanne were received into Orthodoxy through the Mystery of Chrismation in 1991. The following year, His Grace Bishop Antoun ordained Fr. Les to the holy priesthood. He and Kh.

Suzanne founded St. Columba Church, Lafayette, Colorado. For more than 30 years she was a faithful support to her husband, her family, and the entire parish family. Even in their retirement, Kh. Suzanne was a powerful presence and encouragement to the people at St. Columba Church.

Fr. Les recalled that his wife was proud of her German heritage, her family having arrived in Denver in the mid-1800s. Kh. Suzanne was one of the few women in her era to major in mathematics at the University of Colorado. She was fond of travel, having visited more than 40 countries in her lifetime.

Kh. Suzanne had successfully fought cancer for several years. Her husband, children and grandchildren had faithfully attended to her needs until her last breath. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her as such a kind, generous, and strong person.

FADEL, Reverend Deacon Robert Michael Elias reposed on December 5, 2023, in Falls Church, Virginia. Robert was born in Niagara Falls, New York, on March 23, 1935. The proud son of Lebanese immigrants, he was a graduate of Niagara Falls High School and earned Bachelor's and Masters' Degrees from Michigan State University. He met his wife Krystalia (Kokolaki) at MSU. They married on November 12, 1961, at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, Niagara Falls. During his life he called many places home. Beyond Niagara Falls, he lived in Lansing, Michigan; Charlotte, North Carolina; Athens, Greece; Lynnfield, Massachusetts; and Arlington, Virginia. He worked as a high school teacher, an English Department head, and an owner of

restaurants. After retiring in Greece, he returned to the United States in 1997. Deacon Michael served at St. Vasilios Orthodox Church, Peabody, Massachusetts. He and Kristi were founders of, and active in, Orthodox ministries throughout their lives. He retired as a Deacon in 2019.

He is survived by his devoted wife, Kristi, and his children Eva (Jeff Beranek) Fadel and Demetri (Julie) Fadel. Robert was an immensely proud Giddo to Alexander Beranek, Gabriel Fadel, Natalya Beranek, and Sebastian Fadel.

KHOURY, Khouria Vergin Boutrous, 93, reposed in the Lord Jesus Christ on October 20, 2023. She was born in Aleppo, Syria on August 14, 1930. Loved by her family and friends, Kh. Vergin's life was all about her family and her faith.

She helped her husband, the late V. Rev. John Khoury, in his ministry, no matter where it took them, including St. George Church of West St. Paul, Minnesota, where Fr. John retired as pastor emeritus. Kh. Vergin was a lifelong member of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

Together, the Khourys raised five children. They shared nine grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Kh. Vergin was preceded in death by her loving husband of 56 years; her daughter, Zarafat; her grandson, Daniel Anderson; her parents; and her four sisters.

She is survived by four children: Elias (Seta), George (Brigitte), Feryal Rahme, and Antoine; her grandchildren Daniel, Sabrina, Matthew, Rebecca, Christopher, Serge, Katrina, Mary and Yousef; and her great-grandchildren. She is also survived by her siblings: Therese, Leila, Elias and Antoine; and many nephews and nieces.

MOLLOY, V. Rev. Michael Earl, 76, was born on Nov. 13, 1946, to Richard and Belle Molloy of Trem-

onton, Utah, a small city north of Salt Lake City, most of whose inhabitants were and still are Mormons, which included Fr. Michael in his childhood.

Fr. Michael married Khouria Rita on October 5th, 1973. He became one of the original elders, or pastors, of Maranatha North, that became in 1979 one of the nearly 20 churches of the newly formed Evangelical Orthodox Church, taking on the name, St. John Orthodox Church in Eagle River.

Fr. Michael was ordained to the holy priesthood, along with Fr. Harold Dunaway, the pastor of what became St. John Cathedral; Fr. Marc Dunaway, who became pastor shortly after; and Fr. Paul Moses Jaroslaw.

In 2004, Fr. Michael left Eagle River to serve as interim pastor at St. Herman Church in Wasilla, Alaska, for a few years, and then in 2006 moved to Seattle, Washington. In 2008, he officially retired from the U.S. Postal Service, and he and Kh. Rita then moved near Las Vegas, Nevada, to be closer to their children and grandchildren. He was attached to St. Michael Cathedral in Las Vegas, but he often served as a missionary and fill-in priest at All Saints Church, Homer, Alaska; St. Katherine Mission, Pullman, Washington; and St. George Mission, St. George, Utah.

Kh. Rita reposed April 5, 2023. Fr. Michael is survived by his son, Stephen; his daughter Regina (Mario) Sollechio; and their children Charisma, Avonlea and Theory.

SIMON, Fr. Daniel, 86, peacefully fell asleep in the Lord early Friday, October 6, 2023. He lived a selfless and joyful life, in sacramental commitment to priestly service.

At age 6, when he survived polio, Fr. Daniel's parents dedicated his life to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ordained as a subdeacon at the age of 15, he began his ministry to those afflicted and in need.

A native of Grand Rapids, Mich., Fr. Daniel graduated from Central High School and enlisted in the Army in 1958, in which he served as a helicopter mechanic. After leaving the military, Fr. Daniel attended Ferris State University, receiving his Bachelor of Science degree in accounting in June of 1963.

He married Eileen Hoffer in September of 1964, and she accompanied him to St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York. He was ordained to the holy priesthood at Holy Protection Cathedral (Orthodox Church in America) in New York City on December 11, 1966, by His Beatitude Metropolitan Ireney of thrice-blessed memory (OCA).

Subsequently, he served Antiochian parishes, including St. George Church in S. Glens Falls, New York in 1967. In 1968, Fr. Daniel was re-assigned to St. George Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. There he was instrumental in finding and negotiating the purchase of the current church property in West St. Paul. Fr. Daniel also worked for the State of Minnesota as an auditor from 1968 to the mid-1970s.

After his time in West St. Paul, Fr. Daniel served several communities in different jurisdictions, from Italy to Hawaii to the Upper Midwest.

Fr. Daniel is survived by his wife of 59 years, Khouria Eileen; his children Anna, Daniel (Nojelyn Kato), John (Rafif), and Alexander (Elizabeth); his grandchildren James (Alta), Matthew, Anna-Maria, Luke, John, Mark, Sho Kato, Julia, Lila, Aiden; his sister Frances (James) Sears; his niece Mary Simon; and his cousins Christine and Alexis Elias.

He is preceded in death by his parents; his brother, George, and sister-in-law, Kareemeh Simon; his sister Margaret Simon; and his brother Matthew Simon.

THE MEETING OF THE HOLY
SYNOD,
OCTOBER 2023
HIS EMINENCE
METROPOLITAN SABA
(ISPER)

On Saturday evening, October 21, in a solemn prayer of thanksgiving and joy, the metropolitans of the archdioceses of the Patriarchate of Antioch, from various continents, announced the canonization of two new martyrs, Priests Nicholas Khasha and his son, Habib. This solemn celebration was attended by a large audience of clergy, faithful, scouts of the Orthodox Archdiocese of Tripoli, and the choir of the Balamand Theological Institute. For the first time, the *apolytikion* of the newly recognized saints was sung. May they intercede for all of us. Their joint feast is set for July 16 each year.

The two martyrs lived virtuous lives marked by dedicated priestly service and great devotion and asceticism. Each died as a martyr for his faith and priesthood. Saint Nicholas was martyred in the city of Mersin (in present-day Turkey), under brutal torture by order of a security officer, on August 2, 1917. He was tortured to make him confess the names of his parishioners to whom the Consul of England in Cyprus had sent some letters, via another parishioner, who confessed the matter to Father Nicholas before handing the letters to their recipients. Knowing the seriousness of the matter, Father Nicholas prevented him from delivering them and destroyed them. He endured brutal torture until martyrdom and did not acknowledge the names of his congregants.

Thirty-one years after his martyrdom, his son, Father Habib, was also martyred during a spiritual retreat in Mount Hermon, which is shared by Syria and Lebanon, where he was met by a gang of smugglers. He surrendered his soul after he had re-

ceived from their hands a variety of insults and brutal torture to make him deny his faith, and he did not. When the Lebanese police found his body, there was not a single unbroken bone in it. He was martyred on July 16, 1948.

The Fathers of the Antiochian Synod also included Saint Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn, in the Antiochian ecclesiastical calendar, at my request.

The Fathers also designated the second Sunday after Pentecost, the Sunday following All Saints Sunday, as a special commemoration for the Saints of Antioch. Icons of different sizes of both St. Raphael and the New Holy Martyrs, as well as their biographies, were printed in two separate books. The service of the two new saints was also written by the hymnographer Father Athanasius of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra of Athos. A special liturgical service will also be prepared for the feast of All Saints of Antioch. Translation of the biography and the service into English is to be done soon thereafter, in our Archdiocese.

In the context of the inflamed situation in a number of regions and their negative repercussions on ecclesiastical relations, the Fathers of the Holy Synod sent a practical message to all on the priority of reconciliation and peace. They decided to restore the broken communion amongst the clergy that had existed between the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem and to find a solution to the issue of the jurisdictional dispute over the territory of "Qatar" in a way that preserves the See of Antioch's right of historical jurisdiction over it. A delegation of the Antiochian Synod will visit Amman, the capital of Jordan, to express the love of the sons of the See of Antioch for the sons of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, to stand by them in these difficult and fateful circumstances, and to hand

over to them the aid collected in the churches of the archdioceses.

In addition, in an extraordinary session, the Synod of Antioch elected Archimandrite Antonios Saad as Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of Bosra, Houran, and Jabal al-Arab, Bishop GREGORY (Khoury) as Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of Homs and Dependencies, and Archimandrite Dimitri Mansour as Auxiliary Bishop to the Patriarch with the title "Bishop of Qara." The Synod also elected Bishop ROMANOS Al-Hannat, the Patriarchal Vicar, as Secretary of the Holy Synod of Antioch.

The Fathers of the Holy Synod studied a presentation on the livelihood of the priests in the tragic economic conditions experienced by the inhabitants of Syria and Lebanon, prepared by me. The presentation included a theoretical section looking at three possible sources for securing the livelihood of the priest. The implementation of this vision cannot be done now, because of the catastrophic economic situation in the two countries. The second section also included a proposal to establish a common fund to support the livelihood of priests, to be supplied by the archdioceses of the diaspora. The Holy Synod reviewed several pastoral topics, such as the unification of liturgical services, humanitarian aid, clergy decency, and discipline. They also listened to studies and reports on global developments and their relationship to ecclesiastical affairs.

The Holy Synod was preceded by a conference held by the St. John of Damascus Theological Institute at the University of Balamand, titled "The Antiochian Orthodox Church from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century: Towards an Accurate Understanding of History." A number of researchers in church history from various backgrounds, universities, and countries, such as Lebanon, Syria, Greece,



Turkey, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, America, and Germany, participated in the conference presentations. In particular, the conference contributed to clarifying the ecclesiastical situation in the period that witnessed the establishment and growth of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in the East. We are deeply grateful to the Lord of the Church who enabled the Fathers to meet despite the tragic situation taking place in the region. The convening of this Synod meeting has shown that nothing surpasses the importance of meeting our brothers and sisters in a spirit of prayer and love. May God support us all to be messengers of peace, love, and joy in this troubled world, which lacks His living presence among us.

DECLARATION OF
SAINTHOOD OF
FATHER-SON MARTYRS:
PRIESTS NICHOLAS AND
HABIB KHASHA FROM THE
PATRIARCHATE OF ANTIOCH

On Saturday, October 21, 2023,

His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X led a service of thanksgiving in which the Church of Antioch's newest saints were glorified. Joining this service at the Church of the Dormition at Balamand Monastery in Lebanon were His Eminence Metropolitan SABA and his brothers of the Holy Synod of Antioch.

The hierarchs, clergy, and laity processed across the monastery's western courtyard, accompanied by the Orthodox National Scouts who played musical instruments.

Arriving at the monastery church, they venerated the icon of the two martyrs among the priests, Nicholas and Habib Khasha – a father and son – where the thanksgiving prayer was sung by the choir of the Saint John of Damascus Theological Institute at the University of Balamand.

During the service, His Beatitude and Their Eminences signed the decision declaring the sainthood of the Fathers Khasha in the Synod's register, and then the secretary of the Council, Metropolitan GREGORY (Khoury), the newly elected primate of the Archdiocese of Homs and Dependencies, Syria, read aloud the text of the Synod's decision: "Recognizing the holiness of the two martyred fathers, priests Nicholas and Habib Khasha of Damascus."

"The official recognition and canonization of the two martyrs, Priest Nicholas Khasha and his son, Priest Habib Khasha, both of Damascus, took place in the Patriarchate of Antioch on October 19, 2023, as follows:

"The Church of Christ offers praises with all piety to those who underwent martyrdom for the sake of faith in Christ.

"They ask for their intercession with the God who loves mankind for the forgiveness of the people's sins, the healing of the sick, and spiritual benefit. Fathers Nicola and Habib Al-Hasna Al-Abdah pro-

vided amazing evidence regarding their faith in Christ.

"Father Nicholas was martyred in the city of Mersin on August 2, 1917, and his son, Father Habib, was also martyred in the area in Mount Hermon July 16, 1948. Therefore, they are worthy of honor and reverence from the believers.

"In view of these matters, Patriarch JOHN X of Antioch and All the East, convened the Holy Synod of Antioch, exhibited their martyrdom, and requested the declaration of their sainthood and an annual memorial for them, on July 16.

"For this reason, after taking into account their martyrdom for the sake of our faith and the general ecclesiastical awareness of their holiness, we decided, following the tradition of the universal Church, to pay the appropriate and due honor to these holy men, and accordingly, we decided synodally.

"We determine by the Holy Spirit the following:

"The Damascene fathers, Nicholas Khasha and his son Habib, who died as martyrs, are counted among the ranks of the saints and martyrs, and honor is presented to them by the believers with praises every year, on the sixteenth of the month of July. The liturgical service and its icon were also approved. Accordingly, this decision was taken synodally, which was printed and signed in the register of the Holy Synod of the Great Church of Christ in Antioch, and was circulated to all believers and sister Orthodox churches."

At the end of the prayer, His Beatitude delivered a speech during which he touched on the most important issues of the hour in Lebanon and Syria and the bloody siege on Gaza.

He praised the lives of Saints Khasha and mentioned that "the path of holiness is a calling for each one of us," especially since they are models for Christian family life.



Arab Emirates.

MESSAGE OF SUPPORT
FROM THE CHURCH OF
ANTIOCH TO THE CHURCH
OF JERUSALEM
FROM THE PATRIARCHATE
OF ANTIOCH

The Fathers of the Holy Synod of Antioch raise fervent prayers to the King of Peace and Lord of Mercies to wipe away every tear from the eyes of the Palestinian people, and to remove all injustice, oppression, homelessness, and displacement. They call on all their children to consecrate next Sunday in all the parishes of the Antiochian See for raising prayers that God may grant justice and peace in the land of peace, and to collect aid donations to relieve this afflicted people.

Understanding that the current circumstances require intensification of prayer and cooperation, the Holy Synod decided to restore ecclesiastical relations with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, previously severed. The Synod assigned the committee in charge at the Patriarchate to communicate with the brethren from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and solve the dispute over ecclesiastical jurisdiction of “Qatar,” thus preserving the right of ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Antiochian See.

The Synod also decided to send a Church delegation to visit Amman, expressing love from the people of the Antiochian See to the people of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and standing by them in these difficult and crucial circumstances.

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX
DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION (AODCE)

**Interview with
Anna-Sarah Farha, Director**

Tell us a bit about your personal history with the Archdiocese. My history with the Archdiocese began at a Christian Education workshop in

He focused on the Antiochian gesture towards the Jerusalem Church by restoring ecclesiastical communion with it, while emphasizing the right of the Antiochian ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Qatar specifically and in the Arabian Gulf. He raised a cry of peace for the return of the bishops of Aleppo, PAUL and JOHN, and the rest of the kidnapped.

Praise be to God at the end of “this Antiochian week par excellence,” which concluded today with this prayer of thanks.

After concluding the service, the believers participated in a procession of the icon of the martyred saints. Printed lives of the saints and the life of Saint Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn, were distributed to them.

The Church always asks for the intercessions of new saints.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2023
HOLY SYNOD OF ANTIOCH
ELECTS TWO NEW
METROPOLITANS FOR SYRIA

On October 20, the second day of their fall session at Balamand, Lebanon, the Holy Synod of Antioch, under the presidency of His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X, elected two new metropolitans for archdioceses in Syria.

Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Antonios Saad will become the new Metropolitan of Bosra, Hauran and Jabal Al-Arab, the former Archdiocese of His Eminence Metropolitan SABA. Fr. Antonios currently serves in the Archdiocese of Mount Lebanon.

His Grace Bishop GREGORIOS (Khoury) will become the new Metropolitan of Homs and Dependencies. Bishop GREGORIOS has served as Auxiliary Bishop to His Beatitude for the United



2016, hosted by St. Andrew Church in Brier, Washington. Mrs. Carole Buleza (Director, 2000–21), led the workshop. The presentation was so edifying that I was immediately inspired to approach Carole and ask if there was any place for me to serve as a volunteer within the Department. Carole welcomed me onto the team as a Diocesan Coordinator and Assistant for Church Schools.

Through that opportunity, I established and built relationships with church school directors across the Archdiocese and assisted in supporting their Christian Education ministries. These relationships were further strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic when the

Christian Education community resolved to develop virtual Christian Education and outreach programs. This would maintain a personal connection with our students and their families until we could return to the classroom. It is a tremendous personal blessing to work alongside such dedicated educators.

What is your Department all about? What are its basic duties and outreach-es? Christian Education joyfully serves the Sunday Church Schools and families of the Archdiocese. In that regard, the Department educates and trains teachers and directors, attends to curriculum needs, and assists and supports parents and caregivers as they form their children in the Faith.

How has your Department evolved since its inception to present day? Have you added volunteers, new technologies and programs over the years? The Department of Christian Education has a vibrant history that has continually evolved to meet the ever-expanding needs of parishes. In the early years, educators across the Archdiocese mostly stayed in touch by meeting at the Antiochian Village with the late Dr. John Boojamra (Director, 1970–2000), or they would come together at Parish Life Conferences (PLCs). Once the Internet and e-mail were

mainstream, the Department's website and mailing list became valuable resources for quickly and conveniently sharing about curriculum, and program news. Then, Carole organized the Orthodox Institute, which ran for several years as a pan-Orthodox Christian Education conference with notable speakers, workshops, and opportunities for spiritual growth. During this same time, the Department joined social media, with Facebook pages and blogs for educators and families that are still active and thriving today in the online Orthodox Christian community. Several employees, Diocesan Coordinators, and volunteers contributed to the content over the years. The Department has always supported Sunday Church Schools through teacher-training and workshops on the local level and at PLCs.

Now, in addition to in-person events, we can present sessions via Zoom, record the content, and then make it available to everyone almost instantly. Additionally, all new curriculum since 2018 is digital and posted on the Department's website, so that it can be freely accessed. In 2021, the Department of Christian Education (also now referred to as Christian Education Ministry) became part of the newly

formed Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, under the leadership of V. Rev. Fr. Nicholas Belcher. Also within this Department are the Ministries of Camping, Youth, and Young Adults. We are grateful for the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan SABA to continue the work of serving all families across our beloved Archdiocese.

How many people are working in your Department or organization, and what are their roles? Supporting the work of Christian Education on a volunteer basis are the Diocesan Coordinators, who generously make themselves available to present workshops in parishes and at local and regional retreats. We also have a dedicated team of talented writers and clergy editors (including many of our Diocesan Coordinators) producing new curriculum for Sunday Church Schools and writing book reviews and articles for our blogs.

Why is your Department so important to the parishes, clergy and laity of the Archdiocese? Christian Education must be a year-round, life-long ministry in every parish. And it is full of energy, fun, and opportunity for multi-generational learning. The Department offers Sunday Church School curriculum for preschool through adult ages, Vacation Church School summer programs, Christian Education workshops and conferences, and at-home resources for Orthodox Christian families. Christian Education is fully accessible to our students, their families, and our educators throughout the entire year.

What are your Department's primary objectives and vision for the next two years? As one of the ministries within the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, Christian Education will continue to collaborate with Camping Ministry, Youth Ministry, and Young Adult Ministry. We serve the families of

the Archdiocese together and in unison! Currently, Christian Education is creating an eight-year cycle of Sunday Church School curriculum. Each year will focus on a different book of the Bible, selected from the Old and New Testaments. The initiative of producing annual curriculum began with the release of "Who Do You Say That I Am? A Gospel of Matthew Orthodox Sunday School Curriculum" for the 2021–22 school year. Next was "Like the Stars of Heaven: A Book of Genesis Orthodox Sunday School Curriculum," and for this year, "One Body in Christ: A Book of Romans Orthodox Sunday School Curriculum." With the addition of adult lessons this year, parishioners of all ages have the opportunity to learn about the same spiritual theme during the Church year.

Tell us about a recent success story. The Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries establishes an annual theme that is shared across its departments (Christian Education, Youth, Camping, Young Adult) for Sunday Church School curriculum, Creative Festivals, Oratorical Festival, Bible Bowl, Christian Education classes at summer camps, and others. Last year's theme was Genesis 1:26, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness."

The feedback from educators was that they learned just as much or more than their students as they prepared for the lessons and presented them. They were eager to dive deeper into the study of Scripture. Our students also responded positively to the consistent theme across the Archdiocese programs in which they participated: Bible Bowl teams and Oratorical Festival participants were extremely well-prepared at the Archdiocese Convention, and Creative Festivals participation across the Archdiocese increased by 38% from 2022 to 2023. Glory to God!

How has your Department been meaningful to you personally and improved your life in Christ? Growing up, I remember my mother spending several hours each week preparing to teach her Sunday Church School class. She found joy and peace in the Holy Scriptures, and great purpose in sharing the Faith with others during the lessons. From my start as a volunteer within the Department, to the present as its Director, it is a personal blessing to be a part of a ministry for educators, parents, and caregivers who are sharing the Faith in their classrooms and homes. In my Sunday Church School classroom at St. George Church in Jacksonville, Florida, I am learning beside you and growing beside you!

How do people get involved in the work of your Department? What kinds of expertise do you need from them? If you are not already involved with Christian Ed at the parish level, prayerfully consider approaching your priest and church-school director about service opportunities. On behalf of the students and their families, an immense "thank-you" goes out to all the dedicated educators for their enthusiasm and commitment to the highest standard of Orthodox Christian education for our Archdiocese. Parents and caregivers play an essential role in the success of Christian Education, too – it all starts at home: the Little Church! All are invited to the upcoming pan-Orthodox conference, "Handing Down the Faith: Equipped for Every Good Work," at the Antiochian Village, June 6–9, 2024, hosted by the Antiochian Orthodox Department of Christian Education. Learn more about Christian Education and personal faith formation with speakers, workshops, collaborative time with fellow educators, and more. Schedule and registration details will soon be available on the Department of Christian Education Web page.



MINUTES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FIFTY-SIXTH CONVENTION OF THE
**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA**

CONVENED AT THE JW MARRIOTT DESERT RIDGE HOTEL
PHOENIX, ARIZONA, JULY 24-30, 2023



Thursday, July 27, 2023 – 11:15 AM

I. Opening Prayer

His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X, opened the General Assembly with prayer and the *Apolytikion* of Holy Pentecost in both Arabic and English.

II. Roll Call and Quorum

Upon the call of His Eminence Metropolitan SABA, Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor, declared the existence of a quorum and the qualification to conduct the business of the Archdiocese. 852 of a possible 1,014 delegates were present in person or by proxy, constituting 84% of the total possible votes.

III. Introduction of the Patriarchal Delegation and the North American Hierarchs

Sub-deacon Gregory Abdalah, Co-Chairman of the Convention, welcomed and introduced the

members of the patriarchal delegation and the North American Hierarchs: His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X; His Eminence Metropolitan SABA, Primate; His Grace Bishop THOMAS; His Grace Bishop JOHN, His Grace Bishop ANTHONY; and His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS.

Accompanying His Beatitude were Mother Makrina, Abbess of Dormition Monastery in Blamanna, Syria; Archimandrite George, Abbot of the Monastery of the Balamand; Archimandrite Parthenios, Assistant to Patriarch JOHN; Fr. Bassam Nassif, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology at St. John of Damascus School of Theology, Balamand, and Pastor of St. Phocas Church in Kaftoun, Lebanon; and Sister Salome of the Dormition Monastery in Blamanna, Syria.

IV. Introduction of the Officers and Members of the Archdiocesan Board of Trustees

Mr. Fawaz El Khoury, Vice Chairman of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees, introduced the officers, members, and honorary members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees: Archimandrite Jeremy Davis (*Protosyngellos*), Archpriest Michael Ellias (Secretary of the Archdiocese), Archpriest Thomas Zain (Vicar General), Archdeacon Emile Sayegh (Chancellor), Salim Abboud (CFO), Daniel Abraham, Richard Ayoub, James Bach, Dr. Antony Bashir, Daniel Braun, Roger J. David, Darlene N. Haddad, Eli J. Haig, Dr. Elias Hebeke, Michael Homsey, Khalil Kardous, Karen Kinan, Carol Laham, William Morrison, James Moses, Kh. Suzanne Murphy, Kelli Kouri Neagle, Mansour Rayan, Philip Saliba, Douglas Skaff, Dr. George Thomas, Rami Younes, and Dimitri Zeidan. Mr. El Khoury also introduced Archpriest Michael Tassos, Comptroller of the Archdiocese.

Mr. El Khoury appointed Messrs. Philip Saliba, James Bach, and Dimitri Zeidan as Convention Sergeants-at-Arms.

V. Acceptance of the Minutes of the 54th Archdiocesan Convention held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in July 2019, and not yet approved due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Fr. Joseph Purpura moved to accept the minutes, Dr. Anne Thomas seconded the motion, and the motion was passed.

Acceptance of the Minutes of the Zoom General Assembly held in July 2021:

Fr. Elia Shalhoub moved to accept the minutes, Fr. John Hamatie seconded the motion, and the motion was passed.

Acceptance of the Minutes of the Special Nominating Convention held in Dallas, Texas, in January 2023:

Fr. Kamal Alrahil moved to accept the minutes, Fr. Meletios Zafaran seconded the motion, and the motion was passed.

VI. Message of His Beatitude JOHN X, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

Sub-deacon Gregory Abdalah introduced His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X, Patriarch of the Great City-of-God Antioch and All the East. His Beatitude presented his message (which appeared in the September 2023 edition of *The WORD* Magazine, the official publication of the Antiochian Archdiocese).

At the conclusion of his remarks, His Beatitude presented a cross-and-*engolpion* set to His Eminence Metropolitan SABA, an *engolpion* depicting the Theotokos of Antioch to each of the bishops, and a pectoral cross to the convention host pastor, Fr. Christopher Salamy.

VII. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chairman of the Department of Legal Affairs and Resolutions offered the following resolution welcoming His Beatitude:

RESOLUTION WELCOMING
HIS BEATITUDE, JOHN X, PATRIARCH
OF THE GREAT CITY-OF-GOD, ANTIOCH
AND ALL THE EAST

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 56th Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Phoenix, Arizona;

AND WHEREAS, during the past week we have all joined together in true Christian fellowship with love, respect, and unity;

AND WHEREAS, our fellowship this week has been blessed and honored, more so, with the presence of His Beatitude, JOHN X, Patriarch of the City-of-God, Antioch and All the East who continues to express his paternal love to all;

AND WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful of this God-protected Archdiocese wish to convey to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, that we stand with you, we stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we stand with our Mother Church; that we convey our unconditional love to you; that we stand ready and committed and pledge our support to our beloved Church of Antioch, and her faithful members;

AND WHEREAS, the faithful of this God-protected Archdiocese continue to pray that Almighty God will bring everlasting peace to Syria and its inhabitants, and that He will continue to protect the Church of Antioch and her faithful;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of this 56th Archdiocesan Convention, held in Phoenix, Arizona, pledges its undivided support, respect, love, honor, loyalty and obedience to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, our Chief Shepherd in Christ; that we pledge our love and support to our brothers and sisters in Christ; and to our Mother Church; this General Assembly also submits to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our petition, that He grant to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, many more healthy and productive years to come as he continues to lead the Church of Antioch. May Almighty God grant him many years. *Eis polla eti, dhespota!*

The resolution was passed by acclamation.

VIII. Reports of the Organizations and Departments

All reports of the archdiocesan departments were distributed electronically in advance of the Convention and are available for viewing at www.antiochian.org, and will appear in a future edition of *The WORD*

Magazine. All presenters were encouraged to provide a brief synopsis of the written reports.

A. Report of the Department of Finance – Mr. Salim Abboud, CFO/Treasurer

Presentation and Approval of the Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2022

Presentation and Approval of the Proposed Budget for FY 2024

Fr. Michael Tassos, Comptroller

Mr. Abboud reported the conclusion of the first external audit in the history of the Archdiocese. He thanked members of all the committees who have contributed to the successful conclusion of the audit. He noted that many of the parishes need assistance and that the Department needs to improve communication with the parishes and the faithful. He thanked Fr. Michael Tassos, Fr. Paul Matar, Ms. Marlene Ayoub, in particular, as well as many others, especially his wife Julie. Mr. Abboud paid tribute to his late predecessor, Mr. Robert H. Laham, and he asked for volunteers to offer their services to this Department and to others.

Mr. Abboud introduced the chairs and members of each subcommittee and outlined each committee's responsibility:

Real Estate and Capital Improvement – Mr. Dan Braun

Planned Giving, Outreach, and Endowments – Ms. Mary Winstanley O'Connor

Investment – Mr. Roger David

Charitable Outreach – Dr. Anne Bourjaily Thomas

Assessment – Fr. Paul Matar

Financial Strategic Planning and Budgeting – Dr. George Thomas

Internal Audit – Ms. Darlene Haddad

Fr. Michael Tassos summarized the results of both the external and internal audits, both of which resulted in a "clean opinion." There were no significant findings and no adjustments necessary for any internal numbers or assets. This report covers the period through 2021, and the Department expects to receive the same letter for 2022. The whole presentation will be on the Archdiocese website, including the balance sheet and the financial report. Mr. Abboud then presented a number of slides outlining "myths and facts" concerning archdiocesan finances.

Fr. Anthony Yazge moved to accept the report, Fr. Amin Houli offered to second it, and the assembly received the report.

Mr. El Khoury announced that Mary Winstanley O'Connor, Secretary of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees, was preparing for a kidney transplant on August 8, and he solicited intercessions for her health and complete recovery.

There was also a moment of silence for victims of

the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria, for those lost during the pandemic, for the victims of the Beirut explosion, and for former Board of Trustees member Gregory Laham and his son James who recently departed this life in the hope of the Resurrection.

The Chair recognized Ms. Jasminka Chenich-Gabrie, who expressed concerns that the recently retired Metropolitan JOSEPH was not receiving his full retirement package.

Archdeacon Emile Sayegh thanked Ms. Chenich-Gabrie for her concern and assured her of our continuing love and prayers for His Eminence. He reported that the Holy Synod of Antioch had granted Metropolitan JOSEPH the retirement he had requested, and he confirmed that His Eminence would receive his compensation in accordance with the policy on retired bishops established in 2005. There were, however, certain technical issues which required resolution.

The Assembly adjourned at 1:26 PM and reconvened at 2:45 PM.

*N.B. All reports of the archdiocesan departments were distributed electronically in advance of the convention and are available for viewing at www.antiochian.org and will appear in a future edition of *The WORD Magazine*.

B. Ms. Marina Boosamra Ball presented a summary of the report for the Department of Sacred Music Bishop THOMAS moved to accept the report, and Bishop JOHN seconded the motion. The Assembly received the report.

C. Mr. Roger David presented a summary of the report for the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

Ms. Kelli Kouri Neagle moved to accept the report, Mr. Dan Abraham seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

D. Kh. Suzanne Murphy presented a summary of the report of the Antiochian Women.

Kh. Jeanette Galloway moved to accept the report, Ms. Rula Khoury seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

E. Ms. Sophia Salamy presented a summary of the report on behalf of Teen SOYO.

Mr. Eli Hage moved to accept the report, Fr. Joseph Purpura seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

F. Fr. Nicholas Belcher, Fr. Philip Rogers, Ms. Anna-Sarah Farha, Ms. Erin Ghata, and Mr. Khalil Samara presented a summary of the report of the Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries (Christian Education, Youth Ministry, Camping, Young Adult Ministry).

Dr. Antony Bashir moved to accept the report, Ms. Julie Abboud seconded the motion.

Ms. Cindy Karros encouraged the Board of

Trustees to accelerate the Department's work and to use archdiocesan resources to invest in the youth.

Fr. Damaskinos Issa suggested that admission to the camps should include priests' recommendation

Fr. George Baalbaki suggested that the San Francisco area needed a camp.

Fr. John Salem suggested putting resources into doing deanery events, especially for remote areas.

In response to several suggestions for more camps, Mr. El Khoury said that the Archdiocese is gearing up to do more projects, but resources are limited, and local churches have to combine their resources on common projects.

Metropolitan SABA stated that he believes we are discussing one of the most important ministries in the Church. Youth ministry is one of the greatest needs, and the Church must improve this ministry in terms of quantity and quality. He proposed a three-day conference at Antiochian Village to discuss this matter from various viewpoints

The Assembly received the report.

G. Fr. Michael Elias presented a summary of the report of the Department of Clergy Insurance and Retirement.

Fr. Maximos Saikali moved to accept the report, Fr. David Barr seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

H. Deacon Christian Manasseh presented a summary of the report of the Department of Internet Ministry.

Ms. Darlene Haddad moved to accept the report, Mr. Roger David seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

I. His Grace Bishop JOHN presented a summary of the report for *The WORD Magazine*.

Ms. Carol Laham moved to accept the report, Mr. Ernest Younes seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

Metropolitan SABA asked what percentage of people read it? Is there a connection between the magazine and the readers?

Bishop JOHN asked for a show of hands, which demonstrated many of those present do read it. He also said he receives feedback during parish visits. He usually hears from readers when they are angry, for example, when they have complaints about parish news and styles of iconography.

The Assembly adjourned at 4:37 PM.

Friday, July 28, 2023 – 10:10

J. His Grace Bishop JOHN presented a summary of the report of the Western Rite Vicariate.

Fr. Meletios Zafaran moved to accept the report, Fr. Dimitri Darwich seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

K. Dr. Sarah Byrne-Martelli, APBCC, presented a summary of the report of the Department of Chaplain and Pastoral Counseling.

Dr. Antony Bashir moved to accept the report, Fr. Maximos Saikali seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

IX. Archbishop Thomas Zain, Vicar General, introduced His Eminence, Most Reverend Metropolitan SABA who offered his Address to the 56th Archdiocesan Convention.

The address will appear in the September 2023 issue of *The WORD Magazine*, the official publication of the Antiochian Archdiocese.

Following his address, Metropolitan SABA presented a pastoral staff to His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN as an expression of the Archdiocese's love and respect.

Then, in honor of Metropolitan SABA's 35th anniversary in the holy priesthood, on behalf of the whole Archdiocese, Mr. Fawaz El Khoury presented Metropolitan SABA with a *dikirion* and *trikirion* set and an *epigonation*, the vestment indicating a spiritual father.

Via teleconference, Archdeacon Hans El Hayek then appeared before the Assembly for a special presentation.

Archdeacon Emile Sayegh offered the following resolution honoring Archdeacon Hans:

RESOLUTION HONORING, WITH LOVE AND APPRECIATION ARCHDEACON HANS EL HAYEK

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 56th Biennial Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Phoenix, Arizona;

AND WHEREAS, Hans El Hayek, was born in Raskifa, Lebanon, on February 2, 1946;

AND WHEREAS, after completing his primary education at the Kousba Elementary School followed by the Balamand Secondary School, in 1971 he earned a B.A degree in Philosophy at the American University of Beirut, followed by a Master of Arts degree at the same AUB;

AND WHEREAS, on February 2, 1967, on his 21st birthday, Hans El Hayek was ordained to the Holy Diaconate, at the Balamand Monastery by then His Grace, Bishop IGNATIUS (Hazim) the future patriarch of the Great See of Antioch;

AND WHEREAS, on July 24, 1973, having completed his Master of Arts Degree at the AUB, Deacon Hans El Hayek petitioned the late Metropolitan PHILIP, (of thrice-blessed memory), to come to the United States for further theological studies;

AND WHEREAS, Deacon Hans El Hayek,

having been accepted as an archdiocesan seminarian, was assigned to the Archdiocese headquarters, as administrative assistant to the Metropolitan while attending St. Vladimir Seminary in Crestwood, New York, earning his Master of Divinity degree in 1977;

AND WHEREAS, during the course of his ministry and having been deemed worthy, Deacon Hans was elevated to the dignity of Archdeacon by the laying on of hands of the late Metropolitan PHILIP;

AND WHEREAS, at all times Archdeacon Hans served this Archdiocese with great devotion, commitment, love, discipline, loyalty and humility;

AND WHEREAS, for more than forty years Archdeacon Hans traveled all across this vast Archdiocese, making thousands of visits, alongside the late Metropolitan PHILIP, where many of us witnessed his love and utter dedication to this God-protected Archdiocese, giving birth to the maxim: "Where Metropolitan PHILIP was, there was Archdeacon Hans at his right side";

AND WHEREAS, during his ministry and in addition to an already overburdened schedule, Archdeacon Hans managed and operated the Department of Publications from the Archdiocese Headquarters, facilitating and providing all of our service books and other important materials to our clergy and parishes alike;

AND WHEREAS, the kindness and friendly smile of Archdeacon Hans is imprinted in the minds of thousands of faithful of this Archdiocese, and he is justly deserving of our admiration and deep gratitude;

AND WHEREAS, following his retirement from active ministry in 2015, Archdeacon Hans continues to remain an integral part of this Archdiocese;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X, along with His Eminence, Metropolitan SABA, together with the General Assembly of this 56th Archdiocesan Convention in Phoenix, Arizona, this 28th day of July, 2023, bestow upon the Rev. Archdeacon, Hans El Hayek, with unanimity and by acclamation, its undivided honor, love and respect; that this General Assembly also offer its supplications to Almighty God that He grant Archdeacon Hans many more happy and healthy years to come, as we all shout, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

The resolution was accepted by acclamation, with a standing ovation.

Reports of the Organizations and Departments
(Continued)

L. Fr. Thomas Zain and Fr. David Barr presented a summary of the report of the Department of Inter-Orthodox and Inter-Faith Relations.

Fr. Joseph Abud moved to accept the report, Dr.

Fadi Metri seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

M. Fr. Andrew Damick presented a summary of the report of Ancient Faith Ministries on behalf of Kh. Melinda Johnson.

Mr. Alex Milkie moved to accept the report, Mr. Khalil Najjar seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

N. Fr. Thomas Zain and Deacon Peter Samore presented a summary of the report of the Department of Liturgics.

Fr. Kamal Alrahil moved to accept the report, Fr. Samer Youssef seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

O. Fr. Thomas Zain and Fr. Paul Matar presented a summary of the report of the Department of Statistics and Credentials.

Dn. Christian Manasseh moved to accept the report, and Fr. Michael Ibrahim seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

P. Deacon Peter Samore presented a summary of the report of the Department of Communications.

Mr. George Zain moved to accept the report, and Fr. Peter Cox seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

Q. Fr. John Finley presented a summary of the report of the Department of Missions and Evangelism.

Fr. Elia Shalhoub moved to accept the report, Dr. Anne Bourjaily Thomas seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

The Assembly adjourned at 1:12 PM and reconvened at 2:15 PM.

R. Kh. Maggie Hock presented a summary of the report of the Department of Marriage and Parish Family Ministry.

Fr. Elias Khouri moved to accept the report, Fr. David Lewis seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

S. Fr. Noah Bushelli presented a summary of the report of the Department of Homeschooling.

Bishop THOMAS moved to accept the report, Fr. Anthony Yazge seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

T. Fr. Fadi Rabbat and Fr. Michel Najim presented a summary of the report of the Antiochian House of Studies.

Mr. Mansour Rayan moved to accept the report, and Mr. Eli Hage seconded the motion.

Archdeacon Emile noted that the Antiochian House of Studies (AHOS) now offers five degrees, but he asked if priests must acquire a seminary degree.

Fr. Michel responded that the AHOS model returns to the old school of Antioch in which mentoring under the metropolitan was the model. Fr. Fadi added

that seminaries are relatively modern innovations.

Metropolitan SABA stressed that we should support the institutions we have, but that does not mean that what we have is complete or perfect. All graduates should be under test and perhaps should spend a year in a monastery prior to ordination.

The Assembly received the report.

U. Fr. Damaskinos Issa and Fr. Michel Najim presented a summary of the report of the Department of Liturgical Translations.

Fr. Maximos Saikali moved to accept the report, Fr. Kamal Alrahil seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

V. Mr. Raed Sweiss and Ms. Carol Jazzar presented a summary of the report of the Department of Conventions and Conference Planning.

Dr. Elias Hebeke moved to accept the report, Fr. Joseph Olas seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

The Chair adjusted the agenda in order to accommodate delegates who were preparing to depart.

W. Report from the Nominating Committee for the Board of Trustees – Fr. Thomas Zain, Chairman

Fr. Thomas Zain, Chairman of the Nominating Committee for the Board of Trustees introduced the candidates and instructed the delegates to vote for exactly ten names:

- Dr. Isa Canavati
- Mr. Eli Hage
- Dr. Nicholas Massad
- Mr. Kameel Najjar
- Mr. Philip Saliba
- Dr. Ayham Farha
- Mr. Roger David
- Mr. Khalil Kardous
- Mr. Rami Younes
- Mr. James Bach
- Dr. Nawar Mansour
- Mr. Majed Nesheiwat
- Dr. Fadi Metri
- Mr. Antoine Zammar

Mr. Sweiss and Ms. Jazzar solicited bids for the 2029 convention site. St. Andrew Church in Riverside, California, where Fr. Josiah Trenham is the pastor, would host the convention in 2027. The room rate at the Anaheim Hilton is \$209/night, and the hotel is two blocks from Disneyland with discounted tickets.

Fr. Christopher Salamy moved to endorse Anaheim as the 2027 convention site, Deacon Christian Manasseh seconded the motion, and the Assembly accepted the bid.

X. Old Business

There was no old business.

XI. New Business

A. Fr. Fouad Saba, Pastor, and Ms. Darlene Haddad, Chair, of St. George Church, Cicero, Illinois, presented the report on the 2025 Archdiocesan Convention. The convention will take place July 20–27, 2025, at the Hyatt Regency in Rosemont, where the room rate will be \$189/night and there will be a free shuttle from the airport. A video presentation followed.

Ms. Reem Sweiss moved to accept the report, Kh. Julianna Youssef seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

B. Fr. Peter Ackle presented a report on the new children's magazine named *Farah*, or "Joy," for ages 6–12 under the patronage of St. Charalampos. The magazine would operate on a non-profit basis so as to



remain affordable for all.

C. Fr. Adam Roberts and Fr. John Finley presented a summary of the report of the St. Athanasius Academy.

Ms. Kelli Kouri Neagle moved to accept the report, Ms. Karen Kinan seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

D. Mr. Dimitri Zeidan and Ms. Amy Stiffler presented a summary of the report of the Antiochian Village Camp and the Heritage and Learning Center and Antiochian Village Council.

Dr. Elias Hebeke moved to accept the report, Fr. Fouad Saba seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

E. Mr. William Morrison presented a summary of the report of the Department of Stewardship.

Mr. Elias Shaheen moved to accept the report, Mr. Dan Braun seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

F. Dr. Antony Bashir presented a summary of the report of the Department of Lay Ministry.

Kh. Laila Ellias moved to accept the report, Fr. Anthony Yazge seconded the motion, and the Assembly received the report.

G. Archdeacon Emile Sayegh, Chancellor, presented Proposed Resolutions for Adoption by the Assembly.

RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION TO THE HOST PARISH

WHEREAS, St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, Phoenix, Arizona, has graciously hosted the 56th Biennial Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention at the beautiful JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa, from July 23–30, 2023;

AND WHEREAS, the Pastor, Very Rev. Fr. Christopher Salamy and the Convention Co-Chairpersons, Mary Kay and Taysir Haddad, together with the entire Convention Committee, the Parish Council and all the faithful have worked tirelessly and spared no efforts to assure the success of this Convention, and provided wonderful hospitality for our every need, family fellowship, and spiritual growth;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this 56th Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Phoenix, Arizona, from July 23–30, 2023, in unanimity and by acclamation extends to the Host Pastor, the Convention Committee and the entire parish, its heartfelt thanks and appreciation for an outstanding, elegant and extraordinary convention.

Mr. Philip Saliba moved to adopt the resolution, Ms. Darlene Haddad seconded the motion, and the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION OF LOVE AND APPRECIATION TO METROPOLITAN ANTONIOS (EL SOURY)

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 56th Biennial Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention at the beautiful JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa, from July 23–30, 2023;

AND WHEREAS, following the retirement from active ministry of His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH, the Holy Synod, under the leadership of His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X, duly appointed Metropolitan ANTONIOS, who is the (Metropolitan of Zahle, Baalbek and Dependencies), as the Patriarchal Vicar to assume his vicarial duties here in North America during the vacancy of the seat in North America;

AND WHEREAS, His Eminence, Metropolitan ANTONIOS having arrived here in the United States in November, 2022, assumed his duties as Patriarchal Vicar, with such commitment, dedication, paternal love and wisdom as to leave an indelible mark on all of the faithful here in North America;

AND WHEREAS, His Eminence Metropolitan Antonios, along with his kind assistant, Fr. Porphyrios, traveled the length and breadth of this Archdiocese visiting numerous parishes and states in order to hear from, and comfort, as many clergy and faithful as possible during his short tenure;

AND WHEREAS, during our time of uncertainty and anxiety, His Eminence, Metropolitan ANTONIOS, through his wisdom and gentleness, imparted a profound sense of calm and serenity that was palpable to us all;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this 56th Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Phoenix, Arizona, from July 23–30, 2023, in unanimity and by acclamation extends our deep appreciation and love to His Eminence, Metropolitan ANTONIOS, coupled with our fervent prayers for his continued strength and good health for many years to come. We love you, Sayidna Antonios!

Fr. Joseph Purpura moved to adopt the resolution, Fr. Jeremy Davis seconded the motion, and the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION WELCOMING HIS EMINENCE, METROPOLITAN SABA

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 56th Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention here in Phoenix, Arizona;

AND WHEREAS, following the retirement from active ministry of His Eminence, Metropolitan JOSEPH in October, 2022, this Archdiocese was left

in a state of great anxiety, apprehension, and uncertainty;

AND WHEREAS, during this period all of our beloved clergy and faithful offered their fervent prayers that the members of the Holy Synod, under the wise and loving leadership of our beloved Patriarch JOHN X, would elect a worthy candidate to assume the position of Metropolitan Archbishop of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America;

AND WHEREAS, on February 23, 2023, the Holy Synod, convening at a special meeting held in Balamand, Lebanon, elected from amongst its members a new metropolitan archbishop to assume his position as Metropolitan of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America;

AND WHEREAS, the new Metropolitan of our beloved Archdiocese, was born in Latakia, Syria, in 1959; was ordained to the Holy Priesthood in 1988 and was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite in 1994, at St. Michael the Archangel church; in 1998 was elected Auxiliary Bishop and assigned to serve under the omophorion of the late Patriarch IGNATIUS (Hazim); and immediately following was elected in 1999 to the rank of Metropolitan, where he assumed his duties as Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of Bosra, Hauran and Jabal Al Arab in Syria until 2023;

AND WHEREAS, during his tenure as Metropolitan in Syria, his ministry was filled with great accomplishments and the faithful were cared for in every way possible;

AND WHEREAS, upon his arrival to the shores of this great continent, His Eminence Metropolitan SABA, immediately assumed his position and literally “hit the ground running”;

AND WHEREAS, since his arrival here in the United States, many of the clergy and faithful already realized that our new shepherd is a remarkable man filled with many gifts, including his fatherly love and patience, his eagerness to reach out to the hearts of all and to bring a strong sense of peace across our Archdiocese;

AND WHEREAS, His Eminence Metropolitan SABA has already expressed his vision and direction for our beloved Archdiocese, bringing excitement and great hope to us all while enriching us, spiritually through his weekly theological teachings;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of this 56th Archdiocesan Convention, held in Phoenix, Arizona, welcomes with open and loving arms, our new Chief Shepherd and Father. We pledge our undivided support, respect, love, honor, loyalty and obedience to His Eminence, Metropolitan SABA, and we express our deep appreciation to His Beatitude, Patriarch JOHN X and to all members of

the Holy Synod for such a brilliant and wise decision, bringing a new spirit of fraternal love across this beloved Archdiocese.

May Almighty God grant him many years. *Eis pol-la eti, abespota!*

Dr. Elias Hebeke moved to adopt the resolution, Mr. Dimitri Zeidan seconded the motion, and the resolution was adopted.

RESOLUTION CALLING FOR A UNITED NATIONS INVESTIGATION INTO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF KIDNAPPED HIERARCHS

WHEREAS, the hierarchs, clergy and faithful of this God-protected Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America have met as the General Assembly at the 56th Biennial Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan Convention at the JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa, from July 23–30, 2023;

AND WHEREAS, on April 22, 2013, during a joint philanthropic mission on the outskirts of the Syrian City of Aleppo, Syria, the tragic kidnapping and disappearance of Metropolitan PAUL (Yazigi), (the brother of our beloved Father and Patriarch JOHN X), and the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop YOHANNA Ibrahim, both of Aleppo, Syria, took place;

AND WHEREAS, since such tragic events, the Orthodox World has been demanding that governments all over the world intercede, investigate, and determine the whereabouts of these two hierarchs, which cries up until now have gone unheeded;

AND WHEREAS, it has been more than ten years since the tragic kidnapping and disappearance of our two beloved hierarchs took place;

AND WHEREAS, the Orthodox World will remain persistent and unrelenting in its pursuit of the truth, to know the whereabouts of our two beloved hierarchs;

AND WHEREAS, today we once again renew our united and firm demand, calling upon all governments whose values are based on respect for life, liberty, and justice for all, to intercede and offer their resources to determine the whereabouts of Metropolitan PAUL and Archbishop YOHANNA;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this 56th Archdiocesan Convention, duly assembled at Phoenix, Arizona, from July 23–30, 2023, in unanimity and by acclamation calls upon the United Nations to conduct a formal investigation into the disappearance of the two hierarchs, and authorizes the Board of Trustees to convey this message to the United Nations, and to request that the United States of America support this initiative.

Deacon Peter Samore moved to adopt the resolution, and Fr. Joseph Purpura seconded the motion.

Mr. Dimitri Zeidan moved to amend the resolution to add a request that the Government of Canada support this initiative. The mover agreed to the friendly amendment, and the resolution was adopted by acclamation.

Fr. Thomas Zain announced the results of the election for Board of Trustees:

- Dr. Nicholas Massad
- Mr. Kameel Najjar
- Mr. Philip Saliba
- Dr. Ayham Farha
- Mr. Roger David
- Mr. Khalil Kardous
- Mr. Rami Younes
- Mr. James Bach
- Dr. Nawar Mansour
- Dr. Fadi Metri

His Eminence Metropolitan SABA appointed five additional members: Deacon Christian Manasseh,

Mr. Salim Abboud, Mr. Bassam Assad, Mr. George Laham, and Mr. Emile Sayegh. He also named Mr. Majed Nesheiwat and Dr. Elias Hebeka as Honorary Members of the Board of Trustees.

Mr. El Khoury thanked the outgoing board members for their dedicated service: Mr. Mickey Homsey, Ms. Karen Kinan, Mr. Elias Shaheen, and Mr. Bill Morrison.

XII. Adjournment and Closing Prayer

Fr. Fouad Saba moved to adjourn the Assembly. Fr. Milad Selim seconded the motion. The motion passed, and His Eminence Metropolitan SABA closed the General Assembly with prayer at 4:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
V. Rev. Fr. Michael Ellias, Secretary
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of
North America

2024 JACK G. SHAHEEN MASS COMMUNICATIONS SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarship Award \$4,000.00

PURPOSE

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

ELIGIBILITY

American-Arab U.S. citizens that are currently enrolled in the September 2024-2025 academic year at universities and colleges. Students must be 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 letters of recommendation signed by your Mass Communications professors.
2. Print copies and/or email links of your relevant work.
3. Share how Dr. Jack Shaheen's work has influenced you. Include this in your one page statement explaining your goals, and stating you are a U.S. citizen of Arab heritage.

4. Official academic transcripts (minimum 3.0 GPA is required).
5. Permanent home address, mobile number and email address.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE:
Friday, April 12, 2024**

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, D.C. 20036

Should you have further questions, call (202) 244-2990, or email nmohamad@adc.org.

The Jack G. Shaheen Scholarship Awards will be presented at the 2024 ADC National Convention.

The Dr. Jack G. Shaheen Mass Communications Scholarships were established in 1997. Thus far 98 previous scholarships have been awarded to recipients!

THE CHRISTMAS ROAD GAME



This board game is designed to promote unity, spiritual growth, and a deeper connection to our faith in festive settings. It is perfect for families, youth groups, and church gatherings.

It takes you on a journey through the Bible, icons, and saints of the Orthodox faith. The Christmas Road tests your memory and problem-solving skills, and lets you experience the depth and richness of our faith in a fun and interactive way!

The box contains:

- 1 The Board
- 1 Dice
- 6 Tokens/Pawns
- 69 Joy's Cards
- 57 Joe's Cards
- 8 Icons

The game is of good quality, with beautiful colors, printed, and packaged in the USA.

It is suitable for ages 7 and up, and between 2 to 6 players can play the game and enjoy learning about Christmas. Players roll the dice and move their pawns across the board from space numbers 1 through 75 (according to the dice) to arrive at the manger where baby Jesus is laid. Joe's and Joy's trivia cards will be placed on the board, face down, in their



assigned places. The 8 Icon Cards will be placed on the side of the board to be used when prompted to.

The game instructions say that the baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger. The Wise Men arrived from afar, bearing gifts. Now it's your turn to travel to the cave to welcome the new baby and offer him your commitment to the Christian virtues as your gift. Joy and her brother Joe will be your guides. Along the way, you will have the chance to test your knowledge by answering the questions on the trivia cards and have fun with the surprise cards that pop up unexpectedly! The objective is to be the first player to reach the final space, number 75.

If you have more questions and/or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact Fr. Peter Ackle at edmund.ackle@gmail.com, or (226) 350-2230.

The Children's Relief Fund



I greet you on behalf of all the children of the **Children's Relief Fund (CRF)**, past and present. We pray that you receive this letter in their gratitude and appreciation for the love and concern that you have shown them in our Lord's name. We pray for your continued health and prosperity in this New Year.

This letter brings you our **"2024 New Year Appeal."** The purpose of this program within the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America is to provide funds for the children in need in Lebanon and Palestine, and the children of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The **CRF**, under the **"Department of Charitable Outreach,"** has been a godsend to hundreds of needy children and their families. We are so proud and privileged to help and support them financially – but more importantly, to show them our love and concern.

We will continue to assist these children, just as we have since the Funds' inception in 1983. We have provided close to **4 million dollars** in aid, but we can't do it alone. Your past participation has brought much joy to so many young suffering children. **100% of your donation goes directly to the sponsored child and no money is used for administrative services.**

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, \$1.10 per day. Donations of any amount are always welcome. Once you sponsor a child, we will send you their name, age, address, and a brief biography. Your child will correspond directly with you, sending you letters and pictures about their life. You will be able to develop a special bond and personal relationship with them.

Your assistance will improve the lives of these children and give them a chance for a better future.

For those of you who are already sponsoring a child, we offer you our most profound thanks. Please continue your love and support.



New sponsors are encouraged to join this humanitarian effort and lift the burden off these children.

In anticipation of your kind response, we thank you for your generosity, and pray you enjoy the New Year with health, happiness, and prosperity. May God bless you and yours and give you the strength you require in the coming days.

In Christ's Service,

Amy Stiffler,

Executive Director Antiochian Village &

CRF Administration

724-238-3677 ext. 402

Childrensrelieffund@gmail.com

You may donate through PayPal on our website:

<https://antiochian.networkforgood.com/projects/127989-the-children-s-relief-fund>

Please make checks payable to:

Children's Relief Fund

Mail to:

Antiochian Village Conference

Center

Attention: Children's Relief Fund

140 Church Camp Trail

Bolivar, PA 15923

