

# THE الكلمة WORD

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES:  
NOURISHMENT OF  
THE FAITHFUL

ARE YOU MY MOTHER?

2025  
ARCHDIOCESE  
CONVENTION  
CALENDAR OF  
EVENTS

PLEASE PRAY FOR PEACE  
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

# THE WORD

الكلمة



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# Are You My Mother?

BISHOP JOHN

One of my favorite children's books is *Are You My Mother?* by P. D. Eastman. A bird goes searching for his mother to understand his identity. What does it mean to be a mother or father, and, for that matter, family, and what does any of that have to do with our relationships within the Church? In our Church family we call our pastors and bishops "father" or "master." These titles define our relationship. They let us encounter God through our common work (liturgy) of being the Church and accepting responsibility for each other. I realize that what I just shared needs to be unpacked, so I invited Metropolitan SABA to help me think through these concepts, as well as our salvation. I pray that I have not scared you off with some of the heavy words I have used, but I promise that understanding our relationships in the Church will change our lives.

Just as our earthly parents bring us physical life, our spiritual relationships bring us spiritual life, a way of living in Christ. The Church, sometimes called a family, and sometimes a single body within the body of Christ, is a means of our life in Christ. Our spiritual father, Metropolitan SABA, calls us a family. In a family the children are not given a choice to belong or not belong, and likewise parents are not given a choice to give the child back. We are blessed with each other and work hard to negotiate our relationships for our mutual salvation. It is our God as Father and Church as mother that shapes our identity. Now, I understand that metaphors always limp, but bear with me. Without the bishop and his presbyters, the parish is not part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is outside of God's Church. It is the role of the bishop to

continue the apostolic tradition by preserving the faith as delivered to the apostles, and through them. It is also the bishop's task to maintain the unity of Christ's Church through love.

Maintaining the tradition and keeping the Church united requires real love. We say of this love in the marriage service that it is a gift from above. It is not the love of the fallen world, corrupted by fear and greed; rather, it is from above. It is a gift from God. It flows through us and unites us to God Himself. The Church also is called our mother because she, like the Mother of God, gives flesh to the Word of God and bears Christ. We bishops and priests cannot choose to love or not love the people God entrusted to us. We parents cannot choose to love or not love our children. They are God's gifts, and we need to love them, forgive them, and embrace them as God loves, forgives, and embraces us. Likewise, we children, regardless of age, tantrums, sins, or particular choices, are entrusted by God to our bishops, priests, and parents. We have an inner call to maintain and develop our relationships. Sometimes this is difficult, but working through issues with holy endurance, clear boundaries, and common sense allow us to receive and follow God.

Bishops and presbyters are real people with backgrounds and genetics that limit us. Parents, too, can only parent as well as they have been taught. Yet we are called to do better than make excuses. We all need to be continuously learning from each other how to serve our children and even our adult children in a way that reflects the life of the Trinity and is holy and acceptable to God. We need to find others in the Church who have followed "the Way" of Christ. Sometimes that means waiting, like the

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The Right Reverend  
**Bishop THOMAS**

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**Bishop JOHN**      **ANTONY (Bashir)**

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good Father in the parable of the prodigal son, but doesn't allow us to accept being cut off. We need to continuously pray for our children. When we envelope them with God's prayer, God calls them home to us. God can bring them to their senses, but we must not give up. I was very slow as a priest to trim the mailing list, even though it was expensive to send materials to people who had stopped coming to church. A few times they came home when I was there, others after I was sent to serve elsewhere. This is all God's work, God's success; it can't be about me. Once we understand that God is calling us to Himself, going to church and living God's way brings real harmony and peace.

Some children have fallen out of the habit of being dedicated to God through His Church: remember that God is not dependent on us, but we on Him. Even if we don't feel His presence or think that He wants our worship, our feelings don't change God. This is a profound statement and difficult to hear when we live in a society that assumes that this life and its pleasures are all there is. Remember that God came to us to join us to Him and to share His love with us as persons and as a church family together *forever!*

Enmity in the home, church, society, and the world comes from fear that God will not take care of us. Fear that we will not get our fair share, and fear of everyone outside of our group, however we define it, can harden us. The idea that the world is all about us is distorted, because Christ took on flesh and revealed to us *the Way* we should walk and be. It takes courage not to follow what Sayidna SABA calls the trends of this age, but instead to hold fast to truth and follow Christ.

When we call the bishop or presbyter "father" or "master," we submit to our mentor and can learn from him. When a child submits to his parents, his parents are better able to keep him safe. When a Christian submits to those more experienced, he can better consider the teachings and see how they reflect the truth of God's being. Bishops and presbyters submit to Christ, as He is revealed to everyone in the Church. We work hard to make sense of everything, and in love, humility, and balance, to submit to each other as St. Paul tells us to do in Ephesians 5. Our Metropolitan maintains this order in the Church and God reveals Himself in all our holy relationships.

May we, understanding the Church as our mother, use our holy parental and brotherly relationships to dedicate ourselves and each other to Christ our Lord.

# The Holy Scriptures: Nourishment of the Faithful

His Eminence Metropolitan SABA (Esper)

**T**he name of the Holy Scriptures is derived from the Greek word *biblia*, which literally means “books.” This term passed into most languages, and it was called *the Bible* in languages of European origin.

The faithful regard the Holy Scriptures as God’s personal message to them, devoting themselves to daily reading, and meditating on its verses and their impact on their lives. Thus, the Holy Scriptures contribute to their growth in life in Christ, refining them morally and

spiritually. The Holy Scriptures are an indispensable nourishment for the faithful, irreplaceable by any other book, no matter how sublime or important.

## Getting to Know the Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures are comprised of a considerable number of books, not just one book, as the reader might think at first glance. Even in their composition, they differ from other books as they are a library, containing many works. This library contains seventy-two books, divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament comprises forty-



six books divided into four sections: the books of the Law (*Torah*), history, prophecy, and wisdom.

The New Testament consists of twenty-seven books, beginning with the Gospel in its four narratives (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), followed by the Acts of the Apostles, then the fourteen Pauline epistles and the general epistles, and ending with the Book of Revelation by John the Evangelist.

These books cover various and extensive topics, spanning a period from Abraham, the first faithful (around 1800 B.C.) to the end of the First Century A.D., when the last book of the New Testament was completed.

The multiple themes of these books are presented in a variety of literary styles. There are long tales, short stories, epics, poems, proverbs, and hymns. Moreover, many writers contributed to their composition. Additionally, the Holy Scriptures were not written in one language, but in three languages: Hebrew, the language of most Old Testament texts; Aramaic, used for some of its texts; and Greek, used for all the books of the New Testament. The Orthodox Church considers the Old Testament translation into Greek known as the Septuagint (from the Second Century B.C.) as a divinely inspired and authoritative reference.

The first book of the Holy Scriptures deals with the beginning of the world and the origin of life: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), and the last book ends with a call anticipating Christ’s second coming: “Surely I am coming quickly. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

### **Which Book Tells of the Beginning of the Universe and Its End?**

Many have considered the Bible to be a history book, because it recounts God’s revelation throughout

the history of a people called the Hebrews. Others saw it as a book of science, because it tells stories of the creation of the world and includes wisdom containing much of the science of the time in which it was written. Those who consider it a philosophical book are not few in number either, as it contains a particular view of life, God, pain, and death.

### **What in Reality Is This Book?**

It is, first and foremost, a theological book, presenting the mystery of God to humanity in a practical, not theoretical, manner. Our mysterious God, who cannot be comprehended, reveals Himself to humanity little by little, progressively. God accompanies humans with astonishing patience to open their minds to understand Him as He *is*, not as they imagine Him to be. Often, people misunderstood Him (and still do), attributing their whims and perceptions to Him, distorting and desecrating His image. The perpetual sin of men is to restrict God according to their measure, instead of raising themselves to the measure of God. Therefore, God chose to reveal Himself by using those whom He designated, those who we refer to as prophets and apostles. However, He began to reveal Himself practically by accompanying the people to whom He chose to reveal Himself. From Abraham, the father of the fathers, and father of many nations, to Jesus Christ, God patiently waited over eighteen centuries for His image to be truly revealed to humanity. Still, people wanted (and want) to perceive Him in their own image and superimpose on Him their ideas and interpretations.

It is, therefore, a divine book, gradually unveiling the truth of God using the style that is understood by those to whom He reveals Himself. If the book speaks of history, it is to show God’s work within it, thus revealing His nature. Consider the following as an example. According to the understanding

of the peoples of the Near East, when two peoples confronted each other in war, their respective gods were believed to take part in the war alongside them – isn't this what we see in the religious thinking of people even today? So, when a people is victorious, their god is deemed to be the strongest; thus the defeated people worship him, while the victorious offer him thanks. In this manner, the people of the Old Testament believed that God fought with them when they won, but when they were defeated, unlike all of the other ancient peoples (and herein lies the divine work in the Holy Scriptures), they understood that their God abandoned them because they had sinned. Therefore, they had to repent and return to obeying God's commandments to win and be liberated.

Thus, God revealed Himself as the Master of history. God used history as a stage to reveal His attributes. When the Holy Scriptures narrate a historical event, they do so not historically but theologically – meaning that the purpose is not simply an historical record of the event, but a religious perspective on the God who is revealed through the it. The protagonist of the event is not the prophet, or the king, or the leader, but God, who is hidden behind what is happening in history, or rather, moves the strings of history while holding them all in His hands.

In this way, we should read the Holy Scriptures as a message from God addressed to us personally. A message telling us that we are loved by Him, that the meaning of our lives and existence is in Him, with Him, and through Him, and that we are called to remove the dust of sins accumulated on us to see the truth of God as He is.

Anyone who has experienced the extent to which his sins conceal him from God realizes well the way in which human beings pollute and distort the image of God. God's continuous work in the Holy Scriptures

was to constantly reveal Himself each time to the extent that people could understand and comprehend until "the fullness of time" arrived. Then He fully revealed Himself to them in the person of His only Son, Jesus Christ. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father... (John 1:14).

God did not complete this revelation on his own, apart from man. That is to say, God was not solely the actor and man solely the receiver. Man needed to grow in the knowledge of God so that God could reveal Himself more and more. Thus, an educational program was initiated by God for the benefit of man. This divine program required the gradual, spiritual elevation of man until he could rightly come to the knowledge of God. The fallen, sinful man, enslaved to Satan and incapable of enjoying the grace of God, whose mind was darkened and divided against himself, his brother, and nature, longed for his origin but did not know it. He could not reach it, could not begin to walk the right path. The solution was in God's hands, and the initiative came from Him.

His first call went to Abraham. Thus, Abraham knew a God who promises and fulfills His promises, as when He promised him that Sarah would conceive. He is a God who does not accept human sacrifices but, as is seen in the narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac, instead asks for animal sacrifices. He is a God different from other gods. Abraham's righteousness lies in his loyalty to God. God did not change much about Abraham's habits and moral concepts, but was content to be Abraham's God, for Abraham to be merely loyal to Him and His teachings. Thus, God was first known as the God of Abraham. Then, with the descendants of Abraham, He became the God of Abraham and Isaac, and later Jacob was added. Thus, He was known as the God of our fathers.

This was not strange to the concepts of those days. Each tribe had its god, each clan its deity, and often a clan had more than one. However, the God of our fathers was different because He did not accept any other god beside Him. He was a jealous God, restricted by nothing: no idol, no image, no place, and so forth. He initiates and commands, and He is obeyed. He is the God who makes a covenant with man and remains loyal to this covenant, so long as man reciprocates this loyalty. When man breaks God's covenant, as he often did and still does today, God's response is to leave him until he repents and returns to Him – then He accepts him quickly and resumes His commitments. Even in God's temporary abandonment of man, there is an educational objective. Such a dynamic and vital relationship is unknown in the history of religions: A God calls, and a man responds. Man often falters and disrupts this covenantal relationship, yet God waits for His creature to recommit to the terms of that covenant and resume the journey with Him towards the completion of his salvation. Our is a God who endured for eighteen hundred years the harshness of man, his narrow-mindedness and his ignorance. Such a God could not be the creation of human beings, because humanity was not capable of conceiving of such a God.

### **What Then?**

After revealing Himself as “the God of our Fathers,” God began to reveal Himself through His attributes by practical application. The people He had chosen were ignorant and ungrateful: “Not because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples” (Deuteronomy 7:7). They were a stubborn people, who understood only practical things with great difficulty: “. . . for you are a stiff-necked people” (Deuteronomy 9:6). Is this not the reality of human beings, even in our present day? God first revealed to Moses that He is the Existing One: “I am

who I am” – *ehye ‘asher ‘ehye* in Hebrew (Exodus 3:14) – and the journey effectively started. God became known through His action in nature: He became our God; the One who takes care of us. He is the God who made the Red Sea into dry land, who fed us in the wilderness with manna, who brought water out of the flinty rock, who healed us from snake bites, and so on. Thus God appeared as the Master of nature.

Confrontations began with other tribes and nations. These conflicts were common in those days, especially among nomadic peoples (Let us recall the tribal invasions, the raids of the Bedouins ....) The land was still under various forms of colonization and occupation. Here, God appeared as the Master of history, but His program with His people was different. Although He is supremely powerful and mightier than all gods, He does not always grant victory to His tribe. When they win, He is the victor and the strongest, and when they lose, He has withdrawn from them His support, yet remains the strongest. Why did God abandon us? This question recurs many times in the Old Testament. We still ask today why God left us in this or that ordeal. Why does He allow temptations? Why doesn't He stop evils from happening to us? Do we not often behave like the people of the Old Testament? Do we not act as though God is exclusively our God, as if we were His chosen people by nature, and other others peoples are not of His creation, and are at best, of a lower rank?

God's answer was, I am with you as long as you are faithful, but when you abandon my covenants, I leave you to what you have left me for. They knew then that He is a sovereign God and that they must obey Him. His laws and commandments require moral change and spiritual transcendence.

It was time for humans to rise to the level of justice. God's law for them became to establish justice:



“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...” This was a qualitative leap for a society dominated by vengeance and disproportionate retaliation.

### *What Does This God Want Next?*

Justice is good. Yet it is but a step towards knowing God; it is not in itself sufficient. Man must move from the letter to the spirit, from the laws to their goal, from the canons to their purpose, from the rituals to the heart of the Lord. He must penetrate from the body to the core. Mercy is more important than justice. Animal sacrifice is a symbol of the sacrifice of the heart: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit” (Psalm 51:17). Worship is not simply in hymns, incense, and grand celebrations, but in mercy, justice, and kindness. This God seeks hearts of flesh, not stone. (See the prophets, especially Isaiah and Joel.)



The harshness of man, however, drives him to resist spiritual transcendence. Hence, exile was a means of purification from worldly and eternal impurities. God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the Temple, thus mocking the people who tried to confine Him to it. By the time of the exile in Babylon, they had spent a thousand years with this God, yet they still were unable to grasp that He is the one true God, not confined to any place – not even the Temple of Jerusalem. They lamented: “By the rivers of Babylon ... how shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137). Their concern was whether He would hear their song, as if they were far removed from Him. The shock of exile was severe, yet purifying and cleansing. The Babylonian captivity created the faithful remnant, who remained loyal to their God’s teachings and aligned their lives with His commandments. From them would come John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary, and all who would accept Jesus Christ.

In light of this reading, we understand the Holy Scriptures and hear God’s word directed to us personally. Such a reading recognizes that the Holy Scriptures are a religious book, not a history book, although they contain elements of history. They are not a book of science and secular knowledge, even if they mention information that may align or conflict with contemporary scholarship. They are not a book of human wisdom, although they used the wisdom of the time to educate and refine humanity. They are the journey of God with humanity – a personal journey and intimate companionship – culminating in His death on the cross for them and their salvation. They are a book where we encounter our God, get to know Him, and hear His word.

Shall we begin to understand our Christian reading of the Holy Scriptures?

# Five Heavenly Gifts

## What I Have Witnessed in My Life as an Educator, Administrator, and Pastor

Fr. Michael Massouh

**H**ave you ever wondered what your purpose in life is? What are you to do in this world? Is it to become a CEO, a millionaire, an actor, a physician, a lawyer, a plumber, an electrician, or something else?

When we are born, we have no idea who we are and what we will encounter during our earthly life. When we are baptized, however, we are given – unbeknownst to us – five heavenly gifts that are there to sustain us as we navigate our earthly life to God’s kingdom. Since most of us Orthodox Christians were baptized as infants or young children, we have no recollection of what we experienced at the baptismal font, or of these five gifts which connect us to God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God watches over us with the help of our patron saint and our guardian angel, our parents, our Godparents and our clergy. Moreover, as Orthodox Christians we all acknowledge that “Christ is in our midst and ever shall be.” “When two or three are gathered in my name,” He says, “there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). When we know these gifts that guide and protect us, and how they are answers to our prayers, we see that we have an abundance of support.



## **Patron Saints and Godly Relationships**

Usually before holy baptism, our parents with the help of the priest and members of our family will select a name that we use as our baptismal name. This is the name we give whenever we are asked our name before a priest gives us communion. We have icons of the saint in our prayer corner, and may carry his or her icon in our wallet or purse. We consider our patron saint to be our protector and one on whom we can call when we need help, much as we consider the patron saint of our church who protects our congregation. We read about his or her life and learn his or her troparion. Our patron saint is joined by our clergy, fellow parishioners, and Godparents to mentor and guide us in the Christian way. The Godparent professes the faith for us and promises to make sure we grow up understanding the faith that is professed.

## **Guardian Angel**

Our patron saint is probably the patron saint of other Christians; but our guardian angel is just ours. At baptism we are “yoked to a radiant angel.” Like two oxen yoked together, wherever one goes so does the other. Wherever we roam, our guardian angel is there. According to the Akathist service to our guardian angel, “Our Lord who loves mankind wanted to protect us from the fate of Adam, [so] He sent holy angels throughout all the earth to each man and woman. He assigned one as guardian.”

His role is to protect us from the wiles of the Devil and his demons, to remind us to stay loyal to God’s commandments, to intercede at the most Holy Throne of God, so that God might not destroy us utterly, but might grant that we inherit “the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The Akathist service also summarizes the constant role of the Guardian Angel: “Having received my soul

from the font of holy baptism, thou didst preserve me in infancy, didst teach and admonish me in my childhood, didst keep me from stumbling into sin during youth, didst guide me when I arrived at adulthood, and have kept me in all my ways even unto old age, chastising and comforting me, always helping and guarding me toward the path of salvation.” As part of his protection of us, he wields a flaming sword that keeps the demons at bay in our unseen warfare.

## **Baptism: Becoming a Member of the Christian Community**

When we are immersed in the blessed waters of the font three times, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit – the Holy Trinity – we then become one with the community of believers. We are no longer alone. We belong. As St. Paul says, we become one with the Body of Christ. “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:27). St. Peter describes our relationship with a different metaphor: we are “living stones” “to build up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). St. Paul again states, “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). We have a place in God’s kingdom. We have a role to play that includes loving our neighbor as ourselves, and taking up our cross to follow Christ.

## **When We Are Given Our First Communion, We Become One with Christ**

As part of our baptism, we receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Christ made it very clear when he declared “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (John 6:56). Communion is a heavenly gift that we may receive throughout our lives which puts us in constant communion with our Savior. Christ’s communion also instills in us the love of God and His concern for our welfare.

### **Our Personal Pentecost: Holy Chrismation**

Our fifth and final gift is to be anointed with the holy oil. This chrism has to be made over several days by bishops and patriarchs only – not priests – chanting special prayers and incorporating special herbs. Priests can bless anointing oil during the Holy Unction service on the Wednesday of Holy Week by reciting prayers that prepare a holy oil to be used to anoint the sick that evening and for the rest of the year. The chrism, however, is different.

This special oil, this chrism, which is given at the end of the baptismal service, is a child's personal Pentecost. In the life of the Church, Pentecost occurred fifty days after Christ's Resurrection and ten days after His Ascension into heaven. At Pentecost

the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles as tongues of fire (a form of energy). As Luke records this event in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, there was a rushing of wind and then the empowering of each Apostle. This empowerment is in contrast to the fear the Apostles felt when Jesus was arrested.

After Christ's arrest His Apostles went into hiding, thinking they might be next to be arrested. They scattered. Peter denied Him. Judas sold him and then hung himself. When Jesus went to greet them after His resurrection they were locked in an upper room "for fear of the Jews." Once the Holy Spirit descended on them, however, they become empowered. No longer afraid, they were now equipped to proclaim Christ's Resurrection. Peter now boldly, publicly addressed the crowd of visitors



in Jerusalem. His powerful sermon convinced at least 3,000 people to be baptized. In like manner, a newly baptized person is also empowered when he is old enough to speak his or her belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To accomplish the person's chrismation, his personal Pentecost, the priest will take the chrism and make the sign of the cross on the forehead, the eyes, the nostrils, the lips, the ears, the breast, on both hands, on both feet, between the shoulders, saying each time, "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." The Godparents and the congregation respond to each anointing by saying, "Sealed!" We are thus sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to use these gifts throughout our lives.

### Conclusion

These five heavenly gifts given to us at baptism provide us with a framework for the rest of our lives, a remembrance of God's love for us, and supports on which to lean as we encounter life's trials and misfortunes. We will not be spared from heartache, but our gifts given at baptism help us weather the storms that come our way. From the earliest time in our Christian history, we are made aware of what the Apostle James, the Lord's brother and first bishop of Jerusalem, includes in the first verses of his epistle; we will face "trials" in our earthly lives (James 1:2). This testing of our faith, he says, produces steadfastness. During our life there will be times when we face sorrow and trouble, or when we are at our wit's end. Yet knowing we are not alone, and that God and all of those God has put in our lives are there for us, means that we can endure whatever suffering we face. Think of Job, who stayed steadfast against the advice of his wife and friends. He endured as far as he could bear it. These gifts give us a framework on which to lean. They give us support to withstand the winds of storms. We are not at a loss in times of trial.

The gifts prepare us for our life, tell us who we are, where we belong, what our purpose is, what the meaning of life is, and where we are headed.



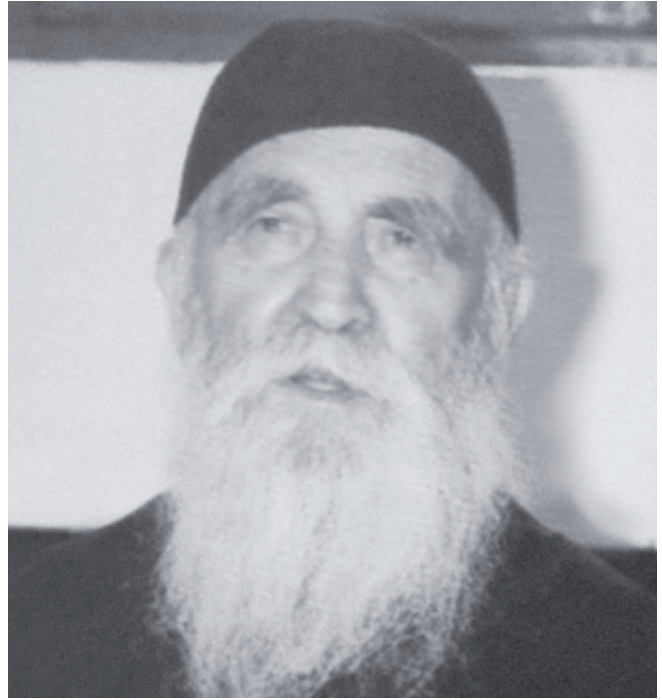
**THE GIFTS PREPARE US FOR  
OUR LIFE, TELL US WHO WE  
ARE, WHERE WE BELONG,  
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WHERE WE ARE HEADED.**



If a child is familiar with these gifts, chances are that he or she will not go astray. We know we are part of a loving community and that we belong to God and His Church. We know God's love for us, particularly if we receive regular communion. We know we are not forgotten, we are not alone, we belong to a loving, caring community. So, there is no need to wonder who we are, or where we are going. God is with us wherever we go.

For some of us who will marry, we do so within our church community. When we become old and feeble, members of our faith community are there to help us, and when we come to the end of our earthly life, the loving community is there to pray that God will give us rest "in a place of brightness, a place of verdure, a place of repose, where all sickness, sorrow, and sighing will flee away."

# PAPA Dimitri Gagastathis



I was first introduced to the extraordinary and miraculous life of Papa Dimitri Gagastathis while a deacon in Omaha, Nebraska, more than two decades ago, having heard about him at a retreat and then reading what is essentially his journal. This autobiography of sorts is now published with the title *The Amazing Life of Papa-Dimitri: The Man of God* (Orthodox Witness, 2009). His story has remained indelibly with me since that time as a source of inspiration and a testimony to what he so often announced: “Our Faith is alive!”

The life of Papa Dimitri reads like an action-packed, adventure novel or Hollywood production, full of danger, suspense and last-minute escapes from certain death. In describing the life of this holy and simple priest, I have often quipped that it is the equivalent of an Orthodox “Rambo” or “Indiana Jones.” However, this hero stood courageously against other-worldly threats from demons, as well as worldly forces, including Turks, Nazis, and communists. His weapons were a child-like faith,

prayer, the lives of the saints, and especially the intercessions of the Holy Archangels, to whom he spoke face-to-face with great boldness.

## **Preparation: His Life as a Layman**

Papa Dimitri was not a great intellectual or “theologian,” nor was he a monastic or *hesychast* (in the traditional sense). He was a shepherd, first of physical sheep and later of a spiritual flock; a married priest and father of nine, all daughters. Yet he showed what it means to be a true man of God: meek, strong, forgiving, faithful, and uncompromising for the sake of the love of God and man.

## **Childhood**

Dimitri was born on August 1, 1902, in the village of Plátanos, Tríkala Prefecture, Greece, to pious but poor parents, Christos and Catherine. He was only able to attend grade school, as the family could not afford anything more. As a child he loved to help the parish priest at the village parish of the Holy Archangels, and in his spare time he played “priest,”

performing the liturgical services with various props. He would visit the church often to pray, as did his mother, and to look after it.

At age fifteen, Dimitri acquired a few sheep and tended to them. During this period, he was not able to attend church as much, but he read spiritual books, especially the lives of the saints, consciously avoiding any worldly preoccupations. Because of this, the demons attacked him regularly, trying to frighten him with loud noises, coming to his hut at night, appearing in the form of a huge dog, once even stirring up a strong wind to destroy his hut. By the intercessions of the Archangels, they were unsuccessful.

Once when he was resting from work at home, an “old man” appeared to him in a dream and warned him to take his brother and leave the house immediately. He did so before the house collapsed.

### **In the Army**

At age nineteen Dimitri enlisted in the Greek army. He was appointed to the “Death Battalion” in Smyrna of Asia Minor, “face-to-face with judgment,” as he described it. He kept paper icons of the Lord and the Saints inside his coat, turning to them often for consolation and help. He was saved miraculously, after crying out to Archangel Michael, when he and two other soldiers were barraged by a cloud of bullets from a squadron of Turkish infantry. His two friends were killed immediately. Dimitri escaped any harm, and hiding in a cabbage patch he was not detected.

As the Turkish army moved deeper into Asia Minor, Dimitri was instructed several times in dreams by the same “old man,” allowing him to escape with his life. He was honorably discharged from the military in 1924 and, as he desired to become a priest, he attended a grade school and received his sixth-grade

certification (the minimum educational requirement for the priesthood at that time). He attended seminary for sixth months at Trípolis, Peloponnese, and in May of 1931 he was ordained a deacon and then a priest, being assigned to his own village Church of the Holy Archangels.

### **War-Time and the “Dark Years”: 1942–49**

During WWII, the Italians and Germans occupied Greece. It seems Papa Dimitri had served for about eleven years in relative peace (if one discounts direct demonic attacks), but that period ended with the start of the world war and the Greek civil war. There are too many stories to tell, but here are some.

### **Communism: Papa Dimitri Takes a Stand**

Pro-communist Greek guerilla forces arrived in the village in early 1943, parroting patriotic slogans. As Papa Dimitri states it, “they appeared to us as saints.” He and the villagers provided food and clothing and other support. From that time, however, the man of God felt that the Holy Archangels no longer accepted him. He could not feel at peace in their church. One Sunday before liturgy, it dawned on him that they were “wolves in sheep’s clothing”; they were a threat to the Church. At that moment he resolved to “lay down his life for the sheep;” he would preach actively against communism. Thus began a great struggle.

That night he received a sign confirming this decision. Two radiant Greek army officers appeared to him in his sleep, offering him several loaves of bread and encouraging him, “Don’t be afraid.... You have a long journey ahead of you.... This is surely the way of victory, but it will take time. In every danger, we will be with you. This is the real way of God!” Upon waking, Papa Dimitri was convicted that the communists were “the enemy of the Church, Country, and Family.”

The guerrillas called the holy priest in for interrogations three times, requesting that he sign a declaration of cooperation, as most other priests did. But he would not, as he considered it a denial of Christ. “I will die doing my duty,” he told them.

### Saved from Death

Sadly, the communists were able to pressure the bishop to sign a decree sentencing Papa Dimitri to death. He was in their way. The villagers loved and respected their priest and so the communists could not “convert” them. Not long after, three men came to take the pesky priest away to his death. Papa Dimitri asked for a few minutes, lit the oil lamp before his icons and began to sing hymns. He gathered his *presbytera* and four daughters, preparing them for the impending doom. You can imagine, there was great emotion and sorrow! Papa Dimitri was resolved: “I am on my way to martyrdom. The Lord is calling me. May His name be glorified....”

Along the way he asked for ten minutes alone in the church. As he prayed before the icons of the Archangels he heard a loud crash and the iconostasis shook. The Archangels seemed to be telling him something. He went outside to find that the men were gone. The Germans had entered the village and everyone dispersed. Rejoicing, Papa Dimitri cried out: “Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered. And let those who hate him flee from before his face.”

When he was sentenced to death a second time, the Greek Nationalist Army offered to fly him to safety and comfort, but he said he would need to pray about it. That night, more radiant Greek Army officers appeared: “Stay put! The Germans will come, but they will not harm anyone. We are on your side. This is a long and arduous journey, but do not be afraid....” The next morning Papa Dimitri responded to the offer: “I will

not desert my flock and the Church of the Archangels. Even if I suffer tortures and afflictions, I will side with Christos [Christ] and not with chrysos [gold].”

### On the Run

The communist guerrillas had taken over the village. Papa Dimitri was forced to flee. After four days without food, in darkness, in rain, in fog, he was hungry and exhausted. Some shepherds could only offer him their last few crumbs of bread. When they were grief-stricken to see the man of God in such a dire condition, the humble priest answered: “My sins persecute me – not men.”

Coming upon a deep stream, Papa Dimitri could not muster the strength to cross. Suddenly, there was a strong wind and he saw a radiant man on a horse riding by and greeting him. It was St. George. The priest marveled to find himself on the opposite side of the stream! “What glorification can I offer or what words can I utter? God is with me and protects me!”

Seeking refuge in the home of a brother priest, Papa Dimitri, like Job, found himself being mocked: “Welcome, hero of the nationalists! Here is the savior of the nation and of the Church! Do you see all the priests around you? They are with us. We have a bishop and great scientists on our side too. Do you, insignificant little man, still think that you alone will do any good?” Upon finally returning stealthily to his home, the humble priest heard these words from his own wife: “Do you not see the other priests who stay in their homes, go about their job, and eat and drink with their families?” To those who lamented his sufferings Papa Dimitri responded calmly, like a new St. Athanasius: “Christ suffered for us, so now we must also suffer for Him. All this darkness and filth will soon go away, and the Church will shine forth once again. Those who oppose Christ will be ruined,



but those who believe in Christ will live and reign.”

In contrast to Papa Dimitri’s struggles with the enemies of the Church, with hunger and fatigue, some other clergy compromised, revealing their lack of faith and fortitude. Two such priests sat on Great and Holy Friday playing cards, eating eggs and cheese. Justifying themselves by difficult circumstances, they complained, “We have a struggle going on right now – it is no time to care about such things” (as fasting and prayer). Yet those who betrayed and opposed Papa Dimitri often found themselves the victims of the communists’ ferocity.

### **Divine Zeal and Protection**

On Meatfare Sunday in 1945 the communist guerillas planned to hold a rally for their cause. Papa Dimitri was to serve Divine Liturgy and a wedding at St. Nicholas Church. During Orthros the rascals would not stop disturbing the service by ringing the church bells. Papa Dimitri grabbed a sturdy stick and spoke boldly before St. Nicholas’ icon: “Don’t you hear what is happening outside? You yourself once struck Arius.... Your act was an act of righteous anger. Now, for my part, I will strike those devils one by one, and I will get them down from the bell tower. I will do the beating, but all the responsibility for what happens to me will be yours!” After the poor men received their beating, this new “St. Nicholas” once again besought the original, this time to keep the people from attending the rally. Papa’s entreaty was heard. Only eight people attended the rally.

On another Sunday morning, the guerrillas threatened the whole village. Papa Dimitri set off to find nationalist soldiers in a nearby village, but was overtaken by a group of horsemen who began shooting at him. Somehow, the bullets pierced his cassock but did not injure him. When they encircled

him, labeling him a “bearded devil,” Papa cried out to the Archangel Michael, who appeared “like lightning” and cut the cords of their leader’s saddle with a sword. The horseman fell and broke his spine. The other men froze in fear. Finally, one said, “Forgive us, my priest – go on your way! You have high protectors!” The man of God thanked them, forgave them, and admonished them to pursue goodness and repentance.

Papa Dimitri was a great intercessor, both in prayer and by action. On many occasions he saved villagers, soldiers and even communist collaborators from death. In the latter case, he once explained to a nationalist army officer: “You know that I am the greatest enemy of communism and I have suffered much for this. God, however, says that we must love our enemies and do good to those who do us harm.”



Papa Dimitri attributed God's protection to the fact that he had always honored the Archangels, trimming their oil lamps and caring for their church. To his enemies he explained, "I do not blame you. I am persecuted by my sins, the cause of my punishment. We have all strayed away from God in one way or another, and we must all repent."

### Peacetime and Spiritual Warfare

The years following the war found the pious priest Dimitri experiencing many blessings but, as is the case with those whom God loves and prunes, not also without difficulties.

### Revelations and Temptations

Beginning in 1949, the Theotokos appeared to Papa Dimitri in dreams three times over a period of about 18 months. He saw her in a deep blue dress, instructing him to rebuild the Church of the Ascension which had been destroyed in the war. At the first appearance, the civil war had not yet ended, so Papa kept the revelation to himself. After the second, he felt helpless to do anything as he did not have the funds. Finally, in October 1950, the Panagia insisted, "I cannot be in the rubble any longer!" With that appearance came a group of radiant young men chanting the *apolytikion* of the Resurrection in the eighth mode. "Such celestial chanting has never been heard on earth."

With the bishop's approval, on the Feast of the Ascension, 1951, Papa Dimitri and his people processed to the site of the old church, prayed, and collected the contributions. The foundation was laid in February 1952 and the church was built in thirteen days.

Papa's liturgies were occasionally accompanied by divine experiences. Once, after a particularly uplifting Divine Liturgy, he learned that all the children under twelve years old saw two long ladders with radiant

children ascending and descending. These radiant ones also appeared in the altar during the Gospel reading. On the Dormition in 1959, the iconostasis began to shake as the festal icon was lifted up. This lasted for thirty minutes. Three days later, during the liturgy, Papa Dimitri saw "a small, beautiful child follow the procession at the time of the Great Entrance."

When Papa Dimitri began his first forty-day series of liturgies (starting at 3:00 a.m.), he was faced with resistance from the evil one. His altar server was harassed several times on his way to church by someone throwing stones at him. A large dog attacked Papa as he walked to church. More directly, he was attacked by a "giant black beast" that attempted to strangle him. When these did not deter him, an atheist who lived near the church complained to the police about the ringing of the church bell. The other villagers, however, came to Papa's defense. "We like hearing the church bell! It is the voice of the Church calling us to come to the temple!"

The demons would attack whenever Papa did his forty-day liturgies. They would appear in the form of a boar or a dog, and again as a tall, dark man taking him by the throat. On one occasion, as he was passing



by the chapel of St. George, he saw a demon lying down. He asked, "What are you doing here?" The demon replied, "I'm sitting here so that no passerby makes the sign of the Cross."

### **Presbytera and Patience**

Papa Dimitri was not only harassed by the powers of darkness, but by his presbytera. As he put it, "she caused me to endure much suffering – a level of anguish surpassing that of the communist guerilla era." She would try to dissuade him from serving the liturgy for forty days, suggesting he would get sick and die, threatening not to make prosphora, and complaining that other priests told her it was not necessary. Papa's journal simply says, "I pretended not to listen."

His presbytera was influenced by a conversation with a young woman who chided her for letting her girls stay "behind the times." Rather, they should embrace "the cinema and contemporary fashion" and "modernity" in general. That evening, Papa Dimitri got an earful! He was holding the girls back, wanting them to be nuns, and not marrying them off successfully. God, however, granted him patience to hold his tongue without getting upset. He considered this a great miracle: "As a doctor injects a drug to numb a patient prior to an

operation, so I too became numb to the disturbance."

His wife really lost it when their youngest daughter, secretly, with Papa's blessing, left for a monastery. She pestered him "for two full hours." Papa Dimitri just sat reading the lives of the saints and "pretended not to hear anything" (something not recommended for most!). At this point, unexpected guests arrive who, on learning about Chrysoula, encouraged presbytera. "You must be glad and proud that you have offered a gift to the Most Holy Theotokos." Some months later, upon visiting her daughter, presbytera was happy to see her as a nun. As time went on, presbytera came around to a new spiritual understanding more akin to her husband's.

### **Illness and Repose**

In March of 1966, Papa Dimitri began experiencing stomach pain and was diagnosed with gastrorrhagia (stomach hemorrhage). Medication and a strict diet helped for the next few years. In February of 1969 he had a portion of his colon removed. Sometime later, Papa went to Metéora to spend time in prayer and repentance at St. Stephen Monastery. That night, in a dream, an elderly monk came to him, saying he had heard his prayers. The monk began examining him like a physician and, pointing to the source of his pain, directed him to seek treatment immediately. The "monk" was St. Nectarios, whose *Akathist* he had prayed.

Upon waking, Papa Dimitri was seized with excruciating abdominal pain. He got up, prepared, and tried to serve Orthros, but could not continue into the Divine Liturgy. His travel companion drove him to Annunciation Hospital in Athens, where he waited for twelve hours in extreme pain before being diagnosed with cancer. It seems some time passed before an operation could be performed, so he remained at home. In the meantime, Papa prayed



as usual, except for the six days before the operation when he required the help of his daughter and others. Many were praying for him at this time and liturgies were served on his behalf. Papa could feel the presence of all the prayers and said that “someone” would rock his bed, as a mother rocks a little child, from 10:00 p.m. until morning, in order to help him sleep.

Finally, the operation was performed on the very spot indicated by St. Nectarios (the Liver). Afterwards, the doctor confessed that no one thought the priest would survive. He considered this a miracle. The hospital staff nicknamed him “Lazarus.” One must read the testimony from his physician to understand the incredible impression he made on the hospital staff. There is too much to tell! The doctor himself assisted him as he prayed Compline each night along with the *Akathist* to the Theotokos, standing for an hour and a half. However, this operation was only a brief extension granted him by the mercy of God.

Back at home, Papa Dimitri prayed around the clock as he lay in his bed, both with his priestly stole on and then with the prayer rope. Presbytera became his chanter, responding to his petitions, and often took up her prayer rope on his behalf. Fourteen days before his repose in 1974 he wrote to a friend, “From the bed of pain and through the telephone of mental prayer, I remember you and visit you three times during the night.”

Papa Dimitri was loved and revered by many holy ones contemporaneous with him: St. Ephraim of Katanoukia (+1962), St. Amphilochios Makris (+1970), Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980), and Elder Aimilianos of Metéora and Mount Athos (+2019). Papa had frequented Metéora and was personally invited to Athos by the Mother of God herself!

Perhaps the greatest testimony to his spiritual

stature was provided by Elder Philotheos, who wrote of him: “Papa Dimitri made his confession filled with so much repentance, contrition of heart and humility, the depth of which I have not witnessed in any other clergyman I have confessed.”

### **Wisdom and Insights from Papa Dimitri On Prayer**

I’m definitely not educated, but I can empirically tell you - that’s what life has taught me - that it’s at night and on an empty stomach that one can pray better.

We haven’t placed Christ inside us and that’s why we don’t know what is love, peace, concord, etc.

Prayer is a telephone, a wireless, by which one communicates directly with God. You dial the number on the telephone of prayer to speak with God and He answers. You hear Him clearly, you feel Him very close.

Prayer comes first in the larynx, then goes up to the brain and then down to the heart. . . . It’s true that in the beginning, you’ll have difficulties. You’ll try to pray and at time so you won’t be able to, at times you’ll have wandering thoughts and temptations, and at other times you won’t be able to wake up at night. But you must insist. The Lord, seeing your disposition, will uphold you and deliver you from all temptations. We must not waste the whole night sleeping, because then Satan does whatever he wants with us.

### **On Demons**

Satan doesn’t know our thoughts. He knows only whatever he himself puts in our minds, as well as whatever he figures out from our movements, and whatever he hears from our words ....

Satan opposes every Christian who strives sincerely. However, no one must be afraid of the demons. They are smoke, dust and stench. They don’t

have power over men. God allows the temptations to try men's faith.

They can be found even in the church, even during the time of Divine Liturgy. They put bad thoughts in the minds of the people and distract them from prayer and attention to the divine mystery. However, at the time of the Cherubic Hymn and of the Great Entrance, they depart.

Satan must not find any cowards, because he does whatever he wants with them. Satan is afraid of the pure and sincere confession, of humility and love. Where these exist, he just cannot enter.

### **On the Contemporary World**

God saved us from communism, but Satan delivered us to materialism.

We find it impossible in this day and age to work well in this life, according to God's will, because we

lack the two wings of love and humility.

Now it's time to weep and pray for the condition of today's world. We must pray that God may enlighten them to see the way of God, the way of truth and of righteousness.

Both clergy and people today have lost their spirituality. They constantly talk only about material and political things.

Our Faith is alive, but we abandoned it because selfishness and materialism drew us away.

### **On Sickness and Suffering**

To me, the illness which the good God gave me is a great gift. I lie on the bed of illness and am confined to the duties of prayer – it is now that I feel well. I relinquished the stole and took up the prayer rope.

The pain will do its job, and I will do mine. Whatever the good God has allowed, let it be blessed!



# ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

## ORDAINED

AWAD, Ephraim (Walid), to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan SABA on December 4, 2024, at St. George Orthodox Church, Boston, Massachusetts. He is serving at St. George Cathedral in Worcester while completing his seminary education at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology.

KASSAB, Nicholas (Ghassan), to the holy diaconate by Bishop ALEXANDER on November 24, 2024, at St. George Church, Montreal.

MAKHOUL, Deacon Paisios, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan SABA on November 30, 2024, at St. Antonios Church, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Fr. Paisios is assigned as Assistant Pastor for the parish.

## ELEVATED

HOWELL, Fr. Matthew, to the dignity and rank of archpriest by Bishop JOHN on October 20, 2024, at St. Herman Orthodox Church, Wasilla, Alaska.

ISSA, Fr. Damaskinos, to the rank of archpriest by Bishop THOMAS on October 13, 2024, at the Church of St. Mary, Hunt Valley, Maryland.

## RESTORED

AYOUB, Archpriest George, to the ranks of the canonical clergy of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America; and the Parish of Mar

Elias Eastern Orthodox Church of Ontario is accepted as one of the canonical parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America.

## RETURNED TO THE RANK OF LAITY

WARREN, Ignatius, on October 24, 2024.

## RELEASED

HODGE, Fr. Paul, to the Orthodox Church in America, effective September 9, 2024.

## DEPARTED

RAHAL, Archpriest Joseph, on October 25, 2024. Archpriest Joseph served the Antiochian Archdiocese faithfully for many years, most recently as Pastor of St. George Church, Washington, D.C., from 1999 until his retirement as Pastor Emeritus in January of 2021. During his tenure, in 2005–06, a new addition to the church was erected. This included a parish hall, eight Sunday School rooms, new church offices, and a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen. Fr. Joseph also represented the Archdiocese at various government functions in the nation's capital. He produced several English-Arabic service books and compiled the first edition of *The Services of Great and Holy Week and Pascha*.

DOWNING, Archpriest John, 92, on October 4, 2024 at Guiding

Light Assisted Living Home in Eagle River, Alaska, where he had been living since 2019. Fr. John was a member of the Saint John Cathedral community since 2003, following the death of his beloved wife, Khouria Nancy. Fr. John served a full career as a priest in the Episcopal Church until he converted to Orthodoxy in the early 1990s. He was ordained to the Orthodox priesthood at Saint Michael Church, Whittier, California, and assisted Fr. Michael Trigg (of blessed memory) there for ten years. Fr. John was a beloved priest. In Eagle River he assisted at the altar, served as a school chaplain, counselor, prison ministry chaplain, and even dressed up as Saint Nicholas on Christmas. He also served twice a month as a priest for Saint Herman Church, Wasilla, Alaska, for nearly two years. Fr. John showed extraordinary diligence and capability in assuming all these tasks, even as he aged. He touched the lives of many in our Archdiocese who will hold in their heart fond memories of him.





Fr. Peter Kavanaugh

# To Seek God and Find God

**T**here was once a man banished to Siberia. He was pious, but morose and bitter. You see, while a child, his uncle had caused great pain, killing his mother and squandering his inheritance. In a fit of youthful fury, the man shot and wounded his uncle and then served out his sentence. He married, and settled down, but was never free of a deep, gnawing anger. One day, as he wrestled with his anger and knelt in prayer, the man heard a voice in the breeze, “I am coming.” “It is the Lord,” he said to himself, and he became obsessed. His only care was to meet his Savior. He had his wife set the table every night in case the Lord arrived. No one came. He prayed more earnestly. He longed for Christ; he sought him in every breath. Nothing. Then one day, he heard again in the breeze, “I am coming, soon.” He set out to prepare for a banquet and invited all the

neighbors, even the beggars and destitute. This would be the day. They gathered and waited. Immediately, a storm arose outside. It was cold and windy. The crowd waited longer, wondering if this guest would arrive. No one came, and they proceeded to bless the food. No one still. A heavy gust of wind shook the house. The door blew open. A brilliant light shown out of it, and a disheveled old man fell through. The host lifted the old man and began to weep. He laid him in his bed, nourished and warmed him, and then fell on his knees asking the visitor to forgive him. Who was it? It was his uncle. The uncle had come a long way to find his nephew and reconcile. When the storm picked up, he lost his way and despaired. Just then, some few yards from the nephew’s home, he met a man, a beautiful man, glowing in wondrous brightness. “Come with me,” the divine being told him, “I am going to a banquet, but you can take my seat.”

God comes to a man who seeks him. What is preventing God from coming to us? Are we seeking? What is stifling our search? Is there sin, anger, selfishness, or distraction stuffing up our hearts, something that needs to be healed? What must we do to find Him?

**And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple (Luke 2:42–46).**

“Ανεζήτουν αὐτόν... καὶ μὴ εὕρόντες.” “They sought him . . . and he was not found.” They lost God. It was a “dark night of the soul.” They felt what modern man feels so often: emptiness and dryness. Then they sought for God, but could not find him.

“O God ... My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1). “God is not found immediately,” Origen the theologian writes. “Nor is He found among cousins and kindred of the flesh . . . He is not found among the famous of the world . . . they find him nowhere but in the Temple. And you must therefore seek Him there in the Temple, seek Him in the Church.”

“ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ.” “They returned to Jerusalem.” They turned around. They repented. They followed their steps backwards. So it must be with us. How many sins do we carry in our

guilty conscience? How many wrong steps have we made, one bad habit after the other, one justification following another? We cannot heal until we follow our heart back, back to each transgression, back to the root of our hurt and anger, and then offer up our hearts in confession.

Sin is like a deep cut on a tree. Without immediate care, bark will grow over it, time will bury it, but the wound is never really healed. It festers and bulges and hinders the tree's growth in secret ways. “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account . . . Draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:12–13, 16).

ὑπέστρεψαν . . . ἀναζητοῦντες αὐτόν.” “They returned . . . seeking him.” *ἀναζητοῦντες* comes from two words – *zētēō*, “seek,” and *aná*, “up and down,” “back and forth,” “earnestly, with difficulty.” Origen reads from this word that our Lord's parents sought him “sorrowfully.” “It was as when you are reading Scripture, and you seek with pain to find the meaning within it, not that you think that the Scripture has erred . . . but you strive to find the truth that is hidden there” (Origen). They sought with intentionality. “Whoever therefore seeks Jesus must not seek Him carelessly, or disconnectedly, as many seek but do not find Him; but with toil and anxiety” (Origen). They sought for God in humility and purity.

It is possible to seek God in the wrong way. The pharisees were looking for the Messiah, but they did not find him. “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given



to it” (Matthew 16:4). They wanted big shows, miracles, and power. They found nothing.

St. Augustine the Great tells how he once searched for Truth with pride. He studied holy books with “critical discussion rather than pious research.” Immorality blinded his heart. “Through my lax morals I closed off my own access to the Lord. In my pride I dared to seek that which no one can find unless he practices humility” (St. Augustine).

“The Lord does not seek the monk or the layperson, the scholar or the simpleton, the rich man or the pauper, but only the heart that thirsts for God, full of a sincere desire to be true to Him and His commandments!” St. Ephraim the Syrian teaches.

“The Lord seeks a heart filled to overflowing with love for God and our neighbor,” St. Seraphim of Sarov explains. “[Love] is the throne on which He loves to sit and on which He appears in the fullness of His heavenly glory. ‘Son, give Me thy heart’ He says, ‘and all the rest I Myself will add to thee,’ for in the human heart the Kingdom of God can be contained.”

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**WE WILL ONLY FIND  
GOD WITH  
PURE HEARTS.**

”

The year 2025 will usher in all manner of crises. Heaven can only guess what. Whether it is another epidemic, political turmoil, anxieties about climate change, border control, or the newest developments in Artificial Intelligence, we know one thing: we will all face a crisis of distraction.

Of all people, as Søren Kierkegaard felt, modern man is least likely to find God. We are too busy. “Of all ridiculous things the most ridiculous seems to me, to be busy,” he says. “To be a man who is brisk about his food and his work.” We live with too much noise. “Even if the Word of God were proclaimed in the modern world, how could one hear it with so much noise?” The philosopher wrote this in the 19th Century. This was before cell phones (if you can believe it). It was before traffic, instant shopping, texting, Zooming, Tweeting, and TikToking.

What would the philosophers say to our own world? Is it still possible to seek and find God? It is possible, but it is harder than we think. It will take sacrifice, and greater sacrifice than we might prefer. It is good that the year starts with the Feast of Our Lord’s Circumcision. This is how we must start our year. What needs to be cut off?

“Μετὰ ἡμέρας τρεῖς, εὗρον αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ.”  
“After three days, they found him.”

God longs for us. He seeks us with an open heart. He wants to rest in our hearts, and for us to rest in His. So, again, I will ask: What is preventing God from coming to us? Are we seeking? What is stifling our search? Is there sin, anger, selfishness, or distraction stuffing up our hearts? What must we do to find Him?

# The Road to *Theosis*

2024 ARCHDIOCESE ORATORICAL  
FESTIVAL JUDGES' CHOICE

**Paul Jackson, Age 17**

St. Andrew Antiochian Orthodox Church,  
Riverside, California  
The Diocese of Los Angeles and the West



**M**y friends, my fellow wanderers in this strange and fallen world, what is the goal of our wanderings? To where are we going? For what are we searching? In short, what is the purpose of humanity? Is there even a purpose? I, for one, would argue so. God would not have made us without a purpose in mind for us.

Now, is all of mankind called to the same purpose? Or does each individual person have a unique purpose? Some will use every form of eloquence and sophistry to say so. Some will try to convince you that your goal is different from your brother's or your sister's merely because you are a different person. Those who argue this, however, are mistaken. While each person made by God has unique talents, we are bound by one common nature to seek a common goal. All of mankind has been, is, and always will be traveling on the same path towards the same goal: *theosis*.

*Theosis*, or the experience that “human beings can have real union with God, and so become like God to such a degree that we participate in the divine nature,”<sup>1</sup> is the true end of humanity. It is what we were created to do! While teaching about *theosis*, St. Gregory of Nazianzus went so far as to say, “Man has been ordered to become God.” We are commanded to take part in deification. Now, do not think that such a thing as *theosis* is easily achieved. Nothing worth attaining is. This road we all travel with the goal of becoming like God is very, very long. It is, in fact, never ending.

Do not, however, be daunted by this. Instead, take heart and rejoice in the infinity of the road, because it shows just how amazing our God is. If there were an end to the road, then our God would be limited. If there were an end to the road, our God would not be all powerful. If there were an end to the road, our God would not be infinite. However, there is no end!

<sup>1</sup> *Theosis: Partaking of the Divine Nature* | Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, [www1.antiochian.org/content/theosis-partaking-divine-nature](http://www1.antiochian.org/content/theosis-partaking-divine-nature)

This is so because our God is not limited: He is all powerful, and He is infinite. What a God we serve, brothers and sisters, what an awesome God we serve!

Describing God, St. Augustine wrote, “The highest good, than which there is no higher, is God.”<sup>2</sup> Consider, too, various verses in the Bible, such as Mark 10:18, in which Jesus Christ our Lord says, “No one is good but One, that is, God,” and 1st Chronicles 16:33: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His mercy endures forever.” From this we see that our infinite and perfect God is also good, the highest good, infinitely good. Accordingly, one can reason that humanity is, in itself, good because we are created in the image of the highest good, God. In fact, to say that humanity is just good is an understatement. After creating us, Genesis 1:31 tells us that God “saw everything He had made” and that “it was very good” in His eyes.

We say, however, that humanity is “fallen,” since it is corrupted by sin and therefore has fallen from God. So beloved, how do we get back up? How do we climb back and, from there, continue to climb towards God? To climb, brothers and sisters, we must choose to love God.

How could we ever hope to become more like God if we do not love Him? As humans, we try to emulate what we love, and we renounce and avoid what we hate. Thus, unless we love God, it would be impossible for us to become like Him. Now, what does it mean “to love”? According to the Christian faith the greatest virtue is love (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is the “fulfilling of the law” of God (Romans 13:10). “God Himself is Love.”<sup>3</sup> My beloved friends, to love God is to remain steadfast

and faithful to His will, to follow His commandments with perfect purity and full devotion to Him alone, and to put His will above our own, in spite of any difficulty, any trial, any circumstance.

We have now covered three very important topics. We have noted that all men are called to *theosis*, and that *theosis* is the purpose of mankind. We have argued that God is good and infinite, and we have observed that, in order to grow closer to God, one must love Him. These topics, of course, are all interconnected, working together to create a beautifully sewn tapestry. To demonstrate the extent of their interwovenness, I would like you to consider Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 8, Verse 28, in which he states, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Using this verse as a lens, we can see that, indeed, all things work together towards our becoming more like God, because God is the highest good, to those who, of their own freewill, choose to follow God’s will and respond to the invitation to attain their calling to *theosis*.

As some of you may already know, if we truly love God, everything that happens to us will help us grow closer to Him. If something good happens to us ... we will thank God. If something bad happens to us ... we will pray to God and grow closer to God as a result. We must do so; this, this, is what it is to be a Christian.

The holy and righteous Job is a striking example of this. The righteous Job “lost his children, his wealth, his glory, and every consolation all at once.” “His entire body became a terrible wound covered with boils. Yet he remained steadfast and patient in the face of his misfortune for seven years, always

<sup>2</sup> Church Fathers: On the Nature of Good (Augustine), [www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm)

<sup>3</sup> “The Orthodox Faith - Volume IV - Spirituality - the Greatest Virtue Is Love - God Is Love,” Orthodox Church in America, [www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-greatest-virtue-is-love/god-is-love](http://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/the-greatest-virtue-is-love/god-is-love)

giving thanks to God.”<sup>4</sup> Because of his love for God, Job was able to grow closer to God in the midst of his suffering!

And, once more, death has no sting to those who love God, no more than trials did for Job. Because of Christ the Lord’s life, death, and holy resurrection, those who love God no longer have to fear death! Now, those who love God can view death as a way to get closer to Him in His kingdom – in Heaven.

Yet be warned, brothers and sisters, this road to *theosis* should not be taken for granted. God gave us freewill and we can pervert and use this gift to separate ourselves from Him, to leave the road. However, I implore you, dear ones, fight to stay on the path. Do not leave the road for earthly pleasures, for there are deep pitfalls and dark ditches waiting for you to fall into them, and you will not be able to avoid them. If you think you won’t fall and that you can make it on your own, then you have already fallen into the deepest and darkest pit out there: pride. You will suffocate in the darkness and dirt, and you will not be able to get out. The more you try to climb out on your own, the farther you will fall and you will bury yourself with your own selfishness and arrogance.

However, if we humble ourselves, repent, and turn to God, God, the Lover of mankind, the Good Shepherd, whose “mercy endures forever,” will not forsake us. He will come, free us from our prison, and guide us out and back to the road, the road to *theosis*. We know this because “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Amen.

<sup>4</sup> “Righteous Job the Long-Suffering,” *Orthodox Church in America*, 6 May 2014, [www.oca.org/saints/lives/2014/05/06/101301-righteous-job-the-long-suffering](http://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2014/05/06/101301-righteous-job-the-long-suffering)

# Arch Week:

## “Bridging the Gap” for Our Youth

**A**rch Week is an immersive, one-week program run by the Antiochian Village Camp for graduating high school seniors seeking to strengthen their faith as they “bridge the gap” to life after high school. This can be a challenging time of transition, which is why the program’s goal is to offer recent high school graduates spiritual mentorship, resources, and a vibrant community of young Orthodox Christians. The seminars, held throughout Arch Week, aim to cover a range of topics: mental health, serving Christ, and transitioning to new environments. His Grace Bishop JOHN and Fr. Matthew Howell will be serving as spiritual guides throughout the program, alongside other clergy and lay guest speakers, as well as a team of dedicated staff. Arch Week retains the “fun of camp” through evening programs, sports, rope course activities, and cabin times. The program also has a capstone event called Arch Day, in which participants engage in meaningful community service and a fun outing in Pittsburgh.

*“Arch Week was the best camp experience I have ever been to. The Christian Ed felt designed specifically for our age group and was really relatable. The activities and programs were all super fun, and I know that I walked out with friendships that will last a lifetime.” – Arch Week 2023 Participant*

Arch Week will be held **June 29–July 6, 2025**, at the Antiochian Village Conference Center. We encourage current high school seniors from any jurisdiction to register. Visit <https://avcamp.org/programs/arch-week/> for more information about Arch Week.

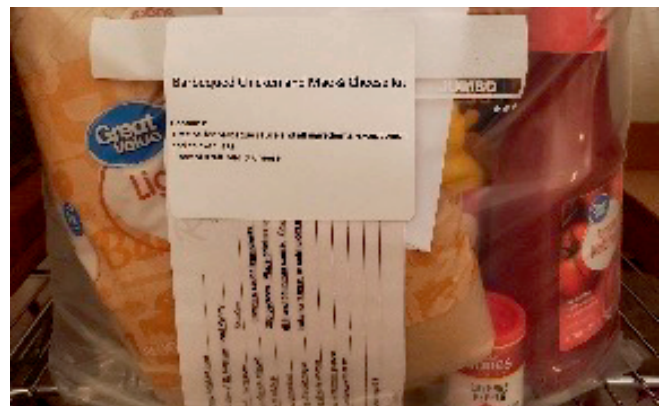
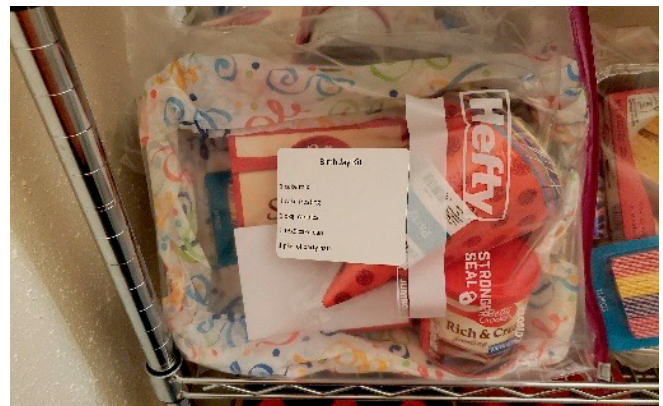
# Charities Corner

## A GRANT REPORT FROM THE FOOD FOR HUNGRY PEOPLE AND CHARITABLE OUTREACH PROGRAM

*How big hearts, a small food pantry and a \$5,000 grant from the FFHPCO impacts a community in Iowa.*

Many lives were touched during 2023 with the grant from the Food for Hungry People and Charitable Outreach (FFHPCO). We ensured that everyone was treated with respect, that no one was discriminated against (if they asked, we helped), and, if opportunity arose, the love of Christ was shared. We pray that through our actions these people's lives have been positively affected," stated Becky Morey of St. Raphael of Brooklyn Orthodox Church in Iowa City, Iowa.

Through the allocations of the church and the FFHPCO grant, volunteers were able to touch lives in several ways. *Utility Assistance* helped four single-parent families with water bills. Although the guidelines for the church's charity program cap contributions per family (on account of lower demand in 2023), the four families were able to pay delinquent bills and keep water service to their homes. It was also a witness to the local utility companies, who referred people to the Church's program.



The *Food Pantry's* shelves were kept stocked with non-perishable and perishable food, as this met a continuing need. A portion of the FFHPCO grant made it possible for St. Raphael of Brooklyn to serve an average of 29 people per month and 12 different households monthly. The people served were mainly members of multi-generational households, but also included single parents and seniors. The food pantry fills the gap for the working poor and those who need just a little assistance when times are tough; it also serves some individuals transitioning from homelessness. Every week we distributed a range of items, from toiletries to meat, to canned goods, to bread, to frozen items. While it is a blessing to serve those in need, we are concerned that the need will increase, as continuing inflation is driving up the costs of basic necessities. (Rent in Iowa City is one of the highest in the state.)

A small, 7-cubic-foot freezer allows the church to store hamburger, other meats, frozen vegetables and fruit, along with excess bread, butter, and frozen items to complement stock on the shelves, such as Hamburger Helper, pasta dishes, and so forth.

The final portion of the grant was for *Holiday Baskets*. During the Thanksgiving holiday, 10 baskets were distributed to food-pantry patrons and members of the parish. Each family was given all the fixings for a traditional Thanksgiving meal, including a nice-sized turkey. We also provided clothing for several families – outerwear and everyday items. While the Iowa City school district has a winter coat program, they did not have coats available in the sizes for a family, so we fulfilled that need with the grant funds. This year, a “mitten tree” will grow, through which people can donate mittens, hats, and gloves for those in need.

Farm Credit Services of America supplemented our grant funds with a \$2,000 grant to plant fruit trees and vegetables in the church community garden, to purchase gardening tools, and to provide seedlings for anyone interested in growing their own tomatoes and herbs. Farm Credit also recently awarded the church an additional \$4,000 to construct a shed to house gardening implements and purchase additional fruit trees. The community garden is open to the parish, food-pantry patrons, neighbors, and anyone who walks through the church backyard. A third-party Master Gardening organization was consulted to design the community garden with walkways, a children's play area, an area for an icon shrine, and a prayer corner. The shed will be constructed by a teen parishioner who is working on his Eagle Scout award, assisted by several men in the trades industry. He and several of his fellow scout members plan to have it built over three Saturdays.

Several patrons share their thankfulness that St. Raphael of Brooklyn Church is active in the community, and area agencies that provide services direct people to our pantry. “This grant from the Food for Hungry People program assists us as we carry out Christ's mission of feeding His sheep, and we pray that we may be a light in a darkened world,” Ms. Morey commented. “Because this is an essential ministry in our parish, and as we see the growing need in our community, the Parish Council has allocated a monthly stipend toward the food pantry for 2025. Our heartfelt thanks go to the FFHP program for entrusting us with these funds and allowing us to minister to those in need in our community.”

*Would your church like to expand its charitable outreach? Visit [Antiochian.org](http://Antiochian.org) Food for Hungry People and apply for a grant.*

# A Heritage of Faith, Service, and Love

Laila Ferris  
President, Antiochian Women of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America  
Past President, Antiochian Women North American Board

“**A**s each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” – 1 Peter 4:10–11

Generations of women profoundly shape who we become within our faith, and our service

to others. The first to influence me were my grandmother and mother, who not only told us, but showed us how, as Antiochian Women, we fulfill our Christian mission. They taught me that we do this not just for ourselves, but for others. This legacy provided me with a foundation for spiritual growth, service, and a deeper compassion and empathy. Other Antiochian Women, such as Susu Morrow, Sherry Abraham, Gloria Armistead, to name a few (may their memory be eternal), also influenced my



growth as an Antiochian woman. They modeled resilience, kindness, and courage, encouraging many of us to reach step our own potential while lifting others through love and service. The bond of fellowship among the Antiochian Women plays a key role in this journey. In it we share wisdom, support one another, and celebrate each other's gifts. Through these connections we encourage each other to believe, to care for others, and to serve them. We foster unity and inspire each other to meet the needs of our families, those around us, and those beyond our sphere, with grace and dedication. This was my inspiration to involve another generation of young women to become a part of the Antiochian Women. One of these is my daughter-in-law, Jaclyn Al-Hanna Ferris (whom I love and value as a daughter), who is the North American Board Treasurer and immediate Past President of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America Antiochian Women. Another is my daughter Lauren Ferris Cass, who is the North American Board Humanitarian Coordinator.

In our Orthodox faith, the bond between mothers and daughters is as a powerful source of inspiration and strength, reinforcing the sacred journey of faith across generations. As a mother who learned from my own grandmother and mother, I believed that it is my beloved duty to impart that wisdom, resilience, and devotion to my daughters, Jaclyn and Lauren. Thus I hope to pass down these traditions that shape our identity and instill a deep sense of belonging to our Lord, the Church, and those who serve both. My daughters, in turn, have brought new perspectives, vitality, and commitment. In this dynamic relationship both generations grow spiritually and support one another in service as Antiochian Women.

Jaclyn and Lauren had been hearing about and meeting Antiochian Women for many years,

through participation in Parish Life Conferences and Archdiocese Conventions. They also learned through the stories I shared of the AW women throughout the years, and of their acts of love and service. They started to attend meetings with me as well. Seeing the Antiochian Women in action only added to their awe at what this sisterhood could accomplish. So even as very young women, they were not strangers to the works of the Antiochian Women. Embraced by this sisterhood, and finding their own purpose as well, they began their own journey. Jaclyn's strong love of servant-leadership drew her to the roles I mentioned above. Lauren's unending passion to develop and serve through humanitarian activities and projects drew her to the position in which she presently serves.

Together, we walk hand in hand, embodying the love and compassion central to Orthodoxy. They stand strong in their faith, in their homes, communities, and their churches, inspiring others through prayer, charitable acts, and faithfulness. This shared journey of love, strength, and devotion to God carries forward the light of Christ, ready to serve and uplift those around us.

The gift of participating and serving our Lord, our faith, and those in need alongside my daughters is indescribable. Serving together is living out our faith as a family, a bond that strengthens our love for each other and for our Lord. The legacy of the generations of service is in good hands. I hope and pray that, one day, Jaclyn's and Lauren's daughters, Ezme and Laila, respectively, will be inspired to continue this service of love. I encourage all young women to join their grandmothers, mothers, aunts, and godmothers, in serving and growing through the Antiochian Women, as we serve Christ through serving others.



# GODMOTHERING

Johanna Cates  
Religious Coordinator  
Antiochian Women  
Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

God gives a special vocation to women: mothering. I know that this statement might trouble the hearts of women who, for one reason or another, have not married, or have not given birth. I do not mean to provoke sadness, but to point out that women mother in one way or another. Women are the heart of the home, the heart of the Church, and the care they give is special. If you have ever taught, held, hugged, mentored, or taken care of a child, an aging parent, a spouse, a sibling or friend, you have mothered. If you have listened to someone, cried with someone, laughed with, prayed for, and loved someone, you have mothered.

The Holy Theotokos is our beloved Mother. She prays for us and loves us. We are to follow her example by striving to be in union with God, as she was, and take care of those around us: to mother.

*Most Holy Theotokos, pray for us!*

There is another holy calling specific to us as women. That calling is being asked to be a godmother to one or more children, or a sponsor for someone seeking chrismation in the Holy Orthodox Church. It is an honor and a privilege to be asked by the parents of a child to join their family and be a godmother to their precious baby. It is a deeply responsible role to stand with someone, guide and help him or her to the foot of the Holy Cross, either infant, older child or



adult. It is a life-long journey with that person, much like being a parent, for the whole of our lives.

Personally, I have been so blessed in my life to have given birth to an amazing son 38 years ago, and to have two wonderful stepchildren, now 45 and 43, come into my life when they were young. The joys of motherhood with these three have been the gifts from God that I have cherished beyond breathing.

I became a Christian in 1990 and Orthodox in 1992 or thereabouts. Then, through a circuitous route, I joined St. Timothy's Orthodox Church in Fairfield, California, the church I have called "home" ever since. Once there, I met my "godsister" and BFF, Victoria, and her wonderful family. One of her three granddaughters was just toddling on pony legs when I arrived, and she and I became special buddies – kindred spirits, actually. Alexa would sit on my lap and feed me grapes from her plate, and she attended my church pre-school class. She and I had a special connection from the moment we met. When they moved to Lompoc, California, I was

without my little buddy, although I did see her often. They came to visit one Sunday, and her parents, Jim and Amanda, asked me to be her godmother. I was, and still am, deeply honored. Alexa and I have each other's hearts and always will. She is a married woman now who is expecting her first baby in April. I will be a "god-aunty," but Alexa will always be my little Lady-Bug.

I became a godmother again in April of 2021 to a woman named January. She and her daughter, Zoe, were to be chrismated. She asked me to be her sponsor, a.k.a., godmother, to which I readily agreed. January is a smart, savvy, beautiful dynamo, someone who is a perfect counterpoint to my more reserved and introverted nature. We talk often and there is no subject that is off the table. As with Alexa, I love her deeply.

Oh my, a third godmothering opportunity came two years ago when little Ruby-Ellen was born to parents Alyssa and Ryan. They asked me to be her godmother, but this time I was hesitant. I had just become a septuagenarian and she, just a newborn baby! How could I godmother her and maybe not be around as she grew up? I asked Alyssa and Ryan to talk to our priest. He was very much in favor of me being Ruby's godmother, they were sure, so I agreed. I am now "Ninang JoJo" to this beautiful little girl. Only God knows how long He will keep me in her life.

Three beautiful goddaughters, all of whom carry my heart in their pockets. I am blessed to have non-official goddaughters as well, young women whom I have mentored along the way and are as dear to me as can be. Alexa's sisters, Xenia and Zoe, are "my angel-girls", and I hold them both very close to my heart.

At St. Timothy's we had our counterpart to the acolytes for the girls, who worked in the nave in front of the iconostasis and helped the Sisterhood. I was coordinator for that ministry, though that is on hold for the time being while our new group of

littles grow. My precious grown-up Myrrh-bearers, Marina, Samantha, Maria, Sandra, Anna, Anna, Zoe and Natalie, are now adults, or nearly so. Some are mothering their own babes, and some have become godmothers themselves. It's been such a blessing to watch these wonderful young women grow into the God-loving women that they all have become, and to be part of their individual journeys. My heart bursts with love for them.

Saint Paisios the Athonite says this of motherhood, "It isn't enough to merely love another; we must love the other more than ourselves. A mother loves her children more than she loves herself. She will stay hungry to feed her children, yet she feels greater pleasure than they do. The children are fed materially, but she is fed spiritually. They experience the taste of food, while she experiences spiritual rejoicing."

I have found the same sentiment as a godmother to my beloved goddaughters. Although I am not responsible for them as a parent, there isn't anything I would not do for them. My role is to be present, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually in their lives, and in-person as much as I can be. I show up, I listen, and try not to be judgmental or dismissive. I take my responsibility as their godmother very seriously. I pray for them every day and we all talk often. Well, Ruby chatters a bit, but I'm looking forward to having a conversation with her in a couple of years that isn't baby-babble. God-willing and a fair wind, I will be with her for a while.

Being a godmother is a precious, rewarding, and fulfilling gift from God. I am deeply honored to have received this gift. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't feel gratitude for all of the kids that God has given me in my life.

May you be so blessed. Go forth to love and serve the Lord

# 2025 Archdiocese Convention July 19-27, 2025 Calendar of Events

## Saturday July 19

- Great Vespers with Artoklasia - Saint George Church
- Welcome Dinner - Saint George Church

## Sunday July 20

- Orthros - Saint George Church,
- Hierarchical Divine Liturgy - Saint George Church
- Welcome Luncheon - Saint George Church

## Monday July 21

- VIP Luncheon (by invitation)
- Hospitality Hub25
- Choir Rehearsal
- Blessing of the Chapel
- Vespers
- Diocesan Teen SOYO Officers Meeting
- Antiochian Welcome Night
- Compline
- "Ask Abound"

## Wednesday July 23

- Bible Study and Confessions
- Daily Orthros
- Shrine Visitation- The Miraculous Weeping Icon of Saint George, Cicero, IL
- Hospitality Hub25
- Exhibits/Vendors
- Club Saint George - Ages 4 - 6
- Club Saint George - Ages 7 - 9
- Club Saint George - Ages 10 - 12
- Finance Committee Meeting
- NAB Antiochian Women Meeting and Brunch
- Financial Strategic Planning and Budget Committee Meeting - TBD
- Saint Vladimir's Seminary Alumni Reception
- Home Schooling Department Meeting
- Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries
- Department of Inter-Orthodox/Inter-Faith Relations Meeting
- Department of Sacred Music Meeting
- Antiochian Village Council Meeting
- Department of Clergy Insurance and Retirement Meeting
- Department of Convention and Conference Planning Meeting
- Department of Marriage and Parish Family Ministry Meeting
- Department of Missions and Evangelism Meeting
- Department of Stewardship and Lay Ministry Meeting
- Workshop - TBD - English
- Workshop - TBD - Arabic
- Young Adult Ministry (YAM) Meeting
- Choir Workshop/Rehearsals
- Vespers
- Dinner on your own
- Bible Bowl
- Family Entertainment Night
- Young Adult After-Social
- Compline
- "Ask Abound"

## Friday July 25

- Orthros and Confessions
- Divine Liturgy
- Shrine Visitation - The Miraculous Weeping Icon of Saint George, Cicero, IL
- Hospitality Hub25
- Exhibits/Vendors
- Club Saint George - Ages 4 - 6
- Club Saint George - Ages 7 - 9
- Club Saint George - Ages 10 - 12
- Brunch/Lunch on your own
- Metropolitan's Address and Archdiocese General Assembly
- Teen Lunch and Humanitarian Event
- Choir Rehearsal
- Vespers
- Arabian Nights - Dinner and Hafli
- Compline
- "Ask Abound"

### Host Parish

Saint George Antiochian Orthodox Church  
1220 S. 60th Court Cicero, IL 60804

### CONTACT US

(708) 656-2927 - Info@AC2025Chicago.org



**AC2025Chicago.org**

## Tuesday July 22

- Bible Study and Confessions
- Daily Orthros
- Shrine Visitation - The Miraculous Weeping Icon of Saint George, Cicero, IL
- Hospitality Hub25
- Exhibits/Vendors
- Club Saint George - Ages 4 - 6
- Club Saint George - Ages 7 - 9
- Club Saint George - Ages 10 - 12
- Clergy/Clergy Wives Breakfast
- Clergy Wives Meeting
- Clergy Meeting with Hierarchs
- Order of Saint Ignatius General Assembly
- Diocesan Teen SOYO Officers Meeting
- Orthodox Leadership Initiative Meeting
- Workshop - TBD - English
- Workshop - TBD - Arabic
- Department of Liturgics
- Department of Western Rite Meeting
- Department of Theological and Pastoral Education Meeting
- Department of Finance Meeting
- Financial Strategic Planning and Budget Committee Meeting - TBD
- Choir Workshop/Rehearsal
- Vespers
- Club Saint George - Evening Edition - Ages 4 - 6
- Club Saint George - Evening Edition - Ages 7 - 9
- Club Saint George - Evening Edition - Ages 10 - 12
- Diocesan Teen SOYO Officers Meeting
- Order of Saint Ignatius Reception and Dinner
- VIP Club
- Compline
- "Ask Abound"

## Thursday July 24

- Archdiocese General Assembly
- Choir Rehearsal
- Club Saint George - Evening Edition - Ages 4 - 6
- Club Saint George - Evening Edition - Ages 7 - 9
- Club Saint George - Evening Edition - Ages 10 - 12
- Great Vespers with Artoklasia
- Balamand Alumni Reunion
- "My Kind of Town" (Chicago Dinner and Music)
- Compline
- "Ask Abound"
- Bible Study and Confessions
- Daily Orthros
- Shrine Visitation - The Miraculous Weeping Icon of Saint George, Cicero, IL
- Hospitality Hub25
- Exhibits/Vendors
- Club Saint George - Ages 4-6
- Club Saint George - Ages 7-9
- Club Saint George - Ages 10-12
- Teen Lunch and Social

## Saturday July 26

- Bible Study and Confessions
- Daily Orthros
- Shrine Visitation - The Miraculous Weeping Icon of Saint George, Cicero, IL
- Hospitality Hub25
- Exhibits/Vendors
- Oratorical and Choir Festival
- Archdiocese Board of Trustees Luncheon and Meeting
- NAC Senior SOYO Alumni Reunion
- Teen Lunch and Retreat
- Young Adult Lunch and Retreat
- Choir Workshop/ Choir Rehearsal
- Workshop - Enliven To Christ
- Medical Professional Ministry Meeting
- Great Vespers
- Club Saint George - Ages 4 - 6
- Club Saint George - Ages 7 - 9
- Club Saint George - Ages 10 - 12
- "Antiochian Legacy" Grand Banquet and Hafli

## Sunday July 27

- Orthros and Confessions
- Hierarchical Divine Liturgy

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- Workshops
- Bible Bowl
- Oratorical Festival
- “Taste of Chicago”
- Antiochian Legacy Banquet and Grand Hafli
- “Ask Abouna” all week

**THE MIRACULOUS WEeping ICON**

Cicero, IL



With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Saba, for the first time, venerate the Miraculous Weeping Icon in the hotel Chapel all week.



**“Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.” Luke 1:38**

**HOTEL RESERVATIONS ARE NOW OPEN!**



[AC2025Chicago.org](http://AC2025Chicago.org)

**Host Parish**  
Saint George Church  
Cicero, IL