

Annunciation of Mary

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THE WORD

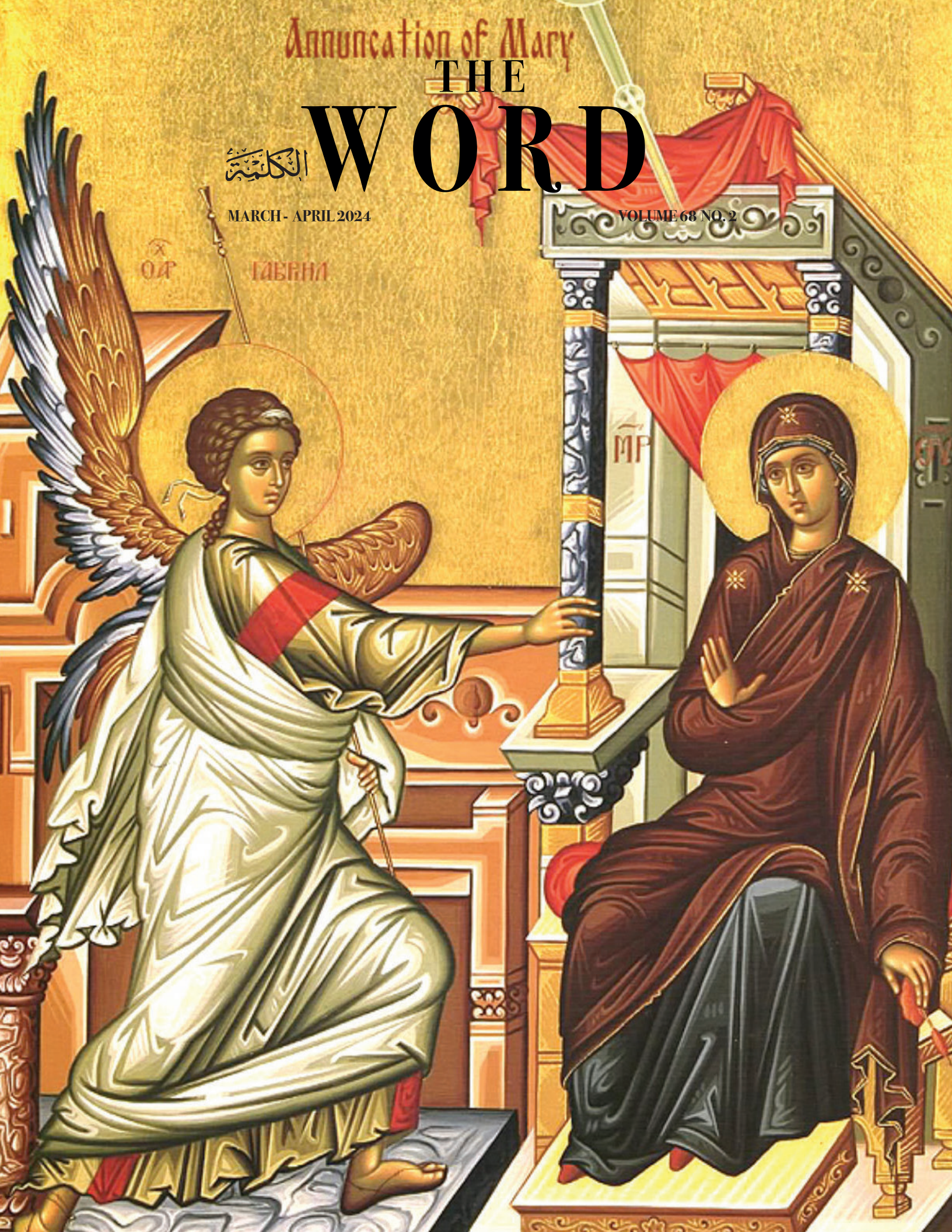
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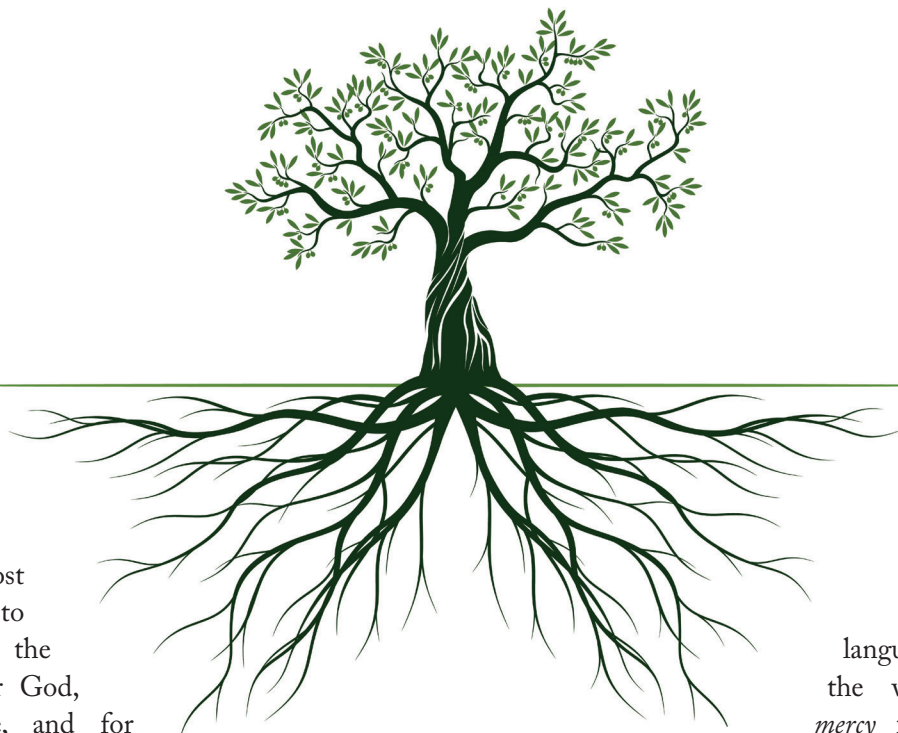
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PRAYER FOR THE MARCH FOR LIFE 2024

Bishop JOHN



was most blessed to witness the love for God, for life, and for

peace, of the people gathered for this March in January. While the post-modern world has abandoned God, life, and peace, to pursue self-gratification through technology and consumption, we have held true to what God has revealed through Jesus Christ and His Church. We stand today with those who for thousands of years have followed the One true God. We have accepted God's way, the way of unity through Christ. We re-present to the world the value that God has given to human life in all its stages. The life He gives us by His Spirit allows us to commune with Him. This life leads us into the way of peace, following Him who humbly identified Himself with humankind. By protecting and speaking for the least able and most vulnerable of our brethren, the unborn, we show ourselves to be co-workers in Christ's own priesthood and ministry. I commend you for holding fast as the world forsakes God.

The semitic languages take the word for *mercy* from the

word *burham*, which means "womb." The womb provides everything for the unborn. It is the source of nourishment, safety, comfort, and growth. *The womb represents the gift of life.* The Greek word for mercy, *eliesson*, comes from the word for olive oil. At the time of Christ, olive oil was the only fat that lasted the winter. It was a luxury; it offered light for study at night, medicine to seal cuts from bacteria, and was used to anoint people. Olive trees meant a time of peace, because it took a long time for a tree to mature, and conquerors often cut down olive trees to weaken the population. In their association with peace, health, and sustenance, *olive trees represent life.* When we act to protect the unborn, we show God's mercy and peace, following a holy order. By *order*, I mean keeping things orderly or correctly, thus expressing the Lord's will and way. Our God gives us such mercy and we need to offer the unborn and each other this mercy in its fullest meaning.

The Most Reverend
Metropolitan SABA

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend
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We accept life as an opportunity to know God, to share His way, and to live in Him. We have accepted Him as our God and have agreed to be His people. We have fulfilled the Old Testament covenant with God and strive today for peace, life, and sanctification. Our cooperation with God is the only way to have peace and contentment. This is the only way to salvation. Life requires that we put away immature ways and submit to God Himself. Let us use our senses to know God, and, knowing God, let us witness to the good news of the Incarnation. God has come to us! It is now for us to accept this by glorifying our God.

Let us pray for all unborn children and their families.

Let us pray for wisdom and understanding.

Let us pray for God to direct our steps.

Let us pray that God might show us how to bring each other out of poverty, fear, and distress.

Let us pray for those who are oppressed and killed.

Let us pray for peace between people, families, warring factions, and nations.

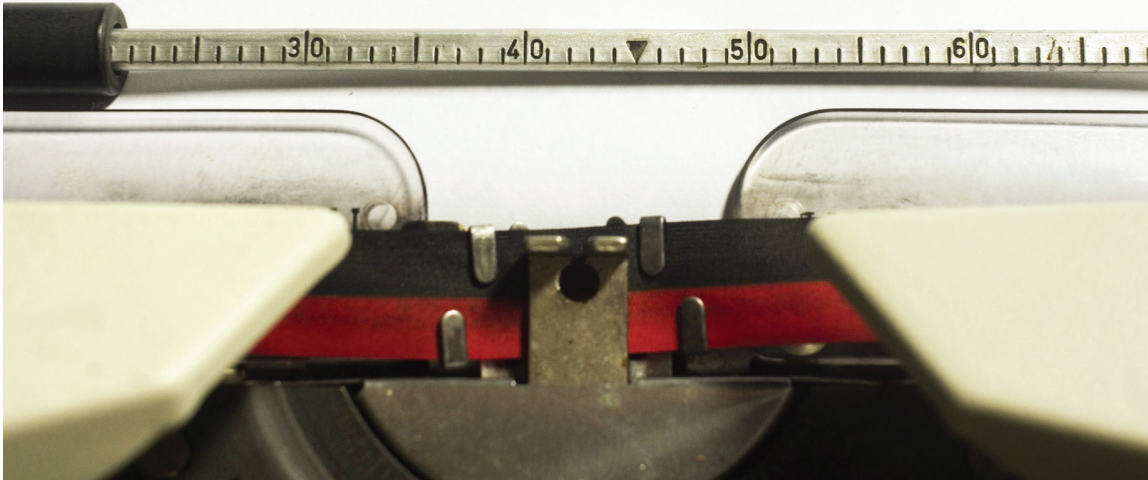
Let us pray that we and others will be open to God's revelation of Himself in our lives.

Let us pray for godly physicians, civil leaders, lawmakers, and caregivers.

O Heavenly Father, Good Comforter, and Lord Jesus Christ; Creator of all things, you who knew us in our mother's womb, and ordered the world for our salvation, protect your babies both born and unborn, guide their parents, reveal to us the ways in which we should walk, today and every-day. Open our hearts and our minds to your gospel teachings and fill us with your light and wisdom. Grant us your peace, not as the world conceives of peace, but *your* peace. Teach us to love as you love, and to serve as you serve.

O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee.

Silence.



MASS PSYCHOSIS AND THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

Fr. Peter Kavanaugh

"I WILL SEND A FAMINE INTO THE LAND: NOT A FAMINE OF BREAD, NOR A THIRST OF WATER, BUT OF HEARING THE WORD OF THE LORD" (AMOS 8:11).

A plague of delusion swept across the Israelite nation during the reign of King Jeroboam in 793 B.C. Psychologists today call it mass psychosis, when a society loses touch with reality. The human heart so easily falls into delusion. We have to be vigilant in our life, guarding ourselves from delusion, and straining our hearts to the Spirit of Truth.

Our Gospel reading today takes us again to our Lord's last sermon. He is preparing the disciples for persecution. "I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues" (John 16:2). You will be the 'ἀποσυναγωγους': exiles from society. Disciples of Jesus Christ will be the fringe minority – the

unwanted, the rejects. You will not fit in with the world. The world will want to kill you.

Why is this? What is it about Christianity which clashes with the world? Why can we not "co-exist" as the bumper stickers say, placing Islam, Wicca, and Christianity side by side? "Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so, they are offering worship to God. They will do this because they have not known the Father or me" (John 16:3, 4).

There is a startling message in our Lord's words. The human heart can be so deluded, so closed off from reality, that we can sincerely believe we are doing good, while committing evil. Good intentions

are never enough. “Zeal without knowledge” quickly leads downhill. Our ability to do good, to better this world, to love people around us, is built on one foundation: how well do we know God?

“I will send a famine into the land . . . [a famine] of hearing the word of the Lord” (Amos 8.11). Their hearts were clogged up. A whole nation lost its ability to שָׁמָע (šhāma). This Hebrew word is used throughout the Scriptures to describe a kind of attentiveness and obedience. Adam and Eve, in their primal state, “heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden.” Untinged by sin, they could still šhāma. In Isaiah, God calls the whole earth to return to a state of šhāma, or listening. “Come near, ye nations, to *hear*; and hearken, ye people: let the earth *hear*, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it” (34:1). The Israelites lost their ability to hear God. Their society fell into delusion and madness.

Even in this busy world, we have everything we need to heal.

What caused this? Amos laid three charges on the Israelites: decadence, idolatry, and sexual immorality. So where does this leave us today, in mainstream American culture? We need to walk very carefully. Writing in the late-nineteenth century, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov warned the Christian people about the fragile state of their culture. It was just shy of the Bolshevik revolution. “Apostasy is permitted by God – do not attempt to stop it with your powerless hand. Flee from it yourself, protect yourself from it; that is enough for you to do. Learn to know the spirit of the age, study it, so whenever possible you will be able to avoid its influence Those who are being saved must understand this and make use of the time given them for salvation.”

We see the same signs of trouble in America today, which haunted the Israelites in Jeroboam’s time and in 19th-century Russia. Decadence, idolatry, and sexual immorality are the norm. Apostasy is everywhere. Our whole civilization has lost the ability to *hear*. We are caught up in a famine of delusion, all of us, to varying degrees. Where do we turn? In our Gospel today, just after warning about delusion, our

Lord offers a wonderful promise. We are not alone. He will send us the Comforter.

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth Ask and you will receive” (John 15:26; 16:14, 24).

The Church uses a word to describe the path to sanity: *hesychia*. It means “stillness.” St. Paisios used to talk a good deal about the noise, distractions, and busyness of modern life. He considered it our greatest calamity. Far more dangerous than nuclear weapons and foreign invaders, the noise in modern life is our foremost threat. Stillness is the doorway to healing. The delusion, the anger, the problems of our world – they are a menacing giant. But stillness is the tiny stone in King David’s sling. Wherever we are, we can retune our hearts to God, by learning stillness.

“Silence greatly helps in spiritual life,” St. Paisios taught. “It is good for [you] to practice silence for about an hour a day . . . to purify [your]

heart. It is very good if there is a quiet room in the house which gives the feeling of a monastic cell The soul warms up and the mind is transported to the spiritual realm Rejoice if [you have] ten minutes for prayer, or even two minutes to read something [Pursue Silence] to drive away distractions.”

Even in this busy world, we have everything we need to heal. Even with all our personal inadequacies and our deep-rooted sin, even in all the craziness and delusion, the spiritual famine of our time, we can become again like Adam and Eve, walking in the coolness of the evening with God. We can learn to *hear*.

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth Ask and you will receive” (John 15:26; 16:14, 24). The Holy Spirit is with us. He is given to us freely, and he can lead us to truth. In stillness and quiet, our hearts can tune in to God’s voice and start to heal.

WELCOMING AND BECOMING THE BLESSED

Dr. Tammy Bachrach
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I WAS ASKED TO SPEAK AT THE WESTERN RITE VICARIATE CONFERENCE AT MY HOME PARISH, ST. MICHAEL ORTHODOX CHURCH IN WHITTIER, CALIFORNIA. FATHER JOHN FENTON ASKED ME FOR A TITLE THAT REFLECTED THE TOPIC WE HAD AGREED UPON. I SETTLED ON ONE THAT I FELT CONVEYED MEANING TO THOSE WHO MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN LISTENING TO THE PRESENTATION: "MINISTERING TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS." IT DID CONVEY MEANING TO THE PARTICIPANTS, BUT IT ALSO REFLECTED THE CHALLENGE OF HOW WE ARE TO THINK TODAY ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER MARGINALIZED GROUPS. SO I HAD TO ADMIT THAT THE TITLE NEEDED TO BE REPLACED.

Who exactly are "special populations"? What does that mean? Some may understand the meaning of *special* as having to do with "special education," or ministering to those with disabilities. This was part of my intention. I was a special education teacher for twenty years. I am now an Associate Professor of Special Education, teaching future general and special education teachers. I believe that God has given me experience and expertise that can help parishes welcome those with disabilities.

Special may also convey the meaning of "unique," or somehow outside the dominant culture. This was also my intent. It is my heart's desire that we welcome those who might be considered outsiders in our church. This might include

- someone who obviously has never set foot in an Orthodox church;
- a homeless old man;
- a scary looking, "punked-out" teenager whom we fear might negatively influence our youth;
- a woman who is struggling with addiction;
- a loud and rambunctious 8-year-old who disrupts the mass; or
- your future self, living with a disability resulting from age or accident.

Yes, these, and others like them, are the people meant by the title.

I believe that most Orthodox Christians seek to be more and more Christ-like, but what does that mean in the context of relating to people who are "not like us"?

Written on the courtyard wall of St. Michael Orthodox Church are the words "Welcome all as Christ." Father John has pointed out that this phrase has two meanings. The first is that we are to welcome all as Christ would. Ephesians 5:1–2 states: "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." The second meaning is that we should welcome all as we would welcome Christ: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine" – the hungry, those without clothes, the imprisoned and the ill – "you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).



Consider whether this is the common practice of your parish. Do you welcome the person just released from prison; the person who doesn't smell very good; or one who is visibly ill (physically, or mentally)? Our Savior's words are very clear: When you welcome those who Christ described, you are blessed and will inherit God's kingdom.

So what should I make the title? The term *special* emphasizes the difference between us: the emphasis is not on our common humanity and our common need for the Savior, but on his otherness. When I categorize her, I may fail to see her personality and gifts. Instead, I may focus on her need or "problem," without recognizing that, in God's eyes, we have a very similar problem, limitation, or lack of ability.

Perhaps *underserved* would be a better term. I don't think we have yet arrived at the place of genuine Christlike welcome to everyone who walks in the door. We have yet to reach out to the those on the margins of society, or those with obvious disabilities, and invite them in as Christ would have us do. Many studies have found that people with disabilities have fewer opportunities to attend a church, and often report feeling unwelcome. Attitudinal barriers exist that prevent them from feeling like they belong. The architectural features of a church may limit access (Reynolds, 2008; Yong,

2011). Few seminaries offer courses that describe the experiences of people with disabilities or their families, and pastors and priests report feeling under-prepared in this area (Annandale and Carter, 2014).

But the words *underserved* and the phrase *ministering to* are also limiting. Yes, Christ called us to aid the poor, the imprisoned and the ill, and we should obey that commandment.

We also need to be careful, however, not to take pride in our position as "the giver." Instead, we should see that God can and does use disability and those who have been marginalized to help save us and to meet our needs.

I believe that we want our church to be filled with those who are blessed by God. Who comes to mind when we consider someone who is blessed? Within our culture, to be blessed often means to have good fortune, wealth, a desired outcome, or comfort. Christ tells us, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). The blessed are those who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers, and who are persecuted. Notice how different Christ's message is from that of the secular world.

The true meaning of *blessed* is to be made holy.

Christ constantly turns the wisdom of our culture on its head. St. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 1: "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" He goes on to tell us that "God chose the

foolish things of the world to confound the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong. He chose the lowly and despised things of the world, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). Our attitude then should be one of loving obedience, and not pride.

If we are to welcome them as Christ did, and do what He calls us to do, we are going to have to step out of our comfort zone, talk to those whom we assume are “not like us,” and become comfortable with people who initially make us uncomfortable. We are going to have to risk looking people in the eye, feeling awkward, maybe being inconvenienced.

Let me share a story from my own experience. I grew up in a family where I was the only person not con-

was sure I was going to say or do the wrong thing. I knew she used a cane, but wasn’t sure how she would navigate the text, the restaurant, the meal. Eventually, after much fretting, I figured out that I had to ask her. I had to be open, admit my ignorance, and seek her guidance. She taught me, and I learned. We became very close friends.

Most people think that to welcome people with disabilities into the church; they have to develop some special expertise or program. We may fall into the erroneous idea that we, the “able-bodied,” out of the goodness of our hearts, are going to help the person in need. I would encourage you not to set up a special and separate ministry for people with disabilities or other groups. Their needs are not homogeneous, and segregation is not belonging. Rather, I would encourage you to see each person whom God leads to your church

All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here • All are welcome here

sidered disabled. My parents and only brother each have learning difficulties of various degrees.

Their historic, formal labels included *learning disabled, mentally retarded, and intellectually disabled*.

To me, as a child, those labels had no meaning. They were Mom, Dad, and Tim. We were an ordinary, boring family. I had no fear or discomfort with people who learned at a different speed or who had intellectual limitations beyond my own. Probably, as a result, I became a pretty good special-education teacher. As an adult, at the local church I attended, we were encouraged to read and discuss a discipleship book with another member of the church. Melanie, a woman about my age, invited me to read through the book with her. Melanie was intelligent, an attorney, and a godly woman. She was also blind. I accepted her invitation to meet weekly at a coffee shop for discipleship, but internally I was scared and uncomfortable. Despite my background, I had no expertise in assisting someone who was blind. I

as an individual. Get to know him or her. Talk with him, share with her, and listen. Ask, and let him or her tell you how you can best accommodate their worship. *Develop a relationship, not a program.* You will not only become aware of their needs, but also of their gifts.

As a teacher, I know that information slips away unless you put words into action fairly quickly. So far, my focus has been to address the heart, and why we should want to have those who are considered marginalized with us in our parishes. If our parishes don’t represent the diversity of people found in our communities, there is work to be done. Assuming we are so motivated, where do we start? How can we proactively prepare to meet the wider range of people in our churches?

- 1. Pray that God will increase your ability to love unconditionally, connect with all types of people, and give you the courage to reach out to those who are marginalized in our community.

2. Invite people.
3. Commit yourself to getting to know people, and ask how you might make it easier for them to participate in all aspects of the church.
4. Identify any potential architectural barriers in your church.
5. Be willing to be creative and flexible to meet people's needs. This may require gathering some new knowledge or resources. (See the resources below. For those only available online, see the online version of this article in *The Word* on the Archdiocesan website.)
6. Identify a point person in your parish to gather needed information and educate others, but don't relinquish the role of welcoming and including others to that person or persons alone.
7. Look for ways to allow everyone to serve in some role in your church.

I encourage you to seek out the blessings that come from the fullness of all God's people in your church, sitting next to you, and teaching you. If someone makes you uncomfortable, lean in. Seek to know them; ask them how your church can meet their unique needs; and be open to how they will teach and minister to you. If we do this, our parishes will be blessed.

Further resources:

Bachrach, T. Creating Welcoming Inclusive Faith Communities. (Powerpoint).

Carter, E. The Absence of Asterisks: The Inclusive Church and Children with Disabilities. Congregation Assessment Survey.

Faithtree, A Step by Step Guide to Making Your Parish More Disability-Friendly.

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, "Fully Human: Toward Full Participation of People with Disabilities, A Resource List."

Howell, E., et al. Parents' Perspectives on the Participation of Their Children with Autism in Sunday School.

Kinard, Summer. *Of Such is the Kingdom: A Practical Theology of Disability*. (See our bookstore.)

Masters, A. "An Opportunity for Charity? A Catholic Tradition in Understanding Disability and Its Impact on Ministry," *Journal of Disability & Religion*.

Orthodox Church of America, "Disability and Communion."

Riggle, C. "Disability in the Orthodox Parish: A Call to Love."

Reynolds, T. (2008) *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press.

Erik W. Carter, Elizabeth E. Biggs, and Thomas L. Boehm, "Being Present versus Having a Presence: Dimensions of Belonging for Young People with Disabilities and Their Families," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 128.

Naomi H. Annandale and Erik W. Carter, "Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study," *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 92.

Amos Yong, "Disability from the Margins to the Center: Hospitality and Inclusion in the Church," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15, no. 4 (November 2011): 340.

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WHAT MAKES EVANGELISM SO DIFFICULT?

Deacon Raphael Abrahams



THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD WAS A SECRET SYSTEM OF TRAILS AND SAFE HOUSES FOR GROUPS OF SLAVES ESCAPING ANTEBELLUM AMERICA. THEIR GUIDE WAS CALLED A "CONDUCTOR." MOST CONDUCTORS ARE UNKNOWN, EXCEPT TO THOSE THEY LED TO FREEDOM. ONE WELL-KNOWN CONDUCTOR WAS HARRIET TUBMAN. IN 2030 HER IMAGE IS EXPECTED TO REPLACE ANDREW JACKSON'S ON THE \$20 BILL.

Evangelists are like the conductors of the Underground Railroad. We help slaves of sin, the world, and sinister spiritual forces find their way to freedom. We bring them to a place of safety and healing – the Church.

In some places of the world, evangelists risk their lives to speak about Christ. In North America we are free to share the gospel. Yet most Christians have a fear of evangelism. What is the source of this fear? Is it a bad evangelistic experience? The worst example I've seen – and on more than one occasion – is a man standing on a street corner with a bullhorn telling passers-by that they are going to hell.

Or is the source of this fear having no training at all? Eight years ago I began development of an online training course for Orthodox Christians. I launched it in July 2022. I call it Evangelist Basic Training or EBT. I teach the roles and goals of the Orthodox evangelist. One important goal is to feel comfortable and natural talking about Jesus and our faith. Many have the idea that evangelism is somebody else's job. Sorry, it's every believer's job. No bullhorns, knocking on doors, arguing, or any special theological knowledge is needed to be an effective evangelist.

Why bother with evangelism?

We should evangelize because Jesus commanded it. He taught His disciples to be fishers of men. He sent them to proclaim His good news. An evangelist is a Christian who tells others about Jesus. In addition to proclaiming the gospel, He took it a step further. He said to make disciples. But why does it have such a negative perception with so many? I see evangelism as a positive thing. And why not? Isn't it the sharing of good news?

What is that good news?

- God loves all of mankind.
- Jesus was God in the flesh.
- He taught us how to live.
- He died on a cross.
- After burial, He rose again, conquering death, and ascended into heaven.
- Jesus made it possible for all mankind to be adopted by God and brought into His heavenly kingdom as His children.

A big part of evangelism is friendly conversations that generate curiosity. It gets people interested, then comfortable enough to ask questions about our faith. It's assisting the Holy Spirit to nudge people to Christ and the Orthodox Church.

Evangelism goes quite a way back.

We don't think of it as such, but God's prophets were evangelists. They warned Israel. Sometimes

Throughout the centuries – without formulas, tracts, and social media – evangelists successfully led people to Christ. In spite of this achievement, we know little about most of those who contributed to its success. Like the brave conductors of the Underground Railroad.

Many say Western Civilization is in spiritual decline

It would certainly seem so. If there was a Golden Age of Christianity in America, it was from 1945 – 1985. According to Gallup polling, 71–73% of Americans belonged to a church at that time. Today, Gallup reports that 47% of Americans are members of a church. They expect church membership will decline more. The three most recent dramatic religious changes are:

- Thirty years ago, one in four Americans were Roman Catholic. Now, for every person who becomes Catholic, six leave.
- Today, 25% of Americans identify as a “None.”

Many have the idea that evangelism is somebody else's job. Sorry, it's every believer's job. No bullhorns, knocking on doors, arguing, or any special theological knowledge is needed to be an effective evangelist.

they warned others, such as the people of Nineveh, and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It wasn't all warning. Part of their message was to proclaim how much God loves them.

John the Baptist, the greatest prophet, warned Israel to prepare for the imminent arrival of the Messiah. Instead of sending prophets to warn, the priority for the Church is to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The Acts of the Apostles gives us a sense of how evangelism went during the first 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus. You might notice there is no formula. That's right: there are no exact instructions on how to do it. Isn't that interesting?

Acts 17 describes how evangelism works best: *you customize it*. In Athens, St. Paul used Scripture to reason with the Jews. He didn't do that with the Greeks. He used their idol of the unknown god to explain who Jesus was. He also met with people in marketplaces and homes. He spoke with them. He met them where they were.

These are people who claim to be unaffiliated with any religious institution. The term *None* comes from the place on forms asking for a religious preference. *None* is one of the choices.

- According to Barna Group, a polling company, 70% of children who leave home for college will return without their faith. Southern Baptist pastor Voddie Baucham says it this way: “We cannot continue to send our children to Caesar for their education and be surprised when they come home as Romans.”

In spite of a spiritual decline in the West, Christianity is surging in Africa and China. Some say that by the year 2030 China will have so many believers it will qualify as a Christian nation even though it's officially atheist.

Despite our nation's decline, there is an increased interest in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Fr. Chad Hatfield, President of St. Vladimir's Seminary, observed that “catechumens are reading themselves

into the Orthodox Church.”

Wait! Reading themselves into the Orthodox Church? This means that despite those ugly statistics I mentioned, many are very interested in following Christ in the Orthodox Church! What Jesus said to His disciples applies to us today, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37).

You might be thinking, “Oh, Deacon, I could never be an evangelist.”

Don’t be so hard on yourself. You learned how to talk before you went to school. You learned how to work before you had a full-time job. Every time you get a new cellphone, you have to learn how to use it. You learn stuff all the time.

Think of all those people reading themselves into the Orthodox Church. Think how many more would find God if we were *speaking* them into our faith. Conversation is the primary tool of the evangelist. You can do evangelism. The immediate problem is you don’t know how. That’s all right. I can help with that. I can even teach you how to talk comfortably with strangers about Christ. In the meantime, here are three easy-peasy evangelistic tips.

Holiday evangelism

St. Patrick’s Day will come early in 2024. St. Patrick was a very holy man. Would he be angered to see his life celebrated as a debauched, green-beer-guzzling guy portrayed in parades?

In the weeks preceding March 17, many offices will be decorated with shamrocks, pots of gold, and leprechauns. This is a time you can talk about who St. Patrick really was in ordinary, seasonal conversations.

First, brush up on him so you can confidently share a story or two about him. An Internet search should be sufficient. People love hearing stories and will love hearing about the real St. Patrick.

Second, start a conversation from which you can share your stories. You’ll know when to ask something like, “Hey, I like your decorations. Do you know who St. Patrick really was?” Or, “Did you know St. Patrick was a real person?” Tie his story with what he was all about: Jesus!

When people say all paths lead to the same place, it’s baloney.

Those who believe this don’t realize that the final destination of other faiths is not the same as that of a Christian. They haven’t done their research. The following are oversimplified descriptions.

In each sect of Buddhism, Nirvana means something different. However, they all center on no more suffering, no more reincarnation, and achievement of spiritual emptiness. Nirvana seems to be a place of nothing, like what an atheist expects in death. Some say Buddhism is a philosophy, not a religion.

To a Muslim, Paradise is a place for those whose good works outweigh their bad as determined in the Koran. All inhabitants will be married, and their every desire will be served. It’s all about you.

To Hindus, Moksha is an escape from the cycle of death and rebirth. When this happens you are no longer you, but become Brahman, part of the universe.

Christians get to be with the one true God. Our Creator wants and loves us. He adopts us as family. Heaven is for those who accept the free gift of eternal life from the Messiah. This gift has several requirements: you must believe, accept, and follow Christ. It’s why Jesus said He is the Way.

A good question for those who advocate ‘we’re all going to the same place’ is, “Which path to heaven do you follow?” Responses vary but you will mostly encounter these two.

- “By being a good person.” Politely and humbly ask, “Good? By whose standards? Yours or God’s?” After a conversation about this ensues, you may add this, “The rules of Jesus are pretty simple. I’d love to share them with you.”
- “I’m Hindu” (or some other religion). Say this: “Tell me what you believe will happen to your life after death.” Then ask what living with a loving God for eternity would mean to them.

Evangelists are gardeners

Jesus said he would turn his disciples into fishers of men, but he also used gardening as an example. Some evangelists are not good gardeners. They have a good message – the gospel – but many don’t follow basic gardening principles. There are four stages to tending an evangelistic garden.

First, the soil has to be cultivated before it can accept a seed. You can’t plant anything in dirt as hard or sterile as cement. A person with a hard heart cannot understand the gospel. They have to be prepared to accept the seed of the gospel. Second, after the heart has been cultivated you can plant seeds.



Deacon Raphael Abrahams of St. George Church of Phoenix, Arizona.

They take time to germinate. Have patience. Third, help those seeds grow. An evangelist knows when to water, fertilize, or weed for fruitful growth to occur. This means asking questions as well as answering them. Finally, the harvest. At some point a seed grows into an inquirer. The evangelist can take him or her to Divine Liturgy – and to meet his or her priest. Adequately prepared, this person will likely become a catechumen.

Realizing which stage a person is in will help you know what to say and ask. The journey to Christ can be a long process. It includes many interesting conversations, some short, some long. Don't be surprised if you find yourself watering a seed another evangelist planted. The Holy Spirit directs souls to Christ. We get to help. How great is that?

Evangelism is an exciting adventure

If you like people, you'll love evangelism. People have so many different opinions and questions

about God. It's fun talking with them about their beliefs. Sometimes it's hard to know what to say. You don't have to know every answer. I teach people how to handle difficult questions. The process is surprisingly simple.

The Antiochian Church is rooted in first-century evangelism. Our church sent out Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and many more evangelists. Read of their exciting adventures in the Book of Acts. They made a great impact on the Western World. Is there any reason our Church can't become the powerhouse of evangelism we once were? It just takes a little of the right kind of training. Are you up for it?

Deacon Raphael Abrahams
St. George Church, Phoenix, Arizona
Deacon Raphael writes about evangelism and other topics for Orthodox Christians on his website, DesertDeacon.com. The Abrahams are parents of three children, and proud grandparents to two granddaughters.

GLASSES AND SWEATERS, REASON AND LOVE: A REFLECTION ON MARY

Fr. John Oliver



Let's begin in an ancient time of desert and uneasy borders, and working the land to survive. We've been through a lot. Our first king – Saul – has begun to decline, as if he's going mad. He's always been inconsistent: sure, he kept us safe from the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Amalekites, but he's also been brutal, disobedient to God, and fiercely jealous.

King Saul: By Ernst Josephson - Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=33968024>

Of whom is Saul jealous? David, who has his own imperfections: sure, he conquered Jerusalem and gave it to us as our own city, but he also has a bloodthirsty streak that has not gone unnoticed by the Lord. Building a temple, then, is a task that will be given not to a man of violence but to a man of peace.

King David: By Gerard van Honthorst - dQFEnS-BuziiUpQ at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=110608360>

Enter Solomon, David's son. In the fourth year of his reign, the conditions are finally right to erect a house of

King Solomon



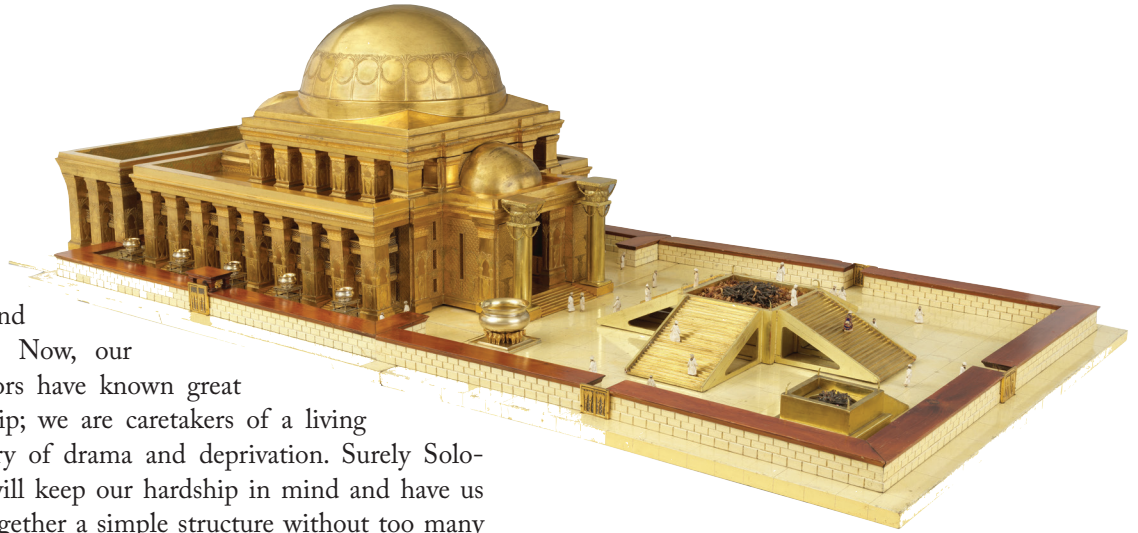
wor-
ship and
liturgy. Now, our

ancestors have known great hardship; we are caretakers of a living memory of drama and deprivation. Surely Solomon will keep our hardship in mind and have us toss together a simple structure without too many demands on our thin resources.

Hardly. It will be ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, forty-five feet high; the porch alone will be thirty feet wide and fifteen feet deep. There will be huge spaces for windows. The finest cedar and stone in all the land will be used. There will be winding staircases adorned in gold and jewels and precious stones. This Temple will be neither simple, nor cheap. Solomon will call up 30,000 laborers just to harvest the timber from Lebanon, and another 150,000 just to quarry and transport the stone. This is a massive undertaking for a modest people. Can we afford a Temple like this? Even if we could, can we build a Temple like this? This is not *reasonable*.

Yet, it somehow appeals to the *heart*, and the heart is the only place where a beautiful house of worship like this makes sense to us poor peasants. While the head is stuck in details, the heart is stirring with wonder.

This time of year, we celebrate the entrance of the child Mary into the Temple where, for the next dozen years or so, she will be formed daily by the prayers and psalms and hymns and incense and liturgies within. Many of us come from Christian confessions that aren't sure what to do with Mary – for some, she's almost a co-redeemer to be worshipped; for others, she's rather a tool to be forgotten.



Notice how the fragrance of Mary rises from the pages of our Bibles:

- Genesis 28: as the angelic ladder that Jacob beholds bridging heaven and earth, for she will become the bridge whereby the heavenly God comes to dwell on earth;
- Exodus 16: as the golden dish of Moses that holds the precious manna, for she will hold within her the Bread of Life;
- Numbers 17: as the staff of Aaron that blossoms forth a bud that has no seed, for she will blossom forth the God-Man without seed;
- Psalm 45: as the “queen arrayed in a robe of gold,” for she will clothe herself in the golden robe of humility and become the physical “palace” for the King;
- Ezekiel 44: as the gate through which the King passed, as the gate then closed off to every other man, foreshadowing the ever-virginity of her who became the Gate through which God passed into our world, the gate then closed off forever.

Those details matter because the head needs to be satisfied. We desire evidence that Mary is worthy of the attention the Church gives to her – not too much, but not too little.

But what if the head – that essential but often frosty faculty of reason – is not where our experiential understanding of Mary will unfold? What if, as the head is stuck in details, the heart stirs with wonder? After all, the heart was the only place where

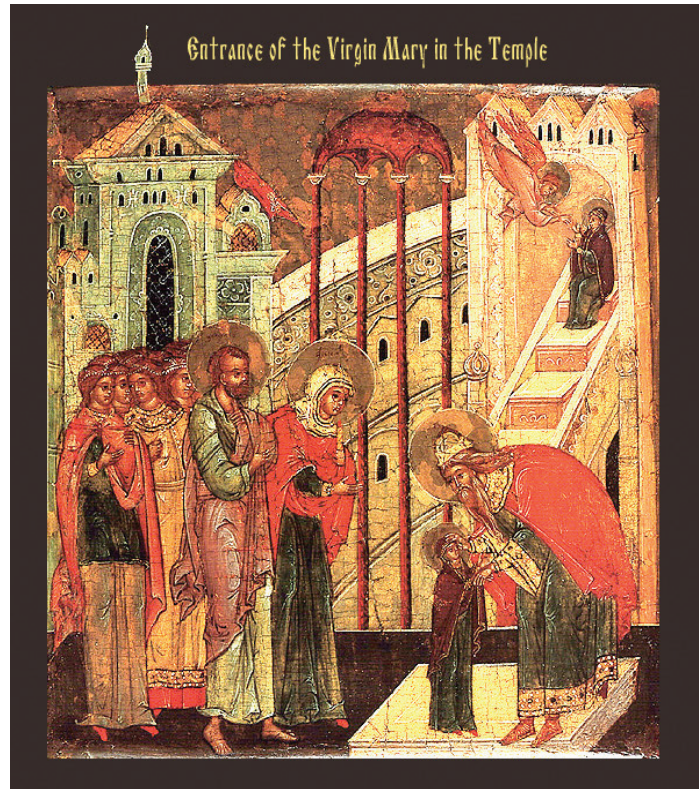
Solomon's beautiful house of worship made sense to us poor peasants. Maybe it's the only place where the mother of Jesus, and all the mysteries of Christian experience, will make sense, too.

There once was a priest from Philadelphia whose enduring faithfulness made him beloved by many. His funeral was attended by his bishop and priests and deacons and many men, women, and children who came to pay their respects.

As many slowly ambled by his casket, they looked down to see him wearing glasses. Strange, right? Illogical. Most prominent on his corpse was the one item it didn't need. Yet, all who knew him knew those familiar gold round-rimmed glasses that fit his face so well, as if holding a permanent place on his countenance and his character.

There once was a lady from North Dakota whose hospitality made her beloved by many. When she died at home, she was surrounded by family who helped tenderly move her to the ambulance in the driveway, on its way to the funeral home. As the gurney was rolling from the home onto the driveway, her daughter panicked slightly. Wait, she said to the paramedics. She ran back inside and grabbed her mother's sweater. "Mom will be cold," she thought. Strange, right? Illogical. Most prominent on her corpse was the one item it didn't need. Yet, those who knew her also knew of her warm and comfortable sweaters that fit her slender shoulders and fell just right — essential for a respectable woman from the upper Midwest.

The Christian is committed to absolute truths, revealed doctrine, the subjection of emotion to revelation, and the designs of God as described in Holy Scripture. We call this *reality*. It can be as confusing and demanding as constructing a massive temple in a desert, but we are also a people who want to be inspired. We want to know that



we belong to something wonderful and meaningful. We yearn to feel that our lives are tucked inside a sweeping love story between a personal Creator and an eager creation. This is what we build the Temple *for*.

So what about Mary, this Birthgiver of God in the flesh? What of the other deep, yet elusive mysteries of this Christian experience? The details matter, but there are just some questions that only love can answer.



ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

ORDAINED

BIRDSALL, Deacon Joshua, to the holy priesthood by Metropolitan SABA on January 7, 2024, at St. Mary Church, Bayridge, New York. He is in his final year at St. Vladimir’s Seminary.

COX, Deacon Constantine (Donald), to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan SABA on October 1, 2023, at Ss. Constantine & Helen Church, Carrollton, Texas.

HADDY, Deacon Elias, to the holy priesthood by Bishop NICHOLAS on October 14, 2023, at St. Nicholas Church, Pinellas Park, Florida. He was appointed Pastor of St. Elias the Tishbite Mission, Land O’Lakes, Florida, effective October 15, 2023.

HANNA, Deacon Raphael (Gilbert), to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan SABA on October 14, 2023, at the Balamand Monastery, Lebanon.

LIPSCOMB, Cornelius, to the holy diaconate by Bishop NICHOLAS on October 14, 2023, at St. Nicholas Church, Pinellas Park, Florida. He is attached to the parish.

SAMORE, Peter, to the holy diaconate by Patriarch JOHN X on July 23, 2023, at the Archdiocese Convention in Phoenix, Arizona. He is assigned to St. George Church in Phoenix.

RETIRED

TANGUAY, Fr. Joseph, effective January 8, 2024.

TRANSFERRED

BEAN, Deacon John, is attached to St. Xenia Church, Payson, Utah, effective August 16, 2023.

BOURASSA, Deacon Jacob, is assigned as Pastoral Assistant at St. Nicholas Church, Spokane, Washington, effective December 23, 2023.

CORONEL, Fr. Gabriel, is assigned as Second Priest of St. George Church, Cicero, Illinois, effective July 11, 2023.

COX, Fr. Peter, is assigned as Pastor of St. Mary of Egypt Church, Greenwood, Indiana, effective January 1, 2024.

DIBS, Deacon John, is attached to St. Timothy Church, Fairfield, California, effective October 1, 2023.

O’GRADY, Fr. Patrick, is assigned as Pastor of St. Gabriel Church, Angels Camp, California, effective January 8, 2024.

TUBBS, Deacon Michael, is attached to Christ the Savior Church, Spokane Valley, Washington, effective December 20, 2023.

DECEASED

VLAS, Deacon Sergiu (“Chris”) on November 20, 2023, 50 years

of age. Deacon Sergiu was a member of St. Ananias Church of Evansville, Indiana. He was born March 20, 1973, in Bucharest, Romania, to Paul Vlas and Marilena (Popescu) Vlas. He earned his Master’s Degree in Computer Science from Indiana University. He was a founding member of St. Ananias Church, where he loved serving the needs of the congregation. He worked as a Senior Software Engineer for Yahoo. He loved playing soccer in his younger years, and later, enjoyed watching games. He also enjoyed gardening and traveling.

Deacon Sergiu is survived by his parents, Paul and Marilena Vlas; his loving wife of 22 years, Oana Popescu-Sandu; daughters, Alexandra Vlas and Clara Vlas; brother, Radu Vlas (Cristina); and niece, Margaret Vlas.

ELAC, Isabel, on January 8, 2024. Born on September 24, 1937, in Chile, she is perhaps best remembered as a member and leader of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America since its inception in 1973. Isabel had served the organization in every office at the parish level and several offices at the regional-diocesan levels, including as President in the Western Region from 1979–81. Isabel had the distinction of being the first president of the North Ameri-

can Board (NAB) to be elected “at large” in 1987. (Previously, the presidency rotated among the regions/dioceses.) She worked with women from all corners of the Archdiocese. Her meetings included workshops and business meetings, and she recruited coordinators with new ideas and initiatives. The 50th Anniversary booklet of the Antiochian Women (2023) recalled that she maintained some of the traditional programs and approaches established by her predecessors, but also pushed the envelope by including discussions on difficult moral issues under the leadership of the religious coordinator. Isabel also motivated the chapters at parishes to sponsor a child through the Children’s Relief Fund. During her tenure, chapters also redoubled their efforts to raise funds for St. George Hospital in war-torn Beirut, Lebanon. After serving as NAB President, Isabel returned as Treasurer ten years later. She was the parliamentarian at a New York meeting because of her wealth of institutional knowledge and experience. Her NAB colleagues always looked forward to the bay leaves that she had picked from the tree in her home in Southern California, which were dried and presented in plastic bags to those who wished to have some. Everyone looked forward to seeing and visiting “Aunt Isabel” at the dozens of Parish Life Conferences and Archdiocese Conventions that she attended in her lifetime. Isabel also devoted her life to St. Nicholas Cathedral in

Los Angeles, her home parish, where she was active in Junior and Senior SOYO, served on the parish council and the altar society, worked on staff of Camp St. Nicholas in its early years, served as vice chairwoman of the 2001 Archdiocese Convention, ran the cathedral bookstore with her late sister, Ms. Bernadette Elac Krank, worked with the cathedral’s FOCUS outreach, and fulfilled a New York needs her community had. Isabel was the last surviving member of the original choir from when the cathedral opened in 1950. The choir loft was co-named in her honor at the St. Nicholas Day celebrations in 2022. Isabel was also an active member (dame) of The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

Kh. Dina BAHOU 53, on Jan. 2, 2024. Her passing comes about 40 days after the passing of her daughter, Eliana Maria Bahou, 25, into eternal life.

Kh. Dina labored faithfully in our Lord’s vineyard next to her husband, Fr. Ant New York Bahou, at Ss. Constantine and Helen Church of Carrollton, Texas (2001-13) and St. George Church of San Diego, Calif. (2013-present). Together, they raised two children, Eliana and Subdn. Elias. She was born April 21, 1970, in Aleppo, Syria and married Fr. Ant New York on June 8, 1991. Kh. Dina held a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics, taught high school in Dallas and San Diego, and had been working for Sharp Healthcare as a senior analyst. Fr. Ant New York recalls Kh. Dina

as a dedicated wife and a fierce mother, adding that her family and her Orthodox faith were everything to her. The Antiochian Women of St. George Church praised Kh. Dina as a virtuous and faithful wife, mother, sister, and friend to everyone around her, especially to the ladies of the church.

Kh. Sally (“Hannah”) Smart HOWELL after a year-long battle with cancer and then five weeks in hospice, on Dec. 26, 2023. Her husband of 47 years, Fr. Stephen Howell, and two of their three children were by her side. Kh. Sally was born in Bozeman, Mont. on Nov. 21, 1953. The Smart family moved to Sacramento, Calif. in 1963, and she lived there for the remaining years of her life.

In childhood, Kh. Sally attended Hope United Methodist Church. There, in the sweet innocence of youth, she met Jeff (the future Fr. Stephen Howell). Aside from being infatuated with her future husband, Sally played the piano and flute, was part of the youth group, square danced, and participated in many other activities. Sally attended John F. Kennedy High School and was a member of the marching band. She also was a leader in the Campus Crusade for Christ High School Ministry. In 1976, Jeff and Sally were married, settling in South Sacramento where they lived for their entire married life. They raised three children: Shelly, Jonathan and Fr. Matthew. Sally supported their youth sports as a scorekeeper,

registrar, and devoted team mom. She graduated from Sacramento State University in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in child development. While there, Kh. Sally continued in Campus Crusade for Christ along with maNew York other activities. Sally came from a family of educators. Following college graduation, she taught as a first, second or third grade teacher at three schools, where her impact extended far beyond the classroom. Fr. Stephen notes that, "Sally always loved teaching young children. She was the underdogs' advocate and caretaker." In the early 1980s, Sally and Jeff's spiritual journey led them into the Evangelical Orthodox Church and eventually into the Antiochian Archdiocese in 1987, when they received their patron saints of Stephen and Hannah. The Howell family faithfully served St. Athanasius Church in Sacramento, where Fr. Stephen served as a deacon for 20 years until his ordination to the holy priesthood in 2007. He retired as the church's pastor earlier this year. Kh. Sally supported him throughout his ministry.

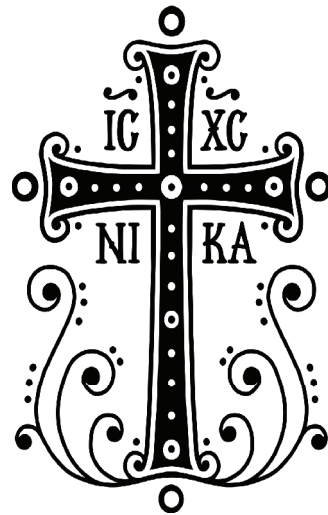
Serving and loving Christ were the primary focus for Kh. Sally which permeated all aspects of her life. She would wake up at 6:00 a.m. every day for prayer and devotions, reading a chapter of Proverbs every day, in addition to other scripture readings. She was involved in music, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School and bible studies. She was director of the annual Christmas program; her last appearance at

church was for the 2022 Christmas program. After her retirement from teaching, Kh. Sally volunteered at Archangel Michael Food Closet in Sacramento, stayed in close contact with friends, and helped care for her grandchildren. She loved God with all of her heart, soul, mind and strength, and that love extended to her family and friends

until the end of her life. Her final message to all who loved her is: Know God, Love God, Serve God. Kh. Sally is survived by her husband, Fr. Stephen Jeffrey Howell, her children Shelly (Robert), Jonathan (Laurie), and Fr. Matthew (Anastasia), ten grandchildren, her sister Sherry Reeve, and numerous cousins, nieces, nephews, and godchildren.

Available from Archdiocese Bookstore at Antiochian Village

THE LITURGIKON



THE BOOK OF DIVINE SERVICES
FOR THE PRIEST AND DEACON

FOURTH EDITION

ARCH WEEK: “BRIDGING THE GAP” FOR OUR YOUTH

Arch 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 offering evening programs, sports, ropes course activities, and cabin times. The program also has a capstone experience 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 30 – July 7, 2024, 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.



Arch Week 2024

Counselor



Summer Camp 2024

Staff / CIT / Volunteer

Staff Applications are closed, late applications will be considered late.



AV Internship

2024 – 2025

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

ON THE SACRAMENT OF LISTENING

Dr. Philip Mamalakis

*Father Joseph Allen Memorial
Lecture*

The Father Joseph Allen Memorial Fund Lecture series continued on October 21, 2023, with a presentation by Dr. Philip Mamalakis. He spoke on the topic of “The Sacrament of Listening” to an audience at St. Anthony Orthodox Church, Bergenfield, New Jersey, where Fr. Allen served for decades. Dr. Mamalakis is the Associate Professor of Pastoral Care at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. He teaches classes on pastoral care and counseling; marriage; family grief and dying; and mental health. He is a noted author and frequent lecturer throughout the United States and overseas.

Dr. Mamalakis engaged in a lively discussion with people from area Orthodox parishes on the importance of truly listening to others, and its importance in building and strengthening relationships in our lives. He suggested practical exercises to improve one’s listening ability.

The evening also provided fellowship, beginning with Vespers and refreshments.

The event was sponsored by the Father Joseph Allen Memorial Fund (FJMF). The FJMF was created in Father Joe’s memory to provide Orthodox Christian educational opportunities. Father Joe served St. Anthony as its pastor

for 53 years. He was an academic teaching at both Holy Cross and St. Vladimir’s seminaries, the author of many books and articles, a Vicar General of the Antiochian Archdiocese, and inaugural chaplain of the Order of St. Ignatius. Father Joe was a founder and director for many years of the Antiochian House of Studies and St. Stephen’s Course in Applied Orthodox Theology. He was instrumental in realizing St. Anthony’s legacy as among the first pan-Orthodox parishes in the United States.

Display materials related to Father Joe’s diverse ministry and St. Anthony’s history were exhibited as part of the evening program. The FJMF is in the process of developing a Learning and Media Center and Archive at St. Anthony. The first FJMF Lecture was held in October, 2022 with Dr. Gayle Woloschak, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies at Northwestern University, who spoke on Orthodox Bioethics and Pastoral Ministry.



THE JOY OF PARTICIPATION WITH OUR ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

Charmaine E. Darnour

Our Antiochian Women's ministry, founded in 1973 by Metropolitan PHILIP of thrice-blessed memory, has through the years grown into our motto, "A Sisterhood Serving Christ, Through Serving Others." It is a blessing to my life, filled me with much joy, and given me a deeper understanding and respect of the rich heritage and traditions of the women of our Church.

My favorite Kahlil Gibran quote is, "I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I woke and I saw that life is all service. I served and I saw that service is joy."

For many years now, I've been blessed to be very involved in our Antiochian Women's Ministry at both the parish level and that of our Diocese of Los Angeles and the West (DLAW). As of our Archdiocese Convention in Phoenix last July, I have been participating as an officer on the Antiochian Women North American Board. Without a doubt, I can say that it has *all* been a blessing filled with much *joy*.

Joy in the relationships that have grown out of it, and that will enrich my life for the rest of my days.

Joy in the purpose that this work has given to me and my life.

Joy in the countless blessings that have stemmed from this service.

Involvement also provides many opportunities for the women of our ministry:

— To build deep and long-lasting relationships with women who share the same walk of faith, across the generations, and with varied life experiences.

— To seek suggestions and solutions to many of the practical challenges life presents from sisters in Christ who have faced them in their own lives.

— To share Christ and His holy Church while strengthening our own walk with Christ.

Participation gives our women an opportunity to

serve in His holy Church through acts of mercy. They can support both local communities and varied Orthodox ministries that in turn, serve all over the globe. It also gives them the opportunity to growing spiritually, keeping them committed and accountable. The psalmist calls us *all* to "serve the Lord with *gladness*; come before His presence with singing" (Psalm 100:2).

Our parishes are not cookie cutters, and similarly our women's groups in the local parishes are not one-size-fits-all. Our churches and our women's

**"I slept and
I dreamed that
life is all joy.
I woke and
I saw that
life is all service.
I served and
I saw that service
is joy."**

Kahlil Gibran

groups are as diverse as our Lord made us! Nonetheless, involvement is a blessed opportunity for relationships with women whose paths you might not otherwise have crossed. It is a chance to learn from each other, to share wisdom, *and also to share mistakes and lessons learned* with each other. It's an opportunity to seek suggestions and solutions to many of the practical challenges life presents from sisters in Christ who have walked those steps in their own lives.

land, Ohio – would they think?" How amazed would they be with how diverse our Antiochian Archdiocese of North America is today? Glory to God!

Still, we can ask, does the great diversity in our demographics bring challenges? Some might say, "Definitely," but I say, "Perhaps." Perhaps it brings challenges, but only if we are not open to being good "Marthas," and being welcoming and hospitable. Also, we must be open to something else, and this is *very* important: "*My way*" is just that –



Participation with our Antiochian Women in Book Clubs, retreats, Psalter Groups, Akathist prayer groups and more, opens the mind and heart to the diversity within our parishes. We recognize that no two parishes are alike, regardless of their composition. Each has its own flavor and character. I've visited many of our parishes, and when I do, I often looked around and wonder, "What would my grandparents, Sitto and Giddo, who as immigrants from Lebanon worked to build a church in Cleve-

my way – but not by a long shot is it the only way. In both my local parish and my work in the DLAW, I have done things *my way*, and I've seen some things succeed and plenty of things crash and burn. Because we are all blessed with unique gifts, however, it's critical that you realize that you don't have to do things like anyone else. I assure you, I do many, many things differently than my predecessors, and I have no doubt that those serving after me will make changes that work best from their perspective.



Trying new things and new ways to do something is the way we see growth and development.

If we want others to get involved, we must be sure they feel appreciated and be open to their suggestions. Let them try things as they see best. We may learn a better or more feasible way to do something because we are all blessed with unique gifts and talents. Some people will volunteer on their own, others we need to invite and ask to help, directly. You must meet people where they are comfortable. Welcome people and their ideas, that often differ from yours. If we don't, how can we expect them to become involved?

If we want the younger women and new women in our parish families to take on more active roles, then we must provide an environment of acceptance and encouragement. We must acknowledge their contributions and perspectives. You may think, "No one did that for me," but wouldn't it have been meaningful if they had? How much would that have meant to you?

As *Maya Angelou* reminds us, "I've learned that *people will forget* what you said, *people will forget* what you did, but *people will never forget* how you made them feel."

Our Antiochian Women's ministry is continuing to celebrate our 50th anniversary. It has flourished and grown on account of the assorted gifts and talents shared by the trailblazing women of

those early years, and those who picked up the baton after them. This is their legacy! I was blessed to be raised by one of those women. I grew up watching my late mother, Ramona George Darmour, serve with the women of our local parish and then as Midwest President and as Cultural Coordinator with the North American Board. If she was here, she would wholeheartedly share the countless blessings serving and participating brought her. One of the greatest was the deep and lifelong friendships that were born out of this ministry. Indeed, meeting and forming relationships with wonderful, dynamic, and like-minded women, who share the same faith, from all over our Archdiocese, is one of the biggest perks!

Participation leads to greater gratitude and appreciation for what we have in our lives as we work to help those in true need in our parish families, local communities, and Orthodox missions worldwide. I guarantee that as you increase your involvement, your blessings will increase as well. If you are not that involved, consider playing a larger role, so that your joy may be even greater!

Charmaine E. Darmour
Public Relations Director, North American Board,
Antiochian Women

TELEVISION AND THE IMAGES WE VENERATE

Fr. Peter Kavanaugh

My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water—Jeremiah 2:13

We must render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. What, we must ask, belongs to God? Our eyes, our attention, our contemplation belongs to God.

On Holy Theophany, 1950, St. Lawrence of Chernigov passed away. He was a healer and prophet, but best known for the wise counsel he offered Christians struggling in the modern world. One day, as his faithful gathered around him, he was asked about the Antichrist. “Blessed, and thrice-blessed is the man who does not desire, and who will not see the abominable face of the Antichrist.” “How will this all come to pass?” they asked him. “In the holy place, the abomination of desolation . . . the Antichrist will appear, and the whole world will see him at the same time.” “Where is this holy place? In a church?” they persisted. “Not in a church,” St. Lawrence warned. “Not in a church, but in every house. In the corner, where the holy icons now stand and hang, there will stand captivating devices which will delude the people. Many will say, ‘We need to watch and listen to the news.’ And behold, in [these devices] the Antichrist will appear.”

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). God has given us our eyes. Have you ever wondered how marvelous these are? Our eyes open our souls to the wonders of the universe. Think about it. Two tiny spheres in our face allow us to gaze at twinkling stars a thousand light-years away. The whole spectrum of colors in the sky, the shades of blue and gold and auburn, every manner of light and hue in the world passes through our eyes. Not only do they pass through, they change us. They enchant us. They make us wonder. They inspire and shape us. The whole universe can fit into


our tiny hearts, because of these awe-inspiring windows: the eyes.

“Death and destruction are never satisfied, and neither are human eyes” (Proverbs 27:20). The eyes are hungry, just like the stomach. The minute we wake up, the eyes start reaching out to be filled and pleased. They drink up everything possible, like a horse drinking up a stream after a good gallop. Shape, size, texture, color, depth, symbol, all of it, pours down and through these windows into our souls, where it pleases or saddens us, enlivens or depresses, fills us with hope and love, or despair and hate. You could spend all day awestruck at the thought of these little miracles: the eyes.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Matthew 6:22-23).

The eyes are more marvelous still. Hippocrates discovered long ago that our food is our medicine. If we fill our stomachs with junk food, our bodies get sick, bloated, and cancerous. If we fill our stomachs with nutrition, we become strong and energetic. As food is to the stomach, the images we contemplate are to the heart. Think of it. Whatever you spend your time looking at creates the man you become. Whatever you feed your eyes, shapes and makes your soul.

If you look at good, beautiful, and wholesome images, your heart grows and flourishes. If you feed your eyes scenes that are peaceful, still, and harmonious, your heart becomes strong and robust. If you feed your eyes junk food – flashing images, entertainment, consumerism, billboards, polemics and propaganda – your heart shrivels. Even little glances, again and again, poison the heart. One lewd image pops up as an internet ad. Another glance in a television show. You look away and feel righteous



because of your self-control, but you do not turn away from the devices. You stay plugged in, glued to the screen – you are an “adult” after all – and all those little images keep on showing up, keep on flashing before you, and without ever knowing it, you are desensitized. It has seeped into your heart. One tiny sip of poison may not kill you. A hundred tiny sips and it’s game over.

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). What belongs to God? The attention of our heart belongs to God.

We live in an entertainment crazed culture. Indeed, no society in the past has ever been bombarded by such unceasing entertainment as ours. We have to remember, there is no neutral moral ground. In the Book of Isaiah, God laments the lifestyle of His people and destroys Israel because of their luxuries and entertainments. The Church Fathers spend as much time addressing entertainment as they do holy icons. St. John Chrysostom reprimanded the faithful in his days for the time they spent at circuses and races. St. John of Kronstadt urged Christians to avoid worldly pastimes. “Entertainment, cards, dancing, and theaters,” these are things, he said, that turn hearts from God.

I used to cringe at this sort of thing. It sounds so puritanical. We must not go there! We cannot look prudish, or extremist! What a killjoy, a wet blanket, a fusspot (how about that for a nice old-fashioned word). With time, however, I have started wondering. Perhaps they are right. In fact, maybe they are not fusspots after all. Maybe they actually know something about the good life – a life of adoration and leisure.

Worldly entertainments, St. John of Kronstadt teaches, “lull the Christian life to sleep.” Modern men suffer from a great amount of anxiety, he said. They run to entertainment to ease their anxiety, but in the end suffer because of it. “Such means afterwards increase still more the anguish and weariness of their hearts. If, happily, they turn to God, then the burden is removed from their heart.”

It is hard to imagine a life without mesmerizing entertainment and brain-numbing screens. What will we discover? The stars, the sun, the changing leaves, the tiny flowers, the quiet. “When we really let our minds rest contemplatively on a rose in bud, on a child at play, on a divine mystery, we are rested and quickened as though by a dreamless sleep In these silent and receptive moments . . . the soul of man is sometimes visited by an awareness of what holds the world together” (Joseph Pieper).

The Church is not prudish; it is pure. The saints are not bores; they are romantics. They have fallen in love with Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Without screens, without shopping, with entertainment, they have learned to cherish and delight in the gaze “at the beauty of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4).

What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?

No time to stand beneath the boughs, and stare as long as sheep and cows:

No time to see, when woods we pass, where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:

No time to see, in broad daylight, streams full of stars, like skies at night.

– W. H. Davies

WHAT ARE WE PLUGGED INTO?

Fr. Jeremiah Vollman

When the sun's rays touch a rock, the rock begins to shine. When a flame touches an unlit candle, it begins to burn. When a magnet touches a metal object, the object becomes magnetized. When an electric wire touches an ordinary wire, they both become electrified.

All these physical phenomena are only an image, or parable, of spiritual phenomena. All that takes place on the external plane is only an image of what happens on the internal plane. The whole of ephemeral nature is like a dream in relation to internal consciousness, and like a fairytale in terms of intransitory reality. The soul is the consciousness of the body, and God is the consciousness of the soul. When God touches the soul, it is vivified and given sight; when the soul touches the body, it does the same thing. The body receives light, warmth, magnetism and electricity, sight and hearing an movement from the soul.

– St. Nikolai Velimirovich¹

Beloved, we become conformed to that which we prioritize in our lives. We truly do become whatever we unite ourselves to. Whatever it is we “plug into,” this is what we become. We are contingent beings, we have no life in and of ourselves, we are needful. This is important for us to realize. We are in need. This is not, however, the same as having the freedom to say “I need,” which often means, “I desire;” and we’re not only formed by what we see, but defined by *how we see*.

Think about this phrase: “*I need to see Jesus.*” Consider those contemporaries who heard of this man, Jesus, simple, wise, dignified, unpredictable, exceedingly loving, yet a rock upon which hypocrisy shatters, accused by the powers-that-be, performing miracles at nearly every turn.

Wow, had I lived in Jerusalem and heard of such a man, I might say to myself “*I need to see Him, I need to see Jesus.*” This very well may be the case of the crowds we hear of, thronging about, pushing in

upon the man who was a sight to behold, a spectacle to those who “*needed to see Him.*” Yet, though even bumping against Him and His disciples, they did not *really* touch Him, nor were they touched by Him. They, perhaps, went forth shining the light of curiosity upon this enigma; yet a light that produces it’s own radiance blinds itself, and only projects itself outward, seeing only that which it “needs” – or really “wants” – to see.

What an incredible contrast we behold in the one who, in her illness, was not even seen as worthy to be in the midst of the crowd; due to her constant affliction she would have been considered unclean. The light of the curious and inquisitive ones (everyone else) would have quickly turned away from such person. *Perhaps she was afflicted by God, rejected because of some sin she committed;* maybe we will look at her only enough to provide our own diagnosis, to cast our own judgment and attribute it to the Righteous Judge who hasn’t judged *me* with such afflictions (or maybe I’m more gifted at veiling mine).

Back to the woman: I imagine her in a moment saying those same words as the others: “*I need to see Jesus,*” and maybe even, “*I need to touch Him.*” As one so keenly aware of her own brokenness and unworthiness, having no light of curiosity to shine upon Him (for idle curiosity is the convenience of the *unbroken – or of those who hide their brokenness*), no need to “spectate,” she realizes, “*I need not to see, but to be seen,*” not to touch, but to be touched.

I am lost and bewildered, not finding my home in this world of spectators. In fact, I’m not worthy even to be touched, but if I can extend my hand to touch just the hem of His garment, it will suffice. Oh, to breathe the same air as the incarnate God is a gift in and of itself, let alone to touch His raiment. I may or may not be healed, but I will have come into contact with God.

Then in her humility she touched the

untouchable One and power went forth! The others had their source, their reason, and purpose; she was looking for hers, and so His power went forth into her – His uncreated energy – into the being who truly needed Him. Unoccupied with anything else, broken and desperate, undistracted, nothing left but the tears in her eyes and resounding rejection. “*Daughter, your faith has made you well.*”

The untouchable one who touched the uncontainable God drew into herself what is proper to each creature; to be animated by the life that God gives. She was energized not by fleeting curiosity, the vain pursuits that seem so interesting at the time, then less so once the next big thing hits the news. She was animated by God’s grace to be called “*daughter*” (and others “*son*”) by the Lover of mankind. This is the destiny of all who would become electrified by the unassuming power of the One who heals in the way that only He knows.

She was healed of her physical ailments, as were many others, but not all.

Yet, “behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure (1 John 3:1–3)

Surely, “when the sun’s rays touch a rock, the rock begins to shine. When a flame touches an unlit

candle, it begins to burn. When a magnet touches a metal object, the object becomes magnetized. When an electric wire touches an ordinary wire, they both become electrified.”

When the human person stands before the Lord – the God of all creation – as one who has none other help, she becomes transformed by grace (“*your faith has made you well*”), becoming, most truly, what she already is, a child of the living God.



Beloved ones, this is our purpose and our true calling, to be the children of God, brought back to life by His grace. This is our healing, and makes all that we face worthwhile. We have entered a slumber in our fallen state, and we’re even tempted to return to it, yet we hear the voice of the Savior say to us, too: “*Child, arise!*” Let us not pretend to be asleep, or return to that slumber, but let us arise as children of the Most High, sons and daughters of the living God – who gives Himself to us freely, should

we allow His light to shine upon us.

May He who bent low, in a manner past telling, continually make us His own as we work out our faith with fear and trembling; may God, our Father, be glorified in our lives, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Fr. Jeremiah Vollman
St. Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church
Brier, Washington

1. *Homilies*, 2, p. 243.



SACRED ARTS FESTIVAL EXPLORES “WONDER AS WORSHIP IN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ART”

On the weekend of October 6–8, 2023, with the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan SABA, St. Athanasius parish in Santa Barbara, California, revived its Sacred Arts Festival, which was first inaugurated in 2011. The plan was to host an Arts Festival every two years, but the global pandemic interrupted that schedule, forcing the postponement of the 2020 festival to this year.

The guest speaker for the three-day festival was

Fr. Turbo Qualls, the pastor of St. Mary of Egypt (Serbian) Orthodox Church, Kansas City, Missouri. His visit to California was a bit of a homecoming, as Fr. Turbo grew up in Garden Grove and spent many years in Orange County as a (well-known) tattoo artist, turned evangelical youth pastor, turned Eastern Orthodox priest. Fr. Turbo’s YouTube podcast, “The Royal Path,” has a large following of young adults and spiritual seekers. Having studied both



classical Western art as well as Byzantine iconography, Fr. Turbo brought to the table a deep understanding of the role of beauty and wonder in worship through artistic expression.

The weekend began with three different workshops offered simultaneously: *prosphora*-baking, taught by Fr. John Finley; prayer-rope weaving, taught by the nuns from St. Barbara Monastery in Santa Paula, California; and iconography, taught by Khouria Cayce-Marie Halsell and Dorothy Alexander. (Dorothy recently received her Master of Theological Studies degree with an emphasis

and an experience of God's grace.

The festival concluded on Sunday afternoon with a public concert featuring the St. Athanasius choir, along with guest singers from Orthodox parishes in San Diego and Riverside, conducted by Valerie Yova. The program explored the wide variety of influences on Orthodox Christian liturgical music in America, including the received Byzantine and Slavic traditions, as well as more recent influences on Orthodox contemporary composers, such as Native American, Plantation, Folk, and Gospel melodies.



on iconography through the Antiochian House of Studies.)

On Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, Fr. Turbo spoke about "Wonder as Worship," exhorting us to see icons not as imaged words to analyze and "read," but as images that present to the believer the opportunity to obtain childlike awe as we approach God. He spoke of icons as a window through which we can encounter God as he condescends to us, and we, in wonder, shed our preconceived ideas in ascent to Him. When experienced in this way, icons are a proclamation of the Gospel, a place to find spiritual healing, an encouragement to strengthen us in times of weaknesses,

Audiences throughout the weekend were comprised of Orthodox Christians as well as seekers and inquirers from throughout the Southern and Central California region. The Sacred Arts Festival was initiated as a means of sharing the richness of Orthodox Christianity with non-Orthodox friends, neighbors, and colleagues, and of strengthening and enlivening the faith of Orthodox believers.

ORATORICAL FESTIVAL JUDGES' CHOICE

ELISA MILKIE, DIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

BECOMING MORE LIKE HIM

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" – Genesis 1:26

I encourage you all in this moment to look at your neighbor. Do you notice a physical characteristic or an expression on their face? Oftentimes, that is the first thing we notice when we look at someone.

When I was five, my family and I went to visit a church we had never been to before. Walking in, I noticed the nave was *entirely* covered with the most *beautiful* icons I had ever seen.

I was captivated with the many images of God in the depictions of all the saints. Thinking about each saint, I now realize how everyone manifests the image of God in his or her own way.

As human beings, we are created in the *image* of God, meaning we bear God-like qualities. Every person has these qualities, but reveals them in various ways. We are called to live lives that conform to His likeness and be "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

We discover that being human is not just a product of chance, but rather a purposeful design by our Creator. God created us as rational creatures, with a



free will and moral responsibility. These differences separate us from the animal creation and make us human. We who believe are also the offspring of Christ and are his kin; therefore, we can know God and be in communion with Him. Bishop Kallistos Ware tells us, "If a man makes proper use of this faculty for communion with God, then he will become like God, He will acquire the divine like-

ness. In the words of St. John of Damascus, he will be 'assimilated to God through virtue.'" According to many of the Church Fathers, we can better understand the difference between God's image and likeness. We are created in God's image and have the potential to *grow* in His *likeness*. We become *like* Him through His Spirit and by the choices we make. In every situation, we can ask ourselves if the choice we are making is one in which God would be pleased or displeased. Likeness is becoming united with God and becoming more like God, which is the definition of *theosis*. St. Athanasius writes, it is "*becoming by Grace what God is by nature.*"

God is giving us the opportunity to be *like Him*. It is natural for God to be this way, since He is divine. We are not the same, but through grace we are given the opportunities to be Christ-like.

In Genesis, Chapter 1, we see the first revelation of the Holy Trinity: “Let US make man in OUR image, according to OUR likeness.” “Us” refers to the Trinity. The bond between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is similar to the bond of a father, mother, and child. All three share the same nature, but are separate Persons. Being *the same nature* does not mean being *identical*. During the Liturgy we hear, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity one in essence and undivided.” The Trinity was fully revealed at Christ’s baptism: the voice of God the Father is heard, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The Holy Spirit is seen descending in the form of a dove.

The Incarnation of Jesus reveals to us what it means to be made in the image of God. Jesus came to restore what was lost by the fall of Adam and Eve. He reestablishes the order with obedience to God’s will by becoming a human being and voluntarily choosing to conform to the will of His Father. Our participation in being one with Him by Baptism and receiving the Eucharist is the physical way we are renewed in a new life by the Holy Spirit. We have a potential for spiritual growth with our participation in the sacramental life of the Church and self-discipline through prayer. We are tied to Christ who empowers us by the Spirit to make wise and godly choices in our lives.

We have a special relationship and responsibility to God because He made us stewards of His creation. We are accountable to Him for how we care for His creation. We *all* have a shared responsibility. Through deepening our relationship with Him, we can better care for those around us in a spirit of forgiveness, understanding, and compassion.

When I helped out at a Los Angeles food bank, I was part of a large group who bagged, packaged, and moved boxes of about three thousand pieces of fruit. No words can express how that made me feel. By engaging in physical, hands-on work, I had a sense of purpose and helped others who are *no* different from me. God is in *each* of us and we need

to help our brothers and sisters just as Jesus Christ did; this is *our shared* responsibility. Looking back at that day, every time I would hand someone a package, and look into their eyes, I would see their smile and words of gratitude. This is an example of how we can make a difference in someone’s life. In sharing ourselves we engage in the synergy of God’s love for all mankind. These connections with each other are very powerful and spiritually transformative, especially for teenagers.

Jesus became one of us and had relationships with people from all walks of life. He desires a relationship with us. He modeled the importance of being face-to-face. The restoring of sight to the blind, the healing of those with leprosy, and the feeding of the five thousand are just a few examples of Jesus ministering in person, dynamically. He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). As young people in the Church, we need to work together and continue Christ’s ministry. By serving others, we open our hearts to becoming more like Him. The time is *now* for us to discover and recognize the talents we have received by God’s grace. When we recognize our talents, we can share them with others to achieve our potential for living godly lives in this world.

1 Corinthians 12:4–6 says “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.” Saint Peter echoes this sentiment: “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10).

We have many examples of good stewards when we gaze at the icons of the saints in the interiors of our churches. Each saint possesses his or her own qualities and strengths, yet they all lived according to Christ’s teachings. Their lives were godly and they demonstrated many virtues. In the icon of All Saints, we see how many diverse people of all ages and backgrounds worked to attain God’s likeness.

During my trip to the beautiful church I mentioned earlier, I remember seeing one particular icon of the Theotokos with Christ that captured my

attention. During the service, I was given a small piece of paper and a pencil so that I could draw the icon. I still, to this day, carry the little drawing with me. Every time I look back at my icon of the Theotokos, I am reminded of how I saw her as a child and how I still see her now: with the utmost humility, compassion, and love for each of us. She was asked to fulfill an *enormous* request; she agreed, and now serves as an *exemplary* model of how to live a virtuous life. I am so grateful for her presence in my life as she is a mother to all of us.

St. Gregory of Nyssa tells us, “You alone are an icon of Eternal Beauty, and if you look at *Him*, you will become what He is, imitating Him Who shines within you, whose glory is reflected in your purity. Nothing in all creation can equal your grandeur.

He dwells within you.... He pervades your entire being....”

Now let us look at our neighbor again. He or she is a living *icon*, as is each of us. We don’t know all of the crosses that our neighbors bear, so let us see God in the eyes of one another and encourage each other to become more like *Him*. Let us be grateful for being made in His image and aim towards conforming to His likeness.

“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

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

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The Children's Relief Fund



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

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

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

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

You can help change the life of a child by being a sponsor for as little as \$400 a year, just \$7.69 per week, \$1.10 per day. Donations of any amount are always welcome. Once you sponsor a child, we will send you their name, age, address, and a brief biography. Your child will correspond directly with you, sending you letters and pictures about their life. You will be able to develop a special bond and personal relationship with them.

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

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



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

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

In Christ's Service,

Amy Stiffler,

Executive Director, Antiochian Village &

CRF Administration

724-238-3677 ext. 402

Childrensrelieffund@gmail.com

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