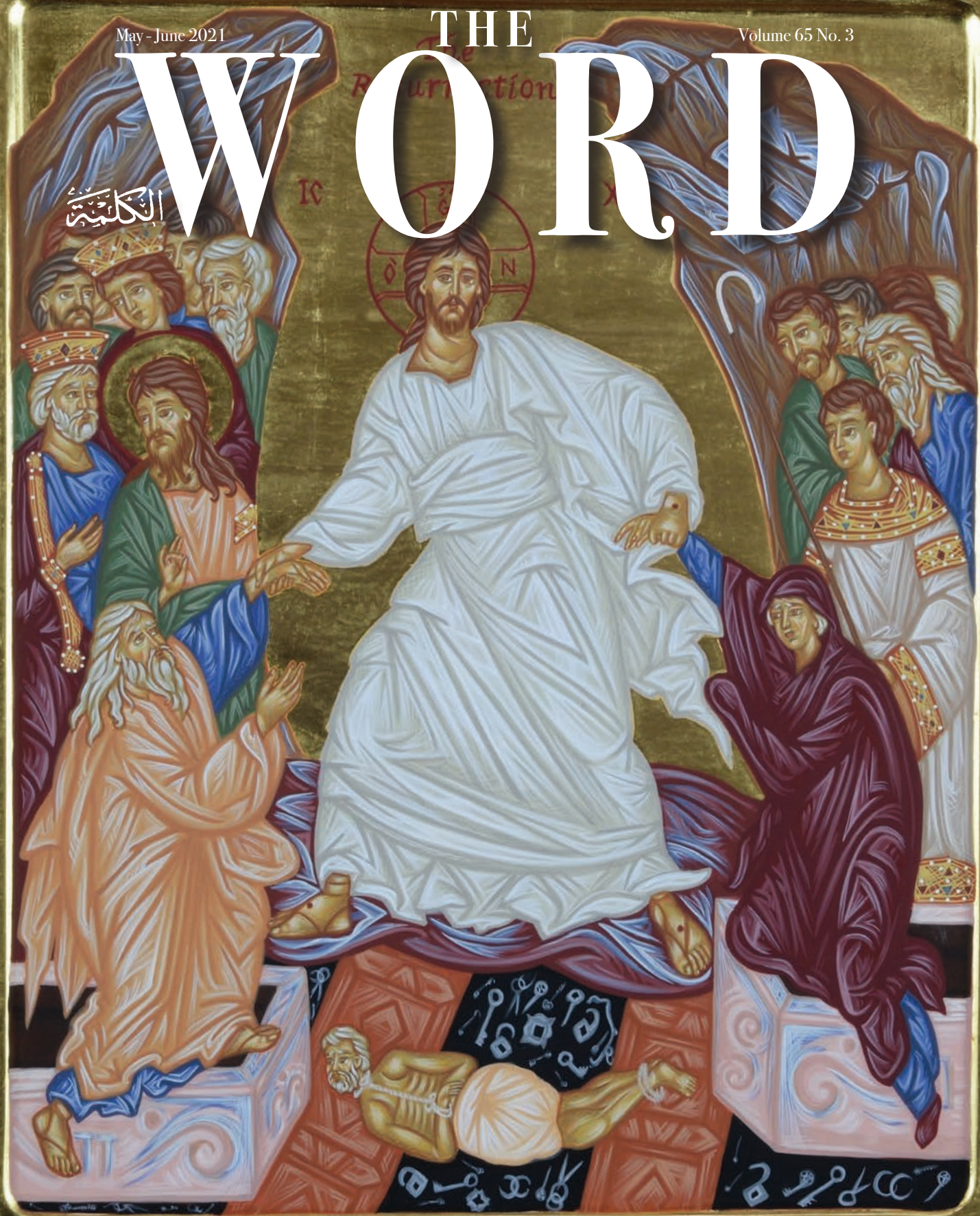


May - June 2021

Volume 65 No. 3

# THE WORD

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# THE WORD

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photo by Katherine Hanlon, unsplash.com

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

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# IT'S TIME!

Bishop JOHN

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**W**ith many already vaccinated, many recovered from Covid-19, and government restrictions being raised, we hope that people will be getting back to work. By *work*, I mean the corporate church work of worship through the liturgy. Our jobs are important to us, but our liturgy is what defines us and feeds us. It allows us to see and be who we are. We who are baptized into Christ and who have put on Christ are His people, created in His image and growing constantly into His likeness. We dwell in Him and He in us. Father Alexander Schmemmann often said that we are not people who go to church on Sundays; rather, we are God's people who go from Church on Sundays to live in our homes and work at our jobs to bring Christ to the world and the world to God.

Church participation cannot be reduced to niceties. It is our vocation and life. Liturgy is the celebration of God's victory through Christ over death, and the restoration of creation as

*holy and good*. It is our time in TIME, that, is God's time and eternity. Laying aside all earthly cares, we pause from the business of the social and economic structures to meet our Creator, be taught by Him and be fed by Him. For Christians this is the essential connection that we need in order to be who we are.

The Church is our community, the community of orthodox believers spanning from Adam until the end of the world. It is the people who, like us, say Yes to God, and live the Orthodox way. It is the community of love that shares, not just human love, but the love that flows inside the Trinity perpetually.

Liturgy and worship are essential for maintaining the Orthodox way. Liturgy teaches and typifies, and allows us to participate in the love and life of God. We can't live without it. Is it time to come home? Do what you need to do to be as comfortable and safe as needed, but do what you can to participate as fully as you can. We can't live without it.

# ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICE

## ORDINATIONS

CARPENTER, Luke (Jeffrey), to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on February 3, 2021, at the Church of St. Philip in Souderton, Pennsylvania, where he is assigned.

COOK, Deacon David, to the holy priesthood by Bishop JOHN on March 14, 2021, at St. Paul Church, Katy, Texas. Fr. David is assigned as Pastor of St. Nicholas, Spokane, Washington.

HALLOCK, Deacon Demetrius, to the rank and dignity of Protodeacon by Bishop ANTHONY on February 7, 2021, at St. James Church, Williamston, Michigan, where he is attached.

HYAT, Deacon David, to the holy priesthood by Bishop THOMAS on March 20, 2021, at the Church of St. John Chrysostom, York, Pennsylvania, where he is assigned as second Priest.

KOVACICH, Peter, to the holy diaconate by Bishop ANTHONY on January 10, 2021, at St. Ignatius Church, Madison, Wisconsin, where he is attached.

MAKARIOS, Mark, to the holy diaconate by Bishop THOMAS on March 14, 2021, at the Church of St. Mary in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Dn. Mark is completing his studies at St. Tikhon Seminary.

McCOY, Timothy (Brad), to the holy diaconate by Metropolitan JOSEPH on October 11, 2020, at St. Ignatius Church, Florida, New York, where he is attached.

MORFAS, Kosmas (Mitchell), to the holy diaconate by Bishop JOHN on March 17, 2021, at St. George Church, Boston, Massachusetts. Dn. Kosmas is completing his studies at St. Vladimir's Seminary.

## DEPARTED

HEDGES, Very Reverend Father Jon-Stephen, reposed in the Lord on February 25, 2021. Born on December 24, 1947, Fr. Jon was the son of a naval officer, and as such spent his youth moving about. He considered Colorado "home," and came to Isla Vista in 1968. He graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) with a Bachelor of Arts degree in cultural anthropology, and also completed a Masters in Orthodox Theology from St. Athanasius Academy.

Father Jon-Stephen served as an Assistant Pastor at St. Athanasius for many years, in addition to serving widely within the Santa Barbara community. He served as volunteer Chaplain with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, the Isla Vista Foot Patrol, and several other agencies. He was a Board-Certified Crisis Chaplain with the American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress; a Certified Trauma Responder (CTR); and an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT-B).

Father collaborated and consulted with several Santa Barbara County agencies on crisis, trauma, and disaster issues. He was deployed by the Red Cross after Hurricane Katrina as a Disaster Mental Health worker. He helped develop the St. Brigid Fellowship of St. Athanasius Church which serves the unsheltered in our

The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend  
Bishop BASIL

The Right Reverend  
Bishop THOMAS

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ALEXANDER

The Right Reverend  
Bishop JOHN

The Right Reverend  
Bishop ANTHONY

The Right Reverend  
Bishop NICHOLAS

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by Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny)  
Founded in English as  
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community. He collaborated with Doctors Without Walls and many others to encourage his friends on the streets.

Father Jon-Stephen was married to Khouria Melissa Hedges, and was the father of two grown children, Ben Hedges (Viktoria) and Sarah Brasel (Zach), and was the grandfather of Sydney, Cole, Ethan, Noah, Luke and Elias. His hobbies included hiking, fishing, and playing folk music.

FARHA, Brenda Kaye, fell asleep in the Lord with her loving family around her on February 16, 2021. She was born in Wichita, Kansas, on March 1, 1941, to Bahij (BF) and Marguerite Farha, the youngest of five children. In July 1960, she married her beloved husband George; together, they had four daughters and a great life.

Brenda is best described as a strong, generous, loving woman with a feisty zest for life. She was deeply devoted to God, family, and community. Her lifelong membership at St. George Orthodox Christian Cathedral was the foundation for Brenda's devotion to all levels of the Church. She enjoyed her weekly volunteer shifts at The Treehouse and was known as "Chief Kibba Baker" for the St. George Annual Lebanese Dinner. As a teen, Brenda helped start the Orthodox Youth Group, Teen SOYO, and maintained her commitment to supporting youth through Christ the Savior Academy and the Orthodox camping programs. Brenda had served on the American Board of the St. George Hospital in Beirut, Lebanon, whose mission is to treat all patients with dignity, respect, and compassion. Throughout her life, Brenda's community involvement included memberships in the Medical Auxiliary, The Junior League of Wichita, and the Wichita-Sedgwick County Historical Museum. She was dedicated to fighting Huntington's Disease, and was a founder of Hereditary Neurological Disease Centre (HNDC). At Wichita State University, she served on the Board of Trustees and was the first female chair; she sat on various other university committees as well. Brenda was also very fun-loving.

Brenda is preceded in death by her husband, Dr. George Farha, her parents Bahij and Marguerite Farha, and siblings Fredrick Farha, Marlene Kraker, Emily Day, and John Farha. She is survived by her four daughters: Gayle (Doug) Malone, Joan (David) Farha, Laura (Randa Harik) Farha,

and Julie (Scott Harvey) Farha; and by grandchildren Jamil Malone, Michael (Patty) Malone, Anna (Cooper) Rowe, Grace (John Dixon) Farha, Lily Farha and Georgina Farha; and by great-granddaughters Eloïse and Anabelle Malone; and by countless nieces, nephews, godchildren and friends; and her beloved dog GiGi.

MORELLI, Archpriest George, Ph.D., on March 16, 2021. He celebrated his final earthly Liturgy on Sunday, March 14, and edified the faithful with a sermon. Father George was assigned as Assistant Pastor of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, San Diego, California, in 2000. Previously he served the Archdiocese since his ordination to the holy priesthood in 1973 as Assistant Pastor, then Associate Pastor, of St. Mary's Antiochian Orthodox Church, Brooklyn, New York. He was loved dearly by all his parishioners and his brother clergy of St. George. He was a humble and gentle priest, and a good and faithful servant of Christ.

For years, Fr. George has been the Coordinator of the Archdiocese's Department of Chaplain and Pastoral Counseling Ministry, offering guidance to those in the fields of mental health and pastoral care. A prolific author, Fr. George's article archive on OrthodoxyToday.org contains many articles on parenting, marriage, and mental health. Antiochian.org hosts his online course, Orthodox Christian Spirituality and Cognitive Psychotherapy.

Father was raised Roman Catholic in rural New York State, but was made aware of his mother's Orthodox roots. From an early age he felt a calling both to the holy priesthood and advanced academic studies. While a scholastic student in a Catholic religious order, courses in dogmatic theology and church history led him to the conclusion that the Eastern Orthodox Church was the authentic Church founded by Christ.

He is survived by his mother-in-law Viola Morelli, his wife Nancy, and his brother Peter. May his memory be eternal and may our Lord place his soul with the righteous!

# METROPOLITAN JOSEPH CONGRATULATES NEW PATRIARCH OF SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

On behalf of his brother bishops, members of the Board of Trustees, clergy and laity, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH congratulates His Holiness

PORFIRIJE upon his election as Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovac, and Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Serbia. His Holiness succeeds Patriarch IRINEJ, who reposed in our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ last year.

The website of the Serbian Patriarchate announced that bells at Saint Sava Cathedral in the Vracar district of Belgrade rang on Thursday afternoon, February 18, indicating that the 46th Patriarch of Serbia was elected.

Just prior to his election by his brother bishops, Patriarch PORFIRIJE, 59, served as Metropolitan of Zagreb-Ljubljana in northern Serbia. Earlier in his life, he served as Hieromonk and Abbot of Holy Archangels Monastery in Kovilj, near Novi Sad. His Holiness earned his Ph.D. from the Faculty of Theology of the University of Athens with his dissertation entitled, "Possibility of Knowability of God in St. Paul's Understanding According to the Interpretation of Saint John Chrysostom." In 2005, he formed a therapeutic community called "The Land of the Living," to treat those suffering from drug addiction.

Metropolitan JOSEPH asks the clergy and laity to pray to Almighty God for Patriarch PORFIRIJE as he leads the Serbian Orthodox Church. Axios! He is worthy! Moustahiq!

#### URGED BY METROPOLITAN JOSEPH, 2021, IS DESIGNATED THE "YEAR OF THE YOUTH" BY THE ASSEMBLY OF BISHOPS

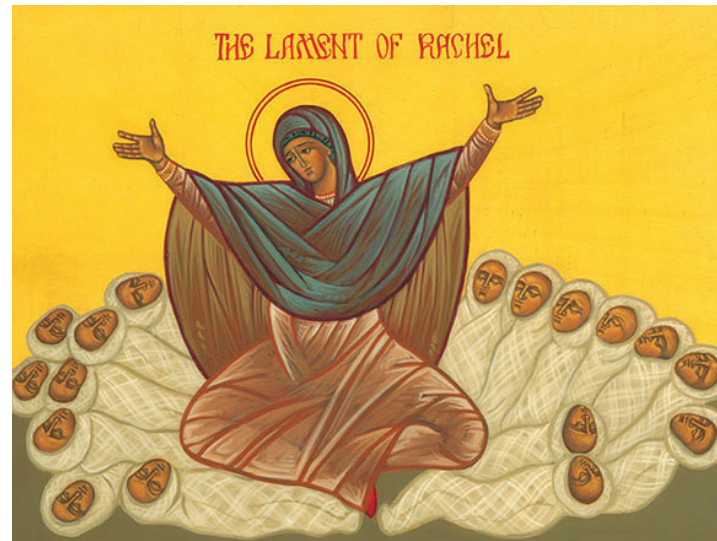
At the annual meeting in October 2020, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America declared 2021 the "Year of the Youth," with the intent of augmenting ministry to children, teens, and young adults across the country. The yearlong festivities will focus on the presence and potential of youth within the Church by celebrating and enhancing their God-given talents.

The presence of youth, as full members of the Body of Christ, is essential to the life of our communities. The youth are our present and future. Our hope stems from a faith that is not only lived daily, but is passed on from generation to generation, ensuring continuity in witnessing to Christ's love in the world.

The presence of youth in our Church gives us hope and purpose, following the words of the Psalmist: "He established a testimony in Jacob, and

appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God but keep His commandments . . ." (Psalm 78:5-7).

The Assembly of Bishops, in collaboration with the Orthodox Youth Directors of North America, is planning a variety of exciting events in the coming months. The plan includes a series of online events and webinars, as well as opportunities for youth, youth workers, and parents to witness the faith and celebrate their good works in Christ. More details will be made available in the coming weeks and months at [orthodoxyouth.net](http://orthodoxyouth.net) and [assemblyofbishops.org](http://assemblyofbishops.org).



#### ASSEMBLY OF BISHOPS ENDORSES ALTERNATIVES TO WOMEN IN CRISIS PREGNANCIES

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America reaffirms the sanctity of life, based on the firm conviction that human life begins at the moment of conception. All human beings, whether in the womb or in the world, are made in the image and likeness of God, possessing God-given beauty and dignity. Therefore, we can never condone the willful and elective taking of a human life.

At the same time, Christ is the only ruler of the world and judge of all. Therefore, rather than ascend His judgement seat and condemn those who find





themselves contemplating abortion, we are called to minister to all and to provide alternative options. Indeed, many times women feel trapped and even forced to make this heart-wrenching decision, due to financial hardship, family or communal rejection, or other difficult life circumstances. When the burden is too heavy, we, the Church, must be there to lift the burden and open the door to other, more perfect solutions. Otherwise, we too are missing the mark.

With this mission, the Assembly of Bishops' Affiliate Ministry Zoe For Life! (<https://zoeforlife.org/>) "affirms the value of all life by helping women in a confidential manner during and after crisis pregnancies." We encourage any woman in need of refuge and support to reach out to Zoe For Life!

You remain very much in our paternal concern, and we are ready to help you.

## METROPOLITAN JOSEPH HOSTS HIS BEATITUDE METROPOLITAN TIKHON OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

On Thursday, March 4, 2021, His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America welcomed His Beatitude Metropolitan TIKHON of the Orthodox Church in America to the headquarters of the Archdiocese in Englewood, New Jersey. The two hierarchs met and had a fraternal discussion of a wide array of issues of common concern. Above all, they gave thanks to God for allowing them to meet in person for the first time since the pandemic, and for bringing them and their church through this difficult time in good health and safety.

In the course of their discussion, they reviewed the work of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, and the state of Orthodox unity in America. They also considered the state of theological education, both the work of the seminaries and the late-vocations programs, and the pressing vocational challenge facing the Orthodox Church. The two primates also spoke candidly about the worrying polarization and extremism found both within the Church and in civil society.

They pledged to work together and find common ways to address these issues within their churches.

They concluded the meeting exchanging prayers for each other and their churches at the outset of the Lenten journey to Pascha.

After their meeting, they released the following statement:

"We have come through a year that has seen unprecedented challenges facing our communities and, indeed, society as a whole. The pandemic, growing political polarization, civil unrest, the rise of extremism, and economic anxiety have all contributed to test us within the Orthodox Church. While some of what has tested us is new, other things are as old as human history. In response to



all of them, there is only one response, remaining firm in our faith in Jesus Christ, who alone is our Savior, and loving one another as he has loved us (cf. John 13:34).

“We thank the faithful of our churches for their labors, their patience, their steadfastness, and their love during all that has transpired throughout this most difficult time. We also join together and mourn those whom we have lost in our churches, because of the pandemic. May their memory be eternal!

“We bemoan the political polarization within this country and within the Orthodox Church, and call all to remember that we are created, each of us without exception, in the image and likeness of God. We strongly condemn extremism and fundamentalism, whether in the Church or society, and call to repentance those who would perpetrate acts of violence or hatred against any of our brothers and sisters in our communities or in society.”

#### STATEMENT OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE OF ANTIOCH AND ALL THE EAST ON COVID-19 VACCINES, DAMASCUS, FEBRUARY 8, 2021

Considering the spread of Covid-19 in the pandemic which afflicts the world and its people today, and subsequent to the production of its vaccines, the Antiochian Orthodox Church, after consultation between His Beatitude and the Antiochian Hierarchs, would like to clarify the following to her faithful:

In the Pastoral Letter issued in 2019, the Church reaffirmed “the sanctity of life and the necessity of respecting it alongside her openness to scientific advancement.” In the same context and believing in the pivotal role played by scientific progress throughout the ages, the Church encourages

scientific research and scientists, and blesses every proper initiative that contributes to the progress of humanity and relieves human suffering. Therefore, she offers her prayers for all those working to safeguard and serve human life, including researchers, scientists, medical doctors, nurses, and all healthcare workers in hospitals. She pleads for their protection, especially that, in this pandemic, they have showed unique dedication, continuous vigilance, and heroic self-sacrifice. May God strengthen them with His grace. May they be faithful co-workers with Christ our God, the Physician of our souls and bodies. The Church also offers her prayers for the healing of all the sick, the sustenance of their families, the comfort of the bereaved, and the repose of the souls of those who have departed in hope of resurrection and eternal life.

After scientists have prepared a set of Covid-19 vaccines and in reviewing various medical reports and consulting with specialists, the Church considers that the matter of vaccination is not the specialty of the field of theological and spiritual studies, but rather specific to the field of medical sciences and its authorities. The decision regarding taking the vaccine is a personal decision. Every faithful has the right to make this decision in consultation with his or her doctor.

This pandemic continues to pose a threat to human life, since the health specialists have not yet found a cure for it despite the immunity that the vaccine provides, which we hope is effective. Thus, the Church draws the attention of her faithful to the importance of continuing to adhere to all health measures requested by the competent authorities, whether before or after vaccination, in order to further preserve the safety of society and human life. Moreover, we note that the present vaccines were



made in record time with the aim of limiting the spread of the pandemic, thanks to the contemporary medical and technological progress, the concerted scientific efforts, and the procurement of necessary resources.

The Church warns against any political or commercial exploitation of the issue of vaccines, especially against withholding them from marginalized groups and distributing them in a way that contradicts the principles of equality, justice, and solidarity among all people.

The Church understands that there are different existing opinions stemming from fears and concerns that are being circulated in the media in an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and intimidation. This atmosphere is caused by the way the issue of public health has been tackled and the many pressures that were and are still being practiced. Some have set out to address this issue based on their desire to preserve the gift of life, but without neglecting their faith and spiritual background. The Church confirms that all these people, regardless of their different opinions and various positions, remain her children. She invites them to preserve the bond of peace, unity, and love that brings us together in Christ.

There is no doubt that all preventive health measures and vaccinations are beneficial to our physical safety. However, we must not overlook the importance of our spiritual safety, which requires us to turn to that “safe distancing” that we, as humans, practice between us and God, our fellow human beings, and our natural environment. We live in estrangement from God, in a conflict with our brother, and in an incursion into our vital environment through an insatiable consumption of its resources. This situation is dealt with by changing our behavior through sincere repentance, returning to God in prayer, and a life of communion and service. We must renounce whatever harms ourselves, our brother, and our environment. We are called to live the mystery of Divine Thanksgiving, being grateful for God’s gifts and mercies, and igniting our hope through reading the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the saints and their teachings. The permanent fellowship with God and all his saints incites the church militant to join the church triumphant, so the latter pours upon the former divine graces of sincere love, courageous spirit, and genuine solidarity with our fellow human beings.

Finally, the joy springing from our belief that

Christ is with us until the end of time makes us companions on the way with our Fathers who followed the path of struggle in every time and place. This joy strengthens us in the face of every evil and iniquity, and makes us like them, able to overcome, with God’s grace and through concerted efforts, the challenges that face our journey, so that God may be glorified in our words and deeds.

ANTIOCHIAN  
ARCHDIOCESE OF  
NORTH AMERICA  
COVID GUIDELINES  
MARCH 4, 2021

I commend you for your ministry during this tumultuous time, as most of you have cooperated with our directives. It has been and remains an ever-changing situation, yet with God’s help we will continue to work together based on the best information we have. I am dedicated to provide the best directives possible for your spiritual and physical well-being.

With that in mind, as we begin our journey to Pascha, I offer the following directives as we move forward. These supersede all previous directives for both the clergy and faithful:

1. First and foremost, we must focus on Christ and His Resurrection. This past year has been a divisive and passionate one. The goal of the fast is to be dispassionate and focused on our own sins. By being obedient to Christ and the Church we share in God’s grace instead of our pride and self-direction. Let us be good examples to our faithful and teach them to do the same. Let’s heal our divisions and be examples to our nation.

2. Masks: Masks should continue to be worn in church, however, in those areas of greatly decreasing numbers, where the state government allows, the faithful may lower or remove their masks for periods of time. When people move about the church or enter or exit, masks should continue to be worn. Clergy should continue to wear masks while interacting closely with parishioners before and after services. As we will be having many more services during this time, we are to remain vigilant. We would like to avoid getting sick and having to close any church during this holy season.

3. Social Distancing: Social distancing and capacity controls are to be followed according to the maximum capacity at which the parish can

properly socially distance (with certain exceptions for Canada, where the laws are more restrictive). Parishioners should continue to refrain from close contact outside their family pods (e.g., no kiss of peace, modified rite of Forgiveness, whereby people prostrate and bow with their hands crossed over their chests, etc.).

4. Church Schools: They may resume (or continue) with the guidance of the local bishop with all precautions in place, including proper ventilation, cleaning, etc.

5. Coffee Hours, meetings, Lenten potlucks, meals, etc.: Unless they can be done outside or safely in a well-ventilated hall with proper distancing, etc. they are still not allowed. There should be no buffet lines in any case.

6. Hall and Room Rentals: For parishes with commercial rental facilities, you may resume business operations in accordance with the local and state laws with regard to reception halls, schools, and other public gatherings after Pascha with the blessing of the local bishop.

This directive represents how we are to enter the Great Fast with regard to the pandemic. If you have questions, please seek the guidance of your local bishop or e-mail us and we will do our best to help you. Again, we want our focus during this time to be on piety and overcoming the passions. Therefore, implement these directives in a positive way, with the idea that while we are doing what we can to return to “normal,” we continue to be cautious and vigilant, so we do not have to close even a single church during the fast due to an exposure in one of our parishes. Then turn your entire focus to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and encourage your parishioners to do the same.

As we approach Holy Week and Pascha, we will continue to monitor the situation and give further direction as to processions and increased capacities if things continue to improve.

Wishing you, your families, and your faithful a blessed Fast, I remain,

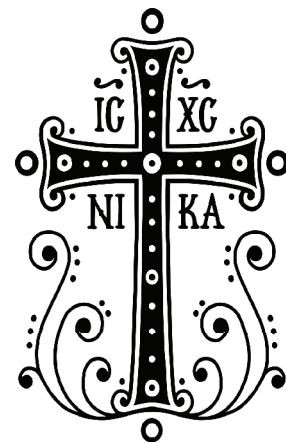
Your Father in Christ,  
Metropolitan JOSEPH



photo by Despina Galani, unsplash.com

*Coming soon with updates!*  
*Available from Archdiocese Bookstore at Antiochian Village*

## THE LITURGIKON



THE BOOK OF DIVINE SERVICES  
FOR THE PRIEST AND DEACON

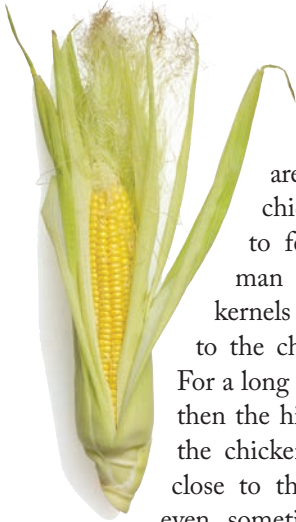
FOURTH EDITION



# A Happy Gospel Reading

ON JOHN 1:43–51

Father Andrew Harmon



Some people are not sure about who – or *what* – they are. There was a man who had a chicken farm. He hired a fellow to feed his chickens. The hired man would carry a big sack of kernels of corn and throw the kernels to the chickens out in the farmyard. For a long time, this went smoothly, but then the hired man developed a fear of the chickens! He would avoid getting close to them, back away from them, even sometimes climb over the fence to avoid them. This meant that he was throwing the kernels of corn to them from far away. Lots of corn was being wasted, and the chickens were getting thin!

The farmer asked the hired man what the problem was. He said that he had to come to realize that he himself was a kernel of corn! The chickens were trying to eat him! So the farmer, being a kind man, took the poor fellow for a series of psychiatric treatments, and after a while, the man became convinced that he was a human being, and not a kernel of corn. He was happy and the chickens were again being fed well.

Then, sometime later, the same strange behavior started all over again. The farmer said to the hired man, “Have you had a relapse? Are you again having the delusion that you are a piece of corn?” The hired man replied, “No, no, that’s not the problem. I know I am a man, not a kernel of corn. I’m cured of that delusion. The problem is that I now realize that the chickens are having delusions: they believe I am a kernel of corn, and so they are trying to eat me!” Well, the farmer had to make a choice: he could either take all the chickens to the psychiatrist, or he could fire the hired man. He fired the hired man (Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Verso, 2009, p. 454).

As I said at the beginning, some people aren’t sure who they are, or what they are. Maybe not

many would be so deluded as to think that they are a kernel of corn, but they are mixed up about their identity.

Some people think we are all just animals, not essentially different from a horse or a chicken, just smarter. Other people are sure we are products of chance: no one made us, we just happen to exist. Some are sure we are of no ultimate importance whatsoever. Our importance is equal to that of, say, a kernel of corn.

We Christians know better. We know what human beings are, we know what we are. We are wonderful creations of God. We are made in His own image. We are made to live forever. We are of ultimate importance. We are created to show forth the glory of God. We are not animals, not products of chance, not unimportant.

God wants us to know how important we are, and how important to Him we are. And He wants us to know how much He loves us. And so God came down to us two thousand years ago. God the Son, the Second Person of the all-holy Trinity, became one of us. We are *that* important to God, *that* loved by God.

This is why today’s gospel reading from John 1 is such a happy one. In it, we hear about Nathanael’s happiness as he meets Jesus for the first time. And Nathanael realizes who Jesus Christ is: the Son of God.

We hear his excitement in his words in John 1:49: “Rabbi! You are the Son of God!” Nathanael happily realized that day that the Son of God



photo by Daniel Tuttle, unsplash.com

had become the Son of Man, that God in the flesh was standing right in front of Him! The Lord had come, and that made Nathanael happy. He signed up to become one of the Twelve Disciples.

We weren't there that day by the Jordan River with Nathanael. We didn't get to see Christ there as he did. Still, we have icons, and when we see an icon of Christ, it should excite us, too. Icons of Christ remind us that the Lord has come to our world to be one of us. We can have pictures of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, because that Person became human.

When we look at icons of Jesus, they remind us: we matter so much that the Son of God became one of us. That's something to be very happy about!

Today is the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first

## "Rabbi! You are the Son of God!"

Sunday of Lent. On this day, all Orthodox Christians focus on the icons, because it was on this day, long ago in the 800's A.D., that the holy icons were restored to the churches after having been removed or destroyed during the decades in which the Iconoclasts declared icons to be evil.

We believe icons are good, not bad. There are several reasons we believe that, but I'll just speak about one reason: today. Icons of Jesus Christ remind us that God loves us so much that He joined our human race in the Person of Jesus. The Son of God became one of us – that's how important we are to God! That's why Jesus Christ is so important to us! For Christians, He is the very center and focus of our lives.

The third largest religion in India is the Sikh religion. It is often described (though not by Sikhs!) as kind of a hybrid faith, combining some elements of Hinduism with some elements of Islam. Back in the last century, a well-known and influential Sikh leader, Sadhu Sundar Singh, became interested in Christianity. This interest eventually developed into faith in Christ, and led to his being baptized as a Christian. Of course, this caused an uproar in India, and to some extent around the world. One European religion professor was very bothered by what Singh had done, "abandoning" his own native religion for a "foreign" faith. He wanted to write about what had happened and decided to first travel to India to interview Singh. He asked the new Christian, "Why

this change in religion? All religions are very similar, so why upset people by switching?" Singh replied, "Because I wanted to know Jesus Christ." The European then said, "But aren't the moral teachings of the two religions very similar?" Singh answered, "Yes, that's true ... but Sikhism doesn't have Jesus Christ." Then the professor said, "Don't you think there are good people among the Sikhs?" Singh said, "Oh, yes, many good people! But that faith doesn't have Jesus Christ." The professor, in his frustration, finally said, "Well, I just can't understand this. You left one perfectly good religion for another and upset many people. Why?" Singh calmly answered, "Because I want Jesus Christ" (J. T. Seamands, *The Supreme Task of the Church*, pp. 65–66).

We are Christians because we want Jesus Christ (or, at least, this should be the reason). We aren't Christians because we dislike people of other religions or no religion. We aren't Christians because we love our ceremonies and customs. We are Christians because we want Jesus Christ, and because we believe, like Nathanael, that Christ is truly the Son of God come to us in the flesh.

But perhaps some of you aren't quite sure about all this. Maybe sometimes when it comes to faith, you have more questions than you do answers. Maybe you have doubts . . . That's not rare!

If so, let's talk: coffee and conversation (just you and the priest!) at Starbucks or some other coffee shop. Nothing would make me happier! Call me, text me, e-mail me, grab me after liturgy. We'll figure out a time to talk about what questions you may have about the biggest issues in life. That will make my day! Because the best way to deal with doubts is not to ignore them, but to face them head on. To discuss them, to struggle with them. I'd love to have the opportunity to try to help with that over a cup of coffee.

This gospel reading is a very happy one! Nathanael gets excited because he now knows that the Son of God has come. So he enlists to be a disciple, and gives his whole life over to Jesus of Nazareth. Every icon of Jesus Christ should make us happy, too, because those icons show us how much God loves us – enough to come down here and join us and save us! That is how much we matter! That is why Jesus Christ should matter more to us than anything else!

Father Andrew Harmon



# THE MOTHERS OF THE CHURCH

Photo/Iconography: Elina Pelikan



When you enter an Orthodox church, you are greeted by the *Panagia* icon in the apse above the altar. This is the *Theotokos*, or the Mother of God. The Virgin Mary is considered the Saint of all saints. She is intimately involved in God's union with man, and is our example of holy obedience. From the Annunciation, Mary embraces her role as the Mother of God and selflessly cares for her

son, Jesus Christ, even after His death. We honor the *Theotokos* as our holy Mother, and seek her intercessions throughout the services we pray.

The Church also provides us with another mother, though she is most often not front and center. In fact, sadly, sometimes she receives no special recognition at all. We may know her as *khouria*, *matushka*, *popadia*, or *presbytera*. Some of these names

are a form of *mother*, or even *priest*. The role of a priest's wife is especially unique. There is no specific list of roles or tasks that she is obliged to take on. As each woman is different, so are her offerings to the Church. One fact is certain, because of a *khouria*'s primary work of love and devotion to her husband, the priest, the church is abundantly blessed. Any other service she offers to her parish is icing on the cake. She deserves to be honored and respected for the sacrifice that she makes for her church and for the salvation of the world.

March is recognized as Antiochian Women's Month. This is when we focus our attention on the women of the Church, in particular, their ministry and service to the Church. I can think of no better women to highlight this month than the mothers of our parishes. I've recently had the opportunity to interview a *khouria* from each diocese of the Antiochian Archdiocese. I have been so privileged to talk with each of these women. May you also be blessed by their words of wisdom and encouragement.

#### DIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES AND THE WEST

*What did you think or feel when you found out your husband would be ordained, or pursuing ordination?*

I first met Father Paul in church. He was the chanter and I was the soprano in the choir. Funny fact: on one of our first dates he taught me the eight tones. He probably figured, "If she will sit here through the eight tones, then she is 'the one.'" He was a young man, well-versed in the Bible, and he would quote the Holy Fathers and I was just really intrigued by him. I knew that it was going to change our lives forever. At the same time, I was

very thankful that God chose me for him, and him for me. He actually asked me one day, 'What do you think about one day being a *khouria*?' I was really shy, but I looked at him, and knowing his heart and the love that he had for our Lord, and the compassionate person that he was, I knew that I too would come, not only to love and embrace my new role as *khouria*, but that I would try to be a good role-model for others, to show my love, to open my heart to being vulnerable and to embrace the priesthood. When your husband is ordained, I truly believe we are ordained alongside him together, and we have the same responsibilities as our husbands and the same joy, but also the same martyrdom and in the end, if God wills, the same crowns in the Heavenly Kingdom.

*What do you wish lay people knew?*

I wish lay people knew we are not built like a machine. We are humans, too, and we have a heart. We feel pain the way you feel pain, and our children feel that same pain, too. There are times where we weep in the middle of the night, or have sleepless nights. Yet, not to sound dull or dreary, on the flip side, we are also taught that it's all about casting our burdens onto the Lord. I did realize a little later in life that, instead of taking on any of the challenges I was faced with (related to my husband, my kids or my own family), turning to God and being in constant prayer is a good thing. We take pilgrimages to the *skete* or even to visit my spiritual father; he lives in a monastery. One of the things that I was taught is to be in constant prayer in whatever you do in life; for example, if I am doing dishes, or cooking, or chopping wood. Even going on a bike ride, or when I'm in church, or my mind wanders, or I day dream, I just quickly turn to the Jesus Prayer. I wish I knew the Jesus Prayer early on in life, which is "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." It's actually very humbling, but also very comforting to me, reciting the prayer and trying to live by those words, asking for God's mercy, asking for God's mercy upon someone else. I realized early on that it [being a priest's wife] is an honor and a dignity. When he was ordained, I felt like I was ordained alongside him.

*What is your favorite part of being a khouria?*

My favorite part of being a *khouria* was the ministry, and trying to be an example for all. One of the ministries I took on early on is to the elderly of the parish. I love old people. I think I have an old soul. I



Khouria Jean Baba and Father Paul will have been married for 27 years on February 20, 2021. They currently serve at Holy Virgin Mary Orthodox Church in West Sacramento, California. Their three grown children are Nicholas (26), Nathaniel (23), and Gabriella (21).



have always had a love for the elderly people in our parish. They are people who have worked hard. You look at their hands and their hunched backs and the lines on their faces. You look at them and realize these are the people who went before us and created what we have today. For example, in our previous parish my main ministry was to the elderly or to the seniors of the parish in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I was blessed by Father Paul to be in a program that catered to the folks who were 55 and above. After all, they were the generation before us that worked so hard to provide us with what we were given, and they deserved the dignity of kindness and to have someone else care for them.

The other favorite part of being a *khouria* for me, in my current community, is reaching out to the people without housing in our community. Several years back we began a ministry with the youth of our church to serve the homeless. We continue to do this now. Especially now during the pandemic, so many programs in our city have shut down or come to a halt, there is a limited amount of resources available. We actually hold biweekly dinners in the parish, not only to sustain the church, because we are a smaller parish and we've seen a lot of changes, but also to continue the ministry and to serve the "least of my brethren." That is something that I love about being a *khouria*, and something that I head in our church.

Another thing is being a mother to everybody. The college students who move away from their homes always use our house as a safe place, a place they can have a home-cooked meal. Also being a mother to the Antiochian Women in our parish Chapter, all the way down to the toddlers.

Also, being alongside my husband in our ministry, and through prayer strengthening the people in their faith is another thing that I love. Plus, I'm a godmother to about 13 children and adults, another blessing. Mostly just striving to be closer to God. Though, as a person, I am not perfect in any sense of the word, I continue to struggle and endure and to stay in prayer. I seek just to be really true to my role as a *khouria* and a mother to all.

*Do you have any funny experiences you can share?*

We had just begun our ministry and transferred in the middle of the worst snow storm to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It also happened to be around Epiphany. Father had come to the church two weeks before the boys and me. Father Paul was getting to

know the parish. It was his first Sunday, and he received a call from this gentleman.

He said, "Father, my name is Dennis and I want to meet you and I want you to come to my house and bless my house." Father said, "Oh, Dennis, I'd love to come to your house." The next day was a Sunday, and Father asked if he would wait until Sunday. Dennis replied, "No, Father! I want you to come to my house, I want to meet you."

So Father got the address from him and showed up at the door. This gentleman opened the door and Father Paul said, "Hello Dennis!" The guy replied, "Yes?" and Father Paul continued, "How are you? It's me, Father Paul! I'm here to greet you and to bless your home. Please welcome me in!"

In walked Father Paul with Dennis. They sat around the table. The kids were sitting having cereal at the time. Father Paul introduced himself, and wanted to know more about the family. Father Paul said, "Is your wife around?" Dennis answered, "Yes, she's upstairs getting ready." So Father Paul asked him to bring her down so he could meet her. Father was dressed in his *phaltheon* and long black coat, and he was ready to bless the house.

The wife came down, looked at Father, and said, "Hello?" He then went from room to room and asked, "Do you know 'When Thou, O Lord, was baptized in the River Jordan?' Do you want to sing along with me?" They said, "No, you go along ahead." So he chanted, going from room to room and blessing every room in the house. Then he went to exit, and said, "It was nice to meet you! It was nice to meet your little kids. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow in church. I can't wait to get to know you." He left for home.

The next day is Sunday. He has the long line at the end of church for the dismissal. A gentleman is in the line and he's rather antsy. Father keeps watching him, while trying to say hello to everyone and meet them. Then the man approaches him. "Father!" Father Paul replies, "Well, hello! Nice to meet you. What is your name?" The man responds, "My name is Dennis. Where were you yesterday?" Father responds, "I'm sorry, what do you mean?"

To which Dennis replies, "I asked you to come bless my house." Father says, "I did, I went and blessed Dennis's house." Father looks at Dennis and Dennis looks at him. Dennis finally says, "Oh, Father! I am so sorry! Lord have mercy! Forgive me! I moved! And I sold my house to a man named

Dennis. I gave you the wrong address.”

This story has stuck with us for about 20 years now. Ever since then Father has not forgotten Dennis, and Dennis has not forgotten Father.

*Are there any additional things that you would like to share?*

I have advice for a new *khouria* coming in: have a mentor, like a mentor-sister. This should be someone you can trust, who will continually pray for you and rejoice with you through all the good times, and cry with you and hold your hand during the not-so-good times. Remember that we are in this together, lay people and priests. Also, remember that the Mother of God said to the Apostles, when you preach and teach and are out in your ministry in the world and someone hurts you in some way, “Quickly turn to me and through our prayer through Jesus Christ I will restore that joy within you as soon as possible.” I have always found that to be very comforting. The Mother of God plays a huge role in my life and my ministry. She might not answer you right there and then, but she’s listening.

It’s OK also to have your secular friends. It’s OK to have a couple of extra friends outside of church. I have a few, great, trusted friends I have met either through work or in the community, who have become great pals. It’s just nice to have that.

#### DIOCESE OF OTTAWA AND UPSTATE NEW YORK

*What did you think or feel when you found out your husband would be ordained or pursuing ordination?*

We were both students of the School of Theology at the University of Balamand in Lebanon in



Khouria Rita Saikali and Father Maximos have been married for 35 years. They currently serve at St. Antonios Orthodox Church in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Their children are Milad (32), Maria (30), Anthony (27), Stephanie (25) and Elianna (21).

1986. Before we met, he was studying to become a priest. I wanted to be with someone who was devoting his life to God, and I could see his devotion and love for the Church through the way he treated people and worked for others.

*What would you tell your younger self?*

I would remind myself that being a *khouria* means you have a responsibility to the whole community, and this is a great honor.

*What do you wish lay people knew?*

Everything that the *khouria* does is out of love, because she sees the whole parish as her family.

*What is your favorite part of being a khouria?*

My favorite part is being able to attend all of the services and to praise God through my chanting in the choir.

*What is the hardest part?*

You must keep in balance your involvement in the community and in your family at the same time; this is important and must be always done with love.

*Are there any additional things that you would like to share?*

I want to thank all of the members of St. Antonios Orthodox Church for making my experience as a *khouria* such a great blessing.

#### DIOCESE OF TOLEDO AND THE MIDWEST

*What did you think or feel when you found out your husband would be ordained or pursuing ordination?*

My husband and I met when I was a student at St. Vladimir’s Seminary. He was in the incoming year of my second year. I really didn’t know him that well, and we didn’t start dating until after we both



Khouria Jeanette Gallaway and Father Thomas have been married for 39 years. They currently serve at St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Lexington, Kentucky. Their three sons are Patrick, Michael and Timothy. Khouria Jeanette is a retired critical care nurse of 41 years and President of the Antiochian Women of the Diocese of Toledo and the Midwest.



graduated. I knew he was going to be ordained one day from the time we met.

I was raised in a Serbian Orthodox Community and the Church was always a very important part of our lives – from going to church, to singing in our youth choir, to performing in our Tamburitzan group for nine years. Other than school, our life was centered around the church. Therefore my husband being ordained was not a shock, as it is to many, but I just continued my dedication to Christ and His Church in a different capacity.

*What do you wish lay people knew?*

I wish people knew that being a *khouria* is a role that varies from person to person, and just because you are the wife of a priest doesn't mean you don't love Christ and His Church. Too many think you come to church because you are the *khouria*, and not because you love the Church. They expect you to do everything, instead of working together as a team.

*What is your favorite part of being a khouria?*

My favorite part of being a *khouria* is always having a church and services to go to. Too often, we have parishioners who move because of their jobs, and they have no Orthodox Church to attend. Church is my life, and I couldn't bear not being able to attend.

*Do you have any funny experiences you can share?*

I have an identical twin sister who is also a *popodija* in the Serbian Diocese. This has been such a blessing when we can share things that no one else can relate to. When I would call my sister and tell her what I was doing, she would say, "You're not supposed to do that as the wife of a priest; others in the church should be doing that." After her husband was ordained, she called me and told me what she was doing (which was similar to what I was doing) and I told her, "I thought you weren't supposed to do that as the wife of a priest."

We decided we were raised being active in the church and followed our mother and grandmothers examples, and couldn't really change our involvement in the church.

*Are there any additional things that you would like to share?*

Although I have always had an active role in the church, I thank God that I also had a profession to fall back on. I am a retired critical care nurse, and my sister is a retired OB Nurse. This gave us a different perspective and a reality check when things would get tense. I worked with open-heart surgery

patients in recovery, and dealt with death and dying frequently, as well as complex family dynamics. I would just remember other's situations, and realize how God has blessed Father and me, as well as our children and grandchildren. God is good.

When we were growing up, our high school was across from the church. During Feast Day liturgies the priest would call the principal of the school and asked for us to be excused so that we could sing for Liturgy. We would leave school, sing for Liturgy, then have a snack with the priest, and go back to school. It was a different world then – thank God.

## DIOCESE OF NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON, D.C.

*What did you think or feel when you found out your husband would be ordained, or pursuing ordination?*

I met Father Michael when he was just beginning seminary. He was assigned to my parish. He would come with a good friend of ours, who was also in seminary, and my brother, who was at the medical school campus up in Columbia. I was studying at the teachers' college of Columbia University. They would pick my brother and me up on the way



Khouria Laila and Father Michael have been married 34 years. They have two adult children, Matthew (33) and Marie (31). They currently serve at St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Brooklyn, New York, where they have spent the last 19 years. They have also served St. Elias, Sylvania, Ohio, and 7 years at St. George, West Roxbury, Massachusetts. Khouria Laila works as a speech language pathologist for the New York City Department of Education

to church. We ended up in the car, just the two of us once, and started talking. I started dating him while he was in seminary, so I pretty much knew what I was getting into. I was very nervous, very excited, and very grateful, but it was not a surprise. I really did fall in love with my husband and knew that no matter what he did, that's what I wanted to do, too. I am the granddaughter of a priest and was raised in one of those "first-one-in, last-one-out-of-the-building" families. I did five summers as a counselor at Antiochian Village the first year it opened. One of the things that was said about my friends, my peer group, was "Wow! You'd make great priest wives." We all looked at each other like, "Not a chance!" Every one of us ended up marrying a priest. Most importantly, however, I really wanted to marry Father Michael and the person he was. I started out as pretty nervous, but anticipating it sort of as a challenge and an adventure.

*What would you tell your younger self?*

I think my wisdom might be more life-specific than clergy-specific. It would be something like: a little more joy, a little less worrying. I can honestly say that at any given time and age in my life, I was doing the best that I could. I don't know what I would have done with advice, even from myself. In the big picture, I might have enjoyed things more and worried less. When I give advice, when asked, it has changed over the years. In some ways I'm more confident now and in some ways somewhat less confident. I'll explain that. A seminarian's wife, a few years after her husband graduated, got sent wherever they got sent. We bumped into each other at a convention. She said, "I'll never forget that thing that you said to me. 'If you are authentically who you are, then you gotta love me.'" I am going to be who I am, rather than worry about meeting everyone's expectations. People recognize when you are being authentic and that's all you can do. The night before we were getting in the car and heading to Toledo, three months after having gotten married, I had a horrifying dream that I could feel in the pit of my stomach, that I was never going to be happy again. I told my Father, who has been a clinical psychologist, and he told me, "*Happiness is not about where you are or any of the things around you. You can be happy anywhere.*"

*What is your favorite part of being a khouria?*

For me personally, you get to be in church a lot; it's a plus. Don't misunderstand me, I struggle with

attention, I struggle being there for the right reasons, I struggle with being distracted. In general, however, I grew up loving to be in church. I would say, more to the point, as clergy wife you have this rare and holy privilege to be included in people's most personal moments of joy and loss. There have been a couple times I've been able to accompany my husband when he brought sacraments to an elderly person. You have these lovely quiet moments in which you are included. I love getting to be part of people's lives, and often they want you to be included. They feel it's a good thing to include you and they welcome you. That is lovely. It often happens either by my presence. Just standing there and listening or maybe saying something, I am able to be comforting to someone or make their day better, and usually it's important. It's an amazing gift that anyone would feel that about a person.

*What is the hardest part?*

Friendships inside the parish are fraught with difficulty. People are easily hurt on either side. You learn who you can trust and who can handle some of the dips and flows. If you're working or have another outside interest, it's great and can provide you with a network.

One of the things Bishop JOHN recently shared with us, "As clergy wives or husbands we are called to bring the resurrection to people." This is the notion of bringing the resurrection to your parish, and also to do that wherever you are. With all humility, I bring something literally to the conference table or lunch table, that just makes everybody just think a little bit. And maybe that's not the worst thing in the world. People are aware of my life, and maybe that's not such a bad thing. I bring a little bit of the resurrection wherever I am, even if I'm not preaching with words.

Sharing your husband with others. I have a memory of sitting in a home after a death. And by sitting there with Father Michael I understood what it is. Sometimes you sit there in silence while the mother bursts out in tears again, and someone goes to put on another cup of coffee. It's not like, how long does it take to console a family? It's not that cognitively I didn't know that before, but sitting with him I was like, "Ok, I get it now. There are nights that are just going to be like this." Even if you had asked me if I would be OK with my husband going to console a family, I would have been like, "Of course!" But it wasn't until I understood what



that entailed, it changed my whole feeling of him being called away. That really helped me a lot.

The most difficult thing was the moving. Moving does a couple of things for kids. It gives them life skills that you cannot manufacture. So when my daughter moved to college and was lying in a strange bed that first night, she was like, “OK, mom, this is not new to me.” She was used to acclimating. My kids’ teachers noticed that they were able to communicate with adults, that they had been in a variety of settings.

*Are there any additional things that you would like to share?*

I would say I am very grateful for the life that we have and the people we have gotten to know. I’m learning all the time how to keep carrying the resurrection to people. Wherever I am, with my family, or at work, certainly at the church, I fall down and I get back up again. There is a story of a pilgrim who visits a monk, and he asks him, “What is it that you do all day?” and the monk responds, “We fall down and we get back up.” That’s the journey, and yet I can’t imagine living any other way. We’ve encountered a lot of joy and a lot of sadness, but a lot of strength. I’ve met some wonderful people. I would say this about my kids, to this day we have this certain code and secret language that only clergy kids can understand, so that’s kind of a shared thing and there is some comfort in that. When you get older, you question a lot of things. I’ve never questioned that this is a lovely and valuable way to live.

## THE DIOCESE OF MIAMI AND THE SOUTHEAST

*What do you wish lay people knew?*



Khouria Ranwa and Father Kamal will celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary April 20, 2021. They serve at St. George Orthodox Church in Jacksonville, Florida. Their daughter, Miriam, is 17 and a senior in High School.

I wish lay people knew the extent of the behind-the-scene work within the priest family. Because, after all, we are human. We are not superheroes, and we don’t have armor on our hearts. The priests are called to give their lives to the Church, we are aware. Most of us do the very best we can to support them in this, and raise our families to love God and people. Most of us love the Church, want to serve, want to be relatable, and want to use our gifts for God and His Church.

*What is your favorite part of being a khouria?*

A *khouria*’s role is helping the priest, and my favorite part is the *servanthood*. I love being a woman who is specifically influential in her conduct, functioning effectively as a woman of God who supports her husband, and is an active member of the church. Jesus served the Father by serving mankind. Lest any of us should think we are of too high a station to serve our fellow man, we would do well to look to the example of Christ. Jesus Christ, through whom and for whom the entire universe was created (Colossians 1:15–17), left His glorious throne in heaven to serve sinful man. Christ did not limit His service to mighty miraculous acts, such as healing the sick and raising the dead, but condescended to the lowest menial tasks, such as the washing of His disciples’ feet (John 13:1–20).

*What is the hardest part?*

The hardest *part* of being a *khouria* is that we can sometimes be unfairly judged. The hardest *thing* about being a *khouria* is seeing the people you love and serve go through difficult circumstances (sickness, death, tragedy, divorce, betrayal). When one member of the body hurts, we all hurt.

Another hard part is the expectations you feel others have for you and the false expectations you have for yourself. I find myself comparing my “role” with other *khouria* and wondering if I’m doing all the right things.

*Are there any additional things that you would like to share?*

Guarding your heart is important: people are the worst, but they’re also the best. And when they’re the worst, you have to guard your heart and remember the best. God has given us a very valuable position, and that is to support and carry the ministry together with our husbands. Sometimes, when there’s opposition or just plain mess, you have to be intentional about guarding your heart from getting poisoned. You have to remember, too, not to give poison to your husband,

your kids, or to someone else.

Your words have value, so you have to be aware of what you say, and know that what you say has weight to it. Now, don't operate in fear, just in wisdom in what you speak. Keep your focus on God and be consistent in your prayer life and feed yourself spiritually, always seeking to grow and you'll be more than ok. *That ministry never ends, and you can't "clock out."*

Sometimes it's frustrating when I want quality time with my husband and he gets a call on his day off to go fix a leak at the church, or to counsel someone through a tough situation. I've had to learn to be flexible and share my husband even when I don't want to.

### THE DIOCESE OF WORCESTER AND NEW ENGLAND



Khouria Carol Hughes and Father Anthony have been married for 36 years. They currently serve at St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their two grown sons are Alexander and Gregory.

*What did you think or feel when you found out your husband would be ordained, or pursuing ordination?*

When we were dating, I knew that this was what Father Anthony wanted to do. He wasn't ordained until 19 months after we were married. Though I knew before we were married, when it actually happened, the reality of it sank in. Obviously I was for it, or he wouldn't have been able to proceed with ordination: I gave my blessing. It was not taken lightly; our oldest at the time was 14 months old. Before he was ordained, Father Anthony worked at a bank. It was just a job to get him through. He had already gotten his M.Div. from Oral Roberts, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He only had to complete a year at St. Vladimir's Seminary.

*What would you tell your younger self?*

I would tell my younger self that, when crises happen in the church, not to take it all so seriously. Try to take it objectively; it's not the end of the world. Spare yourself the stress and worry. It didn't need to be. Try not to let it get to you. *As you would with a dandelion, look at it, acknowledge it, blow on it, and let it go.*

*What do you wish lay people knew?*

I wish lay people knew that my role can sometimes be lonely. I think it's important for readers to know that, in spite of the ups and downs, we do love everyone, and even in the hard times. Everyone we've met in the ministry, we've grown from that encounter. When we came to the parish in Cambridge 28 years ago, my sons were seven and four. I was so worried about how they were behaving, one of the women, actually one of the founding families, came up to me and said, "Your family is just like anybody else's; you're not different from us." And she was right, we are not different than anyone else. We have grown through every encounter and every experience.

*Do you have any funny experiences you can share?*

Once a parishioner passed away and I was asked to start calling families in the parish. The boys were one-and-a-half and four at the time. While I was on the phone, all of a sudden I saw the Christmas tree, which was tied to the ceiling, start to sway and ornaments began flying in all directions! Of course, it was two little rascals swinging on the tree. I was on the phone, however, delivering the sad news, and couldn't act quickly enough to prevent disaster. Looking back on it, it was funny. I laugh now, but I didn't then.

### THE DIOCESE OF WICHITA AND MID-AMERICA

*What did you think or feel when you found out your husband would be ordained, or pursuing ordination?*

One day Father Mark came to me and he said, "I have an appointment with Father Constantine on the 30th of December." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "I want to go where the church never changes, I'm tired of the church always changing." His journey towards finding truth began 33 years ago as a prison chaplain. Then we journeyed through several Protestant denominations.

As a young girl I was enamored with the thought of growing up and marrying a pastor. As I got older, I thought, "Why? Let's rethink this." Because I





Khouria Susan Wallace and Father Mark have been married for 43 years. They are currently serving at St. James Orthodox Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Their three grown daughters are Andrea, Alison and Amy.

knew it would be a very sacrificial life. And it would be hard and we would be poor. I've learned to trust Him, however, and it has ended up being a very rich life. When we became Orthodox, 55 people joined us and we were all chrismated on the same day. Over the next year another 10 joined. All told, 65 people became Orthodox because Father Mark decided, "You know what, I'm not going to compromise anymore." Because there were so many of us, in the next year they ended up ordaining him so he could start a Western Rite Orthodox church. We did that in the chapel of St. Elijah's. Then we were in a storefront for two years. We ended up back at St. Elijah's and he got trained in the Eastern Rite. After he spent a couple years at St. Elijah's in the Byzantine Rite, Bishop BASIL put him in Stillwater, Oklahoma, helping an aging priest who was getting close to retirement.

*What is your favorite part of being a khouria?*

My favorite part of being a *khouria* is practicing hospitality. That really is not about food. In the dictionary, *hospitable* is between two words: *hospice* (which is a place of rest) and *hospital* (which is a place of healing). So when you are hospitable, people find rest and healing in your presence. I love to give people worth, and that's what hospitality really is. As a *khouria* I have a unique position to be able to do that. God opens many doors to me to give hurting people significance. I am grateful for that. I have a lot of opportunities that lay people do not have in giving people worth. When you see a broken person

begin to become whole because they feel loved, it's just the greatest gift to me. I am grateful for those open doors that come with this role.

*What is the hardest part?*

All of us are broken people, in one way or another, including the clergy. My husband is far from perfect. But this I know: he genuinely loves God and he sacrifices so much for his church and for his flock. Actually he's bi-vocational. He's a full-time hospice chaplain, and then he's exactly an hour from our driveway to the church in Stillwater. He never has a day off. I think it hurts me when I hear criticism of him.

*Are there any additional things that you would like to share about your journey through Orthodoxy?*

My husband was ordained 13 years ago, yet in many ways I feel like I've just begun the journey. I am so grateful because I feel safe. I tell people that and they don't understand. I have never felt more respected than as a woman in the Orthodox Church. They understand the iconic roles of men and women. My saint is Saint Susanna of the Myrrh-bearing Women. When I heard "equal to the Apostles," I thought, "Never would you hear that in a Protestant church." I want to be a woman like the myrrh-bearing women, I want to be a woman of courage. Because they had great courage: they were at the cross, when the disciples fled in fear, and they remained. And then they had the courage to go back early in the morning to the cave, knowing they were going to face the Roman soldiers. That did not stop them. They were very courageous women. That is my goal in my walk, "Lord I want to be a woman of courage for the sake of Truth." One of the verses that the Lord gave me when I was coming out of Mormonism is in Galatians: "It is for freedom that Christ set you free . . . do not be enslaved again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). I think about that all the time, I have been living a journey of slavery to freedom, and I continue to make that walk. I am very grateful, I don't want to go back, and I don't want to become enslaved. I just want to be a courageous woman in the middle of spiritual warfare that knows who I am and who I belong to. I want to be a woman who always asks questions.

**DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON,  
OAKLAND & THE MID-ATLANTIC**

*What did you think or feel when you found out your husband would be ordained, or pursuing ordination?*

I started in 1980 as a counselor at Antiochian Village and Father Don started there in 1982. When we met at camp, he had just finished his first year at St. Vladimir's Seminary and we became friends. I think that's a good way to start out, as friends. Then you get to know the real person. I



Khouria Janet Shadid and Father Don have been married 35 years. They currently serve at St. Mary Orthodox Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Their two sons are Father Christopher (33) and Stephen (31). Khouria Janet works as a licensed social worker (MSW/LSW).

told him, "What you see is what you get." I wasn't surprised, and as my brother, Bishop JOHN, was in New Kensington, Pennsylvania, I would go visit him a lot. So I kind of knew what a priest's life was like. In fact, the reason I went to The Village that first summer was because I had never been away from home. I even commuted to a college and I grew up in Boston. My father had just died in April, and my brother told me I should come up to The Village for a couple of weeks to see if I would like it. Because we were close, and he said that he would see me often, I agreed to give the Village a chance. I was like the cat that you feed and that never goes home. Every week I would call home and ask if I could stay one more week, and I ended up staying the whole summer, even for Special Olympics after Camp. Then I came back the next four years. I was there for five summers altogether. The third year I was there Father Don came. Father Don and I were counselors with Bishop THOMAS, Bishop ANTHONY, Khouria Laila Elias, just a whole bunch of people; and we still remain friends today. The Village is like Heaven on earth, because it's based on Christ. I just love it so much. So again, my husband came the third summer I was there, and we were just friends. When I knew he was going to be ordained, I wasn't surprised, but I was pretty scared because reality hit. We lived at the Village. I

loved living at the Village, especially being with Fr. John Namie, the first Camp Director. Although I am not good with change, a part of me was excited when I heard that we were going to be transferred to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, because the Village can be pretty lonely during the year. Also, I was looking forward to being part of a parish family that was only twenty minutes from the Village, so I could have the best of both worlds. Though I was scared, I had to practice what I preached, which was, "Have faith, God is good, and God will always take care of us."

*What would you tell your younger self?*

I would say, Be yourself. You can't please everybody, so don't try. You just have to realize some people are only happy being unhappy, and you have people who are happy being happy. We need to associate with positive people and stay away from the negative ones.

We need to take care of ourselves. I've always told my family: put God first, family second, and church third. When I say church third, I mean, the family is a little church. Charity begins at home. I don't mean, don't go to church. I mean, I would not feel guilty because I went to my son's soccer game instead of choir rehearsal. Or, I don't want to be in charge of the Sunday School right now because I want to be in charge of the soccer boosters. Because even though church is important, so are outside activities. You have to find a balance. You can't be everything to everybody. You can't go to everything. So it's better to do a few things well, than a lot of things not well. Don't spread yourself too thin.

We can't worry about pleasing everybody because that is impossible. So what I do when somebody says, "Someone is mad at you," I ask myself, "Do I respect that person enough to care what he or she thinks." Focus on the positive. We were blessed to have so many positive people in our church. And even with our parenting stuff. I loved how one woman raised her kids, and I would always go up to her and ask her advice on how to raise kids. She was always a good support. So find the people you connect with, and just try to build relationships with them, and try to stay away from the negative stuff. You have to be open to what people say, without being offended. It's hard to hear when you mess up. You want to hear how wonderful you are, but we can't fix something we don't acknowledge. People can't tell us if we aren't approachable. We need to



be approachable, that is, we need to be open to what people have to say. It's not that we have to agree with it, but we have at least to listen to it. If enough people are telling you the same thing, maybe the world is right, and you're wrong.

Take care of yourself, not only physically and emotionally, but definitely spiritually.

*What is your favorite part of being a khouria?*

My favorite part of being a *khouria* is being part of a big family, having a lot of activities going on, having a lot of people to support you. I was always active in church. I grew up in a big church, and being active was just what I did. I did what I wanted. I loved being a youth director and Sunday school teacher. Honestly, I like working with kids more than I like working with adults, because kids are very innocent, honest, open and forgiving. They should run the world.

I love having a lot of priest wives that are friends. Even though they are all over the country, we still stay together. We have Zoom meetings and things like that. I think being a priest's wife is what you make it. It can be as joyful or as miserable as you want it. You need to focus on the positive people and the positive activities. I think you should do what you want to do, and use the talents God has given you. Don't be made to feel guilty, and compelled to do things that you really don't want to do, or have time to do. The other thing I would recommend is having a life outside of the church. I loved being a stay-at-home mom, but you know how you can't get a song out of your head? The song in my head was, "The wheels on the bus go round and round." I went to confession, and I was talking to the priest, and he says, 'You know what? You need a life!' So I went back to school, and that's how I got my Master's degree. First, however, I took classes just to get my mind going. It was really neat, because I wasn't Father Don's wife, I wasn't the boy's mom. Nobody knew my husband was a priest. People treated me like they treated everybody else.

The other thing I would do is get involved in my kids' activities. I wish people would be happy with what they have, instead of dissatisfied with what they don't have. It's important to pray often and take care of yourself, physically, mentally, and spiritually, and just be joyful in what you do.

*What is the hardest part?*

The hardest part for me is being away from family. I'm 550 miles away from my family and I was

super close to my family. So it's not like I can just go home for the weekend, or they can just come see the soccer game. Especially as they get older. Or as when people die, and you can't be there for them like you want to be. Though I was lucky enough to have Bishop JOHN only an hour-and-a-half away, at least we spent holidays together. It's so hard not being able to go home whenever you want.

The other hard thing is not knowing when you will get transferred. The summer was always stressful: my husband would get a letter, you could tell it was addressed to him from the Archdiocese. Not knowing where you're going to be, and for how long. This was especially so having kids. I always teased my husband that if he got transferred, we would write. We would miss him and we would write to him. You get established. Then again, you have to have faith that God provides. You will be fine.

## I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU VISITED ME . . .

After serving six years in prison for a felony, Greg was a free man. He was released to a small town in California to serve out his parole. He had the basics to start his new life: a place to live, and food, and medical assistance.

There was just one thing missing: a spiritual home. In those first weeks of freedom, when the release and reintegration into society were still a shock to his system, Greg made it a priority to "come and see" the Orthodox Church.

He had learned about the Orthodox faith while in prison through Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM), an agency of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America.

Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry proclaims Christ to men and women who are incarcerated, many of whom are being introduced to the Orthodox Church for the first time. For Orthodox Christians whose lives have been upended by their crimes and prison sentence, OCPM helps them to return to the Faith, offering forgiveness and reconciliation. As a result, families are reunited, marriages are healed, and thousands of incarcerated men and women have a new sense of peace and restored order in their lives.

OCPM serves the spiritual needs of incarcerated men and women in a variety of ways. We correspond with thousands of prisoners and provide them with books, Bibles, pamphlets, and icons. We catechize them in the Orthodox faith through special correspondence courses. We train Orthodox priests and laypersons to visit and counsel them in prison. We also lobby correctional facilities around the country to recognize the Orthodox faith.

# CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN A PANDEMIC

FAITHFUL TO THE TASK, LOOKING BACK, AND LOOKING FORWARD

Carole Buleza, Anna Sarah Farah, and Gail Meena Malaniak

“THIS, THEN, IS OUR TASK: TO EDUCATE OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN IN GODLINESS.”

## ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, “HOMILY ON EPHESIANS”

St. John Chrysostom is the patron of the Department of Christian Education. The quotation from his “Homily on Ephesians” was our inspiration before the pandemic. It was even more significant this year, as our church schools did what they could to continue providing Orthodox education for our children.

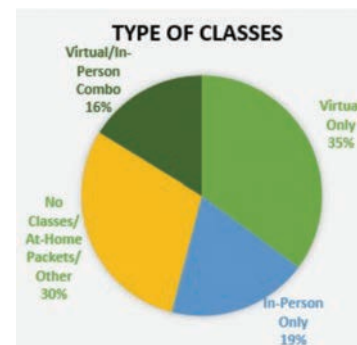
In August, the Department convened a Zoom conference. We asked several Church School directors to join the Department’s coordinators and associates to discuss their plans for the coming year, and to learn how we could help. Committees of coordinators, staff, and Church School directors were formed to provide resources, resulting in the substantial “2020 Church School Resources Table.” This can be found on the Department’s website.

In December we wanted to know how they had fared during the first four months of the school year. Anna-Sarah Farha, Christian Education Coordinator for the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast, who also volunteers her time to the Department by serving as the Assistant for Church School Directors, took on the project. Directors in our database were sent an e-mail invitation to participate in a survey. The questions covered types of classes, virtual platforms used, how often classes met, texts or other materials used in class, materials provided for families, special events, and changes, if any, planned for 2021. Directors from 38 churches responded from various parts of the Archdiocese. Although it was a small sampling, it yielded interesting and useful information.

Anna-Sarah completed the project by tabulating and graphing the data. Her report was sent out to all the Church School directors in our database in January.

## SURVEY RESULTS

As the first graph, “Type of Classes,” indicates, only 19% of these 38 parishes continued with in-person classes, adapting with masks and social-distancing. Another 16% had virtual and in-person classes combined, making a total of 35% of parishes where students were in-person for some or all classes. Churches that went virtual-only were 35%. We provided an article discussing platform options in our 2020 Church School Resources Table, as well as links to websites that provided tutorials for Zoom. As to the platform used, 54% used Zoom, with 25% using a combination of Zoom with Google Meets, or videos. It is heartening to realize that 70% of the parishes surveyed were able to maintain classes during the pandemic.



Chur-

ches that went virtual-only were 35%. We provided an article discussing platform options in our 2020 Church School Resources Table, as well as links to websites that provided tutorials for Zoom. As to the platform used, 54% used Zoom, with 25% using a combination of Zoom with Google Meets, or videos. It is heartening to realize that 70% of the parishes surveyed were able to maintain classes during the pandemic.

The 30% of parishes that were not able to provide classes did not choose that option lightly. Parents may not have wanted to juggle another set of Zoom lessons, and children may have been resistant – “Zoomed-out.” Perhaps teachers were not able to adapt to the virtual platforms. What these 30% *did* provide were links to various resources and, in some cases, the textbooks and materials needed, typically each month, for the parents to use in educating their children.

The second graph, “Class Frequency,” shows for the parishes that had classes, 54% kept the normal



Sunday scheduling. Below are responses to some of the other questions.

### Which curricula, programs, materials and resources were used?

Materials and curriculum for both virtual and in-person classes were varied. Ten parishes were able to proceed with their typical OCEC and GOA texts or programs. The

other programs used, their links, and the corresponding number of parishes are as follows: “Let Us Attend” from antiochian.org/christianeducation (7), their own programs

(5), Be the Bee (4), Links from our Church School Resources Table (3), “Ask Abouna” (3), The Relationship Project from [faithtree.org/the-relationship-project](http://faithtree.org/the-relationship-project) (2), Orthodox Journeys from [orthodoxjourneys.com](http://orthodoxjourneys.com) (2), Orthodox Pebbles from [orthodoxpebbles.com](http://orthodoxpebbles.com) (2), *The Good Samaritan: A Children’s Catechism* from [ancientfaith.com](http://ancientfaith.com) (2), Tending the Garden of our Heart from [tending-the-garden.com](http://tending-the-garden.com) (1). Several responses also included online learning games and puzzles from Kahoot.com, and Quizzizz.com.

The parishes that created their own programs gave us the details. Ann Clough from St. George in Indianapolis, Indiana, wrote, “I have been using the iconography on our church walls, with online resources for their biographies.” “Videos and discussions with Fr. Fred reading a book to the children once a month,” was the plan for St. George, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Dee Kacere explained. Studying the lives of the saints also complemented the regular program at St. Ignatius, Franklin, Tennessee, according to Anne-Marie McCollum. Lila Coudsy, St. Michael, Van Nuys, California, responded, “For middle and high school classes we’ve been talking about different virtues each week, since perseverance, courage, good judgement, and purposefulness have to do with our interactions with one another.” Claire Levash shared that the Divine Liturgy was the focus at St. George, Little Falls, New Jersey: “Early in Fall we had a teaching in-person Divine Liturgy – very successful – complemented with a PowerPoint done by our Assistant Director.” Nadina Robinson of St. Barnabas, Costa Mesa,

California, had the same focus: “Zoom classes discussed teacher-made worksheets to fill in while following the liturgy.”

Creating a year’s curriculum is not an easy task, even with the assistance of online resources, and I know that these Church School directors and teachers put in many hours developing lessons for the children.

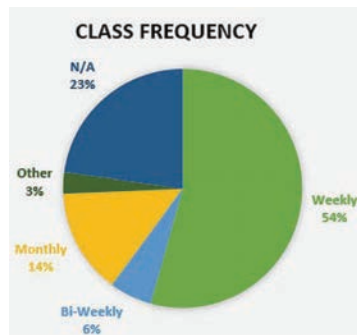
### Which Christian education materials were provided for families?

Whether classes were offered or not, Church School directors and teachers from all the surveyed parishes kept the families engaged. Katie Reetzke used her Church School Facebook page to connect families at Holy Apostles, Bowling Green, Kentucky, to offer resources, coloring pages, lessons and supplements. Amanda Qaqish at St. George, Richmond Hill, Ontario, provided families with curriculum books, crafts and coloring sheets, and games. Lesson materials from *Orthodox Journeys* were printed and distributed regularly in “remote learning baskets” by Amanda Florian and the Church School staff at St. George, New Kensington, Pennsylvania. Dee Kacere writes, “Copies of ‘Let Us Attend,’ craft materials for Zoom lessons, and books from the student library were given parents in a ‘drive-by,’ or hand-delivered by teachers.” The Church School of Saint George Cathedral, Coral Gables, Florida, led by Lama Elhaj, provided an *Orthodox Study Bible* to families and icon pictures for the Feast Days.

### Were there any special events?

The directors organized several special events; here are a few. By way of Zoom, a “hot-chocolate night,” in which students made Nativity cards for the single persons of the parish; a virtual St. Nicholas Day event with treats sent home to the children; a two-session virtual event for teens, teaching students how to make a meal for their family, and how to make a dessert; an in-person tea party for the young girls for the Feast of the Presentation of the Theotokos; a group video for the Nativity Program; a Christmas Spectacular Show with children individually or with their class presenting a puppet show of the Nativity or a Christmas carol.

The report on Christian Education in the Archdiocese from September through December, 2020, provided a look at the efforts of 38 parishes. If this snapshot is indicative of the level of energy and resourcefulness of all of our Church Schools, we can see in it the commitment and dedication of our Church



School directors and teachers that have kept the faith growing in our children!

This is the end of the survey report, but not the end of our stories on Christian Education during the pandemic ....

## TWO NEW RESOURCES DEVELOPED

*Gail Malaniak, Associate of the Department and Church School Director at St. Matthew the Evangelist Orthodox Church in North Royalton, Ohio, has found in these months of the pandemic an opportunity to develop new Christian education materials, as she explains below.*

## FAMILY ACTIVITY PACKETS

One program that has become very popular with our families is our monthly “Family Activity Packets.” In the packets, we use the Antiochian Gospel Program, “Let us Attend,” as a basis for many of the suggested activities. There is an introductory letter included with each packet. The letter includes focus points for that month, such as feast days and special services, a list of weekly activities, and other helpful information, such as setting up a family icon corner, an explanation of icons, and suggested websites. We have also included suggestions for worshipping

at home. We also list the days and times of services for families to attend in person or virtually.

Beginning with our January packets, we included a family interactive section. Now that we have had several months for families to become accustomed to this format, we are asking for responses, comments, suggestions, and the sharing of ideas that are being used in their homes. Those will be included in the following month in the new family interactive section.

The following is a quote from a few parents about the packets:

*“I like the monthly Christian Education at-home packets, because they help us to prepare for what we will hear at Liturgy. It puts the resources right in my hands so that I can teach and remind my children about the commemoration or gospel reading. It’s easier for them to attend and understand when I’ve already established a foundation of background knowledge in the week prior.”*

*“The packets are very easy to use and full of great ideas for activities. My kids have really enjoyed them.”*

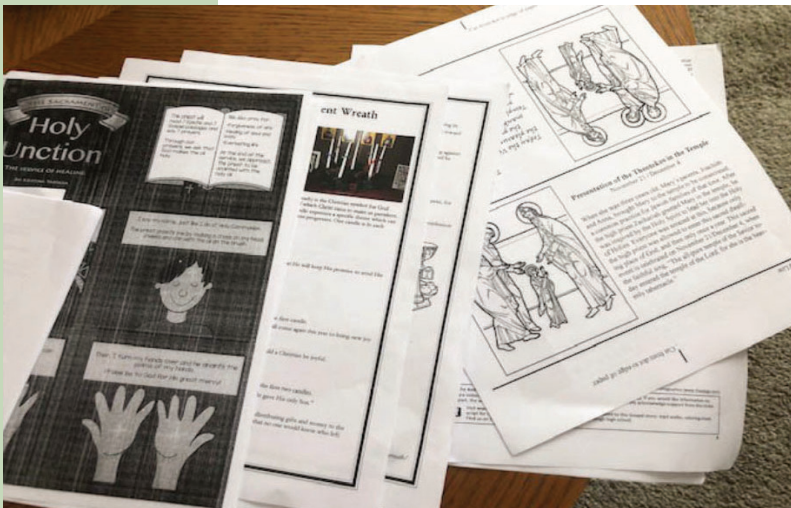
*“We are all learning about our faith together through the packets.”*

Families sign their name on a sign-out sheet so that we can keep track of who is using the packets. Some packets are mailed out to those families that are currently unable to pick them up in person. It’s our hope that families will use this opportunity through the packets to start or continue important Orthodox traditions in their homes.

Our parish has just completed construction of our new and beautiful temple, which includes a room that is typically thought of as a “cry room.” While we see the need for parents of young children and/or special needs children to have a place to be able to worship when they need a “break,” we are encouraging families to use the room only as a time to re-focus. We call it the Guardian Angel room, and it contains icons, a window to view the church, and a sound system so people can hear the services. This room also has books, and a few educational toys. We have a sign to encourage parents to keep their children in the Liturgy as much as possible, however. We do not want anyone to feel that the children’s “noise” is disruptive.

## WORSHIP BAGS

In order to help parents keep their young children engaged in the Divine Liturgy, we have created “worship bags.” Most of the materials and ideas have come from various websites, such as Orthodox Pebbles, and Summer Kinard. Olivia Harmon, a teacher



at home while watching livestream services, such as dressing up, following along in the book, singing the hymns together.

Following the letter are copies of the weekly gospel lessons, with a variety of suggestions, craft ideas, *troparia*, prayers, and meal and snack ideas that are relevant to that month. If there is a feast-day for that month, we include ideas for celebrating that feast-day





and a mom from our parish, has prepared and laminated most of the materials for our bags.

The materials in the bags include picture cards, numbered 1–30, on a ring. Each card contains a picture related to the liturgy, with a note on the back. For instance, on the card for “Blessed is the Kingdom,” the note says, “Watch Father raise the Gospel in the form of a cross.” We also have a “flat Matthew,” similar to the character from the book, *Flat Stanley*. It’s a small, laminated picture of St. Matthew, our church’s patron saint. Each one has a different fact about the saint on the back. We are also putting together “I-Spy” books, which will include pictures of the clergy, items they see as they look around, and icons to locate while they are in church. We will also add materials as needed that relate to a current feast-day. Each bag is slightly different, in order to provide a variety each week. It is our hope that the worship bags will help parents keep their young children engaged in the Divine Liturgy so that the need for “breaks” will be minimized.

Our plan for phase two of the worship bags is to send kits home with instructions for families to create similar materials to be used while attending liturgy virtually.

We look forward to returning to our normal Christian Education programs. When that time comes, it will be with the prayer that we have fervently upheld our ministry along the way, and that our families will have developed a stronger Orthodox foundation.

### LOOKING FORWARD


On Sunday, March 7th, 2021, Anna-Sarah Farha convened a Zoom meeting of Diocesan coordinators and Church School directors to discuss how the Department of Christian Education should support Church School directors as they prepare to re-open classrooms and alternative spaces to students.

All in attendance voiced their anticipation to resume face-to-face instruction, as well as their concerns about the challenges Church Schools will face with in-person classes as we emerge from a global pandemic. From this open, productive dialogue came the formation of a committee tasked with the creation and distribution of a transition planning guide, covering topics such as CDC classroom guidelines, example classroom set-up, helpful forms and documents, how to support church school staff during the transition, and reconnecting with church school families.

During this unprecedented challenge, our Christian educators have been faithful to St. John’s words, and to Christ.

Contact information: Anna-Sarah Farha at [aodce.csdirectors@gmail.com](mailto:aodce.csdirectors@gmail.com), Gail Meena Malaniak at [gailmeen@gmail.com](mailto:gailmeen@gmail.com).






# Thank You

## Saint Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church

Good food is the foundation of good health, and good health is the foundation of a good future. Thank you for addressing immediate hunger needs and ensuring long-term impact for our community’s children. Your support is nourishing thousands of West Michigan kids to reach their full potential. We couldn’t do this important work without YOU.



Dear KFB,

Thank you for giving me healthy food. I love the diggers that are on the bags. Those bags inspire me to be healthy and also be in the same thing as you. Thanks for helping me out.

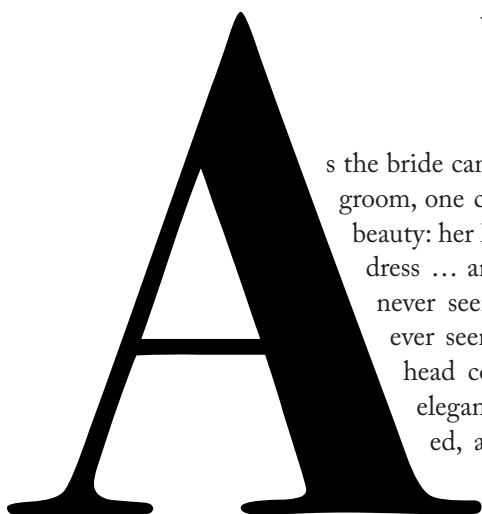
Sincerely,  
Iris Cruz



"FROM THESE STONES"

DEPARTMENT OF MISSIONS AND EVANGELISM

# XYZ, ETC. & ICXC



As the bride came down the aisle toward the groom, one could not help but notice her beauty: her lovely smile, a stunning white dress ... and a full sleeve tattoo. I had never seen her bare arms. Nor had I ever seen her in church without her head covered for services. She was elegant, poised, traditionally minded, and born between 1981 and 1996. She was a Millennial.



photo by James Coleman, unsplash.com

The current generation of young adults and young parents is different from their forebears. True, this can be said of every generation. Preceding generations through the so-called Boomers (1946–1964), however, were formed and influenced by what we might

call Christian culture. That is, for much of American history there was a common thread of biblical knowledge that wove together the speech and behavior of even nominal Christians. Non-believers were aware of the Golden Rule and the Commandments, and even adhered to them, and held the hope of a good end in the hands of a merciful God.

These days it seems we have a whole generation that has either grown up home-schooled, Harry-Potter-fed, classically read – or has been indoctrinated by politically correct, often anti-Christian, public schools. They eat, sleep, and live differently than their elders; in equal measure being both more conservative and liberal than their forebears, depending on the issue. When they come to the Church, what do they seek?

Obviously (churchy answer for the win), they are seeking salvation. They also seek stability and tradition. Whereas their parents and grandparents may have appreciated authority figures that were “cool”

and relevant, Millennials may be in search of a parent figure. Whereas Boomers grew up in an era when a parent’s discipline may have often hindered their view of a merciful God, many Millennials have experienced no parental discipline at all.

A newcomer, a fellow Boomer, once said, “Within moments of my first experience of Orthodox worship, I thought: ‘Daddy’s home.’” I immediately understood. Think about it: “Blessed is the Kingdom ... Lord have mercy ... Through the prayers of our holy fathers,” and so forth. Having left the Episcopalian communion as a young adult, I had additional reasons for appreciating her comment.

These young adults, Millennials (and subsequent generations), grew up in a world that was online from the time of their birth; for many, not only computers, but also cell phones have ever been at their hands and in their memory. For most of their life, social media has been as prevalent, if not more so, than what used to be called a social life.

Many grew up unchurched in a world saturated with news of “authority figures” – musicians, actors, politicians, influencers – too often coupled with abuse. Political correctness, gender bending, and all sorts of sexual perversion has not only been tolerated but championed within their classrooms, peer groups, and especially online.

You may have heard of a study done some years ago where the landscapers created two different playground environments: 1) an open field, and 2) a fenced in area. The difference in the children’s behavior, depending on which area was occupied, could not have been more different. In the open field, the children were reluctant to interact, stray, or play. With fences, the children ran around the entire playground. They felt safer and freer with boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

Many Millennials grew up in a culture without boundaries. They did not need to dive into this environment; they were treading water from first breath. They have swum in the world without dams.

They seek the Ark, a choice between the world and the Church.

They do not come to us without investigation. Unlike the days of yore, when catechism was at the feet of the faithful parent, priest, or catechist, when the Millennial first enters the door of the temple, he or she has spent time poking around “Orthodoxy” all over the Internet. Have you ever poked around the Internet? There be dragons! Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!<sup>2</sup> What are we, the clergy and faithful, to do?

First, stop trying to be hip. As we used to say, “You can’t hang.” Most importantly: Learn the Faith. In olden days newcomers arrived with mostly Protestant baggage. It was only fitting that those catechizing them would know the various heterodox positions and questions, and Orthodox answers to the same.

These days, you gotta know what you’re up against. There is nothing new under the sun – even pagans. Stick to the patristics, stick to the basics, stick to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). It would be easy to disagree; to say, “That’s what we’ve always done.” That is just not true, nor is it going to cut it. This is new territory for us Boomers; much has changed. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must adapt our methods to meet the needs – the needy – at hand. If pandemic restrictions taught us anything it is that, regardless of restraints and rules, you cannot prevent the Holy Spirit from leading people to the Church. The Church will continue and “the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18b).

At January’s Houston-area clergy association meeting, the gathered clergy all commented that they were seeing more newcomers, inquirers, and catechumens than before the restrictions of 2020. As I traveled back to the church I wondered if that were the whole truth. Could it be that we clergy,

thanks to 2020, were seeing newcomers more so than in the past? Sundays are busy days. We see whom we need, or want, to see. With everything turned upside down, our busyness also changed. Hoping that things would return to normal and the normal faithful would return, we were able to notice, encourage, and engage the newcomer.

In my experience, many a newcomer is a Millennial or Gen X, Y, or Z: tatted up, pierced up, and seeking up. We do not need to become part of their

culture to welcome them to ours. Besides, it is His culture they seek: a culture that is found in the lives of the saints, the witness of Scripture, and the fullness of Tradition. May it also be found in us, sinners though we be. It is our brokenness, our fallen humanity that we share. Yet, through repentance, we become one family, through the Body of Christ, the Church.

Let us welcome those whom the Holy Spirit has nudged our way. Let’s hit the books, as old fogies used to say. Make your cross and poke around the Internet, in consultation with your spiritual father, and see what it is that has sparked their interest in the Faith. There are a lot of Orthodox talking

heads out there; some may not be your cup of tea. But as St. Paisios said: “We have no right to judge other people or other situations.”<sup>3</sup>

Better yet, train up the younger generation to teach and catechize the younger generation. The past lives and culture of the newer generations may be different, but the Body of Christ is ever the same. As we did not encourage Protestant inquirers to hate their past, but to thank God for the journey, let us welcome the next generation (tatts, piercings, warts, and all) into the warm embrace, the saving boundaries, of the Church.

Fr. Joseph Huneycutt  
Vice-Chairman, Department of Missions and Evangelism

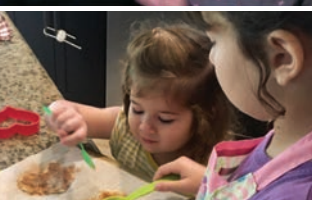
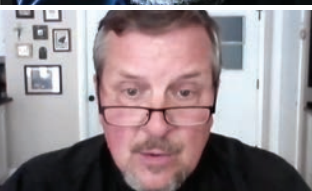
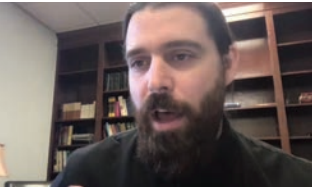
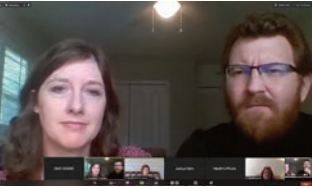


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1. <https://www.asla.org/awards/2006/student-awards/282.html>
2. Spoken by the Tin Man, Dorothy, and the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).
3. St. Paisios of Mount Athos, *Spiritual Counsels*, vol. 2: *Spiritual Awakening*, p. 142.

# DOMSE Fall Retreat 2020

“BEHOLD, HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS FOR BRETHREN TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY.” —PSALM 133:1



Under the leadership of His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS, the Diocese of Miami and the Southeast (DOMSE) held its annual fall retreat, virtually, October 2-4, 2020.

Over five hundred participants registered. The topics of the workshops included spiritual growth, chanting, mentorship, book reviews, and Orthodox art. We also enjoyed our perennial favorite (and never boring!) Clergy Trivia Game Night. The laity and clergy were able to gather over Zoom to listen to speakers on various topics meant to encourage and foster a sense of community in this unprecedented time of separation. Presenters for this retreat included clergy, laity, and professionals from DOMSE and beyond.

Our theme was explored by sessions with Fr. Stephen DeYoung, as he spoke about unity in the Church, around the bishop. Fr. Kosta Petrogeorge, a psychologist, spoke on dealing with the Orthodox view of the isolating pain of sexual addiction, and how we can be a bridge to recovery. Our own Director of Education, Anna-Sarah Farha, led our Church School teachers in a workshop that helped them prepare for the upcoming season of Advent. Anne Marie McCollum, who is a leader with the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, shared more about this amazing program with teachers from our parishes.

Several of our talented young adults led a chanting workshop, which is a favorite of our SOYO members. Fr. Nathaniel Trembley and his wife Khouria Sarah led workshops on topics dealing with cultivating resilience when the world is falling apart.

We were blessed to have workshops led by such amazing speakers as Fr. Herman Lasseter of Hiram, Georgia, Fr. John Oliver of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and Fr. David Winn of Raleigh, North Carolina. DOMSE is extremely blessed to have such a wealth of speakers to draw from.

DOMSE has been blessed this year with several new priests and their families moving to the diocese to serve in parishes. We were able to meet and welcome these new faces virtually over Zoom, and to enjoy their input in our workshops.

The retreat was kicked off by an address from Sayidna NICHOLAS on Friday afternoon, calling all parishioners of all ages to fellowship and spiritual renewal. Each day the Education Department of DOMSE offered a virtual Kids Club, which was a huge hit with our younger parishioners.

Each participant was encouraged to worship with their own parish on Saturday evening and Sunday morning, in person or online, and then we gathered virtually in the afternoon to close the retreat with encouraging words from our beloved Bishop.

We have missed being able to be together in community over the last few months but it is always encouraging to see smiling faces on the screen and to know that, even though we are not together in person, we are one body in Christ and that we truly dwell together in unity.



# ST. COLUMBA'S “Dream” of the Rood Screen

Fr. Les Bundy  
St. Columba Orthodox  
Church,  
Lafayette, Colorado

photo by Wolf Zimmermann,  
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One of the oldest pieces of Anglo-Saxon literature is the seventh-century poem, *The Dream of the Rood*. In this poem, the author recounts a dream in which he sees the Cross of Christ and meditates on its meaning. The word *rood* is old English for *cross*. Basically, a rood screen is a short wall or partition that separates the altar area (also referred to as the chancel) from the nave (the area where the congregation sits or stands). The screen is called a “rood screen” in reference to the crucifix traditionally placed at the top of the screen.

The St. Columba Rood Screen has been a “dream” of the congregation for many years. It is a work of love on the part of the members of the congregation: parish member, Sub-deacon, and construction-company owner, Steve Kitsmiller, did the main construction and various members of the congregation did the finishing. Fr. Bundy, Steve Kitsmiller and Karl Bundy painted the icons that adorn the panels in the lower part of the rood screen.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE ROOD SCREEN

The development of the chancel as the principal place of sacramental worship was not an innovation on the part of the Church, but the continuation of God’s plan for salvation made manifest in the continuing worship of His people. Rooted in the worship of the ancient Temple, Christian sacramental worship centers on Christ as the replacement for the High Priest. George Barrios in *Jesus Christ and the Temple* gives a fairly complete description of the place of the Temple in the life of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> As Barrios notes, the Temple was not an accident of history, but part of God’s overall plan for salvation.

The image of Christ as the ultimate High Priest is beautifully laid out in the New Testament book of Hebrews. The nave (the place where the congregation gathers) in the Christian church replaces the court of the priests in the ancient Temple. The chancel becomes the Holy of Holies, where God and mankind come together in their most intimate contact. As in the Temple, there is usually an outer courtyard, or a porch (commonly called a narthex) as the entryway into the nave.

In the West as well as the East, the practice of mounting a cross or crucifix over the entry of the chancel or altar became common. The diagram of a church iconostasis in Ouspensky and Lossky’s *The Meaning of Icons* shows a cross at the top of the iconostasis.<sup>2</sup> In the West the cross

was commonly a crucifix, with Mary the Mother of God and St. John on either side. The cross or crucifix, using the ancient British term *rood* for cross, came to be associated with the Western chancel screen. This screen could be directly before the chancel, or sometimes, following certain monastic practice, could enclose the choir within an extended chancel.

The similarity of the rood screen and the iconostasis can be seen in a comparison of a Greek chapel and a small Norwegian church from roughly the same era. The iconostasis in a chapel of the Greek monastery of Hosios Lukas, built 1011, has a chancel screen made up of marble columns topped by decorative marble architrave. In the lower half of the spaces between the columns on either side of the entryway into the chancel are decorative marble panels. The open space above these two panels is filled with two large painted icon panels. In comparison, the Norwegian, Hopperstand Stave Church, dating from about 1150, has a solid wood chancel screen made up of large wooden columns with painted wooden panels in between. The pillars that define the entrance into the chancel have carved capitols with a decorative arch over the entrance. Other than the difference in materials (wood in the Norwegian church, marble in the Greek chapel) the two screens are almost identical.

## MODERN FORM AND THE ANCIENT CHURCH

Architecturally, the St. Columba Rood Screen is a modern adaptation of the Romanesque style; having the typical rounded arches but done in a simplified form. The overall inspiration for the design of St. Columba parish church was the Northern European Medieval rural parish church. The St. Columba rood screen was designed with a desire to recover the pre-schism ethos of the Western Church. The Pantocrator on the wall above the altar is modeled on a famous Romanesque fresco from the Spanish church of San Climent de Taull, currently housed in the National Museum of Art of Catalonia, in Barcelona, Spain. Saint Columba is a modern church based on historic Church models. With the completion of the Rood Screen, St. Columba is truly a parish “dream come true.”

1. St. Vladimir’s Seminary (SVS) Press, 1980.
2. SVS Press, 1982.

photo by Rafik Wahba, unsplash.com



# OUR LADY, EAST AND WEST

Deacon David Lochbihler

1. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, trans., *The Service of the Akathist Hymn: The Salutations to the Most Holy Theotokos*, (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1991), p. 79.
2. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 55.
3. Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 257–258.
4. Andrew Louth, “John of Damascus on the Mother of God as a Link Between Humanity and God,” Chapter 10 in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary Cunningham (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), p. 154.
5. Mary Christine Athans, *In Quest of the Jewish Mary* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), p. 27.
6. Andrew Gary Podolak, “*Most Holy Theotokos, Save Us*,” Master’s thesis, Balamand University, 2015, p. 12.
7. Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 153.
8. Brian K. Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Period*, vol. 1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), p. 54.
9. Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 27.
10. John Anthony

“More honourable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, thee who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very *Theotokos*, thee do we magnify.”<sup>1</sup> These words of veneration for the Blessed Virgin Mary, prayed and sung throughout the Orthodox Church for centuries, epitomize the special love relationship between the Theotokos and the Orthodox faithful.

“Throughout history, and especially during the fourth and fifth centuries, the basic category for thinking about Mary was that of paradox: Virgin and Mother; Human Mother of One who is God, Theotokos.”<sup>2</sup> A theological understanding of Our Lady is found most readily in the Divine Liturgy. “In Orthodox services Mary is often mentioned, and on each occasion she is usually given her full title: ‘Our All-Holy, immaculate, most blessed and glorified Lady, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.’ Here are included the three chief epithets applied to Our Lady by the Orthodox Church: *Theotokos* (God-bearer, Mother of God), *Aeiparthenos* (Ever-Virgin), and *Panagia* (All-Holy).”<sup>3</sup> The veracity of these titles for the Blessed Virgin Mary has been affirmed throughout Church history, especially in the Ecumenical Councils. “The authority for these epithets

is to be found in the records of the early ecumenical councils.”<sup>4</sup> The veneration of Our Lady permeates the life of the Orthodox Church. “Although these titles have never been defined explicitly in an ecumenical council of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, they are used frequently in liturgy and personal prayer.”<sup>5</sup> Every Orthodox Church features an icon of

the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus near the altar, and our people’s intense love for the Theotokos runs wide and deep. These three titles of the Virgin Mary will be considered in turn.

The Virgin Mary is called the *Theotokos*, or God-bearer, from the earliest centuries of the Orthodox faith. Around the year 250 A.D., the term *Theotokos* “was found in a prayer written on a fragment of Egyptian papyrus for use during the Coptic Nativity Liturgy. The prayer is known as the *Sub Tuum Praesidium* (translated into English as, “Beneath Thy Compassion”). The significance of the use of this written word in this prayer indicates that it was in common use during this liturgy and most likely used at least decades prior.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, as most likely the oral tradition precedes the written word, it is likely the figure of the Virgin Mary was venerated quite early in church history. “Precisely because



photo by Rafik Wahba, unsplash.com



the Son of God became incarnate in Mary's womb, she is rightly called Mother of God."<sup>7</sup>

Mary also is referred to as *Aeiparthenos*, the Ever-Virgin. "Turning to the Fathers, one of the first proclamations of the doctrine of the virginal conception is by Ignatius of Antioch,"<sup>8</sup> a saint and bishop living in the first and second centuries. St. Ambrose (340–397) "appreciated how hard it was to maintain Christian virginity, and so he offered Mary as a companion to the celibates who tried. The purity of her body and her decorous comportment were to be emulated by women who strove for virtue, since Mary was a mirror of all virtues."<sup>9</sup> Mary as Ever-Virgin cleanses those mired in sin and striving for holiness: "O Pure One without flaw, Holy One without blemish, Cleanse me that I might become pure. Sanctify me and I shall be made holy."<sup>10</sup> The Virgin Mary inspires all Orthodox Christians, both celibate and married, to faithfully live their respective holy callings in purity and chastity. "Blessed is she who received the Holy Spirit; He purified and polished her, and He made her a temple, and the Lord Most High dwelt in her abode."<sup>11</sup> Mary's virginity makes her uniqueness as the Mother of God even more pronounced, as only a pure and holy woman would be able to bear the Son of God in her virginal womb.

Besides being the Mother of God and pure virgin, Mary is called *Panagia*, the All-Holy. "Mary became 'all holy' as a result of the process of *theosis* (deification or divinization), and this was the result of both 'her free will and consent and ... of the grace of the Logos of God.'"<sup>12</sup> After Mary assented to become the Mother of Jesus, the Holy Spirit "sanctified her, purified her and made her blessed among women . . . . She was summoned that she might be the Mother of the Son of God; the Holy Spirit had sanctified her and so dwelt within her."<sup>13</sup> How was Mary, born of a man and a woman, able to overcome the corruption of the human propensity to sin? "The Son of God wanted to be related to her, and first He made her body without sin."<sup>14</sup> The glorification of Mary resounds from the angelic hosts in heaven: "The heavenly company performed their 'Holy, Holy, Holy,' unto the glorious soul of this Mother of the Son of God."<sup>15</sup>

St. Ambrose "places his Mariology firmly within the Christological context."<sup>16</sup> Specifically, for St. Ambrose, "the Virgin Birth is closely related to the divinity of Christ."<sup>17</sup> Mary's status within the

Orthodox Church exists primarily because of her pivotal role in the mystery of the Incarnation. "Anyone who thinks out the implications of that great phrase, *The Word was made flesh*, cannot but feel a profound awe for her who was chosen as the instrument of so surpassing a mystery."<sup>18</sup> The essence of the Incarnation is remembered and recited at the end of every Western Rite Mass, as the priest reads about the Incarnation of Jesus from John 1:1–18 in the Last Gospel after the Final Blessing of the people. In addition, just prior to the singing of the closing recessional hymn, the priest and people pray the Angelus together. The *Theotokos* is immersed in the mystery of the Incarnation, next to the Trinity the most profound mystery of our faith. "She gave flesh to her Son, and she is this God-bearing and theophoric flesh through which the flesh of the world is brought to Him for salvation."<sup>19</sup> Her unique role in the Incarnation is both essential and indispensable.

Two beautiful devotional prayers from both the East and the West honor and venerate the *Theotokos*, the Blessed Virgin Mary: *The Prayer Rule of the Theotokos* in the East and the Rosary in the West. At the heart of each prayer, a special tribute to Our Lady is spoken most often. First, from *The Prayer Rule of the Theotokos*, the following prayer to the *Theotokos* is said: "Rejoice, O Virgin *Theotokos* Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with You. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of Your womb, for you have born Christ, the Savior of our souls."<sup>20</sup> Second, the "centerpiece of the Rosary"<sup>21</sup> is the Hail Mary: "Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."<sup>22</sup> Our diverse and wonderful Orthodox Church is doubly blessed by our mutual heartfelt devotion to the *Theotokos*, our Blessed Virgin Mary, as we venerate her across the whole world, both East and West.

Deacon David Lochbihler  
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*A sermon inspired by a lecture by Fr. Maximos Constas, "The Buried Seed, Prayer of the Heart in an Age of Technology and Distraction," Part 4.*

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13. Jacob of Serug, *On the Mother of God*, p. 34.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
16. Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, vol. 1 (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), p. 78.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
18. Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 258.
19. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsman Publishing, 2009), p. 111.
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# LOST IN THE NOISE

Fr. Peter Kavanaugh

A sermon inspired by a lecture by Fr. Maximos Constas, "The Buried Seed, Prayer of the Heart in an Age of Technology and Distraction," Part 4.

Three brothers aspired to serve God. The first wanted to be a peacemaker, the second, to feed the poor, and the third, to go to the desert to pray. The peacemaker networked with all the important people in society: the entrepreneurs, law-makers, and politicians. He worked day and night. Yet, despite his dedication, war and fighting continued. He gave up and went to find the second brother. The second brother had built a soup kitchen, and began a ministry of feeding the poor. Yet, no matter how much money he raised, or how much food he gathered, there were always more hungry people. Both lost their faith in humanity, and went out to find their third brother, who was a hermit in the desert.

When at last they met, the first two poured out their sorrows to their third brother. He listened, and pondered quietly. Finally, he looked over at the empty bucket on the floor where they sat and told his two questioning brothers to take the bucket down to the stream and

bring back water. They did so. Then the hermit brother picked up a stick, stirred up the water, and asked the other two what they saw.

They could not see anything because the water was agitated, so the brother said to be still and wait. The water calmed down and they looked again. "We see ourselves," they said. The hermit brother replied, "And that is what happened to you in the world. You went into the

world and you were caught up in the chaos and disorder and agitation of the world and you lost yourself."

On Sexagesima, the second Sunday before Lent in the Western Rite lectionary, we read the Parable of the Sower. Jesus spoke to the crowd:

"A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear

listen!" (Luke 8:4-6).

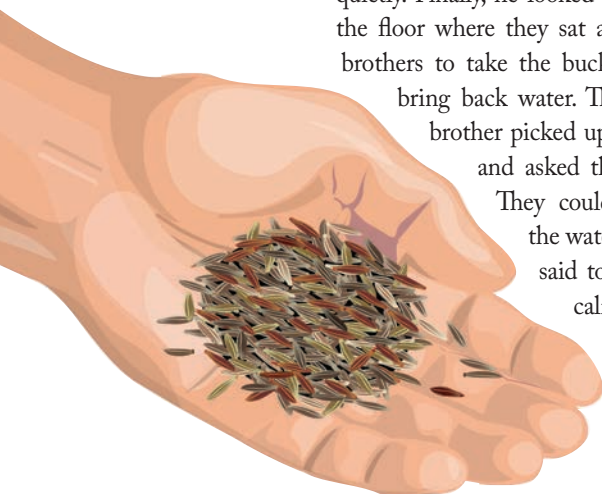
Faith is a colossal challenge in our time. I do not mean superficial faith. Shallow and exterior faith is easy to come by – it is the spirit of the times, a sort of thin and soupy faith in something, we are not always sure what. Superficial faith is the faith of a vague, moralistic, therapeutic deism, rather than the faith of Christianity. An authentic faith is one in which God is not an idea outside of oneself. He is an internal, dynamic presence. The Athonite monk and teacher, Fr. Maximos Constas, says: "The problem is that if we live in our head and thoughts, God will always be a reality that is external to us. For many people, God is an idea or concept or something to be argued about. God remains external and our thoughts swarm around us like so many flies, and they distract us from ever knowing God. But if we undergo that shift from the outer to inner and from mind to heart then God ceases being simply an idea but becomes a living and powerful reality."

True faith is impossible when we are buried in noise, chaos, and restlessness. So where do we begin? "A sower went out to sow his seed." We have to start with what God has given: Himself. "God has sent forth His Spirit into our hearts" (Galatians 4:6). This is the good seed. Do we realize this? The sacraments, Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, and the Eucharist, are the seeds of God's Spirit planted into our soul. We dream of heaven and paradise, as though it is somewhere far away. All along, we carry the fullness of heaven in our hearts, but we ignore it.

To the saint, the Scriptures say: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:22-23). Where is this Mount Zion? It is inside us, but it is buried deep within.

There is an altar in our church. There is also an altar in our heart, a place of constant communing with God, a place of rest with God. Before the fall, it is said that Adam walked with God (Genesis 3:8). This is what this scripture is talking about – our natural state, a state of constantly existing and worshipping in God's presence – and this is the life we are called to.

What happens?



The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature (Luke 8:11–15).

We get choked by the world. I suspect that we fail to grasp the reality of this passage. When you hear the same passages, again and again, you can easily miss their gravity. They become part of the religious noise in our heads. We think, “Oh, yes, I know this one,” and we go on with our lives. But to what is Jesus Christ referring? Where are the thorns and thistles in our twenty-first-century American life, choking our ability to walk with God?

In 1931, Aldous Huxley wrote a book called *A Brave New World*. That was an era when many authors were writing about dystopias. George Orwell and others imagined totalitarian states — Big Brother watching and ruling with an iron fist. Aldous Huxley had a different idea about what could happen to the West. He imagined a world oppressed not by dictators but by entertainment, drugs, and glamor. In one of his lectures, “Amusing Ourselves to Death,” one author comments: “Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy . . . . He believed that it is far more likely that the Western democracies will dance and dream themselves into oblivion than march into it, single file and manacled” (Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*).

This comment was made in 1985. Where do we stand in 2021? Where are the distractions in our lives? How are we swamped and drugged in too much entertainment? Are we dancing and dreaming ourselves into oblivion? There is more noise now than ever. Television, video games, pornography, drugs . . . add to that, the noise of social events, political and ideological mud-flinging, heated debates over face masks, accusations, threats, and fear from every angle. Will we get so caught up in it all that we lose ourselves? Will we lose God?

Some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.’ As he said this, he called out, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’ (Luke 8:4–6).

Fr. Peter Kavanaugh  
Pastor, St. Benedict, Wichita Falls, Texas

With no car, and only Google to give him directions, Greg took a series of buses and walked two miles to an Orthodox parish, where he experienced his first Divine Liturgy. A parishioner welcomed him and asked him how he had learned about Orthodoxy. Greg hesitated but the warmth of the man’s welcome encouraged him to be honest and he admitted that he had first learned about the Orthodox Church while in prison. Without missing a beat, the parishioner offered to give Greg a tour of the church and introduce him to the priest.

The warmth of that welcome was everything to Greg, who still felt deeply ashamed of his crimes. Had the man rejected Greg, Greg may well have rejected the Orthodox Church.

If a convicted felon walked into your parish, would you welcome him?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, our Lord sets out clearly the conditions for inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven. We satisfy the hungry and thirsty; we take in the stranger; we clothe the naked; and we visit the sick and those who are in prison.

We may find it easy to perform most of these commandments, but when was the last time you entered a correctional facility to visit a prisoner? Thousands of men and women are languishing in the battlefield that is prison. Many have experienced the limits of what non-Orthodox ministries offer. They suspect there is more, but they don’t know where to find it.

OCPM visits and meets prisoners where they are, with the full truth that is the Orthodox Faith. Every year, we process thousands of letters from prisoners and personally respond to each one, by speaking to their particular situation. We maintain relationships with prisoners across multiple prison transfers, and we assist them in finding an Orthodox parish upon their release.

Oftentimes, a lack of spiritual direction becomes evident for prisoners when they are released. They may have a place to live, a job, and access to mental health services, but without a supportive spiritual community and a repentant understanding of what landed them in a prison cell in the first place, their freedom is often difficult to sustain. This is an important contributing factor to the absurdly high recidivism rate for ex-prisoners in the United States. According to the Department of Justice, 83 percent of prisoners released in 2005 across 30 states were arrested again within nine years of their release.

Today, Greg is still attending that same Orthodox parish and he is now looking for a fulltime job. Finding a welcoming Orthodox parish centered him in his release, but he would not have found out this spiritual centering, had our Church and OCPM not been there to minister to him in his darkest hours in prison.

Please find out more about how you and your parish can have a vital ministry to incarcerated men and women, by visiting [www.theocpm.org](http://www.theocpm.org).

## 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 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 *"2021 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 innocents. ***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 in 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 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 open a window of concern and join this humanitarian effort to lift the burden off these children.

In anticipation of your kind and 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 strength in the coming days.

Deborah Brown  
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[childrensrelieffund@gmail.com](mailto:childrensrelieffund@gmail.com)

You may donate through PayPal on our website at:  
<http://www.childrenrelieffund.org/donate-now.html>

Please make check payable to:  
**Children's Relief Fund**  
P.O. Box 90072  
Brooklyn, NY 11209

